

# **Misunderstanding in second language instructional communication**

**by  
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To my husband and sons,  
for their continued patience  
and unyielding belief in me.

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## **Soli Deo Gloria**

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## **Abstract**

### **Misunderstanding in second language instructional communication**

Misunderstanding refers to an erroneous interpretation of the meaning of an utterance – a failure to understand. The instructional context relies almost exclusively on oral communication. The instructional message can be hampered, no less by the teacher as prime interlocutor whose utterances may result in misunderstandings. To answer the question: "To what extent are misunderstandings the result of English second language speakers' oral proficiency?" misunderstandings were identified in the instructional settings of 26 pre-service teachers who used English as the medium of instruction. This qualitative research drew from ethnographic and case study designs. Speech Act Theory and theories on misunderstandings and instructional communication underpinned the study.

Data collection was based on video recordings of the student teachers' authentic lesson presentations during their internship. Misunderstandings were identified and described in terms of their occurrence, nature, frequency and consequence, e.g. whether they were the result of grammatical clumsiness, cross-cultural transfer problems, or lean vocabulary. These students were not mother tongue speakers of English and the International English Language Testing Score was used to rate their oral proficiency in this language. Focus group interviews were conducted with the student teachers to gauge their awareness of and response to the occurrence of misunderstandings. They also completed a questionnaire in order to establish their awareness of misunderstandings. This small-scale survey also served to provide clarification of information gathered from the interviews. Several iterations of data combing were executed and coding and categorising were done concurrently within each data set.

Findings corroborated the initial proposition that misunderstandings in the instructional context occur as a result of poor oral proficiency and inadequate speech act realization patterns. Underdeveloped communication skills included verbosity, unclear enunciation, non-standard pronunciation and inadequate rate of speech. However, what had not been anticipated was that the oral proficiency and speech act realization patterns of the student

teachers were considerably weaker than had been expected. Furthermore, methodological factors and inadequate instructional skills similarly compounded the classroom communication. Participants displayed difficulty in formulating effective questions, explaining new concepts, giving instructions and designing well-structured lessons. Their inadequate content knowledge caused erroneous explanations, and poorly structured delivery resulted in instructional dissonance. The overarching theme of failure emerged, namely, inadequate pragmatic competence, underdeveloped content knowledge and scant methodological skills.

Recommendations for policy and practice serve to highlight the importance of teachers' proficiency in the medium of instruction. Coupled with a sound knowledge of the subject field and the prerequisite of well-developed methodological skills, the student teacher will be equipped to teach effectively. Several research topics relating to classroom communication, such as pre-service teacher development courses and cross-cultural and cross-linguistic competence, have been suggested for further exploration.

**Key words:**

communicative competence; instructional communication; language of learning and teaching (LoLT); misunderstanding; non-understanding; oral proficiency; pragmatic failure; speech act, Speech Act Theory

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## List of acronyms

The acronyms below are grouped together in coherent units. The units are not necessarily standard usage but are grouped as applied in this study.

### General

DoBE: Department of Basic Education (after April 2010)

DoE: Department of Education (before April 2010)

### Language teaching

CC: Communicative competence

ESL: English second language (speakers)

IALs: Indigenous African languages

ICC: Intercultural communication

L1: First language (speakers)

L2: Second language (speakers)

LoLT: Language of learning and teaching

NS: Native speaker

NSE: Native speakers of English

NNS: Non-native speaker

SLA: Second language acquisition

ZPD: Zone of Proximal Development

### Misunderstanding

C: Core of misunderstanding

MU: Misunderstanding

NU: Non-understanding

P: Production

R: Reception

T: Type of misunderstanding

## **Oral proficiency**

G:	Grammar
IELTS:	International English Language Testing Score
P:	Pronunciation
T:	Transfer

## **Speech acts**

DCT:	Discourse completion test
EC:	Effective communication
HI:	Hearer interpretation
IF:	Ill-formed
ILA:	Illocutionary act
LA:	Locutionary act
PLA:	Perlocutionary act
SAT:	Speech act theory
SI:	Speaker intent
WF:	Well-formed

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## 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 English<sup>1</sup>, 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")

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

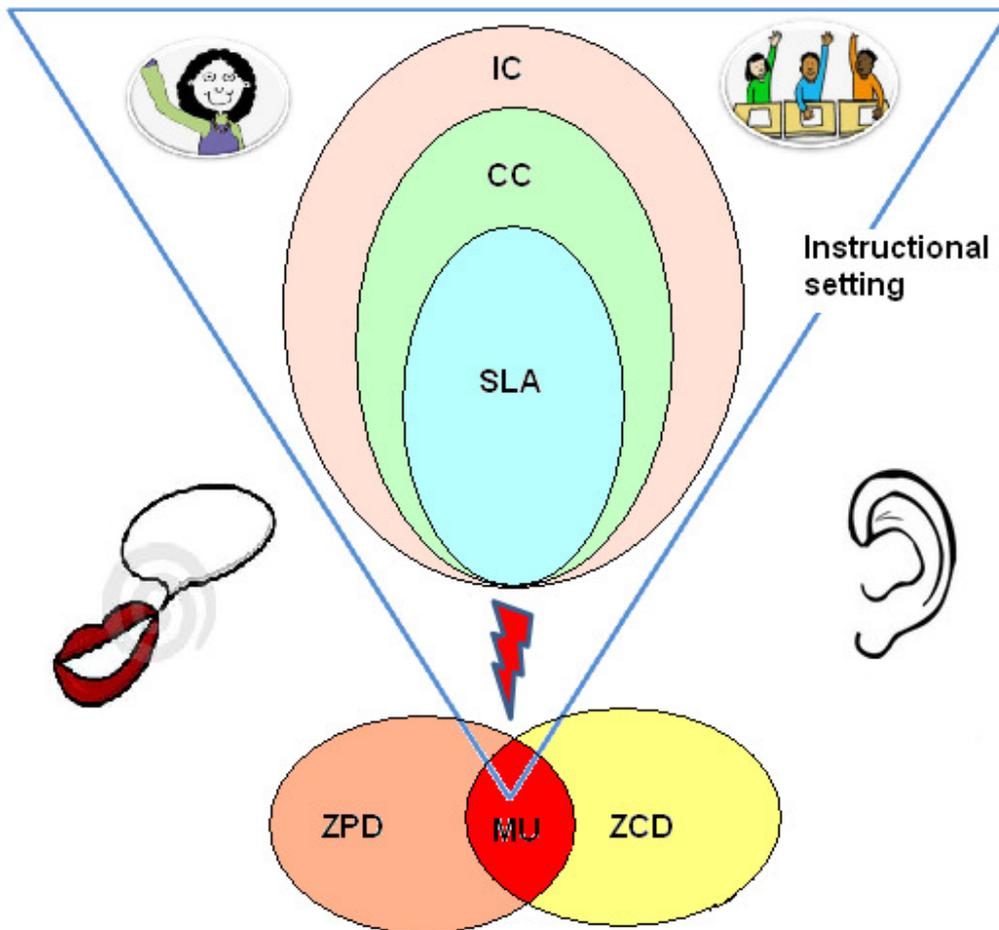
## **Chapter 2 Conceptual framework**

### **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
<b>Zulu</b>	25%	23%	7%
<b>Xhosa</b>	22%	16%	6%
<b>Afrikaans</b>	10%	10%	12%
<b>English</b>	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 implicature<sup>3</sup>. 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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).

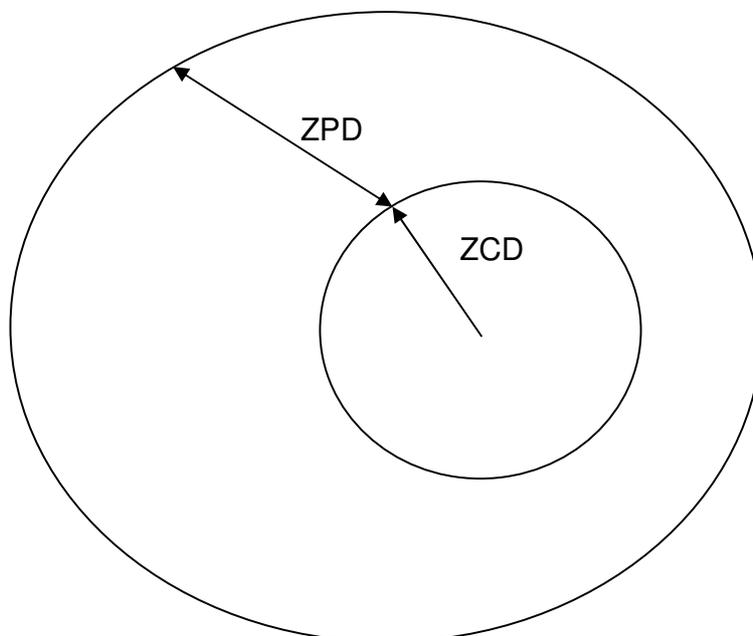
Vygotsky's main contribution regarding the ZPD was that instruction and learning do not take place because of development, but rather that instruction and learning open up the way for development to take place (Dunn & Lantolf 1998). This theory assumes interaction "between a more competent and a less 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 principles<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>4</sup> 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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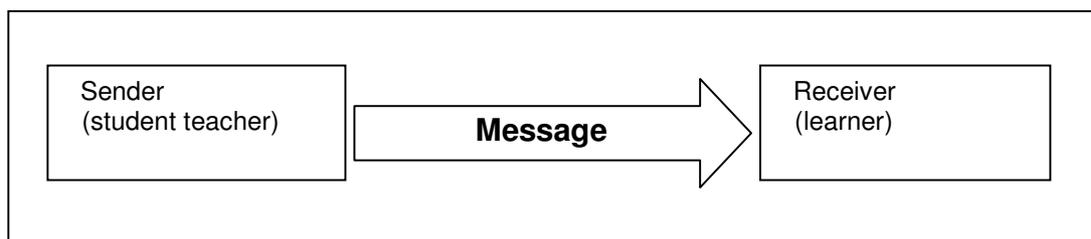
competence is defined as "the ability to use language effectively in order to understand language in context" (El Samaty 2005:341).

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**

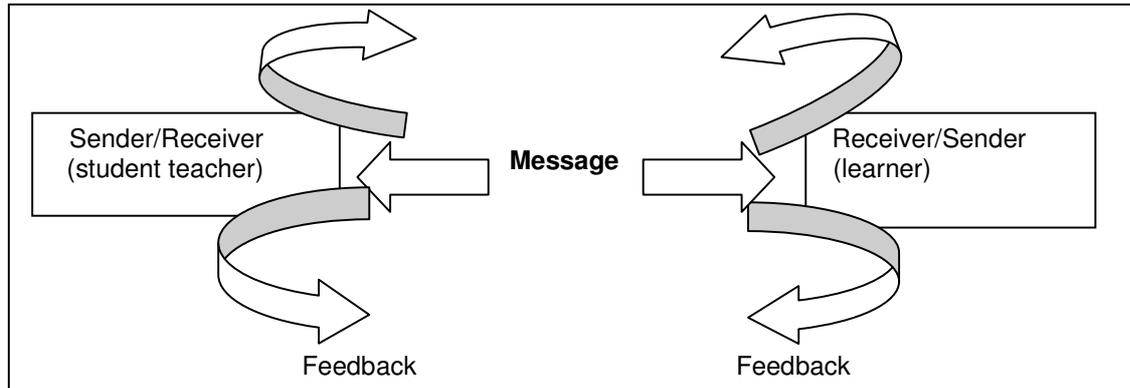


(Adapted from Neo & Neo 2004)

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 assembly<sup>5</sup> one morning at a dual medium<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

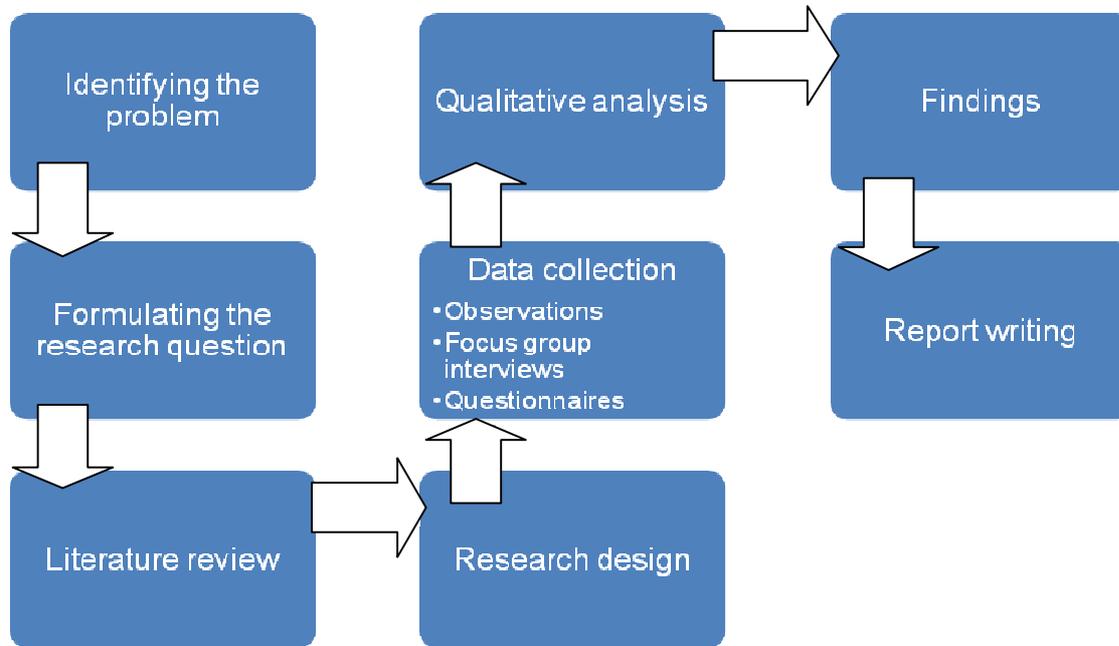
## **Chapter 3 Research design and methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the occurrence, type, frequency and causes of misunderstanding in an instructional setting. This chapter provides an explanation of the research philosophy as well as the epistemological and paradigmatic perspectives informing the study. The theoretical framework underpinning the study is described and the methods selected and the instruments designed for data collection are then explained. The data analysis process is described and the strategies for enhancing trustworthiness provided. Lastly, the role of the researcher and ethical considerations are described.

The research design and methodology chosen both focused on finding accountable answers to the research questions. The research design is the planning of the research and indicates the type of study undertaken, while the research methods indicate the steps taken, instruments used and techniques implemented to complete the research process (Mouton 2001). This study used a strong qualitative approach, although elements of quantitative research were included. Qualitative research centres on determining "how people do things and what meaning they give to their lives" (Merriam 2002:19). Since this study aims to describe a social phenomenon, namely misunderstanding, as clearly as possible, a qualitative study is most suitable and deemed appropriate for this study. The nature of the inquiry was social-constructivist since knowledge was gained through observation and interpretation in a social setting. The study was placed within the interpretivist paradigm and confined within a case study, the case being student teachers as second language speakers of English with the resultant misunderstandings as the unit of analysis. The qualitative approach focused on data generated mainly from video recordings, a rating of oral proficiency and focus group interviews. A short questionnaire, which produced quantitative data, was also used. Figure 3.1 provides a visual representation of the research process.

**Figure 3.1: Presentation of the research process**



### 3.2 Paradigmatic and epistemological premises

Research usually comprises the search for knowledge and gaining of new insights into some unknown area. Qualitative researchers often begin their inquiry within a paradigm, in other words, with certain assumptions or with a particular world view (Creswell 2007). A paradigm includes the researcher's "epistemological, ontological and methodological premises that guide the researcher's actions" (Denzin & Lincoln 2000:33). Although there are a number of perspectives from which one can research and interpret social reality, these perspectives should be clearly defined in terms of ontology and epistemology. Creswell (2003) holds that ontology refers to the most fundamental categories of being and the relations among them. It comprises the theory and nature of existence, of what there is, why, and how. It concerns the very nature and essence of the particular field of research. Epistemology, or the researcher's theoretical perspective, is concerned with knowledge, how it can be acquired and communicated to others, how one distinguishes between what is legitimate knowledge as opposed to opinion or belief, and will direct the way in which the researcher acquires new knowledge (Ely & Rashkin 2005; Scott & Usher 1999; Cohen &

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Manion 1994). I approached this study with a post-modernist view which places a high premium on human perception and experience (Spies 2006). Therefore, in this study an interpretivist paradigm, which concerns meaning and seeks to determine society's definitions and understandings of situations (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004), was followed. An interpretive approach, which allows the researcher to describe and explore, assisted me in the process where I was "the primary instrument for both collecting and analysing the data" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 2002:126) and resulted in a richly descriptive and holistic account of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Merriam 1988), namely misunderstandings. Methodologically, this study follows the idiographic approach as opposed to the nomothetic approach since an idiographic approach scrutinizes a single case and its relationship with a larger context (Babbie & Mouton 2006). As such, this study will identify and describe the occurrence, type, frequency and causes of misunderstandings occurring in an L2 instructional context.

