Talking to Foreigners: The Role of Rapport

By
Peggy Lenore McCurdy
A.B. (Louisiana State University) 1962
M.A. (Tulane University) 1963
M.A. (University of California) 1974
C.Phil. (University of California) 1976
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Chairman

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Talking to Foreigners: The Role of Rapport

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by

Peggy Lenore McCurdy
To my mother and father
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to many generous people for supporting my efforts to write this dissertation.

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And most of all I thank my mother and father, Marie and William McCurdy, who participated throughout the entire process, and, as always, helped in every way.
"FT" stands for the talk addressed to foreigners or learners (L's) of some language by native speakers (NS's) of that language. Evelyn Hatch reserves the term "foreigner talk" for extreme forms of grammatical simplification, such as "Me no want go." I prefer, for the purposes of this paper, to let the term FT cover all speech to foreigners no matter what the degree of modification, and to call such utterances as "Me no want go" "degrammaticalized FT." I use the term "FT conversation" as a shorthand for "native speaker/non-native speaker conversation." (What the learner says is thus included in "FT conversation.")

"BT" (baby talk) stands for talk addressed to babies and very young children by parents or caretakers. It has also been called "caretaker speech" or "motherese." It is to be distinguished from "TB," that is, the talk of babies, the talk produced by babies or very young children.

Though the distinction that Steve Krashen and others have made between "acquisition" and "learning" is a valuable one, for the purposes of this paper, I use the two terms interchangeably. "2LA" stands for second language acquisition.

The tapes of the conversations between Petra and Rhoda are titled for brevity's sake "Rhoda's Tapes."
tapes of the conversations between Jean-Pierre, Mimi, Kathy, and Bob are titled "Kathy and Bob's Tapes." Longer excerpts from them that are included in the paper have also been given titles:

Rhoda's Tapes

The First Twelve Minutes
The Mothball Fleet
Did You Keep It?

Kathy and Bob's Tapes

They Beg for Electronics
Scrabble
Concubinage

Shorter excerpts haven't been titled. Within each excerpt, titled or not, contributions have been numbered.

Playback excerpts have not been numbered. What the native speakers say in them has been edited for readability and should not be used in this form for a comparison, say, of Rhoda's NS/NS talk with her foreigner talk.
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Introduction: A Sample of Foreigner Talk and An Illustration of Approach

The Mothball Fleet

(Rhoda, Stacy, Petra and I are driving out to the country to go on a hike. Petra is a beginning learner of English from Colombia whom I have met on one previous occasion; Rhoda met Petra for the first time half an hour ago. There has been some talk about cars imported from Japan. The Mare Island "mothball fleet" becomes visible from the car window, and Rhoda calls Petra's attention to it.)

1 Rhoda: These boats out here?
2 Petra: Mmm?
3 Rhoda: Do you see the boats?
   All those ships?
4 Petra: No. No, the cars
5 Rhoda: Oh, yeah. The ships are um
6 Stacy: (noticing the ships for the first time) Lookit the huge ship! A huge one!
7 Rhoda: Those are the, mm,
   They call it the, well,
   They're boats, that're all left over from World War II.
   They're na-, the navy's boats that uh,
   They store 'em here.
   They're obsolete, old boats that they don't use
and they just store 'em all over there.

8 Petra: Mmmm (very high, rising) These boats, this

9 Rhoda: Yeah, uhuh

10 Petra: From Japan?

11 Rhoda: These?

12 Petra: No?

13 Rhoda: I think those are the ones they don't, they don't use 'em at all anymore.

14 Rhoda: They have uh, uh, a docks down there where they bring in the, the boats that, that, just sit there year after year after year, they don't know what to do with 'em.

(Extended pause, 7 seconds)

15 Stacy: Does this look like Colombia, Petra?

Researchers investigating the speech addressed to foreigners have found that it is characterized by slow pace, careful pronunciation, simplified vocabulary and syntax, frequent questions, and paraphrase. Rhoda's remarks on the mothball fleet exhibit many of these characteristics, most strikingly the last one. She manages to come up with a half dozen semantically overlapping words and phrases for "obsolete": old, left over, just sitting, not used, just stored (the passivization is mine; Rhoda avoids it), year after year. For "boats" there is "ships"; for "docks" there is "where they bring in the boats that just sit there."
There is repetition of locatives: "out here," "here," "over there," "down there," "there." There is repetition with slight variation of sentences: "they store 'em here," "they just store 'em all over there" and "old boats that they don't use," "the ones they don't, they don't use 'em at all anymore."

The usefulness of paraphrase is obvious; it makes Rhoda's talk easier to understand by increasing redundancy and providing Petra with a little more processing time. The question that I would like to address is a different one. Why does paraphrase occur in foreigner talk in the particular form that it does?

For instance, why does Rhoda offer a paraphrase immediately after (7) "They're boats, that're all left over from World War II"? What kinds of indirect checking is she doing to discover whether Petra understood the original formulation of the message? What kinds of feedback is Petra supplying her with? Finally, what are the pressures that keep Rhoda's checking and Petra's feedback indirect? Conceivably Rhoda could have asked directly at that point, "Do you understand?" Or, "Do you know what 'left over' means?" And there are several points later in her paraphrase at which a direct verbal check might conceivably have been undertaken. Conceivably also Petra could have spoken up at any point, acknowledging that she didn't understand and asking for a repair.
One possible explanation for the absence of direct understanding checks and repair requests is efficiency. If Rhoda had stopped and checked, there's a good chance Petra would indeed have had to ask for a paraphrase. Immediate paraphrase eliminates both a native speaker understanding check and a learner clarification request, thereby saving time. Efficiency is, of course, an important consideration in every conversation and might serve as a sufficient accounting for paraphrase on any occasion of talk in which clarity predominates. However, in most "small talk" situations, there is no real need on anyone's part for the information that is exchanged. Here, there is no more need to know about the mothball fleet than there is a need to save time in learning about it.

The explanation I would like to consider is rapport-based. Rhoda, I believe, offers the unsolicited paraphrases in order to spare all of us in the car the discomfort of directly confronting a failure by Petra to understand something. Such a failure, or several of them, could be face-threatening, and could torpedo the fragile definition of the situation that we are all cooperating to maintain -- that Petra is sufficiently competent to participate in the type of social interaction that is already underway, and that the restricted register we are all wrestling with is not only not burdensome, but is in fact easeful and enjoyable.
In 1973, Robin Lakoff called the attention of the linguistic community to the primacy of rapport, and to what might be termed the dispensability of clarity. She suggested that violation of Grice's maxims is more the rule than the exception. To anyone still unconvinced of this, I extend the following invitation. Observe for five minutes a native speaker caught in a foundering conversation with a beginning learner powerless to assist him, particularly in one-to-one small talk with no visible instrumental rationale and no excuse for closure in sight. The alacrity with which the native speaker will jettison quantity, quality, relevance, and anything else he can lay his hands on will probably take your breath away. At least it will dispel your lingering doubts.
Chapter Introductions

This study is an investigation into the conversational processes that lie at the heart of second language acquisition.

In Chapter One I review some of the literature on first and second language acquisition, as well as some of the approaches to the study of conversation which have been developed in several different research traditions and which offer to second language acquisition research both a comprehensive perspective and a set of valuable theoretical and methodological tools.

In Chapter Two I describe in more particularity the orientation of this study, and give some background information about the conversations that are analyzed. In Chapters Three and Four Rhoda's Tapes are examined; in Chapter Five, Kathy and Bob's Tapes.

Chapter Three begins with the transcript of the opening of Rhoda's conversations with Petra, titled The First Twelve Minutes. Playback comments that the participants made about failures to understand each other are aligned on the left-hand pages with the parts of the conversation where they occurred. The transcript is followed by an interpretation of what transpired, in which issues are raised in an order which follows the chronology of the conversation. I first discuss the definition of the situation that Rhoda and Petra tentatively project and their covert negotiations about ignoring failures to understand. Then
the difficulties and frustrations that native speakers encounter in their struggle to simplify their speech are described, and three strategies are proposed as operable when a friendly native speaker is trying to maintain him-or herself in conversation with a learner. I then identify the considerations of face and efficiency that give rise to the strategies and to the simulation of understanding in general. The chapter ends with a comment on baby talk and an aside on talking about language proficiency.

Chapter Four begins with an outline of Sacks, Jefferson and Schegloff's theory of the organization of repair and with the identification of what I believe to be some of the limitations of their approach. The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections based on the fact that in the data I examined, repairs on what the native speakers said differed from repairs on what the learners said; and, further, when repairs on native speaker statements were separated from repairs on native speaker questions, even more differentiation emerged.

The first section covers native speaker statements (Rhoda's "declarative contributions") -- how Petra was able to simulate understanding of them and how Rhoda was able to determine, by guessing or directly checking, whether to repair them. Then some pressures against NS statements are described. The second section covers NS questions, which are shown to provide automatic exposure of the need for
repair. The third section covers the L's contributions, for which repair was only rarely initiated by the NS.

The overall patterning that emerged was as follows: repair on NS statements tended to be self-initiated and self-completed, on NS questions other-initiated and self-completed, on L contributions self-initiated and other-completed. It is claimed that the reasons for the patterning are the following: the completion of repair usually depends on the NS because he knows the language. Other initiation is kept to a minimum because of efficiency and face. The NS avoids initiating repair because of his own negative face; the L avoids initiating it because of his own positive face, but cannot avoid it in the NS questioning format.

In Chapter Five, Kathy and Bob's Tapes are examined. First, the imitative features of Kathy's speech are described. It is proposed that they are linked to her efforts to talk more slowly and to her rapport strategy which is identified as a combination of camaraderie and deference. Further correlates of her rapport strategy are the suppression of NS/NS asides and the use of French. There is a brief section on the pragmatic homonyms of slowed speech, and then there is a discussion of Bob's rapport strategy, which is identified as camaraderie dominant. While he is conventionally deferential (politely asking questions rather than volunteering his own opinions or comments), he is less
inclined to set his own wishes aside for the French's benefit and less willing to confine himself to a restricted register, allowing himself a more rapid pace, more NS/NS asides, and more joking, self-directed comments.
CHAPTER ONE

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter I review some of the literature on first and second language acquisition, as well as some of the approaches to the study of conversation which have been developed in several different research traditions and which offer to second language acquisition research both a comprehensive perspective and a set of valuable theoretical and methodological tools.

On the Input to Language Acquisition

The acquisition of language perhaps more than any other kind of learning activity requires the participation of at least two parties—the learner, and someone who speaks the language already.... Exposure to the language is not enough; it must be directed at the learner and shaped with his needs and abilities in mind. The speakers of the language must want to be helpful, they must be willing to take the perspective of the learner in deciding how much to adjust their speech. The learner also must participate by giving evidence when he comprehends and when he does not.

Lily Wong Fillmore, 1976, p. 119

In the above passage Fillmore is speaking both of first and second language acquisition. One cannot study the latter without considering it in the light of the former. Likewise, one cannot investigate the learner's acquisition
process in either of them without considering the native speakers who offer the input to that process. Every learner must have people who will engage in conversation with him and accommodate what they say to what he can understand.

What follows is a brief review of the literature on input in first language acquisition, child second language acquisition, and adult second language acquisition.

The Talk of Mothers as Input to First Language Acquisition

The modifications an English speaker has to make when talking to a young child learning English as his first language, and those he has to make when talking to an adult learning English as a second language, have some things in common. Ignoring for the moment the undeniable differences between addressing a child and addressing an adult, and considering that both baby talk and foreigner talk are simplified, accommodative registers, we can see that there is something to be gained from examining the speech directed to young children. This is particularly true since the collection and analysis of conversational data in the field of child first language acquisition is relatively advanced. Thus when researchers in this area chose to focus on input (Talking to Children, 1979), they had a firm descriptive base from which to identify both the modifications mothers made
and the functions of those modifications in the acquisition process.

Noam Chomsky's postulation of a "language acquisition device" for a time focused attention on the competence of the learner and greatly reduced the attention that was given to input, that is to the learner's linguistic environment. Children learning their native language were seen by many as "miniature grammarians working on a corpus composed of snatches and fragments of adult discourse," and input was seen for the most part as fragmentary and imperfect. Children seemed to learn in spite of it rather than because of it. The influence of this view has now diminished, however. Counter-evidence has been assembled from, for example, the study of a hearing child of deaf parents whose language acquisition was impaired because of the limited nature of the input he received (Sachs and Johnson, 1972). Much more counter-evidence has been gathered from the study of mothers' speech to children. Jean Berko-Gleason writes:

Sitting in people's homes listening to them say to their young children things like "Where's the ball? There's the ball. Give mommy the ball. That's right, give me the ball. Give it to me." hardly seems an activity that might lead to changes in theoretical models of language development, yet it has done just that. (1979, p. 199)

The examination of mothers' speech has shown that the input children receive is specially modified, even fine-tuned, in
ways that seem well-adapted to assist them in learning the language.

**Modifications of Grammar, Phonology, Content, and Lexicon**

Sentences addressed to young children tend to be short and simple. There is very little coordination, subordination, or complementation. Caretakers may omit inflections, the copula, and articles. They tend to avoid past tenses and pronouns, replacing the second person pronoun with other forms of address. They use reduplication and hypocoristic affixes ("tum-tum," "doggie"). They ask a great many questions and give directives. They repeat.

Mothers use a higher pitch and exaggerate their intonation patterns, doubling the range found in speech among adults. They pause more at utterance boundaries. They confine themselves to the here and now. The lexicon of BT, thus, contains words for the body, for family members, and for such qualities as "hot," as well as words for food and animals and words that occur in games.

Much attention in BT research has been devoted to accounting for the modifications outlined above in terms of their communicative functions. To quote Elaine Anderson's summary:

> These modifications are helpful (1) in attracting and holding the young child's attention, and (2) in providing consistent clues to the child about how to...
map ideas onto language and how to segment the flow of speech which he hears, in order to identify sentences, phrases, words, and morphemes. (1977, p. 18)

The frequent use of the child's name and the marked prosody of BT clearly help the child to distinguish the speech directed to him from speech intended for others. Questions and imperatives also address the problem of getting the child involved in a conversation and keeping him involved. Mothers like them "because the verbal or action responses they require provide a constant check on whether the child has listened or understood" (1977, p. 20).

When topics are confined to the here and now the child is reinforced for looking to the physical context for cues to help him decode the words he hears. Even if mothers depart somewhat from the immediate setting they "tend to make predictable comments about predictable topics," as Catherine Snow observes (Talking to Children, 1979). The child thus can often fathom the mother's intention even without understanding her words. Conversely, the mother can often divine the child's intentions and supply the words that will express them. It is "in the context of activities and routines shared by the child and its primary caretakers" that communication develops and language acquisition takes place.

Several devices that caretakers employ help children to identify constituent boundaries. The pattern of pause and
the use of partial repetition and reordering can serve this purpose. Snow cites the following sequence:

Put the red truck in the box now.
The red truck.
No, the red truck.
In the box.
The red truck in the box.

Similarly, the repeated use of sentence frames such as:
"Where's the ______?"  "That's a ______,"  and  "Give me the ______,"  assists the child to recognize boundaries.

In the case of mothers and children, certain social factors are given; the structures of rapport and responsibility between them are pre-established. It can be assumed that parents desire to initiate and maintain interaction with their children. They also desire to help in the language learning process. Thus Roger Brown, the well-known researcher in first language acquisition, is often called upon to answer the following question:  "How can a concerned mother facilitate her child's learning of language?"
His answer is:

Believe that your child can understand more than he or she can say, and seek, above all, to communicate. To understand and be understood. To keep your minds fixed on the same target. In doing that you will, without thinking about it, make 100 or maybe 1000 alterations in your speech and action. Do not try to practice them as such. There is not set of rules of how to talk to a child that can even approach what you unconsciously know. If you concentrate on communicating, everything else will follow. (1979)
When we come to second language acquisition, however, Brown's advice isn't immediately applicable. The structures of rapport and responsibility between learner and native speaker don't pre-exist. In fact, the native speakers who come in contact with a learner may feel no particular concern about facilitating his acquisition of English. Some of them may even find talking to a foreigner so trying that they simply want to escape as fast as they can. Others may maintain conversations but be principally concerned with avoiding social discomfort and keeping themselves entertained. Yet it is out of these very conversations that the necessary structures of rapport and responsibility must arise, a joint creation of the native speaker and the learner. And it is these very conversations that in fact constitute the input to the second language acquisition process.

The Talk of Children as Input to Second Language Acquisition

Of the various studies of child second language acquisition the one that has made the most important contribution to the study of input is The Second Time Around, Lily Fillmore's landmark longitudinal study of the untutored acquisition of English by five Spanish speaking children. Fillmore's focus was primarily on the learner -- how formulaic speech figured in his language development, how he
managed to initiate and sustain interactions with English speaking children, and how individual differences affected the speed of his learning. She identified his social task:

Ordinarily it is up to the learner to invite interaction. He is the "outsider"; therefore he must somehow give the impression that he is worth talking to before the speakers of the target language are willing to have him join their group. (1976, p. 667)

She identifies the strategies that the learner uses when he undertakes his social task:

1. Join a group and act as if you understand what's going on, even if you don't.
2. Give the impression -- with a few well-chosen words -- that you can speak the language.
3. Count on your friends for help.

Fillmore also reported very insightfully on the input that the learners in her study received. Her comments provide an important orientation to the study of input. "It seems that in talking to the learners the English speaking friends were in a sense taking their perspective, and deciding what they could talk about and how they might say it on the basis of what they believed the learner was able to understand" (p. 695). The friends included the learners so that they received the exposure they needed, believing that the learners could and would learn. They tried to figure out what the learner was saying and made the most of it. When they spoke they "seemed to sense" what
the learners could understand, though they also overestimated. Only one child used language like "Me shot both," and "No, you robbers.... One cowboy--this me" (p. 698). The rest, though they simplified, used language that was faithful to the target and natural. Their talk was repetitive and well-contextualized, confined to topics and activities in the "here and now." It was clear that they perceived differences among topics in terms of contextualization, because at times when they wanted to say something unrelated to the immediate physical environment, they asked the observer to translate. Finally, they never teased the learners or made fun of their language.

The Talk of Adults as Input to Second Language Acquisition

In this field the base of conversational data is much slimmer. There are studies of social factors in adult second language acquisition, but they have focused almost exclusively on the learner -- on, for example, his motivation, whether it is integrative or instrumental (Gardner and Lambert, 1959). Existing studies of the native speaker's part in the process have not concerned themselves with social factors, although at times researchers investigating other things have made insightful comments about them. There has been little attempt to investigate social factors per se, and little discussion of the sort of methodology one
might need to carry out such research. Instead scholars have looked at the kinds of measurable phenomena that can be quantified in large samples, and have demonstrated that native speakers do make modifications of such things as sentence length and complexity and proportion of questions asked. Often the language studied is classroom language; investigations such as Barbara Freed's (see below) of social conversation are rarer.

In this section I will discuss four studies that shed light on the investigation of input -- two are elicitation studies of the foreigner talk register. Two are descriptive studies of adult foreigner talk conversation.

**Elicitation Studies of the Foreigner Talk Register**

The pioneering elicitation study was done by Charles Ferguson in 1975. He asked 36 college students how an English speaking person "acting as the spokesman for a group of three and addressing a group of non-English speakers who are obviously non-European and illiterate" might modify ten sentences of standard English. The group might "have heard some English before, but they are not really able to understand it or speak it." The ten sentences were dictated and the students rewrote them. Their modifications were systematic, resembling in some ways the simplifications of BT and differing in others.
They used short simple sentences and repetition. They tended to omit inflections, articles, the copula, and other grammatical words such as prepositions, conjunctions and auxiliary verbs. They avoided the inversion of subject and auxiliary verb in questions. They used invariant forms for negatives and pronouns: "no forget" for "don't forget" and "me go" for "I go." They used invariable tag questions: "see?" "no?" "okay?" They used reduplication: "talk-talk" and added the subject to imperatives: "you come." They exhibited a tendency to analytic paraphrase (which is characteristic of pidgins), replacing "my brother" with "brother to me" or "brother of me," replacing "yesterday" with "day before this" or "one day gone," replacing "where" with "which place."

A striking phonological modification that occurred in this study was the addition of vowels to the final consonants of words: "workee," "nexta." Lexical modifications included the use of such words as "savvy" and "wampum." "There is a tendency," Ferguson comments, "to use non-English words even if it is clear that the person addressed is not familiar with the language from which the words are borrowed" (1975, p. 9).

It is important to note that Ferguson urges his readers not to generalize uncritically from his results.

The whole procedure was quite informal and was originally intended only to provide a basis for class discussion, so that background information
about the students is not available. The data of this study are very limited, and caution must be used in generalizing from them. Ten sentences elicited under highly artificial conditions, in reference to one kind of speech situation, from a total of 36 university students are a far cry from the actual use of foreigner talk.... (pp. 3, 11-12)

Unfortunately one sometimes sees this study quoted in very general terms without the inclusion of Ferguson's qualifying comments. Freed, for example, writes:

Phonological distinctions are made in FT which do not exist in BT (e.g., adding a vowel to a final consonant: talkee-talkee.)
....A special lexicon exists in FT which does not exist in BT (e.g., savvy, wampum, and foreign words). (p. 1)

And Elaine Anderson writes:

at the phonological level, foreigner talk is marked by... reduplicated forms (e.g., talkee-talkee; bang-bang--for gun).... Another phonological feature of foreigner talk is the addition of a vowel to the final consonant of a word, giving forms like workee, datah (that + V). (pp. 24-25)

In fact, addition of vowels to final consonants is not widespread in Ferguson's data. In the first elicitation there were only four words thus modified ("talkie," "worka," "workee," and "nexta" -- one instance each). (It's even possible that they were all produced by a single student.) In the second elicitation there were only three ("slippa outa," "giva," and "datah"). Reduplication was equally rare -- only "bang-bang" in the first elicitation and only "bang-bang," "boom-boom," and "talk-talk" in the
second. The "special lexicon" included only "savvy" (five students), "bang-bang" (mentioned earlier), and "moolah/wampum" (one student).

I will return to the discussion of Ferguson's study after describing another one of the elicitation type -- Elaine Anderson's recent dissertation, Learning to Speak with Style: A Study of the Sociolinguistic Skills of Children. (I've chosen to discuss it here instead of with Fillmore's study because of its elicitation format.)

Anderson asked groups of children of different ages to role play using dolls in three different contexts -- the family, the doctor's office, and the classroom. The roles included mother, father, child, doctor, nurse, patient, teacher, student, and foreigner. One child at a time participated with the investigator. She found that children systematically modified their speech, that is, produced registers appropriate to different situations of use, and that the modifications increased with age in complexity and consistency.

The foreigner talk role play took place in the classroom setting. The child first enacted teacher and student. Then another doll was introduced -- the foreigner. Some children, particularly the younger ones, were unwilling to continue at this point, or expressed some confusion about how to proceed. Those that undertook the roleplay produced some interesting modifications. When the children addressed
the foreigner they spoke more slowly, more loudly, and with a higher pitch, whether they spoke in the role of teacher or in the role of student. They deleted grammatical morphemes and avoided contractions.

Why you "spinach"?
You know what a farm? Farm?
Do not eat the food. It is plastic food. (p. 129)

The students also used boundary markers with the foreigner: "Now,..." "Well, now..." "All right then...." These were elsewhere reserved for the teacher role and not employed by the child as student.

When the children roleplayed the foreigner himself they produced similar modifications. Phonological substitutions included glottal stops for medial consonants and neutral vowels for glides. Prosodic markings were sporadic, evidencing "the children's uncertainty about what a foreigner was really supposed to sound like" (p. 12). The most consistent modification was the use of a robot-like speech -- high-pitched, slowed, and monotonic, with a single level of stress. At other times the foreigner's speech was portrayed as very halting, or sing-song, or creaky.

While most students only spoke a modified English to the foreigner, others were able to speak his language and translate for him. Some children in portraying the foreigner
would follow his "foreign" sentences with translations given in the same creaky or slowed manner.

