

Chapter 1 Overview of the study

1.1 Introduction

"A pause in the wrong place, an intonation misunderstood, and a whole conversation went awry."

(From: *Passage to India* by EM Forster 1924:269)

In conversations with others, misunderstandings often arise for various reasons. To avoid misunderstandings and achieve successful communication, speakers and hearers need to achieve some form of mutual understanding. This effort to achieve mutual understanding in communication can, however, go "awry" (Foster 1924:269) and may cause misunderstanding. The misunderstanding may provide amusement, but often causes embarrassment. In an instructional context, however, such misunderstandings may lead to a breakdown in communication and may have a negative impact on the learning experience. Commonly, language is described as the means by which a person learns to organize experiences and thoughts. It stands at the centre of the many cognitive, affective and social factors that shape learning (Thomas & Collier 2002). One of the most important uses of language, therefore, also in an instructional setting, is for the purposes of successful communication between people, be they native or non-native speakers of the language (Dascal 1999).

The notion of misunderstanding has been described using socio-linguistic terms, among others, miscommunication, misinterpretation, pragmatic failure or breakdown in communication (Dascal 1999:753). Although one cannot possibly know how often misunderstandings occur in everyday conversation, Dascal (1999:754) states that it is "assumed that misunderstandings are ubiquitous". Hinnenkamp (1999:9) agrees by stating that "my own research rather supports the view that misunderstandings are all-pervasive and ubiquitous, in all kind of encounters". This is something we can all agree on as we continuously experience misunderstandings in our everyday lives. It would seem, however, as if native speakers of English are able to repair misunderstandings rather quickly, often within the next turn. In view of this ability for quick repair, some researchers have come to

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believe that misunderstandings should not be considered a problem, or something to be fixed, but rather that it should be considered a natural part of communication (Hinnenkamp 2003; 1999; Wong 2000; Dascal 1999). Misunderstandings occur daily, and while these misunderstandings are not necessarily always due to second language (L2) phenomena, such as grammatical inadequacy or cross-cultural transfer, it is evident that second language speakers at times experience difficulties in expressing their thoughts in the target language, which may ultimately result in misunderstanding.

The study of misunderstanding falls within the domain of intercultural communication (ICC). Hinnenkamp (1999:1) states that misunderstanding has become the "raison -d'etre" for studying ICC because the communication involving the misunderstanding is often between "cultural others". A great body of knowledge on theory and analysis of miscommunications and misunderstandings exists in the literature, mainly perhaps, owing to linguists' interest in ambiguity in language (Hinnenkamp 2003; Wong 2000; Dascal 1999; Weigand 1999; Weizman 1999; Schegloff 1992). This research deals with, among others, defining the term "misunderstanding", and classifying and analysing misunderstandings. However, research interest seems to have excluded the actual misunderstandings that cause miscommunication. Misunderstandings in the literature are generally classified according to structural rather than content factors, such as where the misunderstandings occur in the turn-taking (Wong 2000; Schegloff 1992). There seem to be few classifications that categorise what is actually occurring when misunderstandings take place, and fewer still explain the reasons for the occurrence of misunderstandings in an instructional context, which this study aims to address. The type of misunderstanding and the possible reasons for such misunderstandings could shed light on problematic instructional communication. This study is, therefore, an investigation into the occurrence, type, frequency and causes of misunderstanding in the instructional setting.

1.2 Rationale

As a lecturer at a large, research intensive, urban institution of higher education in South Africa, my responsibilities include the professional development of pre-service teachers through teaching practice. During teaching practice sessions second, third and fourth (final)

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year pre-service students are placed at local schools to gain authentic teaching experience. While second and third year students do teaching practice sessions for three weeks per year, final year students are placed at schools for an internship period of approximately six months. During the internship period, student teachers' progress and classroom performance are assessed by mentor teachers and lecturers. During my many years of observational field visits I have become aware that students, in particular those who are speakers of English as a second language, struggle to perform well orally when teaching content. The principles of the communicative approach to language teaching are taught in my courses, as well as formal, academic English¹, or as Cummins (2009:4) puts it: "cognitively demanding language". The students are encouraged to apply this knowledge in their language use, however, my perceptions have been that their ability to use English remains problematic. Students' grammatical errors have become fossilised, especially those of concord, past participle application, spelling and general grammar. When presenting oral work, not only do pronunciation, enunciation and accent interfere with their successful communication, but grammatical errors abound. In an informal conversation, a colleague referred to the English spoken by some of these students as "scary English". Furthermore, where student teachers teach subjects other than English, content delivery and facilitation of learning become problematic because English is the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) in many schools in South Africa. The student teachers' oral proficiency in English seems to be inadequate as English is not their mother tongue.

Anecdotal evidence gleaned during my years as mentor lecturer suggests several factors that possibly influence speakers' acquisition of the target language (in this case English as a second language). A factor that could be influential is the inability to realise speech acts correctly in the target language, due to, among others, cross-cultural transfer problems. The following are authentic examples of utterances, or speech acts, produced by student teachers in instructional settings during my school visits:

"I cannot do nothing for you." (incorrect double negative)

"Come by, come by!" (meaning "Pay attention" or "Wake up")

"Come again, Joseph?" (meaning "Please repeat, or "I didn't hear/understand")

¹ Reading widely, thinking critically and writing literary-based critical analyses using formal register.

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"Do you get me?" (meaning "Do you understand me?")

"Do you have a problem?" (meaning "Is there something you don't understand?", but interpreted as a threat)

"Please, I was asking for the homework." (incorrect tense)

"She said I was absent but I refused." (incorrect word choice)

"I very glad." (no finite verb)

What is worrying is that it is precisely these students who, in some cases, become English teachers and who will be responsible for the learners' successful acquisition of the target language, or who will have to deliver subject content in their second language. Yet they themselves have not sufficiently mastered the target language and the cycle of problematic language use in the classrooms is perpetuated.

Of greater concern is the implied tension between the reality in the instructional setting and government policy, since policy demands that it is the language teacher's responsibility to ensure that the LoLT does not become a barrier to learning (Evans & Cleghorn 2010; Department of Education 2003).

Inadequate language proficiency may complicate the learning process and cause "instructional dissonance" (Evans 2005). Utterances such as the aforementioned made me aware that student teachers' realization patterns of speech acts may be problematic. One cannot merely assume that student teachers' oral proficiency or communicative (pragmatic) competence in their second language is adequate. The student teachers' ungrammatical and non-standard realization patterns could lead to misunderstanding, cause dissonance, create barriers to learning or may negatively affect the learning process.

Speakers of a second language may be unfamiliar with idiomatic or technical English; contractions; prepositions; pronunciation; complex language; jargon and/or acronyms; or they may not be used to hearing English, thus using it incorrectly themselves. Speed of delivery, intonation, rhythm and syllabic stress, to name a few, become problematic. How the student teacher, as such a speaker of a second language, uses the target language may very well exacerbate the problem. In my opinion, teaching relies very heavily on

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effective communication and if that communication is distorted, misunderstandings may occur.

I was, therefore, interested in studying the misunderstandings occurring during instruction as my proposition was that the misunderstandings might be caused by the oral proficiency of student teachers. I decided to include only spoken proficiency, since this mode is principally used in an instructional setting. Where student teachers are orally proficient, instances of instructional dissonance may be fewer. In order to gain understanding of successful communication in the instructional setting, I chose to trace misunderstandings that occurred among non-native speakers of English student teachers and their learners. The main research question informing the study was:

To what extent are misunderstandings the result of English second language student teachers' oral proficiency?

In an attempt to answer this question, I was guided by the following sub-questions:

- How/when do misunderstandings occur?
- What level of student teacher oral proficiency is required to ensure learner understanding?
- What strategies do student teachers employ to compensate for distorted/ambiguous communication?

The extent to which the above research questions were answered by the study, is explained in chapter 4 and 5.

1.3 Scope of the study

The study spanned the period 2008–2011 and focused on misunderstandings that occurred during instruction. The study was conducted in three phases, namely a pilot study in 2009 (April to October) and a data collection period in 2010 (April to October) and one in 2011 (April to June), which included 26 student teacher participants in total. Since the study was limited in scope it implies that certain choices had to be made regarding what to include. As such, while one includes some aspects, one necessarily excludes others. For

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example, only those student teachers teaching English as a subject or teaching through the medium of English (LoLT) were included. All student teachers included in the study were thus non-native speakers of English, with home languages such as Afrikaans, Sepedi and isiZulu. Furthermore, only final year student teachers were included so as to capitalize on their extended internship period in schools. Gender and age of student teachers were not considered as these variables were not deemed important in the outcome or the findings of the study. Regarding the research sites for this study, I included those schools where the participants taught English as a subject or where the LoLT was English. I did not include a specific type of school in terms of socio-economic background or size as these variables were considered irrelevant in the outcome of the study. I did not include the learners and their use of language as I was interested in the language usage of the student teachers I have come to know.

Since the focus was on misunderstandings possibly caused by final year student teachers' inadequate oral proficiency, or inability to realise speech acts, the literature review was limited to the domain of communicative competence. Communicative competence includes second language acquisition and speech acts. Theory on instructional communication and misunderstandings was also included.

Language development and language proficiency is a multi-faceted aspect and it was not possible to investigate all relevant aspects in this study. I narrowed my focus to include cross-linguistic factors, although I referred to cross-cultural influences as they materialized in the study. I also narrowed the focus to include linguistic literacy but not academic literacy, although I acknowledge that both may have a causal role in the manifestation of misunderstandings. In this study I excluded research on processes of language acquisition which happen outside of formal contexts of language teaching or where the target language is taught explicitly, as I was concerned only with the instructional context where the second language is used as LoLT.

1.4 Terminology

The following terms are considered key to the interpretation of this study and

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are defined as they are used in this study:

- **Communicative competence:** pragmatic competence which implies knowledge of linguistic norms, such as grammar, as well as social norms (Sage 2003; Hymes 1967); appropriate use of target language in a social and cultural context (Tanck 2002); knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts such as requests and apologies; capability, proficiency (in this study pertaining to the English language) in applying grammatically correct sentences
- **Cross-cultural transfer:** a second language (L2) English speaker's transfer of his/her L1 cultural norms to L2 linguistic use; leads to pragmatic failure, or cross-cultural communication breakdown (Thomas 1983)
- **Dissonance:** traditionally a musical term meaning discord or disharmony; where I refer to dissonance in this study it refers to disharmony experienced in the learning and teaching process, caused by barriers, such as misunderstandings
- **Instructional communication:** communication that is initiated by the teacher; the communication skills necessary to teach and facilitate learning and to function competently in the classroom (Simonds 2001); communicative skills, including oral proficiency, required for interaction with learners, verbally and non-verbally, in a face-to-face learning environment (McCroskey, Valencic & Richmond 2004)
- **Language of learning and teaching (LoLT):** language medium in which learning and teaching, including assessment, takes place; in this study the LoLT is English
- **Literacy:** traditionally considered the ability to read and write; the ability to use language proficiently, but including literacies, i.e. other forms of literacy, such as visual literacy, financial literacy, computer literacy; where I refer to illiteracy in the study, it implies the traditional meaning, the inability to read and write or use one's first language proficiently
- **Misunderstanding:** the inability to understand or interpret an utterance correctly/appropriately; a failure to interpret speaker intent (function) of an utterance; also includes mispronouncing, mishearing
- **Non-understanding:** a failure to understand the message of the speaker (which differs from misunderstanding); in this study non-understanding results due to inadequate preparation or inadequate content knowledge

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- **Oral proficiency:** ability, aptitude, competence in speaking a language; fluency (speaking naturally and normally, using rhythm, intonation, stress and rate of speech appropriately); accuracy (speaking naturally and normally, native-like, using grammar and vocabulary correctly)
- **Pragmatics:** the study of the use of language in communication; branch of semantics concerned with the meanings of sentences in specific contexts; appropriate use of language, appropriate application of language use in specific contexts; includes interpretation of utterances and speech acts
- **Second language acquisition:** the processes by which people develop proficiency in a language other than the one(s) they learnt to speak after birth; learning and acquiring an additional language (not the mother tongue or first language)
- **Speech act:** an utterance as a functional unit in communication, usually with two kinds of meaning – locutionary or propositional meaning (literal meaning) and illocutionary meaning (force/intent); an utterance in speech conceived as an act of the speaker, e.g. in saying, "I will be there tomorrow", the speaker makes a promise (Searle 1969; Austen 1962)

1.5 Summary of research design and methodology

The study was interpretivist (anti-positivist), qualitative in nature and placed within a case study design. The study was informed by a social-constructivist world-view (cf. section 3.2) since the meaning created in this context, the instructional setting, is socially constructed. The study was guided by a strong conceptual framework founded in Vygotsky's (1986) socio-cultural approach, specifically his theory on the Zone of Proximal Development, as one circle of theory that intersects with theories of communication, such as that of McCroskey, Valencic and Richmonds' (2004) Model of Instructional Communication. Speech Act Theory (SAT), where a speech act is considered unachieved if there is a discrepancy between the speaker's intent and the hearer's interpretation (Holtgraves 2007; Marcu 2000), was used as an analytical tool to determine speaker intent and hearer interpretation. When the speaker's intent (in this case the student teacher) is misunderstood, communication fails. SAT places a strong focus on communicative

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competence which centres on the premise that communication takes place when a person uses a specific type of language, in specific contexts, in order to achieve specific meaning (Gumperz 1982; Scarcella & Brunak 1981; Hymes 1967). My lens was the point where the above-mentioned theories overlap in terms of misunderstanding. My assumption was that where a speaker is not communicatively competent, misunderstandings may result.