The anti-positivist paradigm of a qualitative approach, which emphasises the uniqueness and culture-bound nature of data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2001), is particularly suited to the nature of this study, as it underlines the important role of the researcher's subjective involvement. A qualitative approach will, furthermore, allow for rich description of the misunderstandings encountered. A qualitative design is also flexible to changes "where and when necessary" (Babbie & Mouton 2001:278). My focus is on understanding and describing this social phenomenon and not on generalizing the findings. I concur with Babbie and Mouton (2001:274) who state that

... researchers within the qualitative paradigm understand that the aim of their study is to provide an understanding of the meaning which one or two people attribute to a certain event and not to generalize.

In summary, in this study I was influenced by an interpretivist paradigm and followed a social constructivist philosophy to conduct a qualitative study. The interpretivist paradigm is shown in table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: The epistemological, ontological and methodological premises**

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Data collection
<p><b>Anti-positivist/ Interpretivist:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determining meaning and understanding</li> <li>• Gaining a unique perspective of the knowledge</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social-constructivist:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reality can be understood and interpreted, but not controlled</li> <li>• Participants' internal and subjective experiences are important</li> </ul>	<p><b>Constructivist:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge is gained through observation and interpretation</li> <li>• The researcher is empathetic and subjectively involved</li> </ul>	<p><b>Qualitative:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-participant observation and interviewing</li> </ul>

(Adapted from Maree & Van der Westhuizen 2007)

### 3.3 Research design

Qualitative research is broadly defined as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical quantification and can be multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the subject matter (Creswell 2003; Denzin & Lincoln 1998). Traditionally, qualitative research focuses on discovery, exploration and theory or hypothesis generation. As an outflow of cultural anthropology, it depends on watching people in their own environment (Denzin & Lincoln 1998). Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002) concur and state that qualitative research presupposes an in-depth investigation of a particular phenomenon. This means that qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural setting, where participants behave in their typical manner. The intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, rather than the measurement of quantity, amount or frequency of relationships between variables is stressed (Denzin & Lincoln 2001). The qualitative researcher looks at knowledge from a subjective point of view (Onwuegbyzie & Collins 2006).

In this study, the environment or setting was the formal instructional context of a classroom. My proposition was that misunderstandings might be caused by student teachers' inadequate oral proficiency, inadequate speech act realizations and inadequate

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communicative competence. I assumed that because the student teachers in this study were second language (L2) speakers of English, teaching learners who were second language speakers of English, using English as the LoLT, there would inevitably be misunderstandings. Communicative competence involves the manipulation of form, function and context of a language (cf. section 2.3), implying that speaker intent (the function of the utterance) and hearer interpretation need to correlate for misunderstandings to be avoided. To describe the misunderstandings fully, a qualitative design was deemed appropriate. My thinking was clarified after Creswell (personal communication May 2008) suggested I apply a qualitative study as quantitative data, usually from a questionnaire, could often be elicited in focus group interviews. I agreed and continued with a mainly qualitative approach, although I decided to include a small-scale questionnaire for the purpose of corroboration.

I placed the study within a case study design which typically focuses on one case (or a limited number of cases) while employing several data-gathering strategies (Yin 2009). A case study approach – as a type of ethnography – was used to view misunderstandings in the classroom. The case study design enabled a description of the misunderstandings occurring in the classroom and whether they were caused by the language used by student teachers.

A case study is an in-depth analysis of one or more events, social groups, communities or other "bounded systems" in their natural contexts (McMillan 2008:288). Creswell (2005) states that case study researchers are more interested in describing the activities of a group (the case) instead of identifying shared patterns of behaviour exhibited by the group, as would ethnographers. The purpose in case studies is, therefore, not to understand a broad social issue, but merely to describe the particular case being studied. Merriam (1998) claims that a case study is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. It is particularistic in the sense that it focuses on a specific issue while illuminating a general problem. It is also descriptive in that it reveals the complexity of an event. It is heuristic since it explains, provides reasons for or provides the background of a particular situation (Kaburise 2005). Using case study as design will allow gaining an in-depth understanding,

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not of the life of the individual, but of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Creswell 2007), namely misunderstandings. It, therefore, provides the opportunity to gain understanding of the complexity of misunderstandings in an instructional setting. As such, the type of case study used is observational (McMillan 2008:289) where non-participant observation was the primary method of gathering data to study a particular entity or some aspect of the entity.

A case study has several hallmarks (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000) of which the following are most important and applied in this study:

- rich and vivid description of events
- chronological narrative of events
- blending of description and analysis of events

Given the nature of case studies the researcher can never be neutral or a passive instrument in the discovery of the issue being studied. Certain meanings are attached to things and certain forms of language are used to describe these things because of who we are. I believe that it is difficult for a researcher to observe reality without becoming deeply and subjectively involved in the research. I, therefore, agree with the notion that there is no objective truth (Leedy & Ormrod 2010; Nieuwenhuis 2007; Creswell 2005; Cohen & Manion 2001). Reality cannot be determined objectively, but rather is socially constructed and should always be interpreted in its specific context (Nieuwenhuis 2007). This view seems to be constructivist in approach and holds that "there is no such thing as knowledge separate from the knower, but only knowledge we construct ourselves as we learn" (Gottlieb 2000b:1). We all bring different assumptions to the same situation and interpret reality differently (Goldenberg & Goldenberg 2008). Our culture, background and personal experiences determine our view of the world and reality. When trying to make sense of what we observe, we rely heavily on what we already know and believe (Denscombe 2007). We cannot see things "as they really are", we can only describe things as we see them, and how we see them will be based on our background (Denscombe 2007:68). In this regard I was influenced by a social-constructivist perspective in investigating the

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particular phenomenon, namely misunderstanding, since the meaning created in this context is socially constructed.

I recognised that my beliefs and assumptions could invariably influence my understanding and interpretation of what I found at the research sites. To compensate for this, I reflected on the process and data gathered. This introspection helped me to make sense of initial concerns and perceived dead ends in the data collection. I was thus able to steer the progress of the research and refine the strategies for data collection. This process and development were recorded in a reflective journal. The purpose of the reflective journal was to keep me consciously aware of the possible influences that all subjective impressions may have on the research. My concerns about the research and its direction were carefully documented in the journal. As I am not personally inclined to use journals as such, this process was a difficult and unfamiliar one in the beginning. In time it became an extremely useful tool which enabled a greater understanding of the research process. My personal experience and perceptions inform my interpretation of what I observe and as such is subjective and forms an integral part of the research process. My personal impressions, thoughts, hunches and opinions were written in the reflective journal while events and discussions that occurred during the study were also noted in the form of what Mayan (2001:104) refers to as "notes on notes". This ensured a conscious effort on my part to counter subjective assumptions and prejudices. Since I am a strong supporter of mother-tongue instruction, I am inevitably biased. I know that mother-tongue instruction is not a reality in South African schools (see chapter 1), therefore, I anticipated both student teachers and learners to produce many linguistic errors. I assumed that misunderstandings might be caused by these errors. I minimised this bias by employing strategies to ensure credibility, such as member checking and triangulation, as well as by trying to stay objective and describing only what I observed at the sites. Mayan (2001) suggests that impressions and observations be noted as soon as possible and that discussions on such observations be avoided until they have been written down. These suggestions were followed and no editing of my thinking was done.

### **3.4 Theoretical framework**

Theoretically, I framed the study in the socio-cultural approach of Vygotsky (1978), specifically the Zone of Proximal Development and Speech Act Theory (SAT) (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) (cf. section 2.4), a discourse evaluation method within the cross-cultural domain. Vygotsky's (1987:86) ZPD presupposes an 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-accomplished task". Learning thus emerges 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" (Chaiklin 2003:2; Donato 1994:40). Thus, the teacher assists the learner in achieving a level of performance within the ZPD which the learner would be incapable of whilst acting independently and will subsequently be able to achieve alone (Harland 2003; Scott 1998). Applied to language learning, the concept of the ZPD brings together all of the relevant pieces 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). In short, from this perspective, learning principally takes place within the learner's ZPD (Nassaji & Swain 2000). Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD thus acted as one circle of theory that intersects with theories of communication so that the lens of the study was the point where they overlap in terms of misunderstanding.

In linguistics one may choose from a number of approaches to describe or analyse discourse and these descriptions can be undertaken in various paradigms, such as interactional, ethnographic or pragmatic (Kaburise 2005). Any approach requires a particular lens through which the researcher views the research design and research methodology. A variety of analytical approaches can be used to analyse utterances that may or may not lead to misunderstanding (Thomas 1983; 1995; Gumphez 1984; Hymes 1979). Sociolinguists, for example, usually use conversational analysis or discourse

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analysis within an ethnographic paradigm mainly to show how linguistic forms of language functions might change according to gender and age, or the roles of speaker and hearer (Kaburise 2005). The focus generally is on turn taking and repair structures. Another popular approach is to use critical discourse analysis to describe power relations or instances of inequity. Psycholinguists will determine the sequence of acquisition of communicative competence by using a grammatical analysis of the surface and deep structure of discourse (Kaburise 2005).

None of the aforementioned approaches seemed to suit the purpose of this study. Since the focus was not intended to be solely on words or sentence structures (structural form) but mainly on function (speaker intent) and context, I decided on applying the principles of Speech Act Theory, particularly those relating to the illocutionary force of an utterance, as an analytical tool to determine whether communication has failed between student teacher and learner. Hymes (1972a) suggests three components as units of analysis for speech acts, namely event (language), situation (context), and act (meaning). In other words, communicative competence is based on the premise that communication takes place when a person uses a certain type of language, in specific contexts, to achieve a specific meaning. When applying Speech Act Theory, the researcher has to determine whether the hearer interprets the speaker's meaning or intention correctly. I argue that when the force of an utterance (intention) is misinterpreted, misunderstanding may occur, which makes Speech Act Theory particularly relevant.

A naturalistic pragmatic approach such as a speech act approach focuses on the relationship between the linguistic form, the communicative functions which these forms are capable of serving and the contexts or settings in which these linguistic forms can have those functions (Kaburise 2005; Thomas 1995; Fillmore 1981). Analysis of the structural form (syntactical analysis) of an utterance alone will merely determine the interlocutor's mental competence (Chomsky 1965). An analysis which examines the function and context of an utterance will provide a more comprehensive idea of the interlocutor's competence. SAT departs from the premise that interlocutors must create meaning during linguistic interaction and when this meaning is not created, reasons have to be found (Kaburise

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2005). It is the insistence that language is a functional tool for social use that motivates investigation when an utterance does not create meaning, or causes misunderstanding.

Relatively few studies on any aspects of pragmatic processing in L2 (Kasper & Rose 1999) appear to have been done and my reading of the literature produced few studies on oral speech act failure in an instructional setting. In this study, therefore, I used the principles of SAT as an utterance analysis tool to establish the connection between oral proficiency, realisation patterns and misunderstanding in a specific context, namely the instructional setting. I used the communicative competence or source of linguistic knowledge provided by the student teacher's use of English, while teaching, and focused on how the student teachers used speech acts in their instruction. The assumption here was that misunderstanding might be caused by inadequate realization of speech acts and inadequate communicative competence which in turn might influence the understanding of the learner. Communicative competence 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. In SAT, a speech act is considered unachieved if there is a discrepancy between the speaker's intent and the hearer's interpretation. In this case, when the student teacher's intent is misunderstood, learning could be hampered. The conventional methods used in SAT measure **written** responses. Since I was interested in **oral** responses only, I applied the principles of SAT but did not make use of conventional SAT methods such as discourse completion tests. As stated previously, using SAT as a framework means one has to establish whether speaker intent or meaning in use has been correctly interpreted by the hearer. This forms a big part of what this study has aimed to do, except that the focus has been on utterances provided by ESL speakers which contain idiosyncratic expressions.

I further applied a combination of the frameworks of Dascal's (1999) four factors of misunderstandings as the standard case and Hinnenkamp's (1999) seven types of misunderstandings as classifications of misunderstandings (cf. section 2.5). In the data analysis I took into account Hinnenkamp's (1999:8) claim that in each of the seven classifications only two factors are relevant, namely what he calls the "event" and the

"core" of the misunderstanding. I used the abovementioned frameworks onto which to map the identified misunderstandings.

### 3.5 Methodology

One of the underlying philosophical beliefs that direct qualitative research is the anti-positivist belief which underscores the important role of the subjective involvement of the researcher. Through this particular role the researcher gains a unique perspective of the knowledge as one view of reality (Cohen et al 2001). The qualitative research of this study was based on *in situ* video recordings and semi-structured focus group interviews. As my proposition was that misunderstandings might be caused by inadequate oral proficiency, speech act realization and communicative competence, the oral proficiency of student teachers and their use of speech acts were scrutinized. I used an internationally accepted set of band descriptors for assessing English oral proficiency, namely the International English Language Testing Score (IELTS) (cf. section 3.5.4.2) to measure my rating of the student teachers' oral proficiency during instruction. Regarding the quantitative aspect, a questionnaire was used to determine the type and frequency of utterances which may or may not have led to misunderstanding. I used a checklist as an informal data collection instrument to help me focus my observations of the recorded lessons. This allowed for a detailed evaluation of the errors made by the student teacher, as well as the resultant misunderstandings which occurred during student teacher-learner interaction.

To summarise, this study identified and described the nature, occurrence and frequency of misunderstandings that occurred in the instructional context of student teachers who were second language speakers of English, using English as LoLT. Therefore, I observed instructional communication in an authentic setting (the classroom) and identified the misunderstandings that occurred.

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#### 3.5.1 Selection and profile of participants

Currently, at the University of Pretoria, one of the prerequisites for the BEd degree<sup>7</sup> is an internship period in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of study of more or less six months, divided into two phases – one (April to June) before the winter holidays and one (August to October) after the holidays. During this time student teachers are placed at schools according to their specialisation. The student teachers are mentored by teachers at the school as well as lecturers from the university for the duration of the internship. It was during these two internship periods of three months each that the study was undertaken (2009 – 2011).

During the first phase of the internship, student teachers are placed at schools of their choice in Pretoria, as university lecturers need to offer guidance and do on-site observations at the schools. A list of the student teacher placements in Pretoria schools was used to identify those students who had indicated that they would be teaching English as a subject or teaching subjects through the medium of English. The sample chosen for this study is, therefore, a purposive sample (Creswell 2005), as it was taken from the list provided by the Teaching Practice office. The strategy used was homogenous (Creswell 2005), since I selected only those student teachers who matched the selection criteria. The three selection criteria were the following:

- 1) being a non-native speaker (L2 speaker) of English
- 2) teaching English as a subject or teaching through the medium of English
- 3) myself not being their mentor lecturer

After having applied the first selection criterion, I compiled a list of 34 possible participants. After having applied the second selection criterion, 27 possible participants remained. Selection criterion 3 further reduced the number to 19. Since the study was done with student teachers placed only in schools in Pretoria, where I am based, the sample was also one of convenience (Creswell 2005).

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<sup>7</sup> Four year undergraduate degree in Education, allowing for specialization in early childhood, primary school or secondary school teaching

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In the pilot as well as the subsequent two collection periods, the selection of participants for the sample was not influenced by race, age or gender. The main selection criterion was that the participants should all be non-native speakers of English. In 2009, the 4<sup>th</sup> year student teachers identified from the list who met the requirements (19) were approached to participate in the research study. During a first meeting with these student teachers, the nature and purpose of the research were discussed and those student teachers who indicated their willingness to participate were provided with letters of information about the proposed research and letters of informed consent were handed out to be signed. Due to changes in the time table and for personal reasons, four student teachers withdrew from the study. The 15 remaining student teachers taught Mathematics, Economics, Life Orientation, History, Technical Drawing and English First Additional Language<sup>8</sup>.

The same process was repeated in 2010 where a further 28 student teachers, meeting the same requirements as in the pilot study, were approached, following the same procedure as in the pilot study. However, only ten student teachers agreed to participate and signed the consent forms. These student teachers taught the subject English First Additional Language to learners in different grades varying from grade 4 to grade 11.

In 2011 a further 12 student teachers, again meeting the same requirements as before, were asked to participate. Six initially indicated their willingness to participate, however, due to personal reasons, five withdrew. Only one agreed to participate and subsequently signed the consent form. I was not able to identify any reasons for the decrease in number of participants; I had followed the same process with equal enthusiasm but for some reason the students in 2011 declined to be involved. The student teacher for the third data collection period taught the subject English First Additional Language to grade 11 learners. The purpose of this third round of data collection was to ensure data sufficiency. In total 26 student teachers, ranging between 21 and 23 years of age, participated in the study. Table 3.2 provides a summary of the participants selected in each data collection period.