An Aside on the Sources of FT

In Ferguson's discussion with his students following the elicitation, the only suggestions made about possible sources were the mass media -- films or television. Ferguson comments that this could hardly be the primary source of FT and speculates that it is really acquired by children from their peers during childhood play. "The widespread familiarity with the American Indian variety of foreigner talk comes only in part from cowboy novels or Western films -- children in play learn to use the greeting 'How!', the intensifier 'heap' much, very, (and) 'wampum' for money...." (p. 11). My own impression, however, is that television could very well be a primary source, and that children nowadays play more at being space-men than they do at being cowboys and Indians. The "foreigners" who turn up in Star Wars or Star Trek and must be somehow communicated with are likely to be alien beings, not even humanoid. This may account for the robot speech in Anderson's data.

Elicited Stereotypes Versus Situated Performances

Asking college students or children to produce FT when no real foreigners are present can only tap some kind
of abstract or stereotyped representation of FT. What the subjects produce is determined by their internal perception of a convention within a linguistic community, not by cues in the immediate situation. The distinction between the elicited stereotype and situated talk with feedback from a real foreigner must be borne in mind.

This distinction is recognized by investigators of baby-talk and has been insightfully discussed in a number of sources. Jean Berko-Gleason writes: "children themselves help shape the language behavior of those who speak to them by the kind of feedback they produce" (p.204). BT that is inappropriate or too difficult may be extinguished when its user is ignored or deserted by the baby who is the intended recipient. "Even an experienced mother is not capable of producing fully adequate mother's speech if the child is not present to cue her" (Snow, p. 37). To illustrate, a mother who in an elicitation situation with no baby present may produce no repetitions, may in the presence of a baby produce many repetitions without being conscious that she is doing so or recalling them later. Likewise, some people who say they never use BT because they believe it slows the child's progress do in fact use it in context. O.K. Garnica has demonstrated that some of the modifications characteristic of BT appear even in the speech of people who say they disapprove of it. Roger Brown tells us about "some parents, very education-oriented, who intend never to use BT since
babies already know it. Every such parent that I know," Brown continues, "only succeeds in avoiding the few features of BT that everyone knows about, such as the diminutive, and unwittingly uses about 100 others" (p. 11).

All of these comments serve to underscore the discrepancy between conscious mental representations and situated performances in interaction with real babies. However, there are more discrepancies involved here, I believe, than at first meet the eye. The mother who disapproves of an existing BT convention in a particular community has in mind both a representation of the disapproved convention and a representation of her own approved version. She may believe that her approved BT is not a convention at all, that is, she may believe it to be unique to her. I suspect, however, that this is most often not the case. Rather, I think, most mothers believe that their approved BT is shared by their friends and other members of their generation who also share their level of education and a variety of other attitudes and sensitivities. I suspect that they see it as an alternative or competing convention, more or less widespread.

Approved Versus Disapproved Stereotypes

An elicitation procedure can be designed to tap either the disapproved representation ("their" convention) or the approved one ("our" convention). Both may differ from

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the BT the mother produces with a baby present. What must be borne in mind here is that for any comparison of elicited representations with situated performances, both the approved and the disapproved BT's should be elicited.

A similar situation prevails with respect to foreigner talk. It is possible for there to be two (or more, distinct or overlapping) FT conventions within a given community. An individual speaker can have both (or either or all) of them represented internally as a part of his competence, available to be tapped by an elicitation task. He may approve of one and disapprove of another.

Ferguson addressed the issue of disapproval and indeed took particular care that his subjects did not suppress a FT convention that was part of their competence because they disapproved of it.

I made the setting hypothetical and third person since I assumed that at least some members of the class would either disapprove of the use of FT or would be reluctant to admit their own possible use of it. (p. 3)

Even if a given speaker may disapprove of such sentences (as "Me Tarzan, you Jane") or choose not to use them under appropriate conditions, it is possible to elicit them from him or have them acknowledged as well-formed in the simplified speech which he attributes to others. (p. 2)

It is not clear whether Ferguson views the FT his subjects would have approved of as an alternative convention (and also conventional) or as individual deviations from a unique single convention. It may even be that he sees the FT his
subjects would approve of and use as somehow underlain by the suppressed disapproved convention.

**Varieties of FT**

It should be obvious from the way I have presented this material that it is my belief that there are different varieties of FT, all potentially conventional, and that these varieties of FT overlap along a kind of continuum according to the extent that they deviate from native talk.

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When a speaker says he disapproves of FT he may intend to exclude only (4), or only (3) and (4).

People who say they don't ever use FT may mean that they make no modifications, that is, that they speak to foreigners as they would to other native speakers. In real contact with a foreigner, however, they probably unconsciously make many of the modifications from (2). My own conscious intentions are to remain within (2), simplifying all I can, but speaking grammatically. From time to time, however, I
find that something degrammaticalized will slip out. My impression is that there is a kind of grammatical filter that switches on when I intend to simplify, and whose output can surprise me.

When Evelyn Hatch (a researcher whose work I will describe below) says that "simplification to the point of 'foreigner talk' is a much more prevalent phenomenon than (she) initially suspected," I believe that what she refers to is (3), the degrammaticalized modifications. I would hope that (4), that is, the tendency mentioned by Ferguson to use non-English words without regard for the language spoken by the foreigner, is much rarer. However, from visits that I've made to adult schools I know that "non-Ll imitation" does occur. An elderly nun volunteer tutor was helping three Cambodian women. She was pointing to numerals on cards and saying the English words for them, but from time to time she would "translate": uno, dos, tres. When I pointed out that the students didn't understand Spanish, she replied, "Yes, I know, but this helps them."

Perhaps the tendency arises from a notion that if English words don't work, you should try your foreign words, or even a notion that any foreign word has some special and unaccountable intelligibility to any foreigner. Or perhaps the rationale is a kind of compromise: "If something I understand clearly you can't understand, then perhaps if I use something I can't quite clearly understand, you will be
able to partially understand it. If what is transparent to you is opaque to me, perhaps what is opaque to me will be transparent to you."

My own feelings of approval/disapproval with respect to the varieties of FT are the following: I approve of modifications from (2), simplification within the bounds of grammaticality. I don't approve of the de-grammaticalized modifications of (3), and I find the modifications in (4), especially when made without regard for the language of the foreigner, naive, to say the least. I was formerly under the impression that most non-naive persons would share my views. This impression changed, however, when I undertook an informal replication of Ferguson's study.

Replicating the Foreigner Talk Study

I made three changes in the design of Ferguson's study. Two changes were in the instructions.

1. I asked the subjects for language they themselves would use (rather than what a third person would use) in an effort to elicit an approved stereotype or convention.

2. I omitted the phrase "who are obviously non-European and illiterate" because I feel it introduces extraneous cultural and status factors—attitudes toward "primitive" or uneducated people. (In any case, in what sense can illiteracy be "obvious"?) Ferguson says that the intent of this instruction was to avoid use of French or any international language. So I
added the statement, "they don't understand any international languages, such as French."

The third change was in the student population. In Ferguson's study the subjects were students in a sociolinguistics class; in my replication they were students in the MA TESL program at San Francisco State University. I chose this group because I expected them to be relatively free from negative attitudes towards foreigners, to be relatively free of condescension and stereotyping.

My hypothesis was that I would find modifications from (2) above, simplifications but within the bounds of grammaticality. I anticipated no degrammaticalized modifications from (3), or at least very few, and none from (4), use of foreign words or endings without regard to the language of the addressees.

The elicitation was administered in three different sections of a methodology course. I did it in one class; in the other two it was done by the teachers. (The instructions are in the Appendix.) Twelve of the students were not native speakers of English; their papers were not scored. Of the 27 students remaining, only ten submitted papers with modifications completely within the bounds of grammaticality. The remaining 17 wrote degrammaticalized sentences like, "Him your brother?" and "What she say? You understand?" There was even one student who included modifications from (4). He used words like "bro" and "fa,"
commenting that these were hopefully like West African pidgin.

These results, informal and inconclusive as they are, suggest to me that substantial numbers of educated people likely to be interested in foreigners and free of condescension would approve of using ungrammatical English to communicate in the interests of simplification. I suspect that this approval is keyed to the perceived level of the foreigner's proficiency in English.

In the replication what probably triggered the degrammaticalized modifications was the line in the instructions which said that the "non-English speakers might have heard some English before, but they are not really able to understand it or speak it." One or two students even commented that it seemed pointless to revise sentences for people who still wouldn't, according to the instructions, be able to understand them. Perhaps the more a subject envisions himself uttering words in semi-isolation with gestures, the less he feels compelled to mark grammatical interrelationships.

Descriptive Studies

These elicitation studies are more recently being supplemented with descriptive studies in which investigators have collected and analyzed tape-recorded data from naturally-occurring conversations. The two researchers whose work I
will describe here are Barbara Freed and Evelyn Hatch. Freed's dissertation, *Foreigner Talk: a study of speech adjustments made by native speakers of English in conversation with non-native speakers*, examined the speech of eleven NS's conversing with eleven learners of English of differing first languages and levels of proficiency who had volunteered to participate in a "Conversational Partners Program." The students met in "informal settings of their own choosing" for conversational and cultural exchange. Each pair was taped for about an hour twice within ten days; the investigator was not present. Freed also taped conversations between herself and the NS's for comparison purposes. One hundred fifty utterances spoken by each NS to his partner were transcribed.

A very significant finding was that there were no ungrammatical utterances. Thus no sentences of the "me no want go" type could have occurred, because presumably deletion of articles and omission of inflections would have been scored as ungrammatical. Thus varieties (3) and (4) would be excluded. Freed speculates that the FT data she collected differed from Ferguson's because "even the very lowest foreigners in this study have a very rudimentary competence in English" (1980, p. 13).

Another important finding was that there was fine-tuning to the level of the learner, with respect to both length and structural complexity of sentences.
Finally, Freed also found that NS's made significantly more use of questioning in conversation with foreigners than they did with other NS's. In FT 26% of all sentences were questions; in NS talk only 2% were questions.

Besides doing a quantitative analysis of the surface forms of utterances, Freed also considered them in the light of their functional intentions. Her method was to inferentially interpret a speaker's underlying intention and assign his utterance a functional role based on "preceding utterance, succeeding utterance, and tone of voice." She observes that all of the conversations had the "unifying intent of information exchange," and that though FT shares some grammatical and phonological features with BT, the two are functionally quite different. "On a conversational level, native speakers interact with the foreign listener as an adult with cognitive and social presence" (1980, p. 28). Besides the exchange of information she identifies "two other concerns: comprehension and the continued flow of conversation" (p. 26). The continued flow was apparently a source of some anxiety at times for the NS's.
In principle, the responsibility for maintaining a conversation is shared equally by both participants in that conversation. In FT, however, it appears that many of the NS's utterances were motivated by the need to keep the conversation going. (p. 22)

Evelyn Hatch in her paper "Discourse Analysis and Second Language Acquisition" discusses data from taped conversations between various investigators with both adult and child learners of English. Her sources include Guy Butterworth's tapes of his conversations with a teenage Spanish-speaker; Brunak, Fain, and Villoria's tapes of their conversations with a Spanish speaking woman; Hatch's own tapes of ESL teachers addressing classes in an adult school; and tapes of telephone conversations between learners and various service personnel.

Hatch argues for the use of discourse analysis as a methodology for the study of 2LA. To make the case for it, she writes, "we must be able to show how syntax grows out of discourse" (p. 404). She challenges the view that one first learns vocabulary and structures and how to manipulate them and then learns how to put them all to work in a conversation. Instead she proposes that one first learns "how to interact verbally, and out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed" (p. 404). She is interested in discovering whether the order of acquisition of such grammatical morphemes as third person singular -s, plural -s, and -ing "is really a reflection of conversational growth" (p. 412). It may be that differential
frequency of the morphemes in the learner's input determines the differential order of their acquisition. What, then, might be the conversational forces that determine that frequency?

We need to know what kinds of conversations prompt use of such a large number of ING morphemes, why there are few -s endings for third person singular (do we always talk about ourselves rather than he/she?).

Hatch is also interested (happily, from my point of view) in exploring conversational processes for their own sake, even when it is not immediately apparent how the exploration will bear on the staging of the acquisition of syntax. I believe her discussions of the operation of these processes in conversations with learners of English are truly ground-breaking.

She describes the way L's and NS's nominate topics and carry on conversations about them. She shows that the L often has a hard time identifying NS-initiated topics correctly and solicits repairs with echoes and "huh's" and "pardon's." The NS cooperates by carefully establishing the shared information needed to identify the referent in a building up process that Atkinson has called topic-priming. (Note degrammaticalized simplification.)

Once the referent has been recognized, the L must try to figure out what the NS's comment on it might be. It often takes the form of a question. The L can then "use his knowledge of the world and of discourse in his own language to predict the possible questions...about that topic" and even their possible order. He can thus make educated guesses when he answers the questions, even if he doesn't understand their wording. Hatch identifies three kinds of L responses to questions -- topic-relevant, topic-related, and topic-irrelevant responses. A process by which the NS aids the L in answering his questions is by repairing WH-Q's to yes/no or OR CHOICE Q's. These repairs are often unsolicited. They serve to model a correct response for the L and they "shift down what is required of the L in order to respond" (p. 419).

When the L wants to nominate a topic he often has to solicit vocabulary from the NS in order to do so.

L: Brother of my, how do you say, my, my uncle woman, you know?  
NS: Your uncle's wife.  
L: Yah...woman is my uncle.  
NS: Oh your aunt. Aunt. (p. 429)

Usually the work required to nominate the topic and to make the comment on it take up a great deal of conversational space. Perhaps because these sequences are so drawn out the NS is "driven to paraphrase everything that has been said in one sentence. This occurs," says Hatch, "in all the data.
we've looked at for adults" (p. 426). Sometimes, however, the NS doesn't understand enough to make a summarizing paraphrase and simply changes the subject.

**On Conversation**

The following is a review of some of the approaches to the study of conversation which have been developed in several different research traditions, and which, I believe, offer to second language acquisition research both a comprehensive perspective and a set of valuable theoretical and methodological tools. The research traditions are linguistic pragmatics, the ethnography of speaking, and ethnomethodology.* Topics investigated within these traditions that I think are especially relevant to this study include rapport, face, style, conversational inference, and contextualization.

**Linguistic Pragmatics**

Linguistic pragmatics has its origins in generative semantics, deriving some of its initial momentum from that movement's challenge to the autonomy of syntax -- to the notion that "a syntactic rule makes reference to syntactic phenomena, and nothing else," and that "all the information

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*In organizing this review I have drawn on the survey John Gumperz made of studies of conversation in his 1977 paper, "Sociocultural Knowledge in Conversational Inference."
one needs to determine whether, in a particular environment, a syntactic rule shall apply is itself syntactic" (Robin Lakoff, 1974, pp. XVI-1). To determine whether a rule should apply, one may need not only syntactic and semantic information but also pragmatic information, information about context. One may need "knowledge of the world."

Pragmatics in a sense encompasses both syntax and semantics. Charles Fillmore describes the interrelatedness of the three terms in the following way:

Syntax...characterizes the grammatical forms that occur in a language, while semantics pairs these forms with their potential communicative functions. Pragmatics is concerned with the three-termed relation which unites (1) linguistic forms and (2) the communicative functions which these forms are capable of serving, with (3) the contexts or settings in which those linguistic forms can have those communicative functions. (1974b, p. VI)

The study of pragmatics requires that linguists look beyond the single sentence to discourse, to the entire written text or spoken conversation. It also requires recognition of the fact that the "study of writable statements and the study of speaking are different things" (Goffman, 1964, p. 134). To move from the single sentence to conversational interaction one must cross a bridge, and once across (as Goffman says in another context (p. 134)), one becomes too busy to turn back.

Linguists crossing the bridge found on the other side much work already in progress in such disciplines as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and cognitive psychology.
The work of the philosophers J.L Austin (How to Do Things with Words) and H. Paul Grice (Logic and Conversation) has had a formative influence on the development of linguistic pragmatics and its identification of meaning with intention and speaking with acting. Austin's theory of speech acts was incorporated into linguistic theory via the performative analysis of J.R. Ross (On Declarative Sentences) and via the formalized pragmatics of David Gordon and George Lakoff (Conversational Postulates).

Intention is central to Grice's definition of meaning as "the effect a sender intends to produce on a receiver by means of a message." Intentions are assessed by conversational interactants with respect to the "cooperative principle" which Grice proposes as underlying all conversation. Cooperating speakers (1) say as much as necessary and no more, (2) tell each other the truth, (3) are relevant, and (4) are clear. In other words, they obey the maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. When a speaker violates any of the maxims, his partner can assume he does it for a reason and he can figure out what the reason is by the process of conversational implicature.

A linguist particularly interested in violations of the maxims and the sorts of regularities that underlie and govern the violations is Robin Lakoff. She proposes that speakers defying the cooperative principle are honoring another principle which she calls the principle of rapport. I will say more about R. Lakoff's system below.
Frames and Scripts

An approach to structuring the rather diffuse notion "knowledge of the world" is offered by the concept of "frame" or "script" or "schema" developed in artificial intelligence and in psychology. Linguists such as Charles Fillmore (The Need for a Frame Semantics within Linguistics, 1976) have argued for the applicability of the concept to pragmatics. A comprehensive survey of the role that it has played in different disciplines is provided in Deborah Tannen's paper "What's in a Frame?" (1979b). She defines frames as "structures of expectations" which are at once abstract and potentially concrete. A human being tends (according to F.C. Bartlett, one of the earliest developers of the concept) "to get a general impression of the whole; and, on the basis of this he constructs the probable detail" (1932, p. 206). Frames are created from a person's past experience, which operates as an "organized mass rather than as a group of elements each of which retains its specific character" (p. 197). A person first has concrete experiences of particularized situations or activities which then contribute to the construction of a frame, such as "washing clothes." This frame then functions both in the perception of new experiences and in their later recall. Experimental subjects, for example, who hear a description of a series of actions in which only pronouns are used will fare poorly
on recall tasks, compared to subjects who are first given the frame "washing clothes." Other examples of frames that have appeared in computer-related work are such event sequences as birthday parties or ordering a hamburger at a restaurant or expectations about physical settings such as living rooms (Minsky, 1974; Schank and Abelson, 1975).

Frames have been viewed by some researchers as static constructs; others (among them Bartlett, Tannen, and Gumperz) prefer to see them as "active, developing patterns" and emphasize the human's ability to modify and revise frames in the process of interaction.

The Ethnography of Speaking

Another approach to "knowledge of the world" is that offered by ethnographers of speaking. They have collected descriptive data across different cultures on what they term "speech events." John Gumperz writes:

....members of all societies recognize certain communicative routines which they view as distinct wholes, separate from other types of discourse, characterized by special rules of speech and non-verbal behavior and often distinguishable by clearly recognizable opening and closing sequences. (1972, p. 17)

Examples of speech events would include such isolable and often somewhat ritualized activities as riddle telling, asking for someone's hand in marriage, or verbal duelling among Turkish boys (Dundes, et al., 1972). Important work within this framework has been assembled in two anthologies,
The Ethnography of Communication (1964) and Directions in Sociolinguistics (1972).

A scholar who is interested both in speech events and in the ordinary talk that provides the ground on which the speech event appears as the figure is John Gumperz. He points out that participants' sense of what sort of speech event is taking place may change during the course of an interaction though the physical context of the talk remains constant. He investigates the "contextualization cues" by which participants relate what they're saying to "one or another of a range of culturally sanctioned activities" (1980, p. 9). Gumperz's work will be discussed more fully below.

Ethnomethodology

Casual conversations not assignable to any speech event category are also the subject of study for a branch of sociology known as ethnomethodology. Like the ethnomethodologists are concerned with the careful collection of naturally occurring data, but to them one of the most salient facts about conversation is that it is a cooperative endeavor. What they study is the mechanism of conversational cooperation -- how it is that speakers coordinate openings, turn-taking, side-sequences, and closings. They focus on the surface of talk without reference to its meaning, giving a very fine-textured
description of such paralinguistic phenomena as in-breaths, and finding much that is highly structured and systematic. Leading researchers in this field are Harvey Sacks, Gail Jefferson, and Emmanuel Schegloff; their paper on "repair" in conversation will be discussed in Chapter Four.

**Conversational Rapport**

Participants in a conversation sometimes say more than they need to say; sometimes less. Clarity is often sacrificed by speakers honoring another interactional principle which Robin Lakoff calls rapport. To establish rapport, speakers use differing strategies; some favor distance, some deference, and some camaraderie. In Lakoff's system we can identify a type of discourse in terms of the strategy that governs it.

In clarity-governed discourse what matters is the transmission of factual information. The relation between the human beings participating in the conversation is not an issue and may be ignored. Clarity is the target in instrumental situations, newscasts and encyclopedia articles. In discourse governed by distance, personal relationship between the participants is denied. The distant speaker strives to evade responsibility for what he says at the same time that he claims the authority to say it. For exposition he may prefer technical terms and formal register, or, to express anger, silence and sarcasm.
This is not to say that the distant speaker is necessarily cold or unfriendly. He may be just as eager to establish rapport as someone using another strategy. But in establishing it he seeks to avoid imposition; he wishes neither to impose nor to be imposed on. Illustrations of the language of distance are bureaucratese and academese. When deference is the strategy, relationship between the speakers is acknowledged, and the power in the relationship is offered to the addressee or assumed to be in his hands. A deferential speaker gives his interlocutor options. A woman saying, "It's up to you, dear" typifies deferential speech. Finally, in talk governed by camaraderie, the relationship between the participants is acknowledged and is considered more important than the informational content of the conversation. Jokes, the use of first names and nicknames, and confrontation -- the direct expression of both good and bad feelings -- illustrate camaraderie. The chart on the next page displays the interrelatedness of these parameters.

There are several important correlates of this system. First, it can embrace all aspects of behavior -- not only language but also gesture, posture, actions, etc. Second, we can distinguish deep and surface levels, that is, real and conventionalized targets for an interaction. A person may, on a deep level, wish to establish a distant relationship with his addressee but at the same time feel
compelled to maintain a surface appearance of camaraderie. The opposite situation is also possible -- surface distance and deep camaraderie. The existence of levels makes ambiguity and paraphrase possible.

Third, we can think of a culture as having a more or less dominant target or stereotype: for instance, Germany--distance, Japan--deference, California--camaraderie, women's culture--deference. Historical change produces shifts in cultural targets. Lakoff notes that the appearance of etiquette manuals in medieval Europe coincided with the movement from camaraderie to distance, and that a shift in the opposite direction in contemporary California has given rise to a kind of counterpart to them -- psychological self-help manuals. Because of historical change it's more
accurate to speak of a culture as being at some nodal point between two targets.

Fourth, if a certain target is dominant for a culture, we would expect that a considerable amount of behavior directed at that target would be conventional rather than real. For example, if we observe a putatively distance-honoring German manifesting distant behavior in a situation that calls for deference (say, meeting the president of his company), we could infer that he was acting conventionally, perhaps automatically. However, a German displaying camaraderie is less likely to be behaving conventionally, since that behavior is not a targeted one.

Fifth, and finally, we tend to interpret other people's contributions in terms of our own system. That is, our own targets structure not only production but also comprehension or interpretation. Consequently contact between groups using different targets doesn't necessarily lead to readjustments and improved communication. In fact, it may lead to stereotyping.

**Style**

Another area that has interested Lakoff is style. We are told from the time we are children that what we say is not as important as the way we say it, and it is the way we say things that constitutes the core of style. Lakoff has urged us to expand the notion of personal style beyond
this core to include "the way we move, respond emotionally, work, and think" (Stylistic Strategies Within a Grammar of Style, p. 1). Style thus can embrace many linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena -- anything that has the potential to express meaning and transmit it to others. Clothing, gesture, vocabulary, turn-taking behavior, proxemics, sentence structure, voice quality and pitch, ideas and world-view, mean length of utterance -- any and all of these can be regarded as features of style.