The study was placed within a case study design as a type of ethnography (Creswell 2003). Although case studies usually research individuals rather than the group, the focus is on the activities of that group, rather than the shared patterns of behaviour of that group. Case study researchers are also less interested in identifying themes, but more interested in an in-depth exploration of the case (Yin 2009; Creswell 2007; 2003). Although this study does not match the principles of case study perfectly, there are enough corresponding aspects to justify the choice (cf. section 3.3).

I observed *in situ* and interviewed 26 final year student teachers doing their teaching practice internship in urban schools. The classes taught by these students ranged from grade 4 to grade 11. All the classes were taught through the medium of English (LoLT), which is not these student teachers' (or learners') mother tongue.

The focus was on misunderstandings in classrooms (at the teaching practice internship sites) and as such the oral proficiency of the student teachers and the interaction with learners through the LoLT were scrutinised. The qualitative methodology enabled a detailed description of misunderstandings that occurred in the instructional setting and provided answers to the question: "To what extent are misunderstandings the result of English second language student teachers' oral proficiency?"

Data collection was qualitative and was based on non-participant observations of lessons of 45 minutes each presented by student teachers during teaching practice sessions. I recorded each of these lessons on video and these recordings formed one data set. The second data set was formed by an evaluation of the student teachers' oral proficiency using the International English Language Testing Score (IELTS) (cf. section 3.4.4.2). The third data set consisted of data gleaned from semi-structured focus group interviews

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conducted with the student teachers. A small-scale questionnaire was also used, where quantitative data on the type and frequency of possible errors were collected. The data obtained from the questionnaire formed the fourth data set.

Data analysis was done qualitatively using transcriptions of the recordings of the lessons presented by the 26 students. The analysis of the recordings was done in search of speech acts and the recordings were scrutinised to determine whether misunderstandings had occurred. Verbal and non-verbal data from the student teachers specifically were used to inform incidents of misunderstandings. By examining speech act realization patterns I had the opportunity to describe misunderstandings in the real-life context where they occurred.

1.6 Anticipated research constraints of the study

At this point it would be prudent to mention a few anticipated difficulties regarding this study. The instances expected to be a challenge are explained firstly in terms of technical difficulties with the observations and then in terms of more serious academic concerns. I had never before done research which involved the video recording of participants and was mildly apprehensive about my personal technical abilities. However, my uncertainties had been overcome by the time the pilot study was completed. When the second phase of the study commenced, I was comfortable with my knowledge and new-found technological expertise, and was confident that this aspect would not influence the data collection process. I anticipated that the learners might experience the video recording of their lesson as a challenge as I did not know how the learners would react during the lesson. I did not want them to play up to the camera and thereby distract the student teacher or distort the findings. I did not want to provide too much detail about what I was researching, either to the learners or to the student teachers, and so influence the natural proceedings during the lesson. However, I had to provide a detailed enough account to conform to ethical requirements. I, therefore, provided sufficient detail in the letters of information and consent/assent and in addition asked the student teachers to explain to the learners the importance of behaving naturally during the lesson and to ignore the camera as far as possible. This worked well and only minor problems were experienced and only at the commencement of the recordings.

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I was also concerned about how the student teachers would react to being video recorded and observed. Jansen (2009a:42) indicates that one of the limitations in research is what he calls "empathetic neutrality". He states that neutrality may be influenced by the fact that the researcher now fulfils the role of observer and not participant. This may be unfamiliar to individuals, and/or groups, and could influence their behaviour. This was a consideration in my study, as the participants were not used to being video recorded. Most of the participants acknowledged that they were nervous or apprehensive, but I was able to set their minds at ease by explaining that the purpose of my study was to gain an understanding of communication in the instructional setting and not to judge or evaluate them. Once the lesson was underway they were able to concentrate on the learners and the lesson and not the fact that they were being video recorded.

Another challenge associated with observations is that the information gathered is highly selective and subjective. I addressed this in the study by being conscious of my own biases and assumptions and dealing with them in a particular way, as explained in section 3.7. My role in the observations was as passive non-participant. Since a qualitative researcher attempts to understand the phenomenon under scrutiny, it is possible that I might have become too subjective. A different researcher may interpret the study differently. In terms of the chosen research methodology, it is possible that a Discourse Analysis or Conversation Analysis or Ethnographic Content Analysis approach could have provided different results.

A more serious concern was whether I would actually observe instances of misunderstandings in a lesson. The possibility existed that a lesson of 45 minutes would pass without any misunderstandings having taken place and the study, therefore, not being viable. As such, my proposition that misunderstandings may be the result of student teachers' oral proficiency would be disproved. I shared this concern with colleagues and my supervisor and was constantly assured that in environments where the LoLT is not the first language of either the student teacher or the learner, misunderstandings regularly manifested. After the pilot study had been completed, and having seen what was available in terms of data, I was convinced of the viability of the study.

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As none of the available electronic analytical tools to assist with data analysis (such as Atlas.ti, eCove or Nvivo), was deemed suitable, data analysis was done manually. I found that although these tools assist in organizing and classifying the data, they do not offer an interpretation of the data. Even so, I was still concerned that not using these tools could in some way influence my interpretation of the data. Since the study was mainly qualitative, I felt satisfied that by adhering to sound principles of data collection and analysis techniques and by providing rich descriptions of every step in the process, as well as asking critical readers to verify my interpretation, I would be able to interpret the data without using such tools.

1.7 Outline of the study

In this chapter I provided introductory information on misunderstandings and communication. I provided an overview of the rationale for the study as well as the theoretical framework underpinning the study. An indication of the methodology used in collecting and analysing the data, the key concepts pertaining to the study as well as the scope of the study were provided. The remaining chapters are divided as follows:

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relevant to this study, namely second language acquisition, communicative competence, speech act theory, misunderstanding and instructional communication. The relevant literature discussed provides the conceptual framework for the study. The chapter is divided into sub-topics which serve as explanation of successful communication in the classroom. An account of Speech Act Theory, its origin and the principles which enable meaningful communication are given. Theories on communicative competence, classification of speech acts and the creation of meaning are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter 3 presents a full description of the research methodology pertaining to the study and the application of Speech Act Theory in evaluating misunderstandings, as well as ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness. An explanation of the selection criteria and the data collection and analysis techniques is provided. Chapter 4 is a presentation and discussion of the findings resulting from the data. The chapter offers an interpretation of the findings obtained in the analysis, in accordance with the theories on communicative competence, misunderstandings and instructional

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communication. Chapter 5 provides conclusions drawn from the study. The findings are used to answer the research questions articulated in chapter 1 and to discuss the implications and significance of the study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for interested stakeholders, such as teacher educators, curriculum planners, policy makers and education specialists. Avenues for further research are suggested.

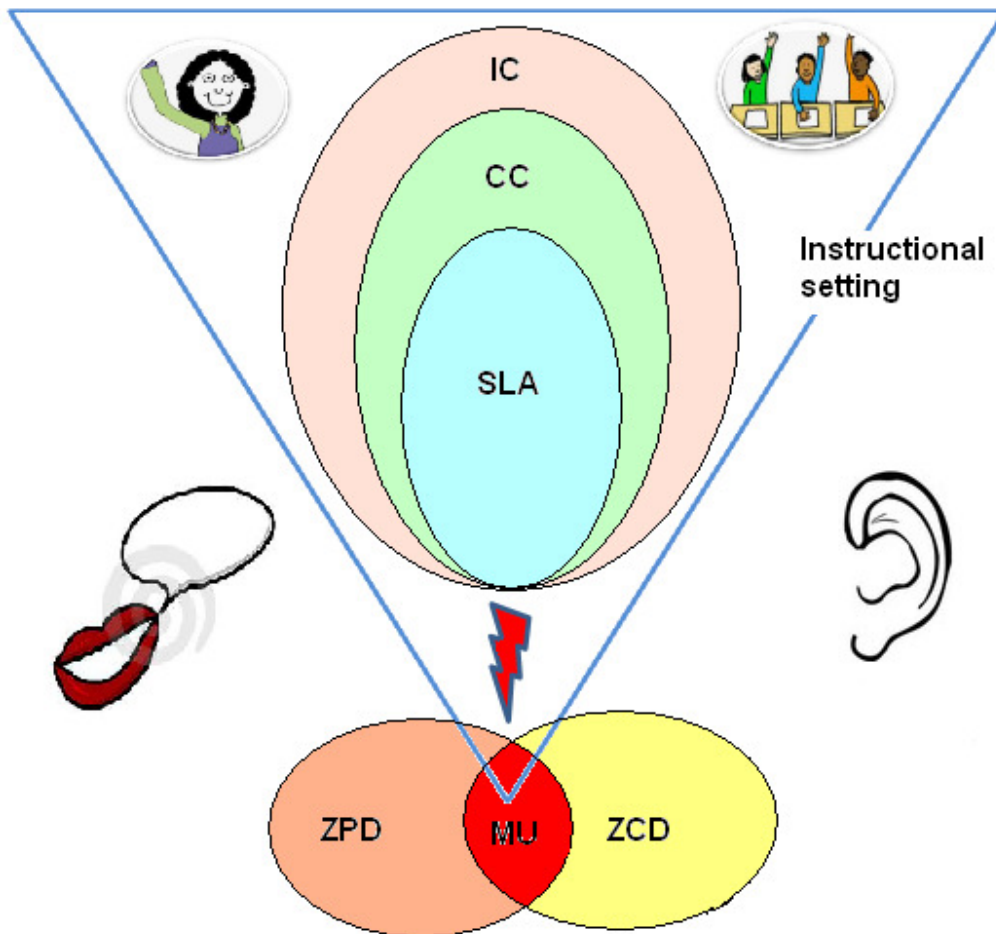
Chapter 2 Conceptual framework

2.1 Introduction

The conceptual framework for this study is drawn from the literature review to describe the occurrence, type, frequency and causes of misunderstanding in an instructional setting. In order to study misunderstandings, I chose theories for second language acquisition, particularly Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, a social constructivist perspective on learning, and specifically his Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as well as elements from several theories on communication, including communicative competence, a pragmatic perspective, and instructional communication (McCroskey et al 2004). The lens through which I viewed misunderstandings was where the theories intersected; the ZPD, as one circle of theory, intersects with theories on communication. The misunderstanding occurs where they overlap and acts as the interface between them.

Since Vygotsky's theory of ZPD is applied in studies on second language acquisition (SLA), and since communicative competence (CC) is an important part of communication theory, these two concepts were included in the discussion as they relate to misunderstandings. Furthermore, Speech Act Theory (SAT), integral to communicative competence, was employed as analytical tool in this study to describe the identified misunderstandings, and was, therefore, also included in the discussion. Figure 2.1 provides a schematic description of the conceptual framework underpinning this study.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework



Legend:

IC = instructional communication; CC = communicative competence;
 SLA = second language acquisition; ZPD = zone of proximal development;
 ZCD = zone of current development; MU = misunderstanding

As introduction to the aforementioned concepts the particular context of South Africa will be described as any discussion on language issues in South Africa inevitably is combined with the political background and multilingual nature of South Africa.

After 1994 the National Department of Education in South Africa adopted a multilingual language policy (*The Language in Education Policy* in terms of section 3 (4) (m) of the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996) where official recognition was given to nine

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indigenous (African) languages (Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu) as well as Afrikaans and English, resulting in the sanctioning of 11 official languages into the constitution. The intention was, among others, to promote the status of African languages by using them as languages of learning and teaching (LoLT) (Department of Education 2002), but also to promote multilingualism by giving each language the accreditation that it deserves (Broom 2004). The *Language in Education Policy* (Department of Education 1996) has as its underlying principle the use of a home language as the LoLT, especially in the early years of schooling, while it provides access to an additional language (usually English) in order to facilitate the bridging of racial, linguistic and regional divides (Heugh 2010). The current language policy (Department of Education 1997) states that an individual learner has the right to choose the language in which he or she wishes to receive instruction. It would seem, however, as if English and Afrikaans remain the LoLT in most schools (Kamwangamalu 2000). In many schools, particularly rural schools where learners are predominantly black, the African languages are used as languages of learning and teaching from grade 0 to grade 3, after which English (not Afrikaans, because of, among other reasons, its negative association with apartheid) is used as LoLT (Kamwangamalu 2000). Where learners do not speak the LoLT, it is possible that authentic teaching and learning cannot take place (Myburgh, Poggenpoel & Van Rensburg 2004).

