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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE RECOGNITION AND HANDLING  
OF CONVERSATIONAL MISUNDERSTANDING

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

CHIKAGE IMAI  
Norman Oklahoma  
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**A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE RECOGNITION AND  
HANDLING OF CONVERSATIONAL MISUNDERSTANDING**

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATION

BY

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A cross-cultural analysis of the recognition and handling of  
conversational misunderstanding

ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the study is to examine the occurrence of misunderstanding in everyday conversation. Specifically, the study explores how conversational interactants recognize and handle misunderstandings during the course of their talk. The secondary purpose of the study is to compare and contrast American and Japanese conversations in terms of interactants' recognitions and handlings of misunderstanding.

To pursue the above purposes, the study employs both the conversation analytic and interview methods. That is, the study analyzes interactants' language behaviors in light of their semantic experiences available through interviewing. Simultaneous examination of conversational and interview data best illuminates the reality of everyday misunderstandings as lived and experienced by ordinary interactants.

As a result, the study finds that interactants' recognitions and handlings of misunderstanding are largely the same across American and Japanese conversations, while, at the same time, there are also some cultural differences. In terms of misunderstanding recognitions, interactants across the two cultures are directed to the presence of a misunderstanding by five distinct forms of "wake-up" calls. Through these calls, interactants "wake-up" to the reality of misunderstanding from the presumed intersubjectivity. In terms

of misunderstanding handlings, interactants across the two cultures resort to one of two major alternatives: exposing or waiving a misunderstanding. Several psychological and pragmatic factors appear to guide interactants' handling choices.

Regarding cultural differences, the study finds that American conversationalists tend to recognize a wider range of misunderstanding than their Japanese counterparts do and that Japanese conversationalists use a special method of handling a misunderstanding, namely a "secret operation." Further, the two cultures demonstrate differing views of face-saving concern as a factor guiding interactants' handlings of misunderstandings. The potential cultural backgrounds behind these differences are addressed.

These findings further lead to the comprehension of a mechanism (logic) of everyday conversational misunderstanding: how misunderstandings emerge and develop in human conversation. The logic consists of four pre-conditions of conversational misunderstandings. The comprehension of the ways in which everyday misunderstandings develop may serve as a critical first step toward theorizing misunderstanding.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Misunderstanding is one central phenomenon in human communication. We misunderstand each other in infinitely many different ways: motive, intention, referent, reason, purpose, implication, significance to name a few. Misunderstanding is a fact of life and communication. Yet, it is among the least investigated areas in communication<sup>1</sup>. Even when misunderstanding is taken up as an academic agendum, it tends to receive marginal treatment as something problematic, undesirable, and thus to be eliminated. In other words, misunderstanding is seldom treated as a central issue of academic investigation in the contemporary field of communication (Coupland, Wiemann, & Giles, 1991; Taylor, 1992).

The current study bestows serious attention on the phenomenon of misunderstanding. It "rescues" misunderstanding from its marginal status by approaching it from a perspective of its own, not from a perspective of "effective" communication. When approached from a perspective of efficiency, misunderstanding only receives aberrant status such as "trouble," "problem," and "obstacle." Instead, the present study views misunderstanding as a type of understanding, rather than as an obstacle to it. Misunderstanding is a reflection of the interactant's effort to understand, only in a

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<sup>1</sup> Although research on misunderstanding is underdeveloped in the modern investigation of communication, efforts to address the interrelated issues of meaning, interpretation, understanding, and misunderstanding have been existing in the history of academia, especially in the history of hermeneutics. Among researchers who address these issues are Paul Ricoeur, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Kate Millett, Jean Genet, Stanley Fish, Henry James, Friedrich Nietzsche, J.L. Austin, John Searle, Walter Davis, etc.

manner unintended by the speaker. This basic viewpoint supports the present study and runs as a central theme throughout.

With this theme, the present study aims to describe everyday misunderstanding as lived and experienced by social interactants without imposing particular conventional presumptions (theories or hypotheses). In other words, the nature of the study is descriptive and data-driven, rather than predictive and hypothesis-driven. Specifically, the present study explores the ways in which ordinary interactants recognize and handle conversational misunderstandings during the course of their talk.

Further, communication researchers tend to view misunderstanding as being caused by cultural or language differences among intercultural communicators, and thus, tend to study misunderstanding in the intercultural setting. Should the study of misunderstanding be limited to the intercultural encounter? Does adequate communication really take place among intracultural communicators? Do not misunderstandings occur even among people who use the same language and communication conventions? Such intracultural misunderstandings may occur as frequently as, or potentially even more frequently than intercultural misunderstandings. Ultimate questions are: "Why do misunderstandings occur between interactants who use the same language?" and "Why is not sharing the language good enough to assure understanding at any given time?"

Driven by the above questions, the present study examines practices of misunderstanding in the intra-cultural context and compares and contrasts different cultures' practices. Specifically,

the study investigates American conversation and Japanese conversation and discusses their similarities and differences. It is interesting to pursue whether or not everyday misunderstanding finds different expressions across different cultures, and if it does, what the differences are.

In sum, the present study questions and brackets the conventional approaches to misunderstanding as its starting point, and from this point, proceeds to describe everyday misunderstanding in its own terms. To this end, the study specifies its domain as conversational misunderstanding between people who speak the same language and as cross-cultural comparison between American and Japanese talk.

This research interest is closely tied to the factors that originally motivated the researcher to study human communication. Misunderstanding was often present to the researcher without knowing why and how it occurred. A lack of understanding about the why and how of misunderstanding results in unpleasant feelings such as a sense of helplessness, incompetence, and frustration. Communicators in general may have these unpleasant feelings toward the occurrence of misunderstanding. This may accelerate emotional and psychological distancing between interactants.

In the above circumstance, avoiding misunderstanding is not important because misunderstandings do occur no matter how hard we work to avoid them. Instead, comprehending the why and how of misunderstanding is important. While avoiding only enhances the fear and frustration of having misunderstanding, pursuing the why and how may contribute to the comprehension of something we did



not know before. The present study, therefore, is written in the pursuit of better knowledge about us, human interactants, and our communication. Studying misunderstanding provides us with an opportunity to better understand ourselves; the way we ordinary are and interact with each other.

The remainder of the present study includes the following: Chapter II addresses rationales for conducting the study, the conceptual framework underlying the study, and the domain and research questions; Chapter III provides a review of the literature on misunderstanding in the contemporary field of communication; Chapter IV explains the method that the study employs; Chapters V, VI, and VII offer analyses of the result (Chapter V concerns interactants' recognition of misunderstanding, Chapter VI concerns their handling of misunderstanding, and Chapter VII addresses the "how" of misunderstanding); finally, Chapter VIII discusses the implications of the study, including cultural implications.

## CHAPTER II

### PROBLEM

#### RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

This study contributes both academically and practically to the field of communication. The academic and intellectual side of the contribution is roughly summarized as having the following three elements. First of all, the study of misunderstanding is succinctly characterized by a lack of consistency. Misunderstanding has no consistent definition across researchers and is studied from vastly diverse perspectives. To date, studies of misunderstanding are fragmented and made incommensurable across research attempts. Some researchers equate misunderstanding with a lack of clarity (Ochs, 1991). Some researchers view it as a breakdown of communication (Gumperz, 1982). Yet other researchers approach misunderstanding as a target of repair work (Schegloff, 1987; 1992). Such fragmentation might have resulted from the general perception of misunderstanding by both laymen and professionals: misunderstanding is loosely understood as something "undesirable" and tends to receive no further serious attempts at definition. The diverse and inconsistent approaches to misunderstanding may, however, result in fruitless investigations. The establishment of a unifying definition is a must for a systematic and fruitful investigation.

This study attempts to comprehend misunderstanding in its own terms, not simply as a deficient aspect of communication. As

such, the study may uncover the mechanisms and characteristics of misunderstanding which would otherwise be unavailable to the conventional approaches. This ultimately serves as a critical first step toward a systematic effort at definitions and conceptualizations. By illuminating misunderstanding's basic characteristics, this study avoids offering just "another" definition to be added to the existing fragmentation.

Second, research trends are generally reflections of certain metatheoretical assumptions. The traditional perspective within which misunderstanding has been studied needs critical examination since perspectives serve the very source of knowledge; a perspective promotes research, and research creates knowledge. As a powerful tool for knowledge creation, any perspective deserves serious examination. A literature review in the field of misunderstanding reveals a certain perspective as predominating in the current conceptualization and investigation of misunderstanding. To use Gebser's (1985) words, it is a "mental-rational consciousness" that dominates the modern research of misunderstanding. Mental-rational consciousness strives for efficiency (e.g., effective machine, effective computer, effective education, effective communication, and so on) by encouraging logical and analytical modes of investigation. Logical and analytical modes of investigation refer to the idea that a researcher isolates variables which constitute a certain phenomenon and again brings them together under law-like formulations (often numerical laws such as the more A, the more B). This methodology is generally accepted as the mainstream science in our age. It holds true not

only for natural sciences but also for human science. The science of misunderstanding is no exception. The role misunderstanding plays within the mainstream science is that of obstacles to be eliminated for the sake of effectiveness. Misunderstanding tends to be approached with the questions: "How can misunderstanding be eliminated or at least minimized?" and "What factors cause misunderstanding and how are they identified and eliminated?" These questions are innocent and natural as we live in the age of efficiency and technology.

However, it is important to note that it rests on our choices whether we take existing general presumptions for granted or question and challenge them in order to generate more genuine understanding of human communication. Efforts to examine taken-for-granted presumptions may unveil ways in which such presumptions pose limitations on our thought and behavior. The current presumptions of misunderstanding motivate us to eliminate, rather than to deal with, misunderstanding. They accentuate our fear of misunderstanding as a "deficiency" of communication, rather than helping us to understand each other. In short, the current investigation of misunderstanding may do some harm to our communication. A new and alternative perspective of misunderstanding is necessary as we approach the turn of the century when an increasing amount of distancing and indifference among people is expected due to fast-growing computer technology. This study analyzes perspectives underlying the current research of misunderstanding and discusses an alternative perspective. More specifically it offers to conceptualize misunderstanding as a form

of understanding, rather than as a lack of it. This new conceptualization is based on Schutz' theory of understanding; his theory of understanding is applied to the domain of misunderstanding as we see later in the section on theoretical frameworks.

Third, yet another intellectual contribution is that this study reinforces and strengthens the conversation analytic approach. Conversation analysis (CA) is an effort to describe mechanisms and structures of everyday conversation. It analyzes how various speech activities (e.g., questioning, answering, offering, inviting, accusing, apologizing, insulting, and so on) are structured in relation to one another and how such structures are locally managed by interactants at the moment of interaction. This research interest is rooted in the CA assumption that conversational interaction has its own indigenous structures, and such indigenous structures emerge regardless exogenous influences. In other words, CA assumes that fundamental mechanisms of conversation exist within locally negotiated conversational interaction and thus cut across differences among interactants (e.g., race, class, gender, personal predisposition, etc.).

This stance has generated an on-going controversy between conversation analysts and other social scientists, and even among conversation analysts themselves<sup>2</sup>. The controversy regards the use of data outside conversational interaction (e.g., interviewing

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<sup>2</sup> Among conversation analysts who are involved in the dispute are Stewart Sigman, Don H. Zimmerman, Emanuel A. Schegloff, Anita Pomerantz, and Micheal Moerman. In particular, Zimmerman (1988) addresses this controversy as a central agendum in his work.

conversational participants and surveying participants' backgrounds). Some argue that the use of extra-conversational data is pertinent, while others argue that it is not pertinent in comprehending social interaction.

The above dispute remains largely unsettled today. As a result, researchers of CA often start with an prereflected assumption that certain utterances constitute certain speech activities in order to seek the sequential relationships among these speech activities. In this circumstance, an important question arises: "What if a conversation analyst and a conversational participant finds different activities in the same utterance?" This question is highly relevant in cases where multiple interpretations are possible. For instance, when a conversationalist says, "Well, I don't know . . . . (pause)," should this utterance be interpreted as an effort to preserve his own turn or as a move to terminate it, inviting the conversational partner to take the next turn? Further, if a conversationalist says, "Don't do it," is this utterance best understood as a threat or a request? The school of CA leaves these issues largely unresolved. As a result, analysis by the conversation analyst may occasionally override the experience of the participant. This represents a major limitation of CA.

The present study supplements this limitation of CA by incorporating the voices of the actual participants into analysis. This is important especially because the study deals with a domain that is basically semantic in nature. In the field of misunderstanding, analysis apart from the experiences of conversational participants is meaningless and unrealistic.

Therefore, it is critical that the present study combine CA and interviews of conversationalists in order to comprehend everyday misunderstanding. (Ch. IV discusses the method in detail.) By adopting the combination approach, the present study contributes to the reinforcement of CA; analyses of conversation are endorsed and authenticated by the lively voices of interactants.

To illustrate the importance of the combination approach, it is pertinent to note that Schegloff (1987, 1992) takes up the phenomenon of misunderstanding and examines it largely as a target of subsequent repair work. Although he must be given credit for taking up misunderstanding as a serious academic agendum, affecting subsequent research efforts (Drummond & Hopper, 1991; Ochs, 1991), his work may provide partial comprehension of "misunderstanding" by conceptualizing it as something which conversationalists attempt to repair. Should misunderstanding be limited to such an entity (target of repair)? How about cases in which conversationalists notice a misunderstanding and yet "let it pass"? Such cases are likely to escape CA because they do not leave any trace or evidence of misunderstanding to be analyzed. Nonetheless, should not the "let it pass" case be included as data of misunderstanding? Interviews with the participant help unveil his or her experience of the misunderstanding and thus include the "let it pass" case as an important part of the study. The point is that stronger conversation analytic work may be grounded in the comprehension of the experiences of the interactants who live in the conversation.

To provide a summary, the academic significance of this study contains three elements: 1) it studies misunderstanding in such a way as to contribute to its systematic conceptualizations for future investigation, 2) it analyzes the current underlying assumptions of misunderstanding and discusses an alternative perspective, and 3) it strengthens the grounding of conversation analytic work. In short, the study is an effort to approach everyday conversational misunderstanding in a manner that largely departs from the conventional approach.

The above academic contributions further lead to practical contributions. The practical side of the contribution lies in relational development among friends, co-workers, and business partners. In human interaction, misunderstanding is inevitable. It appears that misunderstandings do occur no matter how hard we try to avoid them. When people try to avoid the unavoidable, they face more serious troubles which lead to relational deterioration in the long run. Misunderstanding must be dealt with and comprehended, rather than being avoided or suppressed. While the conventional approach may accentuate the fear and frustration of having misunderstanding by stressing its "deficient" nature, the present study attempts to comprehend the reality of misunderstanding apart from any presuppositions. As such, the study may help everyday interactants see the source of unpleasant feelings accompanying misunderstanding, such as frustration, embarrassment, and inadequacy, and thus, may provide the interactants with the courage to overcome these unpleasant feelings. This ultimately helps the social interactants develop richer and healthier relationships.



Further, this principle of contributing to relational development also applies to interaction between or among intercultural communicators. Although this study is directed to analyses of intra-cultural conversation, the utility of its findings is not limited to the intra-cultural domain; it extends to other domains such as intercultural, interethnic, intergenerational communication, and so on. This researcher proposes that misunderstanding found in the intra-cultural environment is the most fundamental form of misunderstanding of all and that the findings concerning intra-cultural misunderstanding apply to other contexts. This is a sensible and reasonable proposition (and remains so until proven otherwise) because misunderstanding DOES occur even among interactants who share the same language codes and conventions. Sources of misunderstanding, thus, must lie elsewhere other than cultural and social differences. The essential structures of misunderstanding cannot be found by studying cultural and social differences among interactants. Intergroup communication does not really "cause" misunderstanding as generally believed. Rather it only facilitates occurrences of misunderstanding. More extensive discussion of this claim will be seen in the chapter on literature review. At this point, it is pertinent to mention that this study examines sources of misunderstanding by looking at intra-cultural communication, and that its findings extend to the field of intergroup communication among male-female, teacher-student, employer-employee, and intercultural interactants.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Schutz' theory of understanding gives a central conceptual foundation for the current study. This study proposes to analyze the current conceptualization of misunderstanding as an obstacle to understanding and reconstruct it as a form of understanding. The proposition is based on an application of Schutz's theory of understanding to the field of misunderstanding. Understanding "understanding" is not only relevant to but also critical to understanding "misunderstanding."

Outlining the basic direction of Schutz's work is pertinent. Alfred Schutz, a social phenomenologist, questioned the traditional methodology of human science which seeks to explain human behavior in terms of general laws (such as the more A, the more B or the more A, the less B). Placed within law-like formulations, humans are viewed as reacting to certain stimuli. To Schutz, such mechanistic explanations were inadequate for the investigation of the human realm. Instead, he proposed that the purpose of human science is to grasp the meaning structures that belong to living interactants. What distinguishes a human from a rock is his thinking and understanding upon which he acts. Schutz was deeply interested in structures of social interaction: what it means to understand each other (*intersubjective understanding*). To him, the concept of understanding played a central role in the investigation of social interaction, and thus, he sought to theorize intersubjective understanding.

Interestingly, Schutz conceptualized understanding in terms of meaning. He notes that "understanding (*Verstehen*) as such is correlative to meaning, for all understanding is directed toward that which has meaning (*auf ein Sinnhaftes*) and only something understood is meaningful (*sinnvoll*)" (1967, p.108). To Schutz, understanding and meaning are one inseparable entity.

Further, Schutz posited that meaning resides in relationships among elements, drawing on Gestalt theory. Meaning emerges when an element is placed among other elements or in a context. Schutz argued that "I cannot really say that I understand the word until I have grasped the meaning of the whole statement" (p.125). For instance, the utterance "I am sorry" comes to bear different meanings when placed in different contexts. Consider the two contexts: "I am sorry. I did not mean to hurt you." and "I am sorry that I ever trusted you in the first place." The former bears a sincere apology, and the latter expresses a bitter resentment.

Process in which meaning emerges through a context is not limited to the immediate contexts as illustrated above. It also extends to larger (infinitely larger) contexts. Such contexts include place, time, situation, occasion, purpose of interaction, motives of interactants, knowledge of prior events, past experiences, relational history, and future plans. Strictly speaking, literally *everything* counts as a context; no single element in the world of human interaction is excluded from being a potential context. When we understand something, be it a word, significance, or intention of the other, we bring an arbitrary context as a basis of understanding. Meaning and understanding emerge not as an invariant and permanent

property but rather as a contingent one given in a specific and local context at the moment of interaction.

Out of potentially infinite elements of contexts generating meaning, Schutz mainly emphasizes two types of meaning contexts: *in-order-to motive* and *because motive* (1967). In-order-to motive refers to an actor's goals and purposes of his action, and because motive refers to his knowledge from the past regarding the action. In-order-to motive and because motive both answer the question "Why does the actor do the action he is doing?," but they do so differently. For instance, the fact that John is reading a communication textbook is explained in two different ways: *in order to* learn the material in the book in preparation for a upcoming exam and *because* he knows studying will help him get a good grade. Polkinghorne notes that "Schutz's distinction between the two types of motives offers an interesting approach to the problem of determinism and freedom" (1983, p.209). Given the distinction made by Schutz, it becomes clear that because motive (knowledge) alone does not necessarily "cause" the actor to do the action (John to read the textbook). John may choose not to read the book if he does not care for the grade. It is John's in-order-to motive (will) combined with because motive (knowledge) that drives him to read the textbook. In short, teleology as opposed to determinism plays an important role in Schutz's work. In-order-to and because motives are among the most emphasized elements of meaning-contexts in Schutz's work. Other less emphasized elements include situation, past experiences, future plans, classification scheme, and knowledge of social norms.

One problem with which Schutz concerned himself and struggled was the issue of how the actor's meaning context becomes available to observers. Schutz claims that "genuine understanding" (p.111) occurs when a behavior is interpreted from the actor's meaning context (including in-order-to and because motives), not from an observer's meaning context. An important question arises, however, concerning whether an observer can fully transcend his position and meaning-context and join those of the actor. Schutz carefully and honestly points out that no two individuals can share the same meaning-context, and therefore that genuine understanding only exists as an *approximate* value of the other's intended meaning (p.109).

Schutz's theory of understanding leads us to the recognition that understanding is a function of a continuum that ranges from the most genuine to the least genuine understanding. There is always more or less discrepancy between the actor's meaning-context and the observer's interpretation of it since no two individuals can share the exact same experience. Stated differently, the discrepancy between the actor and the observer ranges from minimal to maximal. When the discrepancy is minimal and the observer's understanding of the actor's meaning-context exists as an infinitely close (approximate) value of the actor's meaning context, then the word "genuine" understanding applies. By contrast, when the discrepancy is maximal and is too critical to overlook, the word "misunderstanding" applies. Thus, both the "genuine" version of understanding and the "missed" version of understanding are a matter of degree on a continuum. Based on the above discussion,

this researcher conceptualizes misunderstanding as a form of understanding, rather than as a lack of it.

Schutz's theory of understanding is heuristic and inspiring in the sense that it helps modify the conventional conceptualization of misunderstanding in an important manner. Conventionally misunderstanding has been viewed as an obstacle to understanding. Now Schutz's theory allows the researcher to reconceptualize misunderstanding as an extension of understanding. This is an important move because it helps emancipate communicators from their fear of misunderstanding as a "deficiency" of communication. When threatened by this fear, communicators seek to avoid, instead of dealing with, misunderstanding. Misunderstanding is, however, natural process of our communication, and is inevitable. By attempting to avoid the unavoidable, communicators might do some harm to their relational development in the long run, and the harm is often beyond their recognition. Thus, such unnecessary fear and threat must be critically and thoroughly examined. Schutz's theory gives us an opportunity to revisit the validity of such commonsense fear.

## DOMAIN AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study specifies its domain as *recognized conversational misunderstanding between people who speak the same language*. To date, very little is known about misunderstanding in the field of human interaction due to the fact that it has received marginal treatment. The current study is a preliminary effort to

explore the relatively unknown and embedded world of misunderstanding. As such, the study must specify its domain and narrow its scope instead of dealing with the misunderstanding phenomenon in general. Dealing with the general phenomenon of misunderstanding would be too ambitious a task to successfully complete in initially exploring this realm.

The first criterion of the current domain is *recognized misunderstanding*. Misunderstanding is an elusive entity and takes on a wide variety of shapes or appearances. For instance, some misunderstandings go unnoticed by any party, escaping every chance of detection. Other misunderstandings eventually surface and call for the interactants' attention beyond the immediate time-frame of conversation. This process of recognizing misunderstanding takes an unknown amount of time, be it a week, a month, an year, a decade, or even a century. In some cases, misunderstanding may receive immediate recognition by the present participants and be clarified right away. In other cases, the participants may not recognize, but a third party points out, the possibility of misunderstanding.

Given the complexity of misunderstanding manifestation, it is extremely difficult to study every shape and appearance of misunderstanding in this initial effort. Therefore, the present study chooses to deal with one dimension of misunderstanding: cases in which at least one participant recognizes misunderstanding within the time-frame of the interaction. Narrowing the scope of the investigation allows the researcher to make a manageable, realistic, research effort.

The second criterion of the current domain is *conversational misunderstanding*. The primary purpose of the study is to uncover how people misunderstand each other in their everyday social interaction. Conversation is a primordial site of social interaction and invites numerous cases of misunderstanding. Such frequent occurrences of misunderstanding are probably due to the fact that conversation involves the use of language, an arbitrary tool of communication which is often subject to multiple interpretations. Thus, conversation presents an adequate site for the current investigation. This is not to say that all cases of misunderstanding occur within the sphere of conversation. In fact, some cases of misunderstanding involve interpretation of bible, law, behavior, and cultural objects. Nonetheless, significant numbers of misunderstanding do still occur within the sphere of everyday conversation, and the significance is worthy of initial investigation.

The third criterion of the domain is *intra-cultural misunderstanding*<sup>3</sup>. In the field of communication, misunderstanding tends to be studied in the inter-group context. A primary example is the intercultural context. A widespread assumption behind this tendency is that misunderstanding occurs due to language and cultural differences among interactants. Because of this assumption, little is known about intra-cultural misunderstandings, despite the fact that misunderstandings do occur on a regular basis among people who speak the same native language

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<sup>3</sup> In the present study, *intra-cultural misunderstanding* refers to that between people who speak the same native language and who grew up in the same cultural sphere. Language expresses a way of making sense of the world and thus provides a basic resource for members' intersubjectivity. It is interesting to pursue how such intra-cultural communicators misunderstand each other.



and utilize the same communication conventions. The present study addresses this simple fact of life by pursuing why and how communicators misunderstand each other while resorting to the same communication conventions and practices.

In sum, the current study sets the specific domain of misunderstanding: recognized conversational misunderstanding in the intra-cultural context. This domain will be illuminated by asking the following research question:

1) How do participants of everyday conversation come to recognize the occurrences of misunderstanding - both as the misunderstood and as the misunderstanding parties?

The above research question leads to another related research interest; "what do people do when they come to recognize misunderstanding?" They might, for instance, choose to ignore misunderstanding and "let it pass." On the other hand, they might suspect misunderstanding and yet not care a great deal about it. In other cases, people might expose and discuss misunderstanding with each other in order to "fix" the misalignment. Pursuing the question "how do people handle misunderstanding?" may lead to an interesting discovery; it may uncover how the nature of the participants' relationship, significance of misunderstanding, and purpose of conversation affect the ways in which people make choices in dealing with misunderstanding. This interest will be explored by asking the following research question:

2) How do the participants handle misunderstanding when they recognize it - both as the misunderstood and as the misunderstanding parties?

The above two are fundamental research questions which will guide the current investigation. Through these specific research questions, the study provides a first step toward understanding the nature and structure of conversational misunderstanding.

An additional question is asked to explore the secondary interest of the study: the comparison and contrast of the Japanese and American cultures as regards misunderstanding. This cultural issue is less emphasized compared to the first two issues (participants' recognition and handling of misunderstanding). Nonetheless, it is interesting to explore how Japanese and American ways of recognizing and handling misunderstanding differ from each other, if there are any differences. Japanese culture and American culture may differentiate in the ways people recognize and handle misunderstanding. For instance, Japanese may take more subtle approaches such as leaving a source of misunderstanding ambiguous, rather than making it obvious. To the extent that the two cultures do differentiate, the discussion leads to cultural contrast. On the other hand, to the extent that the two cultures do not differentiate, the discussion leads to the possibility of universality in the way people orient themselves to misunderstanding. At this point, the researcher is not expecting any specific result of the comparison and contrast between the two cultures, simply a clarification of

cultural differences. The third research question is stated as the following:

3) What are similarities and differences between American and Japanese participants in the ways in which they recognize and handle misunderstanding in conversation?

### CHAPTER III

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review of misunderstanding points to three general trends in its contemporary investigation. First, misunderstanding is mainly studied within the context of inter-group communication. A recurring theme is that when people with different backgrounds (culture, ethnicity, gender, age, and social class) interact, their communication is vulnerable to misunderstanding due to differing norms and practices. Second, misunderstanding tends to receive marginal treatments. Such marginal treatments include negative conceptualizations of misunderstanding, intentions to eliminate or minimize it, and warnings of its negative social consequences. A largely shared view is that misunderstanding is problematic and undesirable. Third, misunderstanding has not yet received a consistent definition across researchers. Researchers define misunderstanding from vastly diverse perspectives, resulting in a lack of dialogue among them. Diverse perspectives make dialogue across researchers incommensurable. The discussion in this chapter concerns these three major trends.

#### THE STUDY OF MISUNDERSTANDING IN THE INTERGROUP CONTEXT

First, misunderstanding has mainly been studied within the context of inter-group communication such as intercultural, interethnic, interracial, cross-sex, intergenerational, and so on.

Misunderstanding is largely viewed as a function of differences in communication practices and norms among interactants. Research efforts concerning misunderstanding in the inter-group context are discussed in the following order: intercultural, interethnic, cross-sex, intergenerational, and cross-social class contexts.

The intercultural context is the most dramatic in the sense that it accentuates and makes easily identifiable occurrences of misunderstanding. Tannen (1980) notes that members of particular cultural groups have a repertoire of conversational devices that they use with a certain frequency. Such culturally unique devices are often regarded as sources of mutual misunderstanding.

Accordingly, intercultural misunderstanding draws significant attention from contemporary researchers. Gumperz and Roberts (1991) study the ways in which culturally different sets of behavioral expectations produce misunderstanding. They offer a turn-by-turn analysis of intercultural conversation among Punjabi and British English speakers in the counseling context. Their findings suggest that Punjabi speakers use much less eye contact and backchannel responses compared to British English speakers, which are taken as signs of indifference by English speakers. Chick (1985) analyzes intercultural encounters between native speakers of English and Zulu (a tone language, a version of English). His analysis focuses on micro conversational mechanisms such as prosodic cues, accent placement, and paralinguistic choices. The study indicates that differences in these micro mechanisms between native English and Zulu speakers reinforce and renew existing racial discrimination in South Africa, aggravating negative evaluations of each other.

Miller (1991) studies verbal listening behavior in conversations between Japanese and Americans. The study finds that Japanese conversationalists over-perform listening behavior compared to Americans. For instance, Japanese communicators provide backchannels such as "uh huh" and "yeah" far more often than Americans normally do. These listening tokens by Japanese not only occur more frequently than those by Americans but also do so in such a manner as to overlap the current speaker's talk. A suggested consequence is that American speakers may think Japanese speakers are constantly interrupting or insincerely agreeing with their talk. On the other hand, Japanese speakers may feel that Americans are not showing enough appreciation of their talk because American listening responses are below their expectations. Elsewhere, the Japanese listeners' frequent responses are often discussed as sources of misunderstanding (Lebra, 1976; White, 1989).

The issue of culture is further closely associated with that of ethnicity. Ethnic diversity is viewed as an extension of culture in the sense that people with different ethnic backgrounds have different norms and practices of communication. Diverse ethnic traditions exist even within one culture. The most notable example is America; American culture includes White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian heritages. Gumperz (1982) notes that communication practices consist not only of speaking grammatically correct sentences but also of appropriately managing contextualization cues such as phonetic, prosodic, and formulaic conventions (p.209). Contextualization conventions are locally and historically established. Thus, people who may speak the same language but are

brought up in different communities resort to different contextualization conventions, often misunderstanding each other. Gumperz notes that "a significant number of breakdowns may be due to inferences based on undetected differences in contextualization strategies" (1982, p.210). Gumperz requests that contextualization conventions be included in the research on human understanding.

In particular, Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) examine conversation among ethnically diverse interactants, consisting of native English speakers and West Indian speakers. Their findings based on a case study suggest that a West Indian male speaker favors a certain persuasion strategy; he relies on the participants' ability to read his indirect contextualization cues to carry his argument. The consequence is that this West Indian speaker is perceived as ineffective by English speakers.

Male-female communication is also viewed as a version of cultural/ethnic communication; men and women represent two different cultures. Tannen (1982; 1986) studies the ways in which different conversational styles between men and women result in communication breakdowns. She notes that "there are differences in habits and assumptions about how to have conversation, show interest, be considerate, and so on" (1986, pp. 143-144). According to her study, women are often more attuned than men to the metamessage of talk; women pay more attention to how things are said while men pay more attention to what things are said. A lack of awareness of these differences may lead to communication breakdowns such as attributing each other's messages to bad intentions. Similarly, Maltz and Borker (1982) argue that American

men and women come from different sociolinguistic subcultures. Cultural differences exist between men and women in their conceptions of friendly conversation, their rules of engaging in it, and their rules for interpreting it (p.200).

Moreover, Henley and Kramarae (1991) take the issue of male-female miscommunication to a political arena by arguing that miscommunication results not just because of different 'cultural' backgrounds but because of power inequality between men and women. Because of the power differences (men as dominant and women as submissive), men's speech styles tend to force their way as normative and women's styles tend to be marginalized as inferior or inappropriate. Thus, "the construction of miscommunication between the sexes emerges as a powerful tool . . . to maintain the structure of male supremacy" (p. 42).

Further, communication between people of different ages represents yet another type of inter-group communication. Different age groups resort to different styles of communication even though their culture, ethnicity, and gender remain the same. Interaction between or among different age groups often draws research on misunderstanding. Coupland, Nussbaum, and Coupland (1991) offer a literature review in the field of intergenerational talk. According to their literature review, the current studies of intergenerational interaction point to "systematic" miscommunication between elderly and younger adults. That is, "elderly" identities are interactionally constructed through talk, and such elderly identities are further associated with negative stereotyping such as incompetency.



Finally, people may share the same culture, ethnicity, gender, and age identities, and yet they may differ in terms of the social classes they belong to. Such social classes may include occupation (teacher-student, physician-patient, employer-employee, salesperson-customer, and so on) and economic status (high income vs. low income). People of different social classes often demonstrate ignorance and insensitivity toward each other. As a result, their communication might become one-sided, rather than two-way, especially when one group has power over the other. West and Frankel (1991) point out that one characteristic of medical setting communication is the "cultural" differences existing between care-providers and patients (p.166). West (1984) analyzes turn-organization of talk between physicians and patients. She claims that physicians interrupt patients far more frequently than the reverse, noting that interruption is rule violation and is a form of miscommunication. McTear and King (1991), on the other hand, examine miscommunication in the speech therapy context. Specifically, they analyze dialogues between speech therapists and their child patients, noting that "miscommunication derives primarily from discrepancies between the mental states of the dialogue participants" (pp.195-196).

As we have seen above, the investigation of misunderstanding is closely tied to the inter-group context, be it intercultural, interethnic, cross-sex, intergenerational, or cross-social class. A recurring theme is that when people with different cultural and social backgrounds interact, their communication falls subject to misunderstanding. In this theme, culturally different norms and

practices are primary agents of misunderstanding. One can easily believe that differences "cause" misunderstanding. Taylor (1992) attributes this causal view to "social determinism" predominating in the current investigations of human communication (p. 136). Social determinism offers a rather mechanistic explanation of misunderstanding, arguing that a communicator's social and ethnic backgrounds determine the pragmatic style, and further that, because of socially determined pragmatic styles, communicators with different cultural and social backgrounds often misunderstand each other. The causal view and social determinism are predominant assumptions of misunderstanding, and they do not allow much room for alternative explanations.

However, any researcher who resists accepting taken-for-granted assumptions ought to ask the questions: "Do misunderstandings always happen due to different conversational norms and practices? Don't communicators misunderstand each other even though they share the same cultural and social background?" Phrased differently, "Is misunderstanding limited to the context of inter-group communication? Isn't it generally presumed that adequate communication occurs in intra-group communication because of the interactants' shared language behavior? How valid is such a presumption?" Asking these questions leads us to the recognition that inter-group contexts do not really "cause" misunderstanding; rather, they "facilitate" occurrences of misunderstanding. Misunderstandings do occur even among people who share the same language, social backgrounds, and conversational conventions. Unveiling mechanisms of

misunderstanding in such "intra-cultural" contexts is, thus, a must facing researchers who wish to understand the very nature of misunderstanding. This is not to say that investigating misunderstanding in the inter-group context is meaningless; rather, that it is meaningful in the sense that it makes us aware of different communication styles that facilitate misunderstanding, but that it does not help nail down the very nature and structure of misunderstanding. The very nature and structure of misunderstanding lies in ordinary conversation among ordinary people who share the same communication styles. It is interesting to ask "why and how does misunderstanding happen even among people with the same cultural and social backgrounds?"

Accordingly, the current study investigates *intra-cultural* misunderstanding instead of *intercultural* misunderstanding. This selection of research interest rests on the proposition that misunderstanding in the intracultural context is the most basic form of all misunderstandings, and that findings of intracultural misunderstanding should serve as a basis for investigations of other forms of misunderstanding.

#### GENERALLY NEGATIVE TREATMENT OF MISUNDERSTANDING

Besides the fact that misunderstanding tends to be studied in inter-group contexts, the current literature review reveals that misunderstanding tends to receive marginal treatments. The marginal treatments include three further elements which are interrelated: generally negative conceptualizations of

misunderstanding, intentions to eliminate or minimize it, and warnings of its negative social outcomes. A largely shared view in the current literature is that misunderstanding is problematic and unwelcomed. Misunderstanding represents an obstacle to effective communication. Naturally, researchers attempt to "get rid of" such an obstacle. The motive to eliminate misunderstanding is present, either explicitly or implicitly, in the current investigation of misunderstanding. The following discusses the three main elements of marginal treatments that misunderstanding receives.

Conceptualizations of misunderstanding are overwhelmingly of negative tone. Eisenberg and Phillips (1991), for instance, formulate miscommunication in terms of a "failure" of communication: 1) failure to be understood, 2) failure to achieve one's communicative goals, 3) failure to be authentic, honest, and disclosive, and 4) failure to establish an open dialogue (p.245). Further, Gumperz (1982) associates misunderstanding with "breakdowns" of communication, which "lead to stereotyping and pejorative evaluations" (p.210). It must be pointed out that such negative views of misunderstanding are common and widespread not only among academic professionals but also among lay communicators.

Furthermore, these negative evaluations of misunderstanding are understandably tied to the motive to "get rid of" it, which underlies a number of research efforts. For example, West & Frankel (1991), in their effort at a literature review of miscommunication, pose the questions: "How can cases of miscommunication be recognized and what if anything can be done to avoid them?" (p.167)

Gudykunst & Kim (1992), on the other hand, posit that "communication is effective to the extent that we are able to minimize misunderstandings" (p. 230). These examples succinctly illustrate the general research interest in the field of misunderstanding; the general interest is directed toward the effort at elimination or minimization of misunderstanding. An assumption underlying these approaches is that misunderstanding is an independent factor which can be isolated and removed from the mainstream effective communication. Academic and commonsense knowledge as well tell us that misunderstanding is an obstacle to desirable communication, and that our communication becomes better if the obstacle is removed.

While some researchers express their concern for eliminating misunderstanding in their explicit statements as we have seen above, others do so in a less explicit manner, by warning of the negative social consequences of misunderstanding. Gumperz and Roberts (1991) demonstrate how misunderstanding may affect individuals' career chances such as job interviews; differences in conversational expectations lead to an interviewer's negative evaluation and rejection of the prospective employee. Chick (1985), on the other hand, emphasizes how cultural misinterpretation and misunderstanding between English and Zulu speakers reinforce the existing racial discrimination in South Africa. Gumperz (1982) makes a similar point when he says, "breakdowns lead to stereotyping and pejorative evaluations and may perpetuate social divisions" (p.210).

To provide a brief summary of the discussion above, misunderstanding tends to invite negative conceptualizations such as "failure" or "breakdown," and this negativity serves as a force to motivate researchers to wish to eliminate or minimize misunderstanding. It is unquestionable that misunderstanding receives a marginal status in the current investigation of communication in general.

A careful reflection, however, allows us to understand that this marginal status points to a certain mode of awareness that dominates the current investigation of human communication. In fact, this mode of awareness penetrates every corner of human activities including not only research but also business, industry, education, and politics. Human activities are historical and local products, and they are unique to their time and place. According to Gebser (1985), the modern era is characterized by the "perspectival" mode of consciousness. This refers to the current tendency to classify, analyze, and breakdown a given problem based on a certain set of standards. Among such standards guiding today's investigations are efficiency, pleasure, low cost, promptness, and utility. These values have guided and dominated efforts at business, education, industrialization, and academic investigation. Given significant development in technology in many areas of our lives, the above set of standards proves itself to be appropriate and useful and further gives additional force to the current analytical mode of investigation. In short, the current "perspectivity" (the perspectival mode of awareness) has an internal mechanism that justifies itself. Today, the mainstream "science" consists of analyzing a phenomenon

based on certain established criteria, isolating variables that constitute the phenomenon, formulating the relationships between or among the variables under mathematical statements, and subsuming the mathematical formulation under general laws.

According to Polkinghorne (1983), this methodology is known as the "nomothetic" as opposed to the "idiographic" approach (p.23). The nomothetic approach seeks the establishment of general laws that explain individual events while the idiographic approach seeks uniqueness in individual events. It is largely the nomothetic approach that has advanced industry and technology, and thus that is perceived as the mainstream science. Although the idiographic approach is an important part of human knowledge, it is often considered as less scientific or marginally scientific because of its lack of generalizability.

The nomothetic approach dominates natural sciences and human sciences as well. Understandably, it also extends to research on misunderstanding. In other words, the investigation of misunderstanding is not exempted from the mainstream view of science. The role misunderstanding plays in the conventional approach to human communication is that of a variable to be isolated and removed from effective communication. Researchers often ask the questions, "What factors cause misunderstanding and how can they be eliminated?" More important and critical questions are, however, "Is misunderstanding adequately approached using the above questions?," "Should researchers take those questions for granted?," and "Are there any alternative approaches to

misunderstanding which help us to understand better the phenomenon of misunderstanding?"

Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles (1991) succinctly point out that the research on miscommunication and misunderstanding is generally underdeveloped, and that the underdevelopment is due to the "Pollyanna" perspective that communication research has adopted (p.1). They explain that "researchers have looked for the 'good' and ignored the 'bad'; communication problems were treated as aberrant behavior which should be eliminated" (p.1). They suggest that simplistic negative labels attached to miscommunication, such as breakdown and failure, may hinder a comprehension of the potentially rich and varied process of miscommunication. For instance, some miscommunication may be simply a matter of transient annoyance which has no significant lasting effect while others may inhibit life-satisfaction, career chances, health, and healing. On the other hand, some miscommunication may actually bring out positive contributions to social relationships (Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles, p.3). For instance, sincere and open discussion of misunderstanding might bring the interactants closer than ever. The point is that by giving miscommunication simplistic negative labels, researchers "risk under-analyzing the multiple levels and dimensions" involved in the process of miscommunication (p.3).

Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles and their followers attempt to revisit miscommunication as a central issue of communication, rather than as a marginal and deviant issue, and to explore its rich process in diverse contexts. They take the perspective that miscommunication is intrinsic part of communication. In other



words, communication is intrinsically "flawed, partial, and problematic" (p.3). Their work must be credited for elevating the issues of miscommunication and misunderstanding from deviant phenomena to the central academic agenda. The work helps us question the existing general presumption that hinders our understanding of rich and complex communication dynamics.

#### LACK OF CONSISTENT DEFINITIONS OF MISUNDERSTANDING

The generally marginal treatment that misunderstanding receives further relates to a lack of a consistent definition, which characterizes yet another trend in the current investigation of misunderstanding. Misunderstanding and miscommunication as well are slippery terms and are often used interchangeably. This slipperiness may derive from generally negative views of misunderstanding and miscommunication as illustrated above. The conceptualizations of misunderstanding as something "bad," "negative," and "problematic" do not encourage further serious attempts at definition. Once labeled "bad," misunderstanding is easily discarded or buried, and thus, demands no further attention from researchers. It compares to the idea that once we take trash out of our houses, we do not usually go out and check the content. Misunderstanding, like trash, represents an undesirable and unwanted entity which deserves elimination. In sum, the concept of misunderstanding is not dealt with seriously other than being understood as an obstacle to effective communication. The lack of

serious attention partly explains why misunderstanding has no consistent definitions.