People see these varied features as interrelated, some closely and some more loosely, and it is on this basis that stylistic coherency -- the predictability of one component from another -- can be assumed. We depend on interrelatedness when we formulate our expectations about which features will co-occur. "We are surprised if someone affects Victorian manners and dresses in tie-dyed shirts and cut-offs." We are amused at the incompatibilities of stylistic modalities in the persona portrayed by the comedian Woody Allen (p. 5). We need for our expectations to be "predictive across modalities (that is, from one aspect of behavior to another)" (p. 3). We also need for our expectations to be predictive across time. We are surprised if someone is on Monday "bound up with niggling details" and on Thursday "affecting an extremely general and undefined Weltanschauung" (p. 3).

Style is diverse in its features; it is also diverse in the kinds of messages that are transmitted by the features.
Pittenger, Hockett, and Danehy write,

No matter what else human beings may be communicating about, or may think they are communicating about, they are always communicating about themselves, about one another, and about the immediate context of the communication.... Anyone will tell us, over and over again in our dealings with him, what sort of person he is, what his likes and dislikes are, and so on. (1960)

Style is shaped by the patterns of choices a person makes in terms of the rapport principles of distance, deference, and camaraderie -- which principle to honor most, and when, and where, and with what other interactants.

We must assume a theory of style something like the above if we are to understand what happens when people modify their speech. It is impossible to change one feature in isolation. Any change has repercussions everywhere in the system and affects how others will interpret our communicative intentions in far-reaching ways. We may find that when we change something as apparently straightforward as the rate at which we speak, we can no longer signal our intentions or contextualize in the same kind of indirect way. This may be so even though slowing has left the literal meaning of a sentence unchanged. And we may find that our conscious control over the modifications we make is quite limited.
Rapport and Face

An approach related to Lakoff's is one proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, who seek "a source outside the purely linguistic system to motivate grammatical constructions" (1978, p. 260). "It is from the linguist Robin Lakoff's work," they write, "that we draw the courage to promote the view that social functions are a prime candidate for the motivation of the great mass of superficial derivational machinery that characterizes a particular language" (p. 262). Their system is based on the notion of negative and positive face, negative face being the desire of every speaker that his wants and actions be unimpeded by others, and positive face being his desire to have his wants and actions be approved or wanted by others.

Speakers may perform actions that threaten the face of others; they may also act in a way that threatens their own face. To illustrate, if I give John an order, I threaten his negative face, his desire to be unimpeded. If I contradict him, I threaten his positive face, his desire to be approved or ratified. I can threaten my own positive face by apologizing or confessing to John, or by acting stupid or shuffling before him. I can threaten my own negative face by offering to do John a service, or by noticing a faux pas he commits, or by accepting a favor, thereby placing myself under future obligation.
The weightiness of a threat to face can be computed in terms of (1) the distance between speakers, (2) the power relation that obtains between them, and (3) the rank of the imposition. To illustrate the operation of these three variables -- to ask a stranger of equal status for the time is not weighty principally because of (3) -- the service requested is minimal. To ask the same stranger for a loan of bus fare would be weightier. To ask an acquaintance would be less weighty because of (1), distance. If the acquaintance were your boss the request would be weightier than if he were a co-worker because of (2), power.

If a speaker chooses to do a face threatening act, he can do it baldly, without redressive action, or he can do it with redressive action -- positive or negative politeness. Brown and Levinson chart the possibilities:

- Do the FTA
- Don't do it
- On record
- Off record
- Baldly
- With redressive action
- With positive politeness
- With negative politeness

Compare, for instance, the form of the following two requests with respect to degree of redressive action. "Got the time?" and "Excuse me. I hate to bother you and I know it's a lot to ask, but I'm in an awful predicament and I wonder if you'd mind lending me five dollars?" Compare also the situation in which the speaker in the
predicament decides not to ask for help, or asks off the record by simply describing his predicament. "The choice of the strategy," Brown and Levinson conclude, "will encode the estimated danger of the face threatening act" (p. 275).

Devices of Conversational Style

Another researcher working within Lakoff's theoretical paradigm is Deborah Tannen. Her work is also much influenced by John Gumperz's theories. In her view the strategies of distance and deference are closely connected, and jointly counterposed to the camaraderie strategy. Camaraderie aligns with respect for positive face; the joint distance/deference with respect for negative face. "All speakers," she writes, "seek to fulfill the universal human wants to feel connected to other people and to be left alone" (1979a, p. 27). Tannen's work has focused on the identification and description of some of the devices which make up conversational style. Below she lists two sets of co-occurring devices and associates each of them with a rapport strategy. The first she calls a high-involvement style; the second she calls a high-considerateness style.

...a person may have a style made up of the use of the following devices: frequent overlap; free offer of opinions unrelated to previous talk; persistence of contributions over several turns despite lack of reaction from others; preference for loud and/or
high-pitched utterances; contributions timed to latch onto preceding utterances without pause; few internal pauses; and so on. All of these devices may grow out of a particular way of fulfilling positive face wants or the rapport function of communication. The assumption is that "true friends" do not have to worry about imposing on each other, and the nicest thing one can do is to act as if "we're true friends."

The actual friendliness felt by one operating on such a strategy does not necessarily differ from that felt by one who operates on a different strategy. For example, another speaker might use the following devices: infrequent overlap; picking up on topics raised by others; hedges and hesitations when offering new topics; use of flat intonation; allowing for silence between contributions, and so on. These devices may grow out of a particular way of fulfilling negative face wants or the defensive function of conversation; that is to respect people's preference not to be imposed on. The assumption is that true friends respect each other in this way. (p. 29)

Tannen shows that in cross-stylistic talk, that is, talk between speakers employing different strategies, conversational breakdowns and misunderstandings occur. These are evidenced by disturbances in rhythm and other marks of discomfort, as well as by corroborating participant judgments in playback. In co-stylistic talk, on the other hand, speakers share expectations about the use of stylistic devices and how they are to be interpreted. Their talk is marked by rhythmicity and other signs of participant satisfaction.

One of the devices of the high-involvement style is the machine-gun question -- timed by its user to overlap with his partner's contribution. For the questioner it carries the "metamessage" (Bateson, 1972), "I am so
interested in you that I can't wait for you to finish your turn before finding out this extra information about you" (Tannen, 1979). However, if the recipient of the machine-gun question operates with a high-considerateness strategy, the metamessage may not get through. Instead he may feel thrown off balance, on the defensive. His overlapped contribution may stumble to a halt. His stopping, in turn, may be interpreted by the questioner as a reproachful overreaction, designed to make him feel like a bull-dozer.

In the kinds of phenomena she investigates and in her overall approach Tannen has been much influenced by the anthropologist John Gumperz.

**Contextualization**

One of the principal focuses of Gumperz's work is how conversants "contextualize," that is how they jointly determine what kind of interaction is taking place -- whether it is a counselling session, a job interview, or just a chat -- how they "associate what is done with one or another of a range of culturally sanctioned activities" (1980, p. 9). How do speakers judge where the conversation is heading, follow shifts in focus, decide when it is appropriate to take a turn? How do they discover what each other's main points are and what is merely background? And,
finally, how do they "go beyond the literal meaning of what is said to interpret what is intended, what it is that motivates a particular utterance, what is ultimately wanted?" (1980, p. 10).

Contextualization cues may include the choices a speaker makes among words or grammatical structures, as well as his voice quality, intonational patterning, pace or volume. Almost any aspect of surface form has the potential to cue the frames that are used in the interpretation of talk. These signals, functioning together, comprise "ways of speaking."

In the course of a group's history, certain ways of speaking become associated with certain types of speech activities and come to signal the communicative goals associated with these activities...they can be understood as indirect means of conveying communicative intent, of suggesting how what has been said should be interpreted. That is, whether it should be interpreted as an evaluation, an explanation, a humorous remark, part of a narrative, a criticism, or as a mere statement. (1980, p. 17, italics mine)

It is especially significant, I believe, that both the contextualization signals and the messages they convey function on the periphery of awareness. They are learned indirectly in the process of socialization and produced unconsciously in the process of an interaction. It is also especially significant that the production and interpretation of contextualization cues is not uniform across cultures or even across sub-cultures. Communication problems frequently
arise, for example, between speakers of Indian English and British English, and between American Blacks and whites; it is these sorts of problems that Gumperz investigates. His subjects are all fluent speakers of English; they have no difficulty decoding the literal meanings of each other's utterances. Still, despite this and despite what are often good intentions on both sides, misunderstandings occur and communication breaks down.

Gumperz has been particularly interested in work-related communication and what Frederick Erickson calls "gate-keeping" encounters. His data has been collected on site and also generated in role play sessions. He has devised an investigative methodology that "like the techniques of the older structural linguists, combines analysis with discovery procedure. The starting point of the analysis is the speakers' situated interpretation of verbal exchanges. The purpose is to discover (a) how and by what verbal devices such interpretations are generated and (b) what underlying social assumptions are necessary in order to relate situated interpretations to linguistic form" (1976, p. 42). His method entails having participants listen to recordings of themselves in conversations and questioning them about their interpretations and about the kinds of information they used to arrive at them.

In "The sociolinguistic basis of speech act theory" (1979b), Gumperz analyzes a counselling session between an
unemployed teacher who speaks Indian English (a man), and a woman who speaks British English and whose job it is to do counselling and to deal with communication problems. The session is beset with difficulties and marked by asynchrony: false starts, nervous laughter, poorly coordinated turn-taking, and many other symptoms of distress.

All of this, however, does not arise from what is commonly thought of as a "language problem." Instead, different expectations about what the nature of the interaction is -- different contextualizations -- cause confusion. The man sees himself as petitioning for a position and as expected to offer arguments on his own behalf "based on personal need or hardship." The woman sees herself as responsible for gathering information about the man's teaching experience and skills and for ascertaining what kinds of training he needs to improve them.

Gumperz's analysis places emphasis on intonation and the differing interpretations that members of different cultures can assign to the same intonation pattern. To give just one illustration: at one point the man says "Very nice" with a breathy and very contoured intonation. British English speakers viewed the comment as the sort of thing one says to a child and found the prosody even interpretable as vaguely sexual. Indian English speakers, on the other hand, viewed the comment and its prosody as signalling polite emphasis, no more.
Conversational Inference

Gumperz's theory of conversational inference is an outgrowth of work done in linguistic pragmatics, ethnomethodology, and the ethnography of speaking. In it he introduces the "speech activity" -- a construct related both to speech events and frames. "Chatting about the weather" and "discussing politics" are both illustrative of the construct, but Gumperz prefers not to view speech activities as entities with sharply definable boundaries that are easily listable or labelable. He sees them rather as operating as "guidelines for interpretation" (1977, p. 205). In general, Gumperz moves beyond listing and classifying those things that affect interpretation; his focus is more on how interpretive frames are accessed during the process of interaction, what the mechanisms are by which they are signalled, and how it is that interactants can come to agree on the framing of a conversation.

Gumperz rejects unilateral notions of meaning; he stresses that meaning is a "joint construction" and that interpretation is negotiated cooperatively by both participants. He also rejects the view that plans or scripts exist only prior to an interaction and separable from it and the view of context as constant throughout an interaction and separable from it. He sees context as created in the conversation itself. "It is necessary," he writes, "to establish
through talk the contextual condition that makes the desired interpretation possible. Thus, to end a conversation, one must lay the groundwork for an ending; otherwise, the ending is likely to be misunderstood" (1977, p. 196).
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER ONE


3 The term comes from R.N. Ross, 1975.
CHAPTER TWO
THIS STUDY

In Chapter Two I describe in more particularity the orientation of this study, and give some background information about the conversations that are analyzed in Chapters Three and Four (Rhoda's Tapes), and in Chapter Five (Kathy and Bob's Tapes).

It's no secret that children often learn second languages faster and better than adults do, and that adults with close friends who speak the second language fare better than adults without them. What kind of input does the adult without such close friends receive? Can we identify a recurrent or typical linguistic environment for him? Clearly we will find nothing as standardized as the environment that schools provide for children. There are, however, ESL classrooms, service encounters, and informal conversations with new acquaintances in a social context. It is from this third environment that I collected data.

Much of the adult data Hatch draws on has researchers as the principal native speaker participants. This material can yield valuable information about the acquisition of grammar, phonology, and lexicon; however, generalizable information about native speaker rapport strategies can't
really be sought from such sources. My data was collected, as Freed's was, from native speakers who were neither second language acquisition researchers nor ESL teachers.

In this study I want to examine the features and processes of foreigner talk conversations, as Hatch and Freed have done, and to further describe and exemplify them. Beyond this, I want to address some other issues. The question posed to Roger Brown was how a mother could facilitate her child's acquisition of language. Those posed here are different: How does a friendly adult manage in a conversation with a beginning learner of English? Are understanding and being understood his highest priorities? Does he seek above all to communicate? What are his social strategies? How does he establish rapport and cope with the threats to face that are part and parcel of such conversations? I believe that undertaking to answer such questions could ultimately tell us something important about adult language learning.

We still have a long way to go before we can determine in what ways the adaptations native speakers make when they talk to beginning learners facilitate the acquisition process. We have even further to go before we understand how rapport and face figure in the process. However, it is important to recognize that they are very powerful determinants of the kind of input that learners receive.
About Method

My intention was to give as complete an account as possible of a small body of data, but this study is not really a "micro-analysis" of the sort undertaken by Labov and Fanshel or Pittenger, Hockett and Danehy. It might better be called a "close" analysis, and at the present stage of adult second language acquisition research, I think that a close analysis approach has a great deal to recommend it. John Gumperz has argued for the importance of collecting as much background information as possible about participants and setting before attempting to analyze conversation. This kind of contextual data has not I think previously been emphasized enough. To investigate rapport or face we need much more information than just the immediate context of an utterance. We need detailed and complete description in order to understand the processes of conversational interaction, to identify the kinds of variables that affect the language that native speakers and learners produce, to make our intuitions about it explicit, and to formulate hypotheses that can be tested by scanning larger bodies of data.

Arguments for close analysis are given by Pittenger, Hockett, and Danehy in their discussion of the relative merits of hermeneutic and nomothetic analysis.

To us the most discouraging characteristic of the behavioral sciences today is the prevalence of an
overweening drive for quick nomothetic results of high statistical reliability, whatever the cost in relevance. The statistical tail wags the scientific dog.... In the last analysis, the notion that human beings can be studied only in batches, or via simple questionnaires used on individual respondents, can be rationalized only by assuming that the behavior of the individual, like that of a particle in Brownian motion, is random, so that one can expect to discern no regularities save by way of emergent mass effects. ... The members of any single community share literally thousands of behavioral conventions which are as dominant as our [driving] rule of keeping to the right, but which are much more subtle than that because they are learned, acted, responded to, and taught almost entirely out of awareness.... In the discovery and explication of patterning, gross statistical methods are neither necessary nor possible; what is required, rather, is some method by which things we "really always knew" -- but only out of awareness -- can be more or less systematically dredged up for conscious examination. Psychiatry, anthropology, and linguistics all supply such methods. (1960, pp. 211-212)

I share the respect these writers have for hermeneutics, but consider their attitude towards batches and gross statistical methods a bit harsh. There is much to be gained from dredging up for examination the covert processes of native speaker learner conversations, even though doing so subjects us to the dangers and uncertainties of interpretive work and denies us the clear-cut results that the study of more readily definable, observable, and measurable matters might afford us. For verification of our work we have as a resource the kind of confirmation that a playback interview can afford, as well as the kind of confirmation that other observer/analysts can offer (what Deborah Tannen calls the "aha!" factor). Yet we are always, as Catherine
Davies points out, vulnerable to the criticism that our readings of conversational data can only be explained or justified by reference to other such readings, and their relation to the whole. If another interpreter does not understand this kind of reading, or will not accept it as valid, there is no recourse. (1980, p. 21)

Playback

In this study I made use of the playback interview, a very valuable tool which has been employed by Gumperz, Labov and Fanshel, Tannen, and others, and which I believe has much to offer in several areas of second language acquisition research. Following Tannen's procedural suggestions, I attempted to have the subjects control the tape recorder, stopping it and commenting whenever they wished to. Only if they didn't comment on a passage I was interested in did I call it to their attention. Initially I asked general, non-directive questions. Only as a last resort did I ask specific questions about particular hypotheses that I had, or offer my interpretations for confirmation or rejection.

A development I hadn't anticipated was that the subjects sometimes felt that I was evaluating them with respect to their skill in FT. This arose in part I believe from my efforts to withhold my own views and avoid biasing their comments by the kinds of questions I asked or reactions
I gave to their answers. They were sometimes a bit defensive when I called attention to an episode they hadn't commented on — "Why do you ask about that? What am I supposed to say?"

After my first interview I was able to modify my approach, and the defensiveness was considerably diminished. I explained at the outset that I would be less responsive than I am ordinarily and would refrain from offering any opinions, at least until I had heard theirs. I also explained that evaluation of them was not the goal of the interview.

I want to reiterate that playback is a valuable tool. If I hadn't used it, my analysis would have been different, and in some cases quite wrong. Playback comments helped me a great deal in correcting the bias implicit in my own rapport strategy, which is somewhat similar to Kathy's and different from Bob's and Rhoda's. Like Kathy I tend to think it's "right" to focus more on the foreigner's needs than on my own, because his situation is more difficult. Contributing to this bias is my occupational history. As an ESL teacher, the way I measure my own success in an interaction with a learner is in terms of his success. Consequently, I am less conscious of my own desire not to be imposed on and tend to repress whatever feelings I might have of boredom or impatience.
There were, thus, some surprises in store when I did playback with Bob and Rhoda. To give just one example, I had interpreted an instance of Rhoda's changing the subject as an effort on her part to rescue Petra from some discomfort; the way she explained it herself in playback was that she was impatient and a little bored. Of course, my desire not to be imposed on is as much as determinant of my behavior as Rhoda's is of hers, it's just that my rapport strategy has demanded that I be less conscious of that desire.

The Limitations of Audio-Recording

The most obvious and compelling advantage audio-recording has over video is that a small tape-recorder can go many places that a video-recorder cannot, and, once there, is so unintrusive that it can be forgotten for at least part of the time. Visual information, of course, is lost. Tannen writes about this problem and puts it in perspective:

- the isolation of a single channel is not so dreadful a shortcoming in the light of the redundancy of channels. Information lost from nonverbal channels, such as facial expressions, gestures, and body-movements is not totally different from that preserved in the speech channel. (1979, p. 68)

Generally speaking I agree with this view. In one particular area that I would like to investigate, however,
non-verbal channels assume a special importance. The area is learner understanding of native speaker contributions. There I think nonverbal channels may contain messages that are at odds with those that are recorded from the audio channel. I would very much like to examine the facial and postural signals learners use to show comprehension and non-comprehension. I would also like to see to what extent the NS can request confirmation of understanding via non-verbal channels. Some information about these processes is preserved in such things as the intonation patterns used by the NS and the L, or the length of a paraphrase. But since rapport pressures keep feedback and checking indirect and subtle, it is important to gather all the information we can, and I believe video research is particularly needed in this area.

The Need for Controls: How Does FT Differ from NS/NS Talk?

It should be noted that it is not possible to properly describe NS/L conversation without comparing it to NS/NS conversation. Unfortunately, we don't as yet have a truly adequate description of NS/NS conversation to turn to.

Roger Brown raises the question of the need for controls and answers it in the following passage about baby talk.
How can we know that some feature or other of talk addressed to babies is peculiar to such talk and not to be found with every sort of addressee? Oddly enough, it would seem that we can sometimes tell and that no control is necessary. (1979, p. 2)

Some phenomena, such as the simplification of consonant clusters, the use of names instead of pronouns, and the use of higher pitch "can be tested against the investigator's intuition and reliably judged to be peculiar to the baby talk register." In conducting research, writes Brown, "we want to increase our knowledge, not confirm what is already banal" (1979, p. 26).

The intuitions of the investigator are reliable in some areas. However, there is a great deal that goes on in conversation that is outside of awareness, as Gumperz consistently reminds us. My own intuitions about the kinds of phenomena Tannen has so insightfully investigated -- overlap for example -- are not very strong. And it is here that we need as a starting point a more complete description of NS/NS conversation. How much variation in overlap should we expect from a single speaker? How much across speakers? Do certain settings and topics favor its occurrence? What are its correlates among other conversational devices? After we have more of these answers we will be in a better position to ask -- how is overlap used in FT?
A Word on Situational Variables

My work in this study has convinced me of the crucial importance of identifying and controlling situational variables. The observable phenomena of FT cannot be counted up without regard for the rapport and situational variables that affect the frequency of their occurrence. In some situations simulation is rare; NS's and L's readily acknowledge even the possibility of an understanding failure. In instrumental situations, for example, where there is a real need to know (e.g. getting directions to someone's home, completing registration at a university), achieving understanding outweighs other considerations. Also, in situations where a bond exists between the speakers and neither imposition nor inadequacy is a threat, even the lengthiest repairs can be undertaken without distress.

In baby talk, it has been shown that these variables have a demonstrable effect on language. The language mothers use in instrumental situations, such as giving a bath, differs from what they use in non-instrumental situations, such as reading a book. In the "for fun" situations, mothers' speech is more complex. Perhaps since efficiency matters less and the referents of topics are easier to establish, comments can be more wide-ranging.

The situational variables that we need to take into account must include (1) the level of proficiency of the learner. Freed has demonstrated that it determines sentence
length and complexity. To generalize about the use of
degrammaticalized simplification, for example, or the
occurrence of repair, we need to know the level. (2) We
need to know whether the situation is an instrumental one
or talk for talk's sake, and whether the talk occurs in a
focused or an unfocused interaction, in a dyad or a group.
These things affect how long a repair effort will persist
and how and whether a failure of understanding will be ac­
nowledged, and so on. (3) We need to know whether the
participants are new acquaintances or not. This affects
how large the pool of shared information is onto which words
and sentences can be mapped, what topics are nominated and
how, and generally how well participants understand one
another. (4) We need to know what the social responsibilities
are that the speakers assume for one another. Is the NS
willing to do the work necessary to keep the conversation
going? Will he make the effort to cope with the threatening
aspects of the situation, so that the "filter" (as Steve
Krashen calls it) is down and the learner can learn?

Toward a Definition of Small Talk

The situation from which I collected data was the
"small talk" situation. Small talk is spontaneous, friendly
conversation whose principal purpose is enjoyment. It may
be distinguished from any talk for which there is an
instrumental rationale, such as ordering a meal or explaining how to operate a lawnmower. In small talk between new acquaintances the speakers are exploring, seeking to discover shared interests, similar attitudes, perhaps even friends in common or overlapping histories. Considerable mutual questioning about backgrounds is undertaken, within the culturally defined limits of what is free goods. Topics range widely and may be impersonal as well as personal. When small talk occurs in focused interactions, particularly dyadic ones, silences can be threatening and closings must be negotiated with care. A silence that falls when two people are seated face to face at a table, for example, can be more uncomfortable than a silence that falls when they are seated in a car going for a drive. Silences are threatening because they may be interpreted by a participant as evidence of a lack of interest, and the reciprocal expression of interest is expected in small talk. There is no expectation, however, that contacts between the participants will necessarily be extended into the future, or that more lasting relationships will develop. On the other hand, depending on the extent of the commonalities that are discovered during the process of self-revelation that occurs, such relationships may in fact develop.
The Subjects and the Research Sites

A Drive to Go Birdwatching: Rhoda's Tapes

I first met Petra at a disco dance sponsored by the Intensive English Program. She was introduced to me by my friend Stacy, her pronunciation teacher in that program. Petra is a native speaker of Spanish from Colombia, in her thirties, who will enroll in the graduate school of Education after she finishes nine months of intensive English. At the time of the disco, she had been in the US for three months.

I had gone to the dance hoping to contact some beginning learners of English who would volunteer to be subjects for my dissertation research. My plan was to tape conversations between learners and adult native speakers (not ESL teachers) in order to study the input that adult learners of English receive.2

Over the roar of the disco music (faithfully recorded by my 4"x6" Sony TC56 recorder with "invisible" lapel mike) I explained my plan to Petra. She consented to participate because she felt it would give her an opportunity to practice English conversation.

Stacy then made the inspired suggestion that we accompany her on a bird watching hike sponsored by the Audubon society that was to occur a few days later. We all agreed.
My original strategy for the hike was to have Petra wear the taperecorder in a small backpack and wear the unobtrusive lapel mike. She would strike up a conversation with a hiker at which point I would quickly approach, explain my project, and obtain the hiker's informed consent before Petra switched on the mike.