If this picture is accurate, the learning of a second language can only be fraught with difficulty. Added to this, in the South African context, are issues of under-performing, dysfunctional schools; a problematic education system; under-qualified teachers and inadequate teacher competencies (Bloch 2009). Despite societal and educational transformations that have taken place in the post-apartheid South Africa, many schools still face educational disadvantages, and thus the adequate development of language skills should be a national priority (Donald, Condy & Forrester 2003). In essence South Africa moved from an officially bilingual nation (during the apartheid era prior to 1994), with English and Afrikaans as its two official languages, to a multilingual nation with 11 official languages (after 1994). Regarding the 11 official languages in South Africa, the national policy states that it is important for learners to reach levels of proficiency in at least two

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languages and that they are able to communicate in their vernacular (Department of Education 2002).

South Africa has a population of over 46 million people (Statistics South Africa 2004). The preliminary predictions for the 2011 Census indicate that this number will have increased to over 50 million. However, based on the previous census (2001) and the most recent published statistics, only 8,2% of the 46 million people claim English as their mother tongue (Statistics South Africa 2004). For the vast majority of learners, more than 90%, the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is English (Strauss, Van der Linde, Plekker & Strauss 1999). Table 2.1 provides an indication of the home languages of learners in South African schools and the percentage in which these home languages are used as LoLT.

Table 2.1: Home languages of learners in South African schools (Statistics South Africa 2004)

	Home language	LoLT: Grades 1–4	LoLT: Grades 10–12
Zulu	25%	23%	7%
Xhosa	22%	16%	6%
Afrikaans	10%	10%	12%
English	6%	22%	65%

Demographically, Zulu (25%) is the most widely spoken home language in South Africa, followed by Xhosa (22%) (Department of Basic Education 2010). However, since English remains central to the country's government and administration (Singh 2009), English is the predominant language of learning and teaching (LoLT) (Probyn 2001). English is currently still the most powerful language and is used for education, diplomacy and economy. It serves as the country's *lingua franca* and is seen as the language of the elite, power and privilege. Many people view it as a means to achieve unlimited vertical social mobility. It is also the dominant language of trade and industry (Heugh 2010; Van der Walt 2007; Kamwangamalu 2000). Knowledge of English is, therefore, perceived to be essential for economic empowerment (Webb 1992; Reagan 1985). Because English is the language that holds the highest status it may become the sole official language in South Africa (Broom, 2004). Kaschula and De Vries (2000) claim that it is ironic that English is regarded as the language of trade, because it is spoken by such a small minority and thereby a large

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proportion of the population is marginalised and excluded from participating in the economic sector. Despite this discrepancy, English is still acknowledged as the language of economic empowerment. Webb (1992) and Beukes (1992) stress that upward mobility is impossible without proficiency in English. This has resulted in English being the dominant medium of instruction at most educational institutions (Singh 2009; Uys 2006a). "Less than one South African child in ten speaks English as their home (first) language. By the end of grade three, most schoolchildren are taught and assessed in English" (Fleisch 2008:98). It is no wonder, then, that English second language (L2) learners in South Africa face special challenges when trying to achieve academic success. Competence in English is seemingly a prerequisite for successful participation in the national, political and economic system. English has now acquired the title of the world's leading "global language" because it is used for business, science and politics (Crystal 2003:1).

The aforementioned situation might be considered one of the reasons for the resistance of many people in South Africa towards the use of African languages as media of instruction or LoLT. In essence, many parents choose English as the LoLT for their children, mainly due to the reasons provided earlier and the status currently afforded the language. That is the reason why many parents perceive English proficiency as essential for educational success (Buthelezi 2003). It is clear that English has gained more territory and political importance than Afrikaans enjoyed previously in the apartheid era. Currently, English and Afrikaans remain the main official languages of instruction, with English also being used more and more in traditionally Afrikaans schools. These practices make it obvious that English is assigned more value than any other official language (Heugh 2010; Kamwangamalu 2000) and is likely to remain the chosen medium of instruction in South Africa, especially in secondary schools (Probyn 2001).

A grave concern for me is that learners may not only be hindered by their own low level of English language skills, but also by those of their teachers. Teachers' general competence in the language of instruction, their knowledge about the language and how they speak the language are crucial issues which could influence the effectiveness of their teaching and the learners' understanding of new content (Hugo & Nieman 2010). The lack of adequately proficient teachers who teach through the medium of English has been named as one of

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the major barriers to effective learning (Evans & Cleghorn 2010; Heugh 2009; Alexander 1997). According to The National Teacher Education Audit conducted by Hofmeyr and Hall (1996), the majority of teachers in South Africa are under-qualified or not qualified to teach. In addition to this, it seems as if teachers have limited oral proficiency in English, they lack the skills to teach English as a second language and do not possess the knowledge to teach in a bilingual/multilingual education context. A more recent study on teachers' ability to read English in a postgraduate programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal shows that a third of the sample "struggled to read to learn" (Bertram 2006:5–18). As a consequence, a large number of learners are taught in a language other than their home language and often by teachers who are not adequately prepared to teach through the medium of English (Heugh 2009; Uys 2006a). Although English is spoken widely in South Africa today, it cannot be assumed that all speakers are fluent in English. Because of its wide use in South Africa, English is not considered a foreign language, but in most cases it is in actual fact the third or even fourth language acquired by many learners and teachers. Since English is the LoLT in most classrooms where a variety of indigenous African languages are often spoken as mother tongue, the linguistic and instructional context becomes a complex one, particularly since the teachers are often non-native speakers of English themselves.

Added to this is the issue of cultural diversity where learners experience a shift from not only the home language to English, but also from home values and cultural norms to a Western ideology with typical individualist norms and values (Evans & Cleghorn 2010). This may limit learners' understanding and prohibit their social integration into the larger South African community. The result is a rich source for misunderstanding in the classroom. Often parents do not consider the relationship between the child's first language (L1) and the language of instruction (Myburgh, Poggenpoel & Van Rensburg 2004). This in turn influences the learning experience of the learner and the pattern is repeated endlessly. Wierzbicka (2003) proposes that the need for English to be regarded as an asset and an empowering literacy has never been more important than today where millions of people cross borders, not only between countries but between languages, and where more and more people of many different cultural backgrounds have to live together in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies. Wierzbicka (2003:17) continues to say that

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"peaceful co-existence, mutual tolerance and necessary understanding in the work place, in the increasingly global and yet in many places, increasingly diversified world, rely on research into differences between cultural norms associated with different languages". I concur, but want to stress the importance of the teacher's linguistic proficiency in the LoLT, especially in the instructional context. The linguistic role of the teacher is crucial, as the assumption can be made that the teacher's oral proficiency and language skills in the LoLT could be transferred to their learners. This may be a primary cause for misunderstanding as well as learners' understanding and usage of English being affected.

Kendall, Lin and Perkins (2006) emphasize that second language speakers need to develop knowledge of pragmatic and socio-linguistic rules in order to avoid communication failure and misunderstanding. In South Africa it would seem as if this knowledge of pragmatic rules has not been adequately mastered by many second language speakers, partly because South Africa has a diverse mix of languages and cultures, but also due to educational disadvantages experienced by many, as explained earlier in this section. To address the challenge of adequate development of language skills, the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education 2002) outlines the need to include in the teaching of reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, other literacies such as computer, critical and media literacies.

My understanding of the aforementioned is that speakers need to develop proficiency in the target (second) language in order to read, write and understand cognitively demanding texts such as novels, plays, science laboratory reports, historic accounts and mathematical word problems. Besides developing the four communicative skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing, speakers need to go one step further to gain what is called communicative competence. Communicative competence means acquiring both linguistic and pragmatic competence. These concepts are further explained later in this chapter (cf. section 2.3). In situations where learners have little knowledge of the language of learning and teaching, they tend to be invisible, passive and inaudible in the classroom (Hugo & Nieman 2010; Cummins 2001). This in turn may hamper their becoming proficient in speaking the target language or becoming communicatively competent, which may lead to pragmatic failure. The only way to avoid pragmatic failure is to develop pragmatic

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competence which El Samaty (2005:341) describes as "the ability to use language effectively in order to understand language in context". Since most language teachers do not stress pragmatic knowledge in their classrooms but rather focus on linguistic knowledge (Al Falasi 2007), learners do not have sufficient opportunities to communicate in the target language, resulting in inadequate oral proficiency. As young adults, speakers with inadequate oral proficiency enrol at university to become teachers, and, as in the case of this study, intend to become teachers of English or teachers of other subjects using English as LoLT.

I argue that the misunderstandings encountered in the classroom may be as a result of the teacher's inadequate pragmatic competence and poor oral proficiency. It is for this reason that I wanted to explore the occurrence, type, frequency and causes of misunderstandings that occur in an instructional setting. I believe that two aspects play a crucial role in the exploration of misunderstandings as a phenomenon in the classroom. Firstly, how speakers become proficient in the target language, in other words how speakers acquire their second language (cf. section 2.2) may be crucial to becoming competent in that language. Secondly, being competent in the target language implies more than just being orally proficient; it implies being communicatively competent (cf. section 2.3).

Communicative competence is viewed as the ability to process social as well as linguistic knowledge (Yano 2000; Blum-Kulka 1982) and it implies the appropriate use of language in a social context. The two aforementioned concepts are intrinsically linked, however, for ease of interpretation and for the purpose of clarity I will discuss them separately, although when discussing one concept the other concept will inevitably be referred to.

Since the context of this study is the instructional setting, an exposition of the instructional setting and the instructional communication (cf. section 2.5) used in such settings follow these sections. Furthermore, since the proposition of this study is that misunderstandings in the classroom may be caused by the teacher's inadequate oral proficiency, a description of misunderstanding (cf. section 2.6) concludes this chapter. These key concepts are discussed as a broad conceptual framework as they relate to misunderstandings.

2.2 Second language acquisition

A well established and diverse body of knowledge exists on the topic of SLA. The main thrust of this research covered topics such as the comprehension of indirectness and pragmatic awareness in the 1970s, discourse competence and pragmatic transfer in the 1980s and the effect of instruction on the classroom learning of second language pragmatics in the 1990s (Kasper 2005). This research was influenced by Hymes's (1967) theory of communicative competence (CC), (cf. section 2.3), Searle's (1969) speech act theory (SAT) (cf. section 2.4) and Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature³. Studies on SLA have evolved from structural linguistics, behaviour psychology, generative linguistics and cognitive psychology to constructivism (Nel & Swanepoel 2010). Many theories were developed specifically to explain why children acquire language in different ways, but I will discuss three of these theories which I consider the most important. The Behaviourist, the Innatist and the Social Interactionist theories will be discussed to show how the understanding of second language acquisition has developed through the years.

Firstly, the Behaviourist Theory (Skinner 1953) suggests that language is the acquisition of sounds and words that have been sufficiently reinforcement and that language acquisition is like any other kind of cognitive behaviour (Brown 2000; Moerk 1992; Skinner 1957; 1953). The Behaviourist Theory is a development of the major learning theory developed by Skinner (1953) which emphasizes stimulus, response, and reinforcement as the basic elements of learning. For language acquisition, behaviourists claim that children learn their first language through stimulus, response, and reinforcement, positing that imitation and association are essential in the process (Brown 2000). This implies that learners will imitate what they hear and then through practise will develop certain habits (Conrad 2001). Behaviourists also believe that in the process of learning, children respond to environmental stimuli in an observable way (Reynolds 2009; Harmon & Jones 2005). In second language learning, the processes involved also consist of imitation, repetition, and reinforcement, but particularly of grammatical structures. Errors should be corrected immediately to avoid learners forming bad habits that would be difficult to change later.

³ Read Grice (1981) for information on conversational maxims, cooperative principal and implicature.

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This view started the well-known drill-and-skill practice which was often conducted through listening to audiotapes in language laboratories (Reynolds 2009; Brown 2000). A criticism of this theory is that imitation does not necessarily help the learner in real-life situations. A small number of pre-practised sentences are not enough to uphold conversation, not even when an instructor is present (Conrad 2001).

The second theory, the Innatist Theory (Krashen 1985; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen 1982), similar to Chomsky's (1965) Nativist theory, states that learning is natural for human beings. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) propose that English language learners construct the rules of the second language in a creative manner similar to that observed in first language acquisition. Innatists believe that babies enter the world with a biological inclination, an inborn device, to learn language (Reynolds 2009; Brown 2000). The Innatist Theory does explain to some extent how children can generate or invent language they have never heard (Reynolds 2009).

Krashen (1982) developed a series of hypotheses about second language acquisition that have become the foundation for second language teaching (Brown 2000). Krashen's five hypotheses are: (1) the acquisition-learning hypothesis, (2) the monitor hypothesis, (3) the natural order hypothesis, (4) the input hypothesis, and (5) the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen 1985).

Chomsky (1965:25) supported the Innatist Theory saying that language acquisition could only be explained by an "innate, biological language acquisition device" (LAD), an inbuilt mechanism which enables a child to automatically decode the language it hears (Reynolds 2009; Brown 2000). Specifically, Chomsky (1965:25) claims that infants universally possess an innate "grammar template", or universal grammar, which allows them to choose the appropriate grammatical rule of the language they hear spoken around them, as they gradually construct the grammar of their mother tongue. Chomsky (1965:25) suggests that all languages have a similar "deep structure" in common despite the many differences in their "surface structure". He argues that the ability of language acquisition is innate; therefore taking a biological stand. Children will automatically acquire language by being exposed to it.