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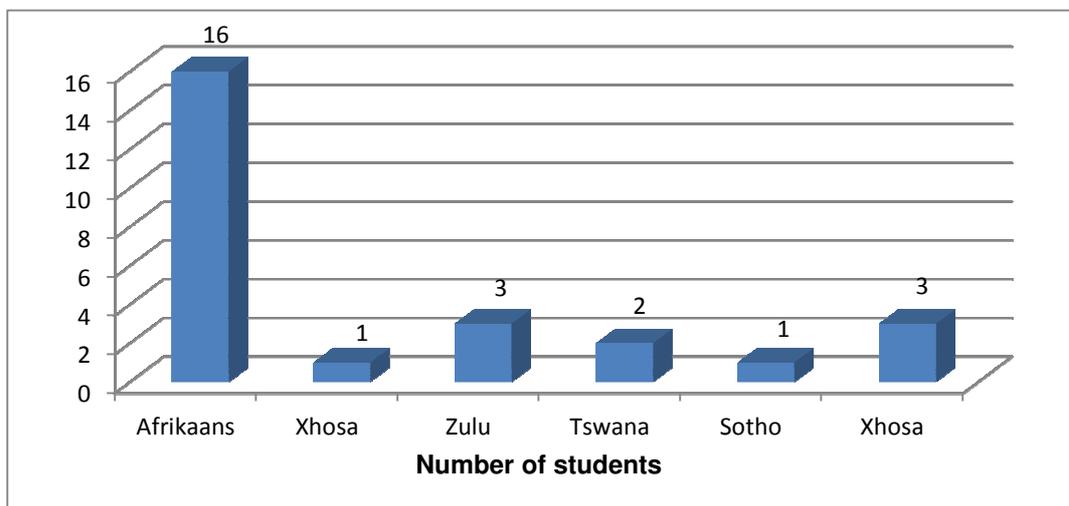
<sup>8</sup> In South Africa, in the National Curriculum Statement, this is the label used for second language

**Table 3.2: Participants in each data collection period**

Period	Number approached	Number agreed	Gender	
			Male	Female
2009	19	15	7	8
2010	28	10	1	9
2011	12	1	1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>

In figure 3.2 below, an indication of the participants' home language is provided.

**Figure 3.2: Number of participants for each home language**



The learners in the student teachers' classes were not participants, although their verbal and non-verbal reactions (gestures, facial expressions) to the student teacher were considered during the analysis of the data. Learners were not required to complete questionnaires or participate in focus group interviews. They all did, however, complete forms of assent and their parents completed forms of consent for the video recordings, as described in the section on ethical issues in this chapter.

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3.5.2 Research sites

The research sites for this study were the schools where the selected student teachers were placed for internship. The placement of student teachers is usually determined by the student teachers' fields of specialization, their preference in terms of location and the schools' willingness to accept these students for placement. As student teachers are placed at schools by the institutional Teaching Practice office, selection criteria for the research sites, e.g. type of school (such as co-ed, single sex; well-resourced or under-resourced) were not applicable as I did not have the option of selecting specific schools. During the pilot study, the student teachers involved in the study were placed at three English medium schools – one primary school and two secondary schools, and three Afrikaans medium primary schools, where the subject English is taught as a second language. During the remainder of the study, student teachers were placed at seven Afrikaans medium schools – three secondary schools and four primary schools, and three English medium schools – all primary schools, where English, the learners' second language, is used as LoLT. All these schools are considered large schools, i.e. ranging from 800 to 1 300 learners. Table 3.3 indicates the distribution of the sample and the sites.

**Table 3.3: Distribution of participants and sites in the sample**

Number of student teachers	Subject taught	Grade taught <sup>9</sup>	School's language policy
4	Mathematics	1 x gr 7, 1 x 8, 2 x gr 10	English medium
1	Economics	1 x gr 8	English medium
1	Life Orientation	1 x gr 8	English medium
1	History	1 x gr 9	English medium
1	Technical Drawing	1 x gr 12	English medium
18	English First Additional Language	2 x gr 4, 6 x gr 5, 2 x gr 7, 2 x gr 10, 3 x gr 11	Afrikaans medium
		3 x gr 6	1 Afrikaans medium 2 English medium

<sup>9</sup> In South Africa, grades 1–7 are taught in primary schools and grades 8–12 in secondary schools

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### 3.5.3 Data collection process

My choices regarding the methods of data collection were informed by Bogdan and Biklen's (1982) nine process-based criteria for the simultaneous collection and analysis of data. Among others, Bogdan and Biklen (1982), supported by Merriam (1988), suggest the following five criteria, which I applied in this study:

- 1) limiting the investigation (collecting more data on a specific topic than inappropriate data on too wide a field)
- 2) taking note of all observations and hunches, not necessarily part of the planned investigation
- 3) making notes of the learning process
- 4) scrutinizing the literature while collecting data
- 5) trying to recognize correlations and similarities

Data were collected in various phases using various strategies and continued until saturation was reached (cf. section 3.1.5). The first phase was a pilot study used to determine whether the proposed direction of the research was viable, to familiarise myself with the technological aspects of video recording, to identify any unsuitable items in the questionnaire, and to practise interview techniques. During the pilot study I realised that recording lessons was not an easy process and the technical quality of the recordings was poor. It was not easy to decide where to place the camera and who or what to record so as to capture everything that was deemed important. In an attempt to follow the movements of the student teacher and each learner as they spoke, I held the camera in my hand and zoomed in on the subject being recorded. This proved to be problematic since, as a result of the movement, the recording was out of focus. I also tended to train the camera on the learners more than was necessary, instead of on the student teacher. Eventually it became clear that in order to capture as much as possible of the student teacher and the reactions of the learners it was best to place the camera in the front of the class, at an angle towards the student teacher. In my follow-up attempts I used a tripod, focused on the student teacher and, only when necessary, I panned to the learners who responded to the student teacher's questions. This provided greatly improved results. I also had to take certain field

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issues and outside influences such as noise, interruptions and back lighting into account. In some instances there was little I could do to change the physical layout of the classroom, such as where windows ran along both sides of a class and the light inside was too bright. To compensate for this I ensured meticulous descriptions in my field notes which helped with recall during data analysis.

By the second half of the pilot study, most of the changes and technical improvements had been made and I was confident that more detailed and better quality data would be gathered and collected. Once the pilot study had been completed, the main study was carried out at other schools in Pretoria, following the same procedure as in the pilot study.

#### 3.5.4 Instrumentation

Four main instruments were used to collect data, namely observations (recorded lessons) together with the International English Language Testing Score (IELTS), focus group interviews and a questionnaire.

##### 3.5.4.1 *Observations*

Non-participant observations were conducted to gather data on the occurrence, type, frequency and causes of misunderstandings in an instructional setting. Generally, observations as an instrument to gather data are useful as they provide the researcher with authentic live data from natural situations (Cohen et al 2000). One lesson of 45 minutes (average time allocated for lesson periods at all the schools in the study), presented by each of the 26 participants, was observed and video recorded at the research sites. The purpose of the observations was to gain open-ended, first-hand information (Creswell 2005) on the communication that took place during the lesson. The aim was to identify any misunderstandings which occurred between the student teachers and the learners. I acted as non-participant observer, or "complete observer" (McMillan 2008:278), observing everything that took place in the 45 minute period. For the recording of lessons a lesson period on the school time table was booked with each student teacher and all efforts were

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made to ensure that the student teachers, as well as the learners, were comfortable with the video recording.

Although I was not a participant in the lessons, I acknowledge that I was fairly intrusive (cf. section 3.8). I video recorded the lessons and simultaneously kept descriptive notes (of the actual lesson) on the self-designed observation protocol (cf. addendum B). These notes were expanded into field notes directly after each lesson and included my personal thoughts, hunches and insights. An observation checklist (cf. addendum C) was used during the lesson to help identify the errors made and later during multiple video analyses of lessons.

*3.5.4.2 International English Language Testing Score (IELTS)*

To be able to determine whether student teachers' communication can be considered effective (successful) or not, and as a result, whether their oral proficiency is considered good or not, I made use of an internationally accepted set of band descriptors for assessing English oral proficiency, namely the International English Language Testing Score (IELTS). IELTS is a joint venture which has been developed to measure the English language proficiency of international students entering British and Australian academic institutions at both undergraduate and post-graduate level (Elder 1993). This tool is used to gauge the student's level of proficiency in English for academic purposes. In an IELTS speaking test, where oral proficiency is evaluated, the examiner and candidate work face-to-face. Kaye (2009) explains that during the test the examiner will start by asking questions related to everyday, familiar topics such as work, study, food, holidays and friends. The examiner then gives the candidate a topic on a card, such as describing a memorable day or a significant person. The candidate needs to speak about the topic for about two minutes, followed by a discussion. The candidate is now expected to evaluate or justify opinions, or to make predictions. During this process the examiner listens to the candidate and evaluates the level of proficiency by comparing the candidate's performance to the band descriptions of the IELTS test. The IELTS band descriptors for speaking cover

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aspects such as fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy and pronunciation (Kaye 2009)<sup>10</sup>.

The band descriptors in the IELTS provide categories for describing proficiency on a level of 1 to 9, 1 being the lowest and 9 the highest level (cf. addendum D) (Kaye 2009). Table 3.4 shows the IELTS score band ratings.

**Table 3.4: International English Language Testing Score (IELTS) band rating**

Band	Descriptor
0	Not attempted
1	Non-user
2	Intermittent user
3	Extremely limited user
4	Limited user
5	Modest user
6	Competent user
7	Good user
8	Very good user
9	Expert user

The English ability and performance level of the candidate is evaluated against the score range indicated above. The 1 band IELTS score represents a beginner in the language and the 9 band IELTS score represents an expert. When a candidate's ability is marked as 1, it means that the English ability of that candidate is extremely low or extremely poor. If it is marked as 9, the candidate's English ability and understanding is considered excellent, s/he has full operational command of English, has complete understanding of syntax and grammar, is fluent and possesses a rich vocabulary. A band score of 6 seems to be an average IELTS score and indicates that the candidate is a competent user of English. S/he

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<sup>10</sup> Although I did not undergo official training in administering an IELTS test, I studied the process and application carefully and felt satisfied that I would be able to use the rubric to rate the participants' oral proficiency

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may be inaccurate at times in understanding and use, but in familiar conditions may understand the complex use of the language well.

Elder (1993:75) claims that the findings of the British-Australian IELTS study are encouraging in that they "demonstrate a fairly strong link between first year university students' IELTS profiles on entry and their subsequent academic success". It seems as if many universities consider the average IELTS score (band 6) the minimum level one must possess to perform well in academics (Kaye 2009; Elder 1993). An average IELTS score of 6 implies that one would probably not encounter much difficulty in one's studies or at work. Where I refer to oral proficiency in this study, my assessment was based on this internationally validated instrument.

*3.5.4.3 Focus group interviews*

A focus group interview entails collecting data from a group of people (Creswell 2005) who interact with each other on a topic or question provided by the researcher (Cohen et al 2000). The interaction could lead to a richer understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny (McMillan 2008) as the participants' insights and opinions about the topic are offered. As researcher, I tried to establish rapport with the participants, making them feel comfortable and again explaining the purpose of the study and their involvement. I further consciously tried to improve my questioning techniques during the interviews so that meaningful data could be obtained. Merriam (1988:78) aptly states that "the key to getting good data from interviews is to ask good questions". I prepared a leading question, with a few prompt questions and formulated them in such a way as to elicit participants' perceptions and beliefs of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

After all the lessons had been recorded a date was scheduled with student teachers to meet at each of the schools for the semi-structured focus group interviews to be conducted. These interviews were grouped according to the student teachers' placements. Where the group of student teachers at a particular school was large enough (at least five) I formed a focus group. Where one student teacher was placed at a school, I grouped that

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participant with other student teachers from schools in the vicinity. Thus in 2009, four focus groups were formed, in 2010 two and in 2011 one. A venue that the participants felt most comfortable with was arranged for these interviews. In each case the focus group interviews were conducted at the schools in a private room, usually the school's boardroom.

Student teachers were asked to give a short oral reflection on the lesson they presented in order to discuss their interpretation of the misunderstandings. This served as introduction to the interview and allowed student teachers to gather their thoughts. The leading question, namely, "Do you find that learners sometimes misunderstand you/How often do misunderstandings occur in a typical lesson? If so, how would you deal with such misunderstandings?" was then asked.

Open-ended prompt questions were then asked to guide the interview in order to explain or support the information gleaned from the observations (Creswell 2005). The student teachers' awareness of the occurrence of and reasons for misunderstandings was also gauged. Their opinions about the reasons for misunderstandings and their experiences in their teaching contexts were discussed. During the focus group interviews the answers to the questions were recorded on the interview protocol (cf. addendum E), but all interviews were recorded on audio tape and later transcribed by me. The seven interviews each lasted for an hour. The data gathered from these focus group interviews were usable and sufficient and served as triangulation with the other data sets, the observations, IELTS evaluations and questionnaire.

#### *3.5.4.4 Questionnaire*

Questionnaires are widely used in educational research and offer data on participants' views, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes (McMillan 2008; Cohen et al 2000). However, I was fully aware of the fact that there is often a low response rate when using questionnaires, and that questionnaires are often completed hurriedly, or that questions are misunderstood or misinterpreted (Cohen et al 2001). The questionnaire (cf. addendum F)

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provided information on the types of errors which might cause misunderstanding and the frequency with which these errors occurred. The questionnaire was sent out to four student teachers during April 2009 as a trial run in order to refine its use in the study. These student teachers were part of the initial selection but chose not to participate in the study. They were, however, willing to complete the questionnaire. I used their responses to refine the questionnaire and then asked the 26 student teachers who participated in the study to complete the questionnaire. During each data collection period the questionnaires were distributed after the lesson observations had been completed in order to prevent the student teachers from being influenced by the information generated by the questions. In total, 25 questionnaires were returned and used for data collection purposes.

This concludes the section on data collection strategies and the instruments employed. The data collection strategies are summarized in table 3.5 and presented in the order in which the data collection took place.

**Table 3.5: Data collection strategies**

Technique/instrument	Action	Agent	Purpose	Contribution to answering research questions
Observation plus checklist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lessons presented by student teachers and learner reactions were observed</li> </ul>	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To determine whether student teachers make errors</li> <li>To identify and describe misunderstandings</li> <li>To help compile the questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How misunderstandings occur</li> <li>What the causes of misunderstandings are</li> </ul>
Video recordings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speech act realization patterns of student teachers' lessons were recorded</li> </ul>	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To record verbal and physical interactions in the classroom</li> <li>To generate small sections of data for the database to be analyzed</li> <li>To help identify relevant questions for focus group interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How misunderstandings occur</li> <li>What the causes of misunderstandings are</li> </ul>
IELTS evaluator for oral proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student teachers' oral proficiency was evaluated</li> </ul>	Researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To determine the level of oral proficiency of each participant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level of oral proficiency required for effective communication</li> </ul>
Focus group interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student teachers' opinions and perceptions of misunderstandings were gauged</li> </ul>	Participants and researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To gather direct information on the perceptions of participants</li> <li>To determine agreement as to the misunderstandings and errors reported</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How participants deal with misunderstandings</li> <li>How meaning or understanding is negotiated</li> </ul>
Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student teachers complete</li> </ul>	Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To form an idea of the kinds of errors made and their frequency and whether this corroborated the earlier findings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of misunderstandings</li> <li>Evidence of misunderstandings</li> <li>How misunderstandings are addressed</li> </ul>

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### 3.5.5 Data analysis procedure

Data analysis is the organisation, interpretation and explanation of data and, in qualitative analysis, these actions may already start during the data collection process (Creswell 2003). McMillan and Schumacher (2001:461) state that there is no "wrong" or "right" way of analysing data, that it is "an eclectic activity" and can be analysed in more than one way. The process of analysis is not always logical or sequential in a predetermined fashion, since the researcher has to be in touch with intuitive feelings (Merriam 1988). Data analysis in qualitative studies involves a complex and time-consuming process, reducing large amounts of data to a few themes (Creswell 2005). A great deal of insight is needed, since the researcher has to interpret the data and make inferences. Since making sense of the data is a highly personal and individual procedure, there are no prescribed rules to follow. As pointed out by Berg (2004), it proved to be a satisfying and enriching process, developing my own understanding of and insight into the research problem. Twelve practical tactics to direct this process, as described by Miles and Huberman (1984:215), were deemed useful in this study and guided the analysis procedure:

- 1) counting (note those appearing more than others)
- 2) noting patterns and themes (scan data to build categories)
- 3) indentifying new concepts or conclusions (often, counteractive findings lead to challenging results)
- 4) clustering (group together those that belong together)
- 5) making comparisons (conceptualize at a higher level)
- 6) splitting categories (often, it makes sense to split one category/theme into two)
- 7) including (smaller elements should be grouped with larger categories)
- 8) factoring (unequal or dissimilar facts may have something in common)
- 9) noting relationships ( consider how concepts relate to each other)
- 10) finding prevailing themes (find reasons why concepts belong together)
- 11) constructing a logical sequence (integrate categories and themes into a logical whole)
- 12) creating unity (find explanations for research questions)

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I approached the data in a reflective manner, using the above-mentioned tactics as guide in the process of the analysis. In tandem with the tactics mentioned above, I also followed an approach outlined by Creswell and others where broad categories are identified and narrowed down to specific focus areas or themes (Creswell 2005; Leedy & Ormrod 2010; Bogdan & Biklen 1982). Some of the data collected lent themselves to statistical analysis and are represented in graphs and tables. The remainder of the data analysed are presented in narrative style in order to offer a holistic interpretation thereof.