We actually managed to enact this unlikely scenario on the hike. Petra and then I approached two or three people. However, the kinds of conversation that ensued were usually directed at me rather than Petra (much as I tried to retreat hastily) and tended to be about research projects in general or the experience of being tape-recorded. One exception was a woman, coincidentally also a native of Colombia, who did direct her remarks to Petra, but spoke in Spanish.

Fortunately for this enterprise, however, Stacy and Petra and I didn't drive to the hike site alone. A friend of mine with a genuine interest in birdwatching accompanied us -- Rhoda. She is not an ESL teacher, and she consented to have her conversation recorded.

On the morning of the hike I picked up Petra and brought her to my house to wait for Rhoda and for Stacy who would drive us to the hike site. We sat in the kitchen to have coffee. A few minutes later Rhoda arrived, met Petra for the first time, and I switched on the recorder, which was visible on the table with the coffee. Their
conversation from that moment up until the time of Stacy's arrival was recorded and is included in Chapter Three in its entirety. There was one lapse in which the recorder was momentarily switched off. During most of the conversation I was making sandwiches across the room and participating only minimally. I also left the room for several minutes.

The drive to the country was a long one. Stacy and Petra sat in front and Rhoda and I in the back. The mike was clipped to a jacket hanging over the back of the front seat between Stacy and Petra. There were some periods of comfortable silence during which I switched off the recorder which was on my lap. There were also many periods of unmodified NS/NS conversation, much of which I recorded, including get-acquainted small talk between Stacy and Rhoda, who had also met for the first time that day. And, happily, there were numerous exchanges between Petra and Stacy, Petra and me, and Petra and Rhoda, now my principal subject.

Little of what was taped during the hike itself is relevant to my research, as I mentioned earlier. However, the return trip in the car also yielded valuable data under excellent conditions. The participants were by that time quite relaxed having spent seven hours together (only two of which were taped) and were also optimally oblivious to the tape recorder.
I happened onto the second source of data by a fortuitous accident. Good friends of mine, Kathy and Bob, were expecting the arrival of a French couple who were touring the US. The French couple had been introduced to them in a letter from a childhood friend of Kathy's, now living in France. Kathy and Bob knew about my work and offered to help. When the French couple phoned from a Jack-in-the-Box to announce their impending arrival, Kathy phoned me immediately. I hopped into my car and reached Kathy's house about an hour after the French with their two children had arrived in their rented car. I secured their consent and began taping immediately, this time with no mike.

Again we sat and had coffee (this time in the living room) and began to get acquainted with each other. Jean-Pierre was somewhat more fluent than his wife and spoke more than she did. Kathy and Bob spoke about an equal amount.

Jean-Pierre and Mimi wanted to go for a drive to see the University of California campus, although it was pouring rain and nighttime. Kathy and Bob obligingly piled into their station wagon with them and the children and my tape recorder, which was still running. I followed them in my car. In Berkeley we met outside my house where I left my
car and joined them in their crowded station wagon. Then we drove through the campus and actually alighted at the Sather Gate entrance to stand on the ASUC porch peering out into the downpour.

After an interval we returned to my house and everyone came in briefly in order to sign consent forms releasing the tape. They left me there, again taking the recorder with them. About ten minutes later the battery ran down.

A Comparison of the Subjects and the Sites

All of the NS's had had very minimal experience talking to foreigners and had never met these particular foreigners before. Kathy characterized her experience as either very brief public encounters such as giving directions or somewhat more extended contact with bilinguals who were fluent in English. Rhoda had had occasional social contact through a mutual friend with a Colombian exchange student over a two year period. She said that that helped her a little to understand Petra's pronunciation. Neither Rhoda nor Kathy and Bob have children or much contact with them. All of the foreigners spoke a romance language and were college graduates in their thirties. Jean-Pierre and Mimi had two children and so did Petra. The Americans were also college graduates in their thirties.
Mimi and Petra were at a comparable level of proficiency. Jean-Pierre was more advanced but would still fall into the broad category beginner. His listening comprehension was better, but he most distinguished himself by the smoothness and rapidity of his speech, and by the fact that he freely and frequently volunteered anecdotes and opinions. The intelligibility of the pronunciation of all three learners was roughly the same.

Because of their mutual friend, Kathy and Bob had much more of a social connection to Mimi and Jean-Pierre than Rhoda did to Petra. They had gone out to buy a French/English dictionary in preparation for their arrival. They assumed host and hostess roles and responsibilities and in fact the French family were their houseguests for the week following the taping. Petra, on the other hand, was my guest rather than Rhoda's on the hike.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER TWO

1 In Talking to Children, Catherine Snow and Charles Ferguson, eds., 1979.

2 I had previously collected data at the YWCA English in Action conversation partners program, and by arranging special taping sessions at Berkeley Adult School with friends of mine who were native speakers of English and students. However, given the focus of this study, I felt that the conversations collected there were not representative enough of the kind of casual social encounter I wanted to examine.

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CHAPTER THREE
THE SIMULATION OF UNDERSTANDING

In Chapters Three and Four Rhoda's Tapes are examined. Chapter Three begins with the transcript of the opening of her conversations with Petra, titled The First Twelve Minutes. This is followed by an interpretation of what transpired, in which issues are raised in an order which follows the chronology of the conversation. I first discuss the definition of the situation that they tentatively project and their covert negotiations about ignoring failures to understand. Then the difficulties and frustrations that native speakers encounter in their struggle to simplify their speech are described. Finally, I propose three strategies that I believe are operable when a friendly native speaker is trying to maintain himself in conversation with a learner, and I identify the considerations of face and efficiency that give rise to them and to the simulation of understanding in general. The chapter ends with a comment on baby talk and an aside on talking about language proficiency.
"...participants need not agree on the details of what was meant in any utterance, so long as they have negotiated a common theme or focus."

John Gumperz, 1979, p. 15

"...there is hardly a legitimate everyday vocation or relationship whose performers do not engage in concealed practices which are incompatible with fostered impressions."

Erving Goffman, 1959, p. 11

It got to be the kind of thing that you didn't want to continually nod your head and say you were understanding when you weren't, so occasionally you tried to really understand what they were saying.

Kathy

When we talk to foreigners we are well aware that they don't understand one hundred percent of what we say, and that we don't understand all of what they say either. Moreover, no one feels it necessary to locate all of the failures* to understand or to attempt to clear them up. In the conversation that Rhoda and Petra had when they first met, Rhoda failed to understand Petra on five occasions but asked for only two repairs. Similarly, of the ten questions that Rhoda asked Petra, she failed at least partially to understand four of them, but only asked for one repair.

In this chapter I will examine the first twelve minutes of that conversation and discuss it with respect to understanding, pretending to understand, and asking for

*The word "failure" perhaps overdramatizes. "Non-comprehension" would be a more neutral term, but is clumsy.
repairs. The entire transcript is included and arranged so that the comments they made during playback about understanding failures are aligned with the parts of the conversation where they had them.

Why examine the first few minutes of a conversation? There is, of course, the precedent set by Pittenger, Hockett, and Danehy's microanalytic examination of the first five minutes of a therapeutic conversation. In addition, there is the importance that researchers like John Gumperz and Erving Goffman have attached to what transpires in the very initial stages of a conversation. Finally, in this particular situation -- small talk between an adult beginning learner of English and an adult native speaker of English -- I believe that the first few minutes have an importance even beyond what obtains in other situations. In the first few minutes certain tacit questions are addressed and implicit negotiations are begun that are crucial to the language learning process. What level of proficiency is required for a conversation not to be unduly burdensome? What level can the native speaker tolerate? What level can the learner manage? Expectations about these issues are set up which will affect how repairs will be undertaken and understanding failures will be handled. This is not to say that the situation is defined permanently in the first few minutes. It can always be redefined later. But, the process of redefinition is,
as Goffman points out, sometimes a difficult one.

Given the fact that the individual effectively projects a definition of the situation when he enters the presence of others, we can assume that events may occur within the interaction which contradict, discredit, or otherwise throw doubt upon this projection. When these disruptive events occur, the interaction itself may come to a confused and embarrassed halt. Some of the assumptions upon which the responses of the participants had been predicated become untenable, and the participants find themselves lodged in an interaction for which the situation has been wrongly defined and is now no longer defined. At such moments...(they) may come to feel ill at ease, nonplussed, out of countenance, embarrassed, experiencing the kind of anomy that is generated when the minute social system of face-to-face interaction breaks down.

(1959, p. 12)
Rhoda's Tapes: The First Twelve Minutes

(Please see Appendix A for an explanation of the transcription symbols. Playback is on the left hand pages; the conversation is on the right hand pages. The numbers on the playback refer to the conversation.)
Rhoda: Well, I hope the birds are out today.

(laughs)

Petra: I understand you only... (makes gesture for "a little")

Rhoda: Mhm.

Petra: But uh, /julai, tey?/

Rhoda: What was that?

Petra: What did you say.

Rhoda: Um, I said I hope the birds are out--outside today, you know because sometimes when it's almost rainy? when it's rainy sort of

Petra: Mhm

Rhoda: they stay in the bushes.

Petra: Mhm. Today, maybe, it's mmm gonna, cloudy?

No?

Rhoda: Yeah.

Petra: You are teacher too?

Rhoda: (shakes her head no)

Petra: No?

Rhoda: Uh-uh. I'm a fr--I'm just a friend of Peggy's and I always

Petra: Ahh

Rhoda: wanted to um, go up to the delta? where

Petra: Mhm

Rhoda: we're going today. It's supposed to be really a nice area for um it's--all the--all the
Rhoda: (laughs) I said that because I wanted to see the birds. I wanted it to be worth it.

Petra: I think I understand in this conversation, this dialog, about the weather: it's cloudy or it's sunny. I was confused between birds and bears.

Petra: I don't understand nothing, now.

Peggy: Even now.
birds come through that area. When they

20 Petra:

21 Rhoda: go north or south they all stop in the delta.

22 Petra: Mhm, mhm. This place is uh up north?

23 Rhoda: Yeah.

24 Petra: Mmm, it's more cool \( \text{than here? No?} \)

25 Rhoda: Mhm \( \text{I don't know, maybe. I brought a jacket. And I also} \)

26 Petra:

27 Rhoda: brought a raincoat.

28 Peggy: Oh, hey.

29 Rhoda: I don't know if I need an umbrella or a raincoat or something.

30 Peggy: Should I bring an umbrella?

31 Rhoda: I don't know.

32: Peggy: I'll get one. I have a small one. I brought some chicken sandwiches and some fruit.

33 Rhoda: Oh, good.

34 Petra: How many people, going to \( \text{No? (laughs)} \)

35 Rhoda: shrugs I'm--

Peggy asked--Peggy asked if I'd like to go.

And I don't know anything about the group, so--

36 Petra: (laughs) /ahbing/ sugar?

37 Peggy: Oh, you want some sugar? It's very sour.

38 Rhoda: Where are you from, Petra?

39 Petra: I'm from Colombia.
26-32 Petra: It's about clothing necessary to the weather, it's rainy or it's sunny. Maybe we need use raincoats or jackets.

34-35 Rhoda: That was probably too complicated. When she just asked how many people, I should've said 5 or 10 or whatever it was as opposed to a long--she probably ultimately never knew how many people were going.

Peggy: Why didn't you just say the short thing?
Rhoda: Well, I think you want more to happen....and (to) make it be like a normal conversation.
40  Rhoda: Oh, yeh?
41  Petra: Tomorrow, some people, Colombian people /ko/ back Colombia. Mhm. (Oh yeh?)
41a Rhoda: 
42  Peggy: I'm going to go get an umbrella. (goes out)
43  Rhoda: They're coming here from Colombia, or--they're coming here? from Colombia?
44  Petra: Yes, mhm.
45  Rhoda: How long have you been here?
46  Petra: How? (laughs)
47  Rhoda: How long, umm,
48  Petra: Here?
49  Rhoda: Mhm.
50  Petra: Uh, three month.
51  Rhoda: Oh, yeh?
52  Petra: Mhm. But, is difficult, este, speak English.
53  Rhoda: You're doing really well, I think.
54  Petra: Yes? But is difficult because, este, when I
55  Rhoda: Yeah.
56  Petra: speak, I want, say many words, uh I don't know.
57  Rhoda: Uh, yeah. (laughs)
58  Petra: (stirs grapefruit juice)
59  Rhoda: Well, I bet you learn really quickly. You-- you're speaking really well, already, I think.
60  Petra: A little bit. (laughs)
61  Rhoda: (laughs) (5 second pause)

It's hard, people speak very quick. I mean,
Petra: This is a difficult question for me in this moment. (gesturing toward tape recorder, meaning on the day of the hike)

Rhoda: Also I notice that I'm saying "uhuh" and "mhm" and "oh, I see" and stuff like that a lot.

Peggy: More than normal?

Rhoda: More than normal, but it's--I think it's sort of encouraging. The way you do when somebody's learning a sport or something and you say "Oh, good, real good," you know. Which you don't say if somebody knows how to do it easily. You don't bother to do that. But, I think it's sort of encouraging.
English is supposed to be hard to learn. People speak quickly and it's not--

Petra: It's--

Rhoda: not easy to learn, I don't think.

Petra: No. Is-- is easy mmm sometime, speak. But is more easy read.

Rhoda: Oh yeh?

Petra: Yeah, because many words is same in Spanish. Only "t" or "d" is different. But the long word? is same.

Rhoda: Yeah

Petra: The pronunciation is different.

Rhoda: I think it must be really hard, pronunciation.

Petra: Mhm, mhm. Yes, ah, many sound, in English, no-- isn't in Spanish.

Rhoda: Yeah.

Petra: "v", "c" (laughs) Is difficult.

Rhoda: (laughs)

What are you studying in school?

Petra: Eh, in the /kubako/ in the university, extension.

Rhoda: Oh. But what-- what subject?

Petra: It's, it's only, only English. For

Rhoda: Oh, I see.

Petra: nine or, nine month or one year.

Rhoda: Oh, I see.

Petra: Depend.
75-76 Rhoda: She didn't understand. I said "what" and she was telling me "where." But then, obviously rather than saying, "No, I meant (laughs) no I meant 'what'..."
Rhoda: Then do you—then do you want to go back to Colombia?

Petra: Yes. No! I must study for three years, here. But English only for one year.

Rhoda: You will be really fluent, probably. Yeah.

Petra: Yeh?

Rhoda: Couple months. (laughs)

Petra: (laughs) The more difficult, the most, most difficult is the tense of the verb. It's "gonna", "going to", "gunna". (laughs) The contractions.

Petra: Is, is difficult. Because in Colombia, they learn English, um, Britannish English.

Rhoda: Right.

Rhoda: Oh.

Petra: The pronunciation is, is Britannish English, no Norte American. The contraction

Rhoda: No?

Petra: is not, mmm in the high school--

Rhoda: Don't they use 'em, the British don't--the British do not We use lots of 'em.

Peggy: (laughs)

(4 second pause)
83-96 Rhoda: I realize that it's really hard when things are slow. She speaks pretty distinctly, but slowly. And there's a kind of impatience that builds up and it's always sort of holding back I think the speed with which you're going to talk, to keep things going.
98 Peggy: Well, where's Stacy? She'd better hurry.

99 Petra: Ah, Stacy come here?

100 Peggy: Yes. And then we all go in her car. \(\text{But,}\)

101 Petra: \(\text{Mhm}\)

102 Peggy: um, this place is very hard to find.

(interruption in tape)

103 Rhoda: (Peggy comes from a) place that's warm too.

New Orleans? She comes from New Orleans \(\text{Mhm}\)

104 Petra:

105 Rhoda: and it's always warm there. I come from a much colder climate.

106 Petra: Mmm, it's more cold?

107 Rhoda: It's fur--where I used to live is fur-- much

108 Petra:

109 Rhoda: further north (and it gets, right now it's

109a Petra: \(\text{Mhm}\)

109b Rhoda: probably uh freezing or zero, degrees uh

110 Petra: \(\text{Mhm}\)

111 Rhoda: centigr-- zero centigrade? zero fahrenheit?

112 Petra: It's near Canada?

113 Rhoda: Yeah, uhh. It's called, it's in the midwest and it's very cold and snowy and so this

113a Petra: \(\text{Mhm}\)

113b Rhoda: seems very warm to me.

114 Petra: Yes. My, my children, I have two children, my children when I call Colombia say, "Mamy, did you buy the, eski? 

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100-102 Petra: I don't understand.

103-111 Petra: (switches off recorder and says emphatically:) Nothing.

103-111 Peggy: What do you think she understood?

Rhoda: Maybe the cold, maybe the word "cold."

Maybe the word Fahrenheit or centigrade.

But since I didn't know what it was, it probably was really confusing. I guess I think I overestimated at some points what she knew. And you think by saying something in a different way they're going to understand, which is not necessarily.... Probably one simple word is what you get when you're picking it up, you know, like "cold" or "hot" and then you kind of take off from that.
Did you buy the, the trineo? When the, the people, eh (gestures) (Uhhh)

115 Rhoda: Oh, sled? Oh, yeh, sled.

116 Petra: say, "Mamy, did you buy the sled?" "No. (Mamy, este, did you eat the snow?)"

117 Peg&Rh: (laugh) (laugh)

Is it very expensive to call Colombia?

118 Petra: "No!" "Mamy, do you--" Every day! Ask me

119 Peg&Rh: (laugh)

119a Petra: about the snow.

120 Peggy: Is it very expensive to call Colombia?

121 Petra: Yes.

122 Peggy: Yeah? About how much?

123 Petra: The /brai/?

124 Peggy: No, the telephone.

125 Petra: The telephone? Oh, eight dollar, for three minutes.

126 Peggy: That's not too bad.

127 Petra: But my children /ey sey/ many many minutes.

It uh cost, it's uh (5 second pause) twelve dollar because they want speak very much.

128 Rhoda: Mhm.

129 Petra: Mhm. They say, "Okay, Mamy," "Bye, bye."

"Mamy, Mamy!" "Okay, bye." "Mamy, mamy!"

(laughs)

130 Rhoda: Who do they stay with? Who are they staying with?
120-124 (Petra explained that she did understand my question and was checking by asking, "The price?" I misunderstood, and corrected her inappropriately: "No, the telephone.")

130-132 (Petra did not understand this question on the day of playback, either.)
Petra: In Bogota.

Rhoda: With, um

Petra: With my mother.

Rhoda: Oh, with your mom.

Peggy: Um, there's a hole in my bag.
I have to go get some /

Petra: Maybe they will come, come here, in March.

Rhoda: Oh, yeah? Oh, how great!

Petra: Or April.

Rhoda: And then they'll stay with, both stay in here? with you?

Petra: Yes.

Rhoda: Oh yeah? Oh that's really nice.

Petra: Yes. I miss them.

Rhoda: Oh, I bet!

Petra: Yes.

(3 second pause)

Rhoda: Is your husband here? Do you have, uh a husband?

Petra: Yes! But he say, "Oh. Go you only, because it's only guwman. Woman? Guwmens. Only womans. Womans? No, women. He say, he say, go,

Rhoda: only you because it's only women.

Petra: Right. Well, it'll be fun. I wish the sun were out, though. I wish it were warmer.
130-131 Rhoda: That seemed sort of leading. That was a similar example of "who" and "where" getting confused.

145-146 (On the day of playback Petra realized that when Rhoda asked "Is your husband here?" she meant in the US. On the day of the hike she thought Rhoda wanted to know why her husband wasn't coming.)

146 Rhoda: I didn't know what the word was. I didn't understand either what--I finally figured out "woman" but by that time I think I'd forgotten what he was saying: "I'm the only--" I can't remember even what it is now. (rewinds and listens again) I still don't understand. Maybe it comes up later.

147 Rhoda: I think (laughs) I couldn't stretch it out any longer, and say, "What was that?" I still didn't get what was said, and I just-- I don't know, I figured it wasn't that important.
(5 second pause)


149 Rhoda: Oh. How many hours do you study it then?

150 Petra: Four.

151 Rhoda: A day?

152 Petra: A day.

153 Rhoda: Mhm? That's a lot.

154 Petra: Yes. But in Oakland, teach English, all day. Four in the morning, four in

155 Rhoda: Oh, really?

156 Petra: the morning, four in the afternoon.

157 Rhoda: But, where is that? Um, in a school there, or

158 Petra: Yes, um Holy Name.

159 Rhoda: Mhm.

160 Peggy: We're ready to go!
154-155 Rhoda: Did she say she taught there? I can't--I spaced out for a second. She's going to school there. Sometimes you think you're understanding and you're hard pressed to repeat what it was you thought you understood. (rewinds and relistens)

Rhoda: Those little "oh"'s. Again, I think it's trying to encourage them to go faster and tell you more. I guess because I think that maybe they think that they're not sure of whether they're being understood or not either. So they need that. You wouldn't want them to repeat it again.

158-159 Rhoda: There's always sort of a little delay, like a two second delay, and then the word, the real word pops into your mind. Usually I can get it, but....
Defining the Situation -- "Disattending"
Understanding Failures

The discussion that follows has three participant perspectives -- Rhoda's, Petra's, and mine. Though I was across the kitchen with my back to them, some of what Rhoda said was directed at both Petra and me.

Rhoda's first comment, "Well, I hope the birds are out today" was to me pregnant with meaning. It was an effort to define the situation and her role in it. I had previously explained to Rhoda when I invited her on this bird-watching excursion that I had also invited a learner of English and that I wanted to tape. Rhoda had given her consent, but it was clear that what she wanted from the day was to see some birds. She was a little uncomfortable about being taped, and about talking to foreigners, and would probably not have volunteered to participate without the birdwatching incentive. Added to that, her decision to come along meant the commitment of an entire Saturday, because the trip would be a long one, and now it looked as if the weather might be bad. Her comment was a reminder that the day could be a disappointment to her. It reflected what I believe to be her rapport strategy -- camaraderie dominant, but with a trace of distance. Her desire not to be imposed on surfaces from time to time during the conversation.
John Gumperz has pointed out that "Conversations are often begun with an introductory phase where common themes are negotiated and differences in expectation adjusted....expectations are signalled and interpretations are agreed upon through a process of negotiation which is part of the interaction itself" ("The Sociolinguistic Basis of Speech Act Theory," p. 7). Rhoda's comment effectively opened negotiations with me and communicated a good deal about her expectations.

To Petra, however, it communicated almost nothing. She didn't understand the words. Nor did she have access to the considerable body of information that Rhoda and I shared by virtue of both our brief prior discussion of the day's plans and our long friendship. She had only a small body of information, really more of guesses than of facts, on which to map the English words that she would hear. She knew that we were going on a hike, but didn't know there was to be bird-watching. She guessed (wrongly) that Rhoda might be an English teacher too as Stacy and I were, and that Rhoda was a friend of Stacy's as I was (wrongly again). She also thought that we had expected her husband to come along.

She responds by saying, "I understand you only... (makes gesture for "a little")"(2). This contribution in a similar way frames the interaction and her participation in it, and is important with regard to her presentation of
self. It is interpretable as a somewhat apologetic
warning -- talking to me may be an imposition on you.
(Significantly, there is only one other occasion in this
conversation where Petra acknowledges failure to under-
stand.) It also establishes a defense against any possible
future charge that she misrepresented her proficiency in
order to gain entree into the conversation.

Rhoda replies "Mhm" as if talking to learners and
not being completely understood were a perfectly ordinary
occurrence in her life. With the "Mhm" the negotiation of
what level of understanding is tolerable begins. Goffman
writes:

It seems characteristic of encounters, as dis-
tinguished from other elements of social organiza-
tion, that their order pertains largely to what
shall be attended and disattended, and through this,
to what shall be accepted as the definition of the
situation. (1961, p. 19)

Rhoda seems at least initially willing to "disattend" the
inconveniences that could result from talking to someone
who understands "only a little." She tentatively projects,
"We can carry on in an adequate way."