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Lastly, the Social Interaction Theory (Vygotsky 1978), also called Interactionist Theory, describes language acquisition as being influenced by the interaction of a variety of factors such as physical, linguistic, cognitive, and mainly social factors, because children learn a language in order to function in society (Brown 2000). The Interactionist view holds that mothers play a critical role in modifying language to foster the child's innate capacity for language acquisition (Reynolds 2009; Brown 2000). Children's language develops over time and not within a single interaction. As children's language develops, they simultaneously construct the meanings of thousands of words. The Interactionist Theory links closely with the Constructivist Theory which posits that children acquire language when they interact with adults and peers.

Vygotsky's (1986; 1978) work is often placed with this theory because of the importance of social interaction in learning a language. Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978) holds that language is the medium through which children learn, access knowledge, think and solve problems. Children learn the cultural ways and views of their world through informal conversations with adults and through formal schooling (Vygotsky 1986). Vygotsky is particularly known for his theory on Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which was introduced as part of a general analysis of child development and learning (Chaiklin 2003). According to Vygotsky (1978: 86) the ZPD is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". In other words, the ZPD refers to "those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation" (Vygotsky 1978:86); the actual developmental level refers to "functions that have already matured" (Vygotsky 1978:86). He claims "what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (Vygotsky 1987:211).

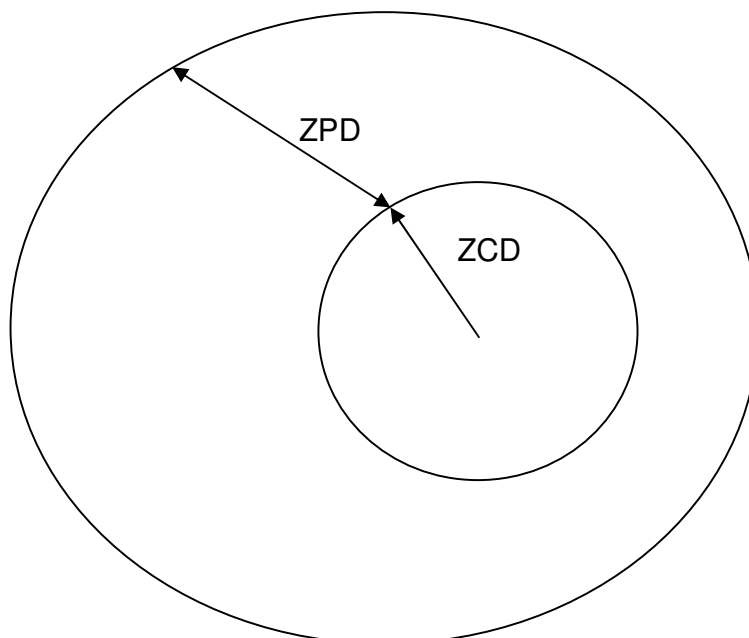
Vygotsky's main contribution regarding the ZPD was that instruction and learning do not take place because of development, but rather that instruction and learning open up the way for development to take place (Dunn & Lantolf 1998). This theory assumes interaction "between a more competent and a less competent person on task, such that the less competent person becomes independently proficient at what was initially a jointly-

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accomplished task" (Chaiklin 2003:2; Harland 2003). Learning thus takes place as the result of interaction, but interaction within the ZPD (Nassaji & Swain 2000:35). This idea, which is known as scaffolding, refers to a "situation where a knowledgeable participant can create supportive conditions in which the novice can participate, and extend his or her current skills and knowledge to higher levels of competence" (Donato 1994:40). Thus, the teacher helps the learner to achieve a level of performance within the ZPD which the learner would not be capable of while acting independently and will as a result be able to achieve alone (Scott 1998; Tharp & Gallimore 1988). This aspect focuses on the notion that a child is able to perform a certain number of tasks alone but in collaboration can perform a greater number of tasks, and can perform tasks more competently (Scott 1998).

This view has important implications for second language learning, one of which is that learners need to be supported in the difficult task of learning a second language while interacting with the teacher. Figure 2.2 is a visual representation of Vygotsky's ZPD as adapted from Harland (2003:265).

Figure 2.2: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development



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The zone of current development (ZCD) in figure 2.2 above represents the level that a learner can reach through independent problem solving and the ZPD as the potential distance the learner could reach with the help of a more capable peer (Harland 2003:269). After successful instruction, the outer edge of the ZPD then defines the limits of the new ZCD.

When the principles of the ZPD are applied to language learning, they combine together all the relevant aspects of the language learning situation, including "the teacher, the learner, their social and cultural history, their goals and motives, as well as the resources available to them, including those that are dialogically constructed together" (Aljaafreh & Lantolf 1994:468; Dunn & Lantolf 1998:425). From this perspective, learning mainly takes place within the learner's ZPD (Nassaji & Swain 2000). Harmon and Jones (2005) support Vygotsky's theory of ZPD and claim that adults modify their speech to operate within the zone of proximal development of children. Harmon and Jones (2005) claim that language acquisition is a developmental process with stages which are easily identifiable.

An approach to learning based on the Social Interaction Theory claims that "there is no such thing as knowledge separate from the knower, but only knowledge we construct ourselves as we learn" (Gottlieb 2000b:1). It assumes that people are interested in understanding the world around them rather than passively gathering objective knowledge as is proposed in behaviourist theories. Interactionists view the communicative process of natural conversations between native and non-native speakers as the defining element of the language acquisition process (Long & Porter 1985). The focus in this process is on the ways in which native speakers adjust their speech to make themselves understood. This trial-and-error process of give-and-take in communication as speakers try to understand and be understood is called the negotiation of meaning (Brown 2000). As meaning is negotiated, non-native speakers are in a position to control the communication process during conversations to some extent, allowing their speech partners to provide input that is more comprehensible (Brown 2000). This is done by asking for repetitions or reacting in a way that shows their non-understanding. The listener's natural response would be to rephrase or use another clue to convey meaning, such as gesturing.

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Of the three approaches, the Behaviourist approach, which emphasises that children imitate what they have heard, is the least adequate for explaining language development in children (Brown 2000). In contrast, the Innatist view emphasises the child, and particularly the innate, biological mechanisms which account for language acquisition. The Interactionist perspective acknowledges both the child's role and that of their mothers in the social environment and holds that social interactions, with communication as its goal, are the primary ingredients in language acquisition (Gottlieb 2000b; Long & Porter 1985). As such it is the perspective adopted for this study.

Current research indicates that a second language is learnt when it is used in meaningful contexts and in natural communication situations and not necessarily through direct instruction in the rules of the language (Brown 2007; Holtgraves 2007; Seedhouse 2004; Thomas 2003; Atkinson 2002; Marcu 2000). The language used by learners is learnt in these natural situations or authentic contexts, which often include a variety of topics, such as the geographical nature of a country or the planets that make up the solar system (Brown 2007). SLA requires a "complex set of skills" such as age, psychological, personality and socio-cultural factors which all add to its complexity (Brown 2007:1–3). Furthermore, inadequate mastery of grammar, together with socio-linguistic inappropriateness, may cause learners to appear incompetent, or impolite or improper. It is not impossible to address these problems, because a second language is usually acquired more successfully when the focus of instruction is on the meaning rather than on the linguistic form of the target language (Krashen 1982). When the teacher places the focus on meaning in instructional communication, conversations are much more natural. These natural conversations allow learners to receive the necessary input and structures that promote sound second language acquisition and help them become orally proficient or communicatively competent (Garcia 1993). SLA is thus a situated, integrated, socio-cognitive process where learners, teachers and contexts are integrated (Atkinson 2002).

The aforementioned sections describe the ideal situation in an instructional setting where the teacher is communicatively competent. What is problematic is when the input and structures mentioned above are not accurate or appropriate, as is anticipated in this study. Sound second language acquisition cannot take place when the teacher is unable to

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provide accurate input. The learner will then "fall back" on the L1 knowledge to supplement L2 production (Krashen 1981:68). Central to Krashen's view of second language acquisition is the input hypothesis (Krashen 1981; 1976). According to the input hypothesis, a second language can only be acquired when learners understand the target language in natural communication situations. In Krashen's (1985b:2) view, "humans acquire language in only one way – by understanding messages, or by receiving 'comprehensible input' . . . that contains structures at our next 'stage' – structures that are a bit beyond our current level of competence".

A central element of the input hypothesis is that the input language must be understandable, hence the term "comprehensible input", but should also contain grammatical structures that are "just a bit beyond the acquirer's current level of second language development (abbreviated as $i + 1$, with i standing for input and $+1$ indicating the challenging level that is a bit beyond the learner's current level of proficiency)" (Krashen 1981:68; 1976:163). More specifically, i is the learner's "current competence, the last rule acquired along the natural order" and $i + 1$ is "the next rule the acquirer is 'due to' acquire or is eligible to acquire along the natural order" (Krashen 1985b:101). Thus, Krashen's theory combines a facet of the learner, namely the learner's internalized grammar; " i ", and a facet of the input, namely " $+ 1$ " (Dunn & Lantolf 1998: 423). Krashen (1982:21) also states that for acquisition to take place, input must contain $i + 1$ (1982:21) and that "if communication is successful, $i + 1$ is provided". Krashen (1985b) suggests that language learners have the ability to understand this complex level of language input because they include extra-linguistic information such as gestures, pictures, general background knowledge and context.

The concept of acquisition used in this study is based on a framework of language acquisition derived from Vygotsky's claims on socio-cultural processes (Vygotsky 1986). Vygotsky (1986) claims that language-mediated interaction leads to an ongoing cognitive process of language internalization. It is through this interaction that competence in a language is achieved (Slavin 2003). A social constructivist approach to SLA is relevant to this study since it maintains that children learn by doing tasks and activities through language with the assistance of more competent peers or adults (Slavin 2003). The student

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teachers who participated in this study assumingly fulfil the role of more competent adults. A social constructivist approach differs from Krashen's (1985;1982) distinction between language acquisition and language learning and as such does not include processes of language acquisition which happen outside of formal contexts of language teaching or where the target language is taught explicitly.

Based on experiential knowledge and on my reading of the literature, my understanding of second language acquisition, therefore, is in agreement with that of Krashen and Brown (2007), Consolo (2006a), Krashen (1987) and Vygotsky (1986) in that it is socio-interactive in nature and is based on the assumption that cognition develops by means of interactive procedures which occur with at least two interlocutors, one being linguistically more competent than the other. It is through this lens that I viewed the phenomenon under scrutiny, namely misunderstandings.

Instructional contexts, such as the language classroom, are socio-linguistic environments where interlocutors make use of a variety of language functions to establish a communication system (Consolo 2006b). The input for language acquisition is expected to be provided by classroom interaction. It is in classroom interaction that meaning is negotiated, especially when interlocutors try to avoid or solve misunderstandings or breakdowns in communication. Interaction entails adjusting one's speech so that it matches the effect one intends to have on the listener. Interaction further entails anticipating the listener's response and allowing for possible misunderstandings, therefore clarifying one's own and the other's intentions and arriving at the closest possible match between intended, perceived, and anticipated meanings (Kramsch 1986). The ability to negotiate meaning in this way happens when the speaker is competent in a given language, but more specifically, also communicatively competent. The primary focus of SLA is the development of communicative rather than linguistic or grammatical competence (Sage 2003; Canale & Swain 1980). This communicative competence is defined as the ability to process social as well as linguistic knowledge (Sage 2003; Yano 2000; Blum-Kulka 1982) and implies the appropriate use of language in a social context. The next section provides an explication of the origin as well as the importance of mastering communicative competence.

2.3 Communicative competence

The term "communicative competence", as a subsection of pragmatic competence, was first coined by Hymes (1967; 1972b) and refers to the ability of an interlocutor to convey and interpret messages, and to negotiate meaning within a given context. In Hymes's view (1972b), a speaker who has acquired communicative competence has acquired not only knowledge of language use, but also the ability to use language. The speaker has thus acquired knowledge of the complete set of rules and conventions which govern the skilled use of language in society. Communicative competence refers to grammatical knowledge (e.g. phonology, morphology, syntax) as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately in ways that are acceptable to other members in the speech event; thus social as well as linguistic knowledge (Kachru, Kachru & Nelson 2009; Yano 2000; Becker 1982; Blum-Kulka 1982; Hymes 1972b; 1967). It is the cultural and social context that influences these features of linguistic performance (Kachru et al 2009). This view differs from Chomsky's conception of language as a mental attribute (Kaburise 2005). Gumperz (1982) identifies communicative competence as the linguistic knowledge and knowledge of communicative conventions (or pragmatic knowledge) that speakers must have to create and sustain conversational cooperation. He states that this involves both grammar and contextualization. Canale (1983) claims that communicative competence consists of four competences, namely grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Tanck (2002) states that communicative competence is the knowledge of both the structural and functional elements of a language and implies the ability to use language forms in a wide variety of situations.