The first step in the analysis of qualitative data is to organize the data by transferring spoken and written words to typed files (Creswell 2005). Field notes need to be organized, transcribed, coded, summarized and interpreted (McMillan 2008). I organized the data by type; all interviews together, all observations together and all questionnaires together. I also made duplicate copies of all the forms of data and did the analysis of the data by hand. In case studies, there are four additional types of data analysis, namely categorical aggregation (coding), direct interpretation (using an example to illustrate meaning), drawing patterns (determining the correspondence between categories and codes) and naturalistic generalizations (suggestions of applicability to other situations) (McMillan 2008). I followed the aforementioned guidelines and applied the four types of analysis to the collected data. After several combings where the data were scrutinized repeatedly, I started coding sections that seemed to belong together and then interpreted the coding in order to determine categories. I then searched for patterns and themes.

*3.5.5.1 Observations*

Once the video recordings of the observations had been completed, the digital information was saved onto DVDs. These DVDs, containing the recorded lessons, were repeatedly scrutinised inductively and interpretively, after which each lesson was summarised on a template (cf. section 4.3.1). I used Speech Act Theory (SAT) as a framework for communicative competence and as such examined the language, context and function of utterances. I analysed the utterances produced by the student teachers in terms of the three parts of a speech act, namely locutionary (hereafter referred to as **LA**), illocutionary

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(hereafter referred to as **ILA**) and perlocutionary acts (hereafter referred to as **PLA**). On this level, I looked for grammatically correct or well-formed (hereafter referred to as **WF**) and ungrammatical or ill-formed (hereafter referred to as **IF**) words and sentences. Following the principles of SAT, the purpose of the analysis was to establish a match between speaker intent and hearer interpretation. This was done in order to examine the misunderstandings that occurred. As such, I tried to establish a match between speaker intent and hearer interpretation as effective communication is said to have taken place when there is a match between intent and interpretation.

Competence implies mastery of all the communication components, namely grammar, discourse, socio-linguistic aspects and psycholinguistic components such as knowledge and skills (Kaburise 2005). In other words, competence includes both mastery of the structural constituents of language and the ability to create meaning within the appropriate social-cultural context (Thomas 1995). All these aspects were carefully considered during the analysis of the data. Groups of interchanges (between student teacher and learner) where speech acts or ill-formed utterances were observed were analysed using SAT to determine emerging codes of errors in terms of locutionary and illocutionary force (cf. section 4.3.3). These codes were then scrutinised to determine whether misunderstandings had occurred and the incidents of misunderstandings were extracted. From these data I analyzed what preceded and what followed the misunderstanding, and analyzed these in terms of types of speech acts, types of errors and evidence of effective instructional communication. The misunderstandings were further analysed to determine the kind of misunderstanding and the reason for the misunderstanding, i.e. whether it was the result of cross-cultural transfer problems, language related problems, lack of sufficient vocabulary, etc. (cf. section 4.3.3 and table 4.6). Verbal and non-verbal data from the student teachers, as well as the learners in the class, were used to inform the incidents of misunderstandings.

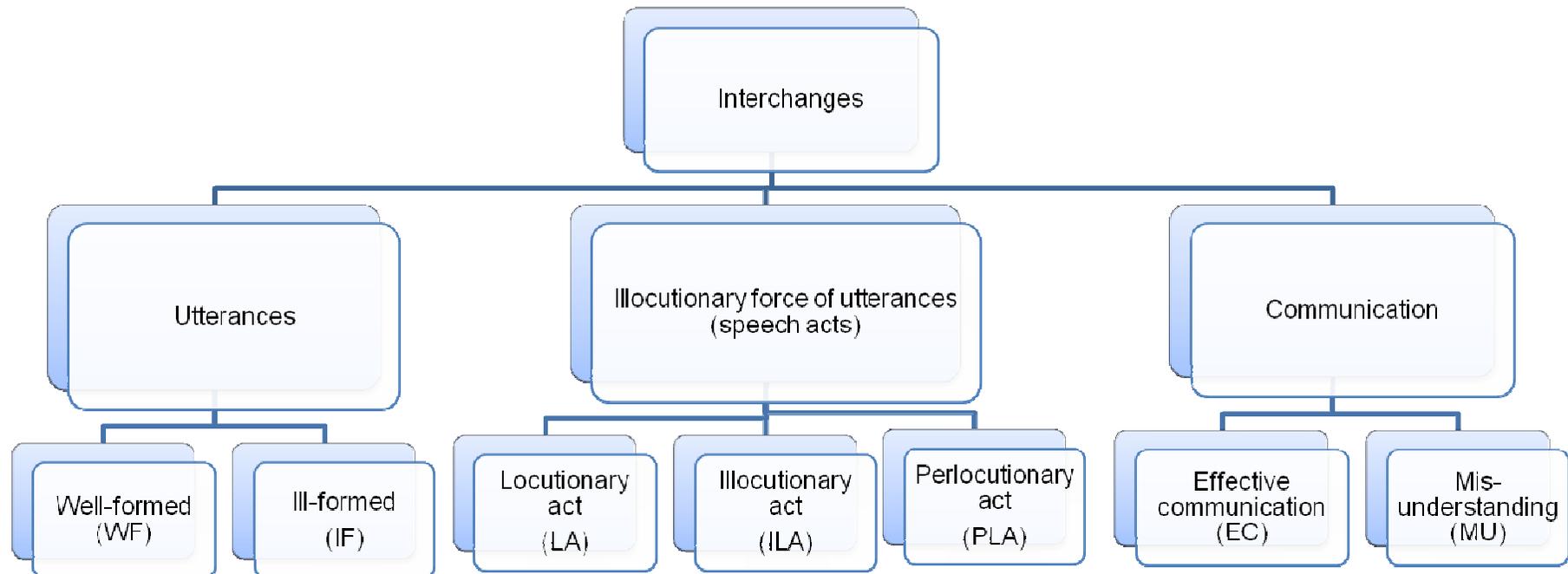
In each case I tried to establish whether the utterances were correctly interpreted by the hearer, in this case the learners, or whether the interpretation led to misunderstandings. Thus, the examination of the utterances provided the speaker's intent (hereafter referred to

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as **SI**), the hearer's interpretation (hereafter referred to as **HI**), an identification of the speech act (**LAs**, **ILAs** or **PLAs**) and whether effective communication (hereafter referred to as **EC**) took place, or whether there was a misunderstanding (hereafter referred to as **MU**). Figure 3.3 on the next page indicates a summary of the codes I identified in the coding process, based on the principles of SAT and reflects the units of analysis of communicative competence, namely language, context and function, as well as the components of speech acts. The main criterion for identifying the utterances for analysis was that they were marked in some aspect, whether phonologically or grammatically, semantically or pragmatically. The challenge was to establish whether these non-ordinary features (idiosyncrasies) had caused misunderstanding, which would imply that speaker intent and hearer interpretation did not match. The misunderstandings that occurred in the lessons were identified and scrutinized in order to code segments. Any overlapping codes and redundancy were identified and the codes collapsed to form categories. The misunderstandings were categorized to determine what the cause and type of the misunderstanding was. I then explained the misunderstanding in terms of Speech Act Theory. The identified misunderstandings were mapped onto the classifications used by Hinnenkamp (1999) and Dascal (1999) (cf. section 2.5) to identify the nature and causes of misunderstandings.

This process assisted in forming descriptions and broad themes in the data. The inductive process allowed for a narrowing of the data into a few themes. A discussion of the key findings from this data set is provided in chapter 4.

Figure 3.3: Codes identified in the coding process based on the principles of SAT



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*3.5.5.2 International English Language Testing Score (IELTS)*

I made use of the International English Language Testing Score (IELTS) (cf. section 4.3.2), an internationally accepted set of band descriptors, for assessing English oral proficiency to assist in measuring the oral proficiency of the student teachers. My assessment against this instrument produced the rating I gave each participant. The rating for each participant was indicated on the template for each lesson summary. I took into account errors in grammar, such as tense and concord, syntax, sentence length, vocabulary, pronunciation and enunciation. A discussion of this rating is provided in chapter 4.

*3.5.5.3 Focus group interviews*

The data gleaned from the focus group interviews were transcribed and carefully analysed by reviewing the transcriptions repeatedly to look for similarities, repetitions and striking segments. This combing of the data assisted me in coding segments of texts. The codes were collapsed and grouped together to determine emerging categories and themes in the discussions. The resultant themes were scrutinized in terms of supporting evidence for the misunderstandings found in the video recordings, which included many verbal interchanges and served to corroborate what was initially found (cf. section 4.3.5).

*3.5.5.4 Questionnaire*

The data produced by the questionnaire were analyzed by carefully summarizing the data provided by the questionnaire and then coded. The segments of texts that could be coded together were grouped together and the themes which emerged were compared with the visual recordings in order to support or refute the results from the observations and focus group interviews. It seemed as though the findings from the observations and the focus group interviews corroborated the findings from the questionnaire, as explained in section 4.3.6.

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The data from the three data sets, namely the observations, the focus group interviews and the questionnaires, as well as the ratings for oral proficiency based on IELTS, were carefully read, divided into segments of information, labelled with codes (about 30) reduced and collapsed to about 16 codes and further collapsed into five categories. The categories were then grouped and reduced to three key themes. These codes, categories and themes are discussed and explained in chapter 4. During the last stages of the analysis I compared the empirical observations with the theoretical concerns in the literature (Berg 2004). This resulted in a proposed amendment to the model of misunderstanding developed by Hinnenkamp (1999).

### **3.6 Role of the researcher**

I was an independent researcher; working in my own time and with my own funds. This role informed many of my actions and the choices I made, including the following:

- I obtained ethical clearance and adhered to the principles of ethical research.
- I arranged access to the research sites through the various gatekeepers.
- I arranged the recording schedule of 26 lessons.
- I consulted with statisticians and distributed questionnaires.
- I organized and conducted the focus group interview discussions.
- I kept informal field notes by writing observations, impressions and hunches in the personal journal.
- I analyzed the video recorded lessons, processed and interpreted the findings and wrote the report.

Apart from the actions mentioned above, I had a particular relationship with the participants. All the student teachers who participated in the study knew me well. I had developed a special fiduciary relationship with most of the student teachers at the faculty over the years and they knew that I could be trusted to be fair and just.

All student teachers' performance is assessed during Teaching Practice and to ensure that their marks were not influenced by this study, I arranged with the Teaching Practice office that other mentor lecturers were assigned for the participant's assessment. I was,

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therefore, in a position to guarantee that the participation of the 26 student teachers in this study would in no way influence their assessment or final marks.

I acknowledge that the possibility existed that my role and experience as lecturer could have influenced the way I looked at the lessons presented by the student teachers. Force of habit could have allowed me to make judgements, not only in terms of misunderstanding and language competence, but also in terms of quality of performance as instructional designer and facilitator of learning. Although I feel the above needs to be mentioned, I do not think that it influenced the outcome of this study.

### **3.7 Strategies for enhancing trustworthiness**

The focus of the interpretation of any social phenomenon, in this case the qualitative data (from focus group discussions and visual recordings), should be viewed as something that can be used for better understanding the phenomenon under scrutiny which might otherwise have been enigmatic or confusing (Golafshani 2003). However, the qualitative researcher has to accept that reality is changing whether s/he wishes it to or not. From a constructivist paradigm, knowledge is socially constructed and may change depending on the circumstances, leading to multiple perceptions about a single reality (Healy & Perry 2000) and multiple or diverse constructions of reality. Therefore, to acquire credible multiple realities, multiple methods of gathering data are encouraged (Golafshani 2003) – in this case focus group interviews, observations and recordings, as well as questionnaires. In qualitative research there is a very definite need to address issues of credibility, precisely because researchers cannot see things as they really are, but can only describe things as they see them, which is influenced by their background, beliefs and assumptions. To address this issue, researchers should fully describe and document the methods used in the research to generate data in order to ensure consistency (Morgan & Drury 2003).

Apart from taking the abovementioned and the considerations for qualitative research as described in Leedy and Ormrod (2011); Nieuwenhuis (2007); Creswell (2005); Golafshani

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(2003); Ritchie and Lewis (2003) and Merriam (2002) into consideration, I increased the credibility of my research by:

- Member checking

Krefting (1991) suggests member checking as a technique, which actively involves participants in the research process by encouraging their own interpretation of the data. Member checking is a form of triangulation and minimizes researcher bias (Creswell 2003). I offered all the participants an opportunity to view, comment on and verify the accuracy of data transcriptions after each data collection period. Those who did so were all in agreement that my interpretations were accurate.

- Peer review

Peer review entails disseminating the data to impartial colleagues or academics experienced in research methods and the research process, to obtain comments or advice (Krefting 1991). I asked two experienced colleagues, one an expert in research methodology, and the other an expert in Applied Linguistics, to act as critical readers of the study. This was done both during the research process and after the first full draft was completed in order to ensure that our interpretation of the data was aligned. Suggestions and recommendations were considered and those applicable were addressed in the final writing of the thesis.

- Triangulation/Crystallisation

Triangulation is typically a strategy for improving the validity of research by controlling bias. According to Cohen et al (2000:112), "Exclusive reliance on one method of data collection may bias or distort the researcher's view of the particular slice of reality s/he is investigating." Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods (Patton 2002). It is prudent to mention here that I noted the criticism by post-modern researchers of the term "triangulation" on the grounds that it assumes only three sides of approaching the world and as a result adopted the term "crystallisation" since I agree that there are "far more than three sides from which to approach the world" (Merriam 2002). The thorough literature study, the observations and focus group discussions, as well as the questionnaire, complemented one another and served as crystallisation of the data.

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The analysis in this study involved evaluative judgement on my part and was inevitably subjective. Although I respect my subjectivity, and do not necessarily consider it a negative entity, I endeavoured to minimise it by fully recording everything that I observed by writing detailed reflective notes (Wolcott 1992), and by staying consciously aware of my assumptions and prejudices. This self-conscious and rigorous examination for bias was a continuous process throughout the research. Qualitative research can achieve strong levels of reliability by documenting the sequence of moves in the data production, analysis and interpretation (Morgan & Drury 2003). My study relied on valid, authentic and trustworthy methods of collecting and presenting information and interpretations. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:191) state that "data in themselves cannot be valid or invalid; what is at issue are the inferences drawn from them". Maxwell (1992:284) concurs: "Validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to the data, accounts or conclusions reached by using that method in a particular context for a particular purpose." To strengthen the reliability of the inferences drawn in this study I applied the notion of rigour through the careful formulation of the research questions and the conceptualising of the research, as well as by comprehensively and accurately collecting and presenting the data. I declared my relationship with the participants, I described the participants and the sites fully, I documented detailed field notes from observation and interviews and thoroughly documented the methods for data collection. This thoroughness increased the reliability of the research. A direct, conscious assertion of validity is not possible for a qualitative study, but I am confident that this research comes close to what Wolcott (1992:120) calls "conscientiously thorough".

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethics deal with beliefs about what is right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad (McMillan & Schumacher 2001). This study was potentially fraught with ethical issues pertaining to the participants being observed, particularly being video recorded, and may have been potentially unpleasant and intimidating, as participants may have had feelings of being exposed or embarrassed. I minimized the effects of the observations by always

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acting in a sensitive and tactful manner. The ethical requirements for conducting research were implemented throughout the study.