Listing a number of definitional attempts illustrates a lack of consistency across researchers. Ochs (1991) defines misunderstanding as a lack of understanding: as "communicative activity in which one or another participant signals noncomprehension or potential noncomprehension" (p.45). To Gumperz (1982), misunderstanding is a function of cultural/ethnic differences in pragmatic communication styles. Schegloff (1987;1992), on the other hand, views misunderstanding as a target of subsequent repair work, offering a retrospective definition. Taylor's (1992) attempt at definition is rather unique and radical; he is skeptical that communicators do not regularly understand each other. Taylor proposes that the common belief that communicators regularly understand each other might be a myth among us, and that misunderstanding is quite an ordinary and routine phenomenon intrinsic to communication. To date, definitions of misunderstanding are so diverse that meaningful dialogue among researchers is made extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Realizing the above difficulty, Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles (1991) offer an attempt to integrate the existing line of work by researchers with diverse backgrounds (from quantitative to qualitative, from interpersonal to organization to mass communication, from cross-sex to cross-generation to cross-culture). Specifically, they present a categorical framework that explains diverse research attempts; the categorical framework

consists of six levels in terms of social significance of miscommunication:

Level of social significance	Characteristics attributed to "miscommunication"	Problem status	Awareness level	Repairability
1	Discourse and meaning transfer are inherently flawed	Unrecognized	unaware	not relevant
2	Strategic compromise; minor misunderstandings or misreadings are routine disruptions to be expected	Possibly, not necessarily recognized	low	relevant at local event only
3	Presumed personal deficiencies	Problems attributed to individual lack of skill or ill will (or both)	moderate	deficient people can be "fixed"
4	Goal-referenced; control, affiliation, identity and instrumentality in normal interaction	Problems recognized as failure in conversational goal-attainment	high	repair is an ongoing aspect of everyday interaction
5	Group/cultural differences in linguistic/communication norms, predisposing misalignments or misunderstandings	Problems mapped onto social identities and group memberships	moderate	acculturation or outgroup accommodation
6	Ideological framing of talk; socio-structural power imbalances	Participants perceive only status quo	unaware	only through critical analysis and resulting social change

(Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles, 1991, p.13)

A close examination of the framework, however, may produce further confusion over misunderstanding. The categorical framework consists not only of social significance, but also of other elements such as problem status, participants' awareness level, and repairability. As a result, the main difference between level 3 and 5 lies in attribution of miscommunication (level 3 attributes miscommunication to individuals and level 5 attributes it to group identities) while the main difference between level 1 and 4 lies in participants' level of awareness (level 1 marks unawareness while level 4 marks high awareness). Further, level 1 and 6 have the largest difference in terms of social significance while having no, or little, difference in terms of participants' level of awareness (both level 1 and 6 mark unawareness). In short, the framework is void of consistent criteria according to which the current body of work is understood and integrated. Thus, the framework does not serve as a solid basis for integrating the current research while its attempt at integration itself is great and ambitious.

However, it must be pointed out that criticizing the model for its imperfection might be unfair, especially when the authors "do not wish to defend its levels in anything like absolute terms" (p.16). As Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles suggest, "it [the model] may provide a preliminary template against which researchers and readers of this volume may locate their own perspectives on miscommunication, and consider others'" (1991, p.16). Thus, despite its imperfection and incompleteness, or because of them, the framework may remain useful as a *first* step toward more meaningful and fruitful efforts at integration. Subsequent

researchers must continue the efforts by modifying, remodeling, and strengthening the integrative framework originally offered by Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles. The original starting point is that misunderstanding must be conceptualized from a perspective of its own, not from the perspective of effective communication. When viewed from the perspective of effectiveness, misunderstanding is only understood as a deficiency or an obstacle. Such simplistic negative evaluations are likely to hinder the comprehension of potentially rich communication process.

Defining and conceptualizing misunderstanding in a consistent manner is a challenging theme facing researchers of misunderstanding. In fact, Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles (1991) seem to willingly admit that arriving at a consistent definition is out of the question when they say "the concept of miscommunication resists any simple definition. Rather, it refers to a highly diverse set of characteristics of interaction, its origins, contexts, and outcomes" (p.16). Is defining misunderstanding in one unifying manner meaningless and useless? Is it virtually impossible? Should the concept of misunderstanding rest on diverse investigations and conceptualizations as Coupland, Wiemann, and Giles argue? Answers to these questions remain unspecified until researchers attempt to arrive at a consistent definition in such a way as to contribute to subsequent research efforts. The current fragmentation of definitional efforts calls for unification and integration.

To provide a summary of the current literature review, the literature of misunderstanding reveals the three main trends: 1) The

study of misunderstanding is closely tied to inter-group contexts, 2) Misunderstanding tends to receive marginal treatments, and 3) Misunderstanding has no consistent definition across researchers. These three trends further point to the general intellectual framework within which misunderstanding has been studied, namely the "perspectival" mode of awareness (Gebser, 1985). The perspectival mode of awareness assigns misunderstanding the role of a variable which is isolated and removed from effective communication. It must be emphasized again that this framework might only reinforce our fear and frustration of having misunderstanding as a deficiency of communication, driving us to avoid, eliminate, and minimize misunderstanding. However, these efforts at avoidance or elimination may actually be harmful to relational development in the long run.

Accordingly, the present study offers to challenge the existing framework and proposes an alternative perspective from which misunderstanding can be studied in a more meaningful manner. What this study challenges are common beliefs that misunderstanding is an "obstacle" to effective communication, that communication is better off without misunderstanding, and that misunderstanding is "caused" by differences in conversational styles and practices among inter-group interactants. Unless we question and challenge these taken-for-granted assumptions, we do not know how limited and biased we might be, and consequently how much we might be missing. Such missing elements may include the emancipation from our fear of misunderstanding and the comprehension of potentially rich communication process.

Questioning the current presumptions is, therefore, a starting point and a basic theme of the present study. The questioning efforts may allow the researcher to see a new perspective that helps emancipate us from our fear and frustration of having misunderstanding. Specifically, the study offers to revisit misunderstanding as a central issue of communication, not as a marginal entity. It reconceptualizes misunderstanding from a perspective of its own, not from the perspective of "effective" communication. By so doing, the study may unveil rich, complex, and yet intrinsic process of misunderstanding and may help us to understand better the fundamental nature of our communication, including both understanding and misunderstanding. These research purposes call for pertinent methodology. The following chapter discusses the methodology of the current study.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY

Given the primary purpose of the study (to explore how people recognize and handle misunderstanding without imposing particular hypothetical assumptions), the present study needs to employ a special methodology that describes the occurrence of conversational misunderstandings as lived and experienced by daily interactants. To this end, conversation analysis (CA) is supplemented with follow-up interviews with the participants. In other words, the present study combines the conversation analytic method and the interview method in order to illuminate the reality of everyday misunderstanding.

The combination approach helps complement a certain limitation of CA mentioned earlier in the chapter on problems. In the CA tradition, a conversation analyst identifies classes of social acts (e.g., threatening, demanding, complimenting, requesting, and so on) on the basis of his or her competence as a cultural member. As a result of this tradition, analysis of the conversation analyst may override and negate the experience of the conversational interactant in some cases. An important question arises: "If the conversation analyst and the participant see two different social acts in the same utterance, how should this difference be adequately resolved in order to comprehend the social reality?" Should not the researcher consider the experience of the interactant who actually lives in that particular segment of social interaction? Accordingly, the study incorporates the interview method into the traditional conversation



analytic method. In other words, while preserving the basic expertise of CA, the present study adopts the voices of social interactants. In this manner, the study is able to ascertain the reality of conversational misunderstanding as experienced by interactants.

It must be added that the combination approach is particularly critical because the study pursues events that are basically semantic in nature. CA alone presents the danger of the researcher imposing her own interpretations of conversational events which may differ from those of actual participants. On the other hand, the interview method alone does not provide concrete and precise conversational episodes as sites of misunderstanding. Therefore, a collaboration between CA and interviews with participants comprises the most adequate method for the present study.

The secondary purpose of the study is to discuss similarities and differences between Japanese and American conversational misunderstandings. To this end, the study compares and contrasts Japanese and American data in terms of the interactant's recognition and handling of everyday misunderstanding. The Japanese and American data are processed (collected and analyzed) in a parallel manner.

Specifically, the method of the present study consists of the following six steps (each of these steps are discussed in detail below):

1. recording conversational interaction
2. follow-up written interview
3. follow-up oral interview

4. transcribing conversational data
5. simultaneous analysis of conversation and interview data
6. reporting

### 1. Recording Conversational Interaction

The researchers asked 12 individuals to record their everyday conversation with any person from the same culture by means of a voice-activated tape-recorder; of these 12, six are Japanese, and the other six are Americans. (See the table below) It needs to be mentioned that these 12 subjects were selected via a convenient sampling process, rather than a random sampling process, due to a special circumstance surrounding the project; the project demanded an average of ten hours of work per individual. Thus, the selection process depended on both whether the subjects were willing, and whether they had the time to complete the project. This inevitably limited the selection process to the network of the researcher's acquaintances.

From these 12 subjects, the researcher collected a total of 22 hours of naturally occurring conversation; 12 hours belong to Japanese data, and 10 hours belong to American data. (As we shall see later, the total of 22 hours of conversation contains 107 instances of misunderstanding.) At this point of data collection, the researcher did not disclose the purpose of the investigation because such disclosure might heighten the subjects' awareness of conversational misunderstanding, and the heightened awareness may have resulted in less spontaneous conversational behaviors. Further, the researcher assured the subjects the confidentiality of

data, including not only the recorded conversations but also the following interviews. The assurance of confidentiality was necessary in order to allow the subjects to talk freely on tapes without having to consider the possible consequences of the talk. For instance, the subject may not want the general public to know the content of "gossip." Step six (reporting phase) explains the specific measurement employed to maintain the confidentiality of data.

Subject	Nationality	Sex	Age	Conversational Partner(s)
J 1	Japanese	Female	20'	Acquaintance
J 2	Japanese	Female	30'	Close friend
J 3	Japanese	Female	60'	Family
J 4	Japanese	Male	20'	Family
J 5	Japanese	Male	30'	Close friend
J 6	Japanese	Male	60'	Family
A1	American	Female	20'	Casual friend
A2	American	Female	30'	Acquaintance, Close friend
A3	American	Female	50'	Casual friend
A4	American	Male	30'	Family, Close friend
A5	American	Male	30'	Acquaintance, Close friend
A6	American	Male	30'	Family

Table 1

Further, in the process of conversational data collection, factors such as interactional context, occasion, place, time, and the nature of the relationship are left unspecified and uncontrolled. These deliberate generalizations are undertaken because the primary

purpose of the study is to explore the domain of intra-cultural misunderstandings in general, and such misunderstandings may occur at any time with anyone in any context. As an initial effort to explore everyday misunderstandings, this study needs to collect its data across from a variety of occasions and situations.

As a result of the above unspecification, interactional contexts in the present data varied from conversing while watching TV, to drinking at a bar, to driving a car. Further, the relationships among participants varied from acquaintance to friend to family. While this study does not particularly pursue how different contexts, occasions, and natures of relationships affect the occurrence of everyday misunderstandings, some correlations may potentially surface between misunderstandings and contextual or relational factors. Such correlations will be worthwhile themes for subsequent research efforts. For instance, the subsequent research may study how the level of intimacy among interactants affects their handlings of misunderstandings. It is possible that if the participants have an intimate relationship, they tend to openly discuss misunderstanding, instead of letting it pass.

## 2. Follow-Up Written Interview

Immediately following the conversational recording, the researcher asked all 12 subjects to listen to the recorded conversation in search of misunderstandings, and then, in the written form, interviewed the subjects with regard to specific instances of misunderstanding recorded in the tapes. At this point, again the confidentiality of data was assured. The assurance was

repeated in order to encourage honest reportings of misunderstandings.

Through the written interviews, the 12 subjects reported a total of 107 cases of conversational misunderstandings in 22 hours of conversation; of these 107, 56 cases belong to Japanese data, and 51 cases belong to American data. These 107 cases constitute the primary conversational data as actual sites of everyday misunderstanding.

One important advantage of the written interview over the oral one is that the former allows the participants more time to reflect and describe their experiences of misunderstanding. This applies equally to both cases in which the subject is misunderstood by the other party and cases in which the subject misunderstands the other party.

The purpose of this follow-up written interview is to allow the researcher to comprehend each event of misunderstanding as lived and experienced by interactants. As mentioned earlier, the researcher should not be in the position of speculating whether, when, and how misunderstandings occurred in the subjects' conversations. In other words, the researcher should not impose the perspective of a third party observing the interaction on the experiences of the interactants. Only the participants can explicate their experiences of misunderstanding by describing how they recognized misunderstandings, how the intended meaning differed from the interpreted meaning, and how they dealt with the situation. Letting participants describe their experiences in their own words is especially important since the domain of the present study is

primarily semantic in nature. Thus, if the researcher wishes to understand the realm of meaning as it is experienced by interactants, it is most appropriate to ask the interactants who live in that realm.

To illustrate the importance of the follow-up interview, consider the following conversation which actually took place. A is the researcher, and B is her student from Malaysia.

- 1 A: "Are you going somewhere?"
- 2 B: "Yeah. I am going home"
- 3 A: "REALLY? That's great. How long does it take to go home?"
- 4 B: "ten minutes"
- 5 A: "TEN MINUTES?"
- 6 B: "yeah. I just walk"
- 7 A: (pause)

This interaction may not strike a third party as an event of misunderstanding; it may simply appear as silly conversation. The interactants, however, experience this exchange as an event of misunderstanding. The immediately preceding conversational topic was about the upcoming spring break. Thus, by "Are you going somewhere?" A meant to ask if B was going somewhere during the break and heard B's reply, "I am going home," in such a context. Thus, A understood that B was going to Malaysia during the break. Given this particular understanding, B's subsequent remarks "ten minutes (to go home)" in line 4 and "I just walk" in line 6 sounded ridiculous to A. This absurdity led A to suspect a potential misunderstanding.

It eventually became clear to A that B understood A's question - "Are you going somewhere" - in the immediate context of now. The fact that A was grabbing her coat in preparation for leaving the office at the moment of conversation may have evoked in B such an immediate context. Thus, by "I am going home," B intended her apartment in Norman. The point is that only the participants present to the conversation can adequately explicate the occurrences of misunderstanding that they recognize. They can do so specifically by describing how their original intended meaning differed from the interpreted meaning, as the misunderstood party, or how their interpretation differed from the intended meaning, as the misunderstanding party. In short, interviews make interactants' experiences of conversational misunderstanding available to the non-participant. Therefore, the follow-up interview is a necessary adjustment to CA in order to grasp the participants' experiences of misunderstanding.

Specifically, the researcher asked the 12 subjects the following questions in the written format. The subjects were instructed to respond to two different sets of questions depending on whether they were *the misunderstood party* (person who is misunderstood by the other party) or *the misunderstanding party* (person who misunderstands the other party).

#### As the misunderstood party

1) Please identify the incidents in which you felt misunderstood. (Give a brief account of the misunderstood content and mark the number indicated in the counter of the tape-recorder.)

- 2) How do you know that you were misunderstood?
- 3) Please explain how your intended meaning differed from the interpreted meaning.
- 4) Please explain, if you could, where you were coming from (meaning-context) and where the other was coming from (meaning-context).
- 5) How did you handle the misunderstanding?
- 6) Did the nature of the relationship with the other person and the significance of the misunderstanding affect the way you handled the misunderstanding? How? Can you think of any other factors which might have affected your handling?

As the misunderstanding party

- 1) Please identify the incidences in which you misunderstood the other person. (Give a brief account of the content you misunderstood and mark the number indicated in the counter of the tape-recorder.)
- 2) How do you know that you misunderstood the other?
- 3) Please explain how your interpretation differed from the intended meaning?
- 4) Please explain, if you could, where you were coming from (meaning-context) and where the other was coming from (meaning-context).
- 5) How did you handle the misunderstanding?
- 6) Did the nature of the relationship with the other person and the significance of the misunderstanding affect the way you handled the misunderstanding? How? Can you think of any other factors which might have affected your handling?



The above two sets of questions are basically designed to illuminate which segments of talk the subject experiences as events of misunderstanding and how the subject recognizes and handles conversational misunderstanding. The questions, thus, address the two research questions: 1) How do participants of everyday conversation recognize the occurrences of misunderstanding both as the misunderstood and as the misunderstanding parties? and 2) How do the participants handle misunderstanding when they recognize it both as the misunderstood and as the misunderstanding parties? Further, the interview questions explore potential factors affecting the subject's handling of misunderstanding. These questions helped the researcher to obtain a vivid picture of each event of misunderstanding.

Furthermore, in addition of the above interview questions, the researcher asked the 12 subjects the following general questions.

#### General questions

- 1) When misunderstanding occurs, do you usually understand why it occurred?
- 2) How do you feel when you experience misunderstanding? Do incidents of misunderstanding discourage you from further talking to the one with whom you had misunderstanding?
- 3) Do you think, in general, you are easily misunderstood? Why, if you could explain?
- 4) Do you think, in general, you easily misunderstand others? Why, if you could explain?
- 5) What does misunderstanding mean to you?

These questions do not directly concern specific instances of misunderstanding. Nonetheless, they illuminate the subject's feelings and attitudes toward misunderstanding in general and thus help the researcher gain additional insights into the subject's experience of misunderstanding.

### 3. The Follow-Up Oral Interview

Immediately following the initial written interviews, the researcher orally interviewed 12 subjects for the purpose of probing and clarification. The confidentiality of data was once again assured. Regarding the place and time of the oral interview, the researcher let the subject choose his or her most convenient location and time. The subjects typically chose their homes; some chose the researcher's home, a cafeteria, or a library. The subjects' selections of time varied from morning, early afternoon, late afternoon, to evening. As to the duration of the oral interview, it averaged one hour and a half, ranging from one to two hours per individual.

In this oral phase of interview, the researcher asked in-depth questions, such as "Why were you preoccupied with the idea that the girl in the other's story took a psychology course?" "Do you have the tendency to skip details in others' talk?" "Did you have the experience of living in a dorm as a freshman? Do you think that the experience affected the way you interpreted the word, 'one'?" and "Why did you ignore the misunderstanding instead of discussing it with the other person? In other words, why did not you say, 'Oh, I

thought you sat in something' when you recognized your misinterpretation?"

These oral probing questions allowed the researcher to further comprehend the subject's experience of misunderstanding in its vividness and richness. In other words, the oral interview enriched the researcher's "participation" in each occurrence of misunderstanding, although it is important to note that such "participation" only approximates the subject's experience.

#### 4. Transcribing Misunderstood Conversational Segments

Based on what the subjects identified as instances of misunderstanding, the researcher transcribed segments of the recorded conversation. This is important primarily for two reasons. First, the written records, in addition to the audio records of conversation as sites of everyday misunderstanding, make the following analysis phase easier. Second, the written records make it easier for the reader to have access to raw data compared to the audio records.

Further, since the present study aims to illuminate the interactants' first-hand experiences of misunderstanding, it pays primary respect to the subject's reportings of misunderstandings. That is, the researcher did not transcribe segments of conversation which were not reported by subjects as events of misunderstanding. As a result, the present study excluded from its data cases in which the researcher suspects the possibility of misunderstanding, but which are not recognized as such by the participants.

The researcher transcribed the conversational data by using the transcribing system originally developed by Gail Jefferson (see Appendix A). The Jefferson notation system makes possible detailed documentation of conversation, including not only contents of the spoken words but also their non-verbal characteristics, such as pitch, volume, stress, cut-off of speech, and prolonged sounds. The detail also extends to miscellaneous background noises and movements including clapping, staring, and gestures. This allows the researcher, and the reader as well, to reconstruct the conversational occurrences as concretely as possible.

Nevertheless, any system of recording, be it tape-recorder, video-recorder, or transcribing system, is a mere representation of the event, not the event itself. Any system is imperfect in the sense that it does not provide the life experience as the actual moment of its occurrence does. Therefore, recorded conversation or its transcription alone should not provide the sole text for the investigation. Instead, they should serve as a complement to each other in order to construct a better and more complete picture of each case of misunderstanding. More specifically, in the current study, combining recordings, transcriptions, and interviews helps the researcher to form the best possible pictures which provide texts of analyses.

## 5. Analysis of Data

Given the semantic nature of misunderstanding, this study needs to adopt a particular analytic approach: simultaneous examination of conversational data and interview data. Separate

analyses of conversational data and interview data would pose a major problem in comprehending realities of misunderstanding. The conversational data alone do not provide the interactants' semantic experiences of misunderstanding. Some cases of misunderstanding are never detected by a third party looking at a conversational segment. At the same time, the interview data alone lack vivid evidence of how talk unfolds as a site of misunderstanding. Relying on interactants' memories is problematic as they may distort or selectively remember their conversations. Thus, interview and conversational data are complementary to each other, and together they allow thick and realistic description of everyday misunderstanding. Thus, in light of the above reasoning, all analyses presented in the chapters on analyses (Chs. V, VI, and VII) are grounded in simultaneous examination of conversational and interview data.

To illustrate the importance of simultaneous examination, consider the following segment. Two interactants are watching a movie on TV and converse very briefly. A is curious about the identity of the narrator and asks B a question.

1 A:       who's voice is this?

2 B:       doctorwho's

((Thereafter, there is no more exchange of words; the conversationalists go back to watch the movie.))

After this short exchange, the two parties proceed to watch the movie and never return to the subject. From the conversation

analytic viewpoint alone, this is simply a normal exchange of question and answer, which constitutes an *adjacency pair*. An adjacency pair refers to a basic conversational unit consisting of two parts: first pair part and second pair part. A first pair part solicits an appropriate second pair part, such as invitation-acceptance (or turndown), accusation-apology (or self-defense), and greeting-greeting. In this manner, mundane conversation is organized around adjacency pairs.

The seemingly normal exchange of an adjacency pair such as "Who's voice is this?" (a question) and "Doctor who's" (an answer), however, reveals a different story when re-considered in light of interviews with the participants (A and B). For instance, the interviews reveal that A realizes she is misunderstood by B when B utters, "Doctor who's" and that A intends by her question to ask, "Which actor is speaking now?" and that B interprets the question as "Which character in the movie is speaking now?" The interviews further uncover that A has a habit of identifying actors and actresses in each movie, and B prefers pursuing the plot development to identifying celebrities' names. Furthermore, the interviews make it clear that although A recognizes the occurrence of misunderstanding, she waives the misunderstanding because it is not very important.

As a result of the interviews, the researcher obtains a rich comprehension of the misunderstanding; the researcher learns that different thought habits between the two participants contribute to the semantic difference, and that A recognizes the misunderstanding because B's subsequent response betrays A's anticipation, and

further, that A "lets it pass" because of the trivial nature of the misunderstanding.

With this rich comprehension of the misunderstanding, the researcher revisits the actual conversation and arrives at a deeper analysis of the conversation. For instance, such an analysis reveals that A's recognition of the misunderstanding is a result of a *violation of conversational occasioning*. Occasioning refers to the idea that an utterance is built on resources provided by the prior utterance and in turn provides resources for the subsequent turn. An utterance is *occasioned* by the prior utterance and *occasions* the subsequent utterance. Conversation flows based on the interactants' basic premise of occasioning; participants hear each utterance as being occasioned by the prior utterance and occasioning the next utterance.

A experiences the misunderstanding when she hears B's reply as not being occasioned by her question. In other words, B's reply steps outside the succession of occasioning. Simply stated, B's answer "surprises" A. Thus, it can be analyzed that this particular segment of conversation does not violate the concept of adjacency pair itself (question-answer), but rather violates the principle of occasioning in the sense that the content of the second pair part lies outside an acceptable range of expectation held by the speaker of the first pair part. This analysis contributes to the researcher's comprehension of how interactants recognize conversational misunderstandings.

Among other potentially useful concepts that CA provides for the current analysis are trouble source, repair (1st position, 2nd

position, and 3rd), repair initiator, self-correction, and other-correction. These concepts were employed by Schegloff and other researchers in their analyses of problematic talk (Schegloff, 1987;1992, Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977). Thus, the above concepts may be relevant to the current analysis of misunderstanding. Extensive discussion of the concepts is, however, omitted at this point.

In sum, CA illuminates interactants' language behaviors that host everyday misunderstanding by providing analytical concepts and vocabularies, and analysis of interviews illuminates the participants' semantic experiences in conjunction with their language behaviors. Analysis of the conversational and interview data side by side forms the best possible equipment to explore conversational misunderstandings. Through the simultaneous examination of conversational and interview data, the researcher is able to ascertain and describe rich details of everyday misunderstandings as lived by participants.

## 6. Reporting

Any conversation analytic claims must be presented with evidence and reasonable arguments. The process of reporting involves the presentation of raw data (segments of conversation). The researcher presents both English and Japanese conversational data in their raw forms. The presentation of English data is easily manageable. The presentation of Japanese data is, however, complex because of the language and cultural issues. Non-Japanese readers may experience difficulties in comprehending Japanese interaction



as experienced by the Japanese participants due to different cultural backgrounds. This limits the process of building arguments on which conversational analytic claims rely; CA draws on the reader's knowledge and competence from the perspective of his or her culture.

As a solution, Japanese conversational data will be presented in Appendix B, not in the main text. This way, the reader may concentrate on comprehending American conversational data, while still having access to Japanese conversational data when he or she wishes to check the resources for findings regarding Japanese misunderstanding.

Nevertheless, while micro analyses of Japanese data segments are presented in Appendix B, major findings of Japanese practices (interactants' recognition and handling) of misunderstanding are incorporated into the main text's discussion. This allows comparison and contrast between Japanese and American misunderstandings, which are the third research interest in the present study.

In Appendix B, Japanese conversational segments will be presented in Roman letters as they sound in Japanese, and then these utterances will be accompanied by pertinent English translations. The following segment illustrates this procedure.

#### Appendix B:

- 1 Taro:     jaa remon kattoide yo  
              (then why don't you go and get lemons)
- 2 Hanako:   DOKODE

(WHERE)

- 3 Taro: ima janai kaminoke kirini itta toki  
(not now, but when you go and get a hair cut)
- 4 Hanako: souka  
(I see)

Further, it is important to note that the researcher maintains the confidentiality of conversational data as well as interview data by altering the names of the subject and his or her conversational partner(s). This measurement equally applies to cases in which the conversational interactants talk about a third party (e.g., "gossiping"). In this manner, the present study protects the privacy of all parties who are either directly or indirectly involved in the conversation.

## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS OF INTERACTANTS' RECOGNITIONS OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS

It must be stressed again that, given the semantic nature of misunderstanding, this study needs to adopt a particular method of analysis; simultaneous examination of conversational data and interview data. That is, interview and conversational data are complementary to each other, and together they help the researcher as well as the reader understand complete and concrete pictures of each misunderstanding. Therefore, all analyses presented in the current and subsequent chapters (Chs. V, VI, and VII) are grounded in simultaneous examination of conversational and interview data.

The current chapter focuses on the process in which interactants recognize conversational misunderstandings. To provide a forecast, the chapter first describes different forms of misunderstanding recognition experienced by interactants and how these forms are chronologically related to one another. The chapter then addresses the nature of misunderstanding recognition; the recognition of a misunderstanding is quite arbitrary and varies from person to person, and from time to time. Finally, the chapter describes a cultural difference found between Japanese and American conversations in terms of interactants' recognitions of misunderstandings.

The recognition of a misunderstanding belongs to the interactant's semantic experience and is not necessarily manifest in conversational data. This is especially true if the interactant keeps

the fact of misunderstanding to himself or herself. Thus, the resource of the current analysis mainly lies in participants' responses to the interview questions: "How do you know that you misunderstood the other?" (as a person who misunderstood the other person) and "How do you know that you were misunderstood?" (as a person who was misunderstood by the other) in conjunction with conversational data as concrete evidence.

By responding to the above interview questions, participants help the researcher identify a particular portion of conversation which triggers them to recognize the occurrence of a misunderstanding. For instance, when a subject writes, "The other responded: No, because she took the course," and the researcher listens to that portion of the conversation, it is then that the researcher comprehends the specific process of recognition. All analyses in the present chapter are made in this manner.

The subjects reported quite diverse forms and shapes of conversational misunderstanding. In the subjects' reports, the specific content of a misunderstanding varied from an object, a concept, a place, a time, quantity, a reason, an intention, an implication, to a social action. Analysis reveals that, however, despite the diversity of conversational misunderstandings, there is a notable characteristic prevailing across varied cases of recognition and across Japanese and American data. That is, the moment of recognition is unanimously marked by a sudden shift in perspective; a shift from the assumption of mutual understanding to the awareness of misunderstanding, from presumed congruity of two minds to newly realized incongruity. The reason why the shift is

"sudden" is because interactants ordinarily assume that interaction consists of mutual understanding and this assumption prevails until the unexpected takes place.

The term "taken for granted," used before, has perhaps to be denied. It means to accept until further notice our knowledge of certain states of affairs as unquestionably plausible. Of course, at any time that which seemed to be hitherto unquestionable might be put in question. Common-sense thinking simply takes for granted, until counter evidence appears, not only the world of physical objects but also the sociocultural world into which we are born and in which we grow up (emphasis added).

(Schutz, 1962, p.326)

The sociocultural world appears to us as the intersubjective world which is common to all of us, rather than as a mere aggregate of individual life experiences. Because of the intersubjective nature of the sociocultural world, we are able to maintain language, culture, rituals, storytelling, and myth as collective ways of making sense of the world. While the natural attitude toward intersubjectivity provides basic building blocks for everyday interaction, there are also moments when such a natural attitude is disturbed and temporarily suspended due to the emergence of "counter evidence," which signals interactants to non-intersubjective reality. Simply put, the recognition of misunderstanding is promoted by a "wake-up call" that strikes interactants who are not anticipating such a call.

## DIFFERENT FORMS OF "WAKE-UP CALLS"

Through analysis of the present data, certain classifications emerged regarding forms that such a wake-up call takes. More specifically, the researcher arrived at the classifications by taking notes on distinct characteristics of participants' responses to the questions of recognition in search of any emergent patterns through the responses. Certain groupings emerged among responses which bore critical functional similarities to one another, and the 107 responses were finally classified into five distinct forms of recognition. (See Table 2 below)

Party Signaled	Forms of "Wake-Up Call"	Frequency Counts		
		Japanese	English	Both
Misunderstood	A. Problematic Understanding	31	21	52
	B. Expressed Recognition of Misunderstanding ("confession")	3	1	4
	* unidentifiable	0	1	1
	Sub Total	34	23	57
Misunderstanding	C. Expressed Recognition of Misunderstanding ("allegation")	9	21	30
	D. Expressed Strangeness	3	1	4
	E. Unexpectedness	10	4	14
	* unidentifiable	0	2	2
	Sub Total	22	28	50
Grand Total		56	51	107

Table 2

To give a brief preview of the current findings, the *misunderstanding party* (person who misunderstands the other) and the *misunderstood party* (person who is misunderstood by the other) are signaled to the occurrence of misunderstanding in different manners by different forms of wake-up calls (or counter evidence of taken-for-granted understanding). The misunderstood party is signaled to the presence of a misunderstanding by one of the two major forms: A) problematic understanding displayed in the other's remark and B) expressed recognition ("confession") in the other's remark. On the other hand, the misunderstanding party is signaled to the presence of a misunderstanding by one of the three major forms: C) expressed recognition ("allegation") in the other's remark, D) expressed strangeness in the other's remark, and E) unexpectedness in the other's remark. These findings cut across American and Japanese data. Each form of the wake-up call will be explained in detail with examples in the subsequent discussion.

Furthermore, the present analysis reveals that the ways in which the five forms of wake-up calls strike interactants are sequentially organized. The forms A, B, C, D, and E sequentially or chronologically relate to one another, relaying the recognition of a misunderstanding from the misunderstood party to the misunderstanding party or vice versa. There is a certain complex but regular pattern among the forms A, B, C, D, and E, and this pattern repeats itself until one interactant is signaled to a misunderstanding by one of these forms. A more specific and

thorough discussion of the relationship among the five forms will be presented after the description of each form of wake-up call below.

#### Forms of "Wake-Up Call" for the Misunderstood Party

The misunderstood party experiences signals to misunderstanding differently than the misunderstanding party. The current section first discusses the ways in which the misunderstood party recognizes misunderstanding, and then discusses the ways in which the misunderstanding party recognizes misunderstanding. The misunderstood party is signaled to the presence of a misunderstanding by one of the two major forms of wake-up calls: A) problematic understanding displayed in the other's remark and B) expressed recognition ("confession") in the other's remark. (See Table 3 below) The first form is predominant (52 out of 57) and the second is infrequent (4 out of 57) across American and Japanese data.

Party Signaled	Forms of "Wake-Up Call"	Frequency Counts		
		Japanese	English	Both
Misunderstood	A. Problematic Understanding	31	21	52
	B. Expressed Recognition of Misunderstanding ("confession")	3	1	4
	* unidentifiable	0	1	1
	Sub Total	34	23	57

Table 3



### A. Problematic Understanding Displayed in the Other's Response

For this form of "wake-up" call," the other's subsequent response (remark) falls outside the expected range and is heard as a sign of an inadequate understanding. This can be understood in light of *occasioning*. Occasioning represents a central principle of everyday conversation and refers to the idea that each utterance is built on resources provided by the prior utterance and in turn provides resources for the subsequent utterance. An utterance is *occasioned* by the prior utterance and *occasions* the next utterance. In this light, each utterance is heard as the manifestation of the speaker's understanding of the prior utterance as well as the manifestation of the speaker's free will as to what to say next. An utterance is the interplay of an understanding and free will. To illustrate this, consider that A intends to compliment B and says, "Boy, you are quite knowledgeable." B's response to this compliment may range from the affirmative, "Well, this is what I do for a living." to the modest, "I doubt it, but thank you. I wish my boss thought the same." to the denial, "Oh, no no. I know nothing." All these responses are unanimously grounded in an understanding of the prior turn as a compliment, as meant by A, whereas they express B's free choice as to how to respond. Therefore, all of the above responses are heard as being *occasioned* and as a sensible extension of ongoing talk.

Suppose B's reply to A's comment is "Look. I may not be perfect, but I am trying my best to help you, all right." To A who intends the utterance as a compliment, this reply falls outside the range of expectation and disturbs the principle of occasioning. The

only way this reply is heard as being occasioned is the possibility that B heard A's remark as sarcasm. A misunderstanding is experienced when the manifestation of the listener's understanding, not the manifestation of the listener's free will, betrays the range of expectation held by the speaker of the prior utterance.

In Schegloff's words;

A Turn 1 (T1)

B Turn 2 (T2)

A <-

T2, built to be and understood as "responsive" to T1, thus regularly displays to the speaker of the prior turn the understanding that has been accorded it - an understanding that the speaker of T1 may treat as problematic.

(Schegloff, 1992, pp.1302-1303)

A state of understanding revealed in an ongoing turn is closely monitored for its adequacy by the speaker of the prior turn. In other words, the speaker "checks" to see if the state of understanding is satisfactory to the purposes at hand. Occasionally, the speaker finds the next turn as displaying problematic understanding. This situation constitutes by far the most predominant (52 out of 57) form of a wake-up call experienced by the misunderstood party in the present data across Japanese and American conversations.

The following two examples illustrate this first form of wake-up call (A) for the misunderstood party. It needs reiterating at this point that the presentation and micro analysis of Japanese data segments are omitted in this chapter due to potential difficulties concerning language and culture. (Japanese data

segments and their analyses will appear in Appendix B.) Thus, all data segments presented in the current and subsequent chapters are from American conversations. Nonetheless, it is important that the major results of analyses regarding Japanese practices are incorporated into the current discussion in order to emphasize the culture-free nature of the findings. In the subsequent American examples, the analytic focus is on how the misunderstood party recognizes the misunderstanding through problematic understanding. The resource of analysis lies in interview as well as conversational data.

In one conversation, for example, Kristy and Kate are discussing proper containers for recycled materials. Kristy suggests an idea and recognizes that her idea is misunderstood by Kate; thus, Kristy is the misunderstood party.

#### Data Segment 1. English Conversation

- 4 Kate: . . . we'd have to sew the bags though  
 5 Kristy: well we got a (katter) on those  
 6 Kate: a what?  
 7 Kristy: I mean that canvas material we looked at early today  
 ->8 Kate: oh but that's plastic canvas it gets crispy but we could try yeah yeah  
 9 Kristy: no no not  
 10 the tarp I'm talking about the (.) cover for a  
 11 Kate: oh that cover (unintelligible) OK

In the written interview, Kristy reports that she realized that she was misunderstood when "the listener [Kate] started talking about

something else." Kristy explains that "I was talking about reusing material from a trunk cover that I had just shown to her. She [Kate] thought I was talking about a big, plastic tarp we had folded together a while earlier." That is, Kristy recognizes the misunderstanding while listening to the arrowed turn (line 8) produced by Kate. Kristy originally refers to a trunk cover that they looked at earlier when she utters in line 7, "canvas material." However, the referent is misunderstood by Kate as a "tarp" that they also looked at earlier the same day. Kristy recognizes this misunderstanding because Kate's response at the arrowed turn (line 8) reveals her reference to something other than what Kristy has in mind, displaying problematic understanding.

Another segment similarly illustrates the first form of wake-up call for the misunderstood party. In the next data segment, Ben reports that he is misunderstood by Cindy when he proposes to watch a soap opera that they regularly watch together. Focus on how the misunderstood party (Ben) is signaled to the occurrence of misunderstanding by problematic understanding demonstrated at the arrowed turn (line 7).

#### Data Segment 2. English Conversation

- 1 Ben:     what time is our soap opera coming on two o'clock?
- 2 Cindy:   uh:m (2.0) I don't know what time I just d- well (.) let's see yeah
- 3           I think our- our soap opera comes on at two
- 4 Ben:     mm ok
- 5 Cindy:   uh
- 6 Ben:     we'll watch the soap at two?
- >7 Cindy:  YEAH but we're talking on the tape right now
- 8 Ben:     no no I'm just saying we have twenty minutes until the soap opera comes

9 Cindy: Oh ok yeah uh huh  
10 Ben: on  
11 Cindy: we'll watch it

An interview reveals that, by the utterance in line 6, "We'll watch the soap at two?" Ben intends to propose that they keep talking on the tape until the soap opera comes on at two o'clock. Thus, a reasonable reply would be, for instance, "O. K. We'll watch it at two" or "It's all right if we keep talking past two. We don't have to watch the soap today." However, Cindy's subsequent response at the arrowed turn (line 7), "YEAH but we're talking on the tape right now," betrays Ben's expectation. An interview with Ben makes it clear that this particular reply triggers Ben to recognize the occurrence of a misunderstanding; Ben reports that he knew that he was misunderstood when "[Cindy] said, 'Yeah, but we're talking on the tape right now.'" Cindy must have heard Ben's proposal as "Let's turn off the tape immediately and get ready for our soap opera."

In sum, the above two segments demonstrate that the misunderstood party is signaled to the occurrence of a misunderstanding when the other's subsequent response falls outside the expected range of occasioning. In other words, when the other's reply "surprises" the speaker, it is then that the speaker recognizes that he or she is misunderstood by the other party. Although Japanese data segments are not presented in the current discussion, analysis reveals that the Japanese misunderstood party similarly recognizes misunderstanding through problematic understanding displayed in the other's responses.

## B. Expressed Recognition ("confession") of Misunderstanding in the Other's Response

For the second form of wake-up call for the misunderstood party, very infrequently (4 out of 57), the other party's "confession" informs the misunderstood party of the occurrence of a misunderstanding; the other party verbally admits that he or she has misunderstood something. The following data segment shows this second and rare form of wake-up call for the misunderstood party. Focus on how the misunderstood party recognizes the misunderstanding through the other's "confession."

In Data segment 3, Cindy tells her husband, Ben, that their wood furniture needs to be oiled. She is misunderstood by Ben and recognizes the misunderstanding by his "confession" at the arrowed turn (line 7).

### Data Segment 3: English Conversation

- 1 Cindy : I need to get some um (.) oil to oil the furniture
- 2 Ben : ok
- 3 Cindy : it's you know it's haven't been oiled since we moved from Vegas
- 4 needs to be
- 5 Ben : why are you having to oil the furniture
- 6 Cindy: it's WOOD honey; (you) if you don't want
- >7 Ben : I thought you were talking about the couch or something
- 8 Cindy : no you need to oil the wood (.) it also gets dry
- 9 Ben : all right

A misunderstanding occurs when Cindy utters in line 1, "I need to get some oil to oil the furniture." According to the interview data, Cindy intends by "the furniture" the wood furniture that they inherited from Ben's parents. Cindy, however, realizes that the

referent of the word, "furniture," is misinterpreted as the sofa on which they are sitting at the time of the interaction when Ben utters in line 7, "I thought you were talking about the couch or something." This analysis is grounded in Cindy's report; in the written interview, Cindy reports that "I knew [that I was misunderstood] when he [Ben] later said, I thought you meant the couch or something." Ben "confesses" that he had the wrong referent in mind, and this "confession" helps Cindy notice the misunderstanding. Analysis of Japanese data reveals that Japanese misunderstood parties similarly recognize conversational misunderstandings when given a "confession" by the other party.

In sum, the misunderstood party across American and Japanese cultures awakens to the reality of misunderstanding through either form A (problematic understanding) or form B ("confession") wake-up signals found in the utterances of the other party. From these forms, the misunderstood party experiences an unanticipated shift from presumed congruity to the awareness of incongruity.

#### Forms of "Wake-Up Call" for the Misunderstanding Party

The misunderstanding party experiences an alarm to a misunderstanding differently than the misunderstood party. The misunderstanding party is signaled to the occurrence of misunderstanding by one of three major forms of the wake-up call: C) expressed recognition of misunderstanding in the other's remark, D) expressed strangeness in the other's remark, and E) unexpectedness in the other's remark. (See Table 4) Each of these forms of wake-up calls is described with examples below.

Party Signaled	Forms of "Wake-Up Call"	Frequency Counts		
		Japanese	English	Both
Misunderstanding	C. Expressed Recognition of Misunderstanding ("allegation")	9	21	30
	D. Expressed Strangeness ("suspicion")	3	1	4
	E. Unexpectedness	10	4	14
	* unidentifiable	0	2	2
Sub Total		22	28	50

Table 4

### C. Expressed Recognition ("allegation") of Misunderstanding in the Other's Response

For the first form of wake-up signal for the misunderstanding party, the other party's "allegation" informs the misunderstanding party of the occurrence of a misunderstanding; the other party confronts the misunderstanding party that a certain misunderstanding has taken place. This form of recognition constitutes the vast majority (21 out of 28) of all recognitions experienced by the misunderstanding party in the present American data. (Interestingly, however, this is not the case with Japanese data; in the present Japanese data, the form E recognition constitutes the vast majority.)

While an "allegation" can be made in a variety of fashions, the most explicit and straightforward (but not necessarily most frequent) style consists of two verbal components: "No" directed at a problematic understanding, and a following clarification attempt. The two components are among items listed as conversational repair



components in Schegloff's (1992) work. While Schegloff explains "No" as a *repair initiating component*, however, this study prefers the term a *rejection token* to a repair initiating component because the present data indicate that "No" not only initiates a repair but also occasionally achieves the repair. Thus, the term rejection token more adequately characterizes the function of "No"; "No" refutes the other's understanding in the context of misunderstanding. The misunderstood party says "No" to point to the inadequateness of the displayed understanding and proceeds to elaborate or clarify in order to elicit a better understanding. In this manner, the misunderstanding party is clearly signaled to the presence of misunderstanding.

The subsequent two English data segments (Segments 4 and 5) illustrate the first form of wake-up call (C) for the misunderstanding party. Each example contains both the rejection token "No" and a subsequent clarification attempt which together form an explicit signal for the misunderstanding party. The focus is how the misunderstanding party recognizes the occurrence of misunderstanding through an "allegation." In Data Segment 4, Linda is telling Kyle about an event in which she helped a girl with her transfer from a community college to a university. Kyle is the misunderstanding party; Kyle misunderstands the reason why the girl in the story believes she has had science courses. Kyle recognizes his misunderstanding, given Linda's "allegation" at the arrowed turn (line12). This analysis is grounded in the written interview of Kyle; Kyle reports that he knew that he misunderstood

the other party because "the other [Linda] responded: No because she took the course."