Rhoda doesn't attempt to repair her original
comment by rephrasing. Possibly she interprets what Petra
said as a preliminary definition of the situation rather
than a repair request. Possibly she is waiting for Petra
to continue, to further define the extent to which her
English will limit her participation.
Petra does continue, "But, uh, /julai, tey/?" (4)
The "But" signals that even though her understanding is limited she is going to try to participate anyway. She is stepping down from her meta-comment on her general ability to understand and returning to her particular effort to understand Rhoda's "birds" comment. By taking this step she tacitly claims that she understands enough to take the next turn. I believe that the unintelligible "/julai, tey/" is an effort to echo Rhoda's comment and locate the trouble source. This is more ambitious than simply asking for a repeat and is illustrative of the way Petra gamely tackled conversational difficulties throughout the day. It ends with a questioning rise, to which Rhoda must respond. She doesn't understand that it's a repair request and asks in turn for a repetition: "What was that?" (5) Petra answers "What did you say?" (6) with a falling intonation that makes it clear she doesn't want Rhoda to repeat "What was that."  

Rhoda's answer is her first attempt at repair and simplification.

7 Rhoda: Um, I said I hope the birds are out--outside today, you know because sometimes when it's almost rainy? when it's rainy sort of
8 Petra: Mhn
9 Rhoda: they-- they stay in the bushes.
10 Petra: But--
Rhoda focuses on repairing two content words — "out" and "rainy." She doesn't suspect what is in fact the case, that Petra needs a repair on "birds" and sees the day as a hike in the country, rather than a bird-watching expedition. Petra is now wondering (as I learned in playback) if we'll see "bears." But she doesn't try to clarify. And though she may not have grasped the point of the remark -- what Rhoda's hopes for the day were -- she did at least understand the word "rainy." It was enough to allow her to take the next turn: "Today, maybe, it's gonna, mmm, cloudy"(10).

Rhoda answers "Yeah" but doesn't hazard a new turn. There is a short pause. Petra sallies forth with: "You are teacher too?"(12). Her question may reflect the hope that Rhoda's occupational role prepares her for this sort of performance. (Can I count on you for help? For tolerance of my proficiency?) Rhoda shakes her head, but doesn't reply. Perhaps she is wondering how she could explain what her occupation really is. (She tries later and it is indeed a problem.) Petra asks, "No?"(14) again attempting to pass on the turn. Rhoda takes it, but instead of telling her occupation chooses to account for her presence among teachers and students. "I'm a fr--I'm just a friend of Peggy's and I always wanted to go up to the delta"(15-17).

In a sense she is hinting, with considerable reliance on implicature, at the limits of her responsibility to Petra and to my undertaking: (I'm just along for the ride.).
The Struggles of Simplification and the Opacity of Second Language Vocabulary

With the passage quoted above (7 to 10) Rhoda first begins to monitor herself, to try to find simpler or more frequently used words, to paraphrase, to fill in background. It is a difficult process. She repeats her comment word for word, but breaks off at "out," substituting a not much improved but more phonologically salient "outside." Then she tries filling in some explanatory background about the gloomy weather, which she had at first assumed to be in Petra's mind too. When she says "rainy" she uses a rising checking intonation. Petra signals understanding with an "Mhm." Rhoda resumes, but breaks off after "they," which suggests to me that she doubts that Petra will understand the forthcoming "bushes." Petra's premature start triggers Rhoda's completion. She finishes without checking intonation on "bushes," reassured that Petra is ready for a turn and relieved of the responsibility of finding a synonym for "bush." Supplying such a synonym would not only be difficult, it would also obscure the point of her comment. This is typical of repairs in talking to foreigners. On a discourse level, repairs may obscure the point; on a sentence level, they may put the topic comment relationship out of focus. Finally, though it may be possible to repair the literal meaning of an utterance, what it originally
signalled about contextualization or communicative intent may be lost.

All of the native speakers in my data expressed during playback feelings of frustration about the effort to simplify. Most people, it seems to me, find it more difficult than they'd expected. There is an absolute limit to vocabulary simplification which is inherent in the arbitrariness of the sound/meaning relationship. If the learner doesn't recognize a word and also doesn't recognize its synonym or paraphrase, and if the referent isn't available for pointing, what recourse does a native speaker have? Rhoda, after listening to herself attempting to explain in simple words the mothball fleet (see Introduction) commented:

Well, she didn't understand that. I used the word "ships"--as if that was easier than "boats." And then I don't know what I was going to say next--"sailing schooners" or something. (laughs) It's like you don't know whether to give up or whether to keep plugging away. In some ways you think, well, you should go on and keep trying to do it.

When NS's begin monitoring their speech they also discover how pervasive idioms are (e.g., "Are we out of those?" or "I can't get over it"). Rhoda was concerned that in her efforts to explicate vocabulary and idioms she was overwhelming Petra with too much talk, and seemed to feel that one single word pronounced in isolation might have been a better way to hit the clarity target. She was also aware that on the spot in the flow of conversation it was not
possible to plan or control her production to adequately meet the demands of simplification.

I notice that if it seemed to me like she didn't understand something then I'd say it probably—maybe a little slower, maybe even a little faster, with different words. Maybe that's not the best way to do it. You think by saying something in a different way they're going to understand, which is not necessarily (what happens).

When I asked Bob if he found talking to foreigners difficult, he said,

I notice it more when I start to talk to Kathy. I think, "Oh, this is easy!" I don't have to explain things. I don't have to talk as slowly, or watch her expression as closely to see if she understands what I'm saying.

Kathy too found simplifying difficult:

I don't know if I was using the kind of vocabulary that would've been real basic and that they might've been able to understand better or what. I knew I was just making this effort and feeling real insecure about whether or not it was working.

And Rhoda found it difficult. At various times during playback she even showed some distress. She is an editor and somewhat concerned about how well she handles words. Though she knew that the difficulties she was experiencing were inherent in the task of simplification, she also blamed herself.

I don't know how you can talk really simply. I'm not used to being around kids. Maybe it's like talking to young children or something. It's sort
of like you're aware that you're supposed to be doing something; you've got to be doing some extra leg-work, but I'm not really used to doing it, so I'm not really doing a very good job of it.

She confessed to feelings of helplessness.

Actually, I think she doesn't understand a lot. Then I didn't think so either, but I just didn't know what to do about it.

And she experienced real discomfort listening to playback of her halts and false starts and word-searches.

Oh, God, that's really embarrassing. That's really unclear. It just seems really embarrassing--the editor.

Strategies in the Simulation of Understanding

That (what I just said) was probably too complicated. When she just asked how many people I should've said five or ten or whatever it was as opposed to a long... (but) I guess you always want to say more. You want to be able to kind of keep it flowing. It's so shortened sort of. When she said how many people I should've said something very specific. Otherwise she probably ultimately (laughs) never knew how many people were going.

Peggy: But why didn't you want to just say the short thing?

Well, I think you want more to happen or you want to get more information out and make it more like a normal...conversation.

Rhoda

In my work as an ESL teacher and in my experiences travelling I am continually struck by my own level of tolerance for small talk in which my partner and I aren't
sure we know what we're talking about. I'm often unsure not only of how much I understand him, but also of how aware he is of my understanding problems. (Was my last response, despite my efforts to make it vague, glaringly inappropriate? Would he let me know if it was, or would he attempt to conceal it? Does he attribute my non-comprehension to inattentiveness or boredom? Or, perhaps worse, does he fear that his English is so hopeless that even an interested and attentive person like myself is powerless to penetrate it?)

Lily Wong Fillmore in her landmark study of child second language acquisition (see Chapter One) formulated a set of cognitive and social strategies for acquisition from the beginning learner's point of view. The one relevant here is the second:

Join a group and act as if you understand what's going on, even if you don't. (1976, p. 667)

On the basis of data collected in this study of adult native speakers, I would like to propose that the following three social strategies operate for native speakers making small talk with foreigners.

1. Act as if you understand most of what the L says, even if you don't.

2. Act as if you believe the L understands all of what you say, even if you suspect he doesn't. Smuggle in an explanation.
3. If something happens which exposes that the L doesn't understand what he professed to understand, if possible pretend not to notice.

All of this amounts to saying that certain repair requests, repair initiations, and understanding checks are "dispreferred," to use Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks' term, or at least constrained.

Strategy 1: In fact NS's don't profess to understand everything the L says. They do request some repairs, but they try not to do it too often. A high concentration of repair requests disrupts thematic continuity and potentially poses a face threat to the L. Most of us have experienced conversations with L's in which we ask for a repetition and still don't understand. If the second or third request for a repetition still hasn't produced a satisfactory repair there is a very pronounced tendency to move on, if possible without acknowledging the failure.

L: He brubay.
NS: What?
L: He bruwbey.
NS: Sorry, he what?
L: He prubay...brubey? No, brubey.
NS: Oh.

NS repair requests tend to be spread evenly throughout a conversation rather than concentrated. Also, the number of repair requests on a single utterance is limited.
Strategy 2: For a NS to ask a L directly and without invitation if he understands something that has been said is a rare occurrence in get-acquainted small talk. The L, by virtue of not requesting a repair, is at least by implication professing to understand. For the NS to question this is potentially to challenge him in his role as a participant in the conversation, to challenge his truthfulness. (Understanding checks are discussed in more detail below.)

Strategy 3: This kind of exposure occurs frequently when the learner makes an inappropriate response to a question or a comment and is rarely acknowledged. If the L's response is irrelevant to the topic at hand, the NS abandons the topic at hand and treats the L's irrelevant response as if it had been relevant. It becomes, in fact, the new standard by which relevance is judged.

Behind the Strategies: Face and Efficiency*

The NS and the L strategies arise primarily from the threats to face that are posed by these conversations and secondarily from considerations of efficiency.

*It is possible to stretch the face terminology to cover efficiency. A participant who wants to avoid conversational inefficiencies can be said to be protecting his own negative face -- his desire not to be imposed on.
participants must to some degree ignore, or in Goffman's words "disattend" two threatening possibilities: 1) that the learner is an inadequate conversational partner; and 2) that the learner is imposing on the native speaker. As for efficiency considerations, they are operable even when face threats have been neutralized, as in conversations between close friends. Participants are naturally reluctant to undertake too much of the conversational "work" of repair.

Thus a learner may simulate understanding for a number of compelling reasons, based in both efficiency and face.

a) He may be embarrassed about his failure to understand.

b) He may fear further embarrassment. Possibly in the repair process some previously undetected monumental understanding failure may be exposed. Possibly the repair process itself will fail. (See below, Did You Keep It?)

c) He may want to spare the NS embarrassment.

d) He may fear a redefinition of the situation.

e) He may fear imposing on the NS. Repairs can be burdensome. (Ironically, the L's simulation of understanding to avoid imposing on the NS sometimes has the opposite effect. To the extent that the NS really wishes the L to understand, he must work very hard at monitoring the L, to discover whether the L is attempting to conceal any understanding failure.)

f) He may himself wish to avoid his share of the repair burden.

g) He may have reason to hope that at any moment something will provide him with the clue he needs
to understand, without having to activate the cumbersome repair machinery.

h) He may not be interested in the subject or desirous of understanding what might be said about it.

The following passage illustrates how protracted an unsuccessful repair effort can be and how avoiding such efforts can be face-saving. Petra is describing a Christmas tree her children made at school, for which they constructed a kind of paper star. We are all in the car on the way home from the hike.

**Did You Keep It?**

1 Petra: They put a big estar.
2 Rhoda: Oh yeh?
3 Petra: They /kuwd/ the star.
4 Rhoda: Oh yeh? Did you save it?
5 Petra: Mm?
6 Rhoda: Did you save it for--for them, to put up this year too? Did you keep it or did you throw it away?
7 Petra: Did you keep?
8 Rhoda: Umm, (3 sec) I wondered if you--oh let's see, keep, save
9 Petra: What does mean, keep?
10 Stacy: Guardar? Keep? Keep it? [Save it?
11 Petra: [Keep
12 Rhoda: N--save it.
13 Petra: No?
Stacy: Don't let it go? Did you throw it away, no!

Rhoda: Do you, do they still have it? Do they have it now, the tree?  Oh yeh?

Petra: [Yes.] [Mhm.]

Stacy: (laughs)

Petra: In the, in the school the children make the boot. Same here.

Stacy laughs, I think, because the prolonged effort ends so anticlimactically. Rhoda reported that it had seemed to her at the time that even at the end Petra still hadn't understood about "keep." I thought so too. Petra confirmed this; she said she hadn't recognized Stacy's "guardar"(10) and hadn't connected Rhoda's final question "Do they have it now, the tree?" (15) with the earlier effort to explain "keep."

Native speakers also simulate understanding. Some of their reasons for doing so are the same as the L's -- they may also be waiting for clues or unwilling to engage on topics that don't interest them. Other reasons are the obverse of the L's. When a NS fails to understand, it usually counts as the L's fault rather than his own. But although the failure may not arise from the NS's inadequacy, the resulting embarrassment affects him as well as the L. Again, with respect to imposition, what the NS fears is being imposed on rather than imposing. He also fears
apologies. If the L apologizes for imposing, the NS will either have to accept the apology or deny, perhaps untruthfully, the imposition.

The cumulative effect of these strategies operating in concert can sometimes be comical, especially when viewed in the light of Grice's maxim of Quality. We sometimes see both the native speaker and the learner cooperating to create the appearance of understanding with each fully aware of the other's knowledge that this projection is a fiction. They struggle to maintain a rhythm of turn-taking, supply credible back-channel cues, cooperatively signal closures, hastily move on to new topics and so on. Their efforts may be uncoordinated and full of premature starts and awkward lapses, but they cooperate in trying to keep up appearances.

It is true that even among native speakers simulation is a pervasive phenomenon. We may even want to claim that it is inherent in the very fabric of human communication. What I want to emphasize here is that in talking to foreigners these practices are often carried to extremes. They stretch the limits of what is possible. People find tolerable and acceptable a level of literal understanding that is quite low, and as long as everyone is felt to be cooperating, almost anything goes.

Rhoda and Kathy made some illuminating comments on understanding in playback. Rhoda emphasized the importance of non-verbal communication, inferencing, believing that
communication was possible, and somehow sensing what the other person intended.

You have to rely on the force of how you say something. You try to use sort of non-verbal ways, almost, to get some of the information across. I don't know how you do it, but you point or you— I don't know. Sometimes I just sort of go on hoping that if you say it louder (laughs) or more intensely, that people will be able to read by your expression or something, some of the content. I think I do that....talking to someone over a longer period of time. Because I think it's sometimes how I read people, when I've been travelling or something and I'm not quite sure what's going on. Usually you pick up one word, and then sort of the emotional content, plus the one word gives you a sense. And then you just make mammoth assumptions from that— that it's good, it's bad, it's hard or easy. And then you sort of jump to what it is.

Kathy emphasized empathy and trust. She said about Mimi that:

She seemed to kind of laugh sometimes and nod her head, but I don't think she really understood some of what was going on. A lot of times she thought maybe it wasn't worth the trouble to get it really all figured out, so she'd just kind of go along. But she was trying to say, you know, "Whatever you want to do is OK with me," and, "I'm willing to cooperate," even though she didn't really figure it out, because she basically trusted that whatever we were trying to do was going to be OK with her.

The Simulation of Understanding in Baby Talk

There is considerable evidence that the simulation of understanding, the primacy of rapport over clarity, and the maintenance of talk for its own sake permeate conversation even in its very earliest stages. Susan Ervin-Tripp
reports that in conversations between mothers and small children exchange of information about the world is often not the real goal; instead the tacit purpose is getting the child to talk. This can be seen in the following description by Catherine Snow of early conversations between mothers and babies.

A six month old is capable of producing many behaviors which, though they might not be intended as communicative by the baby, are nonetheless interpretable, and can thus be recruited into conversations by the mother. For example, a mother who holds up a mobile and says to her child, "Isn't that pretty?" may be equally convinced that communication occurred by a response of looking at the mobile from a three month old, reaching for it by a six month old, or saying "Pretty," by a twelve month old. The mother has, by posing a question, created a context within which a very large class of behaviors can be treated as responses, ie. as communicational. (1978, p. 256) (italics mine)

A mother is satisfied with very minimal responses on the part of her baby; she is satisfied whether the child intends to communicate or not. She persists in going through the motions, so to speak, despite the fact that the discrepancy between her talk with the baby and a "real" conversation is considerable.

One might expect a change in the nature or form of conversation when one participant is incapable of really holding his own. But what we find instead is the other participant taking up the slack, filling in for the deficient partner, and marshalling him somehow through the conversational maneuvers. That is to say, rather than
finding two or three different prototypes for conversation we find one prototype and a number of more or less successful approximations of it.

An Aside on Breaking the Ice: Talking About Language Proficiency

In the Kitchen

45 Rhoda: How long have you been here?
46 Petra: How? (laughs)
47 Rhoda: How long, um,
48 Petra: Here?
49 Rhoda: Mhm.
50 Petra: Uh, three month.
51 Rhoda: Oh, yeah? Mhm.

52 Petra: But, is difficult, este, speak English.
53 Rhoda: You're doing really well, I think.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the two major face threats that I think underlie conversations with foreigners is the threat of learner inadequacy. The level of proficiency the learner has attained and the speed with which he has attained it can be (and often are) thought to be reflections of his personal worth.

At the point in the conversation where the passage quoted above occurred, a definition of the situation had been established, though very tentatively. There was an implicit negotiated assumption that Petra's level of proficiency was adequate to carry on the conversation without imposing too great a burden on Rhoda. In order to maintain this definition, both speakers would at times have to "proffer civil inattention" to failures of understanding.
Erving Goffman writes about "incidents," events in an encounter which "unintentionally introduce information that places a sudden burden on the suppressive work being done in the encounter." He writes about "leaky" words. "In a highschool classroom, for example, sexual issues and sexual statuses may be effectively suppressed until a word is introduced whose homonymous alternate is frankly sexual, thus momentarily inundating the interaction with distracting considerations" (Encounters, p. 46).

I think that for Petra and Rhoda an "incident" takes place when Rhoda asks the question quoted above. The information that Petra has been here for three months is "leaky." It raises the question of her proficiency, of how well someone could be expected to speak who has lived in a country for three months. It creates tension. A speaker confronted with an incident, according to Goffman, has three options. She can try to cope with the incident by "spontaneously treating (it) as if it had not occurred, or by integrating it as best [she] can into the official definition of the situation, or by merely sustaining tension" (1961, p. 51). Petra chooses the second course -- she confronts the English proficiency issue directly and attempts to integrate it.

What follows is Petra's most extended set of contributions thus far (54-95). Its theme is something like "the difficulties one has learning English." It is likely
that she has discussed the subject before with her classmates; it has the advantage of being somewhat rehearsed. And it accomplishes several different things. First, it is distancing. It denies that the relationship between her and Rhoda and the somewhat threatening personal feelings involved are relevant. It objectifies the situation. (We can speak with scholarly detachment about the problems one encounters in learning a second language.)

She invites the comparison of what she has been ineptly saying with what she would say if she only knew the English words. "When...I speak...I want to say many words uh, I don't know" (54-56). She invites the comparison of herself speaking with herself reading, more quickly and easily. She has the chance to display information she has about contrasts between English and Spanish and about reduced forms of English tenses. She attributes some of the difficulties she has with contractions and pronunciation to her Colombian schooling in British English (93).

Finally, the direct reference to her proficiency elicits from Rhoda some supportive statements and compliments: "You're speaking really well already, I think." "I bet you learn really quickly" (59). Goffman gives as an illustration of integration the situation of a person with a physical handicap. Although he may very strongly desire that the handicap be completely ignored, he "may nonetheless feel that the tension will be intolerable unless he openly alludes to his condition and 'breaks' the
ice’” (1961, p. 50). In my experience, beginning learners will often raise and discuss directly their proficiency in the early stages of getting acquainted. The other learners in my data, Jean-Pierre and Mimi, were no exceptions to this.

That the proficiency topic will be nominated, that it will be first raised by the learner, and that the native speaker will respond with explicit praise and encouragement may prove to be recurrent features of foreigner talk conversations. It would be interesting to locate this topic in larger bodies of data across many speakers to discover what regularities exist in the ways in which the face threatening aspects of the proficiency issue are mitigated and integrated into the definition of the situation.
My interpretation of Petra's intonation contour here was verified by Rhoda in playback. There are so many difficulties inherent in the interpretation of prosody that one is tempted to avoid discussing it altogether. Yet it is so crucial to understanding that it is impossible to avoid. James Collins and Sarah Michaels (1980) insightfully describe its problematic nature and its central position in their paper, "The importance of conversational discourse strategies in the acquisition of literacy":

While there is still much that remains to be understood about the uses and regularities of prosodic signals, there is mounting evidence that prosody serves a vast range of complex communicative functions (see Crystal, 1969, for a survey of this literature). The difficulty facing researchers concerned with prosodic cues and their functions is that prosody is at once pervasive yet elusive. It is more context-sensitive and inherently variable than lexical items and syntactic constructions. Hence its functional characteristics are less generalizable, less encodable; in a rough and ready sense, less "grammatical." This state of affairs derives, in its turn, from a series of causes: (1) as a physical phenomenon prosodic systems are poorly understood, as is evidenced both by the acoustic and physiological literature and by the fact that no standard notational system yet exists; (2) as non-segmental signals, prosodic cues are not readily susceptible to native speaker awareness and precise characterization (Silverstein, 1977); and lastly, (3) the reduction of the speech signal to orthographic substitutes, in written transcripts, entails a severe loss of prosodic information.
CHAPTER FOUR

REPAIR IN FOREIGNER TALK CONVERSATIONS

Chapter Four begins with an outline of Sacks, Jefferson and Schegloff's theory of the organization of repair and with the identification of what I believe to be some of the limitations of their approach. The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections based on the fact that in the data I examined, repairs on what the native speakers said differed from repairs on what the learners said; and, further, when repairs on native speaker statements were separated from repairs on native speaker questions, even more differentiation emerged.

The first section covers native speaker statements (Rhoda's "declarative contributions") -- how Petra was able to simulate understanding of them and how Rhoda was able to determine, by guessing or directly checking, whether to repair them. Then some pressures against NS statements are described. The second section covers NS questions, which are shown to provide automatic exposure of the need for repair. The third section covers the L's contributions, for which repair was only rarely initiated by the NS.

The overall patterning that emerged was as follows: repair on NS statements tended to be self-initiated and
self-completed, on NS questions other-initiated and self-completed, on L contributions self-initiated and other-completed. It is claimed that the reasons for the patterning are the following: the completion of repair usually depends on the NS because he knows the language. As for initiation, other initiation is kept to a minimum because of efficiency and face. The NS avoids initiating repair because of his own negative face; the L avoids initiating it because of his own positive face, but cannot avoid it in the NS questioning format.

Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks

According to these authors, "an 'organization of repair' operates in conversation addressed to recurrent problems in speaking, hearing, and understanding." In their conversational data they found a "strong empirical skewing in which self-repair predominates over other repair" (1977, p. 361).

They distinguish between the initiation and the outcome of a repair. Sometimes, for example, "other" initiates a repair and "self" completes it; likewise, self may initiate, and so on through all the possible combinations. They identify three positions at which repair can occur -- (1) in the same turn as the trouble source (also known as the "repairable"), (2) in that turn's transition space, or (3) in the third turn to the trouble source turn.
While self can initiate repair from any of the three positions, other initiates overwhelmingly in the turn subsequent to the trouble source turn. Self and other signal repair initiations differently -- self with non-lexical perturbations such as cut-offs, sound stretches and "uh"'s; and other with "huh?" or "what?", question words, partial repeats with or without question words, and "you mean" followed by a possible understanding of what self has said.

Repairable is defined very broadly in their system. Some things are repaired that apparently have nothing wrong with them: "Sure enough ten minutes later the bell r--the doorbell rang..." (p. 363). "In view of the point about repair being initiated with no apparent error," they write, "it appears that nothing is, in principle, excludable from the class repairable" (p. 363). They minimize the differences among repairables both in terms of self or other initiation and in terms of possible repair position.