I applied for, and received, ethical clearance through the ethics committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria in 2008. I then applied for and received permission to conduct the research in Gauteng schools through the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), also in 2008 (cf. addendum H). In 2011, I was provided with the official ethics clearance certificate to be included in the thesis (cf. addendum G). After discussions with the student teachers and with their consent forms signed, I sent out letters of information and consent forms to the learners in the classes of the student teachers involved in the research, and to the parents of these learners. I communicated the aim, objectives and nature of the study as well as the possible application of the findings to participants prior to commencement of data collection activities. The letters of information, the consent forms for the student teachers and the parents and the assent forms for the learners are included in addenda I, J and K. In all instances, I acknowledged that participation would be voluntary and informed (written) consent from participants was a prerequisite. Assurance was given that no individual's identity would be revealed to anyone other than the researcher. Participants were asked to choose pseudonyms if they wished. I then negotiated access to the sites with the principals of the schools so that all the participants were comfortable with my continued presence (cf. addendum L).

During the course of the research, every effort was made to maintain the fiduciary relationship I had established with the participants. At the onset of the research, during the first meeting with the participants, I explained that I would try not to create feelings of distrust or discomfort. I also explained that participants had the right not to answer questions or participate in research that they felt might hold negative consequences for them. I constantly reminded participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of their contributions. Both the student teachers and the learners were reassured that their participation would not impact on their final assessment or marks.

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The video recordings in the classroom were undertaken in such a manner as to be minimally intrusive and disruptive, e.g. I entered the classrooms before the lessons were due to start and set up the video camera. I remained silent and did not interrupt the lessons. I also offered to record the same groups more than once in order to eliminate the first, awkward recording and to use those recordings where the student teacher and the learners had become used to being observed. None of the participants felt that this was necessary. I explained to all the participants that the findings of the study would be included in a PhD thesis and in the form of articles and conference presentations, which are conventional undertakings in the academic community. I assured them that I would only use the information once their permission had been granted. The participants were given opportunities to view, comment on and verify the accuracy of data transcriptions before the final reporting of the data. Participants, who so wished, would receive a copy of the findings to be included in the thesis. The participants were debriefed after the recordings and analysis in order to ensure agreement and satisfaction with the process. As a token of appreciation, I offered each participant an opportunity to provide advice and share knowledge with them in order to help in their preparation regarding their Teaching Practice obligations. Since I was not their mentor lecturer and was not required to assess their performance, I was able to help them prepare for their assessment by teachers and other lecturers. Each participant also received a small token of appreciation after their participation, as well as a CD copy of their recorded lesson to use when applying for teaching positions.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter I provided a description of the research design, methodology and the process followed in the research. The choices I made regarding the research design and methodology were influenced by my interpretivist world view and the particular lens, namely social constructivist, through which I viewed the phenomenon under scrutiny, namely misunderstandings. These choices were best suited to answer the research questions. I also described the data collection strategies, the instrumentation used, indicated the strategies used to analyse the data and mentioned the steps taken to ensure

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research rigour. The next chapter provides a detailed analysis of the data collected and offers the findings, as well as the implications thereof.

## **Chapter 4: Data analysis and findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The utterances analysed in this study were produced by English L2 speakers (student teachers) and contain idiosyncratic expressions. The aim has been to establish whether such marked speech features had any effect on the hearers' (learners) interpretation, and whether this resulted in misunderstanding. The student teachers' use of the second language was, therefore, explored in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

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

- 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?

In this chapter I explain the procedure followed in the analysis of the data, present the main categories and themes that emerged from the data, and offer a discursive analysis and interpretation of the findings. The study drew on Speech Act Theory as an analytical tool to describe the occurrence, nature, frequency and consequence of misunderstandings that occur in an instructional setting. Speech Act Theory is based on the premise that interlocutors create meaning during a linguistic interaction and when this does not occur, reasons should be found (Kaburise 2005). SAT entails establishing whether speaker intent or meaning has been interpreted correctly by the hearer, as successful communication has taken place when there is a match between speaker intent and hearer interpretation, irrespective of any grammatical idiosyncrasies or deviations from standard language used (in this case, South African English). My assumption was that where no match (a mismatch) existed, a misunderstanding had occurred.

*Chapter 4 Data analysis and findings*

Four data sets, collected from the 26 student teachers in the study, were analysed, namely observational data (cf. section 4.2.1), which also provided oral data based on the IELTS rubric (cf. section 4.2.2), data from the focus group interviews (cf. section 4.2.3.) and the questionnaire (cf. section 4.2.4). Although the data collection was done in three phases (a pilot study and two collection periods) the data from these phases were collapsed per instrument, presented and then discussed as a single unit of analysis. This was done to enrich the analysis and to avoid repetition. The data sets used in the analysis are indicated in table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Data sets analysed in the study**

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Contribution to answering research questions</b>
Observations: video recordings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify and describe errors and misunderstandings</li> <li>To record verbal and physical interactions in the classroom</li> <li>To generate small sections of data for the database to be analyzed</li> <li>To help identify relevant questions for focus group interviews</li> <li>To help compile the questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How/when misunderstandings occur</li> <li>How oral proficiency relates to misunderstandings</li> <li>Other factors that contribute to misunderstandings</li> </ul>
Oral evaluation (IELTS rubric)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To determine the level of oral proficiency of each participant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level of oral proficiency required for effective communication</li> </ul>
Focus group interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To gather information on the perceptions of participants</li> <li>To determine agreement as to the misunderstandings and errors reported</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How participants deal with misunderstandings</li> <li>How meaning/understanding is negotiated</li> </ul>
Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To form an idea of the kinds of errors made and their frequency and whether this corroborated the earlier findings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How meaning/understanding is negotiated</li> <li>How misunderstandings are addressed</li> </ul>

## **4.2 Data analysis – procedure**

The procedure followed for analysing the collapsed data will be discussed first, after which the presentation of the data follows. I engaged with the data inductively, approaching the data from particular to more general perspectives.

### **4.2.1 Observations (recorded lessons)**

Lessons presented by 26 student teachers were video recorded (cf. section 3.5.4.1). The student teachers taught either content subjects using English as the LoLT, or English as a subject to ESL learners.

After having organized the data (cf. section 3.5.5), the data analysis could begin. The first phase in the analysis of the recordings was a preliminary exploratory analysis, inductively scanning and combing the data (Creswell 2005:237) to gain a sense of the data. All ideas, hunches and notes about the data were documented, often as memos in the margins of the field notes and summary of lessons. I also noted aspects such as the time of day of the lesson and the type of lesson recorded, to determine whether these aspects in any way influenced the occurrence of misunderstandings.

I started the coding process with an initial viewing of the recordings in one sitting. Multiple viewings of the recordings followed until I was satisfied that saturation had been reached. I noted all the idiosyncrasies (language errors) in the utterances observed during instruction. These idiosyncrasies were examined carefully in order to group together those errors, which seemed to belong together or were the same type of error, e.g. use of tense, concord, word order, sentence structure, sentence length and pronunciation. I identified three main categories, namely errors in pronunciation, errors in grammatical use and errors of transfer (cf. section 4.4.1). This process helped me to identify whether any misunderstandings had emerged. All the marked utterances were coded and studied to determine whether any trends or themes could be identified. The emerging themes are discussed later in this chapter (cf. section 4.4).

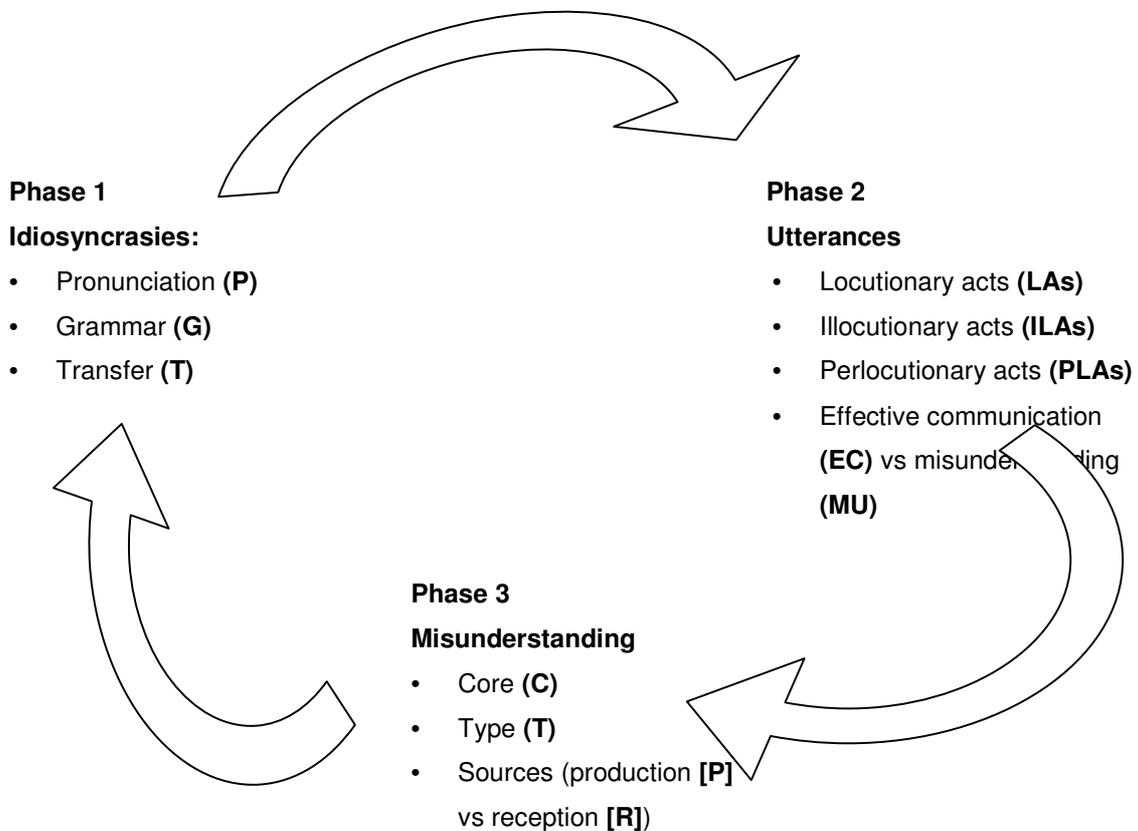
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The next phase in the analysis of this data set was to identify the speech act. I examined those utterances which were marked, either phonologically, grammatically, semantically or pragmatically. In this step, I based my examination of the utterances on the principles of SAT (cf. section 2.4 and section 3.5.5), where a match between speaker intent (**SI**) and hearer interpretation (**HI**) is required for successful communication. To determine speaker intent and hearer interpretation, I identified the type of speech act, i.e. whether it was a locutionary act (**LA**s), an illocutionary act (**ILA**s) or a perlocutionary act (**PLA**s).

The last phase in the analysis of the observations was to determine whether effective communication (**EC**) had taken place and/or whether there was a misunderstanding (**MU**). I coded the misunderstandings into categories, using the classifications of misunderstanding developed by Dascal (1999) and Hinnenkamp (1999) as the basis for my coding (cf. section 2.6). The examination of the misunderstandings was focused on the core of the misunderstanding (Hinnenkamp 1999) (**C**), the reasons for (sources of) misunderstandings (production [**P**] vs reception [**R**]) (Dascal 1999) and the types of misunderstandings (**T**) (Hinnenkamp 1999).

All the identified misunderstandings were coded in terms of the above-mentioned categories and in each case the core of the misunderstanding was identified and used for analysis. My focus was not necessarily on the structure of the misunderstanding, as dealt with in the literature (Dascal 1999; Hinnenkamp 1999; Weigand 1999; Weizman 1999), but on the reasons for, the type of, the occurrence of and the consequences of these misunderstandings. This information is discussed later in this chapter (cf. section 4.5). Figure 4.1 suggests the process followed in the coding of the observations (recorded lessons).

**Figure 4.1: Coding of observations**



#### 4.2.2 International English Language Testing Score (IELTS)

After the analysis of the recordings had been completed, I used the field notes I had made during the observation periods containing my impressions of the oral proficiency of each participant, as well as the recordings of each lesson, to do an initial assessment of the oral proficiency of each participant. I then compared my assessment against the IELTS band descriptors (cf. section 3.5.4.2; table 3.4 and addendum F) to see whether my assessment of the oral proficiency of the participants was accurate. The language usage of each participant was evaluated against the band descriptors and rated on a particular level. For purposes of credibility I had my assessment of the participants' oral proficiency peer-rated by a colleague with experience in language teaching to ensure correlation. The rating for each participant's oral proficiency was indicated on the template summary of each lesson and is explained in section 4.3.2.

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### 4.2.3 Focus group interviews

The focus group interviews were conducted after the observation data collection periods. The transcriptions of all the focus group interviews (seven) were grouped together for ease of interpretation and richness of description. I used the transcriptions to compare the answers to each of the questions for each of the focus group interviews with each other to get a sense of the general perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding the occurrence of misunderstandings. I then coded the data by segmenting and labelling the text in order to determine categories. Some categories became evident soon in the process and are discussed in section 4.5. I captured this information in a table (cf. table 4.7) in order to determine whether any trends or themes were evident. This information is discussed in section 4.4 of this chapter.

### 4.2.4 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was distributed to the same 26 participants who presented lessons for observation, but only 25 were returned (cf. section 3.5.4.4) and analysed. The questionnaire determined how aware the participants were of the occurrence of misunderstandings in their instructional settings and whether they actively sought to address or repair these misunderstandings. This information is described in section 4.5. The first seven questions covered biographical information such as participants' home language and gender, the type of school at which the participants had been placed, the grade taught and the time of day of the lesson. Questionnaire data from the three collection periods were also collapsed for ease of interpretation. The statistical data relating to the participants' responses to each question were captured in a graph (cf. figure 4.3) and scrutinised to determine whether the occurrence of misunderstandings was influenced by these responses or not. Any noteworthy segments, such as the time of day of the lesson or the type of lesson recorded, were coded for later interpretation. The responses to each of the remaining questions (questions 8 to 16) were firstly compared to get a sense of the general perceptions and beliefs of the participants regarding their awareness of misunderstandings. The second step was to interpret the data and to code those segments which seemed noteworthy. The third step was to determine whether the findings from the

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first two data sets were corroborated or disputed by the data from the questionnaire. It was evident that the same recurring themes as in the observations and the focus groups were emerging. It seemed that the emerging themes from the questionnaire corresponded closely to those which had emerged from the focus group interviews. This information is presented in section 4.4 of this chapter. In the analysis of each data set I determined to what extent the research questions could be answered.

### **4.3 Data analysis – presentation**

The data are presented in the order in which the collection took place. The usable data obtained from the observations (recorded lessons) relating to the student teachers, and the application of the IELTS band descriptors to rate participants' oral proficiency, were interpreted together as a single unit of analysis, although they are indicated as separate data sets in the thesis writing.

#### 4.3.1 Presentation of data from observations

Each of the 26 recorded lessons was summarised on a template containing headings that indicated the subject taught, the topic for the lesson, the grade taught and the time of day the lesson was taught. On the template a division was made based on identified items that had emerged from my first combings of the data. These items indicated the subject/topic of the lesson; the grade taught; the time of day of the lesson; and the oral proficiency level of the student teacher as rated against the IELTS rubric. Space was provided for a brief overview of the lesson where a description of the content, progression and outcome of the lesson was given. Space was also provided for relevant initiatives of the student teacher (e.g. actions, initiatives, examples, explanations or questions, tasks set); and the reactions (verbally and non-verbally) of the learners to the student teachers' initiatives. A further space was provided for all identified errors during the lesson, based on the categories identified earlier (cf. section 4.3.1) and for the possible reasons for the misunderstandings identified. These items were updated and added to after each viewing of the recording of the lesson until I was satisfied that all aspects had been included. Table 4.2 indicates the template used for summarising the recorded lessons.

**Table 4.2: Template for summaries of recorded lessons**

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Grade:</b>	<b>Time of day:</b>
<b>Topic:</b>		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b>		<b>IELTS band:</b>
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<b>Reason for misunderstanding:</b>		

The summary of each lesson observed is provided below. In each case my response to the lesson observed is provided after the lesson summary. It is prudent to note here that my comments in the "researcher response" section focused as much on content (correctness) and preparation as on identifying misunderstandings. This is perhaps a result of my role as assessor of students' teaching practice, but proved useful when interpreting the findings.