Speakers considered to be communicatively competent are able to take into account the relationship between the speakers involved and the social and cultural context of the situation (Tanck 2002; Gass & Selinker 2001; Lightbown & Spada 1999; Savignon 1985). I concur with the above views, but emphasize the last, namely the relationship between the speaker and the social and cultural context of the situation. Failing to grasp this relationship may lead to inappropriate utterances, in either meaning or in form (e.g. in speech acts such as inviting, complaining and requesting). It is especially indirect utterances or hints that second language speakers find difficult, for example, when the student teacher says, "I will

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come for you" (meaning "I will listen to your question in a moment"), the learner may interpret this utterance as a threat. This may be because the second language speaker lacks the ability to draw inferences (Akmajian, Demers, Farmer & Harnish 1995). In this regard, Akmajian et al (1995) claim that in the process of learning how to communicate through using language, we acquire a variety of presumptions as well as a system of inferential strategies. More than just a shared language is necessary for successful oral communication, because the hearer has to have the ability to interpret a speaker's intent when communicating. This means that both the speaker and the hearer must share a system of beliefs and inferences, which function as strategies for communication (Akmajian et al 1995). Akmajian et al (1995) call this system the Inferential Model and claim that these inferential strategies explain how hearers arrive at the most likely meaning of an utterance. Failing to reach the intended meaning may lead to misunderstandings and failed communication.

The Inferential Model proposes that successful communication depends on the fact that the speaker/hearer understands meaning, or the ability to distinguish between linguistic meaning (actual words or dictionary definition) and speaker meaning (actual intention, what the speaker in a certain context means by his words). The word "cap", for example, has a linguistic meaning of type of hat or top for a bottle or pen, etc. In the context of students entering a lecture hall, the word "caps" in the sentence "Take off your caps", has the speaker meaning of hat or head covering. The hearer, therefore, interprets the context to understand what the speaker meaning is.

A hearer has to determine from certain clues in the context of the words whether they are spoken non-literally or indirectly, but s/he also has to determine what they actually mean. This is only possible when both the speaker and the hearer share the presumptions and apply the inferential strategies pointed out by Akmajian et al (1995). When a hearer has no reason not to believe that a speaker holds the presumptions as true, and when placed in context, the words spoken are inappropriate, s/he will be able to infer that the speaker is speaking non-literally (Akmajian et al 1995). Trying to determine the speaker's actual meaning or intent is often thought to be good guess-work, based on the presumptions shared by both (Blum-Kulka 1990), but the Inferential Model holds that not guessing, but

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systematic following of set strategies, leads to success in communication. For a more detailed explanation of this model see addendum A.

I support this theory and argue that where these set strategies are not adhered to by all speakers in a communication event, speaker meaning may be incorrectly interpreted. The result would be a rich source for misunderstanding. Researchers (Holtgraves 2007; Kasper 2005; Blum-Kulka 1990) have argued that native speakers seem to have the instinctive ability to address their incorrect interpretation and will try to find reasons for speaker intent, but that the non-native speaker has difficulties with this process, since cultural and first language (L1) transfer interfere with their interpretation (cf. section 2.4).

It would thus seem that communicative competence not only includes knowledge of the linguistic forms of a language, such as grammar, vocabulary and phonology, but also knowledge of the function of a language (Yano 2000), i.e. in Hymes's terms, the knowledge of when, how, and with whom it is appropriate to use these forms (Hymes 1972b). Social relationships may affect communicative interaction and may have a serious effect on the production and interpretation of language (Spencer-Oatey 1993). This could have practical implications, because one of the most important tasks when an additional language is acquired is learning the rules and mechanisms which underlie its appropriate use. Bachman (1990:82) calls this "the contexts of discourse and situation" and explains that language proficiency includes both discourse, namely individual utterances and sentences, and socio-linguistic context. It includes a number of abilities of the speaker, most importantly grammatical and pragmatic competences. Speakers taking part in discourse need to have knowledge which cannot be explained only in terms of Chomsky's (1965) "linguistic competence"; Kasper (1989:38) claims "they need to know how to

- produce language which is appropriate to the situation
- use the appropriate forms of language to achieve their purposes
- combine sentences in a meaningful way"

Such a speaker is, then, assumed to be communicatively competent which would include the four competencies commonly referred to as grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence (Canale 1983).

Grammatical competence refers to the Chomskyan concept of linguistic competence. This

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is typically the native speaker's knowledge of syntax, lexicon, morphology, and phonology of the language. It includes the ability to manipulate the above-mentioned aspects to produce well-formed words and sentences (Moodley 2010; Alptekin 2002). These aspects provide linguistic knowledge of the rules of usage which usually result in accurate performance. Canale and Swain (1980) emphasize that grammatical competence is of great importance for any communicative approach to language teaching,

Socio-linguistic competence is "the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different socio-linguistic contexts" (Canale & Swain 1980:30) and includes knowledge of the social rules of language use and an understanding of the social context in which such language is used (Thomas 1983). Appropriateness of utterances includes appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of form (Moodley 2010). Aspects such as the speakers' role in an interaction, the social status of that speaker, the information the speakers share and the purpose of the interaction are all important aspects to consider for appropriateness. When referring to social context here it means the culture-specific context in which that culture's norms, values, beliefs and behaviour patterns are displayed (Alptekin 2002).

Strategic competence means being able to deal with an authentic communicative situation and being able to continue the conversation (Alptekin 2002). It assumes knowledge of communication strategies which allow the speaker to compensate for inadequate knowledge of rules, or for aspects such as fatigue, inattention and distraction, all of which may inhibit the application of such rules (Hyde 1998). Strategic competence includes sufficient mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies (Moodley 2010) which interlocutors use to compensate for misunderstandings or breakdowns in communication.

Discourse competence is being able to cope in the extended use of language in a particular context, which is usually managed by connecting a series of utterances to form a cohesive whole (Alptekin 2002). The ability to connect utterances is usually implicit as the interlocutor will link ideas to each other based on his/her general knowledge of the world or his/her familiarity with a particular context. Where these intellectual and experiential

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connections are inadequate, the meanings a speaker can infer are usually incorrect and may lead to serious misunderstandings (Hyde 1998). Oral as well as written discourse competence both play a crucial role in language acquisition (Moodley 2010).

In contrast to the above-mentioned views, researchers are now questioning how to determine who the real native speaker is. In his book, *The Native Speaker is Dead!*, Paikedai (1985) indicates that native speakership is a linguistic myth. He argues that the true meaning of the native speaker is no more, nor less than a proficient user of a language. Similarly, Kramsch (1995:10) questions the idea that one is a native speaker by virtue of one's birth or education or membership of a native speaker community. He suggests a conceptual framework where "the competence of the bilingual non-native speaker who operates at the border between the two languages is taken as a pedagogic model". Kramsch (1995:10) further argues that it is now pertinent that the English language teaching field discards its educational vision and practices based on a "utopian notion of communicative competence involving idealized native speaker norms in both language and culture". I agree with this position as it highlights an unrealistic view of communicative competence, where standardized native speaker norms are the focus. This view does not reflect the *lingua franca* status that English has in the Western world. Social and economic globalization has made the use of an international means of communication throughout the world, such as English, more and more a necessity. Already in 1985 it was proposed that the number of people in the world who used English as their native or non-native language was one and a half billion (Crystal 2003; Alptekin 2002). It was predicted that within a short period of time the number of people who speak English as a non-native language would exceed the number of native speakers (Alptekin 2002), and this has already occurred (Deterding & Kirkpatrick 2006; Crystal 2003). English is estimated to remain the international medium of communication deep into the twenty-first century. English has already become the world's main language for storing and transmitting information. In the nineties an estimated 75% of the world's mail was in English, 80% of computer data was in English and 85% of all information stored or abstracted was in English (Alptekin 2002; Yano 2000; Thomas 1996). More recently it was estimated that around 85% of all web pages are in English (Selví 2007; Graddol 2006; Nunberg 2000).

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It would seem that the contexts of non-native speakers need to be taken into consideration if explanations for SLA and communicative competence are to be taken seriously (Coetzee-Van Rooy (2006). The view that SLA will only be successful if one alienates oneself from the local identity is contested by Coetzee-Van Rooy (2002) who found in her study that positive in-group identification correlated with English proficiency. In South Africa, with its multilingual and multicultural context, English is learnt, among others, to better understand speakers of other languages across language boundaries (Coetzee-Van Rooy 2006). English, therefore, operates as a *lingua franca* among non-native speakers of English and the successful mastering of English is not enough reason to be accepted as part of the English speaking South African community (a very small group) (Coetzee-Van Rooy 2006).

It seems possible then that in the South African context a strong case can be made for the rights of non-native speakers of English (the so-called "expanding" or "outer circle" [Kachru 1992:356]) to also "develop their own norms rather than continuing to defer to those of the so-called educated native speaker" (Jenkins 2006:171). Studies that support this view are those that demonstrate how teachers and learners accommodate other varieties of English into their multilingual classrooms (Heller & Martin-Jones 2001; Heller 1999), similar to the South African context. Because English is used as a *lingua franca*, it is apparent that most communication in English involves interactions between non-native speaker and non-native speaker. The relevance of focusing on, for example, the conventions of British politeness, the importance of Anglo-American eye contact, or the socially acceptable distance for conversation as properties of meaningful communication, has thus become less important (Alptekin 2002; Kramsch 1995) (cf. section 2.4).

A shift to the pluricentric realities of English, as proposed by Kachru (1988;1885) and Kachru et al (2009), where communicative competence is equal to the purposes and situations found in these contexts, need to be considered. The notion of acceptability or appropriateness (communicative competence) cannot be applied without taking the context of the situation into consideration, especially in a multilingual situation such as South Africa. When an American and a South African interact, variations in phonology, semantics or pragmatics may interfere with the communicative success. Usually these interferences

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are accounted for as cultural differences which underlie the linguistic choices made by each speaker. Kachru et al (2009) assert that these variations are acceptable for both speakers because they are both native speakers of their particular varieties. The dependence of context and communicative competence on one another is particularly clear in incidences of cross-cultural communication. Speech act realization, such as with apologies or requests, does not always represent the intended message when speakers share different socio-cultural norms (Kachru et al 2009). In the following example, taken from Kachru et al (2009:39), an African-English speaker will greet someone by saying "I see you've put on some weight", which is considered a polite way of greeting in the African culture. The American-English speaker will meet this greeting with indignation because only the cultural equivalent of this greeting, "You're looking well", will be considered appropriate. As a result the utterance will be misunderstood. In exchanges such as these, I am interested in the aspect of communicative competence which caused the misunderstanding, namely whether it is linguistic (register, lexical items, rate of speech) or cultural (pragmatic choices the speaker made based on values). In the aforementioned example it is cultural; underlying the observable factors of linguistic form and polite social behaviour are the interlocutors' value systems. Therefore, I follow Kachru's (1981) definition of communicative competence where Hymes's (1972b) notion of sociolinguistic rules is added to context and situation (social and cultural constraints applicable to the setting of the speech event). This then forms the basis of Kachru's (1981) formulation of communicative competence, namely "interpersonal function of language and a socially constructed meaning potential" (Kachru et al 2009). Kachru's (1981) view of communicative competence is particularly relevant when one needs to determine whether or not a particular use of English is appropriate, or whether native speaker norms and native speaker communicative competence are the only acceptable ways of speaking. Kachru supports the view that it is the local users who are best able to determine what is appropriate in their own contexts of use (Kachru et al 2009).

Communicative competence is also at the centre of language teaching and pedagogy. Until recently, all learners of English had as their goal to acquire native speaker competence and a British (or American) variety was thought to be the model to follow (Jenkins 2009). More recently, the teaching goal has become **effectiveness** in all aspects of

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communication rather than approaches preoccupied with grammatical correctness (Kachru et al 2009). As such, in choosing a classroom model, the diversity of the social and cultural context in which the language will be used, can only be seen as critical.

Nevertheless, in an instructional setting where the teacher supposedly acts as a model of effective communication, at least some level of accuracy and fluency is required for communicative competence to be achieved. Yano (2000) claims that in many countries where English is acquired as a second language, a constant complaint is that the standard of English is falling. Furthermore, despite the growing sense of the strengths of the non-native speaker, the belief in native speaker ownership and superiority persists among both native and non-native speakers (Jenkins 2006).

When non-native speakers of English are considered communicatively competent, they usually employ a variety of communicative acts, called speech acts, to achieve their communicative goals. These speech acts include Searle's (1969) seminal broad categories of classification; commissives, declarations, directives, expressives and representatives, as well as more specific speech acts such as requests, apologies, complaints and refusals (Kasper & Rose 2001; Searle 1969; Austen 1962). While the theory on communicative competence covers several dimensions of language behaviour, the focus in this study is on one aspect of communicative competence, namely speech acts, which was used as analytical framework to describe misunderstandings. The section that follows explains the nature of speech acts and their role in communicative competence.

2.4 Speech Act Theory and speech acts

Being able to recognise the specific speech act which is performed with an utterance is a central aspect of pragmatic competence and as such speech act behaviour has been a fundamental concern for researchers in this field. Studies on pragmatics have been specifically focused on the pragmatic difficulties which differentiate second language (L2) learners' behaviour from that of native language speakers' behaviour. Inadequate mastery of grammar, together with socio-linguistic misperception, makes learners appear improper

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or even incompetent. Failing to utter speech acts appropriately results in the breakdown of communication.