Self- and other-initiated repair deal with the same trouble types...the types of trouble sources which we have investigated and of which we know,...have repair initiated from each of the set of positions previously mentioned and thus by either self or other.... Some types, however, are overwhelmingly initiated by one or the other. (p. 370)

Grammar corrections, for example, are overwhelmingly made by self.
Research undertaken within the ethnomethodological framework has made tremendous contributions to the study of conversation. However, this methodology places many obstacles in the path of the investigation of second language learning as a conversational process.\(^1\) We will sacrifice a great deal if we confine ourselves as the ethnomethodologists do to the observables of surface structure with no recourse to meaning and no way of ascertaining what participants know or don't know or what their motivations are.

In the particular area under consideration here, repair, it seems to me that the methodology gets in the way from time to time. For example, I think that creating a general category "repairable" so large that nothing in principle is excluded from it isn't illuminating. The differences among repairables are more interesting than the tenuous similarities which unite them. Also, to say that self and other repairs repair the same type of repairable is misleading.

Some self repairs are made on trouble sources which could not possibly be repaired by others. Take for example the following self repair signalled by the cut-off after "like."

"Dean came up en 'e said 'I'd like--'Bernice?' he said, 'I'd like t' take you over tuh Shakey's en buy you a beer." (p. 363)

How could other repair a word that hasn't even been spoken? And even when the repairable word is spoken, other still
can't initiate repair unless he has the necessary information.

L: I read a very interesting story today.
M: uhm, what's that?
L: w'll not today, maybe yesterday, aw who knows when, huh, it's called Dragon Stew (p. 366)

In this example it seems highly unlikely that other could have repaired "yesterday." What I'm suggesting is that there are some trouble types whose repairs are not just overwhelmingly initiated by self, but exclusively initiated by self. One can't help wondering if self-repair would predominate to such an extent if we subtracted all its victories over other where self had such an unfair advantage.

A very important claim that Sacks et al. make about other-initiated repair is that it is withheld while the trouble source turn is in progress. Not only that, it is "regularly withheld a bit PAST the possible completion of the trouble source turn...providing an 'extra' opportunity, in an expanded transition space, for speaker of the trouble source to self-initiate repair" (p. 374). To me this is a very interesting claim, and a correct one, but I think it should be noted that audio conversational data, always somewhat vulnerable, is especially vulnerable here. If other raises an eyebrow, cocks his head, or otherwise assumes an inaudible quizzical expression, he is unarguably initiating repair. He may even do so while self's trouble
source turn is still in progress, triggering a non-lexical perturbation and a repair by self. Thus the tape recorder will record as a self-initiation what was in fact really an other-initiation.

Moreover, withholding occurs only for certain types of repairables. In what sense could other be said to withhold repair of something he doesn't know and couldn't know needed repair (as in the Dragon Stew example)? And in a situation where other does know something needs repair, he withholds repair only part of the time. He wouldn't withhold, for example, in the following fabricated example:

A: What time is it?  
B: (looking at a wall clock) Five o'clock.  
C: No, it's five thirty. That clock is stopped.  
(not withheld, I believe)

There would be no point for C to give B an "extra opportunity" to self repair something he doesn't know and couldn't know needed repair. For the same reason, other initiations of hearing trouble repairs aren't withheld either.

A: Were you in therapy with a private doctor?  
B: yah  
A: Have you ever tried a clinic?  
B: What?  
A: Have you ever tried a clinic?  
(not withheld, I believe)  
A: Have you ever tried a clinic?  

I believe that the organization of repair in conversation cannot be adequately described without referring to what a speaker knows and to what he believes about what his partner knows. This information could be obtained very
objectively in playback, and employing it would entail no
sacrifice in rigorousness. If we had it, we could formulate
the generalization about self-repair predominating and
the generalization about other withholding of repair more
precisely and place them on a more secure foundation. With
such information we could identify two classes of repair-
able and exclude them from the data on which both general-
izations are based.*

Class 1  Self repairs in which other is ignorant of
the need for repair, either because the
trouble source word hasn't been spoken or
for some other reason. Here other can't
be said to be withholding repair.

Class 2  Other repairs in which self is ignorant of
the need for repair and other knows self is
ignorant. Here there is no point in other
withholding repair because he knows self
will never be able to make it. All hearing
repairs would fall into this class.

What is left after these exclusions would form a third
class -- the "repair withholdable" class, where other is
more or less certain of the need for repair and believes
self to be more or less informed about it. A proper illus-
tration for this class is the "counting repair":

Steven: One, two, three, ((pause)) four five six,
((pause)) eleven eight nine ten.
Susan: Eleven? Eight, nine, ten?
Steven: Eleven, eight, nine, ten.
Nancy: Eleven?
Steven: Seven, eight, nine, ten.
Susan: That's better. (p. 373)

*All of the examples I have quoted (except for the "five
o'clock" example) are from their paper, and as far as I can
tell, were a part of the data on which both generalizations
were based.
I would like to return now to class two, which I feel needs further subdivision. We can distinguish, first, repairs which locate problems of hearing and/or understanding as obstacles to the production of the sequentially implicated next turn. The following two examples illustrate this subclass which I will call (2A):

Bea: Was last night the first time you met Missiz Kelly?
(1.0)
Marge: Met whom?
Bea: Missiz Kelly. (p. 368)

A: Why did I turn out this way.
B: You mean homosexual?
A: Yes. (p. 368)

Sacks et al. say the following about this sub-class:

...other-initiations of repair locate problems of hearing and/or understanding as "obstacles" to the production of what would otherwise occupy the sequential position in which they are placed--an appropriate "next turn".... Other-initiations of repair undertake to have such "obstacles" removed in the service of the production of a sequentially implicated next. When the hearing/understanding of a turn is adequate to the production of a correction by "other", it is adequate to allow production of a sequentially appropriate next turn..."other" should produce the next turn, not the correction (and, overwhelmingly, that is what is done.) (pp. 379-380)

In addition to subclass (2A) we can identify repairs of content (2B) illustrated by the "five minutes" example above, and (2C), repairs of form, illustrated by another example not from their paper but fabricated by me:
J: Teacher, can I go now?  
T: Not "can I," Johnny, "may I."

Sacks et al. observe that the repairs of class (2A) are modulated by "uncertainty markings," that is, that they appear in question form or with "You mean." They account for uncertainty marking in the following way:

When the hearing/understanding of a turn is adequate to the production of a correction by "other" it is adequate to allow production of a sequentially appropriate next turn. Under that circumstance "other" should produce the next turn, not the correction. . . . Therein lies the basis for the modulation— in particular the "uncertainty marking"--of other-correction: if it were confidently held, it ought not to be done; only if unsurely held ought it to displace the sequentially implicated next turn. (pp. 379-380)

The claim that if a correction is confidently held it ought not to be done may be interpreted as a claim about relevance or thematic progression. If "other" understands well enough to "get the point" a repair is then "beside the point" and should not be allowed to deflect the progression. But let us consider this claim in the light of the "Eleven?" example quoted above. There I think the repairable is on the face of it not an obstacle to the production of the next turn -- in this case a continuation of the game of water-tag. Moreover, it is uncertainty marked, presumably not because Susan and Nancy are unsure about whether eleven comes after six. It's also unlikely that they had trouble hearing the word clearly, especially Nancy, who heard it three times. I would claim that it's uncertainty-marked to
mitigate the threat to Steven's face, and that disguising a correction-initiation as a hearing check is quite conventional. (To the extent that Susan and Nancy don't want to mitigate, they can intonationally signal their incredulity and make what is at best a thin disguise even thinner.) I would further claim that the disguise is so conventional that it's not unusual for a genuine hearing problem to be misinterpreted as a correction, as in the following fabricated example:

Jo: He waited till seven and then Jackie brought the cake.
Tom: Who?
Jo: I thought it was Jackie.
Tom: I'm sure you're right; I just didn't hear you.

To claim as I am doing that uncertainty marking can function as a disguise to mitigate a threat to face is to raise the issue of interpreting participant motives. This is beyond the pale for ethnomethodology. They don't interpret motives; in fact they

...use the term "preference" technically to refer not to motivations of the participants but to sequence-and turn-organizational features of conversation. (p. 362)

It seems to me, however, that if we make a few simple assumptions about motivations and allow ourselves to ascertain whether participants are informed or ignorant, we will be able to make interesting predictive hypotheses about such observable phenomena as the positioning of
repair and its uncertainty marking. We could explain for example why it occurs more in conversations with children, and how it is that among duetters, for example, we can find the (otherwise elusive) same turn other-initiated repair.

The following fabricated example will illustrate some of the distinctions that I think could be made.

Self: That was a nice new anornak you had on yesterday.
Other: 1) Thank you.
2) New? It's quite old, I'm afraid, but thank you.
3) Wasn't that day before yesterday? Anyway, thank you.
4) That was day before yesterday. Thank you.
5) Anornak? It's anorak. But thank you.

Let us assume that the recipient of the compliment confidently holds in each case that it's an old anorak and it was day before yesterday. The correction in (2) is acceptable because it humbles other's face, an appropriate response to a compliment, and also because it doesn't threaten self's face -- his ignorance of the age of the anorak is nothing to be ashamed of. The corrections in (3) and (4) are less acceptable. Notice that the uncertainty marking of (3) makes it more acceptable than (4). Even though the correction is confidently held by other, the uncertainty marking is appropriate redressive politeness. Likewise (5) is bad both for its baldness and its irrelevance, as well as for the fact that it calls attention to a faux pas.
Repair on What The NS Says

I would now like to return to The First Twelve Minutes at the point where Petra asks, "You are teacher too?" (12). Rhoda responds to the question by attempting to give an account for her presence on the hike. How much of it did Petra understand? To use her own words from playback, "I don't understand nothing, now." However, she was able to simulate understanding quite successfully, using a pattern that recurred often during the day's conversation. In order to describe the pattern I would first like to divide what Rhoda said into two very broad categories: (1) her "declarative contributions" (by this I means expressives, representatives, narratives, explanations, almost anything that was not a question or a directive), and (2) her questioning of Petra (by this I mean such queries as "How do you like California?"). I'm ignoring for the moment the utterances that fall between, such as her back-channel comments when Petra had the floor.

Petra's simulation pattern worked best with Rhoda's declarative contributions. She would punctuate Rhoda's statements with back-channel MHM's and a few rising MMM's, confirming understanding with an MHM whenever Rhoda used checking intonation on a word. When Rhoda stopped talking she said MHM once or twice more; then choosing from Rhoda's contribution some word that she understood, constructed a (hopefully) topic-related response, often a question, with it.
I'm just a friend of Peggy's (AAH) and I always wanted to go to um, up to the delta? (MHM) where we're going today. It's supposed to be really a nice area for, um it's--all the--all the birds come through that area. (MHM) When they go north or south they all stop in the delta.

MHM, MHM. THIS PLACE IS UP NORTH? /north/

Um, I said I hope the birds are out--outside today you know because sometimes when it's almost rainy? (MHM) when it's rainy sort of they--(BUT--) they stay in the bushes.

MHM. TODAY, MAYBE, IT'S MMM GONNA, CLOUDY? /rainy/

(Peggy comes from a) place that's warm too. New Orleans? (MHM) She comes from New Orleans and it's always warm there. I come from a much colder climate.

MMM, IT'S MORE COLD? /cold/

Uh, it's fur-- where I used to live is fur-- (MMM) much further north (MHM) and it gets right now it's uh probably uh freezing (MMM) or zero, degrees uh centigr-- zero centigrade? zero fahrenheit?

IT'S NEAR CANADA? /north/

In sum, Petra often didn't understand Rhoda's declarative contributions, but she didn't acknowledge that fact. Instead she contributed appropriately timed back-channel MHM's. This timing, John Gumperz has suggested, is a minimum pre-condition for conversational maintenance. And she also guessed, on the basis of the one or two words she understood, constructing responses that at least succeeded in being topic-related. And she was quite convincing. Although I was fully aware at the time that she was operating with the strategy Fillmore identified, I still wasn't
prepared for the revelations she made in playback. She even had me fooled about two remarks I had made to her, which I thought had been very artfully simplified. And she misled Rhoda.

Maybe I thought she knew more. I think if somebody nods agreement or says "Mhm" or something like that, you tend to assume they understand, all that you're saying.

Although Rhoda was misled sometimes as I was, she was also suspicious. When I asked her in playback what she thought Petra had understood of the last contribution above (107-112) she said:

Maybe the "cold" (laughs), maybe the word "cold." Maybe the word "fahrenheit" or "centigrade." I think I overestimated at some points what she knew. Probably one simple word is what you get when you're picking it up--like "cold" or "hot" and then you kind of take off from that.

Because Rhoda suspected Petra didn't understand, she began to repair and simplify her declarative contributions. We can view her paraphrases (see for example The Mothball Fleet paraphrase in the introduction) as self-initiated self-repair signalled by non-lexical perturbations and occurring in the same turn as the trouble source. I believe that in general repairs on NS declarative contributions take this form.
How the NS Can Assess the L's Understanding

Why does Rhoda undertake self-repair of her declarative contributions even though Petra doesn't ask for it? What kinds of information give rise to her suspicions that Petra needs repair?

Native speakers gather information about learner understanding from many sources.

(1) From discourse history prior to the trouble-source turn.

a) from the learner's past contributions. What he has said allows the NS to assess his overall level of proficiency.

b) from the number of L "mistakes" — responses that have been irrelevant or only loosely related to the topic.

c) from what the L has directly volunteered -- from the times in the past when he didn't simulate and requested repair. (Direct requests may be non-verbal as well as verbal. Raised or knitted eyebrows and puzzled expressions can very unambiguously solicit repair.)

(2) From the trouble-source turn in progress.

a) from the native speaker's evaluation of his own output during the turn. He can assess how well he is simplifying.

b) from L silences -- failures to make expectable back-channel signals or to come in at transition relevance spaces. (Cross cultural interference comes into play here. A NS who expects faster back-channel or overlap timing may interpret silences as evidence of non-understanding and be wrong about it.)

c) from indirect repair solicitations -- via ambiguous facial expressions and intonation. Ambiguity can be intentional. The learner
may wish to hint that he would like a repair without going on record as asking for one. In this way a learner who is concerned about imposing can deferentially leave the decision about whether to keep going or stop and reexplain in the hands of the native speaker.

d) from leakage. Perhaps the learner intends to conceal a failure to understand but his facial expression or tone of voice betray him.

The importance of prosody and of facial expression here (and the consequent need for video data) cannot be overestimated.

In this area again cross cultural interference abounds. An "mmm" of a particular intonational contour may signal understanding to a member of one culture while to a member of another culture it may signal only cooperative listenership and be non-committal with respect to understanding.

In playback all of the NS's commented on the significance of intonation for interpretation. Rhoda reacted to an effort she had made to tell Petra about a trailer park we passed on the drive.

I don't think she knew what I was talking about—just the way she was saying "yes." It sounded like she didn't know.

And later, reacting to another episode:

It didn't sound like—the comprehension was—what is it that's missing when they say that "uhuh"?
How the NS Can Make Verbal Checks for Understanding

When the NS suspects that the L isn't understanding something, the preferred procedure seems to be, as Hatch has documented, to repeat or paraphrase, shifting down vocabulary, filling in background, and so forth. This is often done without a request on the part of the L, and without a direct check on the part of the NS to see if it's necessary.

However, sometimes NS's do directly check for understanding. Some understanding checks are relatively innocuous. First, when the NS is introducing a new topic he may employ what Sacks and Schegloff call "try-markers" (1974). (Try-markers are discussed in an important paper on adult/child discourse that has many applications for FT discourse, Keenen and Schieffelin's "Topic as a Discourse Notion.")

A: ...well I was the only one other than the um tch Fords?, uh Mrs. Holmes Ford? You know uh/ the cellist?

The speaker leaves a short pause following this construction in which the listener can evidence his recognition or non-recognition of the referent. Absence of a positive listener response (uh huh, head nod, etc.) in this pause indicates non-recognition. This in turn leads the speaker to offer further try-markers in an attempt to elicit a positive listener response. (1976, p. 338)

Second, in the course of a contribution the NS may use rising intonation on a word to check for comprehension:
"Peggy comes from a place that's warm too--New Orleans?" (103). Third, at the end of a contribution, a NS could conceivably check directly: "Do you understand what I just said?" or "Are you following me?"

Direct checks of this type occurred nowhere in my data. What Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks would call their "dispreferred" status arises, I think, from the threat to face that they pose. Non-understanding may suggest inadequacy. Moreover, since the L by not requesting a repair has claimed at least by implication to understand, to question him is to challenge the honesty of his presentation of self. This is not to say that such checks could never occur, only that they would occur with mitigation rather than baldly and that their occurrence might precipitate a redefinition of the situation.

Even a direct check, however, doesn't guarantee that the NS will find out how much the L understands. If in response to such a check the L volunteers a repetition of a reformulation of the NS's message, then the NS will know for sure whether he was understood. If, on the other hand, he claims understanding but doesn't volunteer a repetition, the possibilities that he is mistaken or simulating remain. For the NS at that point to ask for a reformulation which hasn't been offered is virtually unthinkable.
Pressures Against NS Declarative Contributions

Rhoda in The First Twelve Minutes made eight declarative contributions. (I am excluding those she made as back-channel support during Petra's extended contribution about learning English. Also, I am arbitrarily counting the climate sequence as three, because Petra makes three responses.) Three of Rhoda's contributions did not require a sentential response and Petra made none. For four of them she was able to guess on the basis of minimal understanding and supply topic-related responses. For only one of them did Petra make a repair request -- the very first one. From Petra's point of view, then, this format had advantages. It offered her maximum opportunity to conceal understanding failures if she wanted to.

But from Rhoda's point of view it had drawbacks. The effort to simplify was taxing; trouble sources were hard to locate; she was not sure she was being understood; and she was constrained by politeness from checking to find out. It is not surprising that her declarative contributions dwindled somewhat. People who feel they're not being understood are understandably reluctant to continue talking. This is particularly true initially if the referent for a topic hasn't been securely established. But it's also true at other stages of the development of topic and comment. This reluctance, combined with the inherent limitations of simplification and the prohibitions against
direct understanding checks, work against NS declarative contributions. At the same time, the conventionality of questioning in get-acquainted small talk unites with other conversational forces to establish and nurture the NS question format.

Native Speaker Questioning: The Exposure of the Need for Repair

It has been observed and documented in the second language acquisition literature that NS speech to L's contains a higher percentage of questions than is normal for NS speech to other NS's. An account that is often given for this is that by questioning the NS can take more control of the conversation and that less of a burden is placed on the learner. There is a further account to be given for questioning, I believe, and it is discussed in the literature on first language acquisition. When mothers and other caretakers use questions with young children they provide themselves with a check on understanding. (For children it is also a check on attentiveness. This is not an issue for newly-acquainted adults engaged in small talk, who usually find themselves in an agony of attentiveness.)

Other, non-question formats don't expose lack of understanding to nearly the same degree. To a NS declarative contribution a variety of responses from the learner are acceptable, many of them capable of concealing an understanding failure, total or partial. The learner may
1) delay responding in the hope that the NS will recycle his statement.

2) delay responding with another hope -- that the NS will signal closure, filling in some sort of response for him and that no further response on his part will be required.

3) make an ambiguous sound (aah, mmm) indicating interest.

4) hazard a guess (see above, Petra's simulation pattern), constructing a comment that (a) may be relevant enough to allow the NS to continue with the previous topic; or that (b) may be less relevant but interpretable as a shift in topic focus; or that (c) may be irrelevant but interpretable as introducing a new topic.

5) admit failure to understand and request repair.

Responses to questions, on the other hand, expose understanding in a way that responses to statements do not. In a question format there are only two avenues open to a L who doesn't understand the question and who wishes to conceal that fact. He may:

1) delay responding in the hope that the NS will recycle his question, or

2) hazard a guess at the answer.

If he is unable to construct a guess or if he fears that his guess might backfire more disastrously than an admission of failure to understand, he must admit the failure and request a repair. If the L frequently delays responding, his understanding failure is gradually more and more undeniably implicated. His guesses, though they may be right part of the time, will sometimes be wrong, again providing exposure.
Admissions, of course, also expose, as do wrong answers
given in the mistaken belief they are right.

NS's do all they can to make their questions un­
derstandable and "easy." Their questions tend to be highly predictable (as Hatch has observed), and to be asked in a predictable series. And whenever there is a lapse in the conversation, they tend to resume questioning, to return to the series. Rhoda did just that, asking ten questions (listed on the next page in Table 1) that were easy to understand, either closely tied to an already established topic, or very expectable in American small talk. To only one question (#2) was Petra unable to respond; she had to request repair. For three others (#3, #5 and #7) she was unable to give a topic-relevant answer, but the answers she managed were at least topic-related. Her answers give us an indication of what her guesses were like, that is, what questions she thought might have been asked.  

3 Rhoda: What are you studying in school?  
Petra: Eh, in the /kubako/ in the university, extension. (WHERE)

5 Rhoda: Who do they stay with? Who are they staying with?  
Petra: In Bogota. (WHERE)

6 Rhoda: Is your husband here? Do you have a husband?  
Petra: Yes!, but he say, "Oh, go you only, because it's only guw man. Woman? Guwmens. Only womens? No, women. He say, he say, go, only you because it's only women. (WHY DIDN'T YOUR HUSBAND COME?)
Table 1

1) Where are you from, Petra?
2) How long have you been here? (recycled: How long, umm..)
3) What are you studying in school? (recycled: Oh. What, what subject?)
4) Then do you--then do you want to go back to Colombia?
   (Petra talks about her children)
5) Who do they stay with? Who are they staying with? (recycled: With..umm..)
   (Petra says that the children will come to Berkeley)
6) And then they'll stay with, they'll stay here with you?
7) Is your husband here? Do you have uh, a husband?
   (Petra says that Stacy teaches her English)
8) How many hours do you study it then?
9) A day?
10) Where is that? In a school there?

In number (6), Petra thought Rhoda wanted to know if her husband was coming on the hike, and she responded with an excuse. In fact, Rhoda only wanted to know if her husband was in the United States.

Thus Petra failed at least partially to understand four out of ten questions. It is also possible that among
the other six there were also partial understanding failures concealed by lucky guesses. However, in spite of imperfect understanding on Petra's part, in the questioning format the conversation still flowed smoothly with only one repair interruption. More importantly, the questioning format provided Rhoda with a relatively clear idea of the extent of Petra's comprehension, which enabled her to better plan her own contributions. Also, since Petra was unaware that three of her responses had not been topic-relevant Rhoda was better informed about Petra's comprehension than she was herself. Finally, in this format, Rhoda knew when she needed to repair. And since there is a limit on how long a single question can be, the number of potential trouble sources was greatly reduced. Locating the trouble source was facilitated. All of the repairs were successful on the first try.

There is one additional aspect of the NS questioning format that I would like to comment on. There is a tendency for NS's to rephrase WH questions as YES/NO questions (Hatch, Freed). "How is the food there? Is the food very good?" Hatch comments that YES/NO questions "shift down" what is required of the learner in order to answer. He need only say yes or no, or repeat the answer modeled for him by the NS. The NS, thus, is placing less of a burden on the L.

I think that the distinction between instrumental and small talk situations is relevant here. In instrumental conversations, such as the phone conversations between
professional typists and beginning learners in Hatch's data, the NS is motivated to place less of a demand on the learner, and is satisfied with a one word answer. In small talk, however, NS's are often really motivated by a desire to pass on the turn, to draw the learner out, to get him to "take the floor." They want more than a one-word answer. They rephrase questions to give the L's a second chance to understand and to provide them with additional vocabulary cues, but what they want is an extended response. For a NS with these motives, any rephrasing sequence will do, not only WH→YES/NO, but also WH→WH, YES/NO→YES/NO, and even YES/NO→WH.

WH→WH:  Who do they stay with? Who are they staying with?

YES/NO→YES/NO:  Have you been out here before? Out in this, this part of the country? Over the hills and, from Berkeley?

YES/NO→WH:  Do you play with any of the other children after school? Who do you play with after school? (Pardo, 1979)

The fact is, however, that despite the NS's motivation to get the L to talk, rephrased questions sometimes do not have the desired effect and the L provides only brief responses.