**Lesson 1: Participant 01/09**

<b>Subject:</b> English literature	<b>Grade:</b> 10	<b>Time of day:</b> 09:30
<b>Topic:</b> <i>Maru</i> by B Head (prescribed novel)		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Poor	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 4 (Limited user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
This lesson was one of a series on the prescribed novel, <i>Maru</i> . The student teacher started the lesson with an explanation of xenophobia and moved on to a discussion, using question and answer techniques, on race-related issues. This was a good attempt at linking the work dealt with in the instructional setting to an authentic, real-life context that the learners would be able to relate to. The student teacher spoke about the three different races represented in the book and discussed the important issues in the chapter they were dealing with.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student teacher asked a series of questions regarding the content of the book and tried to elicit answers from the learners.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was much talking among the learners. The student teacher had difficulty hearing when someone spoke or asked a question.</li> <li>A few learners provided good answers to most of the questions.</li> <li>Many learners did not speak at all, nor did they participate in the lesson.</li> <li>Blank stares and frowns were observed.</li> </ul>		

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**Errors/communicative dissonance:**

- Pronunciation and particularly enunciation problems were evident. The student teacher tended to mumble when he spoke.
- Over use of continuous tense.
- Accent influenced fluency.
- When asking the question: "What questions do we have?" the learners responded with blank stares, frowns, and some asked (together) "What?"
- The student teacher rephrased his question by asking "What questions do we ask here?" Some learners looked around at their friends for help; some looked down at their desks.
- The student teacher gave an answer and a learner realised what he wanted to know and attempted to answer the question. It was also only then that I realised that the student teacher in actual fact wanted to know what the important themes or issues were in this particular chapter, but had used the wrong word. This was misunderstood by the learners.
- The student teacher became frustrated because the learners were unresponsive. He then said, "You've read the book, people", upon which the learners replied, "Yes, Sir". This speech act was also clearly misunderstood by the learners.

**Reason for misunderstanding:**

- In the first two misunderstandings the student teacher used the wrong word in his question: "What **questions** do we have?" He rephrased the question, but made the same mistake again, using the wrong word again. The correct word would have been "**issues**" or "**themes**".
- In the second misunderstanding, speaker intent and hearer interpretation did not match. The learners interpreted the speech act as an interrogative, asking whether they had read the book. To this they replied affirmatively. The speech act used by the student teacher was in actual fact a command to provide answers to his questions and a reprimand. This was misunderstood by the learners.
- It is possible that the constant talking among the learners contributed to the misunderstandings.

**Researcher response:**

I thought that the introduction to this lesson was very good and relevant to the context of both the prescribed book and the reality of the learners, as the lesson took place directly after South Africa had gone through a period of xenophobic incidents widely reported in the media. When dealing with the novel, however, the student teacher struggled to elicit a

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response from the learners. They spoke among each other continuously and ignored the student teacher. It was quite a while before they settled down and some began to answer the questions posed. I believe that the student teacher's enunciation caused the unruliness in the behaviour of the learners, as they had difficulty hearing and interpreting what he tried to say. The learners' lack of content knowledge could also have been a reason for their unresponsiveness.

## Lesson 2: Participant 02/09

<b>Subject:</b> Mathematics	<b>Grade:</b> 7	<b>Time of day:</b> 07:30
<b>Topic:</b> Fractions		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very poor		<b>IELTS Band:</b> 3 (Extremely limited user)
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
<p>This lesson was on multiplication of fractions. The student teacher did not introduce the topic in any way; she just started immediately with the lesson. She asked a few questions to demonstrate fractions, "What is half of the whole?" and the class chanted "Half". She repeated this a few times while folding a piece of paper into halves then asked, "What is half of half?" As she spoke quite timidly and softly, learners had difficulty hearing her. She demonstrated a few examples on the chalk board, and then gave the learners some exercises to do in class.</p>		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student teacher asked questions to elicit answers to the fractions she had taught them. She repeated this a few times.</li> <li>• She asked, "What is <b>of</b>?" I understood this question to mean "What does the word "of" represent in Mathematics?" The student teacher rephrased her question to "What does <b>of</b> mean?" which they then understood and were able to answer "Multiply".</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners were well behaved and attentive.</li> <li>• The learners were confused during her general questioning, but were left to catch up with her on their own. In response to her question "What is <b>of</b>?" the learners did not understand the question and were confused. They gave no response.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pronunciation was atypical and some errors were observed, such as "of" pronounced as "<b>off</b>"; "fractions" pronounced as "frecctions".</li> <li>• The student teacher made a number of language errors, such as concord errors, e.g. "<b>There's</b> more ones"; "...the other, the other, the others".</li> <li>• Enunciation and accent influenced fluency. The student teacher mumbled often and used half-formed sentences.</li> </ul>		

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- She was quite timid and soft-spoken.

**Reason for misunderstanding:**

- The misunderstanding in this lesson was the result of an ill-formed utterance which the learners could not interpret. The student teacher rephrased her question and repaired the misunderstanding.
- Further misunderstandings were incidents of non-understanding, because the student teacher failed to explain concepts to the learners.
- Her timidity and use of half formed sentences, as well as the expectation that learners respond in a chorus, irrespective of understanding, could have left the misunderstandings undetected.

**Researcher response:**

In this lesson the learners tended to respond to questions by chanting the answer in a chorus without thinking what the correct answer should be. I have observed this before and it would seem as if it is possibly cultural behaviour expected by certain schools where learners are expected to respond in a chorus to a question by the teacher as a sign of respect. Clearly this caused non-understanding and dissonance. The learners' conditioning to answer in this way was what caused them to provide the wrong answer. However, the student teacher did not stop to explain when the learners' answers were incorrect; she merely gave the correct answer ("a quarter") and went on with the lesson. Because the student teacher mumbled when talking and did not enunciate properly, the learners were confused and did not understand the work. Mispronunciation of words as well as influence of accent was evident.

**Lesson 3: Participant 03/09**

**Subject:** English                      **Grade:** 5                      **Time of day:** 08:20  
**Topic:** Listening comprehension: Road safety  
**Student teacher's oral proficiency:** Extremely poor    **IELTS Band:** 2 (Intermittent user)

**Description of lesson content:**

The student teacher started the lesson by reading a short story to the class about a girl who dreamed of playing tennis. She would practise in her garden every day. Previously, her mother had taught her how one should look right, then left, then right again before crossing the road. On this particular day, she ran after her tennis ball into the road without looking and was hit by an oncoming car.

**Teacher initiates:**

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- The student teacher asked questions on the story she had read. She asked leading questions so as to drill the correct procedure when crossing the road.
- Learner reactions:**
- Learners had to retell the story to the student teacher in the correct chronological order.
  - The learners were distressed when they realized that the girl in the story had been killed. I heard many distressed sounds, e.g. "Ooh!", "No!", and sharp intakes of breath.
- Errors/communicative dissonance:**
- The student teacher's inaccurate language use was intrusive.
  - Her pronunciation of words was poor, e.g. "towards" was pronounced "toowaddz"; "imagined" pronounced "eemaginead"; tennis "bat" pronounced as "budd".
  - Enunciation and accent influenced accuracy and fluency.
  - She made glaring grammatical errors such as tense and concord errors and
  - sentence structure and word order errors were also observed, e.g. "Why Zola not look before cross the road?"; "What Zola mother say every day?"

**Researcher response:**

I found the lesson too easy for grade 5 level. The learners were merely required to retell the story in the correct order in which the events took place. No new vocabulary or structures were taught. No comprehension exercises were done. Influence of accent was strong. The actual lesson lasted 18 minutes and the learners were kept busy doing homework or drawing for the rest of the period. I felt that the student teacher had not prepared adequately for the lesson. Three or four very basic contextual questions were asked for comprehension, but the student teacher's language usage was so poor and pronunciation so weak, I believe it defeated the exercise.

**Lesson 4: Participant 04/09**

<b>Subject:</b> Mathematics	<b>Grade:</b> 10	<b>Time of day:</b> 11:25
<b>Topic:</b> Range and domain		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Poor	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 4 (Limited user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher had prepared no introduction to the lesson. He merely started the lesson by doing a short and quick explanation on range and domain, and how to determine the value of x. This was followed by five exercises done by five different learners on the chalk board.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student teacher asked five learners to do the exercises on the chalk board, using their answers as a point of departure to explain the work to the other learners.</li> </ul> <p><b>Learner reactions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many of the learners did not understand the work; I observed frowns, confused looks and talking. However, the learners did not ask the student teacher to explain.</li> </ul> <p><b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many pronunciation errors were observed, e.g. "problem" was pronounced "<b>pro-blem</b>" (as in "row" the boat); "X is equals to two" was pronounced as "<b>xsqualstotwo</b>"; "domain" was pronounced "<b>domine</b>".</li> <li>Accent and enunciation were problematic, perhaps due to the fact that he spoke very fast.</li> </ul> <p><b>Reason for misunderstanding:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Misunderstandings in this lesson may be contributed to the fact that the student teacher lacked the mathematical content knowledge to explain the topic adequately to the learners. This led to non-understanding and not misunderstanding. The student teacher's level of language use was inadequate, so much so that the learners had difficulty in following his explanations.</li> </ul>
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**Researcher response:**

The student teacher's inadequate language use was intrusive. Not only mispronunciation, but also influence of marred English accent was evident. He also failed to explain the topic being dealt with adequately. The student teacher, however, contributed the misunderstandings to the learners' inadequate language use. Directly after the lesson the student teacher said to me: "Language is the problem. The teachers teach in their vernacular, so when I come and teach they don't understand me". He explained that the learners in this school were used to hearing (and being taught through) their vernacular. When they then hear the student teacher's "proficient" (in his opinion) language use it was unfamiliar to the learners and they struggled to follow him.

**Lesson 5: Participant 05/09**

<b>Subject:</b> Mathematics	<b>Grade:</b> 10	<b>Time of day:</b> 12:50
<b>Topic:</b> Exponents		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very poor		<b>IELTS Band:</b> 3 (Extremely limited user)
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher presented no introduction to the lesson, he immediately started working		

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through the mathematical homework exercises.

**Teacher initiates:**

- He demonstrated all the sums on the chalk board.

**Learner reactions:**

- Many learners made interjections while the student teacher was explaining the sums on the chalk board, e.g. "huh"; "what?"
- Many learners showed blank stares and frowns.
- Some learners made challenging statements and asked challenging questions, e.g. "We did it just now!"; "Sir, you're wrong!".

**Errors/communicative dissonance:**

- Numerous language errors were made by the student teacher. Sentence structure and word order errors were observed. Some examples are: "I want you to read **careful** number two." and "What is your teacher calling you when you don't have your homework?"
- Grammar errors, e.g. "Ok, now listen careful"; "Why you **doing** nothing?"; "...she **have** one there".
- Pronunciation errors were observed, e.g. "a to the **por** 19" (a to the power of 19).
- Enunciation and accent influenced accuracy.
- He tended to mumble and learners couldn't always hear him.

**Researcher response:**

The student teacher's content knowledge was inadequate; he made mistakes and the learners thus challenged him. The lesson consisted of an explanation of the homework given the previous day. The student teacher failed to explain his mathematical processes on the chalk board. The class was very noisy which made it difficult to hear the student teacher. I found the learners quite disrespectful, possibly because some of the learners understood the work better than the student teacher did.

**Lesson 6: Participant 06/09**

**Subject:** Mathematics

**Grade:** 8

**Time of day:** 09:55

**Topic:** Exponents

**Student teacher's oral proficiency:** Extremely poor **IELTS Band:** 2 (Intermittent user)

**Description of lesson content:**

The student teacher presented no introduction to the topic of the lesson. He had the learners write down verbatim, definitions and sentences about mathematics in general. He then went on to explain some aspects of exponents.

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<p><b>Teacher initiates:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student teacher attempted to provide explanations of the sums they were to do in class.</li> </ul> <p><b>Learner reactions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some learners asked questions to better understand the work, e.g. "Explain again, please, Sir".</li> <li>Some learners showed frowns, blank stares and confusion.</li> </ul> <p><b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student teacher's pronunciation and enunciation were so poor that learners could hardly hear him. This caused confusion.</li> <li>He tended to mumble and spoke inaudibly, which compounded the learners' confusion.</li> </ul> <p><b>Reason for misunderstanding:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The misunderstanding here was content related, thus non-understanding.</li> <li>The inaudibility of the student teacher's speech may have contributed to the misunderstanding.</li> </ul>
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**Researcher response:**

The student teacher's own content knowledge was lacking. His inability to explain concepts well or provide clear instructions added to the confusion. I was not convinced that any learning had taken place. Apart from mispronouncing words, his marred accent together with poor enunciation contributed to misunderstanding. Where frowns, blank stares and confusion were observed or where questions were asked, it was content related. No explanations were provided.

**Lesson 7: Participant 07/09**

<b>Subject:</b> Technical Drawing	<b>Grade:</b> 12	<b>Time of day:</b> 12:45
<b>Topic:</b> Flanges and couplings		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very poor	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 3 (Extremely limited user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher explained the homework exercises on flanges, couplings, keys and shafts. He then illustrated two flanges coupled together with drawings on the chalk board. He systematically explained each of the steps in the drawings.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The student teacher asked leading questions to elicit responses.</li> </ul>		

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- He invited active participation in the drawings on the chalk board.
- Learner reactions:**
- Some learners showed confusion because of pronunciation errors.
- Errors/communicative dissonance:**
- The student teacher made numerous errors and his pronunciation was inaccurate, e.g. "component" pronounced "**compinint**", "board" pronounced "**bore**" or "**bod**", "web" was pronounced "**weeb**" and "rib" was pronounced "**reeb**".
  - Enunciation and accent influenced accuracy.
  - A question he asked, which elicited no response was: "You're thinking the same thinking I'm thinking?"

**Researcher response:**

The student teacher's command of the language was very poor. His accent influenced accuracy and caused confusion. Apart from these errors, this was a successful lesson in terms of content delivery, as it was clear that the student teacher understood the content himself.

**Lesson 8: Participant 08/09**

<b>Subject:</b> Life Orientation	<b>Grade:</b> 8	<b>Time of day:</b> 11:15
<b>Topic:</b> Drug abuse		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very poor		<b>IELTS Band:</b> 3 (Extremely limited user)
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
This lesson was an informal class discussion, using questioning and answering, on the types of drugs available and the reasons why people use drugs. The student teacher started by asking the learners what they thought the reasons were for people abusing drugs. This developed into a lengthy discussion of the topic.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student teacher asked questions to gauge learners' prior knowledge of the topic.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners tended to all speak together, interrupting each other as well as the student teacher. They seemed excited about the topic.</li> <li>• They found the topic funny and made jokes about it, perhaps due to teenage nervousness.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A number of errors were made in language use, grammar and pronunciation, such as "The father is drinking, the mother is drinking, <b>the other</b> is drinking the <b>buzz</b>" (booze).</li> </ul>		

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- Pronunciation observed was marred, such as "obvious" pronounced "oviaas"; "homework" pronounced "homewhack".
  - At one point while the student teacher was speaking, a learner had his hand up, waiting to ask a question. The student teacher said, "Yes, I will come for you" (meaning she would give him an opportunity to speak in a moment). The learner, very shocked, asked, "Why?!" (interpreting her statement as a threat).
- Reason for misunderstanding:**
- The misunderstanding was caused because speaker intent and hearer interpretation did not match. The learner interpreted the speech act as a threat to punish her. The speech act was in actual fact intended to be a promise to give the learner a chance to ask her question later. This was misunderstood by the learner.

**Researcher response:**

This class was noisy and disruptive, everybody tended to speak together. There were many interruptions from outside, learners from other classes walking in and out of the classroom and learners standing in the corridors, talking very loudly. The student teacher did nothing about this, she allowed these interruptions and distractions. I was interested to hear that no warnings on the effects of drug abuse, nor were any issues of morality or ethics discussed. The learners were not told that using drugs is dangerous or illegal.

**Lesson 09: Participant 09/09**

<b>Subject:</b> Life Orientation	<b>Grade:</b> 8	<b>Time of day:</b> 10:00
<b>Topic:</b> Religion and culture		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very poor		<b>IELTS Band:</b> 3 (Extremely limited user)
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher started the lesson by asking the learners to which culture they belonged. She used the words culture, religion and race interchangeably, as if they meant the same. She went on with an explanation of the Zulu and Pedi cultures. No discussion on tolerance or acceptance of others was observed. The student teacher merely talked with them informally about their cultures/religions.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student teacher asked questions to initiate discussions on different religions and cultures.</li> <li>• She asked almost all the learners, "Which culture are you?" [IF]</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some learners were confused; they were not sure whether the student teacher was</li> </ul>		

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asking about religion or something else. This was evident in their answers. Some replied, "I'm a Hindu" to the question which culture they were and others "I'm a Zulu".

- Some learners did not know and could not answer. In order to help these learners, the student teacher then asked them to which church they belonged. This confused the learners even more.
- Learners showed their confusion by frowning and turning to their friends for help.

**Errors/communicative dissonance:**

- Concord errors were observed, e.g. "The religious **parts is** different" and "the **change** that **have** happened"; "...years back ago".
- Pronunciation errors, e.g. "**peepol**" (people)
- The student teacher confused the words "culture" and "religion".
- Accent influenced accuracy of speech.