#### Data Segment 4. English Conversation

- 9 Linda: w'll she she failed these two science courses and whole time they've been  
 10 asking her have you had sciences and she's been saying yes  
 11 Kyle: because she is thinking of psychology  
 ->12 Linda: no because she took the course  
 13 Kyle: oh because she th- yeah  
 14 Linda: ((sigh))

The next segment similarly illustrates the "allegation" form of wake-up call and contains both the rejection token "No" and a following clarification. In Data Segment 5, Lynn tells Kyle how amazed she was at indecent behaviors of construction workers working for a university. Kyle is the misunderstanding party. Interviews of the participants reveal that, with Lynn's phrase "talking and chatting" in line 3, Kyle pictures the construction workers gossiping like girls, while Lynn means that the workers are cursing in public. Kyle recognizes the misunderstanding through Lynn's "allegation" at the arrowed turns (lines 10-14); Kyle reports that he realized the misunderstanding because "She [Lynn] went on to explain that she was talking about their [the construction workers'] use of profanity."

#### Data Segment 5. English Conversation

- 3 Lynn: they were up there and they were just like talking and chatting on before  
 4 they were singing and they were saying about everything that I mean  
 5 people are working up there where's that come from where's that come  
 6 from stuff like it people start choosing w- just like golly why don't you

- 7 (pause) shut up  
 8 Kyle: hhhh  
 9 Kyle: they'd be like talking about individual people?  
 ->10 Lynn: no they weren't talking gossip they  
 ->11 were just just talking and f ward this and f this and f that and I was just  
 ->12 like (.) you're in public I mean it's ok to (.) I mean it's one thing to say it  
 ->13 but saying it in public specially it tuh (pause) outside where everybody  
 ->14 can hear it I was just I didn't think 't was very appropriate  
 15 (pause)

Whereas, as illustrated above, the combination of the rejection token "no" and a following clarification comprises the most explicit style of "allegation," either one of the two components alone similarly functions as the "allegation" wake-up call. For instance, the misunderstood party simply clarifies or elaborates without first saying "no." This signal may be used when "No" seems out of place for varying reasons. The following example illustrates one of such cases. Kyle is a graduate student, and Linda is an undergraduate student. An interview reveals that, coming from the perspective that Linda is not familiar with the graduate terminology "A.B.D.," Kyle assumes that Linda does not know how to use the term properly. Kyle misunderstands her and realizes the misunderstanding, given a clarification effort by Linda at the arrowed turns (lines 25-26).

#### Data Segment 6. English Conversation

- 19 Linda: and then when you finish your dissertation? when you're done?  
 20 Kyle: yes yeah the last phase when you're working on dissertation you're called  
 21 a.b.d all but dissertation  
 22 Linda: I've got a friend who has her a.b.d.  
 23 Kyle: HAS her a.b.d. oh good I- I always thought of it as she IS a.b.d. but I  
 24 guess you can say either way and so (unintelligible)

->25 Linda: she has it because she's not  
->26 working on her dissertation anymore  
27 Kyle: oh I see so she is- that's kind of a cute thing she is saying as opposed to  
28 saying I have my ph.d. I have my a.b.d. ok so she's given up  
29 Linda: yes

In line 22, Linda wittily states, "I've got a friend who has her A.B.D. (emphasis added)" in order to lighten up the otherwise sad fact that her friend gave up on her Ph.D., treating A.B.D. as a sort of degree. In line 23, Kyle halfheartedly accepts Linda's remark about her friend, commenting on the problematic usage of the term "A.B.D." He, in effect, is saying, "You may use the acronym the wrong way, but I know what you mean." The subsequent remark "I guess you can say either way" in lines 23-24 is Kyle's attempt to accommodate to Linda's lack of knowledge. This momentarily changes the direction of conversation from Linda's friend to the use of the terminology. In Linda's subsequent clarification attempt at the arrowed turns (lines 25-26), the rejection token "no" is absent possibly because of the ambiguous nature of its object. The potential "no" may be heard as having direct relevance to the last part of Kyle's remark, as "No, you cannot use the word in a certain way" whereas, in fact, it is directed at Kyle's misunderstanding of Linda's playful intention. The point is that the misunderstood party can still be signaled to the occurrence of misunderstanding without the rejection token "No" when the "No" seems out of place.

Yet, as another version of the "allegation" wake-up call (C), the misunderstanding party can be signaled to a misunderstanding given the simple rejection token "No" without a following elaboration or

clarification. This simple wake-up call may function when it is relatively straightforward as to which unit of meaning the "No" is directed at, but the misunderstood party does not have words to explain what the "no" is about in the immediate time frame. This leaves the misunderstanding party in the position of providing self with an elaboration and clarification.

In sum, the misunderstanding party is signaled to the occurrence of a misunderstanding through an "allegation" given by the other party (the one who is misunderstood). Such an allegation may basically be presented in the three different styles: the rejection token "No," a clarification attempt, and the combination of the two. From these components of "allegation," the misunderstanding party wakes up to the reality of non-intersubjectivity. It must be added that, although Japanese segments are not presented in the present chapter, Japanese conversation similarly demonstrates all of the above three styles of "allegation" as forms of a wake-up call for the misunderstanding party.

#### D. Expressed Strangeness in the Other's Response

Whereas the first and most common form of a wake-up call (C) for the misunderstanding party *clearly points to* the presence of a misunderstanding, relaying the recognition from the misunderstood party to the misunderstanding party, the second form (D) *hints at* a potential misunderstanding, conveying a sense of "weirdness" felt by the misunderstood party. For the second form of wake-up call for the misunderstanding party, the other party finds a response given

by the misunderstanding party somewhat "strange," "awkward," "weird," and anomalous as it does not quite fit the ongoing talk, and expresses these feelings. An expressed sense of "strangeness" occasionally makes sufficient impact on the misunderstanding party so that he or she is awakened to the reality of misunderstanding. This situation constitutes the second form of wake-up call for the misunderstanding party (D) and occurs with a rather low frequency (4 out of 50) across American and Japanese data.

This form of wake-up call leaves the misunderstanding party in the position of first clearly and fully recognizing misunderstanding whereas the first form relays the recognition of misunderstanding from the misunderstood party to the misunderstanding party. Stated differently, when given the form D wake-up call, the misunderstanding party completes the task of recognition that the misunderstood party has initiated by sensing "strangeness" in the discourse.

The following example (Data Segment 7) illustrates the form D wake-up call. In Data Segment 7, Lynn tells Kyle about her boyfriend Brad who wore a Kansas sweat-shirt over an OU sweat-shirt after Kansas beat OU at the OU football stadium. Because of this, Kyle thinks Brad is an unusual OU student who does not favor his school team, misunderstanding Brad's identity as an OU student while, in fact, Brad comes from Kansas to see the game. Thus, Kyle is the misunderstanding party. The analytical focus is on how the misunderstanding party recognizes the misunderstanding through the other's expression of strangeness.

## Data Segment 7. American data

- 3 Lynn: . . . and that's you know Kansas were down there on the-  
 4 on that end=  
 5 Kyle: =(they are in love and still harsh)  
 6 Lynn: and  
 7 Lynn: we were down there and that was before he put his Kansas shirt on his  
 8 Kansas sweat shirt on and um  
 9 Kyle: so he secretly loves Kansas more than OU  
 ->10 Lynn: well I wonder why (.) he lives there  
 11 Kyle: well I- I have a football team that I like better than OU I shouldn't talk. . .

At the arrowed turn (line 10), Lynn utters "Well I wonder why," and expresses an "enigma" she perceives in Kyle's remark "So he secretly loves Kansas more than OU." To Lynn, who knows that Brad is a Kansas student, it is natural that Brad loves Kansas more than OU, and this "love" does not have to be a secret. The expressed "enigma" propels Kyle to take a second look at his state of understanding, and this leads to the realization that Lynn has previously told him that Brad is from Kansas. This analysis is grounded in an interview with Kyle; Kyle reports, "I had thought she [Lynn] was talking about an OU student, but she [Lynn] had definitely mentioned that he was a Kansan." Lynn's subsequent explanation "He lives there" in line 10 gives an additional conviction to Kyle's realization of his misunderstanding. Kyle now clearly knows that he has misunderstood Brad's identity as an OU student.

Speakers of expressions such as "Huh?" and "Well I wonder why" obviously have difficulties in understanding the other's remark as being relevant to (*occasioned by*) the prior remarks. These enigmatic signals trigger the misunderstanding party to take a close

look at their own utterances as displays of problematic understandings. This second form (D) of wake-up call for the misunderstanding party is equally observed in Japanese data in the present study.

#### E. Unexpectedness in the Other's Response

While the second form of wake-up call described above conveys a sense of "weirdness" to the misunderstanding party, the third form does not convey strangeness sensed by the other party nor the detection of a misunderstanding, and yet functions as a wake-up call for the misunderstanding party. The third form simply "takes the misunderstanding party by surprise." More specifically, while two parties proceed in conversation based on the assumption of adequate understanding, the misunderstood party's subsequent utterance during the ongoing conversation may suddenly strike the misunderstanding party as lying outside the expected range of remarks (violation of *occasioning*). This "unexpectedness" redirects the misunderstanding party to the possibility of misunderstanding. In other words, the other's utterance appears "senseless" from the perspective of the currently presumed understanding but may be "sensible" from the perspective of a potentially ongoing misunderstanding. The moment the other's utterance becomes "sensible" marks the moment of recognition.

The following conversation (Data Segment 8) illustrates the third form of a wake-up call experienced by the misunderstanding party. In Data Segment 8, Kyle is the misunderstanding party. Lynn tells Kyle about an unpleasant event in which a group of people took



her and her friends' seats during a football game. Kyle misunderstands the location of their seats. Note how Kyle, the misunderstanding party, recognizes the misunderstanding through unexpectedness in Lynn's remarks at the arrowed turns (lines 17-18, 20).

Data Segment 8. American data

- 5 Lynn: well he just bought two tickets um I mean just regular seat but I had I got  
 6 a student ticket and um(.) there were four of us and some of them had  
 7 already taken our seats and so  
 8 Kyle: (unintelligible)  
 9 Lynn: that happens to me all time  
 10 Kyle: yeah I- I'd ask 'em to move I'd say hey (unintelligible) they are my seat  
 11 yeah  
 12 Lynn: and they were like right on the end of the row so we didn't have to k-  
 13 we really didn't have to  
 14 Kyle: and that's great seats  
 15 Lynn: yeah cause you don't have to walk over anywhere  
 16 Kyle: how close to the fifty yard line was it  
 ->17 Lynn: oh we were at the most second section in the top in the higher section not  
 ->18 down the bottom that we were in the (.) at the top the  
 19 Kyle: oh  
 ->20 Lynn: end zone  
 21 Kyle: oh the end zone ok yeah=  
 22 Lynn: =yeah in the end zone anyway so we were sitting oh we were looking for  
 23 out seats (unintelligible)

Lynn implies that her friends' seats and hers were in the student section of the stadium when she says, "I got a student ticket" in lines 5-6. According to the interview data, with this statement, Kyle pictures the event taking place along the East side line of the stadium, applying his prior experience to Lynn's story (previously he

sat along the East side line with a student ticket). Kyle then proceeds to obtain a more vivid picture of the event and asks in line 16, "How close to the fifty yard line was it [your seat]?" A sensible response, to Kyle, would reveal the location of the seat in terms of yard lines, such as "Oh, we were at about the 35 yard line." Lynn's response in lines 17, 18, and 20, however, betrays Kyle's expectation by indicating the height of the seat ("We were . . . in the top in the higher section"). This betrayal awakens Kyle to the possibility of misunderstanding. The resource of this analysis lies in Kyle's report; in the written interview, Kyle reports that he knew that he misunderstood the other person "when [he] asked the nonsensical question ('How close to the 50 yard line was it?') and received the 'end zone' answer." Lynn's response makes sense if Kyle has misunderstood Lynn in the first place. The truth is that Lynn sat in the North End zone with her student ticket, not along the East side line as Kyle pictured. The "unexpectedness" that Kyle experienced turns out to be a product of his initial misunderstanding. This situation constitutes the third form of wake-up call for the misunderstanding party and is observed equally across American and Japanese conversations.

To provide a summary of the above findings, the misunderstood party and the misunderstanding party take different paths to recognize the presence of a misunderstanding. For the misunderstood party across American and Japanese data, the recognition of a misunderstanding dawns when the other displays a problematic understanding (Form A wake-up call), or confesses his or her misunderstanding (Form B). For the misunderstanding party

across the two cultures, the recognition dawns when the other party alleges a misunderstanding (Form C), expresses a sense of strangeness (Form D), or provides an unexpected remark (Form E). Through these distinct paths, each interactant awakens to the reality of misunderstanding from presumed intersubjectivity.

## CHRONOLOGICAL LOCATION OF RECOGNITION

The above discussion addresses various forms and shapes of "wake-up calls" experienced by conversational interactants as signals to misunderstanding. Yet an important issue needs to be addressed regarding "when" these signals are experienced by interactants. The moment (chronological location) of recognition is distanced from the site of misunderstanding, and the distance varies vastly from case to case in the present data. Consider the following two examples which equally involve the first form of wake-up call for the misunderstood party (A), but are contrasting in terms of the time consumed by the process of recognition. In the first example (Data Segment 9), a misunderstanding occurs regarding the word "one." The site of the misunderstanding is marked by !. An interview reveals that the misunderstood party, Lynn, instantly recognizes a misunderstanding upon the production of the responsive next turn (line 16).

### Data Segment 9. English Conversation

13 Lynn: . . . she gave her I guess my social security number and pulled up in the  
 14 computer and they said oh SHE the yeah enrollment (.) reservation she  
 ! 15 said that they had one ready for me and I was like oh really

- >16 Kyle: (at one room of) a dorm room?  
 17 Lynn: oh no I'm sorry an apartment at Yorkshire  
 18 Kyle: oh right at Yorkshire that's where you  
 19 Lynn: because that's where I applied

By contrast, in the second example (Data Segment 10), the misunderstood party, Linda, takes a much longer time to recognize misunderstanding. Both Linda and Kyle have a bachelor's degree and are discussing how many years they took to complete their bachelor's degree. Linda's utterance "I took six (years) but I took four semesters off" in line 15 is misunderstood by Kyle as "six years excluding four semesters off" while, in fact, Linda means "six years including four semesters off." Linda eventually recognizes this misunderstanding upon the production of the arrowed turns (lines 23-24) by Kyle, which is distanced from the site of the misunderstanding (marked by !).

#### Data Segment 10. English Conversation

- ! 15 Linda: I took six but I took four semesters off and that's hard  
 16 Kyle: ok  
 17 Linda: not being in school for four semesters not all together one semester at a  
 18 time I've taken off  
 19 Kyle: yeah I've taken extra y- extra semesters because I was misdirected yeah  
 20 I started out being one major and switched I wasted a lot of course work  
 21 Linda: but I could've I could've done before years if I hadn't taken four semesters  
 22 off  
 ->23 Kyle: when you took four semesters off you had to take more classes when you  
 ->24 came back?  
 25 Linda: NO I'm saying that my six years include a time off  
 26 Kyle: yeah  
 27 Kyle: I see but you wouldn't let me into that mind  
 28 Linda: well yours is a lengthy gap

As illustrated above, analysis of the present data across American and Japanese conversations suggests that the first form of wake-up call for the misunderstood party (form A) inevitably occurs at the responsive next turn (t2 in Segment X below) adjacent to the misunderstood turn, or after, during turns produced by the misunderstanding party. (That means Form A recognition never occurs while the misunderstood party makes utterances.) A further analysis of the present data suggests that the second form of wake-up call for the misunderstood party (B) inevitably occurs at the turn (t4 in Segment X) after the first three turns (the misunderstood turn, the responsive next turn, and the misunderstood party's response to the next turn), or after, during turns produced by the misunderstanding party. (That means Form B recognition never occurs while the misunderstood party makes utterances.) Furthermore, all three forms of wake-up calls for the misunderstanding party (C, D, and E) inevitably occur at the turn (t3 in Segment X) in which the misunderstood party provides a response to the responsive next turn, or after, during turns produced by the misunderstood party. (That means Forms C, D, and E recognitions never occur while the misunderstanding party make utterances.)

Segment X

Speaker	Turn	Sequential Character of the Turn
Misunderstood:	t1	Misunderstood turn (Site of Misunderstanding)
->Misunderstanding:	t2	*Responsive Next Turn
->Misunderstood:	t3	#Misunderstood Party's Response to Responsive Next Turn
->Misunderstanding:	t4	*
Misunderstood:	t5	#
Misunderstanding:	t6	*

\* recognition opportunity for the misunderstood party

# recognition opportunity for the misunderstanding party

In short, different forms of alarms have distinct starting points for their occurrences and, thereafter, may occur at any distanced locations from the site of misunderstanding. Table 5 below summarizes the sequential locations of the occurrence of the different forms of wake-up calls (Forms A, B, C, D, and E).

Party	Forms of Wake-Up Call	Sequential Locations of Wake-Up Call
Misunderstood	A. Problematic Understanding	Responsive Next Turn ( t2 in Segment X) or After by the Other
	B. Expressed Recognition of Misunderstanding ("Confession")	Turn after the First Three (t4) or After by the Other
Misunderstanding	C. Expressed Recognition of Misunderstanding (Allegation")	Other's Response to the Responsive
	D. Expressed Strangeness	Next Turn (t3) or After by the Other
	E. Unexpectedness	

Table 5

The above findings about sequential locations of different forms of wake-up calls are further explained in the chronological chart (Chart 1) below. The chart helps us visually comprehend how interactants' recognitions of a misunderstanding are sequentially structured. It is important to note that Forms A, B, C, D, and E sequentially or chronologically relate to one another, relaying the recognition of a misunderstanding from the misunderstood party to the misunderstanding party or vice versa.

Suppose, for instance, that Interactant X (male) and Interactant Y (female) converse, and a misunderstanding occurs regarding X's utterance in t1 in the chart. Interactant X (the

misunderstood party) utters in t1, "I met Sally the other day in Tokyo," intending a Japanese restaurant in Oklahoma city named "Tokyo." Interactant Y (the misunderstanding party), however, interprets this as the capital city of Japan and understands that X met Sally in the city. The first chance of recognizing this misunderstanding is granted to X when he screens a state of understanding displayed in Y's responsive next turn (A in t2 in the chart). For instance, Y may say, "I didn't know you went to Japan lately." This recognition may be relayed to Y through "allegation" (C in t3), such as "Oh, no no. I mean a Japanese restaurant in Oklahoma city," or expressed strangeness (D in t3), such as "Well, I didn't. Why?" or may be kept to X for some reasons (undetected by Y).

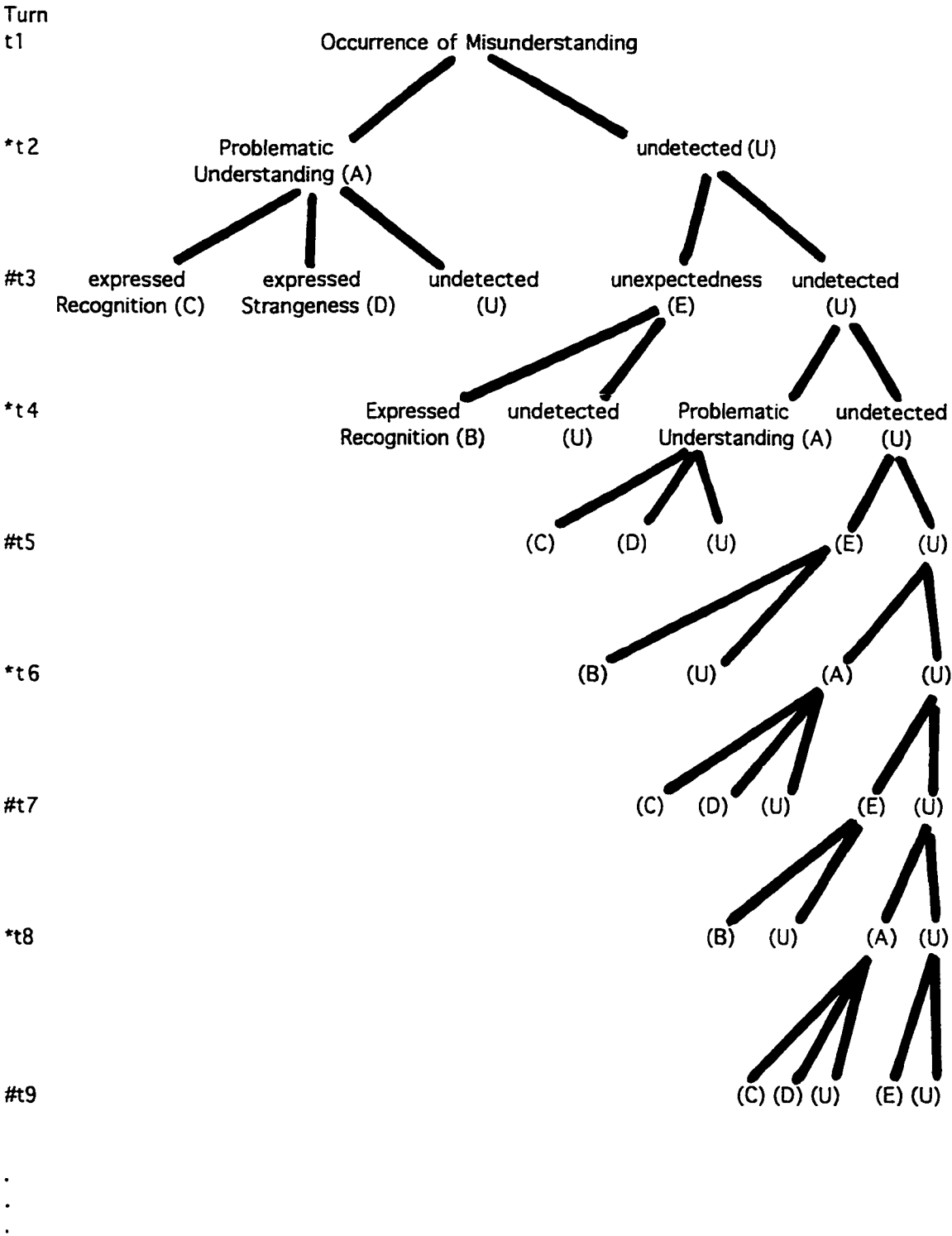
On the other hand, the first chance of recognition (A) may possibly be missed if X fails to see any sign of problematic understanding in Y's response in t2. For instance, Y might say, "Really? How is she doing?" In this case, the second opportunity for recognition is granted to Y, the misunderstanding party, when she attends to the remark (t3) made by X in response to Y's responsive next turn. In X's remark, Y may find unexpectedness (E in t3), such as "She is planning to go to Japan soon," and thus recognize the misunderstanding. This recognition may be relayed to X through "confession" (B in t4), such as "Oh, so you mean you met her [Sally] at Tokyo restaurant" or may be kept to Y (undetected by X).

Further yet, it is still possible that the misunderstanding escapes the second opportunity for its recognition (E in t3) and goes undetected by Y. For instance, to Y's question, "How is she doing?" X may reply, "She's doing fine. She is seeing Tom lately." In such a



case, the third chance is given back to X, the misunderstood party, as he may find a problematic understanding displayed in Y's subsequent turn (A in t4). For instance, Y may say, "Is Tom in Japan?" If this opportunity is missed, then the next chance is given to Y as she might find X's subsequent remark to be unexpected (E in t5). If not, then the next chance is again given back to X (A in t6).

In this manner, opportunities for misunderstanding recognition may keep knocking at the door for interactants, repeating the same chronological pattern among A, B, C, D, and E, until the interactants catch any of these signals. As a result, the recognition of a misunderstanding is characteristically accidental and contingent upon the release of signals and the interactants' attendance to them.



\* recognition opportunity place for the misunderstood party  
# recognition opportunity place for the misunderstanding party

Chart 1

As shown above, the occurrence and surfacing (interactants' recognition) of misunderstanding are two different phenomena which are not necessarily adjacent to each other. Misunderstanding is a semantic event and does not always find an immediate indicator that appeals to interactants. The distance from the occurrence of misunderstanding to its recognition by at least one party may be a matter of a few turns which take only seconds or may be a matter of an extended exchange of turns which takes hours, days, weeks, or even months. The amount of turns and the time consumed by the process of misunderstanding recognition is arbitrary, accidental, and unknown, except for the fact that the recognition takes at least the first two turns: the misunderstood turn and the responsive next turn. These two turns are the manifestations of two meanings, of two distinct semantic locations, and are the minimum necessary condition for the recognition of misunderstanding.

Interestingly, the current finding about varying distances between the location of misunderstanding and its recognition corroborates preceding studies about conversational repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977; Schegloff, 1987; 1992; Drummond and Hopper, 1991). Schegloff (1987; 1992) studies misunderstanding from the perspective of repair work. To Schegloff, the study of misunderstanding emerged as a byproduct of an inquiry into conversational repair. *Repair* refers to the process in which conversationalists "fix" problems and *repairable* or *trouble source* refers to the object of repair work. (Schegloff et al. (1977)

use the spelling "repairable" instead of the common spelling "reparable.")

A: T1 (trouble source turn) ---contains 1st position repair opportunity

B: T2 (the responsive next turn) ---2nd position repair opportunity

A: T3 (the subsequent turn) --- 3rd position repair opportunity

B: T4 (the subsequent turn) --- 4th position repair opportunity

Schegloff notes that the 3rd and 4th position repairs typically deal with a specific kind of trouble source, namely misunderstanding, while the 1st and 2nd position repairs deal with other types of trouble sources such as mispronunciation, word search, or wrong words, as in the following:

#### 1st position repair

A: She was givin me a:ll the people that were go:ne this yea:r I mean this quarter y'  
// know

(Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977)

A uses the wrong word ("year") and replaces it with the correct one ("quarter") within the same turn.

#### 2nd position repair

A: He had dis uh Mistuh W- whatever k- I can't think of his first name, Watts  
on,the one thet wrote // that piece,

B: Dan Watts

(Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977)

Here, A struggles with word search in T1 (trouble source turn). In the next responsive turn, B provides the word "Dan."

### 3rd position repair

- A: Which one::s are closed, an' which ones are open  
 B: Most of 'em. This, this, this, this ((pointing))  
 A: I 'on't mean on the shelters, I mean on the roads.  
 (Schegloff, 1992)

T1 is regarded as a trouble source turn in the sense that it invites a problem of understanding. A, the speaker of the trouble source turn, repairs the problem in T3.

### 4th position repair

- A: Loes, do you have a calendar  
 B: Yeah ((reaches for her desk calendar))  
 A: Do you have one that hangs on the wall?  
 B: Oh, you want one  
 (Schegloff, 1992)

T1 is the trouble source turn as it invites misunderstanding. In T3, the speaker of the trouble source turn rephrases the question, soliciting a repair. In T4, the recipient of the trouble turn, does the repair by clearly announcing her renewed understanding.

Note that trouble sources such as mispronunciation, word search, and wrong word are immediately identifiable and thus repairable on the spot, such as within the same turn (T1) or in the responsive next turn (T2). On the other hand, misunderstanding as a trouble source takes at least the first two turns for its manifestation, making the

first repair opportunity available after the responsive next turn; the first repair opportunity should be in T3 or later.

Further, Schegloff notes that the 3rd position repair may occur in the third turn (T3) or later, and the 4th position repair may occur in the fourth turn (T4) or later, differentiating between the two concepts: *position* and *turn*. That is, *position* is mainly the name for certain functions while *turn* is the name for locations measured by the n-th from the trouble source. More specifically, the 3rd position repair can occur in the 3rd, 5th, 7th, or 9th turn: the turn produced by the speaker of the trouble source after the responsive next turn. Likewise, the 4th position repair can occur in the 4th, 6th, 8th, or 10th turn: the turn produced by the recipient of the trouble source turn.

A: T1 (trouble source turn) —contains 1st position repair opportunity

B: T2 (the responsive next turn) —2nd position repair opportunity

A: T3 (the subsequent turn) — 3rd position repair opportunity

B: T4 (the subsequent turn) — 4th position repair opportunity

A: T5 3rd position repair opportunity

B: T6 4th position repair opportunity

A: T7 3rd position repair opportunity

B: T8 4th position repair opportunity

A: T9 3rd position repair opportunity

B: T10 4th position repair opportunity

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Drummond and Hopper (1991) similarly observe that "as the distance from repairable to repair initiation increases, the term

'misunderstanding' becomes a better and better descriptor for what occurs" (p.305). An important collaboration between the present analysis and previous findings by Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977), Schegloff (1987; 1992), and Drummond and Hopper (1991) is that repairs of misunderstanding have to wait for at least the first two turns (the trouble source turn and the next responsive turn) to be produced, making the first repair work available in the third turn, and thereafter may occur at any distanced locations. Prolonged and varying distances from the site of misunderstanding to the site of repair point to the fact that misunderstanding is primarily a semantic event and is difficult to detect unless and until a clear sign (wake-up call) is given to interactants.

The parallel between the prior findings about the distance from repairable to repair and the current findings about the distance from misunderstanding to recognition, however, must be considered with caution. Repair and recognition are closely interrelated but are two different acts. Repairs are accomplished upon the participants' recognition of the trouble sources. It is important to note that the recognitions of trouble sources may or may not lead to repair work.

Nonetheless, the prior findings shed important additional light on the current findings since the recognition and repair of misunderstanding tend to coincide. Theoretically speaking, the recognition and repair may occur at distinct locations. Empirically speaking, however, the vast majority of recognitions do result in immediate repairs or repair initiations. (See the later discussion of participants' handlings of misunderstanding.)

In light of the above discussion, one can rationally speculate that there may be many cases of ongoing misunderstandings which have not been brought to the participants' attention. Occasionally, or potentially quite often, participants fail to recognize the occurrence of misunderstanding due to a lack of its obvious manifestation. The recognition of misunderstanding is accidentally accomplished given certain wake-up calls, and this takes an unknown amount of time. Unless and until participants are signaled to the presence of misunderstanding, they presume adequate understanding, and based on this presumption, proceed in conversation. In this circumstance, it is likely that one misunderstanding leads to another and again to another without participants' knowledge.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF "WAKE-UP CALLS" TO PARTICIPANTS

The above discussion makes it clear that the recognition of misunderstanding is marked by various forms of wake-up calls given at any moment of interaction after the production of the first two turns. Such wake-up calls, however, only work if participants are ready to attend to them. Participants may choose to be deaf to the calls, although such a choice may not belong to intentional and conscious decision-making. Rather, whether participants hear or mute wake-up calls rests on unintentional and unconscious choices.

Theoretically speaking, when a misunderstanding finds a particular manifestation, and the manifestation is available to both the misunderstanding and misunderstood parties, the two parties



should equally recognize the misunderstanding. In reality (in the present data), however, such a situation is rarely the case. Instead, it is frequently the case that the misunderstanding party recognizes a misunderstanding while the misunderstood party does not, or vice versa. Only in 16 out of the 73 (about 22%) cases reported in the current data, including both Japanese and American conversations, are experiences of misunderstanding shared by both parties. The rest (about 78%) represents cases in which only one party recognizes a misunderstanding while the other remains ignorant of the occurrence of the misunderstanding. The significance of this high percentage points to the quite private and personal nature of misunderstanding recognition.

To illustrate this, the following example is helpful. In Data Segment 11, the misunderstanding party clearly recognizes misunderstanding while the misunderstood party does not. Linda (the misunderstood party) is telling Kyle (the misunderstanding party) a story about a girl she helped with her transfer from a community college to a university. The girl in the story believes that she has had science classes merely because she attended them while, in fact, she failed them.

#### Data Segment 11. English Conversation

- 9 Linda: w'll she she failed these two science courses and whole time they've been  
 10 asking her have you had sciences and she's been saying yes  
 11 Kyle: because she is thinking of psychology  
 12 Linda: no because she took the course  
 13 Kyle: oh because she th- yeah  
 14 Linda: ((sigh))

A misunderstanding emerges regarding the reason why the girl in Linda's story believes that she has had science classes. Kyle misunderstands the reason as being that the girl thinks a psychology course counts as a "science." Several minutes prior to this exchange, Kyle learned that the girl in the story made an A in a psychology class. An oral interview with Kyle reveals that he thought that it was impressive that this girl achieved an A in the psychology class, while he dropped a psychology class as an undergraduate student due to its high level of difficulty. Because of this experience, Kyle's mind was preoccupied with the idea that the girl made an A, and this preoccupation guided his interpretation. Since this segment of talk closely relates to Kyle's experience, it stands out from the rest of the talk. People tend to attend to and retain things for which they care. This explains the fact that the above segment of talk makes an impression in Kyle's experience, making the manifested gap in understanding easily identifiable to him.

On the other hand, the same interaction does not impress itself as an event of misunderstanding in Linda's experience. It is interesting to note that Linda clearly signals Kyle to the fact that he has just misinterpreted the story by giving the clarification in line 12, "no because she took the course." This suggests that Linda resists Kyle's interpretation. Nonetheless, the manifested gap in understanding quickly disappears as a peripheral issue in Linda's experience. Linda might have "heard" a wake-up call in Kyle's problematic understanding displayed in line 11, but did not "listen" to this call because the call did not have a special significance to

her. By contrast, Kyle clearly "listened" to a wake-up call in Linda's "allegation" in line 12. The difference between "hearing" and "listening" is whether you experience a stimulus as a meaningful event; hearing does not lead to a meaning, but listening does. Listening results in clear recognition of a misunderstanding.

The above example demonstrates that people become receptive to certain discrepancies in understanding when the discrepancies have special salience to them. To the extent that the semantic distance (between the intended meaning and the interpreted meaning) matters to a participant, a wake-up call sharply and vividly strikes the participant as evidence of misunderstanding. A resulting situation is that people at times silence wake-up calls, remaining indifferent to the significance the calls carry, while they at other times appreciate wake-up calls, fully identifying their significance. In short, the ways in which interactants attend to a sign of misunderstanding vary from individual to individual, from time to time, and from occasion to occasion.

What matters and what does not to an individual are understood in light of *the figure and ground principle*. (See Figure 1)

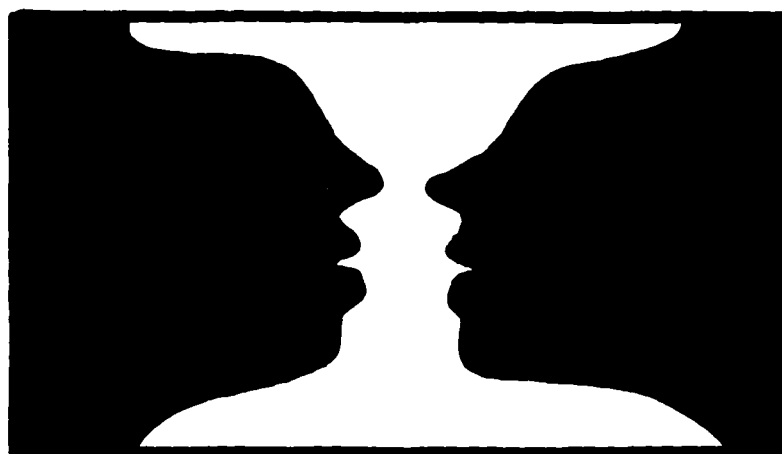


Figure 1

From a certain perspective, the picture strikes the viewer as having two faces; the faces come forward as main figures, and the rest recedes as a background. Yet from another perspective, the same picture depicts a candle holder; the candle holder comes forward, and the rest recedes. Like the picture, the reality of life and interaction consists of the flow of experiences ranging from parts of primary concern to parts of lesser concern to us. Things that do not matter to us easily recede as background miscellanies. These include discrepancies in understandings which mean little to us.

Schutz argues:

It is misleading to say that experiences *have* meaning. Meaning does not lie *in* the experience. Rather, those experiences are meaningful which are grasped reflexively. The meaning is the way in which the Ego regards its experience. The meaning lies in the attitude of Ego toward that part of its stream of consciousness which has already flowed by, toward its "elapsed duration." (1967, pp. 69-70)

To Schutz, not all experiences are attended to or reflected upon by the individual. Unreflected-upon experiences do not have a special significance to that person. It takes a reflective glance of an individual for an event to become phenomenal and meaningful (figure). Without a glance, the event remains prephenomenal and meaningless (background). Through reflective acts, we lift certain segments of experiences from the stream, rendering them meaningful.

Schutz compares this process of lifting to a cone-shaped light: We shall say rather that each Act of attention to one's own

stream of duration may be compared to a cone of light. This cone illuminates already elapsed individual phases of that stream, rendering them bright and sharply defined [and, as such, meaningful]. (1967, p. 70)

The cone of light analogy helps explain the ways in which interactants recognize events of misunderstanding. Unrecognized misunderstandings are the ones that lie outside the ray of light. A misunderstanding does not reach interactants' awareness when interactants make themselves unavailable to wake-up calls that it releases.

In sum, the significance of a semantic distance signaled by a wake-up call is relative to one's psychological standing. In other words, the recognition of misunderstanding is about how significant or how minor the semantic gap appears to one's concerns, needs, and wants at the time of interaction. When the gap appears too significant to overlook, it is then that a participant "recognizes" misunderstanding. A minor gap does not impress itself as a misunderstanding in the participant's experience.

It needs reiterating at this point that the current analysis of misunderstanding recognition relies solely on subjects' reportings. Besides the significance of semantic distances, many other reasons possibly affect the reportings of recognized misunderstanding. For instance, complexity of interaction, time constraints, and lack of enthusiasm might discourage subjects from such reportings while simplicity of interaction, sufficient time, and enthusiasm toward the current project might be encouraging factors. These factors, however, remain outside the researcher's knowledge. One important

fact is that unless subjects find some significance in semantic gaps, they do not report them. In other words, the significance of the gaps may not be a sufficient condition, but a necessary condition, for reporting the recognized misunderstanding.

Based on the above analysis, the current study presents a model that helps explain interactants' recognition of conversational misunderstanding. (See Figure 2) The model utilizes Schutz's cone-of-light principle discussed earlier. The model, to a certain extent, simplifies the reality for the ease of comprehension. For instance, the model portrays the light as consisting of two distinct layers: bright and dim. The boundary between the two layers are artificially drawn in order to facilitate comprehension. In reality, the light should consist of infinite gradations of brightness.

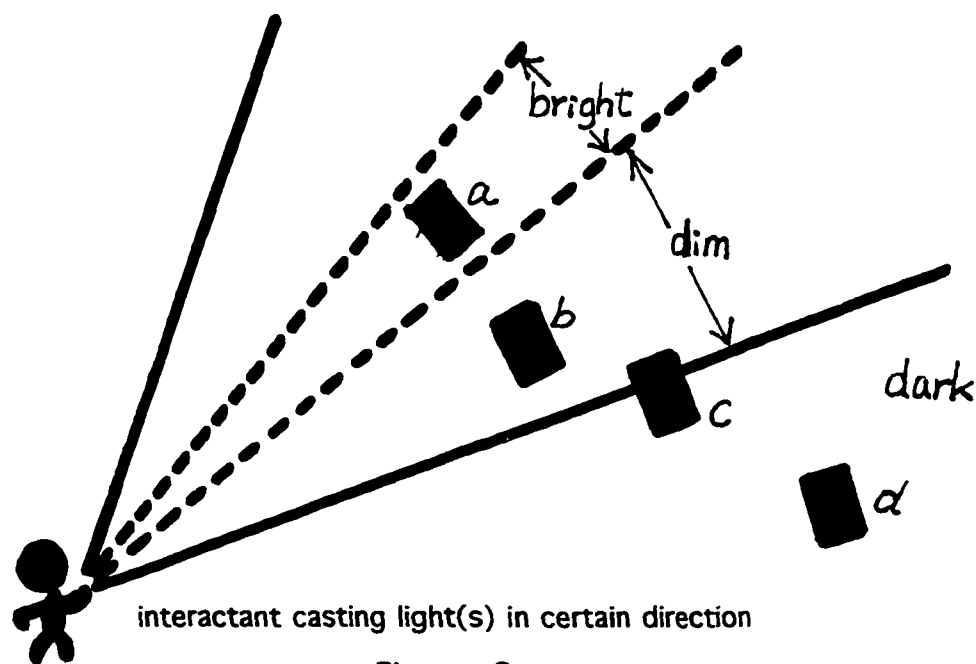


Figure 2

The cone of light represents an interactant's direction of awareness or focus of attention, including needs, wants, concerns, and interests. Each black tape represents a manifested gap between

the intended meaning and the interpreted meaning. Whether the interactant recognizes a misunderstanding depends upon the direction of the manifested gap, compared to the direction of the cast light. When the gap is caught at the center of the light, the interactant easily recognizes misunderstanding. Compare *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*. The gap *a* lies at the center of the light, and thus, is highly likely to be recognized by the interactant. The gap *b* is caught in the light, but not at the center. This gives *b* a modest chance of recognition. The gap *c* is barely caught in the periphery of light, and therefore, is barely recognizable. Finally, the gap *d* is located far from the light and is hardly, if not ever, recognizable. The closer the gap is to the center of the light, the more obvious the gap is to the interactant; the gap presents itself as having some significance to the interactant.

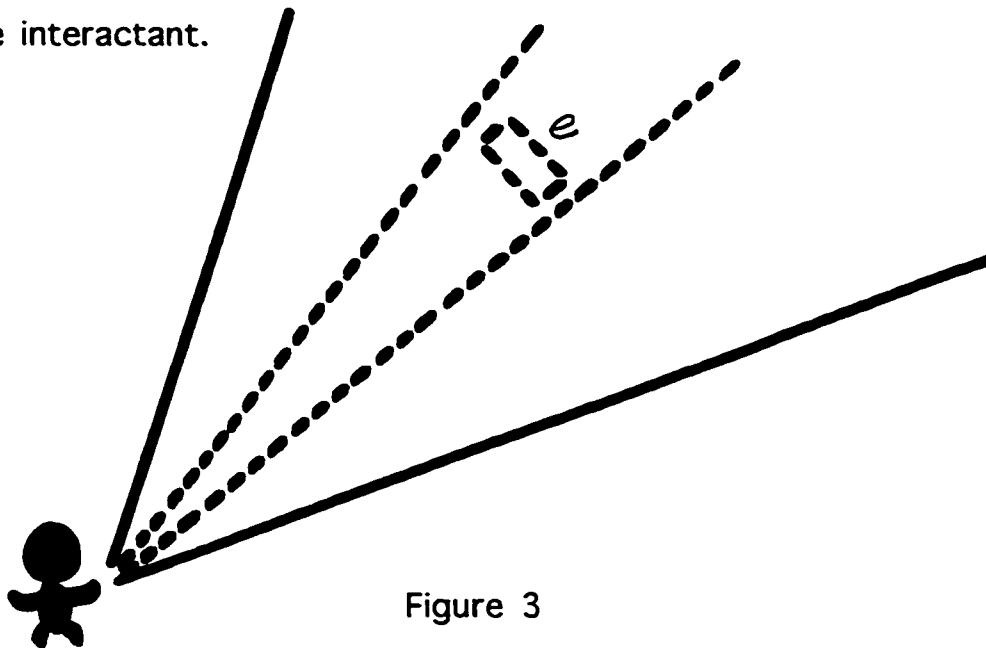


Figure 3

On the other hand, the bracketed tape (*e*) in Figure 3 represents an unrecognized gap between the intended meaning and interpreted meaning. The gap is located at the center of the light but remains invisible because of a lack of manifestation (a wake-up call). A

release of a wake-up call may take an unknown amount of time, be it an hour, a day, a week, or a month.

When a wake-up call is finally presented to the interactant, however, he or she may not be able to recognize the misunderstanding because he or she has shifted the direction of light. As time passes, interactants' interests and concerns change. What was of great concern yesterday may not maintain the same status tomorrow. The model implies that interactants constantly change the direction of light during conversation or beyond the immediate time frame of conversation, and that interactants may cast multiple cones of light at any given time.