It is my impression that the kind of "open-ended" question that would require an extended response (such as "Tell me about it") is not asked very often, either in NS/NS
conversation or in talking to foreigners. For example, if someone says that mountain climbing is his hobby, he is likely to be asked something specific, such as "Where do you climb?" or "What kind of climbing do you do?" This is so even though what his interlocutors really want (and what he would most likely infer that they want) is not for him to give only the particular information that would answer those questions but instead for him to take the floor and himself structure the presentation of information about his hobby. It seems to require some special training for people such as personnel interviewers and salesmen to learn to ask the open-ended questions that prod others to talk even in spite of themselves.

Repair on What the Learner Says

Rhoda tended to avoid making repair requests. This was principally because understanding Petra was not nearly so much of a problem for Rhoda as was making herself understood. She understood Petra much better than Petra did her. Petra's accent did pose a problem, but only a slight one. Rhoda said about it in playback: "There's always sort of a little delay, like a two second delay, and then the word, the real word pops into your mind. Usually I can get it, but...." During playback Rhoda identified only five understanding failures for the first twelve minutes.
Another cause for Rhoda's avoidance of repair requests was her distancing rapport strategy. In Brown and Levinson's terminology, she was avoiding threats to her own negative face — that is, her own desire not to be imposed on. She was often not enough interested in Petra's comments to undertake the work of repair. So she acknowledged only two of the five understanding failures -- the first because she had no other choice, and the second because she had something else to gain. I think that what Rhoda really wants below is not a repair but to draw Petra out.

41 Petra: Tomorrow, some people, Columbian people, /ko/ back Colombia.
41a Rhoda: Oh yeah?
        Petra: Mhm.
42 Peggy: I'm going to go get an umbrella. (goes out)
43 Rhoda: They're coming here from Colombia, or--they're --they're coming here? from Colombia?
44 Petra: Yes, mhm.

Petra's original statement seems to be a topic without a comment, and Rhoda is trying to invite the expectable comment. She might just as easily have asked a question that was not a repair request such as, "Are those people friends of yours?" Not as likely but perhaps more effective would have been, "Tell me about those people."

Another of Rhoda's understanding failures was the "Go you only, because it's only guw man" (146) turn. Rhoda
explained, "I didn't know what the word was. I didn't understand either what--I finally figured out 'woman,' but by that time I think I'd forgotten what he was saying: 'I'm the only--?' I can't remember even what it is now." She rewound the tape and listened again but still didn't understand the point of the comment. Because Petra was making a statement rather than asking her a question, she was not conventionally required to display her lack of understanding and was free to change the subject. She did so, not reacting to Petra's self-initiated repair: "Well, it'll be fun. I wish the sun were out though. I wish it were warmer." She explained the change of subject in playback: "I think (laughs) I couldn't stretch it out any longer, and say, 'what was that?' I still didn't get what was said, and I just...I don't know, I figured it wasn't that important."

It is revealing to contrast Rhoda's understanding of Petra with Stacy's who has been her teacher for three months. Though they haven't had much out of class contact, they have established a small pool of shared information and expectations. When Stacy walks in and says "Hi," Petra immediately says "Pablo..." with a slight rise and shakes her head. (Pablo is her husband's name.) Stacy replies, "Oh, okay! So all women! Okay, that's good, that'll be fine." She not only would have understood Petra's previous utterance, had she been present, she could have filled it in for her. She
used almost the same words, and commented on the same aspect of the situation. She even anticipated Petra's excuse with preemptive reassurances that everything was fine. An article on BT that I referred to earlier is relevant here. In it Catherine Snow identifies two of the conditions that must be met for an adult to have a conversation with a young child. They can converse when "The adult and child share enough experience that the adult knows what kind of thing the child is likely to say," and when "the adult and child tend to comment on the same aspects of a situation" (1978, pp. 254-255). Stacy and Rhoda have a small pool of shared information upon which they can readily map each other's utterances and from which they can get the clues they need to decipher what is difficult. Though it is not even remotely comparable to the kind of comprehensive context a mother and child share, it is still enough to facilitate understanding. It also very likely would facilitate language learning for Petra. Stacy is more easy to understand not only because she has the skill from her teaching experience to speak more slowly and simply than Rhoda, but also because of the shared information she can draw on.

Returning to the problems Rhoda had understanding Petra, she was reluctant to prolong talk about topics that didn't interest her by asking for the necessary repairs. Moreover, when she wasn't interested, she was inattentive and
understood less. In playback she commented on this. After listening to Petra say, "But in Oakland, teach, English, all day. Four in the morning, four in the afternoon," she asked: "Did she say she taught there? I can't--I spaced out for a second. She's going to school there.... Sometimes you think you understand but you're hard-pressed to repeat what it was you thought you understood." At times Rhoda's interest flagged because of topic selection. In the car on the way home from the hike, Petra was talking about children's Christmas celebrations in the Colombian schools. Rhoda's reaction was:

It was like a topic I would kind of know what she was going to say because she was talking about Christmas celebrations. But it didn't quite register. Or else it was an awful lot of talk about a very little topic. I could understand some of (what she said) but I didn't understand the rest of it. But I didn't want to battle to find it out, because I didn't want to hear too much about Christmas. (laughs) It wasn't like a topic of burning interest to me, so then I was maybe more inclined to shine it on. It was sort of the end of the day.

Sometimes Rhoda's interest flagged because of the slow pace at which things had to be expressed. She commented about the back channel signals she had been making:

Those little "oh's." Again I think it's trying to encourage them to go faster and tell you more. I think that maybe they're not sure of whether they're being understood or not either. So then they need that. You wouldn't want them to repeat it again.
Tuning Out

The other native speakers in my data also tuned out now and then while the learners were speaking, and didn't ask for the repairs they would have needed to follow. Even Kathy, whose rapport strategy would least predispose her to do so, sometimes gave up or didn't bother. When Jean-Pierre gave an extended explanation of the kind of work he did, for example, though she gave him positive feedback, she wasn't fully understanding him.

I can remember that I really wasn't understanding what he was saying, but I was just kind of going along with it. It was just I think (because) I would probably not know too much what anybody was saying about computers. I could see he was getting off into some technical explanation of computers that I was never going to figure out, so I just kind of nodded along.

It is consistent with Kathy's rapport strategy that she attributes her inattentiveness to her putative inability to understand technical matters rather than to Jean-Pierre's slow pace or any lack of interest on her part in him or his subject.

It's no secret that native speakers tune out in conversations with other native speakers -- nor is simulating attentiveness and understanding unique to foreigner talk. The person tuning out continues to nod and "mhm" and the person tuned out on, even when aware his partner isn't listening, completes his contribution. If he stopped in the...
middle, it would probably be heard as a rebuke to the inattentive partner.

Though it is not unique to FT, tuning out on another NS differs from tuning out on a learner, if not in kind at least in degree. There are more factors pushing the NS to tune out in FT conversations. There are cultural differences about what sort of topic is interesting, how it should be developed, how the point should be signalled. Also, a contribution that might have been interesting in a one-minute presentation may wane considerably in its appeal after three minutes. The delays for vocabulary search and repairs as well as the slow pace of the learner make this a persistent problem. The effort required of the NS to follow is more intense -- he must adjust to accent, and perhaps there will be a strain on short term memory from repair digressions. Finally, if the NS has a momentary lapse of concentration, when he resumes attention it's more difficult to pick up the thread.
In addition to shortcomings of methodology, the repair paper also suffers from shortcomings of exposition. It is difficult even after several careful readings to say with confidence what the definitions of the terms "repair," "correction," "error," "disagreement," and "comprehension check" precisely are, and what the differences are among the terms. A similar complaint is made by W. Gaskill in his paper on correction in FT conversation.

This example might be classified by the authors as a "disagreement."

From the way the quoted passages are phrased, it sounds almost as if Sacks and his co-authors are claiming that all other-initiations of repair locate problems of hearing/understanding. But it is clear from inspection of the examples cited in their paper that not all repairs do that.

The "conversational duet," described in Jane Falk's dissertation, is a promising site for the study of same-turn other-initiated repair.

I have departed here from the transcription format used elsewhere, inserting Petra's back-channel signals in capitals and parentheses into the text of Rhoda's contributions. The word in slashes at the end of Petra's response is the one I believe she understood and based her response on.

She asked thirteen in all, but three were recycled.

Hatch comments on this fact.

Back-channel comments such as "Really?" or "How interesting" are open-ended but do not require a response in the same way that specific questions do. See Tannen 1979 for a discussion of other devices speakers use to prompt and draw their interlocutors out.

This isn't always the case in FT conversation. Learners with heavy accents pose different sets of problems.
CHAPTER FIVE

RAPPORT STRATEGIES AND EMULATION IN
FOREIGNER TALK CONVERSATIONS

In Chapter Five, Kathy and Bob's Tapes are examined. First, the imitative features of Kathy's speech are described. It is proposed that they are linked to her efforts to talk more slowly and to her rapport strategy, which is identified as a combination of camaraderie and deference. Further correlates of her rapport strategy are the suppression of NS/NS asides and the use of French. There is a brief aside on the pragmatic homonyms of slowed speech, and then a discussion of Bob's rapport strategy, which is identified as camaraderie dominant. While he is conventionally deferential (politely asking questions rather than volunteering his own opinions or comments), he is less inclined to set his own wishes aside for the French's benefit and less willing to confine himself to a restricted register, allowing himself a more rapid pace, more NS/NS asides, and more joking, self-directed comments.
The Imitation of the Foreigner

It is a commonplace that some speakers mimic -- they pick up accents or dialectal or registral features very readily. These "chameleon speakers," as Susan Ervin-Tripp calls them, begin to drawl when they're with Southerners, drop final -g's when they're among workers, and may even acquire a slight stammer when they're around someone who stammers. Likewise in FT conversations some people imitate or emulate aspects of the foreigner's speech. In fact, FT and BT are regarded by some as imitations of the way foreigners and babies talk. The lexical and phonological borrowings that I associated with variety (4) of FT (see Chapter One) as well as the phonological reductions of BT provide some evidence that the two registers share imitative components.

There is much variation across speakers with respect to imitativeness; people emulate to varying degrees and they associate different social meanings not only with the features that are copied but also with the act of imitation.

Imitative Features of Kathy's Speech

The only native speaker in my data who was imitative to any real degree was Kathy. She began to sound a little like the French did speaking English. At times she stressed
the final syllables of words, or altered American sentence-final or clause-final intonation. She pronounced "Santa Clara" with continental, unnasalized vowels (see below, They Beg for Electronics, 27 and 43); she occasionally pronounced fully vowels that are normally reduced, e.g. "a," "the" (20). She avoided contractions. Her speech was considerably slowed and marked by a halting delivery which resembled the uncertain "word search" hesitations of the French. Finally, and I believe this to be emulative in more ways than one, she consistently made efforts to use the French she knew. This sometimes resulted in the mixture of English and French within a single sentence.

All of these modifications tended to be somewhat sporadic. The impression one receives from listening to the tapes is one of speech in the process of change. Kathy seemed to be trying out various devices in search of a style in which she could both communicate much more simply and at the same time feel at home.

The following excerpts illustrate some of the modifications, in particular the mixing of English and French. Very early in the conversation, Bob had asked me briefly about my bed, which had broken the day before when we were moving it into my new house. Kathy explained our aside to Jean-Pierre and Mimi.
1 Kathy: Peggy achete, um, chez, house, home. Just bought. Just now. Just bought a house, this week.

2 J-P: Une maison.

3 Kathy: And we just moved her stuff in yesterday.

4 J-P: Yes!

5 Kathy: (laughs) so, uh, she uh, her uh underlined word broke. Uh, what's the word for bed?


Similarly, when Mimi later asked:

1 Mimi: You learned French in school?

2 Kathy: Yeh, I took two years.

3 Mimi: Two years.

4 Kathy: I did not etudie, um, very hard. (laughs)

Kathy commented on this sentence in the playback interview. "That doesn't really make a lot of sense I'm sure--one word and then the rest all English. It was really a vain effort." Two other mixed sentences she let pass in playback without comment, probably because she was unaware that she had substituted "et" for "and" in what were otherwise completely English sentences.

1 Mimi: I don't like tennis. I don't like the small ball.


(Passing a theater showing a Maurice Chevalier movie):

1 Mimi: Maurice Chevalier!


At times her hesitant French would be followed by a rush of rapid English, as if the pressure to speak slowly had been too much.
1 Mimi: I have heard that in summer in San Francisco, you have fog.

2 Kathy: That's true. And il fait chaud—no, il fait froid, from the fog, ah, la nuit. You always have to bring a jacket when you go to San Francisco. It's warmer over here. We don't get as much fog.

Kathy and Bob not only noticed her tendency to imitate, they also expressed some negative feelings about it. In playback Bob said to me:

Bob: You notice Kathy starts to have a little accent here—"Berk ley."

Peggy: Why do you think that is?

Bob: I don't know. Because Kathy's trying real hard, I think.

Peggy: To communicate?

Bob: I guess so, and this seems like the best way. I never did do that, I don't think. (laughs)

Peggy: Why do you think you didn't do that?

Bob: Because I was aware of how silly it sounded. (laughs) But maybe I did do that, I don't remember...It would be on the tape.

They also offered the following illustrative anecdote:

Kathy: Bob got a lot of amusement out of the way I was talking.

Bob: Did Kathy tell you about, like, I'd come home and she'd already been home for two hours, talking to the French, talking English in her halting way. I'd come home and Kathy would say, "Bob by, Your - mother - called." I knew what she was doing and I'd say "Eh? eh? what?" And she'd say, "Your - mother..." And then she'd say, "Aargh!" (makes attacking gesture)

Negative feelings about emulation arise from the ideas people have about which social group they belong to, whether it's all right to change from one social group to
another, and how much contact with and participation in
the new group is required before symbols of membership can
be claimed. They also arise from the fact that imitation
is used to mock. The stability and strength of one's group
identification can be a charged question. For Kathy,
however, I believe that the identification question is not
strongly charged. She seems to be sufficiently secure on
this issue to risk ignoring it or at least setting it aside
on behalf of something she regards as more important.

Possible Sources of Imitativeness:
Rapport Strategies and Loss of Style

I believe that the imitative features of Kathy's
speech arise primarily from her rapport strategy, which I
take to be targeted somewhere between camaraderie and
deferece. The deference she exhibits might be termed
compensatory or nurturant. It is only by "bending over
backwards" to make up for the learner's deficiencies that
the equality necessary for camaraderie can be established.
Emulation is one way of liquidating inequalities and is a
crude concrete expression of the solidarity that is aimed for.

I believe her imitativeness arises secondarily from
her effort to speak very slowly, which dramatically altered
her normal style. She tried to time her speech to the
rhythm of the French, to establish a pace that would not
only allow them to follow and understand what she was saying.
but also allow them enough time to frame their own contributions and even to overlap at her possible completion points.

Many people find slowing down surprisingly difficult. They may be unaware of the fact that retarding the pronunciation of a single word is only possible to a very limited extent. Also, they may be unaware that words are joined together in the stream of speech, and be dismayed to discover, when they begin to monitor their own production, that tiny pauses at word boundaries like the ones we see on the printed page don't exist in actual talk.

In fact Kathy succeeded in dramatically altering her rate of speech. But it was as if she had turned on a slowing mechanism and its output had surprised her. She was unhappy about the way she sounded. "It really affected my speech. It was like, beyond my control. I felt silly." Her distress at the consequences of slowing down even led her during the playback session to reject the entire effort as a mistake.

Stopping between each word and everything probably wasn't helping them out a bit in understanding what I was saying. But somehow or other, I just ended up talking like that. And I was talking like that to Bob. He certainly can speak English.

But when I questioned her about this comment she explained further:
Peggy: Do you really think it wasn't helping them at all?
Kathy: Well, to speak slower it would seem naturally, you know, logically that it would help somebody to understand. I don't know, I guess I just felt dumb about what was happening to my speech and because of that I thought, well, this can't really be helping because I feel so stupid about it.

Slowing down stripped Kathy's speech of its characteristic style. It forced her in a sense to cast about for a new style, to provide an account to herself, the French, and her quizzical husband for the new voice with which she was speaking. It made her more receptive to stylistic features in her immediate environment. The French were very much a presence, speaking in the same slow way that she was. Since she had in fact copied their speed, and in doing so lost many features of her own style, it was perhaps natural to sporadically reflect some other features of their style as well -- their stress placement, their vowels, their intonation. When we add to this receptiveness the operation of other interactive forces such as empathy, and recall that Kathy truly liked the French couple, especially Mimi who reminded her of her old friend, it's even less surprising.

The following extended passage demonstrates the way in which simplification and emulation worked together in Kathy's speech. She and Bob are driving with the French couple and their children to my house to pick me up. Bob
is at the wheel; Jean-Pierre is in the front seat with him; Kathy and Mimi are in the back with the children.

**They Beg for Electronics**

1 Kathy: *We are* going to the old house, right? Or
2 Bob: // Gee, I don't know.
3 Kathy: I forgot that.
4 Bob: Well, I'll drive by there and [just see if
5 Kathy: I'm not sure either. [OK. All right.
6 Bob: I assumed she was out //
7 Kathy: Probably. Yeah probably. Um, I think, my um, Peggy est-deux-ans. Um uh no nuh deux ans. Uh, deux uh,
8 J.-P.: Deux ans?
9 Bob: Deux addresses?
10 Kathy: Deux addresses. Um, the old one and the new. She has two. And I don't know which one she went to. (laughs)
11 Mimi: Aah, yes.
12 J.-P.: It's easy to find job here?
13 Bob: Pretty easy I think.
15 Bob: //
16 Kathy: Aah, yeah. They beg for electronics.
17 J.-P.: // electronics //?
18 Kathy: Oh yeah. They beg. They say, they give you anything you want. [If you got
19 Mimi: They beg. Ils supplient.
20 Kathy: Um, they, if you work, say, at Hewlitt Packard,
and you get someone to come work for them, they will pay you a **bounty** of like five hundred dollars to get someone to work there. So lots of people will get people they know to come work at the firm they work at and they make money. (someone whistles) They'll pay you $500 to get someone to go work there. Also, they have, um, they will give you a gym, you know, a gym that has handball and tennis and stuff, they build a gym for their employees. Um, oh, all sorts of **benefits**, to attract people, Because

21 J.-P.: **[Perquisites.]**

22 Kathy: Perquisites? (echoes his pronunciation) Um, well, uh d- all sorts of benefits.

23 J.-P.: // (offers to translate for Mimi)

24 Kathy: Uh, okay.

25 J.-P.: (translates)

26 Mimi: Ah, oui. In San Francisco.

27 Kathy: Uh, Santa Clara.

28 J.-P.: Yes, I work in the biggest Hewlitt Packard

29 Mimi: **[System.]**

30 J.-P.: Uh, and the, yes, and the largest H.P. system in the world. It's in France its in the, in a very / way, uh, how to say, it's in a very new way

31 Kathy: Advanced?

32 Mimi: Up to date?

33 J.-P.: Advanced, yes, they have one computer, and a lot of others (I have deleted part of Jean-Pierre's contribution here in the interest of brevity) and uh, engineers from Santa Clara works / worked specially on this problem of-this place.

34 Kathy: Oh, I see. Huh. Well, you could probably get a job very easy.
J.-P.: Mmm.
Kathy: Pay you lots of money. (laughs)
Mimi: (laughs)
J.-P.: I prefer to have, uh, time.
Kathy: Yeah.
Kathy: You know that— I understand they work four days a week.
Mimi: Four days a week!!
J.-P.: Where?
Kathy: Uh, in, uh, Santa Clara, to get, uh, to attract employees, they give you four days.
Mimi: Ooh la la!! (laughs) We go!
Bob: Is that true, Kathy?
Kathy: Yeah, they do.
Bob: You know I don't see her car here. It must be / / Why don't you go and see.
Kathy: All right, OK.

Some General Comments

First of all the content itself of this passage is evidence of Kathy's dominant rapport strategy. She is not only elaborating on a topic Jean-Pierre proposed; she is also, by emphasizing that people with his skills are in such demand, showing him considerable deference.

Her pronunciation is careful; she articulates clearly, pronouncing "a" as /ey/ and "the" as /\#iy/, "bounty" as /baun t\#iy/ rather than /baun iy/ or /baun fiy/.
There is also a peculiar boundary marking effect in this passage which occurs nowhere else. It is on the words "beg" and "for" which end with a pronounced glottal stricture (16).

Her sentence structure is simple and repetitive. At times the simplifications that she undertakes verge on ungrammaticality. The introductory sentence: "They beg for electronics" is less well-formed than "They are begging for people who know something about electronics" or "They're begging for electronics technicians." Similarly, "You could probably get a job very easy. Pay you lots of money" (34,36) would be more correct with "easily" and "it would."

She tends to avoid contractions. Although "they'll" occurs once, we also find "they will pay you a bounty" and "they will give you a gym." In playback, Kathy was embarrassed by her avoidance of contractions and was concerned to know whether other native speakers did similar things. She imitated her voice on the tape:

Kathy: "I did not bring an umbrella." Why is it that people do that? "I did not---" No contractions? I thought they couldn't understand any contractions? .... This is unique with me?
Peggy: No, no it's not.
Kathy: I haven't noticed you not using any contractions though. It's so stilted sounding.

I explained to Kathy that people are sometimes surprised at how they sound talking to foreigners and that efforts to
simplify sometimes produce unexpected results. She con­
ceded, but insisted:

It was really pronounced. It didn't seem like it
happened to you nearly as much as it did me for
some reason.

The Prohibition Against NS/NS Asides

The passage begins with an "aside" between Kathy
and Bob. Because I was in the process of moving, they are
uncertain about which house to go to. They discuss this
together at a normal pace and then Kathy "translates" for
the French. She insists that NS/NS conversations be kept
to a minimum; when they do occur, she explains them.

I didn't feel right about speaking a lot of English
to Bob without trying, even if it wasn't something
that was really important to them or that they really
needed to know a lot, without trying to include them,
because I didn't want them to think we were talking
about them (laughs) or something. Just in general it
seems rude; it's almost like whispering or speaking
pig-latin in front of someone. It's as if you're
trying to shut them out of whatever it is you're
talking about. And I didn't want to do that.

She maintained this position despite the fact that she found
it fatiguing:

I can remember experiencing some relief just being able
to talk to Bob, without having to include them in every­
thing. When, maybe, Bob and I would be in another room
and I could just speak at my normal pace and be under­
stood, it was kind of nice.
I think it is interesting that Kathy's explanations of the "broken bed" aside and of the "which house" aside were both undertaken in French. Explaining the asides in English would perhaps have called undue attention to the necessity of simplification and the discrepancy between "normal" conversation and what the French could understand. The way that Kathy used French, it never seemed that she was forced to because of any deficiency on the part of the French. Rather, it always invited the interpretation that she just wanted the chance to practice.

Finally, Kathy's attitude about asides diverged sharply from the attitudes of the other NS's in my data. Bob, Rhoda, Stacy, and I all initiated them occasionally. Both Bob and Rhoda commented in playback about what a relief it was to lapse into "normal" conversation.

The Use of French

Kathy's use of French had numerous effects. The first one I would like to mention is that it secured the attention of Mimi and Jean-Pierre. It was a clear signal to them that they were being addressed and also that a response was expected. Kathy used the rising intonation characteristic of what Hatch calls vocabulary solicitation; she invited the participation of the French couple and recruited them into helping to formulate her sentences for her. I don't think that this is the most revealing account
for her use of French, however.

Before I interviewed Bob and Kathy together, I interviewed them individually. When I asked Bob separately why he spoke French to the French (which he did, though only occasionally) he replied, "To show off." When I asked Kathy, she had a very different answer:

I guess I had some feeling that perhaps they felt awkward at trying a new language on us and risking making some sort of stupid mistake. I was just trying to make them aware that my French was not really...was certainly much poorer than their English. I don't know, I guess I was really making an effort to speak their language because they were trying so hard to speak ours. And my French is so limited that I guess I just reverted back to these little things that I had memorized.... Mainly I was just trying to make them feel relaxed or whatever.

Kathy neutralized the threat of their linguistic inadequacy by exposing her own. Her use of hesitant French followed by rapid English emphasized the contrast between their level of proficiency and hers, and made it clear that the contrast was in their favor (I can manage to speak only such slow French; you can manage to understand such rapid English).