**Reason for misunderstanding:**

- The student teacher's language proficiency was very poor and she displayed her lack of subject knowledge by confusing key terminology.
- Any misunderstanding that occurred here was because the student teacher used the terms "religion" and "culture" interchangeably as synonyms.

**Researcher response:**

The confusion and misunderstanding could have been avoided had the student teacher prepared better for the lesson. The student teacher seemed very familiar with the students, causing problems in discipline of the learners. Some learners could not hear the student teacher.

By this time in the data collection period, the second half of the pilot study, most of the technical difficulties in the recording of the lessons had been eliminated and only external factors such as light from the windows, interruptions and noise, played a role in the quality of the recordings. The summaries of the remaining 17 lessons observed are provided below.

**Lesson 10: Participant 10/09**

<b>Subject:</b> English	<b>Grade:</b> 4	<b>Time of day:</b> 09:45
<b>Topic:</b> Listening comprehension: Trees		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Average to poor	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 5 (Modest user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		

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The student teacher started the lesson by engaging the learners in a discussion on trees, their roots and their leaves. New vocabulary was discussed, e.g. "evergreen" and "deciduous trees". This was followed by a listening comprehension passage which the student teacher read to the class. After each page a few questions were asked to test learners' comprehension.

**Teacher initiates:**

- Questions were asked to ensure that the learners followed the story in the comprehension passage.
- Directives to establish and uphold discipline, e.g. "Read in your own books!"

**Learner reactions:**

- Learners responded to the questions and were actively involved in the lesson.
- Learners were well behaved.

**Errors/communicative dissonance:**

- Some concord errors were observed, e.g. "There's two kinds of trees ..."; "... it always **stay** green"; "What **is** the two different kinds of trees?"
- Word order and sentence structure errors were made, e.g. "I'm gonna hand you out a paper".

**Reason for misunderstanding:**

- The misunderstanding was a result of speaker intent and hearer interpretation not matching. Speaker intent was a warning/threat not to cheat, hearers interpreted it as a directive/command to read in their books.

**Researcher response:**

Although the student teacher's language proficiency was average (IELTS band 5), the lesson was effective and presented in an interesting way. The speech acts observed in this lesson were understood by the learners, despite containing idiosyncrasies.

**Lesson 11: Participant 11/09**

<b>Subject:</b> English	<b>Grade:</b> 4	<b>Time of day:</b> 10:40
<b>Topic:</b> Reported speech		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very good		<b>IELTS Band:</b> 7 (Good user)
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher started the lesson with a game called telegram, where learners had to repeat a phrase that had been whispered to one learner by the student teacher, to each other. The last learner reported the phrase as he had heard it, which was entirely different from the original phrase. She pointed out that one had to listen carefully and ensure that one passes on		

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information correctly. She then asked the learners to explain the difference between "gossip" and "indirect speech". This was a creative way of introducing the topic of the lesson. The student teacher then explained reported speech and its rules, guiding the learners in practising a few sample sentences.

**Teacher initiates:**

- The student teacher used a 5-point checklist to test the learners' knowledge.

**Learner reactions:**

- Learners responded well and most did the work correctly.
- Learners were well behaved and quiet.

**Errors/communicative dissonance:**

- Only a few minor concord errors were observed, e.g. "a **checklist** of 5 points **are**...".

**Researcher response:**

The student teacher had a good command of the second language. She pronounced words correctly and used correct grammar in most instances. She encouraged learners to participate in the question and answer sessions and seemed knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Overall, this was a successful lesson.

**Lesson 12: Participant 12/09**

<b>Subject:</b> English	<b>Grade:</b> 5	<b>Time of day:</b> 10:40
<b>Topic:</b> Tenses		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Average		<b>IELTS Band:</b> 5 (Modest user)
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher started the lesson by explaining the various tenses, their rules and time words. This he did poorly as he made numerous errors in content, confusing the learners. It was clear that he did not have the necessary content knowledge to explain the work to the learners.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student teacher asked leading questions relating to tenses, their structure and time words.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was very little participation from the learners.</li> <li>• Their responses to the student teacher's questions were correct, but he did not have the knowledge to know that they were correct, as explained below.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Errors in language usage consisted mostly of pronunciation errors.</li> </ul>		

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- Apart from mispronouncing some words, numerous errors in content and the delivery of content were observed.
- His explanation of the tenses was incorrect and he applied the wrong structure to the wrong time word.
- When explaining an exercise to the learners on providing the correct form of the words in brackets, he asked what one called the words in brackets. A learner correctly answered, "The infinitive form", to which the student teacher replied: "No, the verb, the verb that we are going to change". This confused the learners. Frowns were observed.
- A sample sentence in the exercise, taken from a passage on the tigers in South China was, "Usually a tiger (to be) born." The words in brackets had to be changed to its correct form. A learner offered "is born", and the student teacher said, "So is, ... **is** is continuous, err ... but ... yes that is correct." The student teacher's confusion and unfinished sentences caused confusion among the learners.

**Reason for misunderstanding:**

- His faulty content delivery and instruction led to non-understanding.

**Researcher response:**

The student teacher's content knowledge was inadequate. He was not sufficiently prepared for this lesson. Although he speaks English fairly well, he made numerous errors in his explanation of the various tenses; he spelt words incorrectly on the chalk board and his pronunciation at times was not accurate. He applied the wrong structure to the wrong time word. He seemed confused at times and subsequently confused the learners. I had the impression that the learners understood the various tenses fairly well and observed that they were able to do the exercises. It was the student teacher who made mistakes. Once or twice he did not accept learners' correct answers.

**Lesson 13: Participant 13/09**

<b>Subject:</b> Creative writing	<b>Grade:</b> 7	<b>Time of day:</b> 11:30
<b>Topic:</b> Products in the future		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very poor		<b>IELTS Band:</b> 3 (Extremely limited user)
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The purpose of this lesson was to provide sufficient information for the learners to submit a written assignment on what a product would look like in the future. The student teacher discussed what various products looked like in the past, what products are available today, what they look like, what kinds of products we could expect in future and what they would		

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possibly look like. Examples of, among others, cell phones, cars, kitchen appliances and school desks were shown and discussed. Some very creative and innovative ideas were presented.

**Teacher initiates:**

- The chalk board was divided into sections under the headings past, present and future.
- Stimulating pictures were displayed to elicit discussion by the learners.
- Leading questions were asked about products in the past, present and the future.

**Learner reactions:**

- The learners found this lesson very interesting and seemed enthusiastic.
- Learners were able to provide creative ideas for products of the future.

**Errors/communicative dissonance:**

- The student teacher made pronunciation errors typically made by Afrikaans speakers of English, e.g. "apparently" was pronounced "appearantly".
- Errors in word order and sentence structure, and concord and tense errors were observed, e.g. "Some of the cars **has** sensors";  
"The first cell phones **is** ...";  
"Our car **have** a TV"  
"What **is** movies **gonna** be like in the future?";  
"What does your phone **had**, that this phone didn't **had**?";  
"Let's look at **quickly** some of the others";  
"Plug it in and put it **around**";  
"**Sit** on your phones" (meaning **switch** on your phones);  
"**build-in**-GPS" (instead of built-in)  
"taller **then** you"  
"You think cars **look** the way they do **for the last 40 years**?"
- The student teacher spoke very fast, in a shrill voice.

**Researcher response:**

I found this to be an interesting topic that could have worked well, unfortunately the student teacher made so many errors that it detracted from the success of the lesson as many learners became disinterested. The student teacher's proficiency in English was very poor. The tempo at which she spoke caused many errors that could otherwise have been avoided. It seems as if paralinguistic and other communicative skills were lacking; her fast speech left no time for recognition of errors or correction. The learners sat passively while the student teacher did most of the talking.

## Lesson 14: Participant 14/09

**Subject:** English

**Grade:** 4

**Time of day:** 07:30

**Topic:** Poetry

**Student teacher's oral proficiency:** Very poor      **IELTS Band:** 3 (Extremely limited user)

**Description of lesson content:**

The student teacher chose a poem about a child day dreaming in class about her dinosaur. She read the poem and asked questions about the content, then went on to explain certain poetic devices. She had a poster on the chalk board containing definitions of all the poetic devices to be discussed in this lesson.

**Teacher initiates:**

- The student teacher asked a number of questions, both on the content of the poem and on poetic devices.
- When she received no response from a learner she very quickly moved on to the next learner.

**Learner reactions:**

- I observed a number of blank stares and frowns.
- In some instances there was no reaction from the learners.

**Errors/communicative dissonance:**

- The student teacher made numerous pronunciation errors, e.g. "long **knack**" instead of "long **neck**"; "comp**pear**isons" in stead of "comparisons"; "**alteration**" instead of "alliteration"; "Little Miss Muffin" instead of "Little Miss Muffet".
- Some words she could not pronounce at all (onomatopoeia) and deliberately left them out of her explanations on poetic devices.
- She made word order and structure errors, e.g. "When you have **so big** animal, you ..." instead of "such a big animal"
- She failed to explain some of the devices adequately.
- She gave some incorrect answers to her own questions, e.g. she asked the learners to choose a word among three which would describe the tone of the poem. The answer was "playful", but she told the class it was "**sneaky**". This confused them, because most had chosen "playful".
- She confused the tone of the poem with the rhythm of the poem.

**Reason for misunderstanding:**

- The student teacher did not have a good command of English, her proficiency was very poor.
- Her errors in pronunciation were caused by lack of knowledge of correct pronunciation

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- in the target language as well as mispronunciations and slips of the tongue.
- She did not understand all the poetic devices, therefore was not able to explain them adequately.
  - Her inappropriate selection of content and learning material added to the misunderstanding.

**Researcher response:**

Based on my past experience as a secondary school teacher and my knowledge of the prescribed syllabi for language teaching, I felt that this lesson was too difficult for grade 4 level. This was confirmed by the blank stares and lack of learner response. At the end of the lesson the learners could answer content questions on the poem, but could not answer the questions on poetic devices. The student teacher's poor proficiency in English, her limited knowledge of the subject and her inadequate explanation of the poem compounded the difficulties that the learners experienced. Inadequate preparation also contributed to misunderstandings.

**Lesson 15: Participant 15/09**

<b>Subject:</b> English	<b>Grade:</b> 7	<b>Time of day:</b> 10:00
<b>Topic:</b> Relative clauses: My hero		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very good		<b>IELTS Band:</b> 7 (Good user)
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
<p>The student teacher started the lesson with a discussion on heroes. The learners actively participated by naming their personal heroes and the reasons why they regarded them as heroes. The student teacher went on to explain how and when relative and reflexive clauses are used. He discussed a few examples written on the chalk board, then gave the learners an exercise, using information from a number of passages on heroes, to do in their groups. He then asked for feedback from the groups and discussed the answers to the exercise.</p>		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student teacher explained the term "hero" adequately.</li> <li>• He discussed the rules when combining sentences using relative clauses.</li> <li>• The student teacher asked leading questions about the work.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The learners did not respond; they were hesitant and reluctant to volunteer answers.</li> <li>• Answers offered were mostly incorrect.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		

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- The student teacher made virtually no language errors. His pronunciation was good and he had no marked accent.
- He did, however, make errors in content delivery. He was uncertain about this aspect of grammar, therefore was unable to adequately explain it to the learners.
- He did not accept correct answers from the learners, perhaps because he did not recognize them as correct.
- He became frustrated with the learners because in his view they had provided incorrect answers, or answers which were different to his.

**Researcher response:**

Relative pronouns/clauses is a difficult topic for second language speakers. Unfortunately, it was also difficult for the student teacher and he failed to explain it adequately. Although his command of English was good and his manner towards the learners was conducive to learning, his lesson failed because he himself did not understand this section of grammar. When a learner asked him "Sir, when do we use 'whom'?" he could not answer. Another learner offered a correct explanation, after which he just carried on with the lesson. By the end of the lesson, the learners still did not know when to use "whom". Learners would combine sentences in an acceptable way, but because it was not the same as the student teacher's answer, he said that it was wrong. This only served to confuse the learners more. The poster containing information on relative/reflexive clauses on the chalk board was much too small; the learners could not read the information, so it served no purpose but to add to the dissonance. The lack of response from the learners was perhaps due to the student teacher's inability to explain the work, but his impatience also played a role.

**Lesson 16: Participant 16/10**

<b>Subject:</b> English literature	<b>Grade:</b> 5	<b>Time of day:</b> 11:15
<b>Topic:</b> Short story		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Good	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 6 (Competent user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
This lesson was one of a series on a selected short story. The student teacher started the lesson by reviewing what had been discussed in previous lessons. She then discussed the main character of the story in terms of his internal and external characteristics, classifying them as "inside" or "outside".		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		

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- The student teacher asked leading questions about the story and the main character.
- She also discussed the meaning of new vocabulary.
- She switched to the learners' vernacular (Afrikaans) when it seemed that they did not understand her, but did not reinforce the concepts in the second language (English).
- She often asked routinely "Am I right?", to which learners answered in a chorus, "Yes, Ma'am!".

**Learner reactions:**

- Only a few learners tried to answer her questions, the rest were quiet.

**Errors/communicative dissonance:**

- The student teacher was proficient in English, only a few errors were noted.
- She made a spelling error on the chalk board: "disappointed" was spelled **dissapointed**
- She asked the learners what colour people were when they were ill. They did not know and she answered "white" instead of "pale".
- She said, "All his brothers **is** not nice **with** him."
- In determining "inside" and "outside" characteristics, the word "sad" was asked as a question: "Sad?". The student teacher's intention was to ask the learners to state into which category "sad" falls, inside or out, but the learners misunderstood and thought they had to provide a definition for sad. When they realised what had happened many of them were quite unhappy, but the student teacher failed to address the issue. She carried on with the lesson.

**Reason for misunderstanding:**

- The misunderstanding was caused by the student teacher not explaining the content adequately and not framing her question as a complete sentence.
- Speaker intent and hearer interpretation did not match.
- The fact that learners were expected to reply in a chorus as a form of respect was intrusive and contributed to misunderstandings.

**Researcher response:**

When the student teacher asked the learners what the meaning of the word "characteristics" was, they could not answer her. She gave an explanation which was not adequate and then asked them "Am I right?" and they replied in a chorus "Yes, Ma'am". I often saw this during my observations, where learners reply in chorus, possibly because they have been taught it to be polite, but it does not necessarily show evidence of understanding. The student teacher tended to repeat herself and answered her own questions before the learners could respond. This could be a reason for their

unresponsiveness. She tended to ask the same learners questions and not involve the others in the class. The learners' proficiency in English was good.

### Lesson 17: Participant 17/10

<b>Subject:</b> English	<b>Grade:</b> 5	<b>Time of day:</b> 10:30
<b>Topic:</b> Prepositions		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Good	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 6 (Competent user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher introduced the lesson by asking learners to perform certain acts, depicting a particular preposition, e.g. climb <b>onto</b> your chairs. They did this with enthusiasm but remained well behaved. She followed this with another activity, placing the correct preposition with its relevant picture on the chalk board.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student teacher gave instructions containing prepositions.</li> <li>• She folded a piece of paper and in the process made use of a number of prepositions.</li> <li>• She gave the learners the same activity to do in groups, naming the correct prepositions, which worked well.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The learners performed the instructions, practising the various prepositions.</li> <li>• Learners were actively involved in group work activity.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some concord errors were observed, e.g. "There <b>is</b> many prepositions."</li> <li>• The three categories into which prepositions fall were not explained well.</li> </ul>		
<b>Reason for misunderstanding:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaker intent and hearer interpretation did not match ("What preposition is 'over'?").</li> <li>• Careless and hasty delivery contributed to the misunderstandings.</li> </ul>		

### Researcher response:

The student teacher's proficiency was good, however, careless errors were made, perhaps because she spoke fast. When dealing with the preposition **over**, she asked the learners "What preposition is over?" Her intention was to have the learners place the preposition into its correct category of time, location or movement. The learners did not understand what she was asking them, as she had not yet explained these categories to them. She rectified this immediately by explaining the three categories and the learners were then

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able to answer her original question correctly. A few expressions leading to misunderstanding were observed, e.g.

"I can't hear you" (request to speak louder);

"X, you're not looking" (request/directive to look at the teacher and the chalk board);

"I'm hearing your voice" (directive to be quiet and not speak while the teacher is speaking, or perhaps persuading them to be quiet).