Two of the most important contributors to the creation of the classic Speech Act Theory are Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Austin (1962) claims that when speakers utter a sentence, they actually produce three actions or acts, namely a locutionary, an illocutionary and a perlocutionary act. A locutionary act is "the specific utterance with its determinate sense and reference" (Bosco, Bucciarelli & Bara 2006:1400). It is the act of saying something; it is when one utters a sentence with a certain reference, equivalent to its traditional meaning, for example, "The books are on the top shelf."

The illocutionary act is the speaker's "intent in uttering the message" (Bosco et al 2006:1400). It is the act done **in** saying something – it is when we utter, for example, orders or warnings. These utterances have a certain conventional force or intent, for example, "Don't paste the worksheet over the drawing!"

Lastly, the perlocutionary act is the "effects the addressor sets out to achieve" (Bosco et al 2006:1400). It is the act done **by** saying something – it is when we bring about a certain reaction by, for example, convincing, persuading, deterring or even misleading or surprising someone (Austin 1962). For example, "If you are as intelligent as I think you are, you would certainly find the answers."

The locutionary aspect seems to correspond to the conventional content and the illocutionary aspect is identical to the conventional force of an utterance (Marcu 2000). The perlocutionary act produces certain consequential effects upon the thoughts, feelings or actions of other persons.

Searle (1969) presents a theory, which is a development of the account presented by Austin (1962) and claims that four acts are characteristically performed when uttering a sentence. These are performing

- 1) utterance acts such as uttering words (morphemes, sentences)
- 2) propositional acts such as referring and predicting

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- 3) illocutionary acts such as stating, questioning, commanding, promising, apologising
- 4) Austin's notion of the perlocutionary act, where the illocutionary act has a consequence or effect on the actions, thoughts or beliefs of hearers

Together, Austin and Searle provide a useful conceptual framework for describing communicative action (Kaburise 2005). Austin's insight is that an utterance constitutes an act. When making an utterance one not only **says** things, one can also **do** things. An act performed through speech is thus a speech act. The three speech acts are ruled by different sets of felicity conditions (cf. section 1.4) which determine the success or failure of each act (Bosco et al 2006). These conditions include considerations of what is said, the form, meaning and presentation of what is said, as well as the context in which it is said (Kasper, 2005). Felicity conditions, invented by Austin (1962) in his formulation of Speech Act Theory, refer to certain conditions which must be in place and certain criteria which must be satisfied for a speech act to achieve its purpose (Crystal 2003:178). Utterances are not seen in terms of being true or false, but are deemed "felicitous" or "infelicitous" based on a set of conditions. The interpretation of these sets of conditions will differ depending on the type of speech act; whether the utterance is a declaration ("I give you my word"), a request ("Please open your books") or a warning ("Do not shout out the answers"). The different sets of felicity conditions include: (1) an **essential condition** (whether a speaker intends that an utterance be acted upon; (2) a **sincerity condition** (whether the speech act is being performed seriously and sincerely); (3) a **preparatory condition** (whether the authority of the speaker and the circumstances of the speech act are appropriate to its being performed successfully) (Crystal 2003:179). Felicity conditions are, therefore, conventions that speakers and hearers use as a framework to allow them to produce and recognize actions: "Speakers use the felicity conditions for actions as a device for encoding their actions into sentences with a particular linguistic structure that speakers then utter (i.e. they produce the appropriate utterance unit). Hearers, in turn, use the same set of felicity conditions for actions as a device for decoding the speaker's actions from the linguistic structure of the sentences the speaker produced (i.e. from the speaker's utterance units)" (Turnbull 2003:47). Felicity conditions are thus conditions for speech acts to be effective.

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When one or more of the felicity conditions ruling each stage are not satisfied, a speech act will fail. Being able to recognise the actions that speakers perform with their utterances is a crucial aspect of successful language use. When some or all of these conditions are not in place, the force of an utterance may be misunderstood and incidents of communication failure may occur. This may be enough to differentiate a non-native speaker from a native speaker and may cause breakdown in communication.

It would seem that native speakers are able to adhere to the felicity conditions with relative ease, even automatically. This may not be the case for non-native speakers, which may be the reason for misunderstandings. Misunderstandings are considered an integral part of the comprehension process and not merely a simple breakdown (Bosco et al 2006; Blum-Kulka & Weizman 1988; Dascal 1985). The mismatch between the speaker's meaning and the hearer's interpretation is the central defining feature of misunderstanding and communication failure (Bosco et al 2006).

The focus in researching speech acts is mainly on the illocutionary force of utterances, or their functional value (Kaburise 2005; Schmidt & Richards 1980). It remains puzzling that speakers and hearers are usually able to understand one another, not only in terms of the form and meaning of utterances, but also in terms of the functions of the utterances. If, for example, hearers respond only to the form and meaning of the utterance "Can you provide a definition of adverbs?" by simply replying "Yes, I can", they have not taken the illocutionary force of the utterance, namely request, into consideration and are being wilfully (or even unwittingly) uncommunicative. This leads to what Thomas (1983:90) calls "pragmatic failure", or cross-cultural communication breakdown, since it seems to be the transfer from L1 cultural norms to the L2 that causes the misunderstanding or breakdown in communication. Speakers and hearers usually are able to interpret these functions because they understand the linguistic meaning of the utterances, but also because they know under what contextual conditions or appropriateness conditions (Bachman 1990) an utterance can serve as a particular type of illocutionary act. Thomas (1983:97) applied the terms "pragmalinguistic failure", or "linguistically inappropriate transfer", and "sociopragmatic failure", or "cross-culturally different interpretations of appropriateness", to clarify this notion further. Thomas (1983) points out that pragmalinguistic competence

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refers to the competence to use appropriate language to perform an illocutionary act. When one fails to do so, pragmalinguistic failure will result. Sociopragmatic failure occurs when non-native speakers fail to choose the appropriate utterance because of a lack of knowledge of cultural differences. What may be considered polite speech in one culture, may be considered inappropriate in another. Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) state that pragmalinguistic failure includes errors made because non-native speakers, while knowing what the right thing to say is, do not know how to say the right thing. Sociopragmatic failure, on the other hand, includes errors made because non-native speakers do not know what to say or what the appropriate thing to say is because of transferring contrasting rules from their native languages and cultures. An utterance can only be correctly interpreted, i.e. have the illocutionary force as intended by the speaker, if the conditions surrounding the utterance are appropriate.

Where utterances are in disagreement with the appropriateness conditions, often when interpreted literally, hearers usually do not simply reject the utterances as illocutionary failures. They will accept that the speaker is conforming to the general principles of co-operative behaviour (Grice 1975) and will determine whether the utterances have an indirect instead of a direct illocutionary force (Schmidt & Richards 1980). They will then be able to interpret indirect speech acts in the way the speaker intended them to be interpreted. It is important to note that being able to interpret utterances correctly is solely dependent on the speaker's communicative ability or communicative competence, because meaning is flexible, dynamic, and depends on negotiation between speakers (Kasper 2005). This is even more pronounced when idiosyncratic utterances, such as those made by L2 speakers, and the participants of this study, are scrutinized.

It would seem as if native speakers of a language have the instinctive ability to determine the complexities of the inferential processes involved in understanding implied meanings in natural conversations because they are conforming to the politeness principles⁴ and the Gricean (1981) maxims, which are fundamental to human communication (Holtgraves 2007; Kasper 2005; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986). It is strongly believed that pragmatic failure possibly occurs because these principles and maxims are bound by intercultural

⁴ Read Brown and Levinson (1978) for information on Politeness Theory

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differences (Wierzbicka 1992; Blum-Kulka 1990). L2 learners may achieve easy control of the vocabulary and grammar of the target language without achieving the equivalent control over the pragmatic or functional uses of the language, such as those communicated by speech acts. In other words, they may learn various forms for offering their thanks or for apologizing, for example, but may not always know when it is appropriate to use these forms (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986). The L2 learner, therefore, has very specific difficulties in successfully realising speech acts in the LoLT. An L2 learner's lack of awareness of pragmatic aspects of the target language and the subsequent inappropriate transfer of speech act strategies from L1 to L2 may lead to misunderstandings and pragmatic failure. This could impact gravely on the learning experience in the classroom, especially if the teacher is also an L2 speaker of English. In the South African context, with many non-native speakers of English (Statistics South Africa 2001), the possibility for such differences becomes particularly strong.

In contrast to the traditional viewpoints on SLA and communicative competence presented in the aforementioned, there is a growing view among researchers that these views are flawed (Coetzee-Van Rooy 2006; Liddicoat 2000; Sridhar & Sridhar 1992; Kachru 1988; Smith 1983). It has been assumed that success in acquiring a second language is motivated by an admiration for the native speakers of the target language and a desire to become a member of their culture (Sridhar & Sridhar 1992). Native-like second language proficiency would then be possible. Coetzee-Van Rooy (2006:440) argues that such a view "is not tenable in a context such as the South African one, where English is not learned for the purpose of integration with a dominant English speaking group". As Smith (1983:2) states, "No one needs to become more like Americans, the British, the Australians ... or any other English speaker to lay claim on the language". Smith (1983:5) reminds teachers that the goal for teaching English is to "communicate their ideas" and not to learn about English culture. I agree with Liddicoat (2000) who claims that striving for intercultural competence (linguistically and culturally) does not necessarily mean "assimilation into the target culture, but rather developing a third place between the learner's native culture and the target culture, i.e. between self and other" (Liddicoat, Crozet & Lo Bianco 1999:181). Language learners need to understand what native speakers mean when they use the language, even if they do not wish to reproduce native speaker behaviour (Liddicoat 2000).

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Realising speech acts effectively is a fundamental part of communicative competence and implies being consciously aware of linguistic forms, functional meanings, speech styles and relevant contexts (Schmidt 1992; 1993). Trosborg (1995) and Kasper (2001) advocate enhancing learners' awareness of appropriate pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic behaviour by explicitly teaching pragmatic features. This could be done by means of description, explanation and discussion. Kasper (2001:522) further observes that teachers of English must be "sufficiently socialised to second language pragmatic practices so that they can comfortably draw on those practices as part of their communicative and cultural repertoire". Their "metapragmatic awareness" will then place them in a position to support the learning of second language pragmatics effectively (Pohl 2004:12). This is, however, a challenging requirement because most of our pragmatic knowledge is embedded and is only realised through careful observation and the conscious practising of being able to distinguish between expressed and implied meanings (Pohl 2004).

Although much research has been conducted which addresses awareness of classroom discourse, it does not seem appropriate to conclude that all is well in classrooms where culturally and linguistically diverse learners attempt to master English as their second language (Ramirez & Merino 1990). Research on the quality of teacher and learner language (Ramirez, Yuen, Ramey & Pasta 1991; Ramirez & Merino 1990) suggests that the teacher provides a passive language environment, where learners' opportunities to produce language and develop more complex language and thinking skills are limited. Teachers do most of the talking, sometimes making twice as many utterances as learners, and often the only responses from learners are non-verbal gestures (Ramirez & Merino 1990). These non-verbal gestures often convey their misunderstanding and confusion, and if not acted upon, will negatively influence the learning experience (Ramirez & Marino 1990). Classroom interaction should provide learners with the opportunity to create original statements, rather than simple, distinct or closed ended responses. This will allow learners to participate in more complex learning, i.e. higher order thinking skills (Ramirez et al 1991). To do so requires a special kind of teacher and a special kind of curriculum. Although it is difficult to identify specific attributes of teachers necessary for successful language teaching, research efforts have focused on identifying teacher characteristics for successful teaching (Reynolds & Elias 1991). There are four areas in which good teachers

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excel, namely content knowledge, teaching for learning, creating a classroom community, and teacher professionalism (Dwyer 1991). Excelling in these areas provides learners with prime chances of success. However, in this study I argue that misunderstandings may occur when the teacher lacks the proficiency in one (or all) of these domains, and does not possess adequate oral proficiency. Much of the research done in this field has focused on **written** evidence such as discourse completion tests (DCTs), or artificial scenarios to capture speech act realization (De Kadt 1992; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984; Scarcella 1979). A few examples, presented from earlier to the most recent studies on speech act realization, are presented in table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Some studies on Speech Act research

Researcher	Date	Type of speech act study
Scarcella	1979	Roleplay
Robinson	1982	Discourse completion test (DCT), verbal protocol
Olshtain & Blum-Kulka	1985	Rating scale
Blum-Kulka & Olshtain	1986	Discourse completion test (DCT)
Koike	1996	Video-prompted response rating scale
Hill	1997	Discourse completion test (DCT)
Kaburise	2005	Discourse completion test (DCT)
Lwanga Luma	2005	Discourse completion test (DCT)

The above research was conducted on written utterances, mostly in contrived settings, which suggests that there is a gap in the literature on **oral** proficiency and language use in natural settings or settings such as a classroom. In attempting to fill this gap, I focused on misunderstandings and oral proficiency in an instructional context. I concur with Marcu (2000) who states that if we require pragmatics to be meaningful in our understanding of the world, we need to avoid artificially constructed examples and base our research on real-life or actual data.