Hovering in the air over talk with foreigners, there are often certain general propositions (to borrow Labov's term). One is: "English is the international language and everyone should speak it." Another is: "Anyone travelling in a foreign country should have some command of its language." Kathy indirectly challenges both of these propositions and invokes an opposing one, which has, I believe
some validity. It is, "No one who does not himself possess second language proficiency has the right to expect it from others." Comparing Mimi and Jean-Pierre's English with Kathy's English is unfair. The only fair comparison is their English with her French. Her injection of French into the conversation makes this second comparison more accessible. Indeed the comparison becomes impossible to ignore.

Another hovering proposition that Kathy challenges is: "Second language proficiency is a telling measure of personal adequacy." This challenge is at the heart of Kathy's use of French and also explains a joking sequence that took place in the car. In it, Kathy and Bob recited lines from their memorized high school French dialogs which they altered and recombined in ludicrous ways. "La concierge est sur la table." "Il est sur la table dans mon oncle." Jean-Pierre and Mimi seemed to understand the joking and find it very amusing. Both the joking and the other French talk function in the expression of what Goffman calls role distance.

Goffman describes the behavior of a boy "too old" for a merry-go-round. "At seven and eight, the child dissociates himself self-consciously from the kind of horseman a merry-go-round allows him to be.... He rides no hands, gleefully chooses a tiger or a frog for a steed, clasps hands with a mounted friend across the aisle" (1961, p. 107).
Similarly, an adult male may distance himself from a domestic role. "Tasks that might be embraced by a housewife or maid may be tackled by the man of the house with carefully expressed clumsiness and with self-mockery" (1961, p. 112). The boy and the man are "actually denying not the role but the virtual self implied in the role for all accepting performers" (1961, p. 108). Kathy and Bob distance themselves from the role of language learner, making a mockery of their proficiency and at the same time making a mockery of any person who, in accepting the language learner's role, would take seriously the notion that proficiency could be a measure of personal adequacy.

The Pragmatic Homonyms of Slowed Speech

I would like to return now to the fact that Kathy's speech was slowed, and to relate this fact to what Robin Lakoff has called pragmatic homonyms.

I believe that the fear of being thought condescending motivates native speakers to avoid marking their efforts at simplification as such. It also sensitizes them to possible alternative deep structures that could account for the simplified surface. I think this sensitivity is particularly acute when a speaker makes some new modification of his customary manner of speaking. He "notices" possible interpretations for the modification with each turn he takes, and strives to highlight one or two and downplay the others.
There are several possible accounts for slowed speech. In Kathy's situation, it is reasonable to suppose that she slowed down because the French couple's English was poor. Kathy, however, so energetically avoids acknowledging that possibility that she seems willing to entertain almost any other. When she is expressing her distress at the way she sounds she says, "To speak slower it would seem naturally, you know, logically that it would help somebody to understand. . . . It might've helped but they might've just thought I had a speech defect or something (laughs)."

Her comment is evidence, I believe, for the psychological reality of pragmatic homonyms. Clearly she is sensitive to several different possibilities and is aware that her interlocutors may be noticing them also.

Another account for slowed speech more credible than a speech defect is a "word search" -- for a forgotten name, for just the right phrase to describe something noteworthy, or for a word or phrase in a foreign language. Kathy says, "I think I was probably hesitating because I was thinking, 'Well maybe some French will come to me out of the blue.' But nothing was coming, so I was just kind of speaking -- English." Kathy offers French word search as the real account for her slowed speech. In my opinion, the real account was the linguistic inadequacy of the French. Kathy wished to
downplay that possibility — French word search as a deep structure was more comfortable. For a while it served as a disguise for and an excuse for Kathy's halting speech. It might have been more credible and lasted longer if there had been more French up there in the blue.

My own favorite homonym is a different one. When I have to slow down for a learner, I sometimes find myself projecting an altered personality — a reflective, even ruminative one. I chew interminably over each sentence and word and phrase before moving to the next one. The more the learner seems convinced that I'm speaking slowly not for his benefit but because I'm a thoughtful and methodical person, the more susceptible I am to believing it myself. The disguise becomes not a disguise but my "real" slowed style. I don't abruptly cast it off when I turn from the foreigner to another native speaker. Switching to rapid speech would not only discredit my performance (the authenticity of my slowness) but would also make him aware of the extent of the discrepancy between conversation with him and conversation with an adequate speaker. To me in this circumstance rapid speech belongs "backstage." Similarly, Kathy with the French relegated NS/NS talk to backstage. Bob and I by holding asides at normal speed and with unsimplified vocabulary and syntax were being unreliable team members and spoiling the performance.

Pragmatic homonymy is a consideration for learners too; they are also starting to speak in new ways. Petra, for
example, spoke slowly and haltingly and seemed uncomfortable about it, but at times she seemed less so. When she was quoting her children she was more at ease. Rhoda commented on this contrast:

It seems like she talks faster and actually better when she's being her kids. Maybe it's because she's using kids' vocabulary or, you know, simpler vocabulary that it flows more. I can remember thinking that at the time when she talked about them or used their voices, it had a much different flow to it.

Quoting the children provided Petra with an alternative deep structure. (I'm speaking slowly not because my English is inadequate but because I'm imitating the way a child would talk.)

Bob: Less Deference, More Camaraderie

I figured--what the hell, if they understood it, that's good, if not....*

The remark of Bob's quoted above may seem indifferent, even a little callous, especially if we contrast it with the kind of concern Kathy expressed in the preceding excerpts from playback. The comment she makes below is typical of the empathy she felt for Mimi's efforts to understand.

I think sometimes Mimi would kind of giggle, which would be similar to what I would do in a situation where you feel semi-tense and embarrassed and stuff

*I believe Bob's words here to reflect his general attitude, though he said them in response to a particular episode. They are quoted in full later.
like that. She seemed to kind of laugh sometimes and nod her head, but I don't think she really understood some of what was going on.

Kathy projects herself into Mimi's situation. She doesn't believe her to be in serious distress, only "semi-tense and embarrassed." Still, she consistently computes understanding difficulties as weightier (see above, Brown and Levinson) than Bob does. In reality, Bob is neither callous nor indifferent. He simply doesn't view the French as "semi-tense" when they don't understand. I suspect he believes them to have the attitude, "If we understand the Americans, that's good—if not, what the hell."

I commented to Bob during playback that he had asked a number of questions, and inquired about why he thought that was.

Well, it seems like by definition if (you're) going to try to keep it going, (you) just can't keep making statements. If you're going to have a conversation, you have to open it up somehow. I guess that just seems like the easiest and most natural way to keep the conversation going.... People always like to talk about themselves, and that's always kind of the rule of conversation—that you're trying to be friendly and let people talk about themselves.

One wonders why, since people like to talk about themselves, Bob doesn't talk more about himself. Jean-Pierre, for example, without waiting for us to question him or ask for his observations, freely volunteered opinions and nominated new topics. Bob's reticence is a manifestation of his
rapport strategy, which I believe to be somewhat deferential. I can of course make no claims about regional variation from this data, but I think it's worth mentioning that Bob, like Kathy, is from the South. To quote again from his comments:

I guess if as the conversation progressed, if I realized that they were really interested in my observations about something here, I would talk more about it. But, I'm comfortable asking people questions.

While Kathy's deference is both conventional and real (that is, operable both underlyingly and on the surface), Bob's deference is principally conventional. Real, or deep, deference would require that he consistently place choices and decisions in the hands of others, give to others' needs and wishes more weight than to his own, strive not to impose on them. It's true that Bob doesn't impose his observations and opinions on the French, and leaves them the option of inviting them. However, I believe this to be conventional, even automatic behavior of the kind most readily called forth by the highly conventionalized conversational rituals of receiving guests and making them feel at home.

Throughout, Bob takes his own needs and comfort seriously and doesn't set them aside for the French's benefit in the same way Kathy does. One kind of evidence for the claim that his underlying rapport strategy is not deference can be found in his "self-directed" comments. From time to
time he made remarks that the French could hardly have understood or appreciated. It is possible that they were half-intended for my ears or Kathy's, but I suspected at the time that they were chiefly for his own benefit. When I asked about them in playback, he confirmed this. Below are examples of self-directed comments.

1 Peggy: Oh, Scrabble!
2 J.-P.: And, eh, Beth* ...play... in French.
3 Mimi: [in French]
4 Peggy: Oh, yeh?
5 Mimi: She plays very w--very well.
6 J.-P.: [Qui.]
7 Peggy: Oh, uuhh! Yeah.
8 Mimi: She has, uh, much voc--uh, voc..cabulary
9 J.-P.&Bob: / /
9a Mimi: [in French.]
10 Peggy: [Yeh Yeah, yeah.
11 J.-P.: You play Scrabble too, here?
12 Peggy: Yeah, sure.
13 Bob: Yeah, we play in English. (laughs)
14 Mimi: In English.
15 Bob: But, uh, I'm sure you could really beat us in French.
   (pause 1.5 sec.)
   No question about that. (spoken "under his breath")
16 Peggy: (very small laugh)

*Beth is the mutual friend.
When we listened to this in playback, Bob said his remark (15) was, "Just a little understatement." I asked if he thought they understood. He said, "No. Sometimes I just had to throw in stuff like that." What he threw in, I think, expressed an attitude, a humorous reaction to the image of keen proficiency that someone playing successful Scrabble in her second language would present.

Earlier I referred to Pittenger, Hockett, and Danehy's principle of recurrence: in conversations, participants express repeatedly who they are and how they are reacting to what's going on. The very fact of recurrence demonstrates, I think, that there exists a need that people have for self-expression; perhaps we could even describe it as a low-grade pressure. Confining oneself to a restricted register may interfere with this need.

Another example of Bob's self-directed (and self-expressive) speech occurs when Kathy gets herself involved in an explanation of my living situation. I believe the point of her explanation to have been something like "California life-styles" or "non-traditional living arrangements and family patterns." But once launched, the explanation turns out to be somewhat lengthier than anticipated. Both couples have just driven up in front of my house and are waiting for me to emerge.
Concubinage

1 Mimi: It's a big house.

2 Bob: Yeah, it is.

3 Kathy: They have um... a man uh, and a woman, and their two children, and my friend, and her son live there.

4 Bob: Six people.

5 Kathy: Six people. My friend, her son, um, my friend

6 Bob: Three adults.

7 Kathy: is divorced, and uh, she lives with uh her--a man and a woman who are--friends, and the woman from a--has two children from a prior marriage Uh, the man has no children

8 J.-P.: Yes, yes

9 Kathy: from his prior marriage. He is also divorced. Three divorced. (laughs)

10 J.-P.: Yes, I see.

11 Bob: Do you have a word for people who live together but aren't married?

12 Mimi: Concubinage.

13 J.-P.: No, a word, yes, but not used. This word is not used at all. We say uh,

13a Mimi: is not used. It's uh, an old,

14 J.-P.: they live uh, together.

14a Mimi: an old word, together,

15 Bob: Yeah. In English, they've been trying to find a word for it too, and they can't find a word uh that, that everyone accepts. (pause 4 sec.) It's a rough one.

Kathy's explanation is longish and its point is obscure. It typifies the quantity abuse that occurs so
often in FT. Bob's question is an effort to supply a "point," something mentionable enough to warrant the extended explanation. In the process he perhaps exaggerates the intensity of the efforts that "they" have been making to find a word for "concubinage." But even the exaggeration elicits no response, and so he supplies a self-mocking response of his own -- "It's a rough one." Goffman writes, "by contributing especially apt words and deeds, it is possible for a participant to blend...embarrassing matters smoothly into the encounter" (1961, p. 48). I think that Bob may find the discrepancy between actual mention and mentionability here slightly embarrassing. His words are apt -- they express his awareness of the discrepancy and make it humorous. The fact that the French are not likely to be able to understand the words and appreciate the aptness doesn't keep him from saying them.

I figured--what the hell, if they understood it, that's good, if not...I didn't think that they would understand that; I just felt like after going to all that length that I'd just kind of say it to myself.

Like Bob, Rhoda was unwilling to remain bound exclusively to a restricted register. In the following discussion she attributes her insufficient simplification not only to an over-estimation of Petra's level of proficiency, but also to a reluctance to confine herself to that level.
Rhoda: I guess I think I over-estimated at times what she knew.

Peggy: If you had an accurate estimation of what she could understand, and you had it to do over again, would you modify what you said?

Rhoda: I think it's hard to, actually. Particularly if you're going to be spending time with them, and if in some ways you're also half-talking to someone else in the room, where you're trying to get information to them, too. You've got to say more than, "Cold, hot, hungry" and, you know....

Peggy: What do you mean, "if you're going to be talking to them for some time?"

Rhoda: Well, just in terms of your level of... of how you can sustain it (laughs)— being with them for a longer period of time. You just have to say more. In some ways you're entertaining yourself. (laughs) It's like you're talking to an audience that's not there. You're getting (laughs) a chance to lay out all kinds of things which probably the person has no-- doesn't understand.

Some Comparative Remarks

First of all, Bob's speech was generally less hesitant and more fluent than Kathy's. I have two hypotheses about why this was so. First, he relied more on the questioning format than on extended contributions, which are more demanding in terms of simplification and provide less learner feedback. Questioning, I think, allows the NS to be more fluent. Second, he didn't confine himself so strictly to their projected level. While Kathy ruthlessly suppressed anything she thought they didn't understand, Bob allowed himself the luxury of an occasional conversational lubricant, a phrase or a whole remark that pleased him, though it went over their heads.
Kathy seemed to operate on the assumption that learners require a high signal to noise ratio, that is, that they need to understand maybe 80% or more of what they hear. Bob, on the other hand, seemed to feel that they could tolerate perhaps 30% noise, or even more. Kathy's assumption made her task more difficult.

Another interesting issue is rate of speech. Did Kathy's slowness make her easier to understand? Unfortunately, the French left the country shortly after the tapes were made and before I had the opportunity to do playback interviews, so at this point I can only speculate about which rate of speech was felt to be more effective. One important thing to remember is that talk slowed beyond a certain point is more difficult to understand, rather than less. Listeners need to chunk what they hear into processable units; they need to be able to anticipate the intonation contour of an entire phrase in order to make in-progress interpretations.

Finally, Kathy and Bob differed in terms of their rapport strategies. Bob's camaraderie strategy predisposed him to treat the foreigners as if they were equals. To a certain extent he ignored or minimized their linguistic deficiencies and assumed that they were as comfortable as he was. Kathy's rapport strategy on the other hand focused her on their linguistic deficiencies and made her anxious about their comfort. What she ignored and minimized was the burden that the interaction might place on herself.
At the beginning of the playback I asked her how she viewed talking to foreigners. She explained that she rarely had the opportunity to talk to foreigners, except in limited encounters with strangers, such as giving directions. To illustrate, she mentioned a recent experience in a supermarket in which she had answered a Chinese woman's questions about coupons. When I asked if she found this talk difficult, she vigorously denied that she ever felt imposed upon. "I don't have any objection at all to trying to piece together something with sign language or whatever." She empathized very strongly with the foreigner's position, and asserted that whatever burden the native speaker experiences pales when it is compared to what the foreigner must endure. "I'd be much more reluctant if I were the person having to be in a group and asking for help in a different language.... Now that I would have a lot of fear and trepidation about."

Kathy typically takes on a great deal of responsibility in her dealings with other people. And, though she is not under ordinary circumstances more patriotic than the average, with French she felt responsible not only for herself as an individual but also as a representative of her country.

I had this idea, a dumb idea I guess, that they'd have an impression of the United States in their brief stay here by their contact with us. Anyhow I wanted to let them know that we were interested in French and that Americans like French and are interested
in French culture. So since I couldn't speak a lot of French I may be asked some more questions, like "Well, in France do you do this?" you know. Because, since I didn't know them really well, I was just trying to establish some...something there.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER FIVE


3This was pointed out to me by John Gumperz.
CHAPTER SIX
SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter is a brief review of some of the findings of this study. All of the native speakers, Rhoda, Kathy, and Bob, found talking to the learners somewhat stressful; all were conscious of threats to face. They worried about whether the learners felt like inadequate conversational partners because of their English proficiency, and about whether the learners feared imposing on them. They made efforts, directly and indirectly, to reassure the learners, but at the same time they did in fact wish to avoid being imposed on, and they did find the restricted register burdensome. They reported that the effort to slow and simplify their speech was taxing, and expressed some discomfort and even embarrassment when they heard themselves in playback.

The native speakers often suspected that the learners were not understanding them completely, but they refrained from making verbal checks for understanding. Instead they monitored the learners closely for indirect evidence of a need for repair, and provided unsolicited paraphrases. They also asked many questions, which kept them automatically informed about repair needs. When they were listening to the
learners, they themselves didn't ask for all the repairs they would have needed to understand everything. They seemed to be employing the following strategies: (1) Act as if you understand most of what the learner says, even if you don't. (2) Act as if you believe the learner understands all of what you say, even if you suspect he doesn't. Smuggle in an explanation. (3) If something happens which exposes that the learner doesn't understand what he professed to understand, if possible pretend not to notice. I see these strategies as operable with beginning learners in small talk (not instrumental) situations.

In their topic nominations the native speakers relied a great deal on the immediate context or asked predictable questions about the learner's backgrounds and native countries. There was also talk about second language proficiency initiated by the learners in which the native speakers complimented them on their English.

Rapport strategies were identified for the native speakers and their operation was described with reference to the observable features of their talk. All of them honored first the principle of camaraderie; Kathy however also favored deference. She spoke the slowest and confined herself most strictly to what she believed the learners could understand, even "picking up" some features of their speech. Bob and Rhoda spoke more quickly, and permitted themselves more talk that they knew might go over the learners' heads.
During playback, Kathy expressed considerable empathetic concern for the learners; Bob and Rhoda showed concern, but also revealed some impatience.

Research in adult second language acquisition is still in its early stages; there is much that waits to be done. One conversational process that clearly must bear very directly on acquisition is the process of repair. To investigate repair we need the sort of methodology that allows us to differentiate between native speaker and learner repair, and that allows us to determine what the speakers know and don't know. Even more important is determining what the speakers believe they are supposed to know, and how it is that not knowing and not understanding can be a threat to face.

Another issue that bears on acquisition is the question of what it means to understand a discourse, and how it is that conversants can be satisfied with partial understanding. In conversations with beginners, simply to have jointly established an interpretive frame can be a source of some satisfaction. As Rhoda puts it:

I didn't understand the last sentence or two, but you kind of carry over with it. You sort of feel good that the story is over. (laughs) It's sort of a relief, actually. And then you sort of know what the feeling of it is -- it's kind of a cute story about kids. That's kind of neat, you know.
An interesting subject for further research might be the simulation of understanding in the classroom. I suspect that students simulate to a certain extent, and that in the interest of maintaining pace and creating a supportive atmosphere even teachers simulate from time to time.

A final point that I think is especially relevant to adult second language learning is that most people, both learners and native speakers, are willing to attempt a great deal. The sorts of subjects that they will tackle and the sorts of complex attitudes and feelings that they will attempt to convey with all the linguistic cards stacked against them never ceases to amaze me. Again Rhoda puts it very well:

You want to convey some information, like I think the World War II ship graveyard's sort of interesting, or the Datsun site. You know it's sort of risky; maybe it's going to be a pretty hard one to convey, as opposed to "Look-at-the-yellow-flowers." Probably it's going to be harder to get across, but it's interesting information, I would think, for a foreigner. You can both agree probably on "The-yellow-flowers-are-prety." But it doesn't really go anywhere. And it would be neat if you could find out something about cars or factories in Colombia, which she actually did say something about. There's a chance that you might learn something if you can actually get that topic out. Interesting information, even if it's in a real simplified form, would be better than just the simplest of statements.... It didn't necessarily work. (laughs) Well, sometimes it works. It does work.
APPENDIX A

The transcription used here is a much simplified version of Tannen's. Her conventions in turn were adapted from various systems devised or used by such researchers as Jefferson, Gumperz, and Wallace Chafe.

,   minimum pause
... noticeable pause or break in rhythm
dashes-- indicate cut off's
underlining marks emphasis
.   marks sentence final falling intonation
?   marks yes/no question rising intonation, and also marks the end of WH questions
(piano) spoken softly
CAPITALS means spoken loudly
/uwd/ letters within slashes indicate uncertain transcription or unintelligible words
/ / blank space within slashes indicates unintelligible speech
(parentheses) enclose my comments

[ Penned brackets between lines indicate overlapping talk, where two people are talking at the same time. Penned brackets also indicate ] when a second speaker follows a first without a pause.

→ indicates the line of the transcript in which the phenomenon under discussion appears.
All of the native speaker comments from playback that were quoted in the study were edited for readability and conventionally punctuated. In this form, they should not be used to compare, for example, a speaker's NS/NS talk with his foreigner talk.
APPENDIX B

SOME PLAYBACK INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you have much experience talking to foreigners?
3. What was your expectation about their level of proficiency in English at the very outset? As you talked, at what points did you reappraise?
4. Estimate how much you understood what they said. Estimate how much they understood what you said.
5. Were you ever inattentive, spaced out?

(At different points during playback)
1. Do you think he/she understood you here? Why didn't you check if you weren't sure? How would you say the same thing now in a simpler way? Don't stop and think, just say it. Was there a particular word that you used that you thought was too hard?
2. Do you think the conversation is going well here, or not?
3. Why did you say what you said? Where did you want the conversation to go? What is the "rationale" or "point"?
4. Were there other topics of talk that occurred to you but that you rejected?
5. Why didn't you pursue this subject further?
6. (About questions) Did you really want to know or were you just keeping things going?
7. Here it's clear s/he misunderstood your question. Why didn't you clear it up?
APPENDIX C
FERGUSON'S ORIGINAL
FOREIGNER TALK ELICITATION INSTRUCTIONS

Administrator reads:

I am asking you to tell me how you think an English-speaking person might act in trying to communicate with some non-English speakers. The person whose speech I want you to describe is acting as the spokesman for a group of three and he is addressing a group of non-English speakers who are obviously non-European and illiterate. They may have heard some English before but they are not really able to understand it or speak it. I will read you a sentence in normal English, and I want you to write down the way you think the English speaker might say it. I'll repeat each sentence as many times as you like before going on to the next one.

Sentences:

1. I haven't seen the man you're talking about.
2. He's my brother, he's not my father.
3. Did you understand what she said?
4. Come and see me tomorrow. Don't forget!
5. Yesterday I saw him and gave him some money.
6. He's working with me. He'll work with you too.
7. Who is that man? Is he your brother?
8. He always carries two guns.
9. Where's the money I gave you yesterday?
10. She's going tomorrow.

Administrator asks:

A. Would you use this kind of language yourself in this situation? Some features of it more likely than others?
B. Would you make any special use of gestures in connection with this kind of language?
C. Are there any other features of this communication situation you would like to comment on?
APPENDIX D

REPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Administrator asks: Have you ever taught ESL or EFL?

I am asking you to tell me how you think you might act in trying to communicate with some non-English speakers. You are acting as the spokesperson for a group of three and you are addressing a group of non-English speakers, who may have heard some English before but they are not really able to understand it or speak it. They're not European; they don't understand any international languages, such as French.

I will read you a sentence in normal English, and I want you to write down the way you would probably say it. I'll repeat each sentence as many times as you like before going on to the next one.

Sentences:

1. I haven't seen the man you're talking about.
2. He's my brother, he's not my father.
3. Did you understand what she said?
4. Come and see me tomorrow. Don't forget!
5. Yesterday I saw him and gave him some money.
6. He's working with me. He'll work with you too.
7. Who is that man? Is he your brother?
8. He always carries two guns.
9. Where's the money I gave you yesterday?
10. She's going tomorrow.

Administrator asks:

A. Would you make any special use of gestures in connection with this kind of language?
B. Are there any features of this communication situation you would like to comment on?
C. Have you ever heard anything about Charles Ferguson's 1975 study of Foreigner Talk? (No one had.)
REFERENCES


Erikson, Frederick. 1976. One Function of Proxemic Shifts in Face to Face Interaction, in Kendon, Harris, Key, eds., The Organization of Behavior in Face to Face Interaction. Chicago: Aldine.


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