#### DIFFERENCE IN RECOGNITION BETWEEN AMERICAN AND JAPANESE INTERACTANTS

While the current analysis reveals that patterns and process of misunderstanding recognition largely cross the cultural boundary between American and Japanese data, it also observes some cultural differences. American interactants in the present data show the tendency to report a wider range of misunderstanding incidences than Japanese interactants do. That is, American interactants are apt to recognize cases as "misunderstanding" which Japanese counterparts would not. Consider the following four examples reported by American subjects.



### Example 1

Two friends have been discussing the word "assistantship" for a while. A third friend asks:

->Trisha :      now what exactly is an assistantship

### Example 2

One person touches upon the concept "media literacy." The other asks:

->Dana:          how do you define media literacy

### Example 3

One party was telling a story about the reincarnation of her and her son. The other stops her and asks:

->Kristy:          what do you mean

### Example 4

One party explains what a "vita" is. The other asks:

->Lana :          do you have to have a vita to get into grad school?

These remarks are clarification questions and function as requests for information in an attempt to better understand the conversational subject. It can be said that the speakers of these utterances are in the process of understanding; they know that they do not understand. Nonetheless, these utterances are perceived both by the speaker and by the listener as signs of misunderstanding. It is interesting that all six American subjects tended to include clarification attempts as "misunderstanding," while none of the

Japanese subjects showed such a tendency. It may well be argued that to American interactants, misunderstanding occurs even when the other's interpretation has not yet taken a certain distinct shape. A distance between the intended meaning and the interpreted meaning is sensed even when the latter meaning has not been completed. Potential incongruity, not necessarily an established distance between two meanings, may qualify as a case of "misunderstanding" in the views of American interactants. The chapter on implications (Ch. VIII) fully discusses potential cultural backgrounds that may be responsible for the difference in recognition between Japanese and American interactants.

## CHAPTER VI

### ANALYSIS OF INTERACTANTS' HANDLINGS OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Recognizing a misunderstanding is one thing, and handling it is another. One might ask: "Once interactants recognize a misunderstanding, what do they do?" Do they ignore the misunderstanding and carry on conversation, pretending that everything is o.k.? Do they expose the misunderstanding and set the record straight? Do they make the reality of the misunderstanding available to the other party as well, or do they keep the misunderstanding to themselves? Further, what are factors that affect interactants' handlings of misunderstanding? How do factors such as personal predisposition, consequences of misunderstanding, the nature of the relationship with the other relate to interactants' handlings?"

Driven by the above questions, the current analysis focuses on the ways in which interactants handle conversational misunderstandings that they have recognized. As such, the analysis is particularly directed at the subjects' responses to two sets of interview questions: 1) "How did you handle the misunderstanding [that you have just described]?" and 2) "Did the nature of the relationship with the other person and the significance of the misunderstanding affect the way you handled the misunderstanding? How? Can you think of any other factors which might have affected your handling?" Like the previous analysis of interactants' recognition, the present analysis is grounded in interview data in

conjunction with conversational data. In other words, simultaneous examination of interview and conversational data provides the major resource for the current analysis. The analysis is data-driven, and it aims to identify patterns observed in interactants' handlings of misunderstanding and in factors affecting these handlings.

Through analysis of the present data, an important distinction emerged between two populations: *First Recognizer (FR)* and *Second Recognizer (SR)*. FR refers to the person who first recognizes the presence of a misunderstanding, whereas SR refers to the person who is informed of the presence of a misunderstanding by the other party (FR). The ways in which FRs and SRs handle misunderstandings are notably different.

SRs resort to a rather uniform method of handling; they, with few exceptions, acknowledge and confirm the recognition laid down by the other party. If SRs are notified of a misunderstanding via the other's "confession," then they verbally accept the confession either by restating their originally intended meaning (e.g., "No you need to oil the wood") or by accepting the interpreted meaning (e.g., "Oh, I see why you thought that way"). If SRs are informed of a misunderstanding via the other's "allegation," then they accept the allegation either by reaffirming the intended meaning (e.g., "So you're saying. . ."), by showing a minimal sign of understanding ("Oh, o.k."), or by revising the response based on a new understanding ("You mean the alcohol level? I think it's Japanese sake which is stronger between the two.") The present data suggests that SRs almost inevitably join the meta-talk about the occurrence of a misunderstanding which has been initiated by the other party.

Acknowledging the presence of the misunderstanding is socially the most appropriate step for SRs, and ignoring it may be socially detrimental (e.g., they may present themselves as rude, anti-social, or awkward).

On the other hand, when FRs recognize a misunderstanding, they have some choices as to how they handle the misunderstanding, ranging from "expose" to "let it pass" to "hide." The distinction between "let it pass" and "hide," however, will not be made in the present study because it involves the degree of intentionality. When an interactant simply does not care about exposing a misunderstanding, the phrase "let it pass" may be appropriate. On the other hand, when an interactant actively wants to cover up a misunderstanding, the word "hide" may be more appropriate. However, such a distinction is often ambiguous even among interactants. Thus, the current analysis subsumes an act of "hiding" under the general act of "letting it pass," and mainly discusses the two major alternatives: exposing a misunderstanding and letting it pass.

It needs to be mentioned that the term "let it pass" is previously used by Garfinkel (1967). In his work, "let it pass" refers to the situation in which people make sense of and organize social reality by accepting enigmatic and ambiguous events without insisting that these events be clarified. The present study applies the term to situations of conversational misunderstanding. Thus, "let it pass" in the study refers to the idea that conversational interactants perceive the occurrence of a misunderstanding and yet

decide to waive the misunderstanding without insisting it be clarified.

Further, that study finds that there are several psychological and pragmatic reasons behind interactants' handling choices (expose and let it pass) which are worthy of extensive discussion.

Therefore, the current chapter mainly explores the patterns of handling choices made by FRs and reasonings behind the choices.

When FRs recognize a misunderstanding, it occurs in one of two situations: 1) they realize that they are misunderstood by the other and 2) they realize that they have misunderstood the other. Thus, the population FR further needs to be categorized into two sub-populations: *First Recognizing (FR) Misunderstood party* and *First Recognizing (FR) Misunderstanding party*. Questions are: "What do people do when they first realize that they are misunderstood by the other?" for the FR misunderstood party, and "What do people do when they first realize that they have misunderstood the other?" for the FR misunderstanding party. As we shall see in the subsequent discussion, the patterns in which these two groups handle a misunderstanding differ, and the difference deserves clarification. Thus, the current chapter first explores the handlings of FR misunderstood party and then FR misunderstanding party.

## FIRST RECOGNIZING MISUNDERSTOOD PARTY

### Culture-Common Handling

In the present data, all (100%) American interactants' handlings and the vast majority (94%) of Japanese interactants' handlings are categorized into one of the two major alternatives: "let it pass" and "expose." (See Table 6 below) Across the two cultures, the "expose" alternative prevails and outnumbers the "let it pass" alternative. The ratio between the "let it pass" and the "expose" methods is roughly 1 : 2 in both cultures (32% : 68% in American data and 34% : 64% in Japanese data). Interestingly, the ratio is reversed with the misunderstanding party's handling as we shall see later. The current section first describes these two alternatives with specific examples, and then explores factors affecting the interactant's handling choices. Thereafter, the section explains a third and infrequent alternative only observed in Japanese data in the present study.

Handling alternative for FR misunderstood party	American interactants	Japanese interactants	Both
"let it pass"	7 (32%)	11 (34%)	18 (32%)
"expose"	15 (68%)	21 (60%)	36 (64%)
repair without exposing	0%	2 (6%)	2 (4%)
Total	22 (100%)	34 (100%)	56 (100%)

Table 6

Like the previous chapter, the presentation and micro-analysis of Japanese conversational data are omitted in the current chapter due to language and cultural difficulties. (They appear in Appendix B.) Nonetheless, the major results of findings regarding Japanese data along with American data are discussed in the current chapter. This allows us to illuminate similarities and differences between American and Japanese data in terms of interactants' handlings of misunderstanding.

#### "Let it pass" alternative

Occasionally, the first recognizing (FR) misunderstood party does not bother to surface the occurrence of a misunderstanding and chooses to bury or ignore the misunderstanding. This situation constitutes the "let it pass" alternative and is equally observed across Japanese and American data. When the FR misunderstood party lets a misunderstanding go, the other party (the misunderstanding party) typically remains unaware of its occurrence.

The following conversational segment (Data Segment 12) exemplifies the "let it pass" method of handling by the misunderstood party. In Data Segment 12, Lana first discusses her teaching evaluations (students' evaluations of her teaching) and then slightly changes the subject and asks Trisha about her (Lana's) "intimidating" personality. Trisha, however, misunderstands Lana's question; thus Lana is the misunderstood party. The analytical focus is on how Lana lets the misunderstanding go.



Data Segment 12. English conversation (this segment includes many "unintelligible" fragments because it was recorded in a moving car)

- 2 Lana: . . . Lana was intimidating  
 3 it was hard for me to approach her (pause) I'm PLEASED  
 4 Trisha: ahhhhhh  
 5 Haley: hhh great hh  
 6 Trisha: ah:  
 7 Lana: that's what I had as a kind of attitude ( )  
 8 Haley: hey heheh  
 9 Trisha: hey  
 10 hhhh  
 11 Lana: I thought I felt that I was pretty approachable  
 12 Trisha: well I guess not  
 13 Haley: damn it hhh what do you do hhh  
 14 Lana: I know I'm scaring them  
 15 Haley: hhhh  
 16 Trisha: hhh but do you wanna do that?  
 17 Lana: oh yeah because I don't want them messing with me  
 18 Trisha: ok  
 19 Haley: we'll you probably got that attitude  
 20 Lana: and  
 21 Haley: it's probably coming through  
 22 Lana: ok (I) probably was  
 23 Haley: I: don't want to mess with you guys so don't mess with me I'm not ( )  
 24 Lana: now Trisha you don't know me too well you know (pause) but do I act  
 25 intimidating?  
 26 (pause)  
 27 Trisha: gee I don't think so just because (.) what I know about you (.) so I don't  
 28 think I need an example for that  
 29 Lana: ok (pause) that's true but (.) you can you can get it you can just  
 30 Trisha: and also you gotta give me a condition like student  
 31 teacher  
 32 (?) w'll I don-  
 33 Trisha: I don't know if (.) it would have any barriers you know like I don't know  
 34 Haley: why don't you guys ( )  
 35 Trisha: but if I did I was depending on you for my grade

- 36 (pause) (unintelligible)  
 37 Lana: maybe I- that's why I don't see it in terms of depending on  
 38 somebody for their grade and (pause) if I'm not giving you the grade  
 39 you're making your grade  
 40 Trisha: right (pause) but some people are taught like  
 41 Haley: so it is objective right?  
 42 Trisha: yeah (.) it is  
 43 Lana: it is objective

An interview with Lana reveals that she originally intends her question in lines 24-25 to ask about her personality in general; she wants to know if she has an intimidating personality. However, Lana realizes that Trisha interprets this question as being relevant to the prior subject (teaching evaluations) and as within the context of teaching. Trisha's responses in lines 30, 31, 33, 35, and 36 appear to center around the issue of intimidation in the classroom context. For instance, Trisha makes reference to the student-teacher roles and grading. According to Lana's written report, while Trisha was developing the responses, Lana "felt like [she] could not get [her] words out right, that [she] wanted to explain and was frustrated. Trisha , on the other hand, was more in control of the conversation, calm, and trying to finish the point." Eventually, Lana herself offers a comment in lines 37-39 in conjunction with Trisha 's responses and thus provides additional energy for the ongoing talk which has already departed from her intended meaning. Further, in line 41, Haley, the third party, joins the talk, and thereafter, their conversation centers around the objectivity of grading. At this point, the departure from Lana's intended meaning is made decisive. Returning to her original intention (asking about her intimidating

personality in general) now seems extremely difficult, if not impossible. Lana decides to waive this misunderstanding partly because the situation gets out of her control.

The other major alternative method of handling misunderstanding is to expose and clarify a misunderstanding. In the present data, this second alternative is the predominating method observed across Japanese and American conversationalists (60% in Japanese data, 68% in American data).

### "Expose"

Oftentimes, interactants do not want to give up on their intended meanings. Instead of "letting it pass," they confront and come forward with the fact of misunderstanding in order to clarify the intended meaning. This situation constitutes the "expose" method of handling misunderstanding. The main purpose of exposing misunderstanding is to let the other party (the misunderstanding party) know that he or she has misunderstood something and to help him or her to gain a better understanding. Thus, the "expose" method of handling takes the form of "allegation" (the concept of allegation is discussed in the previous chapter).

While exposing a misunderstanding can be done in a variety of ways, it is mainly achieved in three different styles in the present data. They are: 1) rejection of the other's understanding; 2) clarification of the intended meaning; and 3) a combination of both 1) and 2). Each of these styles is discussed with specific examples below.

## 1) rejection of the other's understanding

The simplest way to expose a misunderstanding is to deny and reject the other's interpretation. In English conversation, this is achieved with the word "No," such as "No, that's not what I mean" or "No, I didn't say that." The following segment between two Americans exemplifies the misunderstood party's rejection of the other's interpretation by "No." In Data Segment 13, Ben is the misunderstood party. Focus on how the misunderstood party exposes the occurrence of misunderstanding by rejecting the other party's interpretation with "No." Ben and his wife, Cindy, are recording their conversation. While Ben only tries to test whether the tape recorder is operating properly, Cindy misunderstands him as erasing a previous conversation recorded on a tape. An interview makes clear that Ben wants to clarify this misunderstanding because his wife accuses him of a mistake that he did not make. In the oral interview, Ben smiles and says, "She [Cindy] does not trust my ability in mechanics." Ben's rejection of her interpretation occurs at the arrowed turns (lines 11-12).

## Data Segment 13. English Conversation

- 5 Ben: I'd like to hear our voices let me try something  
 6 Cindy: what do you mean, Wonder  
 ((Ben stops the recorder; their conversation is not recorded for a while))  
 7 Cindy: no its still going  
 8 Ben: w'll I just set it so it records us again (.) I just wanted to test it  
 9 Cindy: no you're  
 10 recording over another conversation we've had  
 ->11 Ben: no no  
 ->12 no I'm not  
 13 Cindy: remember you said I wanna

((Ben stops the recorder again))

14 Ben: now are you satisfied?

15 Cindy: ahahahahaha hhh \$ok\$

16 Ben: hh I was right I was just testing to make sure that our

17 voices are being picked up clear

## 2) clarification of the intended meaning

Exposing a misunderstanding can also be done in an alternative manner to rejecting the other's interpretation; it can be done through clarifying the intended meaning. Rejecting the other's interpretation is rather simple; it is a matter of saying "No." Clarifying, however, is a relatively complex task of reducing the semantic distance between the interpreted meaning and the intended meaning. Specific strategies of clarification are as diverse as the contents of the misunderstood meaning. The misunderstanding of a simple referent (people, object, place, time) may call for a simple correction in terms of re-addressing the intended referent. On the other hand, the misunderstanding of implication, motive, and intent may call for a lengthy explanation of background information and reasoning.

The following example (Data Segments 14) illustrates the misunderstood party's clarification attempt which takes a rather lengthy turn space. Focus on how the misunderstood party exposes a misunderstanding through clarification of the intended meaning. In Data Segment 14, Ben and Cindy, a husband and a wife, discuss a Mexican restaurant that they recently visited and liked. Now Cindy brings conversational attention to her parents' potential opinions of

this restaurant. Cindy realizes that she is misunderstood by Ben and develops a clarification attempt at the arrowed turns.

Data Segment 14. English conversation

- 12 Cindy: I'd like to get my mom's opinion my mom and dad would be able to tell  
 13 whether it's good mexican food  
 14 Ben: well you know there are just different preferences  
 15 Cindy: but the- w'll yeah it's preference true  
 16 but they said that all true mexican food that you can get in New Mexico  
 17 that's the- that's where they make the best Mexican food  
 18 Ben: well that's probably because they grew up in New Mexico and that's what  
 19 they grew up eating and liking  
 20 (pause)  
 21 Cindy: that's yeah I guess you well I know you're right but it is preference but  
 22 Ben: mm hm  
 23 Cindy: (pause) mm I just would like to get my mom and dad's opinions  
 24 Ben: ok they're the experts and they know  
 25 Cindy: ahhhhh  
 26 Ben: they can tell us which we should like better  
 27 Cindy: \$no\$ that doesn't mean we you know (pause) we wouldn't like it  
 28 Ben: ( )  
 ->29 Cindy: I'm just saying that I've wondered if my mom would like this place  
 ->30 would be would be to her liking if we took her there and I have to find out  
 ->31 if it's you know kinda mexican food she likes (pause) I like it  
 32 Ben: ((coughing))  
 ->33 Cindy: I- I liked the mexican food at Ricard's mom didn't like it cause it had  
 34 Ben: yeah  
 35 Cindy: cilantro and she doesn't like cilantro

An interview with Cindy reveals that she grew up hearing her parents constantly praising authentic Mexican food in New Mexico. Because of this experience, Cindy has developed the habit of automatically thinking of her parents' opinions when it comes to

Mexican food. This thought habit propels her utterance in lines 12-13, "I'd like to get my mom's opinion. My mom and dad would be able to tell whether it's good Mexican food." However, in Cindy's' view, Ben's reply in line 14 reflects his misinterpretation; Cindy does not have an opinion of her own and depends on her parents' opinions to determine the quality of the Mexican food that they recently tried. Cindy hears him practically saying, "it's o.k. to like Mexican food that your parents do not approve of" in line 14. In an oral interview, Cindy says, "it bothers me if other people, including my husband, think that I can not make up my own mind." Cindy feels uncomfortable with Ben's interpretation especially because the interpretation does not match her intent. She merely intends to express her curiosity about her parents' opinions, not her dependence on them as Ben interprets.

In a strict sense, it can be argued that Cindy begins her clarification attempt in line 15, and she struggles for a while to get her point across. A more clear and evident clarification effort, however, appears in lines 29, 30, 31, and 33 (arrowed turns). In these lines, Cindy emphasizes her mere curiosity ("I'm just saying that I've wondered if my mom would like this place"), and further provides several pieces of evidence of her independence from her parents' opinions ("I like it [the Mexican food that they recently tried]" and "I liked the Mexican food at Ricard's [another Mexican restaurant they previously tried], mom didn't like it"). This misunderstanding regards the characterization of an utterance (a sign of dependence vs. curiosity). Accordingly, its clarification

calls for the re-characterization of the misunderstood utterance and the presentation of its evidence, which take an extended turn space.

3) a combination of 1) rejection of the other's understanding and 2) clarification of the intended meaning

In the third style of exposing a misunderstanding, the misunderstood party both rejects the other's state of understanding and clarifies the original, intended meaning. In the present data, it is typically the case that the rejection of the other's interpretation precedes the clarification of the intended meaning; twelve accounts represent such an order while one account represents the reverse order. This third style appears to be the clearest and most explicit method of exposing a misunderstanding in the present data across Japanese and American data. The following example illustrates the third style of exposing. The analytical focus is on how the misunderstood party exposes a misunderstanding through the rejection of the other's interpretation and the clarification of the intended meaning. In Data Segment 15, Kristy is the misunderstood party. She and her friend, Kate, discuss appropriate containers for recycled materials. The arrowed turns (lines 9-10) indicate Kristy's clarification attempt.

Data Segment 15. English Conversation

- 4 Kate: that is (.) we'd have to sew the bags though  
 5 Kristy: well we got a (katter) on those  
 6 Kate: a what?  
 7 Kristy: ↓ mean that canvas material we looked at early today  
 8 Kate: oh but that's plastic canvas it gets crispy but we could try yeahyeah  
 ->9 Kristy: no no not



- >10            the tarp I'm talking about the (.) cover for a  
 11 Kate:    oh that cover (unintelligible) OK we need to pull the ruffle off it and  
 12 Kristy:            ( unintelligible )  
 13 Kate:    de:gather it to get the most material out of it

According to an interview with Kristy, in lines 5 and 7, Kristy originally intends to propose a flower-printed trunk cover which is made of canvas material as a candidate container for recycled objects. In line 8, however, Kate starts talking about something different; she talks about a tarp made of plastic material that they have looked at earlier in the day. In an oral interview, Kristy says, "I needed to clarify because it [the misunderstanding] was important. We were brainstorming." Realizing that this misunderstanding hinders their discussion, Kristy rejects Kate's understanding ("no no not the tarp") and then re-addresses the intended referent ("I'm talking about the cover for a [trunk]") at the arrowed turns (line 9-10).

As we have seen, an alternative method of handling misunderstanding to "let it pass" is to expose the other's misinterpretation. The expose method takes mainly three different styles of execution: rejection of the other's interpretation, clarification of the intended meaning, and the combination of the first two. Japanese misunderstood parties equally resort to any of the above three styles of exposing, although the presentation of Japanese conversational segments is omitted at this point. It appears that, for a variety of reasons, first recognizing (FR) misunderstood parties across American and Japanese cultures make choices between "exposing" and "letting it pass" when they recognize

the occurrence of a misunderstanding. The ratio between the "expose" and "let it pass" methods is roughly 2:1 in both cultures (68% : 32% in American data and 60% : 34% in Japanese data); the "expose" method predominates over the "let it pass" method.

Now an interesting question is: "Are there any patterns in interactants' reasonings behind these handling choices?" Do conversationalists resort to random acts of waiving and exposing misunderstandings? If not, what patterns are observed among factors affecting their handling choices? In general, what factors motivate interactants to "expose" a misunderstanding, and what factors motivate them to "let it pass?" The subsequent discussion explores how different factors affect and guide the misunderstood party's handling choices.

### Factors Affecting Interactants' Handling Choices

In the present data, multiple factors affect the ways in which the first recognizing (FR) misunderstood party handles a misunderstanding. These multiple factors simultaneously exist in a single case of misunderstanding and affect the interactant's handling decision by echoing or off-setting one another. In other words, the FR misunderstood party simultaneously weighs the importance of each factor in comparison to one another and makes a decision accordingly.

The researcher arrived at the current findings by extracting key words from subjects' responses to the interview questions: "Did the nature of the relationship with the other person and the

significance of the misunderstanding affect the way you handled the misunderstanding? How? Can you think of any other factors which might have affected your handling?" These interview questions focus on how the nature of the relationship and the importance of the misunderstanding affect handling choices while allowing other significant factors to come into the picture.

The result indicates that many factors identified in subjects' responses overlap between Japanese and American data while a few factors are rather culture-specific (uniquely Japanese or American). The table 7 below summarizes these key factors guiding interactants' handling decisions.

#### FACTORS AFFECTING FR MISUNDERSTOOD PARTY'S HANDLING

##### Common Factors Across Japanese and American Data

FACTOR	RANGE (FROM . . . TO . . .)		CASES AFFECTED		
			Jp.	Am.	Both
importance of content	important	trivial	15	8	23
relevance to given purpose	relevant	irrelevant	5	7	12
concern for face-saving	strong	weak	7	3	10
psychological distance	close	not close	6	2	8
other's attitude	uncooperative	cooperative	4	3	7
complexity of misunderstanding	complex	simple	2	3	5
comprehension of other's point	present	absent	3	1	4
existence of tension	present	absent	2	1	3
situational difficulty	difficult	easy	2	1	3

Culturally Unique Factors

JAPANESE FACTOR	RANGE (FROM. . . TO. . .)		CASES AFFECTED		
			Jp.	Am.	Both
concern for vertical relationship	high	low	3	0	3
concern for saving other-face	high	low	7	0	7
<hr/>					
AMERICAN FACTOR	RANGE (FROM. . . TO. . .)		CASES AFFECTED		
			Jp.	Am.	Both
concern for saving self-face	high	low	0	3	3

Table 7

A closer analysis reveals that among the above factors, some factors function as inhibitors in exposing a misunderstanding, while other factors function as encouragers in doing so. The encouraging factors contribute to decisions to expose a misunderstanding, whereas the inhibiting factors contribute to the interactants' decisions to waive a misunderstanding ("let it pass"). This is best understood in terms of the *cost-reward scheme*. The cost-reward scheme represents the idea that interactants simultaneously see the costs and rewards in various moves in social interaction and make decisions accordingly. For instance, a person decides whether he should go to a party by considering both the costs and rewards of doing so. The costs include the sacrifice of study time, energy expense to get up and get dressed, and psychological stress of facing a crowd. The rewards include the anticipation of a fun time, a

chance for free food and drink, social maintenance, and a possibility of making new acquaintances.

The cost-reward consideration seems to exist in almost every move we make, whether small or big. Indeed, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) utilize the cost-reward scheme as a central template explaining social relationships (*social exchange theory*). They explain that people decide whether they keep or leave the relationship on the basis of the cost-reward balance. In this regard, we may be considered as *rational* social agents as William Dray (1957) views; we are rational agents who consider consequences of an action and incorporates the consideration into decision-making process.

Decision-making in a misunderstanding situation is not exempt from this view. The cost-reward consideration appears to guide interactants' handling decisions equally across Japanese and American data in the present study. Across the two cultures, social interactants consider both what they have to pay (cost) in the process of exposing a misunderstanding and what they gain (reward) as the result of doing so. Simply formulated, when the rewards of exposing a misunderstanding exceed its costs, the interactant may choose to expose the misunderstanding. On the contrary, when the costs exceed the rewards, he or she may refrain from exposing and decide to "let it pass."

Unlike the whether-I-should-go-to-the-party situation, however, decision-making in the conversational misunderstanding context is processed in a split second time frame. Interactants do not stop to take the time to consider the balance of costs and

rewards. Rather, they seem intuitively to know how costs and rewards weigh against each other and make immediate decisions accordingly. Thus, it can be argued that decisions to handle conversational misunderstandings are rather intuitive ones instead of being products of careful calculation.

In light of the cost-reward scheme, factors listed in Table 7 above are classified into two major types: *cost factors* and *reward factors* in exposing misunderstanding. The cost factors mainly function to discourage interactants from exposing misunderstanding whereas the reward factors mainly function to encourage them to expose misunderstanding. The cost factors common across Japanese and American cultures include *psychological distance with the other, the other's attitude, complexity of misunderstanding, situational difficulty, and concern for face-saving*. The reward factors common across the two cultures include *the importance of the misunderstood content, relevance of the misunderstanding to a given purpose, existence of tension, and comprehension of the other's point*. The cost and reward factors which differ across the two cultures include *concern for saving other-face, concern for saving self-face, and concern for vertical relationship*, and these will be discussed later. In general, the lesser the costs are, and the greater the rewards are, the more willing an interactant is to expose a misunderstanding. On the other hand, the greater the costs are, the lesser the rewards are, the less willing the interactant is to expose the misunderstanding (more willing to "let it pass"). Table 8 below summarizes the classification of factors in terms of the cost-reward scheme.

FACTORS AFFECTING FR MISUNDERSTOOD PARTY'S HANDLING  
Common Factors Across Japanese and American Data

COST	greater <----> less		affected cases (both)
psychological distance	not-close	close	8
other's attitude	uncooperative	cooperative	7
complexity of misunderstanding	complex	simple	5
concern for face-saving	strong	weak	10
situational difficulty	difficult	easy	3
<hr/>			
REWARD	greater <----> less		affected cases (both)
importance of content	important	trivial	23
relevance to given purpose	relevant	irrelevant	12
existence of tension	present	absent	3
comprehension of the other	absent	present	4

Table 8

Common Factors Across Japanese and American Data

Cost Factors:

Psychological Distance with the Other Party

One important cost factor affecting interactants' choice of handling which is common to the two cultures is *psychological distance with the other party*: how close the interactants are to the

other and how comfortable they feel in exposing a misunderstanding. In general, when the relationship with the other party is mere acquaintantship, the interactant experiences a great psychological distance, and thus, resulting reluctance in exposing a misunderstanding. Exposing a misunderstanding and creating a conversational "bump" are viewed as being unpleasant and costly in non-intimate relationships with strangers or acquaintances. One American interviewee wrote: "I am not as close to Trisha as Haley " as a reason for her reluctance to expose a misunderstanding. One Japanese similarly wrote: "I and [Jun] aren't in a close friendship. Therefore, I didn't feel like pursuing the misunderstanding."

On the other hand, when the relationship with the other is a close and intimate one, the interactant sees lesser cost in exposing misunderstanding. Revealing a misunderstanding and creating a "bump" are viewed as less detrimental in a stable, comfortable relationship. One Japanese interviewee reports: "I was able to straighten the record up because we have a close relationship. If we were not close, I would have just let it go. I would have left things as they were." Similarly, two American interviewees list an open, friendly relationship as a reason for exposing a misunderstanding. A comfortable relationship may help absorb the shock of a conversational "bump." It is pertinent to formulate that *psychological distance* is a cost factor in exposing a misunderstanding, and that non-intimate relationships represent greater costs in terms of psychological uncertainty than intimate relationships.



### Other's Attitude

Occasionally, an interactant perceives *the other as exhibiting uncooperative attitudes* as the listener, such as being stubborn, non-yielding, or inattentive. In this situation, the misunderstood party considers it a great pain to clarify a misunderstanding and straighten up the record. In other words, the misunderstood party perceives great cost in terms of energy expense in the process of exposing misunderstanding. One Japanese interviewee writes: "The other is hard-headed and is not listening to what I am saying. So I thought it would be less bothersome if I just went along with what she said." Similarly, one American interviewee decides no longer to pursue a misunderstanding since "the listener insisted on" her point.

On the other hand, when the other appears to be open-minded, attentive, and willing to understand, the misunderstood party considers it less painful to expose and clarify a misunderstanding. One American interactant exposed a misunderstanding partly because "[Dana] had goodwill toward my project and wanted to understand." It is pertinent to formulate that *the other's uncooperative attitude* as the listener plays a role as a cost factor, and that the more stubborn and close-minded the other's attitude is, the greater cost exists in the situation; the misunderstood party has to go through a great deal of effort in order to deliver his or her intended point.

### Complexity of Misunderstanding

Some misunderstandings are simple and easily clarified since they may only regard a simple referent of a word. The correction is

a matter of uttering a few words (e.g.. "No, I mean an apartment"). Other misunderstandings are complex and not easily clarified as they may concern implications, intentions, and reasonings. When *the nature of the misunderstanding is complex*, interactants tend to see more energy expense required for the clarification. This situation leads to greater cost in exposing a misunderstanding. For instance, one Japanese interactant passes up the opportunity to clarify a misunderstanding partly because the clarification required a complex and lengthy explanation of how several interstate highways intersect with one another. The perceived complexity of the misunderstanding, together with the fact that the other was not in the mood for listening, discouraged this Japanese interactant from exposing and explaining the misunderstanding.

The flip side is that relatively simple misunderstandings require little energy expense for their clarification, and therefore represent lesser cost in exposing and clarifying misunderstanding. Two American interviewees stated that simplicity was a factor when they exposed and clarified a misunderstanding. For instance, one wrote: "very minor misunderstanding that got straightened out very quickly." Similarly, one Japanese points out the simplicity of misunderstanding as a factor. Interactants may perceive less burden in straightening up the record when a misunderstanding is rather simple. It can be formulated that the more complex the nature of a misunderstanding, the greater the cost perceived in terms of energy expense in the process of exposing and clarifying the misunderstanding.

### Situational difficulty

*Situational difficulty* in exposing misunderstanding is another cost factor observed across the two cultures. Conversational flow is a product of a situation as well as one's intention. Occasionally, conversation develops in an unintended direction, and this makes it difficult for the misunderstood party to come back and clarify a misunderstanding. For instance, one American interactant gives up on a misunderstanding partly because the situation gets out of her control; the topic has shifted, and the misunderstanding now belongs to the past topic. To say, "Oh by the way, what I meant earlier was . . ." appears socially awkward unless the content is very important.

By contrast, situations may make exposing a misunderstanding relatively easy. For instance, the other party paves the way for the exposure by asking for a clarification, such as "You were mad. (pause) Weren't you?" One Japanese interactant reports that the other's clarification question "made the rejection of his interpretation easy." It can be formulated that *difficulty in the situational setting* is a cost factor in exposing a misunderstanding. The greater the situational difficulty, the greater the cost in exposing a misunderstanding; the misunderstood party may have to risk social awkwardness.

### Concern for Face-Saving

Some misunderstandings are embarrassing, and their exposure may bring a sense of "shame" to interactants. From time to time, interactants choose not to expose misunderstanding due to *face-saving* factors. When potential embarrassment is great, so is the

threat to the face of the interactant. Therefore, a detection of potential embarrassment plays the role of an inhibitor in the interactant's decision to expose a misunderstanding. In other words, *the face-saving concern* discourages interactants from exposing and clarifying misunderstanding.

Interestingly, however, significant cultural differences exist between American and Japanese interactants, regarding what is viewed as embarrassing and which side (the misunderstood party vs. the misunderstanding party) is to bear the embarrassment. Japanese culture tends to view being a *poor listener* as more embarrassing than being a poor speaker, whereas American culture views being a *poor speaker* as more embarrassing than being a poor listener. These cultural differences will be explored fully in a later section in the present chapter.

It must be added that several cost factors may echo one another, and together they create a magnifying cost effect. For instance, a complex misunderstanding is even more costly when the relationship with the other is not an intimate one. One American interactant waived a misunderstanding since she "did not know how to get words out right (*complexity of misunderstanding*)" in addition to the fact that she was "not very close to Trisha (*psychological distance*)." A close, stable relationship would have alleviated the costly nature of the complexity of the misunderstanding. In fact, this interactant states in an oral interview that she would have pursued this misunderstanding if she had been talking to a close friend. Thus, several cost factors may reinforce or alleviate one

another to create a unique cost effect in each situation. Ultimately, when the cost effect is strong and intense, interactants choose to silence (ignore) misunderstanding, resulting in the "let it pass" decision. On the other hand, when the cost effect is weak, interactants see little to no hesitation in exposing misunderstandings, especially if the reward is great.

It is important to note that the final effect of cost factors can not fully be measured without considering reward factors. That is, the significance of cost factors is relative to that of reward factors. As the reward mounts to a level of significance, the cost becomes less significant. More specifically, when the reward of exposing a misunderstanding is too great to resist, then a participant does not mind sacrificing some costs such as complexity of misunderstanding and non-intimate relationship. The subsequent section explores reward factors which mainly function to motivate interactants to expose a misunderstanding. Such reward factors include *the importance of content, relevance of misunderstanding to a given purpose, existence of tension, and comprehension of the other's point or position.*

#### Reward Factors:

##### Importance of Content

*The importance of the misunderstood content* is the factor most frequently reported by subjects in the present study across Japanese and American data. It affects (encourages) the handling decision made by FR misunderstood party in 14 cases, which represent the highest number of cases among other factors. Some

misunderstandings are personally important to an interactant as they may concern facts, intentions, and emotional attachment toward the subject matter, and it bothers him or her if these misunderstandings are left unresolved. In these situations, the interactant sees a great psychological and emotional reward in exposing and clarifying the misunderstandings, and thus, does not mind going through some cost-paying process. For instance, one American interviewee writes: "He is my husband, and I did not want him to think that I adopt my parents' thinking." Similarly, one Japanese writes: "I did not want to be perceived as being inconsistent. I had similar misunderstandings in the past." Another Japanese reported that he had special emotional attachment to the word "pride" due to his experience, and thus did not want to give in.

On the other hand, other misunderstandings are trivial and insignificant to the interactant as they may only concern peripheral subject matters. In such a situation, the interactant sees little reward in exposing the misunderstandings and thus cares less about their exposure. One American interviewee writes: "It was a trivial misunderstanding about a trivial subject. It was quickly forgotten." Another American interviewee writes: "It wasn't important" as a reason for waiving a misunderstanding. One Japanese reports: "It did not mean much to me. On top of that, I was watching TV, so I thought 'Who cares?'" It is reasonably formulated that *the importance of the content* is a reward factor in exposing a misunderstanding and that the more important the content is to the interactant, the greater the reward perceived in terms of

psychological and emotional satisfaction in clarifying the misunderstanding.

#### Relevance of Misunderstanding to Given Purpose

If the importance of the misunderstood content discussed above represents psychological and emotional reward, *the relevance of misunderstanding to a given purpose* may represent pragmatic reward. It is rewarding for the misunderstood party to clarify a misunderstanding to the extent that the clarification helps him or her to achieve a particular purpose at hand, such as discussing the money issue, making telephone calls, and brainstorming about recycling procedures. When an interactant finds a misunderstanding clogging his or her way to the specific purpose, he or she is motivated to work on the misunderstanding, clearing the path to the goal. Thus, the resolution of the misunderstanding transforms into a pragmatic satisfaction in achieving the goal. One Japanese subject reports that he clarified a misunderstanding because it was necessary to achieve the goal to make some phone calls. One American interviewee states that misunderstanding was detrimental to the ongoing brainstorming (she and her friend were discussing what recycling container best served the purpose of collecting recycling materials) as a reason for her clarification attempt.

The flip side is that the clarification of a misunderstanding which is irrelevant to a given purpose may be less rewarding in terms of pragmatic satisfaction. One American reports that either of the two alternatives discussed among two friends would work for

their purpose, and therefore clarifying a misunderstanding was not very critical. In general, it can be reasonably argued that to the extent that a misunderstanding is relevant to and detrimental to a certain goal, the interactant perceives reward in terms of pragmatic satisfaction in clarifying the misunderstanding.

### Existence of Tension

Due to a certain misunderstanding, *the tension level* between interactants may rise. Occasionally, interactants become confrontational, argumentative, and, in some cases, hostile to each other. When interactants realize that such conflicting situations are caused by a misunderstanding, they find themselves motivated to resolve the problematic situations by clearing up the misunderstanding. One Japanese interviewee wrote: "I was yelled at in a loud voice. I wanted to make an effort to clarify the misunderstanding rather than leaving the situation as it was." One American reported that the other was accusing him of making a stupid mistake (erasing an audio tape), and she was coming on strongly, and thus, he needed to clarify that he was not making the mistake. As the tension level rises, the prospective reward may become greater. The reward will be given as a relief from an unpleasant conflicting situation.

### Comprehension of the Other's Point

Gratification of social interaction consists of both the desire to be understood and the desire to understand the other. While a sense of being understood is psychologically rewarding, *a sense of*



*understanding the other* may be equally or even more rewarding. Occasionally, *the gratification of understanding the other's point or position* prevails and overrides the need to make oneself understood. In such a situation, interactants no longer feel insistent on their meanings and on setting the record straight. The importance of the intended meanings quickly recedes as an object of lesser concern when the other's point or position appear to have some value to the interactants. Therefore, sticking to the original meaning becomes less rewarding. One Japanese wrote: "I saw a point in what [Chie] was saying. So I did not want to further explain what I meant. Satisfaction [in case he pursued clarification] now does not match the energy required for clarification." One American subject reported: "[I] took it as [Dana] was trying to help me. I respect [Dana's] suggestions and advice." Understanding [Dana's] intent made the misunderstood point less important, and thus, a clarifying attempt less rewarding. It may be formulated that when an interactant experiences *a sense of gratification in comprehending the other's point*, the effort to pursue clarification may become less rewarding. Comprehension of the other's point, therefore, only functions to lessen the reward in exposing a misunderstanding; it never exists as great reward.

Furthermore, multiple rewards may co-exist in a situation and reinforce one another, producing a magnifying reward effect. For instance, clarifying the misunderstanding in the conflicting situation is even more rewarding when the misunderstood content is personally important to the interactant. One Japanese interactant is

misunderstood by the other when he produces a non-enthusiastic reply ("ah:"). While, in fact, he is merely tired, not necessarily indifferent to what the other has to say, the other takes the reply as a sign of indifference. He is eager to clarify this misunderstanding not only because the other was somehow confrontational about his "rude" manner of listening (*existence of tension*), but also because it bothers him when others perceive him as being inattentive and uncaring (*importance of content*). The existence of tension, together with the importance of the content, gave this interactant a strong incentive to clarify the situation.

The above discussed reward factors mainly function to encourage participants to expose and clarify misunderstandings in the present data. In general, the greater reward a participant sees in exposing a misunderstanding, the more willing he or she is to do so. The anticipation of a little reward does not exactly discourage the exposing effort, but does not encourage it a great deal either. (Comprehension of the other's point illustrates this well.) The desire and incentive to expose a misunderstanding may correspond to the significance of reward seen in the situation.

To provide a summary of the current analysis, the cost-reward scheme appears to guide the misunderstood party's handlings of misunderstandings across Japanese and American data in the present study. It is often the case that multiple cost and reward factors simultaneously co-exist in a single case of misunderstanding. These cost and reward factors echo, reinforce, alleviate, or off-set one another, producing a unique effect in terms of the cost-reward scheme in each situation. Therefore, the resulting handling decision

by the interactant is the interplay among various cost and reward factors. The simplest way of formulating their interplay is that when the total effect of rewards in exposing a misunderstanding outweighs the total effect of costs in so doing, interactants choose to expose and clarify the misunderstanding. If the case is the other way around (costs outweigh rewards), then interactants choose to pass up the opportunity to expose misunderstandings and keep the reality of misunderstanding to themselves.

It must be stressed again that interactants make a handling decision very quickly during their conversations. While several factors simultaneously affect interactants' handlings, interactants do not seem to stop to take the time to add, subtract, multiply, and divide these factors. In other words, handling decisions made by interactants in conversation are not a product of rational, meticulous calculation. Rather, interactants appear to make intuitive, instant decisions based on perceived costs and rewards.

As discussed above, many factors (including both costs and rewards) affecting interactants' handling decisions cross the cultural boundary between Japanese and American data. There are, however, a few cost factors which are rather culture-specific and are only observed in Japanese data or American data alone. (See Table 9 below) Uniquely Japanese cost factors are the *concern for vertical relationship* and *concern for saving other-face*. A uniquely American cost factor is the *concern for saving self-face*. These culture specific factors add to the factors common across the two cultures, and slightly modify interactants' decision-making, thus

steering the wheel of interaction into a certain, culture-specific direction.

### Culturally Unique Factors

#### Japanese factors

COST	greater <----> less		affected cases		
			Jp.	Am.	Both
concern for vertical relationship	high	low	3	0	3
concern for saving other-face	high	low	7	0	7

#### American factors

COST	greater <----> less		affected cases		
			Jp.	Am.	Both
concern for saving self-face	high	low	0	3	3

Table 9

Different Cost Factors between American and Japanese Data:

Self-Face vs. Other-Face

The misunderstood Japanese party adds original cost factors to the culturally common cost factors in exposing a misunderstanding. The misunderstood Japanese party demonstrates hesitation in exposing the *other's* shortcoming as the listener (the misunderstanding party), especially when the other is an elder or in a superior status position. One Japanese reports that "Exposing a

misunderstanding is, in effect, to say that the other's interpretation is not valid. It is ultimately to doubt the other's ability to comprehend. This results in the loss of the other's face." He adds, "The act of exposing a wrong interpretation puts the other on the defensive, especially when the other is elder." Another Japanese writes: "The other is my parent and has superiority to me. I thought I needed to treat the other with due respect." This Japanese waives a misunderstanding because of the concern for the vertical relationship and for the other's face. To Japanese, a cost in exposing a misunderstanding lies in the idea of threatening the other's self-esteem as the listener. When the other is in a superior status position for some reasons (e.g., boss, parent, teacher, elder, etc. ), the cost is even greater.

The misunderstood American party also adds a culturally unique cost factor to the culturally common factors in exposing a misunderstanding. The misunderstood American party demonstrates hesitation in exposing *his or her* shortcoming as the speaker (the misunderstood party) in cases in which the misunderstanding is their fault. Two American interviewees state that being a poor speaker is embarrassing; it is much more embarrassing than being a poor listener. One American reports that he feels "frustrated" and "incompetent" largely as the speaker, and that he rarely has these feelings as the listener.