Based on the aforementioned sections (cf. sections 2.2, 2.3 & 2.4), it would seem important for language speakers to develop knowledge of pragmatic and socio-linguistic rules in order to avoid failure and misunderstanding in instructional communication. Pragmatic

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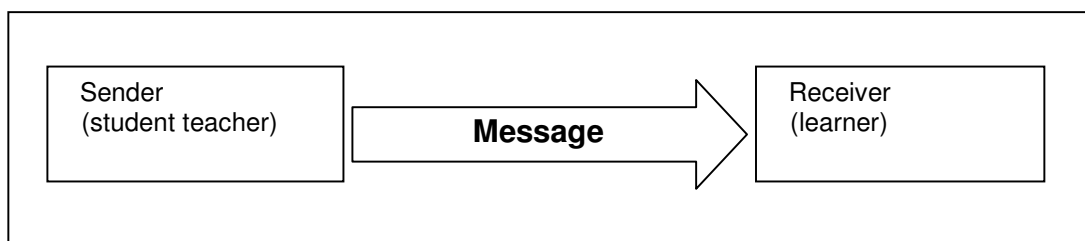
competence is defined as "the ability to use language effectively in order to understand language in context" (El Samaty 2005:341).

I argue that misunderstanding may be as a result of inadequate pragmatic competence and poor oral proficiency. Since this study focuses on misunderstandings in an instructional context, it stands to reason that both the context, namely the classroom, and the communication between the student teacher and learners in this setting should be scrutinised.

2.5 Instructional communication

Communication is "the exchange of ideas, including hearing or receiving information, speaking or sending information, and use of language, written, oral and symbolic" (Collins & O'Brien 2003:65). Communication is interactive and participatory, ideas are exchanged in a two-way process with feedback, it involves basic language skills such as hearing, listening and speaking, and the participants include one who sends information (sender) and one who receives information (receiver) (Collins & O'Brien 2003). Sage (2003:1) states that communication is dynamic in that "it includes many ways of sending and receiving messages, and not simply telling things to others". Figure 2.3 offers a diagram of the communication elements in traditional mono-directional instruction.

Figure 2.3: Communication elements in traditional instruction

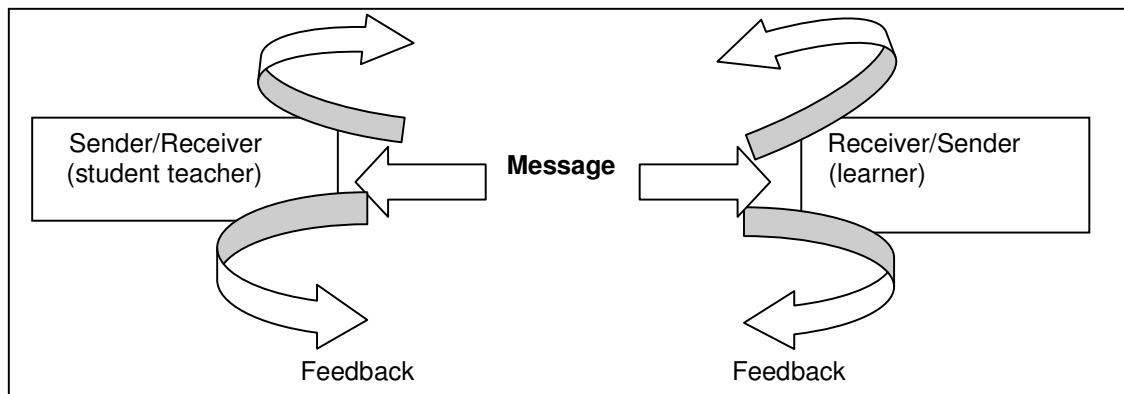


(Adapted from Neo & Neo 2004)

The above diagram indicates only the basic elements involved in the communication process and is, therefore, not satisfactory. There are more aspects involved. Since the communication is a two-way process, it includes processing of information and dealing with

barriers to successful communication in order to give relevant feedback. The diagram in figure 2.4 is a more accurate schematic representation of the communication process.

Figure 2.4: The communication process



(Adapted from Steinberg 1995)

The elements of communication indicated above refer to the ideal setting in an ideal class. A number of factors come into play during the instructional communication process, namely psychological, sensory and external factors, which could all result in instructional dissonance, or what Evans and Cleghorn (2010:141) call "complex language encounters". In a traditional setting, instruction refers to "the guided exercises, lessons, and materials used to teach a subject, the formal act of imparting knowledge or developing skills, teaching" (Collins & O'Brien 2003:181). This definition qualifies instruction as a formal activity where exercises, clarifications and learning materials are used for the purpose of sharing knowledge, developing skills and shaping attitudes/values. In the South African context formal instruction is teaching/learning that takes place within an accredited institution of learning and is geared towards rewarding a learner with a recognised qualification at the end of the programme (school certificate or higher education certificate/diploma/degree) when that learner has successfully mastered the set outcomes.

Several studies have been conducted on instructional communication (Ismail & Idris 2009; Katt, McCroskey, Sivo, Richmond & Valencic 2009; Osakwe 2009; Rhymes 2009; Daly & Brown 2007; McCroskey, Valencic & Richmond 2004; Alptekin 2002; Simonds 2001), all focusing on how language is used in an instructional context. Most of these studies employ

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discourse analysis as methodology to determine what is said and how it is said during instruction. However, the focus tends to be on how language is used and not on how communication fails. My study examines misunderstandings, possibly caused by communication failure, in an instructional setting. Instructional communication is defined by Simonds (2001:1) as "a field of study that informs educators of all disciplines about the communication skills necessary to function competently in the classroom". Teachers need these skills to facilitate the content of what they plan to teach and learners need these skills to engage with the content. For the purposes of this study, the notion of instructional communication is based on The General Model of Instructional Communication developed by McCroskey et al (2004) and in this study refers to student teachers' communicative skills, which include oral proficiency, as they interact with their learners, verbally and non-verbally, in a face-to-face learning environment. Experiential knowledge has led me to believe that oral proficiency and communication skills are inadequately developed among student teachers who are non-native speakers of English, and since English is the LoLT in many schools in South Africa, these student teachers, once appointed, will be expected to facilitate content in English without the necessary communication skills or adequate oral proficiency.

Language classrooms can be viewed as socio-linguistic environments and discourse communities where learners' language development is supported by interaction (Consolo 2006a). Language learning is a social entity and is intrinsically linked to the participation of learners in activities presented in the classroom. It is during the interactions of the teacher and the learner where intellectual and practical activities shape the form as well as the content of the target language (Consolo 2006a). The teacher's management of instructional communication defines the learners' utterances, for example, when they reply to the teacher's questions. When the teacher's management of instructional communication is problematic, learners have to take the initiative to overcome communication breakdowns, as in requests for clarification of what has been said (Katt et al 2009; McCroskey et al 2004; Simonds 2001). This view is supported by several researchers, who refer to communication competence (Schirmer, Mauksch, Lang, Marvel, Zoppi, Epstein, Brock, & Pryzbylski 2005; Lane & Shelton 2001), classroom communication (Ismail & Idris 2009), classroom interaction (Osakwe 2009), verbal and non-verbal behaviour in the classroom

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(Babad 2009) and classroom discourse analysis (Rymes 2009; Nuthall 2005) to explain what happens in an instructional environment. The aforementioned researchers agree that communication is of utmost importance during teaching and learning, because teachers and learners negotiate meaning in a classroom context. As such, the oral proficiency of instructors plays an important role.

Communication is intuitive, and the speaker's feelings, attitudes, general knowledge and social understanding are all part of the communication process (Sage 2003). These are communicated by non-verbal cues, such as facial expression, gestures and posture, also known as haptics. Teaching and learning are, therefore, communicative incidents where verbal and non-verbal information is constantly exchanged between teachers and learners. It follows that communication between teachers and learners should be clear and effective and should follow conventions of conduct so that information is fed back and behaviour adjusted where necessary in order to facilitate understanding and avoid misunderstanding. My assumption was that where misunderstandings occurred, it might be because the student teachers who participated in this study are non-native speakers of English.

Since this study is based on the premise that misunderstandings may occur because of student teachers' inappropriate or even erroneous speech act performance, a closer look at what happens during pragmatic failure is required. As a further premise of the study is that misunderstandings may be caused by pragmatic failure, it stands to reason that the nature of misunderstandings also needs to be investigated.

2.6 Misunderstanding

The notion of misunderstanding has been described under a variety of terms in socio-linguistics: as miscommunication, misinterpretation, misperception and pragmatic failure or breakdown in communication (Verdonik 2010; Bosco et al 2006; Weigand 1999; Weizman 1999; Dascal & Berenstein 1987; Thomas 1983; Zaefferer 1977). Research interest in misunderstandings has been abundant over the last few decades (Bosco et al 2006; Hinnenkamp 1999, 2003; Bazzanello & Damiano 1999a; 1999b; Weizman 1999; Weigand 1999; Weizman & Blum-Kulka 1992; Dascal & Berenstein 1987; Schegloff 1987; Thomas

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1983; Zaefferer 1977). However, research on this topic appears to have diminished in recent years as I found very few studies on misunderstanding published after 2003. Verdonik (2010:1364) describes what she calls "borderline misunderstandings", i.e. whether or not a misunderstanding has occurred, whether or not communication was successful and why interlocutors do not negotiate understanding. Although her study does not aim to classify misunderstandings, many other researchers (Hinnenkamp 2003; 1999; Wong 2000; Bazzanella & Damiano 1999a; 1999b; Weigand 1999; Weizman 1999; Schegloff 1992) have proposed various classifications of misunderstandings. Misunderstandings in the literature have been classified according to structural rather than content factors, such as where in the turn-taking the misunderstanding occurs (Wong 2000; Schegloff 1992). Mainly two approaches have received research interest:

- 1) attempts to trace the sources of, and the reasons for misunderstandings
- 2) attempts to identify the interactional structure of misunderstandings (Hinnenkamp 1999)

The aforementioned studies focus on the role that ambiguity and indirectness (or the difference between speech and intended meaning) play in the speech event. However, there seems to be a dearth of publications related to the frequency and consequences of misunderstandings that cause miscommunication in the instructional setting. My study attempts to address this gap in the literature. The lens of this study is misunderstanding as the interface between theories on communication and Vygotsky's theory of ZPD.

Research on misunderstandings has mainly focused on how often misunderstandings occur (Fraser 1993; Schegloff 1992), how misunderstandings are detected and corrected (Bazzanella & Damiano 1999a; 1999b; Weizman 1999), how misunderstandings are managed (Bosco et al 2006; Bazzanella & Damiano 1999a; 1999b; Hinnenkamp 1999; Weigand 1999), what the causes of misunderstandings are (Bazzanella & Damiano 1999a; 1999b; Hinnenkamp 1999; Weigand 1999; Weizman 1999; Linell 1995; Bilmes 1992; Tannen 1991; Schegloff 1987), and cross-cultural misunderstandings (Tannen 1992; 1991; Chick 1989; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1986; Thomas 1983; Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz 1982). Causes of misunderstanding are closely related to the types of misunderstanding. A useful classification of causes of misunderstandings, which they call "triggers", is provided by Bazzanella and Damiano (1999b:818). These triggers fall into four categories, namely

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structural misunderstandings (such as ambiguity – often the main cause of misunderstandings); misunderstandings related to the speaker; misunderstandings related to the interlocutor and misunderstandings related to the interaction between the two speakers (such as cultural differences, e.g. between male and female communicative styles [Tannen 1991]). Some of the main classifications of misunderstandings in the literature are presented in chronological order in table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Classifications of misunderstandings

Researcher	Date	Classification
Zaefferer	1977	Structural taxonomy (misperceptions or misinterpretations)
Thomas	1983	Pragmatics-based classification of communication failure (pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure)
Dascal & Berenstein	1987	Two modes of understanding: comprehending and grasping (speaker meaning and rules for social interaction)
Weizman & Blum-Kulka	1992	Individual (I-level) and collective (we-level) misunderstanding, each further classified in three dimensions
Bazzanella & Damiano	1999	Five levels of misunderstanding: phonetic, syntactic, lexical, semantic, pragmatic
Hinnenkamp	1999	Seven types of misunderstanding, grouped into event and core
Bosco, Bucciarelli & Bara	2006	Taxonomy: failure of the expression act, failure of the actor's meaning and failure of the communicative effect

The following examples seem to fit the classifications of Thomas (1983) on pragmatic failure (example 1), and Zaefferer (1977) on misinterpretations (examples 2 and 3) and are included to highlight the typical sources of misunderstanding in instructional settings.

Example 1:

During assembly⁵ one morning at a dual medium⁶ secondary school, the national flag is hoisted, but the learners are not particularly interested in the process. The staff member responsible for assembly is upset at the lack of respect and shouts at the learners to look

⁵ Assembly is a formal gathering at school where all learners and staff gather to hear information relevant to all for the week. Typically, the South African flag is hoisted at this gathering and often learners and staff participate in religious ceremonies.

⁶ Afrikaans/English; English as medium of instruction (LoLT).

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at the flag while it is being hoisted. English is not his home language and due to cross-cultural and/or linguistic transfer failure, he uses a typical Afrikaans preposition in the sentence. He shouts:

"Look **for** the flag!"

(translated directly into Afrikaans: "Kyk **vir** (sic) die vlag")

resulting in all the learners searching on the ground for the missing flag!

Example 2:

A teacher hands out essays that she has marked. On some of the essays she has written: "Keep it up!". When she looks up, she sees the learners holding the essays up in the air. The learners misunderstood her sentence, interpreting it as a directive to hold the essays up in the air and not as a congratulatory remark, praising their essay writing skills.

Example 3:

In conversation with friends, I was part of a discussion about an intended overseas trip and the exchange rate of the Rand/Euro and the amount necessary to have available as cash. The following exchanges took place as part of this discussion:

"I still have to bring you the *Heroes* [DVD recordings of a popular TV series]"

"Are you sure? Won't you need them [Euros] yourself when you go [overseas] again?"

"Why would I want to take them overseas with me?"

"One can always use extra Euros."

"No. I'm talking about *Heroes*, the TV series!"

The examples above are definitely misunderstandings. But the question is whether the misunderstandings constitute a problem or not. In social situations like the above, probably not, but in an instructional setting they certainly do. As stated in chapter 1, researchers agree, and I concur, that the most important use of language is for communication between people (Dascal 1999; Weigand 1999; Weizman 1999). This communication can, however, go wrong in a number of ways, as described in the conversation above, and may lead to misunderstanding. Weigand (1999:769) quotes the German author, Johann Wolfgang Goethe as saying: "Nobody would speak a lot in company if they knew how often they

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misunderstood the other." Weigand (1999:773) warns that "if we do not respond appropriately to the information given to us we may be misinterpreting the message, causing bad feelings towards one another and creating other problems".

Misunderstandings are assumed to occur daily which is evidenced by the frequent use and availability of specific repair structures in conversational turns (Dascal 1999). Dascal (1999) claims that speakers become aware of misunderstandings almost immediately after they had occurred (second turn) and most misunderstandings are repaired in the third or fourth turn. There are, however, exceptions, where misunderstanding continues for several turns. If unresolved, these misunderstandings are sustained and may lead to breakdown in communication, which is equal to miscommunication or pragmatic failure. Some authors have stressed that misunderstandings are a fundamental part of the comprehension process and not merely a breakdown (Kreuz & Roberts 1993; Blum-Kulka & Weizman 1988; Dascal 1985). However, it seems as if all authors agree that an inconsistency between speaker meaning and hearer interpretation is the chief determining aspect of misunderstanding.

It is not possible to describe misunderstanding without clearly defining the concept of understanding. Weigand (1999) claims that understanding is a psychological process associated with an abstract object (e.g. a message) or a physical object (e.g. a person), where one is able to think or talk about that object appropriately. She explains that to understand something is to have conceptualized it to a certain extent and provides the following example: one could say that "somebody who reacts appropriately to X understands X", or in other terms, "one understands Spanish if one correctly obeys commands given in that language" (Weigand 1999:776). To understand a request, one would have to understand who made the request, what is expected by the person making the request, whether the request is legitimate and whether one understands the speaker. In other words, one understands a message if one can meaningfully reproduce the information conveyed by the message, correctly and appropriately. In addition, understanding is only possible when one has interpreted correctly the context in which the speech event took place, where understanding or misunderstanding can occur due to the context rather than words or language, and taken body language into account. Weigand

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(1999:769) states that the purpose of all our communicative actions is to "come to an understanding" of one another, and that this is determined by our sensible and conventional use of communicative means. Even when we use indirect ways to express ourselves, we use conventional techniques. These communicative actions, which serve the purpose of "coming to an understanding", are in contrast to the notion of "understanding", which is an intellectual notion, because we rely on certain assumptions and knowledge and use intellectual abilities in drawing inferences in meaning (Weigand 1999:769; 773). It would thus seem that knowledge of speech acts plays a distinct role in avoiding misunderstanding, as speaker intent needs to be determined. This does not mean that complete understanding is always taken for granted. I agree with Verdonik (2010:1377) who states that "there is no such thing as perfect, complete understanding since discourse participants always understand discourse from their own points of view". Because people from different worlds meet and because speakers and hearers are different people and because each communicative episode is different, our level of communicative competence explains some incidences where misunderstanding may occur. This is particularly true of the instructional context where a diverse mix of learners and teachers meet daily.

It is, perhaps, prudent to also clarify the notion of misunderstandings. Weigand (1999:769) argues that the most prominent feature of misunderstanding is that it is a "form of understanding which is partially or totally deviant from what the speaker intended to communicate, it is a communicative phenomenon typically belonging to the receiver, who is not aware of the fact that s/he has misunderstood, it is involuntary and it occurs at the semantic-pragmatic level". It can, therefore, not be described as an act but as an ability (or rather inability) of the hearer. Weigand's (1999) statement points to the receiver/hearer having misunderstood, knowingly or unknowingly, but in my opinion it is often the error (of whatever kind) made by the speaker that leads to the receiver misunderstanding the speaker's intent. The misunderstanding, therefore, cannot only belong to the receiver, but should belong to the speaker as well, although most commonly, misunderstanding occurs without having been intended by the speaker. An example from my observational data supports this thought where a student teacher said to the learners:

"You've read the book, people!", an indirect speech act meaning "Why don't you know the answers?" but interpreted by the learners as an interrogative

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"Have you read the book?" to which they replied "Yes, Sir!"

The receivers/hearers (in this case the learners) misunderstood the intention of the speaker (the student teacher), but it was the speaker's use of an indirect speech act which caused the misunderstanding, albeit unintentionally. I believe both speaker and receiver are thus responsible for the misunderstanding. Misunderstanding can be categorised into two kinds; the first as a result of errors, or problematic performance (inadequate proficiency) and the second as a result of the "conventions and principles of communicative competence" (Weigand 1999:771). Competent interlocutors are able to deal with general performance conditions and tolerate misunderstanding in a "harmonious model of communicative competence" because they assume that understanding will be worked out in conversation and a "coming to an understanding" will be reached (Weigand 1999:769; 771).

Another view on misunderstanding is that which Dascal (1999:753) describes as the "folk-theory" of misunderstandings, where four factors are taken into account, namely:

- 1) production vs reception (where the speaker misinforms or mispronounces and the hearer misinterprets) (cf. example on *Euros/Heroes*, section 2.6)
- 2) the level of the linguistic phenomenon where the misunderstanding occurs (this includes aspects such as acoustics/phonology [mispronouncing]; graphemics [misprinting]; syntax [misparsing]; lexical semantics [misnaming]; stylistic choices [wrong word choice]; speech act conditions [misaffirming]; pragmatics [misanswering or misintending] and rhetoric/argumentation [misconcluding])
- 3) the norms upon which the evaluation is based (violation of communicative norms (incorrect – mispronouncing) vs violation of ethical norms (wrong/bad – misleading/misreporting))
- 4) involuntary vs voluntary misunderstanding (mispronouncing/mishearing vs misconveying) (cf. example on *Euros/Heroes*, section 2.6)

Dascal (1999:754) claims that the categories above assist in characterizing "the standard case" of misunderstanding which could assist in developing a theory of misunderstanding. Dascal (1985:443) emphasizes that the utterance is of utmost significance when attempting

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to avoid misunderstandings and identifies four layers of significance, indicated by four questions:

- 1) What did he say?
- 2) What was he talking about?
- 3) Why did he say it?
- 4) Why did he say it in the way he said it?

Hinnenkamp (1999:3) argues that by identifying the significance of the utterance, Dascal (1985) asserts semantic and pragmatic reasons for misunderstandings. Hinnenkamp (1999) contests the fact that Dascal's taxonomy (1999) can explain the working and treatment of misunderstandings. In reaction, Hinnenkamp (1999:3) describes seven types of misunderstanding (MU), adapted from the work of Linell (1995), which range from "overt misunderstanding (MU 1 and MU 2) to latent ones (MU 6 and MU 7), with covert misunderstandings in between (MU 3–MU 5)".

The seven misunderstandings are listed below:

- (MU 1) Immediate recognition of a misunderstanding, followed by repair and a return to the *status quo ante*, usually with phrases such as "That is not what I meant", or "I think you misunderstood"
- (MU 2) Immediate recognition of a misunderstanding, followed by repair, but no return to the *status quo ante*
- (MU 3) Gradual recognition of misunderstanding, indicated by disturbances in the flow of communication ("uncomfortable moments" [Erickson & Schultz 1982]), with possible but unlikely return to the *status quo ante*
- (MU 4) Gradual recognition of misunderstanding, indicated by disturbances in the communication, but is not treated as in MU1 and MU2; misunderstanding is not treated/rectified or repaired
- (MU 5) Gradual recognition of misunderstanding, indicated by disturbances in the communication, until communication comes to a halt or breaks down, sometimes followed by change of topic
- (MU 6) No obvious recognition of misunderstanding, although an outside observer will regard it as a misunderstanding

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- (MU 7) To an outside observer there is no indication that a misunderstanding has occurred, but one interlocutor may have the feeling that s/he was misunderstood – the misunderstanding, although noticed, remains unnegotiated

Hinnenkamp (1999:8) further claims that in each of the seven classifications, only two factors are relevant, namely what he calls the "event" and the "core" of the misunderstanding. The "event" here is the stretch of talk called the speech event, or the reason for the conversation. The "core" refers to the part or item that is the actual misunderstanding, whether it be mishearing, misinterpretation or poor expression. This argument becomes clear when we revisit the example of the conversation I had with a friend about *Euros/Heroes*. The event in this case would be the section of conversation around the offering of *Euros/Heroes* and the core would be the ambiguity around the interpretation of the words "Euro" and "Hero". Thus any misunderstanding in communication is made up of the "misunderstanding event" as a frame with the core misunderstanding entrenched. Hinnenkamp (1999) states that the frame only exists by virtue of the core and that the core is not identifiable or reparable without the frame event since they all form part of the frame. What all misunderstandings seem to have in common is the "illusion of understanding up to a certain point, when realisation or embarrassment occurs and repair work is required", but not necessarily effected (Hinnenkamp 1999:9).

Weigand (1999:776) claims that misunderstandings are evidence that "inferences are cognitive means to help us understand what is meant. Indirect speech acts are such examples, where inferences are used to determine the indirectly expressed action function". Another cause of misunderstanding is our "knowledge habits" and inferential patterns (Weigand 1999:776). These are intellectual or cognitive and cannot be applied automatically; they are dependent on the context. When they are applied inappropriately, it may lead to misunderstanding. Because we cannot always say everything, sometimes for reasons of economy, we have to rely on what we experience in the communicative situation and we rely on shared or common knowledge about the habits of speakers (Weigand 1999). As Thomas (1983:97) puts it, "While grammatical error may reveal a speaker to be a less than proficient language user, pragmatic failure reflects badly on

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him/her as a person." Since the world continually changes and habits may be followed in general, but not in every case, the ability to draw inferences, is crucial to our understanding (Weigand 1999). Because of the intricacies of the world and of relationships, differences between speakers will always exist and, therefore, the possibility of misunderstanding is inherent in the speech event. We, therefore, have to rely on our ability to draw inferences from what is said. Again, as stated before, while this seems to be a natural, even automatic function for native speakers of a language, it does not necessarily occur automatically for non-native speakers. The non-native speaker may not have the linguistic means, or the intellectual means to correctly identify speaker intent, or there may be outside interference, such as noise or gestures, or habits and preferences, to name but a few, that influence understanding. If communication involves guess work for the native speaker, how much more so for the non-native speaker, and how much greater the probability of misunderstanding?

2.7 Conclusion

Misunderstandings occur daily and could be a complicated issue in the instructional setting. It would seem as if many teachers in the South African context have a particularly difficult task, especially if they are non-native speakers of English themselves. The challenge is to develop communicative competence which would require knowledge of linguistic as well as social norms. A fundamental feature of communicative competence is recognizing the specific speech act that a speaker performs with an utterance. Communicative competence must include pragmalinguistic competence, i.e. choosing appropriate form, and sociopragmatic competence, which is choosing appropriate meaning, if intercultural communication breakdowns are to be avoided. Where these competences are not achieved, pragmatic failure may be the result, causing misunderstandings.

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the literature on second language acquisition, communicative competence and speech acts, which play a crucial role in non-native speakers' ability to impart meaning and communicate successfully. A brief overview of instructional communication, particularly in the South African context where English is the

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LoLT, was given, as well as a description of misunderstandings as they relate to communicative competence.

In studying the literature on second language acquisition, communicative competence and speech acts, I found the theories problematic in their relevance and applicability to the current notions of the "non-native" speaker, specifically in the South African context. In the multilingual context of South African schools, where English is widely used as a *lingua franca*, the non-native speaker may bring strengths and knowledge to the communication process that may add to our understanding of misunderstandings in an instructional setting. To gain a deeper understanding of the occurrence, type, frequency and causes of misunderstanding, I framed my investigation against Vygotsky's theory of the ZPD in second language acquisition (cf. section 2.2), using SAT (cf. section 2.4) as an analytical tool in scrutinizing misunderstandings. The next chapter deals with the research design and methodology which guided the study in order to provide answers to the research questions.