The ability to speak may be most at stake in the context of joking. It takes a great deal of skill to deliver effective punch lines and to solicit laughter from the listener. One American interviewee notes that the success of a joke depends on the ability of the

speaker (joker) more than on the appreciative mind of the listener, except for dry humor. Two Americans gave up on their joke attempts when their conversational partners misunderstood them as being serious. Interestingly, these two Americans attribute the failure of the joke to their ineffectiveness as the speaker, rather than to a lack of appreciation on the listener's side; one of them reports that he should have used a better, more effective word to achieve the joke, and the other reports that his joke failed because he put a serious face on at the time. Clarifying the misunderstanding and explaining a failed joke not only bring disruption and awkwardness to both the speaker and the listener, but also bring embarrassment to the speaker. One American explains, "The best thing in the joking context is that the other appreciates my joke and laughs. This is both rewarding and *face-saving*. The second best thing is that the other does not even notice my joke so that I can pretend that I never joked. This is *face-saving*. The worst is that the other notices my joke attempt and does not appreciate the outcome. This is devastating to my face." It may be unpleasant and embarrassing for Americans to expose their ineffectiveness or inadequacy as the speaker in general, and particularly, in the context of joke in which the speaker's ability is most at stake. To Americans, a cost in exposing a misunderstanding lies in the idea of publicly damaging their self-esteem as the speaker.

The above cultural differences are evident in the present data. (See Table 9) In Japanese data, *the concern for the other's face* as a cost factor affects seven cases of handlings by the misunderstood party, whereas *the concern for self face* affects no case. By

contrast, in American data, *the concern for self face* affects three cases of handlings by the misunderstood party, whereas the *concern for the other's face* affects no case. These cultural differences will be explored fully in the chapter on implications (Ch. VIII). In short, while both Japanese and American cultures similarly see cost in exposing a misunderstanding in terms of the face-saving concern, they differ in their views of the primary recipient of the face-saving concern.

#### Culture Specific Handling:

##### Japanese FR misunderstood party's handling

The previous discussion makes clear that when FR misunderstood parties find a misunderstanding in conversation, they mostly resort to one of two alternatives: expose and let it pass. However, misunderstood Japanese parties also demonstrate a third and culturally unique method of handling which is not observed in American data in the present study. (Refer to Table 6 in page 114) For the third alternative, Japanese interactants neither expose nor let a misunderstanding pass; they conduct a "secret operation" on a misunderstanding that they discover.

More specifically, Japanese interactants accept and confirm the other's misinterpretation as a valid form of understanding, and then proceed to talk with "additional" pieces of information which are designed to clarify the intended meaning. Such additional information may include specification of, complement of, or even contradiction of the prior utterance. As a result, Japanese

interactants may occasionally present themselves as ambiguous, inconsistent, and illogical speakers. For Japanese interactants, the benefit of these acts must overcome the risk of looking ambiguous. The effect of a "secret operation" is that interactants convey their intended meaning without informing the other party of the occurrence of misunderstanding.

FR misunderstood Japanese parties exercise this third alternative when they perceive that both costs and rewards in exposing misunderstanding are great. Due to great costs, they refrain from exposing a misunderstanding, and due to great rewards, they also refrain from letting it pass. An exit from this dilemma is available to Japanese interactants through a "secret operation," or, in other words, repair without exposing a misunderstanding. Appendix B contains several Japanese data segments to illustrate this uniquely Japanese method of handling.

### Factors Affecting Japanese Handling

Theoretically, any of the cost and reward factors discussed earlier as affecting the misunderstood party's handlings (*psychological distance, other's uncooperative attitude, complexity of misunderstanding, situational difficulty, and concern for other-face* as cost factors, and *importance of content, relevant to given purpose, comprehension of other's point, and existence of tension* as reward factors) may affect the Japanese method. However, due to the scarcity of data (no more than two accounts of "secret operation" are found in the present data), the present study refrains from offering conclusive analysis concerning which factors affect



the Japanese handling. In the present data, four factors identified as affecting the Japanese method are: *concern for other-face saving and psychological distance* as cost factors, and *importance of the misunderstood content and relevance of a misunderstanding to a given purpose* as reward factors. These cost and reward factors create balance and equilibrium, and thus, pose a dilemma for interactants. American interactants would resort to either the "expose" or "let it pass" method in this situation. Japanese interactants, however, find an escape from this dilemma in a "secret operation". As a potential reason for a lack of "secret operation" among American interactants, American culture has lower tolerance for ambiguity in communication than Japanese culture; a "secret operation" is likely to present the misunderstood party as an ambiguous, illogical, inconsistent speaker. The chapter on implications more thoroughly discusses potential cultural backgrounds behind this difference in interactants' handling practices.

The above discussion mainly addresses the ways in which the first recognizing (FR) *misunderstood* party handles a misunderstanding when he or she recognizes its occurrence. To summarize, the FR misunderstood party mainly resorts to one of the two alternatives: "let it pass" and "expose." The FR misunderstood Japanese party may exercise the third alternative, repair without exposing a misunderstanding. Further, there are multiple factors affecting the interactant's handling decisions, and the cost-reward

principle appears to best explain the ways in which these factors guide the decision-making.

Now one might ask: "Does the above discussion also extend to the first recognizing (FR) *misunderstanding* party?" When a person realizes that he or she has misunderstood something said by the other party, what does this person do? Does the first recognizing (FR) misunderstanding party also resort to one of the two main alternatives: "let it pass" and "expose?" Further, do the factors discussed above as affecting the misunderstood party's handlings also affect the misunderstanding party's handlings? Does the cost-reward principle equally guide the misunderstanding party's decision-making? The subsequent discussion seeks answers to these questions and explores the handling decisions made by the FR misunderstanding party.

#### FIRST RECOGNIZING MISUNDERSTANDING PARTY

To provide answers to the above posed questions, first of all, the FR misunderstanding party does have the two alternatives: "let it pass" and "expose." The ratio between the two methods is, however, reversed. Unlike the case with the misunderstood party, the "let it pass" method predominates over the "expose" method in the FR misunderstanding party's handling. (see Table 10 below. compare it to Table 6 in page 114) The ratio between "let it pass" and "expose" is roughly 2 : 1 (67% for "let it pass" and 33% for "expose") in the combined data of Japanese and American conversations. It is desirable that the statistical comparison between Japanese and

American data be avoided because of the small data size (a total of 15 cases of handlings made by FR misunderstanding parties in the present data. Of these, 11 accounts are in Japanese data, and 4 accounts are in American data). The small number of total cases makes the statistical comparison across the two cultures meaningless.

Second, the cost-reward principle does exist in the handling decisions made by the FR misunderstanding party, but is played out differently from the case with the FR misunderstood party, due to a unique situation facing the FR misunderstanding party. The subsequent discussion mainly addresses these two issues.

Handling alternative for FR misunderstanding party	American interactants	Japanese interactants	Both
"let it pass"	4 (100%)	6 (55%)	10 (67%)
"expose"	0 (0%)	5 (45%)	5 (33%)
Total	4 (100%)	11 (100%)	15(100%)

Table 10

#### "Let it pass" alternative

It is important to note that among FR misunderstanding parties' handlings, the distinction between the "let it pass" and the "expose" alternatives is often unclear as we shall see. Nonetheless, the distinction exists in the interactant's experience; whether or not one has the *intention* to reveal the occurrence of a misunderstanding marks the boundary. Thus, the current analysis relies on the

interactant's intentionality available through interviews in conjunction with conversational data.

The "let it pass" alternative for FR misunderstanding parties represents the idea that they realize that they have misunderstood something said by the other party during the course of conversation but do not bother to surface the misunderstanding. In other words, they keep the occurrence of misunderstanding to themselves and proceed in conversation. When the FR misunderstanding party exercises the "let it pass" alternative, the other party (the misunderstood party) typically remains ignorant of the occurrence of misunderstanding. The following two examples (Data Segments 16 and 17) exemplify the "let it pass" handling by the FR misunderstanding party. In each example, focus on how the misunderstanding party embeds his or her own misunderstanding in the ongoing talk. In Data Segment 16, Lana is the misunderstanding party; she misunderstands Trisha's utterance about difficulty in finding jeans. Although Lana recognizes her misunderstanding given Trisha's subsequent utterance in line 19, she decides to let it pass.

Data Segment 16. English Conversation (This conversation includes many "unintelligible" fragments because the recording was done in a moving car)

- 11 Trisha: you've got a normal body I have like a high waist or short waist yeah  
 12           that's why it's really hard for me to find (.) jeans  
 13 Haley: metoo  
 14 Trisha: no I'm saying Lana  
 15 Haley: yeah  
 16 Lana: it's hard for me to find 'em (pause) I have( ) I have long torso  
 17 Haley: ( )  
 18 Lana: and long legs so  
 19 Trisha: no it looks normal I'm sure you don't have ANY problem( )

- 20 Lana: |no I do because  
 21 usually the short (.) you know it depends cause I think they are either  
 22 like ( ) too high up you know  
 23 Trisha: yeah

According to an interview with Lana, when Trisha states that "it is really hard for me to find jeans" in line 12, Lana does not pay full attention to this utterance because she is driving a car. She reports that she "didn't catch the first sentence of Trisha 's comment." As a result, Lana selectively hears key words such as "hard," "find," and "jeans." In addition, Trisha utters, "I'm saying Lana" in line 14 in response to Haley 's comment. Because of these, Lana gathers that Trisha is saying that it is hard for Lana to find jeans, misunderstanding the subject of the sentence. This is easily done also because, in Lana's mind, it is true that she has difficulty in finding jeans. In lines 16 and 18, Lana provides reasons for the difficulty in agreement with what she thinks she heard. In line 19, however, Lana receives an unexpected response from Trisha ("I'm sure you don't have ANY problem"). With this response, Lana, for the first time, realizes that she has misunderstood Trisha 's intended meaning.

Now that Lana realizes her misunderstanding, she could have exposed the misunderstanding (e.g., "Oh, I thought you were saying I have the problem"). The oral interview reveals, however, that Lana chooses to bury the misunderstanding partly because Trisha is merely an acquaintance, and partly because the misunderstanding makes little difference in how she proceeds in the conversation. Whether or not Trisha says that Lana has the difficulty, the fact

remains that she does. Note that Lana does not change the content of her responses between lines 16 and 18 (before she recognizes the misunderstanding), and lines 20-22 (after she recognizes the misunderstanding); Lana is persistent on her claim that she experiences difficulty in finding jeans. The only possible difference is that lines 16 and 18 are presented as an "agreement," and lines 20-22 are presented as a "disagreement." The revision from "agreement" to "disagreement," however, is only achieved in Lana's mind, and Trisha remains uninformed of the occurrence of the misunderstanding. In Trisha's experience, Lana's responses probably appear as a consistent "disagreement." In short, Lana manages to embed her misunderstanding in the ongoing talk. She "lets it pass."

The next example similarly illustrates the "let it pass" method exercised by the FR misunderstanding party. Cindy is the misunderstanding party. Cindy misunderstands the cause of a "big wet spot" that appears in Ben's (her husband) pants. Cindy and Ben discuss wet laundry that they hang around in their house. The discussion reminds Ben of his experience earlier in the day; his pants were not completely dried yet, and he had to teach a class with a wet spot.

Data Segment 17. English conversation

- 8 Cindy: w'll you know they're still (damp ) they're not dry yet
- 9 Ben: ( )
- 10 Ben: sure I know it looks like they take two days to get dry
- 11 Cindy: I kinda turned air conditioning here to get 'em dry that way
- 12 Ben: I had a big wet spot on my back when I was teaching
- 13 Cindy: did you really?
- 14 Ben: just like I had taken a leak in the pants



the listener took the time to understand the reason for the wet spot, not necessarily as a sign that she initially had the wrong interpretation. This segment is understood as a case of the "let it pass" method because the misunderstanding party has no intention of exposing the misunderstanding, as the interview reveals. Cindy manages to embed her misunderstanding in the ongoing talk; she continues the conversation without letting Ben know the occurrence of the misunderstanding. It must be added that FR Japanese misunderstanding parties equally practice the "let it pass" method when they realize their own misunderstandings. For micro-analysis of Japanese data segments, see Appendix B.

#### "Expose" alternative

The "expose" alternative exercised by FR misunderstanding parties represents the idea that they realize that they have misunderstood something during the course of conversation and choose to surface the misunderstanding. This is usually done by "confessing" their wrong interpretation. (The concept of "confession" is discussed in the previous chapter.) The main function of the "expose" alternative is to let the other party (the misunderstood party) know the fact that a misunderstanding has taken place.

In the present data, however, the "expose" method employed by the FR misunderstanding party is only observed in Japanese data. A lack of the "expose" method in American data may be more adequately attributed to the small number of the total cases (there is a total of four accounts of handlings made by FR American



misunderstanding parties) than to cultural practices. The researcher speculates that as the amount of data increases, more cases of the "expose" method by the FR misunderstanding party are likely to be found in American data as well.

The reason for the above speculation is that American interactants do, in fact, witness the "expose" method employed by the misunderstanding party. Consider the following segment (Data Segment 18) which is reported from the misunderstood party's perspective, and thus, is not "officially" included as the expose method exercised by the FR misunderstanding party (because it is not reported by the misunderstanding party himself). In Data Segment 18, the misunderstanding party comes forward with a "confession" of his misunderstanding. Ben is the misunderstanding party; he misunderstands the referent of the word, "the furniture," uttered by Cindy. Focus on how Ben exposes a misunderstanding at the arrowed turn (line 7).

Data Segment 18. English conversation

- 1 Cindy: I need to get some um (.) oil to oil the furniture
- 2 Ben: ok
- 3 Cindy: it's you know it's haven't been oiled since we moved from Vegas
- 4 needs to be
- 5 Ben: why are you having to oil the furniture
- 6 Cindy: it's WOOD honey (you) if you don't want
- >7 Ben: thought you were talking about the couch or something
- 8 Cindy: no you need to oil the wood (.) it also gets dry
- 9 Ben: all right

Ben misunderstands the referent of "the furniture" that Cindy utters in line 1. While Cindy intends "the furniture" to mean the wooden piece of furniture that they (Ben and Cindy) inherited from Ben's parents and treasure, Ben interprets it to mean the couch on which they are sitting at the time of the conversation. This interpretation propels his question in line 5, "Why are you having to oil the furniture (the couch for Ben)?," since oiling a textured couch is an unheard-of practice. Cindy's subsequent response in line 6, "it's WOOD, honey," makes clear that she intends the wooden piece of furniture as the object to be oiled. Accordingly, Ben comes forward with a "confession" of his misinterpretation; he tells, "I thought you were talking about the couch or something" in line 7. For Japanese misunderstanding parties' "expose" method, see Appendix B.

#### Factors Affecting the FR Misunderstanding Party's Handling Choices

While the cost and reward factors affecting the *misunderstood* party's handling may apply to the *misunderstanding* party's handling as well, one important fact dominates the cost-reward scheme in the misunderstanding party's handling of misunderstanding, and changes the ways in which cost and reward factors are played out. The critical fact is that it is not necessary for the FR misunderstanding party to expose a misunderstanding. This fact primarily indicates the *no-reward situation*. The moment when the FR misunderstanding party recognizes his or her misunderstanding, the misunderstanding becomes a past event. To realize a misunderstanding is to realize that his or her interpretation was

incorrect, and this incorrectness is only experienced when a correct version of the understanding is now available. Therefore, realizing a past misunderstanding and gaining a new understanding inevitably coincide in the misunderstanding party's experience. (They are co-constituted.)

This fact alone makes the act of exposing a misunderstanding a pointless, unrewarding, and unnecessary move in interaction. If the FR misunderstanding party now gains a due understanding, why should this person dwell on the past misunderstanding, creating an unnecessary "bump" in conversation? Isn't conversation much smoother if the misunderstanding party puts behind the occurrence of misunderstanding and proceeds in talk, now that he or she understands? Why does this person have to expose the misunderstanding especially when the other party has no knowledge of its occurrence? In short, there is no point in exposing a past misunderstanding. The non-rewarding nature of the exposure, thus, plays a central role in the handling decisions made by the FR misunderstanding party. This explains why the "let it pass" method predominates over the "expose" in the FR misunderstanding party's handling in the present data.

However, an exception exists from this no-reward situation when conversational interaction turns into a "scene," such as argument, disagreement, confrontation, and embarrassment, due to the occurrence of a misunderstanding. As these "scenes" develop, they call for a resolution, and the resolution is available through the misunderstanding party's "confession." In other words, a confession

from the misunderstanding party rescues the scene, closing the highlighted event in talk.

Analysis reveals that all cases of the "expose" method employed by the misunderstanding party in the present data are results of some sorts of conversational "scene." For instance, in Data Segment 16 in Appendix B between Kuma and Chie, the two parties argue for a while over whether spinach sold in a plastic bag has the root part. In Data Segment 17 in Appendix B between a sister and a brother, the sister "fosters" a misunderstanding and keeps the brother's notebook paper for as long as two days. These situations represent conversational "bumps" much larger than a "bump" of misunderstanding itself. Exposing the misunderstanding is an effort to reduce these large "bumps" to their causes (misunderstandings), and thus, close the book on the highlighted segments of talk for the interactants. A confession from the misunderstanding party functions as a practical resolution to the elevated situations. This explains why FR misunderstanding parties occasionally resort to the "expose" method, despite the fact that the exposure is virtually a pointless gesture.

To provide a summary of the current chapter, the chapter has mainly discussed the handling decisions made by first recognizers (FRs) of a misunderstanding. Unlike second recognizers (SRs) who resort to a uniform act of acknowledging a misunderstanding laid down by the other party, FRs have some choices. FRs, including both the misunderstood party and the misunderstanding party, handle misunderstandings by one of the two major alternatives: "let it pass" and "expose." Only the misunderstood Japanese party exercises

the third alternative, repair without exposing a misunderstanding, or "secret operation," although such a practice is infrequent.

Interestingly, the ratio of the "expose" and "let it pass" methods significantly differentiates between the misunderstood party and the misunderstanding party. In the misunderstood party's handling, the "expose" method predominates over the "let it pass" method. On the contrary, in the misunderstanding party's handling, the case is reversed, and the "let it pass" method prevails. This is explained by the fact that it is virtually pointless for the misunderstanding party to expose a past misunderstanding unless there is a conversational "scene."

Further, the current analysis finds that there are multiple factors affecting the interactant's handling decisions, and these factors are best understood in terms of the cost-reward scheme. Various cost and reward factors co-exist in a situation and interact with one another. Therefore, the interactant's handling decision reflects the interplay among these factors. In general, when reward factors exceed cost factors in exposing a misunderstanding, the interactant is willing to expose a misunderstanding. When the case is the other way around, the interactant is reluctant to expose the misunderstanding, resulting in the "let it pass" decision.

## CHAPTER VII

### LOGIC OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS

The previous two chapters address how social interactants recognize misunderstanding in conversation, and, once they recognize it, how they handle it. While pursuing the above issues, additional insights and findings have dawned regarding the basic characteristics of conversational misunderstanding. To comprehend the ways in which interactants recognize and handle misunderstandings is also to comprehend the lively details of each misunderstanding. This includes the knowledge of how misunderstandings develop during the course of human conversation.

In the process of comprehending the development of human misunderstanding, the researcher discovered that certain similarities cut across varying occurrences of misunderstanding and across Japanese and American data. In other words, certain similarities predominate in the ways in which misunderstandings emerge and develop beyond the specific content and nature of misunderstanding; beyond contingency. These similarities shall be referred to as a "logic" of misunderstanding in the present study. The current chapter, therefore, mainly addresses this invariant logic found among varying expressions of conversational misunderstandings.

## FOUR PRECONDITIONS OF MISUNDERSTANDING

The logic that underlies everyday conversational misunderstanding consists of four constitutive elements which are best understood as four preconditions of the occurrence of misunderstanding. These four preconditions are ordinary facts of ordinary social interaction which we take for granted, and include: 1) Language has a representational nature, 2) Meaning resides in the interaction between a message and a context, 3) Interactants bring arbitrary frames of reference (interpretive contexts) to find meaning, and 4) Interactants remain unaware of the diversity of interpretive contexts brought by co-participants. These four elements together contribute to the emergence of conversational misunderstanding. Without these elements, conversational misunderstanding is not possible. Each of these elements is discussed with specific examples below.

### 1. Language has an abbreviate nature

Language is not a duplicate copy of mind; language merely functions as a representation of mind. When we utter some words such as "chair," "notebook," "furniture," and "phone book," we are not physically displaying the referents of these words, but are merely producing proper arrangements of sound which symbolize these referents so that other members of the same culture can grasp the meaning of the intended objects. Culture associates sound arrangements with certain meaning, and human interactants utilize this association in their social interaction.

Because words and thought objects merely have a representational relationship, not a direct relationship, social interactants may assign slightly different meanings to the same word or phrase. For instance, when one utters, "Sherry lives in a nice house," one has in mind a modern looking house with skylights and an indoor racket ball court, while the other may picture a nicely carpeted house with a cozy fire place and a balcony. Nonetheless, the two continue their conversation based on the premise that the idea of a "nice house" is by and large shared. Another example is that when one utters, "The movie was very good," and has in mind vivid pictures of humorous scenes, the other may conceive a succession of suspense that keeps the audience on the edge of their seats. Language summarizes and simplifies details of thought objects in mind. Therefore, what we utter is merely an index of our thoughts and experiences. Our efforts to express thought objects through words are inherently limited.

## 2. Meaning resides in the interaction between a message and a context

The limited relationship between language and thought is supplemented with contexts. Interactants need to rely on contexts to construct meaning. Meaning cannot be found in words themselves but in the ways in which the words stand in a particular context. For instance, a wife may say to her husband, "Did you do it?," and the husband understands that "it" means to take their car for an oil change because the couple previously talked about the necessity of an oil change. Because they share the same interactional context,



they are able to arrive at a mutual meaning. Placed in different contexts, "it" may suggest different activities such as doing laundry, registering for classes, and canceling a hotel reservation.

Schutz (1967), a social phenomenologist, provides an explanatory framework for interactants' practices of finding meaning between words and contexts. Drawing on Gestalt theory, Schutz posits that meaning resides in relationships among elements. Meaning emerges when an element is placed among other elements or in a context. This principle appears to underlie our everyday interaction while we are not necessarily aware of its mechanisms. In other words, we rely on the principle of meaning in our communication without knowing that we do. When we converse, we do not lay out every single detail in our minds. Nonetheless, we assume the other fills the unsaid portion of the message, drawing meaning from contexts.

Hopper (1981) draws on Schutz and makes a similar observation when he argues that communication consists of both coded and uncoded information. Interactants synthesize spoken words and unspoken portions of utterances into meaning. The unspoken portions of utterances are generally "taken for granted" by social interactants. *The taken for granted*, or *TFG*, includes missing premises of enthymemes, felicity conditions of speech acts, warrants of arguments, presuppositions of sentences, Grice's cooperative principle, and pragmatic implications. Interactants tacitly rely on these TFGs in comprehending and negotiating social reality.

This condition of obtaining meaning leads to the speculation that once an interactant arrives at a certain understanding, this particular understanding serves as an additional basis for a subsequent understanding of the other's next message. In this manner, one misunderstanding may lead to another misunderstanding. For instance, consider the following conversation between an Avis (a car rental business) employee and a customer. When the customer utters, "I wonder if I can park my car here," he wishes to park his car in an Avis garage while he uses a rented car for a week. The Avis employee, however, misunderstands him as wishing to park his car only while he makes an renting arrangement (for a few minutes). This initial misunderstanding makes the employee prone to misunderstand the customer's next utterance, "How much do I pay you?," as asking about the parking fee for a few minutes, while, in fact, the customer intends this question to ask about the fee for a week.

- 1 Customer: hi, I am renting a car. I wonder if I can park my car here
- 2 Avis: sure go that way and park behind that blue car
- 3 Customer: ((park his car behind the blue car))
- 4 Customer: how much do I pay you?
- 5 Avis: oh no, no charge
- 6 Customer: that's great

This misunderstanding may surface when the customer comes back in a week to see his car towed.

### 3. Interactants bring arbitrary frames of reference to social interaction

Interactants bring a wide variety of frames of reference to their interaction. The frames of reference serve as interpretive contexts in which messages are understood. Such referential frames, are not necessarily shared among interactants as generally presumed. Rather, interactants bring arbitrary and thus quite diverse interpretive contexts to understanding their communication, arriving at different meanings. The following three examples unanimously illustrate the diversity of contexts used by interactants. In Data Segment 20, Lynn tells Kyle how hard and frustrating it is to get a place to live through a university housing department. Kyle misunderstands what Lynn means by "one" in line 15.

#### Data Segment 20. English conversation

- 10 Lynn: . . . but uh I asked her about housing  
 11 something about being enrolled and getting in and she said she called and  
 12 asked and so she called to the housing and asked them and she said (.) you  
 13 know she gave her I guess my social security number and pulled up in the  
 14 computer and they said oh SHE the yeah enrollment (.) reservation she  
 15 said that they had one ready for me and I was like oh really  
 16 Kyle: (at one room of) a dorm room?  
 17 Lynn: oh no I'm sorry an apartment at Yorkshire  
 18 Kyle: oh right at Yorkshire that's where you  
 19 Lynn: because that's where I applied

Lynn is a single mother with a daughter and is looking for a university apartment to occupy with her daughter. Thus, she means such an apartment by "one," although she does not really elaborate on

this information during this segment of interaction. On the other hand, Kyle has the experience of living in a dorm as a new transfer student and applies this experience to Lynn who is also a new transfer student. Thus, Kyle understands "one" to mean a dorm room. This segment illustrates that the same word ("one") bears different meanings when placed in different experiential contexts. The two parties bring different contexts to their interaction due to differing backgrounds and respectively attend to "one" as a natural extension of their contexts.

Similarly, the next Data Segment exemplifies the diversity of interactants' contexts which contribute to differing interpretations. In Data Segment 21, Kuma needs to find a "phone book" and asks Chie where he can find it. Chie, who happens to be in a different room at the time, misunderstands what Kuma needs to find.

Data Segment 21. Japanese conversation

- 3            ano: chotto denwa- denwacho wa?  
              (hey, where is the phone book?)
- 4            (1.0)
- 5 Chie:     denwacho arudesho itsumono tokoroni  
              (the phone book is in the regular place, isn't it?)
- 6 Kuma:    naiyo  
              (no)
- 7 Chie:     nande naino  
              (why not)
- 8 Kuma:    shiran (1.0) saa  
              (I have no idea)

After this exchange, Kuma and Chie get into an argument over Chie's messy room; Kuma complains that he cannot find what he needs to find because Chie's room is too messy to find anything. Eventually, Chie comes out of the other room where she was in and joins Kuma's search for a "phone book."

- 18 Chie: kokoyan  
(here it is)
- 19 Kuma: doko  
(where)
- 20 Chie: koko ((pointing to a phone book on a sofa))  
(here)
- 21 Kuma: chigau chigau chigau chigau  
(no no no no)
- 22 Chie: chiiyanno chicchaiyatsu  
(you mean my little one)
- 23 Kuma: sou  
(yes)
- 24 Chie: adoresuchou ( )  
(you should have said, the 'address book')

Kuma needs to find Chie's address book because it contains the phone numbers of the people whom he has to call. Thus, Kuma intends "the phone book" to mean the personal address book. On the other hand, Chie is in the other room, doing some work such as reviewing and filing papers. Therefore, the word, "phone book," solely evokes in Chie a general meaning (thick and heavy community phone book), instead of the personalized meaning (address book). Chie is preoccupied with her work and does not pay special attention to what Kuma needs. Both Kuma and Chie apply different interpretive contexts to the same word and understand the "phone book" as part of their own contexts; what Kuma means by "phone book" reflects the necessity to call some people and Chie's general interpretation reflects her preoccupation with her work.

The next segment similarly illustrates the diversity of interpretive contexts among interactants. Prior to this

conversation, Aki told Jun about an unpleasant incident in which her Christian acquaintances fiercely criticized her for not believing in creation theory. Aki then mentions a good friend of hers, [Yuji], who is also a Christian.

Data Segment 22. Japanese conversation

- 19 Jun: . . . hanashitakoto aruwake? kareto wa ja  
(have you talk to him, then?)
- 20 Aki: un yokune hanasune  
(yes, I talk to him often)
- 21 Jun: un ja sonokotoni tsuitemo nahashitano?  
(o.k. then, did you talk about that incident?)
- 22 Aki: un hanashita sonohitowane: ma: (.) sonohitowane zenzen dakara [Aki]ga  
(yes I have he doesn't say anything at all about the fact that I don't have
- 23 Jun: ja un un  
(so uh huh)
- 24 Aki: shuukyō mottenai koto ni tsuitewa nanmo iwanaindakedo  
(my religion)

Having listened to Aki's' story about the unpleasant incident, Jun is curious whether Aki has talked to her friend, Yuji, about the incident. Thus, Jun intends his question in line 19 to ask, "Have you talked to him about the incident?" in particular. Aki, however, misunderstands this question as asking, "Do you talk to him?" in general. This is because Aki likes this friend very much and is eager to talk about him: what he is like and how close they are. Since Aki's mind is set to discuss Yuji, it is only natural that Aki hears Jun's question in line 19 as asking what she wants to answer. In sum, conversational interactants appear to bring quite diverse interpretive contexts (frames of reference) to understand their

interaction, and the diversity reflects their varying backgrounds. When placed in different interpretive contexts, a word, phrase, or sentence bears different meanings because meaning is not in a message per se, but in the way in which the message is placed in a context. Interpretive contexts that interactants bring are local and contingent expressions of their being at the time of interaction. Such local interpretive contexts reflect interactants' experiences, needs, preferences, expectations, anxieties, hopes, and thought habits. In short, we tend to hear messages as a natural extension of our local beings.

#### 4. Interactants remain unaware of the diversity of contexts

While social interactants bring diverse interpretive contexts to understand each other's messages, they also remain unaware of such diversity at the time of interaction. When one applies a certain interpretive context to understand a message and arrive at a certain meaning, one does not think "twice" about the possibility that the other may have a different meaning in mind. In other words, once the interactant gains an initial understanding, he or she seizes the search for other possibilities of understandings. Reconsider the previous three examples from the perspective of this fourth point.

#### Data Segment 20. English conversation

- 10 Lynn: . . . but uh I asked her about housing  
 11 something about being enrolled and getting in and she said she called and  
 12 asked and so she called to the housing and asked them and she said (.) you  
 13 know she gave her I guess my social security number and pulled up in the  
 14 computer and they said oh SHE the yeah enrollment (.) reservation she  
 15 said that they had one ready for me and I was like oh really

- 16 Kyle: (at one room of) a dorm room?  
 17 Lynn: oh no I'm sorry an apartment at Yorkshire  
 18 Kyle: oh right at Yorkshire that's where you  
 19 Lynn: because that's where I applied

In Data Segment 20, Lynn assumes that the word, "one," conveys her intended meaning (a university apartment that she can occupy with her daughter) because she presumes that Kyle understands her circumstances; she has a child and cannot live in a university dorm. On the other hand, Kyle similarly assumes that the word, "one," refers to a dorm because, as an incoming transfer student, he used to live in a dorm. The two parties mutually assume that the same word means the same thing to each other. They are blinded with their immediate meanings and cannot think of alternative meanings that the other possibly has.

Data Segment 21. Japanese conversation

- 3           ano: chotto denwa- denwacho wa?  
              (hey, where is the phone book?)  
 4           (1.0)  
 5 Chie:     denwacho arudesho itsumono tokoroni  
              (the phone book is in the regular place, isn't it?)  
 6 Kuma:    naiyo  
              (no)  
 7 Chie:     nande naino  
              (why not)  
 8 Kuma:    shiran (1.0) saa  
              (I have no idea)

After this exchange, Kuma and Chie get into an argument over Chie's messy room; Kuma complains that he cannot find what he needs to find because Chie's room is too messy to find anything. Eventually, Chie comes out of the other room where she was in and joins Kuma's search for a "phone book."



- 18 Chie: kokoyan  
(here it is)
- 19 Kuma: doko  
(where)
- 20 Chie: koko ((pointing to a phone book on a sofa))  
(here)
- 21 Kuma: chigau chigau chigau chigau  
(no no no no)
- 22 Chie: chiiyanno chicchayatsu  
(you mean my little one)
- 23 Kuma: sou  
(yes)
- 24 Chie: adoresuchou ( )  
(you should have said, the 'address book')

In Data Segment 21, Kuma could have used a more accurate term, "address book," to refer to what he needs to find. Unable to think of the accurate words, however, Kuma assumes that "phone book" serves his purpose because, a few minutes prior to this conversation, he mentioned calling two people; Kuma hopes that Chie understands his circumstance and what he means by "phone book." Chie, however, is preoccupied with the work that she engages in a different room, and thus, forgets the fact that Kuma earlier mentioned calling some people. Chie simply assumes that "phone book" means a community phone book because it is what the word regularly means. This segment, like the above segment, illustrates the idea that the interactants are nearsighted about the meanings that they initially gain and do not look further beyond these meanings.

## Data Segment 22. Japanese conversation

- 19 Jun: . . . hanashitakoto aruwake? kareto wa ja  
(have you talk to him, then?)
- 20 Aki: un yokune hanasune  
(yes, I talk to him often)
- 21 Jun: un ja sonokotoni tsuitemo nahashitano?  
(o.k. then, did you talk about that incident?)
- 22 Aki: un hanashita sonohitowane: ma: (.) sonohitowane zenzen dakara [Aki]ga  
(yes I have he doesn't say anything at all about the fact that I don't have
- 23 Jun: ja un un  
(so uh huh)
- 24 Aki: shuukyou mottenai koto ni tsuitewa nanmo iwanaindakedo  
(my religion)

In Data Segment 22, Jun intends his question in line 19 to ask about whether Aki discussed with her friend the religious criticism that she received from her Christian acquaintances. Jun does not specify the content of talk with this friend in his question, but he assumes that his intent is understood because Jun and Aki has been discussing the unpleasant event up until this segment. On the other hand, Aki interprets his question to be a sign of topic shift and as asking whether Aki and this friend talk often in general. This is because Aki is eager to talk about their friendship. Aki hears the question as an extension of her talk agenda and does not think "twice" about the possibility that Jun is still on the previous topic and intends his question to concern with the unpleasant incident. In general, when interactants arrive at certain meaning, they are convinced that they have properly understood the other and stop searching for other possibilities of meaning. Therefore,

nearsightedness about immediate meanings more or less characterizes interactants' tendency in understanding in social interaction.

Our tendency to cease further meaning-search may reflect a certain general premise of social interaction. Social interactants naturally believe that they regularly understand each other and that they are held together by means of language as the primary tool to convey meaning. We may give too much credit to language's ability to communicate and may neglect the fact that interpretive contexts contribute to meaning and that interactants bring quite diverse interpretive contexts to their interaction, arriving at different meanings. When we utter, "one," "phone book," and "have you talked to him?," we assume that the intended meanings are conveyed, and based on this assumption, proceed in interaction. This assumption of mutual understanding is so ordinary and taken for granted that social interactants do not even notice its presence. In other words, the assumption constitutes what Husserl and Schutz call a "natural attitude" of social interactants. It is ironic that, because we easily assume that we understand each other, we misunderstand each other.

It is interesting to note that our natural attitude toward mutual understanding is seriously examined by skepticism. Taylor (1992) argues that the difference between conventional language researchers and skeptics is that the former accepts and the latter doubts social interactants' natural attitude as a basic starting point of research. Conventional language researchers start from the idea that interactants regularly understand each other and ask the "What" and "How" questions: What it is for communicators to understand

each other and How communication understanding occurs. On the other hand, skeptics critically examine the basic idea that interactants regularly understand each other and ask the "Whether" question: Whether communicators ordinarily understand each other. In short, conventional researchers endorse ordinary understanding, and skeptics argue for ordinary misunderstanding. Stated differently, from the conventional perspective, "understanding" is ordinary, and "misunderstanding" is aberrant, while, from the skeptics' perspective, "misunderstanding" is ordinary, and "understanding" is aberrant.

In sum, the above discussion makes clear that a certain invariant logic explains the various occurrences of misunderstanding in human conversation. First of all, language does not mirror thought objects. Rather, it merely summarizes and simplifies complex thought processes. Language has a limitation as a primary tool for communication. Second, the meaning of words is not in the message per se. Rather, it resides in the manner in which the words are placed in a certain context. In other words, interactants draw meaning by placing messages in particular interpretive contexts, or frames of reference. Third, interactants apply interpretive contexts to find meaning in a incongruent manner. They do not apply uniform contexts to arrive at uniform meanings. Rather, they bring quite diverse interpretive contexts, arriving at diverse meanings. Finally, interactants neglect the diversity of interpretive contexts brought by co-participants. They do not realize that the other brings his or her own unique meaning context to understand the interaction, and yet they proceed in conversation. They readily believe that they

have adequately understood each other. These four constitutive elements, which are rarely reflected upon by ordinary interactants, cumulate and pave the way for the occurrence of conversational misunderstanding.

## CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF CONVERSATIONAL MISUNDERSTANDING

It needs reiterating at this point that the present study aims to comprehend the realities of conversational misunderstanding in its own right. Accordingly, the study has explored and described conversational misunderstandings as lived and experienced by participants (how people recognize and handle misunderstanding), and further discussed the logic underlying conversational misunderstandings (how misunderstanding emerges in conversation). Through these paths, the present study ultimately aims to comprehend the essential characteristics of conversational misunderstanding and to arrive at a consistent conceptualization of misunderstanding that may illuminate the subsequent research efforts in a meaningful manner. The existing fragmentation among researchers' definitional attempts calls for such a consistent, unifying conceptualization. Therefore, it is pertinent that, based on the present findings about conversational misunderstanding, the study offers a preliminary effort to conceptualize *misunderstanding recognized in conversation*.

First of all, the present study conceptualizes misunderstanding as a specific type of understanding, rather than a lack of understanding. Misunderstanding is not an antonym of

understanding but should be comprehended as a particular version of understanding. Schutz points out that no two individuals can share the same context and meaning, and therefore, "genuine" understanding only exists as an approximate value of the speaker's intended meaning.

The "genuine" version of understanding occurs to the extent that the intended meaning and interpreted meaning are similar. In ethnomethodological tradition, this is termed "practical understanding." Ethnomethodologists argue that while a complete understanding is theoretically impossible between two people, an approximate understanding is achievable that practically meets the purposes of the interactants. On the other hand, the "missed" version of understanding occurs to the extent that the intended and interpreted meanings are dissimilar. The semantic distance between the two meanings, in the case of misunderstanding, does not function as "practical understanding" for interactants. An important point is that "understanding" and "misunderstanding" belong to the same plane and that they are both functions of the semantic distance between the intended meaning and the interpreted meaning.

Second, the present study conceptualize both "understanding" and "misunderstanding" as degrees on a continuum. They may simply be a matter of quantity, rather than of quality as generally believed, such as good vs. bad, positive vs. negative, and effective vs. ineffective. An act of understanding ranges from minimal to maximal discrepancy in meaning. A "genuine" understanding occurs when the discrepancy is minimal and appears minor to interactants,

whereas a misunderstanding occurs when the discrepancy is maximal and appears too significant to overlook from the standpoint of interactants. Thus, both versions of understanding are about how minor or how significant a certain semantic discrepancy appears to the interactant. It is a function of the human mind that transforms the issue of quantity to the issue of quality.

An applied discussion is that it is possible that an event of misunderstanding in one interactant's view may be an event of understanding in another's view. Indeed the current data contains a substantial amount of such situations. (57 cases out 73, or 78.1%, represent such situations.) For instance, in one of such cases, Chie misunderstands Kuma's utterance, "Nope," as regarding notable TV programs on Sunday, while, in fact, Kuma intends "Nope" as regarding the Sunday column of a TV guide that Chie is reviewing. This interaction is experienced as a case of misunderstanding only by Chie, but not by Kuma. Further, in another case, Kyle misunderstands the reason why a girl in Linda's story believes that she has science classes; Kyle thinks that it is because the girl took a psychology course, while, in fact, it is because she merely attended the science classes. This interaction is registered in Kyle's experience as a case of misunderstanding while, in Linda's experience, it is not the case. Thus, the experience of a misunderstanding event is private and personal; it varies from one interactant to another.

Third, the present study conceptualizes misunderstanding as an interactant's false assumption that he or she has properly understood the other. Once the interactant arrives at a certain meaning via personal contexts, he or she is convinced that an

adequate understanding has occurred, and ceases the further search for alternative meanings. When one's conviction of understanding turns out to be false, it is then that the realization of misunderstanding occurs. Therefore, the interactant's blindness to multiple possibilities of meaning, and the resulting false conviction of an adequate understanding characterize misunderstanding.

It appears that social interactants do not and cannot intentionally misunderstand each other. Even when we pretend to misunderstand others (e.g., jokingly misunderstand others), we know (think) that we understand them. Rather, we do intend to understand others but tend to forget the diversity and multiplicity of meanings that co-participants bring to the interaction. This is endorsed by social interactants' "natural attitude" toward mutual understanding, or intersubjectivity; interactants presume that they regularly understand each other until "counter evidence" or a "wake-up call" points to the non-intersubjective reality. It can be argued that misunderstanding is a product of interactants' blind prejudice toward intersubjectivity. Misunderstanding occurs as a result of interactants' ignorance of their diversity, rather than as a result of their diversity per se. The current data strongly validates this point. If interactants know that the other has a different meaning in mind, it is not a case of misunderstanding; it is a case of understanding.

Fourth, the present study conceptualizes "understanding" and "misunderstanding" as co-constitutional partners. Co-constitution between understanding and misunderstanding represents the idea that they create and define each other. The idea of co-constitution



is succinctly illustrated in the Chinese symbol of "Yin-Yang." The black part of the symbol allows us to understand (creates and defines) the concept of whiteness, and the white part allows the comprehension of blackness. Without the experience of blackness, one never understands whiteness, and without the experience of whiteness, one never understands blackness. Thus they co-constitute each other.

By analogy, when one experiences misunderstanding, it is also the moment that one experiences understanding. That is, to experience a misunderstanding is to realize one's understanding was indeed inadequate, and the realization of inadequateness is possible if a new and adequate understanding now dawns. Further, this new understanding may become a misunderstanding if a newer and more adequate understanding dawns in the future. With each new understanding, the past version of understanding becomes a misunderstanding. As human interactants renew their understanding each moment, this process represents a never-ending cycle. Interactants repeat this cyclic process even though a complete and full understanding is never possible between two individuals who have different life experiences and backgrounds.

In sum, the current section discusses a preliminary effort to conceptualize *recognized conversational misunderstanding* based on the present findings. The conceptualization is summarized as the following: 1) Misunderstanding is a specific type of understanding, 2) Misunderstanding is a degree of discrepancy in meaning which appears significant to the interactant, 3) Misunderstanding is the interactant's false conviction that an adequate understanding has

occurred, and finally 4) Misunderstanding and understanding are co-constituted. The main difference between the present conceptualization and conventional conceptualizations is that the former places misunderstanding at the center of investigation and views it in its own terms, and the latter views it as an aberrant event of communication.

To provide a summary of the present chapter, the chapter examines the fundamental logic that underlies the occurrence of conversational misunderstandings and offers a preliminary effort to conceptualize these misunderstandings. While these efforts do not directly address the posed research questions, they nonetheless contribute to the ultimate aim of the present study: to comprehend the nature and characteristics of misunderstanding from its own perspective. From a perspective of "effective" communication, misunderstanding is only understood as an obstacle to such "effective" communication. Examined from an internal perspective, misunderstanding reveals quite a different story. Misunderstanding is no longer an obstacle to understanding, but rather an intrinsic part of understanding. Misunderstanding is no longer a function of difference in cultures, languages, and communication styles, but rather a function of interactants' blind presumption toward mutual understanding. Misunderstanding no longer has inherent negative status, but rather, it is human orientation toward effectiveness that gives misunderstanding negative status. Stated differently, misunderstanding and understanding do not have inherent qualitative differences such as good vs. bad and positive vs. negative, but rather may simply have quantitative differences (the size of semantic

discrepancy) which are only transferred into qualitative differences by human preferences. Human mind favors smooth interaction over "bumpy" interaction, intersubjectivity over non-intersubjectivity, congruity over incongruity, and efficient communication over time-consuming communication. Placing everyday misunderstanding at the center of investigation reveals a great deal about the way we are naturally and the way we interact with each other, which would otherwise be unavailable to the conventional approach to everyday misunderstanding.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IMPLICATIONS

While interactants' practices of recognizing and handling everyday misunderstandings largely cross the cultural boundary between Japanese and American data, there are also some potentially culture-related differences. The present chapter, therefore, first addresses implications of these cultural differences. Further, an interesting phenomenon regarding interactants' misunderstanding of misunderstandings (interactants misunderstand that the other person misunderstands them) surfaces while investigating everyday misunderstandings. Thus, the current chapter also address this phenomenon of *meta-misunderstanding* as a potentially worthwhile subject for future investigation. Thereafter, the chapter presents an overall summary along with limitations and contributions of the present study.

#### CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

As discussed earlier in the chapters on analyses (Chs. V and VI), the cultural differences found in the present study basically lie in three areas: 1) American interactants have a wider range for recognizing conversational misunderstanding, 2) Japanese interactants demonstrate an indirect mode of handling misunderstanding, namely "secret operation," and 3) the two cultures exhibit different views of face-saving as a factor which affects interactants' handling of misunderstanding. The current

section addresses these three differences and explores their cultural backgrounds.

First of all, American subjects demonstrate the tendency to recognize a wider range of misunderstanding than their Japanese counterparts do. All American subjects in the present study tend to perceive the other person's clarification attempts, such as "How do you define media literacy?" and "Do you have to have a vita to get into grad school?," as signs of misunderstanding. This pattern of perception (recognition) is not observed among Japanese interactants in the present data.

Speakers of a clarification question know that they do not understand and thus want to clarify and better understand the subject. Thus, it is not accurate to say that the speaker of a clarification question misunderstands the other party when he or she is simply requesting more information in order to understand. Such questions arise as: "Why do American interactants perceive the process in which the other tries to understand something as a sign of misunderstanding?" and "Why do Americans experience the occurrence of misunderstanding even before the other party arrives at the wrong interpretation?" It is interesting to pursue the reasons behind this potentially culture-related practice.

It can be formulated that Americans exhibit prospective recognition of emerging misunderstandings as well as retrospective recognition of misunderstandings which have already emerged, while Japanese only exhibit retrospective recognition. One interpretation is that cultural time orientations may affect interactants' modes of recognition. *Chronemics* is the study of human temporality and

views temporality as a primary communication variable (Bruneau, 1990). Cross-cultural chronemics researchers, such as Hall (1959) and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1960), find that the future time orientation predominates in the U. S. culture, and the past time orientation predominates in Japanese culture. American culture tends to be concerned with change and the construction of the future while Japanese culture tends to be concerned with the preservation of tradition. Collective consciousness toward the future or past may make cultural members susceptible to prospective or retrospective recognition. Another interpretation is that American culture has a stronger tendency to pursue clarity and precision in communication, while Japanese culture has more tolerance for ambiguity. Therefore, American interactants may be more sensitive and impatient with the potential development of conversational misunderstanding. As a result, the temporary incongruity of two minds, not necessarily the established discrepancy of two meanings, registers as misunderstanding in American interactants' experiences.

For the second cultural difference observed in the present study, Japanese subjects demonstrate a culture-specific way of handling conversational misunderstanding: a secret operation or, in other words, repair without exposing the misunderstanding. For this handling method, Japanese interactants first accept the other's interpretation as a valid form of understanding and then come around to clarify the intended meaning, even though this may occasionally create inconsistency and contradiction. This method of handling misunderstandings is not observed among American interactants in

the present data. Why do Japanese interactants choose such a "sneaky" method of dealing with misunderstanding? Why not simply denying the other's interpretation and providing a clarification? Denying the other's interpretation seems much simpler, more efficient and straightforward. The Japanese "secret operation" is likely to confuse the misunderstanding party and to present the misunderstood party as an ambiguous and inefficient speaker. Nevertheless, the benefit of a "secret operation" must override the cost of looking ambiguous and inefficient for Japanese interactants.

The benefit to using this "secret operation" resides in the idea that the misunderstood party saves the listener's face and yet is able to deliver the intended point. As discussed earlier in the chapter on interactants' handling, the concern for saving the other's face is a strong construct in Japanese culture. In addition, Japanese interactants do not hesitate to look ambiguous and indirect. In fact, being ambiguous and indirect is a widely accepted norm of interaction in Japanese culture; it is a well-known practice that Japanese "beat around the bush." The indirect communication style is an expression of Japanese interactants' politeness and dislike of conflict. On the other hand, these norms, which Japanese accept and embrace, Americans reject and resist. American society considers indirect speakers as incompetent and thus devalues them; clear and affirmative speakers tend to receive respect and credibility.

The concept of *high vs. low-context communication* further explains these cultural differences. In high-context cultures such as Japan and Vietnam, the bulk of meaning is embedded in contexts, while, in low-context cultures, such as the United States and

Germany, the bulk of meaning is manifested in messages. As a result, high-context cultures foster indirect speech styles while low-context cultures cultivate direct speech styles. In this manner, the discussion of high vs. low-context communication and that of indirect vs. direct speech styles tend to go hand in hand. In short, these different cultural backgrounds help us understand why a "secret operation" is observed in Japanese conversations, but not in American conversations.

For the third cultural difference observed in the present study, American and Japanese interactants demonstrate different views of face-saving as a factor which discourages the interactant from exposing misunderstanding. Misunderstood American interactants are reluctant to harm their face as the speaker, while misunderstood Japanese interactants are reluctant to harm the other's face as the listener. Why do Americans hesitate to expose *their* shortcomings as the speaker, and why do Japanese hesitate to expose the *other's* shortcomings as the listener? Do Americans think that misunderstanding mainly occurs due to the speaker's fault while Japanese think that it is the listener's fault? In other words, do the two cultures differ in their views in terms of which side bears more of the blame for misunderstanding? Further, do the two cultures differ in terms of face negotiation (facework) practice? Do Americans tend to be concerned with the face of self while Japanese tend to be concerned with the face of others? Further analysis reveals the answers to these questions lie in both concepts of 1) *responsibility for misunderstanding* and 2) *facework orientation*.



Japanese and American cultures largely differ in these two concepts.

### Responsibility for misunderstanding

It is true that misunderstanding is an interactional phenomenon, and it takes two (the speaker and the listener) to create an event of conversational misunderstanding. Nevertheless, quite interestingly, the current data reveals that both Japanese and American interactants tend to place the responsibility of misunderstanding on one party over the other, and that the two cultures blame different conversational partners. In the present data, Japanese interactants tend to blame the *misunderstanding party*, while they are aware that misunderstanding is an interactional event. This is evidenced by the fact that, in Japanese data, a substantial amount of comments from subjects' reports points out the faults of the listener, the misunderstanding side, such as, in the words of Japanese subjects interviewed in the present study, "the listener's blind presumption," "selfish interpretation," "quite personal interpretation of words," "lack of understanding of the other's intent," "lack of depth in interpretation," "inattentiveness," and "memory loss."

On the contrary, American conversationalists tend to blame the *misunderstood party* while they are aware that misunderstanding is an interactional product. In the American data, a substantial amount of comments from subjects' reports depicts the faults of the speaker, the misunderstood party. Examples include, in the words of interviewed American subjects, "the speaker's exaggeration," "one-

way (unilateral) talk," "inappropriate vocal use," "wrong word choice," "speech rate too fast," "lack of clarity," and "ineffective speaking."

These cultural differences seem to reflect larger cultural premises: social beliefs and expectations of how daily communication should operate. Japanese culture fosters the communicator's ability to listen: the ability to understand and interpret as intended, the ability to read between the lines, the ability to pick up meaning when it is implied, not manifested. On the other hand, American culture nurtures the communicator's ability to speak: the ability to be clear, concise, effective in wording, and orderly in organization. While communication is an interactional, two-way process, both Japanese and American cultures tend to emphasize one directionality over the other, and they point in different directions.

In light of the above discussion, the following two formulations are possible:

- 1) When First Recognizing misunderstood Japanese party recognizes a misunderstanding, he or she may attribute the cause of the misunderstanding to the misunderstanding party (which means the other) more frequently than to the misunderstood party (which means self).
- 2) When First Recognizing misunderstood American party recognizes a misunderstanding, he or she may attribute the cause of the misunderstanding to the misunderstood party (which means self) more frequently than to the misunderstanding party (which means the other).

Therefore, among Japanese communicators, the misunderstood party's act of exposing a misunderstanding may result in revealing shortcomings of the other more frequently than those of self. On the other hand, among American communicators, the same act may suggest shortcomings of self more frequently than those of the other. This is especially relevant when the nature of the perceived shortcoming is rather severe and embarrassing to the interactant (other or self). Further, to this cultural difference in responsibility of misunderstanding, is added the difference in terms of face negotiation (facework) practices; the two cultures not only differ in their views of which party bears the primary responsibility, but also differ in their practices of which party's face needs protection.

### Facework

Cross-cultural researchers find that "face" is a universal concept observed across different cultures (Goffman, 1959; Brown and Levinson, 1978; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Lim and Bowers, 1991). The concept of "face" refers to the social identity which is projected in a relational and interactional situation. Different cultures, however, have different styles and expressions of facework. Ting-Toomey argues:

The negotiator's predispositions toward the concept of "face," their face-need and face-concern levels, and their modes and styles of managing the conflict episode are, for the most part, influenced by the cultural premises from which they draw their values and norms. (1988, p.213)

Ting-Toomey's (1988) *Face-negotiation theory*, focusing on facework in uncertain situations (e.g., request, complaint, embarrassment, and conflict), posits:

- 1) Members of individualistic cultures such as Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, and the United States tend to express a greater degree of self-face maintenance in a conflict situation than do members of collectivistic cultures.
- 2) Members of collectivistic cultures such as China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam tend to express a greater degree of mutual face or other-face maintenance than do members of individualistic cultures.

Simplistically stated, individualistic cultures tend to be concerned with self-face whereas collectivistic cultures tend to be concerned with other-face.

Face-negotiation theory applies to misunderstanding situations as well. It is especially relevant when the exposition of a misunderstanding poses some threat to the faces of interactants (e.g., embarrassment, unpleasant feeling, and sense of shame). When a threat exists, interactants are inclined to negotiate and work on their "faces." To apply face-negotiation theory to the current study of misunderstanding, it can be argued that Japanese interactants are reluctant to expose a misunderstanding partly because such an exposure may risk the well-being of other-face. American interactants are reluctant to expose a misunderstanding partly because the exposure may risk the well-being of self-face.

In sum, facework practice, together with the placement of responsibility for misunderstanding, produces unique, culturally

grounded reasons for passing up the opportunity to expose a misunderstanding. To misunderstood Japanese interactants, the exposing of a misunderstanding often means exposing shortcomings of the other, because Japanese tend to locate the blame of the misunderstanding in the listener, the misunderstanding party. Further, Japanese are not willing to threaten other-face because of their cultural premises and practices. To misunderstood American communicators, the exposing of a misunderstanding often means exposing their own shortcomings since they tend to locate the blame of misunderstanding in the speaker, the misunderstood party. Furthermore, Americans are not willing to shatter their self-face because of cultural practices. As a result, while both Japanese and American cultures perceive costs in exposing misunderstanding in terms of the face-saving concern, they differ in the specific expression of the face-saving concern: whose face is at stake and for what reasons.

With regard to the concept of face-saving, it must be added that the clear-cut statistic (0 accounts of other-face concern indicated in Table 9, Ch. VI) observed in American data does not necessarily indicate that American conversationalists do not care about other-face at all and do not blame the listener for a misunderstanding. American interactants occasionally do place the blame on the listener's side and do care about other-face as the listener. Rather, the statistic indicates that saving the other's face as the listener is not a factor strong enough to play a key role in the interactant's decision to "let it pass" in the present American data. Likewise, the clear-cut statistic (0 accounts of self-face concern

indicated in Table 9, Ch. VI) found in Japanese data does not mean that Japanese conversationalists do not care about self-face at all and do not blame the speaker for a misunderstanding. Rather, the statistic indicates that, in the present Japanese data, saving self-face as the speaker does not play a role strong enough to affect the interactant's decision to "let it pass."

To place the above discussion of several cultural differences in a larger perspective, cross-cultural communication researchers tend to agree that culture and communication are reciprocal; culture affects and shapes the members' communication, and the members' communication practices further maintain, reinforce, and recreate the culture. Everyday misunderstanding does not escape this reciprocal relationship between culture and communication. As an important aspect of daily communication, the ways in which Japanese and American interactants recognize and handle misunderstanding find unique cultural expressions. Japanese culture's past time orientation, concern for other-face saving, and emphasis on listening ability appear to shape the ways in which the interactants view and negotiate social reality in the domain of misunderstanding. On the other hand, American culture's future time orientation, concern for self-face saving, and emphasis on speaking ability appear to affect the interactants. Social reality negotiated and recreated during the course of interaction further provides the interactants resources for making sense of their world. For example, a new member of Japanese culture (infant), in the process of socialization, learns to recognize certain interactional events as

"misunderstanding" and to deal with them in certain manners. The same process equally applies to a new member of American culture. In this manner, culture and members' communication practice in the field of misunderstanding maintain and redefine each other, representing an unbreakable flow of reciprocity.

In conjunction with the above discussion, it is interesting to note that Ochs (1991) claims that different cultures display different patterns of responding to misunderstanding between adults and children, while, at the same time, there are also culturally universal devices (e.g., ignoring and guessing). Specifically, Samoan and Kaluli adults believe that their youngsters must pay careful attention to adults' speech in the situation of misunderstanding. By contrast, American and European adults believe that they need to assist youngsters, for instance, with speech simplification. In short, in Samoan and Kaluli cultures, children accommodate to adults while in American and European cultures, adults accommodate to children. "Misunderstandings in these ways socialize children into social status and social relationships. Through miscommunications, they come to understand what it means to be a child and a caregiver, for example" (Ochs, 1991, p. 58).

Ochs makes an important point when she observes that "each misunderstanding is an opportunity space for instantiating local epistemology and for structuring social identities of interactants" (p. 60). The view point that misunderstanding, as a microscopic social activity, reflects and redefines a larger social order and structure is fresh and heuristic as it casts light on little-known aspects of culture and misunderstanding. As discussed in the

literature review, culture and misunderstanding have traditionally been studied from a uniform perspective: how different communication practices between intercultural communicators contribute to mutual misunderstanding. Ochs' approach illuminates culture and misunderstanding from a different angle: how different cultures demonstrate different practices of responding to misunderstanding.

With the conventional approaches, intercultural communicators remain uninformed of how their conversational partners handle misunderstanding when it occurs. As a result, their interaction may become complicated as they misunderstand each other's way of dealing with misunderstanding. For instance, an American interactant is likely to misjudge his or her Japanese conversational partner as speaking aimlessly and pointlessly, while, in fact, the Japanese uses a "secret operation" in order to save the American's face. Knowledge of the Japanese method of handling would help the American interactant to see the point in the seemingly "pointless" gesture.

Therefore, it is interesting and fruitful to pursue, in future investigation, how different cultures socialize their members into different styles of misunderstanding recognition and handling. Such an effort will shed additional light on the ways in which culture and misunderstanding relate to each other, and further advance our comprehension of the relationship between culture and communication practices in general. To this end, the researcher plans to continue the effort to compare and contrast among different



speech communities, for instance, Chinese and Russians, in terms of their practices of misunderstanding.

## META-MISUNDERSTANDING

An interesting phenomenon accidentally surfaced while pursuing the present study, which may help enrich our comprehension of everyday interaction. Interactants, from time to time, misinterpret the occurrence of misunderstanding. More specifically, interactant A thinks that interactant B misunderstands him or her, but in actuality, B correctly understands him or her, and, on the contrary, it is A who misunderstands B. This situation shall be termed *meta-misunderstanding* because it is misunderstanding of misunderstanding. At least six accounts of meta-misunderstanding are discovered in the present data. Consider the following two examples which illustrate the occurrence of meta-misunderstandings. In Data Segment 23, Kyle thinks that his joke attempt in lines 5-6 is misunderstood by Lynn .

### Data Segment 23. English conversation

- 1 Lynn: and I didn't even have time for breakfast didn't have time to brush my
- 2 teeth and I was like I told Lisa this morning I said I'm glad I brushed
- 3 my teeth last night before I went to bed so I just stuck a piece of gum
- 4 in my \$mouth\$
- 5 Kyle: oh yeah cause I think a good toothbrushing before I go to bed is good for all
- 6 the next day then often times the morning following it
- 7 Lynn: no I don't think so
- 8 Kyle: you don't do?
- 9 (pause)
- 10 Lynn: is that your personal hygiene practice?

- 11 Kyle: well that's for like emergency situation it's like ( ) like  
 12 Lynn: emergency situation?  
 13 Kyle: like you are (.) like you're doing your hobby (.) which happens to be  
 14 photo journalism there is a danger in the Middle East you know

To Kyle, Lynn's responses to his joke, "No, I don't think so" (line 7) and "Is that your personal hygiene practice?" (line 10), indicate her problematic understanding. From these responses, Kyle perceives that Lynn takes his utterance seriously and misunderstands his playful intention. However, in actuality, Lynn does eventually understand Kyle's intention and replies with a sarcastic remark, playfully probing Kyle's "personal hygiene practice." Kyle misunderstands Lynn's comprehension and intention, but he does not realize that he misunderstands her. Instead, Kyle thinks that he is the one who is misunderstood.

In the next segment, a daughter incorrectly thinks that she is misunderstood by her father. The father's firm provides a service of printing business cards, and the daughter utilizes this service. The father breaks the good news that the requested business cards will be ready by Friday noon before the daughter leaves for a conference for which she needs the cards.

#### Data Segment 24. Japanese conversation

- 1 Father: kinyoubino hirimadeniwa agetekurette kinyoubini ikunyattara  
 (I asked them to get the job done at latest by Friday noon )  
 2 omae hirimadede nakattara komaruyan  
 (you need them [business cards] by the noon, don't you?)  
 (since you are going to leave this Friday)  
 3 Daughter: souya sorede ee choudo ee kinyoubino ( ) hirugorokara  
 (that's right that's perfect since I am going to leave around )

4               deyouto omoushi  
                (noon)

5 Father:      ho ya kaishani yotte  
                (then you come to the firm)

6 Daughter:   (o     ) otousan honattara kaisha ikkai chuudanshite kaette konto  
                (father, then do you take a break from work and come home?)

7               akanwake? =

8 Father:      =JIBUNGA YORUNYAWANA KAISHANI nanchuu kotoo  
                (YOU COME TO THE FIRM what the heck are you talking)

9 Daughter:                               douyatte yorenno  
   (how can I visit)

10              (pause)

When the daughter utters, in lines 6-7, "Father, do you take a break from work and come home?" she only intends to check on the father's plan: whether he plans to come home to hand the daughter the business cards before she leaves for the conference. The father's subsequent reply in line 8, however, strikes the daughter as a sign of his problematic understanding; the father mistakes her utterance as requesting that he come home to give her the business cards. The daughter feels that this misinterpretation induces his loud voice ("YOU COME TO THE FIRM.") and criticism ("What the heck are you talking?"). However, in actuality, the father does understand that his daughter's utterance only refers to his plan, but he considers it outrageous for his daughter to even think about the idea of his taking a break from his work and coming home (just to give her the business cards). This is because the father takes pride in his work. Thus, the daughter's conception of the idea itself annoys him, not to mention the requested execution of the idea. In sum, the daughter misunderstands the father's state of understanding; she thinks that

she is misunderstood by her father, while, in fact, she is not. Ultimately, she is the one who misunderstands the father.

The following segment represents a rather unique situation of meta-misunderstanding. Unlike the above two segments, in Data Segment 25, one party (Ben) purposefully projects a situation of meta-misunderstanding so that the other party (Cindy) incorrectly thinks that she is misunderstood by him. Cindy tells Ben that it is time for them to oil the furniture. This suggestion triggers Ben 's joke, but Cindy misunderstands his joke (she takes it seriously). In an attempt to bury Cindy's misunderstanding (and the fact that Ben tried a joke), Ben recreates the event as if he misunderstood Cindy . The projected meta-misunderstanding is with regard to the word, "furniture."

Data Segment 25. English conversation

- 1 Cindy: I need to get some um (.) oil to oil the furniture
- 2 Ben: ok
- 3 Cindy: it's you know it's haven't been oiled since we moved from Vegas
- 4 needs to be
- 5 Ben: why are you having to oil the furniture
- 6 Cindy: it's WOOD honey (you) if you don't want
- 7 Ben: I thought you were talking about the couch or something
- 8 Cindy: no you need to oil the wood (.) it also gets dry
- 9 Ben: all right

In an interview, Ben states that he made a "snap decision to make a joke" after hearing Cindy say that she has to oil the furniture. In Ben's mind pops a humorous picture of oiling the textured couch on which they are sitting. This picture triggers Ben to *intend* to say,

"Why are you having to oil the couch?" in line 4. Instead, however, Ben misutters, "Why are you having to oil the furniture?" and this sets his ill-fated joke. As a result, Cindy takes his question literally and replies accordingly, "It's WOOD, honey," in line 5. With the realization that his silly intention was misunderstood, however, Ben chooses to bury this misunderstanding because he also wants to bury the fact he tried an unsuccessful joke. In an attempt to cover up his joke, Ben projects ("fakes") his misunderstanding of her and says, "I thought you were talking about the couch or something" in line 6. Now his past utterance, "Why are you having to oil the furniture?" is recast as a result of Ben's misunderstanding, not a result of his failed joke. To Ben, the situation of his misunderstanding is preferable to the failed joke. In short, due to Ben's manipulation, Cindy incorrectly thinks that she is misunderstood by Ben, while, in fact, she is the one who misunderstands Ben.

As we have seen, social interactants both intentionally and unintentionally give the other a false impression regarding the situation of misunderstanding. As a result, one may think that he or she is misunderstood, but, in actuality, he or she misunderstands the conversational partner. The above three cases convince us that perception and reality of misunderstanding are not necessarily in congruence and that interactants may perceive the other's state of understanding differently from reality.

This opens the whole new discussion of how the researcher should distinguish perceived misunderstanding from actual misunderstanding, and more importantly, whether it is meaningful

for the researcher to make such a distinction in the first place. Does reality exist apart from the interactant's experience? In other words, do "pure facts" exist to interactants? Human interactants do not respond to raw stimuli, but rather they respond to how they make sense of the raw stimuli. We, human interactants, appear to construe social reality by subconsciously transforming perception into reality. That is, what we perceive as "real" becomes a piece of reality to us. For instance, if we perceive a fellow interactant's thoughtless remark as a "threat," we act accordingly and thus make the threat real. Likewise, if we perceive a misunderstanding in conversation, the misunderstanding becomes a piece of reality to us, even though that is not the case with the other party or any observing third party. We believe that the misunderstanding occurred and form responses accordingly (e.g., we feel frustrated or compelled to make a correction). Therefore, perceived misunderstanding and actual misunderstanding may, after all, be inseparable. The distinction between the two concepts, if it is necessary and meaningful, should be addressed with a great deal of caution in subsequent research on misunderstanding.

Furthermore, meta-misunderstanding (misunderstanding of the other's misunderstanding) may closely relate to the interactant's personal predisposition. If social interactants have the assumption that they are easily misunderstood or that they easily misunderstand the other, then they might readily impose this assumption on the actual interaction. This process is explained in terms of *self-fulfilling prophecy*. Self-fulfilling prophecy refers to the idea that our anticipation for the future, such as the hope of

succeeding in a speech and the fear of failing in an upcoming math exam, tend to become real (partly because we impose such anticipation on the interpretation of reality), and the realization of the anticipated events further reinforces our expectation for subsequent events. Thus, self-fulfilling prophecy represents a cyclic process that captures us inside, whether it is good or bad to us.

Likewise, an interactant may have the fear of being easily misunderstood and be captured in the cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy. Interestingly, for example, a female subject in the present data reports that she was misunderstood by her conversational partner because, in her words, "[She] didn't explain [her]self fully" and "[She] took it that [she] was misunderstood," not because she received a particular sign of misunderstanding or a confession of misunderstanding from the other party. Indeed, an interview with her conversational partner reveals that no misunderstanding took place in the conversation in which she reported that she felt misunderstood; the partner was simply being "spacey" at the time. Further, in response to general questions, the female subject writes; "When I experience a misunderstanding, I tend to feel I was the cause. Maybe I did not express myself properly, or I did not have the person's full attention." Thus, the female subject may have pseudo experiences of misunderstanding simply because she assumes that she is easily misunderstood due to her imperfection as a speaker.

Another subject (male) in the study also misconstrues the reality of misunderstanding potentially due to his presumption

toward misunderstanding, although, in his case, the misconstruction is limited to the joking situation. The male subject reports that he is easily misunderstood because "the tone of [his] voice remains the same whether [he is] joking or serious. [and] This often leads to confusion." The male subject may readily assume that his jokes are susceptible to misunderstanding due to his vocal mannerism, even when the jokes are actually successful. Indeed, an interview with his conversational partner reveals that she appreciated his particular joke which he thought failed. Both the male and female subjects assume that their conversational partner misunderstands them due to their bias toward the occurrence of misunderstanding, when, in fact, the partner does understand them. The anticipation of misunderstanding easily invites the interactant's perception of its occurrence.

At this stage of research, it is difficult to determine specifically how one's personal predisposition relates to his and her experience of conversational misunderstanding. Does the assumption that one is easily misunderstood or easily misunderstands relate to *communication competence*? Does communication competence in general play a key role in one's perception of misunderstanding? If the interactant has high communication competence, then does this person perceive fewer incidents of conversational misunderstanding than those who have low communication competence? Would communication competence relate to one's attribution of misunderstanding? In other words, if one has high communication competence, does one tend to attribute the cause of misunderstanding to the other, rather than to oneself?



Further, how does one's self-esteem relate to the ways in which he or she handles conversational misunderstanding, if there is any correlation? If one has high self-esteem, is he or she more willing to expose and clarify misunderstanding? These questions are interesting as they illuminate the uncertain domain of how people's predispositions affect their experiences of conversational misunderstanding.

The above questions may be best pursued through a quantitative research method, rather than a qualitative one, in subsequent research because they basically address the quantifiable relationship among concepts. For instance, such a quantitative study may pose these research hypotheses: "The interactant's level of communication competence negatively correlates with the frequency of his or her misunderstanding encounters in daily conversation" and "The interactant with high communication competence tends to attribute the cause of misunderstanding to the other, and the one with low communication competence tends to attribute the cause to oneself." The measurement of variables for these hypotheses, however, calls for meticulous consideration and preparation because both concepts of "communication competence" and "misunderstanding" are slippery terms. Critical issues remain concerning the distinction between perceived communication competence and actual competence and the distinction between perceived misunderstanding and actual misunderstanding.

## CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE STUDY

The present study ultimately aims to describe the reality of misunderstanding as lived by everyday interactants. This is long overdue because communication researchers traditionally have neglected the effort to comprehend the nature and mechanisms of misunderstanding; they have simply treated misunderstanding as an undesirable side aspect of communication. The present study places everyday misunderstanding at the center of investigation and approaches it from two primary angles: how interactants recognize misunderstandings in conversation and what subsequent measurements interactants take to deal with conversational misunderstandings. Further, the study offers an initial effort to explore the relationship between culture and the practice of misunderstanding by examining similarities and differences between Japanese and American data.

To pursue the above purposes, the present study specifies its domain as conversational misunderstanding in the intra-cultural context and predominantly examines the interactants' language behaviors that host the occurrence of misunderstanding. The reader must be reminded, however, that the occurrence of misunderstanding in human interaction is not limited to the above domain and extends to para-language behaviors (eye contact, touching, vocal cues, gestures, etc.) and to non-conversational interaction (interpretation of bible, a diary, broadcast news, etc.). Thus, the present study is only a first step toward comprehending the occurrence of misunderstanding in human interaction in general.

As a result of the inquiry, the present study uncovers the detailed fingerprint of everyday misunderstanding which would otherwise remain buried in the conventional approaches. The ways in which interactants recognize and handle conversational misunderstandings largely cross the cultural boundary between Japanese and American data, while some cultural differences are also identified. Social interactants across the two cultures "wake up" to the reality of misunderstanding from the presumed intersubjectivity, and the moment of awakening is solicited by various types of signals ("wake-up calls"): problematic understanding, confession, allegation, expressed strangeness, and unexpectedness.

When interactants do wake up to the reality of misunderstanding through these signals, they mainly resort to one of the two basic approaches: expose or waive ("let it pass"). The choice between the two approaches reflects the interplay among several psychological, emotional, and pragmatic factors which co-exist in the situation. These factors are best understood as costs and rewards in exposing misunderstanding. The cost factors discourage interactants from exposing misunderstanding and thus contribute to the "let it pass" decision. They include psychological distance, face-saving, situational difficulty, other's attitude, and complexity of misunderstanding. On the other hand, the reward factors encourage interactants to expose misunderstanding and include importance of the content, relevance to a given purpose, existence of tension, and comprehension of the other's point.

Further, these detailed findings of the present study allow certain conceptualizations of everyday misunderstanding across the two cultures which radically differ from the conventional conceptualization. Misunderstanding is no longer conceptualized as a lack of, or obstacle to, understanding, but rather as a specific type of understanding. Misunderstanding is no longer conceptualized as a function of cultural, social, and language differences themselves, but as a reflection of interactants' blind presumptions toward mutual understanding. Misunderstanding and understanding are no longer comprehended as two discrete elements of a dichotomy, but as interwoven, co-constituted partners. They no longer represent the either-or perspective but varying degrees of discrepancy between two meanings, whose significance is measured only against the interactant's psychology. These conceptualizations dawn because the present study chooses not to impose any conventional presuppositions, but to describe events of misunderstanding in their own terms. As such, the current re-conceptualization may help refine and advance our knowledge of everyday misunderstanding in a meaningful manner.

Because this study presents an effort to advance our knowledge and understanding of human behavior, it needs to be scrutinized for its validity, generalizability, and heuristic values. In an effort at self-scrutiny, the present study discusses its major limitations and potential contributions to the study of human communication below.

## Limitations and Potential Contributions of the Present Study

As most qualitative researchers face the problem of a small sample size, this researcher also faces the dilemma between considering a detailed analysis of conversational misunderstanding and a larger corpus of data for the sake of generalizability. In-depth, detailed analysis reinforces rich comprehension and description of misunderstanding as lived by conversational participants while a larger body of data reinforces the likelihood that the findings extend to the general population beyond the immediate data at hand. The present study has a major limitation in the generalizability of its findings because 1) it employs a relatively small number of misunderstanding cases and 2) it employs a convenient sampling process.

First of all, the present study employs a relatively small number of cases of misunderstanding. The researcher collected from 12 subjects a total of 107 cases of misunderstanding through 22 hours of mundane conversation across Japanese and American data. This volume of data poses limitations on the validity and generalizability of the current findings. For example, as explained in the chapter on interactants' handling, subjects' handlings are analyzed in terms of two categories: cases in which the subject first recognizes the occurrence of misunderstanding (the subject is the *First Recognizer*) and cases in which the subject is notified of the occurrence of misunderstanding by the other party (the subject is the *Second Recognizer*). The former category amounts to 71 cases, and the latter amounts to 34. Further, the former category

(cases reported by first recognizers) is sub-classified into two situations: cases in which the subject misunderstands the conversational partner (15) and cases in which the subject is misunderstood by the conversational partner (56). Of 15 cases reported by the first recognizing misunderstanding party, eleven belong to Japanese data, and four belong to American data. The researcher speculates that the small size of the American data (four cases), rather than the cultural influence, explains the fact that no case of the "expose" method is reported by the first recognizing misunderstanding American party (e.g., the misunderstanding party says, "Oh, I misunderstood you") in the present study. The reason for the speculation is, as mentioned in the chapter on interactants' handling, that American conversationalists do witness the "expose" method used by each other during the course of their interaction. The data size (four cases) is not large enough to capture this practice. This speculation, however, needs to be verified with the actual finding that misunderstanding Americans do employ the "expose" method of handling. In that manner, the argument will be more convincing. Such a convincing result is possible if the researcher collects a larger amount of conversational data in a future investigative effort.

The ultimate question, however, remains: "How much data is desirable and necessary in order to achieve a level of generalizability without sacrificing the quality and depth of analysis?" This is a complex question which finds no easy answer and may face any researchers across qualitative and quantitative approaches. Is achieving both the quality and the quantity of

findings impractical as they address two different aims of science, namely thick description and generalization? Should a researcher restrict himself or herself to either one of the two objectives in order to achieve one of them? Should one make efforts to achieve both objectives in one study so that he or she can defend the findings in an all-round manner? As a realistic solution, if achieving both description and generalization is difficult in one study, researchers across different disciplines may collaborate with each other for a more refined understanding of human communication.

The second factor limiting the generalizability of the current findings lies in a potential bias that might have emerged in a convenient sampling process. Because the project demanded a substantial amount of work from each subject (average of 10 hours of work per individual), the selection of subjects depended on their availability in terms of both whether they were willing, and whether they had the time to complete the project. This inevitably limited the selection process to the researcher's network of friends and acquaintances. Due to the limited sampling process in addition to the small data size, one cannot fully exclude the possibility that the personal profiles of the selected subjects may be atypical of the general populations of Japanese and American interactants. (e.g., a Japanese subject may be extremely outspoken and confrontational, or an American subject may "beat around the bush.") This may hinder the generalizability of the cultural findings. The fewer the total number of subjects, the greater the risk that the distribution of the subjects' personalities and behavioral patterns do not match those

of the general populations. The reader needs to be aware that such a risk exists in the present study.

Limitations to the validity and generalizability of findings are intrinsic problems facing qualitative researchers. In this circumstance, the researcher must fully realize and understand the nature of the limitations and make an effort to compensate for the problems if the limitations need to be overcome. The current researcher supplements the existing limitations with an effort to enhance the validity of the findings in terms of richness, plausibility, credibility, and realism in argument. The persuasiveness of an argument is effective only to the extent that the reader, as a member of a certain culture and as an everyday interactant, finds these qualities in the researcher's argument. Qualitative research predominantly uses the rhetorical power of argument, while quantitative research uses the numerical power of statistics; both rhetorical power and numerical power are equally valid forms of scientific proof.

While the present study contains the above limitations, nonetheless, it makes several important contributions to the field of human communication. The contribution of the present study has two aspects which are closely interrelated: knowledge and perspective. In terms of knowledge, the present study contributes to the general understanding of human communication by adding rich and detailed comprehension of everyday misunderstanding to the existing literature. As discussed in the literature review, misunderstanding has predominantly been studied in the inter-group context (e.g., intercultural, interethnic, intergenerational, cross-



gender, and cross-social class) because it is largely viewed as an effect of cultural, social, and language differences among interactants. The present study takes up the relatively unknown realm of intra-group misunderstanding and uncovers its detailed fingerprints. As a result, the study verifies that intra-group misunderstandings do occur with remarkable frequency and that conversational misunderstandings are not really functions of cultural and language differences.

Specifically, the study illuminates how ordinary interactants recognize and handle the occurrence of misunderstanding in everyday interaction. The study finds that interactants' recognition of misunderstanding is solicited by certain forms of "counter evidence" which negates the presumed intersubjectivity and that interactants' handling choices between exposing and waiving reflects the interplay among certain cost and reward factors existing in the situation.

Further, misunderstanding has traditionally been marginalized simply as a "deficiency" of communication. This simplistic view has not encouraged any further serious attempts at definitions and conceptualizations. As a result, misunderstanding does not have a consistent and substantial definition across researchers in the field of communication. Thus, today's study of misunderstanding is best characterized as being fragmented. The present study, by placing everyday misunderstanding at the center of investigation, enables us to understand the process in which conversational misunderstanding emerges and to conceptualize misunderstanding in its own right.

Specifically, the study finds that conversational misunderstanding occurs as a result of several preconditions. First of all, language has an abbreviative nature and simplifies detailed thought process. Second, interactants locate meaning between words and interpretive contexts. Third, interactants bring quite diverse interpretive contexts to interaction, arriving at diverse meanings. Finally, interactants tend to neglect the diversity of meaning contexts brought by fellow interactants. The comprehension of these "hows" of misunderstanding further leads to renewed conceptualizations of everyday conversational misunderstanding. The present study conceptualizes everyday conversational misunderstanding as a type of understanding and as containing a gap between the intended and interpreted meanings which is significant enough to solicit the interactant's attention during the course of conversation. The present conceptualization refines the conventional one, such refinement perhaps guiding the subsequent investigation of everyday misunderstanding in a meaningful and systematic manner.

In terms of perspective, the present study further contributes to a general understanding of human behavior by critically examining the perspective underlying the conventional studies of misunderstanding and other communication practices. One, especially a researcher who engages in the advancement of human knowledge, should not underestimate the power of perspectives as tools for knowledge creation.

The perspective underlying the traditional studies is best described, in Gebser's (1985) words, as a "mental-rational

consciousness" or a "perspectival consciousness." There is the tendency, in the modern investigation of communication, to view human communication as an aggregate of multiple variables, rather than as an integral, inseparable whole. As a result, understanding and misunderstanding are largely comprehended as two discrete aspects of communication, and the former phenomenon is appreciated while the latter is devalued in research. In other words, the modern investigation of human communication normalizes the occurrence of understanding as a sign of effectiveness and marginalizes the occurrence of misunderstanding as a communication defect. Ultimately, the current mental-rational consciousness fragments the inseparable communication process into two discrete aspects.

We should further be aware of the consequences that may follow this mental-rational consciousness. Perspectives underlying research often become premises of social interaction among ordinary communicators, while, at the same time, it is also true that the research perspectives uncritically reflect the premises existing among social interactants. Perhaps, because of the established dichotomy between understanding and misunderstanding and the resulting normalization of understanding and marginalization of misunderstanding, social interactants undoubtedly think that understanding is "good" and misunderstanding is "bad." As a result, social interactants much prefer understanding to misunderstanding in their everyday interaction. This is especially true when they view a misunderstanding as hampering the achievement of their goals.

Indeed, subjects in the present study typically attach negative connotations and feelings to misunderstanding by using words such as "uncomfortable," "guilty," "incompetent," "bothersome," "frustrated," and "embarrassing." When misunderstanding occurs, everyday interactants, as well as conventional communication researchers, put it aside as a matter of "temporary inconvenience" without fully comprehending why and how it occurs. Unveiling the mechanisms of misunderstanding is of lesser concern to interactants, while doing so may have a great deal to offer to advance our comprehension of daily interaction.

Therefore, the preference structure that places understanding over misunderstanding leads to our limited comprehension of human interaction, and this limited comprehension further accelerates the existing preference structure. Thus, we remain intellectual prisoners in the ongoing circle of a limited vision and social reality. The conventional approach to misunderstanding may, in this manner, inhibit a potential advancement of our knowledge and perspective.

Indeed, a number of "myths" regarding misunderstanding has derived from the conventional approaches and hindered our authentic comprehension of what is really occurring in our communication life. We have long assumed that misunderstanding is largely a function of our differences in language, culture, gender, and communication styles and that adequate communication takes place among intragroup communicators. We have long assumed that if we use the same language and communication codes, then we misunderstand other parties less frequently compared to intercultural encounters. In actuality, however, subjects in the present study are typically

surprised to discover so many cases of misunderstanding in their everyday conversation. Everyday misunderstanding occurs with a frequency that goes far beyond our expectation. The present study witnesses that misunderstandings do occur regardless of differences in culture, gender, and communication styles, and regardless of the nature of the relationship between participants.

In fact, interactants from the same culture may misunderstand each other more frequently than intercultural communicators. What they do not know is that misunderstanding is a function of interactants' blind presumption of mutual understanding, not of their differences per se. Intracultural communicators, because of shared language and culture, may have a stronger presumption of their mutual understanding than intercultural communicators do. This may also apply to interactants in an intimate relationship; because of shared experiences, backgrounds, and knowledge of each other, intimate interactants may blindly presume that they understand each other. Indeed, they may have the strongest conviction of mutual understanding. As a result, it is likely that intimate interactants misunderstand each other more frequently than they might misunderstand strangers. In short, the conventional approach to misunderstanding is not healthy, realistic, nor helpful to our communication. By keeping the realities of misunderstanding from interactants, the conventional approach leaves everyday interactants uneducated, misguided, and confused.

We should take a closer look at the reality of our communication; misunderstanding is an inevitable, inseparable part of daily communication, and the effort to eliminate it from our

conversation may prove unproductive as such an effort ignores our basic predispositions as communicators. Our daily communication may be more enjoyable if we admit that misunderstanding is a sign of our lovable imperfection and humorous nearsightedness, if we abandon an "uptight" attitude toward "ideal" and "effective" communication, and if we assume that misunderstanding is a regular occurrence, and understanding is a miraculous achievement. If we adopt these more "realistic" perspectives, we may not get angry at each other as frequently as we do now. For instance, we may use mature judgment by acquiring the habit of first thinking of the possibility of misunderstanding before we wrongly decide that the other is rude, stupid, inconsiderate, selfish, egomaniacal, and outrageous. One occurrence of misunderstanding makes us prone to these premature judgments, and the frequency of misunderstanding far exceeds our expectation. This implies that we may jump to conclusions on a regular basis.

We, as humans, possess the ability to critique the grounding of currently existing knowledge and to emancipate ourselves from the ongoing cycle of limited vision and social reality. No knowledge entails unchallengeable truth because, as Wittgenstein (1968) claims, truthness of knowledge is relative to perspectives predominating in each era (concept of *weltanschauung*). That is, one piece of knowledge which is widely accepted as truth in one era may be denied as myth in another era. By analogy, we may have negative views and feelings of misunderstanding (e.g., we think that misunderstanding impairs effective communication and feel incompetent, guilty, embarrassed, and frustrated when

misunderstanding occurs) not because they are innate to misunderstandings, but because the current paradigm attaches these thoughts and feelings to incidences of misunderstanding, and we are synchronized into this paradigm.

#### CONCLUDING REMARK

In the sense that we easily assume the nature of misunderstanding as a "deficiency," we "misunderstand" misunderstanding. Taken-for granted assumptions need to be questioned as they may occasionally entail unchallenged myth and ignorance. The advancement of human knowledge, therefore, resides in questioning the taken-for-granted and in finding a piece of truth more meaningful to us in the process of questioning.

The piece of truth that the present study discovers is that, while misunderstanding is promoted by the diversity in our meaning-search, such diversity points back to our striking similarity. We are all similar in that we are "rigorous detectives" who actively seek meaning, relying on arbitrary contexts at hand. This basic similarity transcends culture, language, gender, age, and personality. Whether you are American or Japanese, male or female, ten years old or sixty years old, extrovert or introvert, you bring unique and personal interpretive contexts to seek meaning in the interaction and embrace the meaning. Ultimately, to live may simply mean to locate our experiences within our unique horizons of meaning at each moment. While each individual takes his own or her own path of

this journey, social interaction doubles, complicates, and makes the journey exciting.



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## APPENDIX A

### JEFFERSON NOTATION SYSTEM

The transcribing system used in the current study is called the Jefferson notation system (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984, p. ix-xvi). The system allows a researcher to represent not only spoken words, but also nonverbal characteristics of speech delivery, in detail. The symbols and their meanings are shown below.

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
1. [       ]	Indicate beginnings and endings of overlapping utterances.
2.    end of line= =start of line	Indicate that later utterance is latched onto the prior utterance without interval
3.    (2.5)	Silence measured to the tenth of a second
4.    (.)	Brief pauses of less than 0.2 second
5.    we::ll	Prolonged sound. The more colons, the longer the stretched sound.
6.    INCREDIBLE	Words spoken loudly
7.    really	Words spoken softly
8.    th- there	Abrupt cut off of speech
9.    ....	Talk omitted from the data segment
10.   ten?	Rising intonation
11.   (           )	Transcriber cannot catch the utterance

- |     |                   |                          |
|-----|-------------------|--------------------------|
| 12. | (( clapping ))    | Transcriber's comments   |
| 13. | I did <u>a</u> ll | Vocal stress or emphasis |
| 14. | hhhhhhh           | Laughter                 |
|     | hahaha            |                          |
|     | heheh             |                          |
| 15. | \$I know\$        | Smiling Voice            |

## APPENDIX B

### ANALYSIS OF JAPANESE CONVERSATIONAL SEGMENTS

#### HOW PEOPLE RECOGNIZE MISUNDERSTANDINGG

Chapter V discusses that the misunderstood party and the misunderstanding party recognize the occurrence of a misunderstanding through different forms of wake-up calls. The misunderstood party is signaled to the presence of a misunderstanding by one of the two major forms: A) problematic understanding displayed in the other's remark and B) expressed recognition ("confession") in the other's remark. On the other hand, the misunderstanding party is signaled to the presence of a misunderstanding by one of the three major forms: C) expressed recognition ("allegation") in the other's remark, D) expressed strangeness in the other's remark, and E) unexpectedness in the other's remark.

These patterns of recognition are observed equally across American and Japanese data. Because Japanese data segments are not presented in Ch. V due to potential language and cultural complication, this appendix concerns the presentation and micro analysis of Japanese data. The following Japanese segments illustrate Forms A, B, C, D, and E wake-up calls experienced by Japanese interactants. Like analysis of American conversation, the present analysis of Japanese conversation is grounded in interviews of participants in conjunction with recorded conversational segments.



### A. Problematic Understanding

For the first form of wake-up call for the misunderstood party, the misunderstood party realizes the occurrence of a misunderstanding when he or she perceives a problematic understanding displayed in the other's response. The following conversation between two Japanese, Chie and Kuma, exemplifies this first form of recognition for the misunderstood party. Chie and Kuma are at home watching the movie titled *Doctor Who*. The movie begins with a narration by a male voice. Chie is the misunderstood party.

#### Data Segment 3. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Chie: kono koe dare?  
(whose voice is this)
- >2 Kuma: dokuta fu  
(doctor who's)  
((Thereafter, there is no more exchange of words; the conversationalists go back to watch the movie.))

Through interviewing, it is clear that Chie's question is intended as: "Which actor is speaking now?" and thus expects to hear the name of an actor as a response. Chie recognizes that Kuma misunderstands her when Kuma's response betrays her expectation; Kuma replies with the name of a character in the movie, not with the name of an actor as Chie had hoped. This analysis is grounded in Chie's report: "Kuma's response surprised me. I anticipated an answer like 'This voice belongs to narrator Mr. such and such.' But his response was

'Doctor Who's'." Kuma must have heard Chie's question as "Which character is speaking now?"

The following segment similarly illustrates the first form of recognition for the misunderstood party. In Data Segment 4, Aki and Jun are discussing their mutual acquaintance, Kenya. Aki mentions that Kenya was only wearing his "pants" at the latest Japanese party. Aki is misunderstood by Jun and recognizes the misunderstanding through a problematic understanding displayed at the arrowed turns.

Data Segment 4. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Aki: demone anone konomae paatiiga atte jeiesueino soreni ittarane mo::  
(you know there was a party for the Japanese association and I went there)
- 2 Jun: un un funfunfunfun  
(mn mn) (uh huh uh huh)
- 3 Aki: pantsu icchoude hehehehe nondete mou kaomo karadamo makkani nattete  
(I saw him only wearing his pants hehehehe and drinking with his face and body red)
- 4 Jun: ahahahahaha ha ha ha ha ahahahahaha
- 5 Aki: hehehe \$kekkou ( )  
(hehehe quite ( ))
- >6 Jun: hahaha \$Kenya\$ Kenyakun omoshiroideshou nani (.) nani  
(Kenya he is interesting, isn't he? well well)
- >7 Jun: \$pantsu icchouni nattetano\$  
(he was only wearing his pants, huh?)

The misunderstanding is in regard to the word "pants" that Aki utters in line 3. According to an interview, Aki intends by this word

to convey that Kenya was wearing only summer short pants while drinking at the party. In Aki's view, not wearing top clothes, such as T-shirts, is interesting enough to report because most Japanese do wear both top and bottom clothing in most occasions. However, Aki perceives an "over-excitement" in Jun's subsequent response in lines 6-7: "Well, well. He was only wearing his pants, huh?" To Aki, this response contains a rather different type of newsworthiness; Kenya was only wearing his briefs or trunks, which is radical and very newsworthy. Aki reports, "The response implied a state of shock and, at the same time, enthusiasm." In the sense that the level of excitement in Jun's response goes beyond Aki's anticipation, his response displays a problematic understanding. It needs to be added that this misunderstanding could easily occur because, in the Japanese language, "pants" may mean two different categories of clothing: trousers and underwear.

## B. Confession

For the second form of recognition for the misunderstood party, the other party "confesses" that he or she has misunderstood something and thus informs the misunderstood party of the presence of a misunderstanding. The following Japanese data segment illustrates the misunderstood party's recognition through this second form. In Data Segment 5, Kuma and Chie discuss the difference between two ways of purchasing spinach: washed and cut spinach in a plastic bag, and unwashed and uncut (wild) spinach without a bag. Kuma emphasizes the advantages of the latter way

over the former and is misunderstood by Chie. Kuma recognizes the misunderstanding through Chie's "confession" at the arrowed turn.

Data Segment 5. Japanese conversation

- 1 Kuma: sore nisa kocchi mou hitotsuno riteru kore yatosu nemoto nemoto kueru  
(this way has an additional merit. this way we can eat the root part)
- 2 Chie: un un  
(mm) (mm)
- 3 fukuronai haitteruyatsutte ano nemoto hai- haitteruyo  
(ones in bags have the root part)
- 4 Kuma: haittenai  
(they don't)
- 5 hai- haittenaiyo a demo hotondosaa(.)  
(they don't) (oh but they hardly)
- 6 Chie: haitteruyo:: nemoto no houmade  
(they do have the root part)
- 7 Kuma: ano pinku janai jan  
(have the pink part)
- 8 Chie: un  
(mm hm)
- 9 Kuma: pinku natoko nai jan  
(there aren't any pink part)
- >10 Chie: a: pinku no totokoro koto itten no  
(oh you are talking about the pink part)

A misunderstanding occurs when Kuma utters "This way we can eat the root part" in line 1. Interviews make it clear that, to Chie, "the root part" refers to stems (as opposed to leaves) while to Kuma, it refers to real deep roots which include the pink-colored part.

Because of this referential difference, the two parties argue for a while (lines 3 through 9) over whether or not spinach in plastic bags has "the root part." When Chie utters, "Oh you are talking about the

pink part" in line 10, it is then that Kuma first recognizes this misunderstanding. Kuma reports that his particular utterance triggered him to notice the misunderstanding. Chie indirectly "confesses" to Kuma that she has misunderstood the referent of "the root part."

In sum, the misunderstood Japanese party, like the American counterpart, recognizes the occurrence of a misunderstanding through A) problematic understanding displayed in the other's response or B) confession of misunderstanding from the other party. The misunderstanding party, on the other hand, recognizes misunderstanding in different manners from the misunderstood party. The misunderstanding party in Japanese conversation, as well as in American conversation, recognizes a misunderstanding through C) an "allegation" of the other party, D) strangeness expressed by the other party, or E) unexpectedness in the other's remark. The subsequent section discusses these three forms of recognition for the misunderstanding party.

### C. Allegation

For the first form of wake-up signal for the misunderstanding party, the other party "alleges" that a certain misunderstanding has taken place and thus informs the misunderstanding party of the occurrence of a misunderstanding. While this "allegation" can be made in different styles, the most explicit style consists of two verbal components, like in American conversation: the rejection token "No" and a following clarification attempt. In colloquial

Japanese, the rejection token "No" is expressed as "Chigau." "Chigau" literally means "different" and functions the same as the English "No"; it denies the other's state of understanding.

The following data segment illustrates the "allegation" form of wake-up call which contains both the rejection token "Chigau (No)" and a following clarification effort. In Data Segment 10, a daughter misunderstands her mother's remark in line 1 as regarding the current time while, in fact, the mother means the time that her son needs to wake up on the following morning. An interview makes it clear that the daughter receives an "allegation" from her mother in line 3, and thus recognizes her own misunderstanding. The daughter reports, "I knew I misunderstood her (Mother) because she immediately said, 'No, I mean the time your brother needs to wake up tomorrow.'"

Data Segment 10. Japanese Conversation

- |     |           |   |
|-----|-----------|---|
| 1   | Mother:   | hachiji gojuppun<br>(it's eight fifty)  |
| 2   | Daughter: | chaude hachiji jugofunyade<br>(no it's eight fifteen now)                                 |
| ->3 | Mother:   | chaude aiga ashita okiru jikan<br>(no I mean the time your brother must wake up tomorrow) |

Although, as we have seen above, the rejection token "No" and a following clarification together comprise the most explicit style of "allegation," either one of the two components may also serve the function of "allegation" wake-up call for the misunderstanding party. For instance, the misunderstanding party is signaled to a misunderstanding, given only the other party's rejection token "No."

The following Data Segment 12 illustrates such a case. Chie is the misunderstanding party and experiences this simple version of the "allegation" call at the arrowed turn. Chie misunderstands that Kuma is looking for a community phone book while in fact Kuma wants to find an address book so that he can call some of his friends.

Data Segment 12. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Kuma:     ano:chotto denwa denwachowa  
              (hey where is the phone book)
- 2             (1.0)
- 3 Chie:     denwacho arudesho itsumono tokoroni  
              (the phone book is in the regular place, isn't it)
- 4 Kuma:     naiyo  
              (no)
- .
- .    ((long side talk omitted))
- .
- 5 Chie:     kokoyan ((pointing to a community phone book))  
              (here it is)
- 6 Kuma:     doko  
              (where)
- 7 Chie:     koko ((again pointing to the same object))  
              (here)
- >8 Kuma:   chigau chigau chigau chigau  
              (no no no no)
- 9 Chie:     chiyano chicchaiyatsu  
              (you mean my little one)

According to an interview, when Kuma utters in line 8, "Chigau Chigau Chigau Chigau (No No No No), shown a community phone book," it is then that Chie recognizes her own misunderstanding. Chie's

report clearly indicates this particular utterance as triggering her recognition. The rejection tokens (four "Chigau"s) prompt Chie to take a second look at her state of understanding. A clarification effort, however, does not immediately follow the rejection tokens. This leaves the misunderstanding party in the position of searching for the intended meaning. In this case, Chie immediately furnishes the rejection tokens with the clarification "you mean my little one" in line 9. In short, Chie recognizes her own misunderstanding simply given the rejection tokens from the other party.

#### D. Expressed Strangeness

For the second form of wake-up call for the misunderstanding party, the other party conveys a sense of "weirdness" to the misunderstanding party, and this propels the misunderstanding party to realize the occurrence of a misunderstanding. The following segment illustrates this second form of recognition. In Data Segment 14, Chie is the misunderstanding party; Chie misunderstands the meaning of "another problem" pointed out by Kuma. While Kuma refers to the problem of getting up early in the morning, Chie assumes that he is talking about the problem of an uncashed check. The analytical focus is on how the misunderstanding party (Chie) realizes her misunderstanding through a sense of "strangeness" conveyed by the other party.

#### Data Segment 14. Japanese data

- 1 Kuma: anta mouhitotsu mondai aruyo  
(you have another problem)



- 2 Chie: sounandayo hyakuhachijuudoruno chekkuno kotoyaro  
(I know it's about the 180 dollar check)
- >3 Kuma: fun?  
(huh?)
- 4 Chie: chigauno?  
(that is not what you mean?)
- 5 Kuma: fun  
(mm hm)

In response to Chie's remark in line 2, "I know it's about the 180 dollar check," Kuma utters, "Huh?" in line 3, marking his unfamiliarity with the check problem. It is clear through an interview that the expressed unfamiliarity signals Chie to a possible loss of alignment; Chie reports that she sensed her misunderstanding "because [Kuma] replied, 'Huh?'" Chie then seeks to validate this possible misalignment by asking, "That's not what you mean?" in line 4. Kuma's next utterance confirms the misalignment, finalizing Chie's recognition of her misunderstanding.

#### E. Unexpectedness

For the third form of wake-up call for the misunderstanding party, the misunderstanding party perceives unexpectedness in the other party's subsequent responses, and this unexpectedness triggers the misunderstanding party to notice the presence of a misunderstanding. The following Data Segment 16 illustrates this third form of a wake-up call for the misunderstanding party. Aki and Jun are discussing how to cope with stress in everyday life. Aki asks what method Jun uses to reduce stress, and misunderstands his

answer. Jun's further explanation at the arrowed turn contains the form E wake-up call for Aki, the misunderstanding party.

Japanese data 16. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Aki: Junsanwa dousuru? (.) shokuni hashiru?  
(what about you, Jun? Do you resort to eating?)
- 2 Jun: ore:ne (.) ryouri tsukuttari surunoga iiyo  
(me cooking works for me)
- 3 Aki: fu::n=  
(wow)
- 4 Jun: =nankasa dakara kekkyoku ochikondarine nanka suruto chotto kibun  
(in case you get depressed, you need to change the mood, right?)
- 5 Jun: kaenaito nannaijan?
- 6 Aki: un un  
(yes yes)
- 7 Jun: hoide (.) nanka dakara kui- naniwo kuu: (.) tsukurunowo kandaerunoga  
(so I'd like thinking of cooking)
- 8 Jun: sukinano kore tsukurou toka are tsukurou toka mousa  
(I think of cooking this dish and that dish)
- 9 Aki: soshite kaimono itte  
(then you go grocery shopping)
- >10 Jun: sou sou so sorede atamano nakade kandaerunoga sukinanyo  
(right and I like thinking in my head)

When Jun utters in line 2, "Cooking works for me" in response to Aki's question, Aki readily relates herself to the utterance since cooking also happens to be her favorite strategy for stress relief. In Aki's mind emerges a vivid picture of the whole process of cooking: from thinking of what to cook, obtaining materials in a grocery shop, processing the materials, eating the dish, to washing dishes. Completing the whole process represents a nice, stress-reducing

strategy for Aki. On the other hand, Jun is especially fond of the phase in which he thinks of what dishes to cook. Thus, by "Cooking works for me," Jun specifically focuses on the thinking phase. This particular focus, however, escapes Aki's understanding; Aki simply assumes that Jun likes the whole process of cooking, like herself.

Further, due to Aki's blind conviction that she understands Jun, Aki fails to pay close attention to his subsequent explanations in lines 7-8: "I'd like thinking of cooking" and "I think of cooking this dish and that dish." Thus, Aki keeps missing opportunities to realize her misunderstanding. Finally, however, when Jun emphasizes an act of thinking by saying, "I like thinking in my head" in line 10, it makes enough impact to hit Aki as being different from her current understanding. In other words, Jun's utterance in line 10 "surprises" her. This unexpectedness triggers Aki to realize that she has all along misunderstood Jun. Aki now understands what Jun has originally been meaning by the utterance "Cooking works for me." The "surprise" turns out to be a product of Aki's initial misunderstanding.

In sum, the misunderstanding Japanese party, like the American counterpart, awakens to the reality of misunderstanding (the fact that he or she has misunderstood something) through one of the three forms of wake-up calls: C) an "allegation" from the other party, D) a feeling of strangeness expressed by the other party, and E) unexpectedness in the other's remark.

### Significance of Wake-Up Call to Participant

Chapter V further explains that the above different forms of wake-up calls (Forms A and B for the misunderstood party and Forms C, D, and E for the misunderstanding party) work for the interactant if he or she attends to them, and thus letting them work. It is frequently the case that the misunderstanding party recognizes a misunderstanding while the misunderstood party does not, or vice versa, even if the manifestation of the misunderstanding is available to both the misunderstanding and misunderstood parties. This suggests that the recognition of a misunderstanding is arbitrary, and the significance of a gap in understanding manifested through wake-up calls may vary from person to person. In other words, a certain gap in understanding which is significant to an individual may not be significant at all to another individual. To the former, the gap impresses itself as an event of misunderstanding, while to the latter, the same gap recedes as a peripheral event.

To comprehend this, the following examples are helpful. In Data Segment 19, Chie is looking over a TV guide to search for some interesting TV programs during an upcoming weekend.

Data Segment 19. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Chie:     ma toiukotode sorega kyouno doyoubino konshuuno doyoubino hairaitodesu  
             (ok that's this Saturday's highlight)
- 2 Kuma:    souka  
             (I see)
- 3 Chie:     soshite nichiyoubiwa  
             (and then on Sunday)
- 4 Kuma:    naiyo  
             (nope)
- 5 Chie:     arundayo  
             (yes there is)

- 6 Kuma: a (.) puuyanga ittanowa (.) korega naito iukoto  
 (oh I mean there is no Sunday column in the TV guide)
- 7 Chie: a: souka souka  
 (oh I see I see)

This instance of misunderstanding is only reported by the misunderstanding party (Chie). Through interviewing, it is clear that Kuma's remark "Nope" means "There is no column for Sunday programs in the TV guide," but is interpreted by Chie as "There is no interesting program on Sunday." This discrepancy in meaning is vividly registered as "misunderstanding" in Chie's experience. The vividness of the experience is explained by the fact that Chie knew and anticipated a notable program (an interview of a infamous crime suspect) on Sunday. People tend to perceive and retain things for which they care. On the other hand, weekend TV programs seemed a peripheral, if not meaningless, matter to Kuma. Thus, whether or not a discrepancy in meaning occurred also seemed a trivial event. This explains why this interaction does not impress itself as a "misunderstanding" in Kuma's experience. To Kuma, this misunderstanding is "there but not there"; its significance does not matter to Kuma.

It is interesting to point out that Kuma resists Chie's interpretation by rephrasing his intended meaning, "I mean there is no Sunday column in the TV guide." Kuma clearly gives Chie a sign of misunderstanding, signaling that she has misinterpreted what he means, but without allowing this episode to enter his experience as "misunderstanding."

In the next example, Chie again misunderstands Kuma as above. This time, however, the misunderstanding is only reported by Kuma, the misunderstood party (in a reverse of the above case). Kuma asks if Chie can make an additional telephone call for him since Chie will be making several business calls for herself.

Data Segment 4. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Kuma: anta denwasurutoki koremo yattoitene  
(will you take care of this, too, when you make phone calls)
- 2 Chie: anta nandemo chiikanni saserunone  
(you make me do everthing)
- 3 Kuma: sonnakotonaiyo datte . . .  
(that's not true because . . .)

Several minutes prior to this exchange, Kuma told Chie that he was willing to do many favors that day for her such as checking the mail and returning books to the library. Interviews reveal that, in this context, Kuma perceives his request as a matter of reciprocity of favors. On the other hand, Chie perceives his request as an unreasonable demand, not seeing that he is coming from the reciprocity perspective. This is because Chie is under the impression that she always has to make phone calls for him, due to his dislike of telephone conversations. Through the subsequent talk, Kuma helps Chie understand the "reasonableness," not "outrageousness," of his request. Interestingly, although Chie, given the explanation, renews her understanding of the character of this request, she does not experience this interaction particularly as a "misunderstanding." Perhaps the divergence between her initial understanding and renewed understanding does not have special

salience to Chie; whether his request is demanding or reasonable is not of her primary concern. Thus, the gap in interpretation quickly disappears as a trivial event in Chie's experience.

On the other hand, Chie's immediate response, "You make me do everything," reveals a significant interpretation problem to Kuma. An interview of Kuma reveals that he cares a great deal about the fairness of his personality and behavior and that it bothers him if others perceive him as an unfair person. Kuma's concern for fairness sensitizes him to the manifested gap in understanding. In short, Chie might have "heard" but did not "listen" to the wake-up call presented to her, while Kuma surely "listened" to the call presented to him. The difference between "hearing" and "listening" is whether you experience a stimulus as a meaningful event; hearing does not lead to a meaning, but listening does. Listening results in clear recognition of a misunderstanding.

## HOW INTERACTANTS HANDLE MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Chapter VI addresses the ways in which interactants handle a misunderstanding once they recognize its presence, and mainly focuses on the handlings by first recognizing (FR) interactants (parties who first recognize a misunderstanding as opposed to those who are notified of a misunderstanding by the other person). It is made clear that while both FR misunderstood and misunderstanding parties exercise one of the two major alternative methods, "expose" and "let it pass," in both American and Japanese conversations, only

the misunderstood Japanese party resorts to a third alternative: a "secret operation."

Since the presentation of Japanese conversational data is omitted in Chapter VI, the current section presents Japanese conversational segments and offers their micro analyses. Accordingly, the purpose of the present section is to demonstrate how the following Japanese data segments illustrate the "expose," "let it pass," and "secret operation" methods employed by Japanese interactants. Similar to the analysis of American data in Chapter VI, the present analysis is grounded in interviews with participants as well as segments of their conversation recorded on tapes.

#### "Let It Pass" Method by Misunderstood Party

Misunderstood Japanese parties resort to one of the three distinct methods of handling: waiving, exposing, and repairing without exposing (a "secret operation"). The following Japanese data segments illustrate each of these methods. The "waive" or "let it pass" method refers to the situation in which the interactant realizes the occurrence of a misunderstanding and yet decides to keep the realization to himself and herself. As a result, the other party tends to remain unaware of the misunderstanding. Data Segments 1 and 2 exemplify this first method employed by the misunderstood party. In Data Segment 1, Aki is a new exchange student from Japan, studying in an American university, and is talking to Jun, a senior student from Japan. Prior to this segment, she has told Jun that she tends to go through radical mood swings on a daily basis, and that the mood swings depend on whether she can



speak English well on the day. When Aki tells Jun that she is nonetheless gaining emotional stability, Aki is misunderstood by Jun. The analytical focus is on how the misunderstood party (Aki) lets the misunderstanding pass.

Data Segment 1. Japanese conversation

- 1 Aki: demone imawa chotto ochitsuite kitakana nakna kettoune ga:nto ochisouni  
(however, nowadays I am rather stable. When I am about to be depressed)
- 2 Jun: u::n n n  
(yeah yeah)
- 3 Aki: nattara maa ochitemo iinjanaitte jibundene ochitemo iiyo iiyoto  
(I tell myself it's o.k. to get depressed.)
- 4 Jun: n n u::n u::n
- 5 Aki: omouto mata agattekurunone hehehe  
(Then I tend to recover from the depression)
- 6 Jun: n n n n u::n yoyuuga detekitanjanaino  
( mm hm it has become easy, I guess)
- 7 yappari
- 8 Aki: u::n  
(yeah)
- 9 Aki: soukamoshirenai demo eigowane shaberunowa shaberukedo kikenai karane  
(may be that's the case, but listening English is worse than speaking it)
- 10 Jun: haa haa funfunfunfun  
(yeah yeah uh huh uh huh)

In lines 1, 3, and 5, Aki explains to Jun that she lately is gaining emotional and psychological stability, as she has learned to tell herself, "It's o.k. to get depressed." An interview of Aki makes it clear that the emotional and psychological stability has arrived because she learned how to handle and control her radical mood swing, not necessarily because her English speaking improved. Jun, however, sees the stability as being caused by an improvement in

her English speaking ability, misunderstanding the true cause. When Jun offers his analysis in lines 6-7 ("It [speaking English] has become easy, I guess."), Aki feels that she is misunderstood, but chooses rather not to reveal the misunderstanding. As the reasons, Aki reports that "I myself don't know the cause for sure, plus I don't know him well. I thought I should let it go." Instead of exposing the misunderstanding, Aki half-heartedly agrees with Jun's analysis in lines 8-9 and then changes the focus of the talk from English speaking to English listening. Today, Jun does not know that he misunderstood Aki.

The next data segment similarly illustrates the "let it pass" method of handling executed by the misunderstood party. Aki is again misunderstood by Jun and chooses to waive the misunderstanding. This time, however, Aki "lets it pass" for a reason different from that in the above case; she chooses to bury the misunderstanding because it is minor. Aki and Jun are discussing a mutual acquaintance, Kenya. Focus on how Aki (the misunderstood party) handles the occurrence of a misunderstanding by "letting it pass."

#### Data Segment 2. Japanese conversation

- |   |      |   |
|---|------|---|
| 1 | Aki: | karewa sugoi iihitodane iihitotteiuka gangansa shabbette kurerushi<br>(he is a very good person. well I mean his way of talk is powerful) |
| 2 | Jun: | iihito un unun genki<br>(a good person yeah yeah yeah he is   |
| 3 |      | deshou<br>energetic, isn't he?)   |
| 4 | Aki: | un genki karewa<br>(yes he is energetic)  |

- 5 Jun: un haa he:  
(yeah yeah)
- 6 Aki: nansai anohito demo nijuu nan-nansaigurai  
(how old is he? Is he in his twenty's?)
- 7 Jun: nijuu: nijuu hichihachi janaino  
(I guess twenty seven or eight)
- 8 Aki: \$mienaiyone\$ hehehe  
(He doesn't look like it)
- 9 Jun: hehehehehehehe

From this data segment, the reader cannot tell if any misunderstanding has occurred. Interviews of the participants, however, reveal a different story (a misunderstanding has occurred). Aki and Jun know different aspects of Kenya. Aki knows "Kenya" as the president of a Japanese student organization and as a strong, affirmative, dependable leader. On the other hand, Jun knows "Kenya" as his student (Jun previously taught Kenya) and as a cheerful, energetic, and talkative young man. Although these impressions do not necessarily contradict each other, they differ in nuances. Aki's impression of "Kenya" emphasizes maturity and leadership, while Jun's impression of the same person emphasizes youthfulness.

Note that Aki uses the term "gan-gan" to characterize Kenya's way of talking in line 1. "Gan-gan" is a Japanese phrase which connotes power, force, and strength. An interview reveals that, with this phrase, Aki intends to say that Kenya's way of talking is powerful and affirmative. However, knowing a different aspect of Kenya, Jun applies this word to mean "Kenya's way of talk is cheerful, energetic, and enthusiastic." Consequently, Jun in lines 2-

3 offers a comment along the line of this impression. Although this comment projects an image of "Kenya" which is somehow different from what Aki has in mind, she chooses to waive this misunderstanding. The main reason for this choice is because the misunderstanding is trivial and non-annoying. Aki reports, "Since it was no big deal, I didn't mention it at all. It wasn't worth going through the trouble of clarifying." After all, being "affirmative" and being "energetic" are not radically different from each other. Aki agrees with Jun's comment in line 4 and shifts the conversational focus to Kenya's age in line 6. In short, Aki "lets it pass."

#### "Expose" Method by Misunderstood Party

An alternative to the above "let it pass" method is to surface the occurrence of a misunderstanding and helps the other party gain a more adequate understanding. This situation constitutes the "expose" method employed by the misunderstood party. Like in American conversation, the exposition of a misunderstanding in Japanese conversation can be achieved in three different styles: 1) rejection of the other's understanding, 2) clarification of the intended meaning, and 3) combination of the first two.

##### 1) rejection of the other's understanding

The simplest way to expose a misunderstanding is to deny and reject the other's interpretation. In English conversation, this is achieved with the word "No," such as "No, that's not what I mean" or "No, I didn't say that." The Japanese language also has a word for denial: "Chigau." This word literally means "different" and in effect

has the same function as the English "No." In colloquial Japanese, "Chigau" is the common phrase used to deny and reject the other party's understanding.

In the following segment, the misunderstood Japanese party uses this word to point out the occurrence of a misunderstanding. Pu is the misunderstood party. While Pu looks for an address book, Chie misunderstands him as looking for a community phone book. Exposing the misunderstanding is, in this case, a matter of necessity to Kuma because Kuma needs to call several people listed on the address book. Focus on how Kuma, the misunderstood party, exposes the misunderstanding through the rejection of the other's interpretation. The rejection (at the arrowed turn) takes place immediately after Kuma is shown an object different from what he has in mind.

#### Data Segment 4. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Kuma:    ano:chotto denwa denwachowa  
            (hey where is the phone book)
- 2           (1.0)
- 3 Chie:     denwqacho arudesho itsumono tokoroni  
            (the phone book is in the regular place, isn't it)
- 4 Kuma:    naiyo  
            (no)
- .
- . ((long side talk omitted))
- .
- 16 Chie:    kokoyan ((pointing to a community phone book))  
            (here it is)
- 17 Kuma:    doko  
            (where)
- 18 Chie:    koko ((again pointing to the same object))

- (here)
- >19 Kuma: chigau chigau chigau chigau  
(no no no no)
- 20 Chie: chiyanno chicchayatsu  
(you mean my little one)
- 21 Kuma: sou  
(yes)

The next moment, Chie gives Kuma her address book.

## 2) clarification of the intended meaning

The misunderstood party may also expose a misunderstanding without denying the other's interpretation; by clarifying the intended meaning. The following two segments illustrate the misunderstood party's clarification effort.

In the first example (Data Segment 6), a mother tells her daughter that she (mother) wants to cook "octopus tempura." The daughter misunderstands what her mother wants to cook; thus, the mother is the misunderstood party. Focus on how the mother exposes the misunderstanding by clarifying the intended meaning. The clarification attempt is seen at the arrowed turn.

### Data Segment 6. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Mother: takono tempura shitemitaina  
(I want to try cooking octopus tempura)
- 2 Daughter: ( )
- 3 Father: oo douzo ((eating sound))  
(please)
- 4 Mother: oushiide  
(it must be delicious)
- 5 Father: yattekudasai  
(please do it)
- 6 Daughter: tempura? kinou shitayan

- (tempura? you cooked it yesterday)
- > 7 Mother:        tako  
                         (octopus)
- 8 Daughter:        a takono tempura shitemitainatte ittanoka  
                         (oh you said you want to cook octopus tempura)

The initial portion of the mother's utterance, and the daughter's utterance overlap in lines 1 and 2. Because of this overlap, the daughter misses the mother's first word ("octopus") and believes that the mother is saying, "I want to try cooking tempura." Tempura is the name for a Japanese dish, and it usually refers to sliced vegetables fried with special flour; the vegetables include onions, carrots, potatoes, burdocks, and pumpkins. Cooking octopus for the tempura dish is a rather unique and unheard-of practice. Missing the mother's intent to try something new for the tempura dish, the daughter makes reference to the fact that they had regular tempura for dinner the previous day in line 6: "Tempura? You cooked it yesterday." Realizing this misunderstanding, the mother makes a correction by reiterating what she wants to cook ("octopus") in line 7. Since this misunderstanding merely concerns an object of action (object to be fried for the tempura dish), the clarification is a matter of re-uttering the word.

The second example (Data Segment 7) similarly illustrates the misunderstood party's clarification attempt, but unlike the prior example, the clarification attempt goes beyond uttering a few words; it takes extended turns for a reason that we shall see. In Data Segment 7, Aki explains to Jun that politics classes are relatively easy for her, but law classes are extremely hard. Aki is

misunderstood by Jun and develops clarifying efforts at the arrowed turns. The analytical focus is on how Aki exposes the misunderstanding by clarifying what she means.

Data Segment 7. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Aki: seijiwa chotto benkyoushitara torerundakedo (.) houritsuwa  
(I can handle politics classes I just have to study for a while but law classes)
- 2 Jun: un  
(mm hm)
- 3 Jun: monosugoi yaranaito dame  
(You have to study very hard for it)
- 4 Aki: mou (.) maikkai sono uketa ato suguatokara toshokanni itte kyookasho  
(oh everytime when the class is over, I need to immediately go to a )
- 5 Jun: un hou  
(mm hm) (gee)
- 6 Aki: matomete senseino rekuchaa matomete de jibunno ikenmo matometenaito  
(library and summarize the textbook and the lecture and formulate my)
- 7 Jun: haa haa un  
(wow) (wow) (mm)
- 8 Aki: maikai sorewo shitenaito torenai hito nano(ne)  
(opinions. I need to do these things each and every time or I won't pass)
- 9 Jun: hoo:: ja yoku benkyoo suruhito  
(gee you are a diligent student)
- 10 nanda nihonjinniwa mezurashiku  
(unlike most Japanese)
- 11 (.)
- >12 Aki: shinaito torenakutte hontoni nanteiuna aino tomodachinanka hontoni  
(otherwise, I will fail. I'm serious. For instance, my friend hardly)
- 13 Jun: aa: haha baa un  
(oh) (mm) (yeah)
- >14 Aki: nante iuduraine benkyoo shinainoni houritsude kanzenni kantanni ei  
(studies but she achieves an easy "A" in law classes)
- 15 Jun: un un  
(mm hm) (mm hm)



- >16 Aki: tocchaunone demo ai ikkai yaranai-kkatakotoga attesa (.) demone  
 (I was lazy|only one time but still I studied just as much as she did)
- 17 Jun: honto? un  
 (really?) (mm hm)
- >18 Aki: sonohitoto onajigurainiwa yattandakedo (.) mou kanzenni otoshitamon  
 (as a result, I flunked)
- 19 Jun: un  
 (mm hm)

An interview with Aki makes it clear that the point of her talk is to illustrate the extreme level of difficulty that she experienced in law classes. In lines 4, 6, and 8, she exemplifies the difficulty by listing the contents of everyday routines that she went through for her survival (making passing grades) in law classes: go to a library, summarize the textbook and the lecture, and formulate her opinions. Missing this point, Jun attributes these acts to her diligence, not to the demanding nature of law classes, as she intends to mean. This is because Jun generally assumes that Japanese university students are not hard-working since their classes are not demanding. The truth is, however, that the law classes that Aki has taken are exceptionally demanding and that the listed routines are reflections of the situational necessity, rather than reflections of Aki's excellent work ethics. A critical point is that Aki was "forced" to work hard, not that she self-initiated hard work. Therefore, Jun's subsequent comment in lines 9-10, "Gee, you are a diligent student unlike most Japanese," hits Aki as missing her intended point. Since this is a rather significant misunderstanding to Aki, she attempts to clarify it in lines 12, 14, 16, and 18. In her clarification attempt, Aki presents another piece of evidence to convince Jun that law

classes were incredibly hard for her: She flunked when, just for one day, she did not go through the described routines. Aki reports, "I gave him [Jun] examples to explain that I couldn't pass in the classes unless I studied hard." Now the point is hopefully clarified that she studied very hard because the difficulty of the law classes dictated that she did so, not because she was a diligent person. This misunderstanding regards the implication of talk, and thus, its clarification calls for providing further background information. Such a clarification cannot be accomplished in a few words.

3) combination of 1) rejection of the other's understanding and 2) clarification of the intended meaning.

The combination of a rejection of the other's interpretation and a clarification attempt constitutes the most explicit style of misunderstanding disclosure. For this style, the misunderstood party refutes the other person's interpretation with "No" (in colloquial Japanese, "Chigau") and clarifies what he or she originally intends. The following segment between two Japanese interactants illustrates this third style of misunderstanding disclosure. In Data Segment 10, Aki tells Jun that she easily gains and loses her weight, especially in the face, and is misunderstood by Jun. The analytical focus is on how the misunderstood party (Aki) exposes the misunderstanding by both refuting Jun's interpretation and clarifying the intended meaning. Aki's effort to expose the misunderstanding is seen at the arrowed turn.

Data Segment 10. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Jun: ano: futorunowo kinishiterutosa tabenainjanaino (.) tabetaku  
(well I guess if you worry too much about gaining weight, you won't eat)
- 2 nakunarunja naino (.) souiuno kini suruto  
(you don't want to eat, right?)
- 3 Aki: u:n  
(well)
- 4 (pause)
- 5 Aki: demo kini shiterudedo tabetaindakadone  
(I worry, but I want to eat)
- 6 Jun: kinishiteru: keto tabenai?  
(You worry, but you don't eat?)
- >7 Aki: iya tabetai(ne) hehehehehehehe  
(no, I want to eat)
- 8 Jun: tabetai hahahahahaha ha  
(you want to eat)

An interview with Jun reveals that he is health-conscious and resents poor dieting for the sake of looking slim. He thinks that many people (especially women) are so concerned with their weight that they resort to poor eating habits. He applies this thought to Aki and reasons that if Aki is concerned with her weight, she must not be eating right. Thus, when Aki explains, "I worry, but I want to eat" in line 5, Jun assumes that she is saying, "I worry, but I don't eat" (emphasis added). Jun's assumption fills the last part of her sentence before he hears it all. This is easily done especially since Japanese words for "want to eat" and "don't eat" sound similar ("tabetai" for "want to eat" and "tabenai" for "don't eat"). Now the logical connection between the two statements "I worry" and "I don't eat" confuses Jun; the two statements must be connected by "therefore," such as "I worry, therefore, I don't eat," not by "but" as he heard. Jun, in an attempt to come out of this confusion, repeats

what he thought he heard for a confirmation in line 6. Realizing the occurrence of the misunderstanding, Aki first rejects Jun's understanding ("No") and then repeats the last part of the misunderstood utterance ("I want to eat") for a clarification in line 7.

### Japanese "Secret Operation"

Yet another alternative method of handling misunderstandings for misunderstood Japanese interactants is through repairing a misunderstanding without exposing it. More specifically, misunderstood Japanese parties first accept the other's interpretation as a valid form of understanding and then come around to clarify the intended meaning. Thus, this method is named in the present study as a "secret operation" for its "sneaky" nature. The "secret operation" method is only observed in Japanese conversations in the present data.

Japanese interactants appear to use a "secret operation" when they face the dilemma between great cost and great reward in exposing a misunderstanding. Due to great cost (e.g. face-saving concern, psychological distance with the other party), the misunderstood Japanese party refrains from exposing the misunderstanding. On the other hand, due to great reward (e.g., the importance of the subject matter, relevance to a given purpose), the misunderstood party is tempted to expose and clarify the misunderstanding. An escape from this dilemma is available through a "secret operation."

The following two examples (Data Segments 11 and 12) illustrate this uniquely Japanese method of handling misunderstandings. In Data Segment 11, Aki tells Jun that she recently went to see a Native American dance show. As Aki describes the dance movement, she feels that her description is misunderstood by Jun. The analytical focus is on how the misunderstood party (Aki) handles the misunderstanding through a "secret operation." Her effort at the "secret operation" is seen at the arrowed turns.

Data Segment 11. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Jun: odoritoka nanka attano?  
(was there any dancing?)
- 2 Aki: ainiwane doumo aruiteruyounishika mienakatta hahahaha  
(to me they looked like merely walking)
- 3 Jun: hahahahaha haha
- 4 Aki: (unintelligible) suteppuga (unintelligible)
- 5 Jun: hahahaha ugoki ugokiga noroi  
(the movement is slow)
- >6 Aki: haha un tadane hontoni kou aruiteruyouni mierundakedo  
(yes but although they looked like walking)
- 7 Jun: un haahaahaahaa  
(uh huh uh huh)
- >8 Aki: demo onnana hitowa otokono hitono han- hanbunno suteppu shikanaitoka  
(there were meticulous rules as to how they move such as female steps)
- 9 Jun: un
- >10 Aki: nanka iroirone hontowa ruuruga  
(are half of male steps)
- 11 Jun: ha:::  
(wow)
- 12 Jun: aru  
(there were)

13 Aki: un  
(yes)

In line 2, Aki uses the metaphor "like walking" to describe the Native American dance that she saw. Metaphors, in general, highlight similarities between concepts. Through interviewing, it is clear that Aki intends to use the metaphor "like walking" to emphasize the idea that Native American dancers concentrate on leg movement "like walking" does, as opposed to the idea that jazz and ballet dancers move their entire bodies. However, being unfamiliar with the Native American dance practice, Jun interprets the metaphor as emphasizing the idea that the dance movement is slow "like walking," as opposed to the idea that the other dance movements are fast "like running." This interpretation propels Jun's comment, "The movement is slow," in line 5. To Aki, this is a rather critical misunderstanding as it concerns an aspect of a cultural practice that she witnessed. On this account, she is motivated to expose and clarify the misunderstanding.

At the same time, however, Aki is concerned with the nature of her relationship with Jun; they are merely acquaintances. Refuting Jun's interpretation poses some threat to his "face" as the listener. As discussed in Chapters VI and VIII, Japanese are reluctant to threaten the other's face as the listener, especially when they do not have a close relationship with the other party. On this account, Aki is discouraged from exposing and clarifying the misunderstanding. The best strategy to come out of this dilemma is a "secret operation": first to appreciate Jun's interpretation and then

to proceed to explain what she really means by "like walking." Aki reports: "I added an explanation because the misunderstanding was rather significant. However, I first confirmed his interpretation, since I couldn't say, 'No. That's not what I mean.' I felt bad because Jun was sincerely listening to my talk." Accordingly, in lines 6, 8, and 10, Aki first acknowledges Jun's remark by saying, "Yes," and immediately provides an additional piece of information ("there were meticulous rules as to how they move, such as female steps are typically half the length of male steps"). This information is designed to support her intended claim that the Native American dance looks "like walking" because it concentrates on leg movement. After all, Jun may still think that the Native American dance exhibits slow movement, but at least he now knows that it emphasizes leg movement. The Japanese method of handling may not completely clarify a misunderstanding, but helps the misunderstood party get the intended meaning across.

The next conversation among three Japanese conversationalists similarly illustrates the uniquely Japanese way of handling a misunderstanding. In Data Segment 12, Mika and Aki talk in a car while Eriko gets out of the car in order to purchase gas. While Eriko is gone, Mika and Aki discuss the possibility that their dorm will be closed during a holiday season. A misunderstanding occurs after Eriko comes back to the car; Eriko misunderstands a question that Mika asks Aki as being directed at herself. Focus on how co-participants/joint misunderstood parties (Mika and Aki) handle Eriko's misunderstanding through a "secret operation."

## Data Segment 12. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Mika: ee hontoni shimaruno?  
(gee does it really close?)
- 2 Aki: un sourashiiyo  
(yes I heard so)  
((Eriko comes back and joins the talk))
- 3 Eriko: gasorindai hachidoru issento dattandakedo hachidoruni shitekureta  
(the gas costed \$8.01 but I only paid \$8.00. I planned to stop at \$8.00)
- 4 watashi hachidoruni suru tsumoriga sokode tomaranakute hachidoru  
(but I couldn't and the price indicator showed \$8.01 but then again)
- 5 issentoni nacchattandayonee: demo ojisan hachidorude iitte  
(a sweet man said I only owed him \$8.00)
- 6 Aki: yattane rakkii yattayan  
(that's great you were lucky)
- 7 Eriko: un  
(yes)
- 8 (pause)
- 9 Mika: de nande?  
(anyway why?)
- 10 Eriko: dakarasa hachidoru issento  
(because \$8.01)  
.  
.  
.  
(Eriko's explanation of the incident omitted)  
.
- 11 Aki: hontoni rakkiittekotoyannee desa keito sentaano kotoyakedo Mikasan  
(really you were lucky by the way, talking about the cate center, Mika)
- 12 Mika: aa un  
(oh yes)

When Eriko comes back to the car, she is eager to tell two people (Mika and Aki) in the car an incident that she encountered while making a gas purchase. Eriko says in lines 3-5, "I planned to stop at \$8.00 but I couldn't stop, and the price indicator showed \$8.01. But then again a sweet man said I only owed him \$8.00." Because of this,



Mika and Aki temporarily put aside their ongoing talk about the dorm and listen to Eriko's story. When Eriko finishes her talk, Aki makes a comment to appreciate the talk in line 6. Observing a sense of closure in Eriko's story, Mika in line 9 attempts to resume the previous topic which was on the table before Eriko came back, and asks, "Anyway, why?" This question is directed at Aki who has the information about the dorm and intended as "Why does our dorm have to close?" However, Eriko who is still excited about her experience misunderstands the question to be directed at herself, as "Why did you manage to pay only \$8.00?" or "Why did the man say that you only owed him \$8.00?" and thus, in line 10 she starts explaining her experience all over again in response to the question.

Both Mika and Aki realize the occurrence of this misunderstanding but hesitate to expose it due to the face-saving factor. In a written interview, Aki writes: "If we cut Eriko's talk short and reveal her misunderstanding, she will be greatly embarrassed. I thought we'd better wait till she finished talking." In Japanese culture, "omoikomi" (one's strong conviction that he or she understands something which may turn out false) brings a sense of shame and embarrassment to the listener. Being afraid that the exposure of the misunderstanding will smash and shatter Eriko's face, Mika and Aki jointly achieve a "secret operation"; Mika refrains from exposing the misunderstanding (e.g., she does not say, "Oh, I meant to ask Aki."), and after Eriko's talk, Aki comes around to present the subsequent talk as a topic change with the disjunction marker, "By the way, talking about cate center (the name of their dorm) . . . ." The disjunction marker retrospectively bestows Eriko's

talk the status of legitimacy, rather than the status of misunderstanding. The two parties listen to Eriko's talk as if no misunderstanding ever took place and thereafter manage to resume the previous talk about the dorm. In this way, Eriko does not know that she misunderstood, and Mika and Aki achieve their original intent (to discuss the possibility that their dorm will be closed). Like in Data Segment 11 of an earlier discussion, the "secret operation" in this segment is propelled by the dilemma between great costs and great rewards in clarifying a misunderstanding. The costs reside in the concern for saving the other's face, and the rewards reside in the desire or need to continue the talk about their dorm.

The above section demonstrates ways in which the first recognizing (FR) misunderstood Japanese party handles the occurrence of a conversational misunderstanding. To summarize, the misunderstood Japanese party resorts to one of the three basic strategies when he or she notices the occurrence of a misunderstanding: "let it pass," "expose," and "secret operation." It is important to note that the third method is uniquely Japanese (only observed in Japanese data).

On the other hand, the ways in which the FR misunderstanding Japanese party handles a misunderstanding exhibit slightly different patterns. The misunderstanding Japanese party exercises one of the two basic methods: "let it pass" and "expose." The subsequent section presents Japanese conversational segments that illustrate these two methods of handling by the misunderstanding party.

## "Let it Pass" Method by Misunderstanding Party

It needs reiterating at this point that, similar to the analysis of American data in Chapter VI, the current analysis draws on interviews with conversational participants as well as on their conversations recorded on tapes. The interviews are important resources especially since the "let it pass" and "expose" methods employed by the misunderstanding party appear similar. The line that separates the "let it pass" and "expose" methods is the interactant's intention revealed through interviews-whether the interactant intends to let it pass or to expose. The following segment between Japanese interactants illustrates the "let it pass" handling by the misunderstanding party. In Data Segment 15, Kuma is the misunderstanding party; he misunderstands Chie's life style regarding the habit of wearing socks. The analytical focus is on how the misunderstanding party (Kuma) lets pass his own misunderstanding when he recognizes it.

### Data Segment 15. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Kuma: sentaku ikanaito naranyo sentaku  
(we need to go laundry)
- 2 (pause)
- 3 Chie: mada mada aruyo kutsushitatoka ((coughing)) konkai raketto  
(I still have lots of clothes like socks because recently we don't
- 4 Kuma: honto  
(really)
- 5 Chie: yattenaikara un raketto ikanaito yappari kutsushitano hyou-  
(play racket ball. If we don't play racket ball, the use of socks decreases)
- 6 shouhiryoga heru
- 7 Kuma: wai

- (Why)
- 8 Chie: datte racketto ikutabinisa kutsushita issoku sentakubakoni horikomumon  
(Because every time we play racket, I throw a pair of socks into a )
- 9 ase dorodori narukara  
(laundry basket since it gets dirty with sweat)
- 10 Kuma: mainichi dorodori naran?  
(Don't socks get dirty everyday?)
- 11 Chie: mainichiwa kutsushita haitenaiyan hora ((shows her bare foot))  
(I don't wear socks everyday. Look. )
- 12 Kuma: aa  
(oh)
- 13 Chie: kutsushita hakunowa soto ni derutokika racketto surutoki dakara ieno  
(I only wear socks when I go out or when I play racket ball. So)
- 14 Kuma: a honto  
(oh really)
- 15 Chie: nakani irukagirini oitewa kutsushita zenzen hakanaindayo  
(when I'm home I don't wear socks at all)
- 16 Kuma: ((coughing)) honto anta kutsushita hakanai hito  
(really you are an individual who doesn't wear socks)
- 17 Chie: soreto  
(and)
- 18 hakanaiyori kutsushita  
(I don't wear socks)
- 19 Kuma: watashi kutsushita hakundayo  
(I wear socks)

The source of a misunderstanding lies in Kuma's assumption that Chie wears socks everyday, while, in fact, she does not; she spends days with her bare feet and only wears socks when she goes out or plays sports. This assumption emerges because Kuma himself has the habit of wearing socks everyday, and he mindlessly applies his habit to Chie's. Because of this basic initial misunderstanding, Chie's subsequent utterances (lines 5-6 and 8-9) confuse Kuma;

Kuma is confused with the ideas that "if [Chie does] not play racket ball, the use of socks decreases" (lines 5-6) and that "everytime [she] play[s] racket ball, [she] throw[s] a pair of socks into a laundry basket, since it gets dirty with sweat" (lines 8-9). From a perspective of Kuma who wears socks everyday, it should be the case that whether or not she plays the sport does not affect the use of socks, and she throws a pair of dirty socks into a laundry basket everyday. Accordingly, Kuma tries to come out of this confusion by asking clarification questions in lines 7 and 10. With Chie's response ("I don't wear socks everyday") in line 11, Kuma, for the first time, realizes that he has all along misunderstood her life style and that his confusion is a product of this initial misunderstanding. Chie's additional explanations in lines 13 and 15 further reinforce Kuma's realization of this misunderstanding.

Now that Kuma clearly realizes his misunderstanding, he could have exposed it by saying, "I thought you wear socks everyday. I had the wrong idea." Without exposing the misunderstanding, however, Kuma proceeds in the conversation. In the subsequent talk, he demonstrates signs of understanding: "Oh" (in line 12), "Oh, really" (in line 14), and "Really. You are an individual who doesn't wear socks" (in line 16). These signs merely indicate that Kuma took the time to understand Chie's life style, and he wants to get used to the new understanding; they do not necessarily inform the other party (the misunderstood party) of the occurrence of misunderstanding. Thus, these utterances are best understood as a case of "let it pass," rather than an effort to expose a misunderstanding, although the boundary may be fuzzy. In an interview, Kuma reports: "It became

clear to me that I had misunderstood Chie as we talked. So I did nothing." Kuma did not have to surface the misunderstanding because he now understood. Kuma embeds his initial misunderstanding of Chie's life style in the ongoing conversation, and Chie remains unaware of this misunderstanding.

### "Expose" Method by Misunderstanding Party

An alternative to the "let it pass" method for the misunderstanding party is to expose the occurrence of a misunderstanding. The "expose" method employed by the misunderstanding party suggests the idea that the misunderstanding party recognizes his or her misunderstanding and decides to disclose this misunderstanding to the other party. This usually takes the form of "confession"; the misunderstanding party "confesses" his or her wrong interpretation.

The following two Japanese segments (Data Segments 16 and 17) illustrate the "expose" method exercised by the FR misunderstanding party. In each example, focus on how the misunderstanding party exposes a misunderstanding via "confession." In Data Segment 16, Chie is the misunderstanding party. Kuma and Chie are discussing two methods of purchasing spinach: washed and cut spinach in a plastic bag, and unwashed and uncut spinach without a bag. Kuma emphasizes the advantages of the latter way over the former.

#### Data Segment 16. Japanese Conversation

- 1 Kuma: sorenisa kocchi mouhitotsuno riten koreyatosu nemoto nemoto kueru  
(this way has an additional merit. this way we can eat the root part)



they hardly have the pink part" in lines 5 and 7, and "There aren't any pink part" in line 9, help Chie realize her misunderstanding of the referent in question. Accordingly, Chie utters in line 10, "Oh, you are talking about the pink part," and this marks a self-initiated "confession" of her misunderstanding. Given Kuma's probing question in line 11, Chie further advances (elaborates on) her "confession" by disclosing what she had in mind a few seconds ago ("I thought the green stem part"). Chie reports: "I expressed the fact that I had misunderstood him. Thereafter, I honestly told him what I thought, because he asked, 'What did you think?'" In short, Chie decides to expose her misunderstanding.

In the following example (Data Segment 17), the misunderstanding party similarly exposes the occurrence of a misunderstanding by confessing the wrong interpretation. A couple of days prior to this segment, a sister misunderstands her brother as giving her a bunch of notebook paper, while, in fact, the brother only intends to lend it to her. Because of this initial misunderstanding, the sister has been keeping the notebook paper, assuming that it's now hers. The brother, however, believes that the notebook paper is his and wants it back, as he is getting ready for school. During the following segment, this misunderstanding surfaces. Focus on how the misunderstanding party (sister) exposes the misunderstanding at the arrowed turn.

Data Segment 17. Japanese Conversation

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| 1 Brother: | washino nootowa?<br>(where is my notebook?) |
| 2 Sister:  | washino nootowa ima kokoni attayan=         |



- (it was right here a moment ago)
- 3 Mother: =sakki sokoni attayan  
(I saw it right there a while ago)
- 4 Brother: (a) ano tabade watashitayan  
(well you have them in bunch)
- 5 Sister: kiokuni naide  
(I don't remember)
- 6 Brother: kono kore ((showing a notebook))  
(this one)
- 7 (pause)
- > 8 Sister: AA: sore moraeru monoyato bakkari omottetaketo  
(OH that one I thought you gave it to me)
- 9 Brother: \$hitsuyou saishougen\$  
(only a minimum necessary amount)
- 10 Sister: hitsuyou arude  
(I need it all)
- 11 Brother: (iya)  
(well)
- 12 Mother: iya gochagocha iwanto gakkou ikannannyakara dokoni annen  
(well shut up. He has to go to school. where is it?)
- 13 Sister: inno?  
(you need it, huh?)
- 14 Mother: irunyan  
(obviously he needs it)
- 15 Sister: inno? nanya kaeshite hoshiinkaina  
(you need it, huh. Gee, you want it back)  
((The sister goes upstairs and gets the notebook paper))

Because the sister believes that the notebook that she has is hers, she assumes that by "my notebook" in line 1, the brother is merely referring to pieces of paper on which she did his homework for him. This assumption prompts her reply in line 2: "It was right here a moment ago." Realizing that the sister has a different object in

mind, the brother helps her to understand what he wants; he utters, "This one" while, at the same time, showing a bunch of notebook paper similar to the one that the sister has. This triggers the sister to realize not only that she misunderstands the referent of "my notebook," but also that for the last couple of days she has misunderstood the brother's intent as giving the notebook paper to her. Accordingly, the sister "confesses" in line 8, "OH, that one. I thought you gave it to me," exposing the occurrence of the misunderstanding. The sister reports: "I let him know that I renewed my understanding." The brother's subsequent explanation in line 9 further clarifies that he only wanted the sister to use a "minimum necessary amount" of the paper to do his homework and to return the rest to him.

In this situation, the misunderstanding party would normally return the notebook to the misunderstood party soon after the misunderstanding is clarified. However, in this particular segment, the misunderstanding party and the misunderstood party are sister and brother; they can be rude to each other without jeopardizing the relationship. This fact explains the sister's behavior after the "confession": She still insists on her interpretation even after she realizes that it is a misunderstanding, and drags the conversation by saying, "I need it all" in line 10, "You need it, huh?" in line 13, and "You need it huh? Gee, you want it back" in line 15. Obviously, the sister is reluctant to return the notebook paper.

To provide a summary, FR misunderstood Japanese parties demonstrate three alternatives in handling conversational misunderstanding: they either let it pass, expose, or repair without

exposing. While the first two methods are observed equally across Japanese and American conversations, the last method is only observed in Japanese data in the present study. On the other hand, FR misunderstanding Japanese parties demonstrate two alternatives in handling conversational misunderstanding: they let it pass or expose. This pattern of choices is observed equally across Japanese and American conversations.

## APPENDIX C

### DATA SEGMENTS USED IN THE TEXT

#### CHAPTER V

##### Data Segment 1. English Conversation

- 1 Kate: how many (.) probably jus- two I'll walk it off go back there real quick
- 2 (unintelligible)
- 3 ((background music gets louder))
- 4 Kate: that is (.) we'd have to sew the bags though
- 5 Kristy: well we got a (katter) on those
- 6 Kate: a what?
- 7 Kristy: I mean that canvas material we looked at early today
- 8 Kate: oh but that's plastic canvas it gets crispy but we could try yeah yeah
- 9 Kristy: no no not
- 10 the tarp I'm talking about the (.) cover for a
- 11 Kate: oh that cover (unintelligible) OK we need to pull the ruffle off it and
- 12 Kristy: ( unintelligible )
- 13 Kate: de:gather it to get the most material out of it

##### Data Segment 2. English Conversation

- 1 Ben: what time is our soap opera coming on two o'clock?
- 2 Cindy: uh:m (2.0) I don't know what time I just d- well (.) let's see yeah
- 3 I think our- our soap opera comes on at two
- 4 Ben: mm ok
- 5 Cindy: uh
- 6 Ben: we'll watch the soap at two?
- 7 Cindy: YEAH but we're talking on the tape right now
- 8 Ben: no no I'm just saying we have twenty minutes until the soap opera comes
- 9 Cindy: oh ok yeah uh huh
- 10 Ben: on
- 11 Cindy: we'll watch it
- 12 Ben: ((coughing))

## Data Segment 3: English Conversation

- 1 Cindy: I need to get some um (.) oil to oil the furniture
- 2 Ben: ok
- 3 Cindy: it's you know it's haven't been oiled since we moved from Vegas
- 4 needs to be
- 5 Ben: why are you having to oil the furniture
- 6 Cindy: it's WOOD honey (you) if you don't want
- 7 Ben: I thought you were talking about the couch or something
- 8 Cindy: no you need to oil the wood (.) it also gets dry
- 9 Ben: all right
- 10 Cindy: and we have to go a- I need to buy some oil and stuff a- dust it I mean it
- 11 just feels dusty and everything
- 12 Ben: why don't you use Lorenzo's oil
- 13 Cindy: hhhhh what's that
- 14 Ben: that's Tracy's favorite movie
- 15 Cindy: yeah

## Data Segment 4. English Conversation

- 1 Linda: yeah [Lisa] passed psychology
- 2 Kyle: really
- 3 Linda: yeah 'ts uh yeah=
- 4 Kyle: =she got like a C
- 5 Linda: I'm amazed she got an A
- 6 Kyle: an A wow gee I dropped psychology cause it's too tough that was ( )
- 7 Linda: hm
- 8 Kyle: but I was younger and ( unintelligible )
- 9 Linda: w'll she she failed these two science courses and whole time they've been
- 10 asking her have you had sciences and she's been saying yes
- 11 Kyle: because she is thinking of psychology
- 12 Linda: no because she took the course
- 13 Kyle: oh because she th- yeah
- 14 Linda: ((sigh))
- 15 Linda: so I guess now we have to remember questions to say have you PASSED
- 16 Kyle: yeah I see

- 17 Linda: the course  
 18 Kyle: yeah have you taken this course (.) got at least uh (what) a C  
 19 I guess or D wha-  
 20 Linda: a D  
 21 Kyle: a D is what you need?

#### Data Segment 5. English Conversation

- 1 Lynn: I mean just it just kind of kind of stunned me cause these guys were  
 2 up there I guess probly twenty not twenty nineteen something like that  
 3 they were up there and they were just like talking and chatting on before  
 4 they were singing and they were saying about everything that I mean  
 5 people are working up there where's that come from where's that come  
 6 from stuff like it people start choosing w- just like golly why don't you  
 7 (pause) shut up  
 8 Kyle: hhhh  
 9 Kyle: they'd be like talking about individual people?  
 10 Lynn: no they weren't talking gossip they  
 11 were just just talking and f ward this and f this and f that and I was just  
 12 like (.) you're in public I mean it's ok to (.) I mean it's one thing to say it  
 13 but saying it in public specially it tuh (pause) outside where everybody  
 14 can hear it I was just I didn't think 't was very appropriate  
 15 (pause)  
 16 Lynn: stop laughing at me  
 17 Kyle: oh I was laughing at probably ( )  
 18 Lynn: ok  
 19 Kyle: yeah so  
 20 Lynn: but I don't know  
 21 Kyle: uh where are you gonna live in a dorm room?  
 22 Lynn: a dorm with my daughter?  
 23 Kyle: oh you're right yeah where are you gonna live  
 24 Lynn: I don't know  
 25 Kyle: you DON'T know where you're gonna live?  
 26 Lynn: I don't know

## Data Segment 6. English Conversation

- 1 Kyle: anyway it's a BIG project you know
- 2 Linda: how big
- 3 Kyle: a year a year's project an- and that's conservative I just spent a year
- 4 working on just an article or the article and a dissertation is like five
- 5 or six articles all related to the same topic uh topic and ( )
- 6 each one doing a different you know like as a literature review methods
- 7 findings conclusions yeah different sections yeah to have like what are
- 8 your methods w'll I'm going to interview people or I'm gonna send out
- 9 survey questionnaires or I'm going to use census data (.) yeah whatever
- 10 what did you find and then what does it mean you know ok great you
- 11 found out so what do we care
- 12 (pause)
- 13 Linda: you really scared me now (( sign ))
- 14 Kyle: ok it k- it's just a really step by step
- 15 process you go you go A B C D it's fine it's it's nothing that sneaks up on
- 16 you and smashes you in the face it's (.) they (.) and they make sure you
- 17 know what's coming
- 18 (pause)
- 19 Linda: and then when you finish your dissertation? when you're done?
- 20 Kyle: yes yeah the last phase when you're working on dissertation you're called
- 21 a.b.d all but dissertation
- 22 Linda: I've got a friend who has her a.b.d.
- 23 Kyle: HAS her a.b.d. oh good I- I always thought of it as she IS a.b.d. but I
- 24 guess you can say either way and so (unintelligible)
- 25 Linda: she has it because she's not
- 26 working on her dissertation anymore
- 27 Kyle: oh I see so she is- that's kind of a cute thing she is saying as opposed to
- 28 saying I have my ph.d. I have my a.b.d. ok so she's given up
- 29 Linda: yes
- 30 Kyle: holly(.) shit how do people do that
- 31 Linda: because she: ha:d a divorce and two kids to raise and a job to get and has
- 32 her masters and and and
- 33 Kyle: in what
- 34 Linda: social (.) work

## Data Segment 7. American data

- 1 Lynn: we were over the north end and we looked around where the gate is  
 2 they were right across from the residence hall and that's the side and  
 3 were out on the field and that's you know Kansas were down there on the-  
 4 on that end=  
 5 Kyle: =(they are in love and still harsh)  
 6 Lynn: and  
 7 Lynn: we were down there and that was before he put his Kansas shirt on his  
 8 Kansas sweat shirt on and um  
 9 Kyle: so he secretly loves Kansas more than OU  
 10 Lynn: well I wonder why (.) he lives there  
 11 Kyle: well I- I have a football team that I like better than OU I shouldn't talk  
 12 Lynn: shoot  
 13 Kyle: especially when I go out there  
 14 Lynn: hm

## Data Segment 8. American data

- 1 Lynn: students seats are always reserved and we were in the end zone an-  
 2 Kyle: uh huh  
 3 Lynn: I don't know an- that's where all the alumni were too and I didn't know  
 4 if this guy was from the alumni or or whatever I don't know but uh  
 5 well he just bought two tickets um I mean just regular seat but I had I got  
 6 a student ticket and um(.) there were four of us and some of them had  
 7 already taken our seats and so  
 8 Kyle: (unintelligible)  
 9 Lynn: that happens to me all time  
 10 Kyle: yeah I- I'd ask 'em to move I'd say hey (unintelligible) they are my seat  
 11 yeah  
 12 Lynn: and they were like right on the end of the row so we didn't have to k-  
 13 we really didn't have to  
 14 Kyle: and that's great seats  
 15 Lynn: yeah cause you don't have to walk over anywhere  
 16 Kyle: how close to the fifty yard line was it



- 17 Lynn: oh we were at the most second section in the top in the higher section not  
 18 down the bottom that we were in the (.) at the top the  
 19 Kyle: oh  
 20 Lynn: endzone  
 21 Kyle: oh the end zone ok yeah=  
 22 Lynn: =yeah in the end zone anyway so we were sitting oh we were looking for  
 23 out seats (unintelligible)

#### Data Segment 9. English Conversation

- 1 Kyle: uh where are you gonna live in a dorm room?  
 2 Lynn: a dorm with my daughter?  
 3 Kyle: oh you're right yeah where are you gonna live  
 4 Lynn: I don't know  
 5 Kyle: you DON'T know where you're gonna live?  
 6 Lynn: I don't know no one ever when Sara ( ) told me to go  
 7 university college so I come to the university college and I say well (.)  
 8 um you know I- I- after they had ( ) reservation form and everthing  
 9 they had asked me uh ( ) questions ( ) yeah you  
 10 probably won't be able to answer it but uh I asked her about housing  
 11 something about being enrolled and getting in and she said she called and  
 12 asked and so she called to the housing and asked them and she said (.) you  
 13 know she gave her I guess my social security number and pulled up in the  
 14 computer and they said oh SHE the yeah enrollment (.) reservation she  
 15 said that they had one ready for me and I was like oh really  
 16 Kyle: (at one room of) a dorm room?  
 17 Lynn: oh no I'm sorry an apartment at Yorkshire  
 18 Kyle: oh right at Yorkshire that's where you  
 19 Lynn: because that's where I applied  
 20 Kyle: good  
 21 Lynn: and I was like  
 22 Kyle: and you're (gonna be) something like next door  
 23 Lynn: no: I think both en- both sides are full but anyways back to my story  
 24 Kyle: both  
 25 sides of the pool?  
 26 Lynn: full

27 Kyle: both sides are full

Data Segment 10. English Conversation

- 1 Linda: so four years you're saying for your (.) ph.d.
- 2 Kyle: that would be that would be doing quickly yeah five or six years are
- 3 Linda: quickly
- 4 Kyle: probably more common and seven or eight years are not uncommon
- 5 I think eight years is usually the limit (.) and seven years (.) maybe
- 6 seven years is the limit but (.) then you get extended for ( )
- 7 Linda: took six years
- 8 for my bachelors so
- 9 Kyle: I took a lot of- yeah if you count the huge break in- in the middle of my
- 10 bachelors I took ( pause ) ten uh uh uh: eleven years eleven years for
- 11 Linda: ahhhhhh
- 12 Kyle: my bachelors if you count the (.) gap
- 13 Linda: well I wouldn't count the gap
- 14 Kyle: then 't was like (.) five or six probably
- 15 Linda: I took six but I took four semesters off and that's hard
- 16 Kyle: ok
- 17 Linda: not being in school for four semesters not all together one semester at a
- 18 time I've taken off
- 19 Kyle: yeah I've taken extra y- extra semesters because I was misdirected yeah
- 20 I started out being one major and switched I wasted a lot of course work
- 21 Linda: but I could've I could've done before years if I hadn't taken four semesters
- 22 off
- 23 Kyle: when you took four semesters off you had to take more classes when you
- 24 came back?
- 25 Linda: NO I'm saying that my six years include a time off
- 26 Kyle: yeah
- 27 Kyle: I see but you wouldn't let me into that mind
- 28 Linda: well yours is a lengthy gap
- 29 Kyle: yeah w'll I see I see
- 30 (pause)
- 31 Kyle: but yeah I-I got some good times during that gap

## Data Segment 11. English Conversation

- 1 Linda: yeah [lisa] passed psychology  
 2 Kyle: really  
 3 Linda: yeah 'ts uh yeah=  
 4 Kyle: =she got like a C  
 5 Linda: I'm amazed she got an A  
 6 Kyle: an A wow gee I dropped psychology cause it's too tough that was ( )  
 7 Linda: hm  
 8 Kyle: but I was younger and ( unintelligible )  
 9 Linda: w'll she she failed these two science courses and whole time they've been  
 10 asking her have you had sciences and she's been saying yes  
 11 Kyle: because she is thinking of psychology  
 12 Linda: no because she took the course  
 13 Kyle: oh because she th- yeah  
 14 Linda: ((sigh))  
 15 Linda: so I guess now we have to remember questions to say have you PASSED  
 16 Kyle: yeah I see  
 17 Linda: the course  
 18 Kyle: yeah have you taken this course (.) got at least uh (what) a C  
 19 I guess or D wha-  
 20 Linda: a D  
 21 Kyle: a D is what you need?

## Chapter VI

Data Segment 12. English conversation (this segment includes many "unintelligible" fragments because it was recorded in a moving car)

- 1 Lana: it's actually the first time ever I got three comments from both  
 2 intercession that I taught and eleven thirteen Lana was intimidating  
 3 it was hard for me to approach her (pause) I'm PLEASED  
 4 Trisha: ahhhhhh  
 5 Haley: hhh great hh  
 6 Trisha: ah:f  
 7 Lana: that's what I had as a kind of attitude ( )  
 8 Haley: hey heheh

- 9 Trisha: hey
- 10 hhhh
- 11 Lana: I thought I felt that I was pretty approachable
- 12 Trisha: well I guess not
- 13 Haley: damn it hhh what do you do hhh
- 14 Lana: know I'm scaring them
- 15 Haley: hhhh
- 16 Trisha: hhh but do you wanna do that?
- 17 Lana: oh yeah because I don't want them messing with me
- 18 Trisha: ok
- 19 Haley: w'll you probably got that attitude
- 20 Lana: and
- 21 Haley: it's probably coming through
- 22 Lana: ok (I) probably was
- 23 Haley: I: don't want to mess with you guys so don't mess with me I'm not ( )
- 24 Lana: now Trisha you don't know me too well you know (pause) but do I act
- 25 intimidating?
- 26 (pause)
- 27 Trisha: gee I don't think so just because (.) what I know about you (.) so I don't
- 28 think I need an example for that
- 29 Lana: ok (pause) that's true but (.) you can you can get it you can just
- 30 Trisha: and also you gotta give me a condition like student
- 31 teacher
- 32 (?) w'll I don-
- 33 Trisha: I don't know if (.) it would have any barriers you know like I don't know
- 34 Haley: why don't you guys ( )
- 35 Trisha: but if I did I was depending on you for my grade
- 36 (pause) { (unintelligible)
- 37 Lana: maybe I- that's why I don't see it in terms of depending on
- 38 somebody for their grade and (pause) if I'm not giving you the grade
- 39 you're making your grade
- 40 Trisha: right (pause) but some people are taught like
- 41 Haley: so it is objective right?
- 42 Trisha: yeah (.) it is
- 43 Lana: it is objective

- 44 Haley: why  
 45 Lana: why because multiple choice exams and  
 46 Trisha: (unintelligible)

#### Alternative Data Segment 12. English Conversation

((Ben and Cindy are watching TV. A commercial for Furs Cafeteria appears on TV))

- 1 Ben: you know I wonder if Furs Cafeteria is any good  
 2 Cindy: no no it's not  
 3 Ben: you think it's not very good?  
 4 Cindy: no it's not good  
 5 Ben: but looks like the commercial looks like ( ) good chickEn  
 6 Cindy: oh don't that  
 7 Ben: fried chickEn  
 8 Cindy: i- NO: WA:Y  
 9 Ben: you don't think so?  
 10 Cindy: no  
 11 Ben: I want to try the chickEn fried stake  
 12 Cindy: turkey fried stake?  
 13 Ben: yeah the chickEn fried stake  
 14 Cindy: woo: yak

#### Data Segment 13. English Conversation

- 1 Ben: is the tape recorder still working?  
 2 Cindy: yep  
 3 Ben: it's time to turn it off  
 4 Cindy: it's still working  
 5 Ben: I'd like to hear our voices let me try something  
 6 Cindy: what do you mean, Wonder  
 ((Ben stops the recorder; their conversation is not recorded for a while))  
 7 Cindy: no its still going  
 8 Ben: w'll I just set it so it records us again (.) I just wanted to test it  
 9 Cindy: no you're  
 10 recording over another conversation we've had  
 11 Ben: no no  
 12 no I'm not

- 13 Cindy: remember you said I wanna  
((Ben stops the recorder again))
- 14 Ben: now are you satisfied?
- 15 Cindy: ahahahahaha hhh \$ok\$
- 16 Ben: hh I was right I was just testing to make sure that our  
17 voices are being picked up clear
- 18 Cindy: oh they probably are honey
- 19 Ben: well I couldn't tell didn't know
- 20 Cindy: you keep messing with it though
- 21 Ben: oh I'm (not) playing with it=
- 22 Cindy: =you know make me \$nervous\$ hh

#### Data Segment 14. English conversation

- 1 Ben: I like the mexican restaurant here on main (( ))
- 2 Cindy: oh you know THAT is really  
3 good (pause) it's probably better than Macyo's Coyote's and Richard's  
4 back in Nevada Las Vegas
- 5 Ben: oh yeah
- 6 Cindy: this this this this one's probably ten times better
- 7 Ben: (unintelligible)
- 8 Cindy: maybe it's just because we were so hungry \$thahht when we  
9 get there hhh that we don't eve- hhh h we hh\$ we're just so hungry  
10 that uh you know taste good to us but to me it's a good mexican restaurant
- 11 Ben: mm hm
- 12 Cindy: I'd like to get my mom's opinion my mom and dad would be able to tell  
13 whether it's good mexican food
- 14 Ben: well you know there are just different preferences
- 15 Cindy: but the- w'll yeah it's preference true  
16 but they said that all true mexican food that you can get in New Mexico  
17 that's the- that's where they make the best Mexican food
- 18 Ben: well that's probably because they grew up in New Mexico and that's what  
19 they grew up eating and liking
- 20 (pause)
- 21 Cindy: that's yeah I guess you well I know you're right but it is preference but
- 22 Ben: mm hm

- 23 Cindy: (pause) mm I just would like to get my mom and dad's opinions  
 24 Ben: ok they're the experts and they know  
 25 Cindy: ahhhhhh  
 26 Ben: they can tell us which we should like better  
 27 Cindy: \$no\$ that doesn't mean we you know (pause) we wouldn't like it  
 28 Ben: ( )  
 29 Cindy: I'm just saying that I've wondered if my mom would like this place  
 30 would be would be to her liking if we took her there and I have to find out  
 31 if it's you know kinda mexican food she likes (pause) I like it  
 32 Ben: ((coughing))  
 33 Cindy: I- I liked the mexican food at Ricard's mom didn't like it cause it had  
 34 Ben: yeah  
 35 Cindy: cilantro and she doesn't like cilantro  
 36 Ben: I like Garcia's too 's good  
 37 Cindy: I- I never really liked that food I don't think that  
 38 their food is very good  
 39 Ben: I like the cheese and uh spinach enchilada they WERE good  
 40 Cindy: I don't think they were very good

Data Segment 15. (same as Data Segment 1.) English Conversation

- 1 Kate: how many (.) probably jus- two I'll walk it off go back there real quick  
 2 (unintelligible)  
 3 ((background music gets louder))  
 4 Kate: that is (.) we'd have to sew the bags though  
 5 Kristy: well we got a (katter) on those  
 6 Kate: a what?  
 7 Kristy: I mean that canvas material we looked at early today  
 8 Kate: oh but that's plastic canvas it gets crispy but we could try yeahyeah  
 9 Kristy: no no not  
 10 the tarp I'm talking about the (.) cover for a  
 11 Kate: oh that cover (unintelligible) OK we need to pull the ruffle off it and  
 12 Kristy: ( unintelligible )  
 13 Kate: de:gather it to get the most material out of it

Data Segment 16. English Conversation (This conversation includes many "unintelligible" fragments because the recording was done in a moving car)

- 1 Trisha: (I'm gonna try) the mall and I go home
- 2 Lana: ( )
- 3 Haley: ( )
- 4 Trisha: jeans
- 5 (pause)
- 6 ( )
- 7 Trisha: yeah
- 8 (pause)
- 9 Haley: ( )
- 10 Lana: I have no idea
- 11 Trisha: you've got a normal body I have like a high waist or short waist yeah
- 12 that's why it's really hard for me to find (.) jeans
- 13 Haley: metoo
- 14 Trisha: no I'm saying Lana
- 15 Haley: yeah
- 16 Lana: it's hard for me to find 'em (pause) I have( ) I have long torso
- 17 Haley: ( )
- 18 Lana: and long legs so
- 19 Trisha: no it looks normal I'm sure you don't have ANY problem( )
- 20 Lana: no I do because
- 21 usually the short (.) you know it depends cause I think they are either
- 22 like ( ) too high up you know
- 23 Trisha: yeah
- 24 Lana: it's- I'm pretty proportioned and most of the jeans are not made for
- 25 proportioned
- 26 Trisha: we're saying that most of the \$jeahhns ARE made for proportioned and
- 27 Haley: yeah
- 28 Lana: ahhhh no no
- 29 Trisha: that's the prohblem I have\$
- 30 Lana: they aren't
- 31 Lana: but now that they came in with the long it's much better now you never
- 32 used to have the long



## Data Segment 17. English conversation

- 1 Ben: there are so many clothes hanging up it looks neat
- 2 Cindy: HUH?
- 3 Ben: this looks neat all these clothes hanging around ((coughing))
- 4 Cindy: what?
- 5 Ben: like a museum of clothes
- 6 Cindy: ahahahaha
- 7 Ben: the clothes museum
- 8 Cindy: w'll you know they're still (damp ) they're not dry yet
- 9 Ben: ( )
- 10 Ben: sure I know it looks like they take two days to get dry
- 11 Cindy: I kinda turned air conditioning here to get 'em dry that way
- 12 Ben: I had a big wet spot on my back when I was teaching
- 13 Cindy: did you really?
- 14 Ben: just like I had taken a leak in the pants
- 15 Cindy: o:h I- because they were still damp
- 16 are they( ) are they dry now?
- 17 Ben: I didn't really care about it I didn't
- 18 Cindy: oh good just that
- 19 (pause)
- 20 Ben: yeah my lecture went well
- 21 Cindy: ohgood

## Data Segment 18. (same as Data Segment 3.) English conversation

- 1 Cindy: I need to get some um (.) oil to oil the furniture
- 2 Ben: ok
- 3 Cindy: it's you know it's haven't been oiled since we moved from Vegas
- 4 needs to be
- 5 Ben: why are you having to oil the furniture
- 6 Cindy: it's WOOD honey (you) if you don't want
- 7 Ben: I thought you were talking about the couch or something
- 8 Cindy: no you need to oil the wood (.) it also gets dry
- 9 Ben: all right

- 10 Cindy: and we have to go a- I need to buy some oil and stuff a- dust it I mean it  
 11 just feels dusty and everything  
 12 Ben: why don't you use Lorenzo's oil  
 13 Cindy: hhhhh what's that  
 14 Ben: that's Tracy's favorite movie  
 15 Cindy: yeah

## CHAPTER VII

### Data Segment 20. (same as Data Segment 9.) English conversation

- 1 Kyle: uh where are you gonna live in a dorm room?  
 2 Lynn: a dorm with my daughter?  
 3 Kyle: oh you're right yeah where are you gonna live  
 4 Lynn: I don't know  
 5 Kyle: you DON'T know where you're gonna live?  
 6 Lynn: I don't know no one ever when Sara ( ) told me to go  
 7 university college so I come to the university college and I say well (.)  
 8 um you know I- I- after they had ( ) reservation form and everthing  
 9 they had asked me uh ( ) questions ( ) yeah you  
 10 probably won't be able to answer it but uh I asked her about housing  
 11 something about being enrolled and getting in and she said she called and  
 12 asked and so she called to the housing and asked them and she said (.) you  
 13 know she gave her I guess my social security number and pulled up in the  
 14 computer and they said oh SHE the yeah enrollment (.) reservation she  
 15 said that they had one ready for me and I was like oh really  
 16 Kyle: (at one room of) a dorm room?  
 17 Lynn: oh no I'm sorry an apartment at Yorkshire  
 18 Kyle: oh right at Yorkshire that's where you  
 19 Lynn: because that's where I applied  
 20 Kyle: good  
 21 Lynn: and I was like  
 22 Kyle: and you're (gonna be) something like next door  
 23 Lynn: no: I think both en- both sides are full but anyways back to my story  
 24 Kyle: both  
 25 sides of the pool?

- 26 Lynn: full  
 27 Kyle: both sides are full

Data Segment 21. Japanese conversation

- 1 Kuma: hoidesa yamadasan nimo denwa shinaito iKenaindayo anosa ( )  
 (and I also have to call Ms. Yamada)
- 2 jaa onegai suruyo  
 (well, please make sure you do it[wash dishes], ok)
- 3 ano: chotto denwa- denwacho wa?  
 (hey, where is the phone book?)
- 4 (1.0)
- 5 Chie: denwacho arudesho itsumono tokoroni  
 (the phone book is in the regular place, isn't it?)
- 6 Kuma: naiyo  
 (no)
- 7 Chie: nande naino  
 (why not)
- 8 Kuma: shiran (1.0) saa  
 (I have no idea)
- 9 (1.0)
- 10 Chie: ai don nou  
 (I don't know [where the phone book is])
- 11 Kuma: dokoni yattan desuka  
 (where did you place it)
- 12 Chie: ( )
- 13 Kuma: majini naiyo (noise) chotto sagashite katazuketahouga iiyo honto  
 (really, I cannot find it hey, you've got to help me find it you'd better  
 clean the room)
- 14 Chie: anta sonna koto itte ( )  
 (you cannot say that your room is also messy)
- 15 Kuma: un kouiu (pause) fukuwa chirabatte naimon  
 (clothes are not this scattered in my room)
- 16 Chie: honto  
 (really)
- 17 Kuma: un  
 (yeah)

- 18 Chie: kokoyan  
(here it is)
- 19 Kuma: doko  
(where)
- 20 Chie: koko ((pointing to a phone book on a sofa))  
(here)
- 21 Kuma: chigau chigau chigau chigau  
(no no no no)
- 22 Chie: chiiyanno chicchayatsu  
(you mean my little one)
- 23 Kuma: sou  
(yes)
- 24 Chie: adoresuchou ( )  
(you should have said, the 'address book')

#### Data Segment 22. Japanese conversation

- 1 Jun: amerikattenee dakara souiukoto ironnakoto utagaundakedo shuukyouni  
(American culture usually doubts various things, but there are many)  
tsuitewa utagawanai (.) hitoga takusan irunee  
(people who do not doubt about their religions)
- 2 Aki: fu::n a:::  
(oh ok)
- 3 Jun: kagakushatoka demone  
(even scientists do not doubt religions)
- 4 Aki: sounanda:::  
(I see)
- 5 Jun: dakara omoshiroi kunidato omouyo  
(so I think it [America] is an interesting country)
- 6 Aki: sugoino demo fushiginandayona sorewa:: dene tomodachi mou hitori  
(I really cannot comprehend America by the way I have a friend who)
- 7 Jun: u:n funfun  
(yeah mm hm)
- 8 Aki: ritsumeikankara kiterunone [Yuji]tteiukoga sonokowa mou  
(is from the same university his name is [Yuji])
- 9 Jun: a sou funfunfun  
(oh really) (mm hm)

- 10 Aki: kanzennisaa kurisuchan dakara (sugoi) haitterunone dakara  
(since he is a serious Christian, he goes to church every sunday)
- 11 Jun: fun houhouhouhou houhou  
(mm) (uh huh uh huh) (uh huh)
- 12 Aki: kyoukaini i- itterushi maishuu nichiyoubi dene konomaene kyoukaino  
(he told me that he recently participated in his church's camp)
- 13 Jun: fu:n funfun  
(mm) (mm hm)
- 14 Aki: kyanpu tokani itte zutto seishoni tsuite hanashitekita toka ittete  
(and discussed the bible with other people for a long time)
- 15 Jun: funfun u:n fun  
(mm hm) (wow) (mm)
- 16 Aki: haa: ja anatawa shuukyouni tsuitewa fu-\$nehhe\$ gimonwo  
(I thought [or said] 'oh so you do not have doubts about religions')
- 17 Jun: hahahahhh  
(hahahahhh)
- 18 Aki: kanjinaino (to)
- 19 Jun: hehehehehhhh hanashitakoto aruwake? karetowa ja  
(hehehehehhhh have you talk to him, then?)
- 20 Aki: un yokune hanasune  
(yes, I talk to him often)
- 21 Jun: un ja sonokotoni tsuitemo nahashitano?  
(o.k. then, did you talk about that incident?)
- 22 Aki: un hanashita sonohitowane: ma: (.) sonohitowane zenzen dakara [Aki]ga  
(yes I have he doesn't say anything at all about the fact that I don't have
- 23 Jun: ja un un  
(so uh huh)
- 24 Aki: shuukyou mottenai kotoni tsuitewa nanmo iwanaindakedo  
(a religion)
- 25 Jun: funfun  
(mm hm)

## CHAPTER VIII

## Data Segment 23. English conversation

- 1 Lynn: and I didn't even have time for breakfast didn't have time to brush my  
 2 teeth and I was like I told Lisa this morning I said I'm glad I brushed  
 3 my teeth last night before I went to bed so I just stuck a piece of gum  
 4 in my \$mouth\$
- 5 Kyle: oh yeah cause I think a good toothbrushing before I go to bed is good for all  
 6 the next day then often times the morning following it
- 7 Lynn: no I don't think so
- 8 Kyle: you don't do?
- 9 (pause)
- 10 Lynn: is that your personal hygiene practice?
- 11 Kyle: well that's for like emergency situation it's like ( ) like  
 12 Lynn: emergency situation?
- 13 Kyle: like you are (.) like you're doing your hobby (.) which happens to be  
 14 photo journalism there is a danger in the Middle East you know most of  
 15 Lynn: ok
- 16 Kyle: us are (craving)
- 17 Lynn: yeah
- 18 (pause)
- 19 Lynn: yeah we all know you'll go to the Middle East yeah  
 20 Kyle: yeah

#### Data Segment 24. Japanese conversation

- 1 Father: kinyoubino hirimadeniwa agetekurette kinyoubini ikunyattara  
 (I asked them to get the job done at latest by friday noon )
- 2 omae hirimadede nakattara komaruyan  
 (you need them [business cards] by the noon, don't you?)  
 (since you are going to leave this friday)
- 3 Daughter: souya sorede ee choudo ee kinyoubino ( ) hirugorokara  
 (that's right that's perfect since I am going to leave around )
- 4 deyouto omoushi  
 (noon)
- 5 Father: hoyo kaishani yotte  
 (then you come to the firm)
- 6 Daughter: ( ) otousan honattara kaisha ikkai chuudanshite kaette konto  
 (father, then do you take a break from work and come home?)



- 7 Ben: | I thought you were talking about the couch or something
- 8 Cindy: no you need to oil the wood (.) it also gets dry
- 9 Ben: all right
- 10 Cindy: and we have to go a- I need to buy some oil and stuff a- dust it I mean it
- 11 just feels dusty and everything
- 12 Ben: why don't you use Lorenzo's oil
- 13 Cindy: hhhhh what's that
- 14 Ben: that's Tracy's favorite movie
- 15 Cindy: yeah