**Lesson 18: Participant 18/10**

<b>Subject:</b> English	<b>Grade:</b> 6	<b>Time of day:</b> 10:15
<b>Topic:</b> Advertisements		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Poor	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 4 (Limited user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher explained the use of advertisements to the learners. She showed them a few examples from magazines and displayed well made, large posters on the chalk board. She then explained why certain advertisements were effective or interesting to her.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pictures and posters on a variety of advertisements were displayed.</li> <li>• The student teacher gave an explanation of the effectiveness of advertisements.</li> <li>• She did most of the talking.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners were quiet; they listened to the student teacher's explanations.</li> <li>• A few learners made some comments about advertisements</li> <li>• During the group work activity, only the group leaders were involved, the rest talked about personal things.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Errors in concord were observed, e.g. "The group leaders <b>is</b> going to ..."</li> <li>• Pronunciation errors were observed, e.g. "Barbie doll" was pronounced "Barbie <b>dawl</b>" (as in "fall").</li> <li>• The student teacher confused the terms "slogan" and "jingle" and failed to explain these to the learners.</li> </ul>		

**Researcher response:**

The student teacher's proficiency was poor. She was also inadequately prepared for the lesson. Not much discussion or communication took place after the initial introduction. She did most of the talking which added to learners' lack of response. Approximately 15

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minutes was spent on a written activity where no talking was allowed. I was not sure what the purpose of this lesson was. If the focus had been on advertisements, then information on why and how advertisements are used should have been provided. If the focus had been on language use through advertisements, then information on persuasive and manipulative language should have been included. This lack of focus could explain the lack of learner participation. The group work activity failed because the student teacher did not provide rules or regulations. She did not discipline the learners, but left them to their own devices. Task management and instructional skills need development.

### Lesson 19: Participant 19/10

<b>Subject:</b> English	<b>Grade:</b> 6	<b>Time of day:</b> 12:15
<b>Topic:</b> Prepositions		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Poor	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 4 (Limited user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
<p>The student teacher started with a good introductory activity, but then asked learners to provide definitions of prepositions, nouns, verbs and adverbs. Only a limited number of learners were able to give the answers (they are not required to know this in the second language, definitely not at this age). The student teacher proceeded to give a definition of prepositions and explained their use. She then asked the learners to do an activity where they practised prepositions.</p>		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She gave unclear instructions about the activity.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners did not understand her instructions about the activity.</li> <li>• They were unsure what to do.</li> <li>• Some frowning and talking started as a result.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pronunciation errors were observed, e.g. origin was pronounced "oreegin".</li> <li>• Numerous concord errors were made by the student teacher: "Look at <b>this</b> pictures on the board"; "Five of the eight pictures <b>is</b> ..."; "I will hand out <b>this</b> worksheets"; "There <b>is</b> not as many words".</li> <li>• Accent influenced fluency.</li> </ul>		
<b>Reason for misunderstanding:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her explanation of prepositions was not clear and most of the learners did not understand, because her explanation relied on knowledge of the position of the noun and the preposition in the sentence, which was unfamiliar to the learners. As a result</li> </ul>		







**Researcher response:**

This student teacher was inadequately prepared and the lesson failed as a learning opportunity. The student teacher did not possess adequate content knowledge. Basic instructional principles had not been mastered. She seemed uninterested and bored and the learners reacted to this in kind.

**Lesson 23: Participant 23/10**

<b>Subject:</b> English	<b>Grade:</b> 6	<b>Time of day:</b> 09:30
<b>Topic:</b> Agreeing/disagreeing: Disabilities		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Poor	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 4 (Limited user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher started the lesson by asking the learners to explain the word "disabled". She then explained and discussed causes of disabilities. She continued with an activity on agreeing/disagreeing, which worked well. The lesson was concluded with a final discussion with the learners on people with disabilities and the fact that they are the same as any other person and deserve to be treated with respect.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good, engaging questions were asked. When learners provided answers, she repeatedly asked "What else?" until there were no more answers forthcoming.</li> <li>• An activity on agreeing/disagreeing was given.</li> <li>• Flash cards were placed on the chalk board, but were too small and not clear enough.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners participated in a class discussion on disabled people, sharing their experiences and thoughts.</li> <li>• Learners used the structure for agreeing/disagreeing.</li> <li>• They realised that they did not always agree with each other, and could practise how to do this.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language errors observed were mostly errors in pronunciation, e.g. "disabled" was pronounced "<b>dees</b>abled".</li> <li>• Some grammar/structure errors were observed, e.g. "How <b>did</b> you feel if you are blind?" instead of "How <b>would</b> you feel?"</li> </ul>		

**Researcher response:**

The student teacher's oral proficiency was poor. Her lesson, however, was well prepared. When she wanted to consolidate the main goals of her lesson, the learners' beliefs

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regarding disabled people interfered and they missed the point of her lesson. The goal of teaching values and attitudes, specifically tolerance and respect for disabled people, therefore, failed. The attitudes of the learners were evident here, for example some learners had the following to say:

"I'll help them if I'm paid."

"A person can witch you and you will become disabled."

"If I help them and touch them, I will get infected, I will also be crippled."

"They should go to Bethesda, it's for crazy people."

In this regard, the student teacher's message of tolerance, acceptance and respect for disabled people did not seem to change attitudes, as many learners retained their preconceived beliefs.

### Lesson 24: Participant 24/10

<b>Subject:</b> English Literature	<b>Grade:</b> 11	<b>Time of day:</b> 11:25
<b>Topic:</b> <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> (W. Shakespeare)		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very good	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 7 (Good user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
The student teacher started the lesson with a competition quiz, which learners had to answer in groups. They enjoyed the exercise and proved their knowledge of the content by answering correctly. The student teacher then worked through a PowerPoint presentation, reinforcing key terms and issues from Act I, Scene iii.		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student teacher reinforced key terms and facts through the quiz.</li> <li>• PowerPoint presentation to illustrate difficult concepts.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners actively participated in the quiz.</li> <li>• They provided answers and asked questions.</li> <li>• Three learners read to the class from the play.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minor grammar errors were observed, e.g. "<b>this</b> questions as well ...").</li> <li>• Wrong definition for "cut-throat dog" was given. When the student teacher explained the term "cut-throat dog" in reference to the character Shylock, her definition for this term was "a dead dog" instead of, for example, "ruthless creature".</li> </ul>		
<b>Reason for misunderstanding:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorrect information was provided, thus non-understanding, not misunderstanding.</li> </ul>		

**Researcher response:**

The student teacher was well prepared and enthusiastic. She was knowledgeable about the subject. Despite an incorrect explanation, her lesson was successful. She was proficient in the second language, barring a few minor errors.

**Lesson 25: Participant 25/10**

<b>Subject:</b> English Literature	<b>Grade:</b> 10	<b>Time of day:</b> 09:50
<b>Topic:</b> Short story		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Poor	<b>IELTS Band:</b> 4 (Limited user)	
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
<p>The student teacher started the lesson by providing some introductory information, reviewing what had been covered in previous lessons. She then spoke about the structure of the story, comparing it to a picture frame. She read definitions of literary terms, e.g. "frame narrator" to the learners and provided information about the plot of the story and the characters.</p>		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She asked a learner to draw a picture on the white board and placed it within a frame, explaining how the frame supports the picture within, with the focus on the picture itself. She explained that the frame represents the first part of the story where the scene is set for what is to follow and the narrator is introduced to the reader. The picture then represents the main story.</li> <li>• She provided all the answers to her own questions on the story; she did not provide opportunities for learners to suggest answers or to contribute to a discussion.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners listened to the presentation and the explanations.</li> <li>• Learners' non-verbal language indicated that they were bored.</li> <li>• They talked among themselves while the student teacher was presenting the lesson.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student teacher made a number of pronunciation errors: "narrator" was pronounced "nár-rator"; "telepathy" was pronounced "tele-páthy".</li> <li>• Concord errors were observed, e.g. "Someone <b>and</b> Apis <b>is</b>..."</li> <li>• Vocabulary errors were noted, e.g. "You won't <b>expect</b> (suspect) him of murder."</li> <li>• In a discussion on the word "telepathy", a learner asked the student teacher what "tele-telepathy" meant, but she could not answer, she did not know. Interestingly, the learner was able to pronounce both "telepathy" and "tele-telepathy" correctly.</li> </ul>		

### Researcher response:

The student teacher's English proficiency was poor. She did not engage the learners in any form of discussion as they were not included in any aspect of the lesson. The student teacher did not understand the methodological or pedagogical principles that constitute a good lesson. She presented a lecture instead of teaching the learners.

### Lesson 26: Participant 26/11

<b>Subject:</b> English Literature	<b>Grade:</b> 9	<b>Time of day:</b> 13:15
<b>Topic:</b> Poetry		
<b>Student teacher's oral proficiency:</b> Very poor		<b>IELTS Band:</b> 3 (Extremely limited user)
<b>Description of lesson content:</b>		
<p>The student teacher started the lesson by showing a cartoon video clip to introduce comparisons and metaphors. He then reviewed literary devices which had been discussed in a previous lesson by having learners complete a worksheet. The poem was introduced and discussed by means of a PowerPoint presentation. New words were explained, the structure of the poem was discussed and learners were asked questions to determine their understanding of the poem and the poet's message.</p>		
<b>Teacher initiates:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He asked learners to provide definitions for literary devices, such as assonance, alliteration, simile, etc.</li> <li>• He initiated a class discussion on the vocabulary in the poem.</li> <li>• He explained the poem line by line.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learner reactions:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learners listened to the presentation and the explanations.</li> <li>• Learners offered answers to questions, based on their experience and feelings.</li> <li>• They participated actively in the presentation.</li> </ul>		
<b>Errors/communicative dissonance:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student teacher made a number of pronunciation errors: "comparisons" pronounced "cômpereesons".</li> <li>• Concord errors were observed, e.g. "this are all animals"; "there is easy ones"; "if somebody ask you"; "the word 'but' indicate ..."</li> <li>• He sometimes spoke in half sentences, leaving out the verb, or using only half of the verb form.</li> <li>• His enunciation and accent influenced accuracy and fluency. He tended to mumble when he was unsure of the correct form of the verb and consequently left out the verb completely.</li> </ul>		

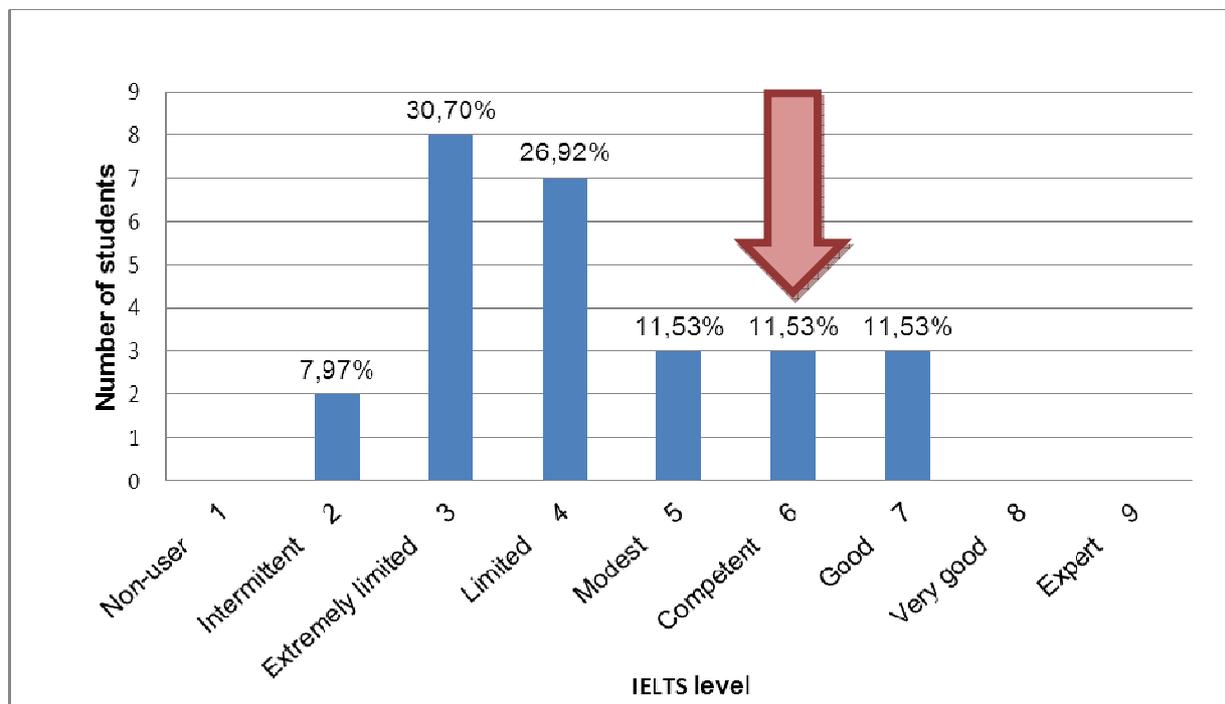
**Researcher response:**

The student teacher's proficiency in the second language was very poor. Learners had difficulty hearing what he said. Although the lesson was interesting, well planned and skilfully executed, language usage errors and poor enunciation detracted from its success. This concludes the summaries of each of the lessons observed. I attempted to provide detail of what I typically observed during the lessons to offer the reader a complete picture. The summaries were compiled only after I had viewed the video recordings repeatedly. In some instances I viewed the video recordings again for clarification. After multiple viewings, the video recordings were compared with my field notes to ensure that nothing was overlooked.

4.3.2 Presentation of data from student teachers' oral proficiency based on IELTS band descriptors

After the lesson observations had been summarised, the student teachers' oral proficiency was assessed and rated against the descriptors of the IELTS rubric. My assessment of the student teachers' oral proficiency indicated that the student teachers' proficiency was below average. Of the 26 student teachers, the language proficiency of eight lay on band 3 (31%) and seven on band 4 (27%), which is considered far below average. Ten (39%) student teachers' language proficiency lay below band 4, which is considered very poor. The language proficiency of only six students (23%), was considered good and lay on bands 6 (three or 12%) and band 7 (three or 12%). As band 6 is the internationally accepted average level for being able to study through the medium of English at universities in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand (Kaye 2009; Elder 1993), the implication is that only six of the 26 student teachers in this study qualify in this regard. Not one student teacher was rated at band 8 or 9. Figure 4.2 provides an indication of the student teachers' oral proficiency, with the accepted average at level 6 indicated by the arrow.

**Figure 4.2: Participants' oral proficiency (based on the IELTS descriptors)**



#### 4.3.3 Presentation of data from focus group interviews

During the focus group interviews the main question posed was whether participants perceived that learners had misunderstood them. This question was asked to initiate the interview and to help participants gather their thoughts, after which the interview was allowed to flow naturally. The key questions for the rest of the interview were based on determining the types and causes of misunderstandings. I also tried to determine whether participants actively sought to repair misunderstandings. All 26 participants answered affirmatively to the initial question, namely whether participants perceived that learners misunderstood them. They said that it was a common occurrence ("Often, at least two or three times in a lesson" [Participant 01/10]). The student teachers would know that misunderstandings had occurred because they would notice blank expressions, frowns, or learners would start playing with something, which indicated to them that the learners had lost interest in the lesson. The following statements are an indication of their responses to this question:

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"They have blank expressions, then you know they have lost you, and you can see it." (10/09)

"I can see it on their faces." (19/10)

"The brighter learner will frown and even challenge you. So you take your cue from them." (15/09)

"Learners all ask the same questions, over and over again, then I know they didn't understand." (14/09)

Sometimes learners would raise their hands to ask a question or in some cases shout out interjections such as "What?" or "Huh?", which indicated to the participants that the learners had not understood. All the participants said that they would consciously do something to repair the misunderstanding:

"I will change tack." (15/09)

"I will ask a strong learner to explain it, then ask a weak learner to repeat what he said." (15/09)

"I walk around a lot and pick up where there are problems, then I explain again." (12/09)

Many of the participants acknowledged that they would ask directly, "Do you understand?", and if necessary, they would then explain again or rephrase. Some participants mentioned that their own teaching strategies and assessment techniques were underdeveloped and might be the cause of misunderstanding. As with their inability to give clear instructions, I believe that these are the most significant reasons for misunderstandings occurring. One participant (10/09) mentioned that her planning and preparation were not always adequate, which made it difficult when explaining something to the learners. This also resulted in misunderstanding.

My observations of the lessons indicated that although the participants' language usage was below standard, this was not always the cause of misunderstanding. What did strike me, however, was the fact that in the focus group interviews, contrary to their acknowledgement that their methodological skills were poor, none of the participants

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perceived their own language usage as problematic. They responded to the question whether they perceived their own oral proficiency to be the cause of misunderstandings as follows:

"No, I don't think so." (17/09)

"Not at all." (15/09)

"I think my language is quite good, I take academic English." (12/09)

Participants did not believe that their own lack of proficiency in the second language caused misunderstandings. When asked what they perceived to be the reasons for misunderstandings, the participants blamed learners' inattention or learners' lack of proficiency in the target language. Another reason for misunderstandings mentioned by the participants was learners' failure to understand their instructions. When I probed deeper they said that learners misunderstood their instructions and that they had to repeat instructions a few times, sometimes three to four times:

"Instructions cause problems, they don't always understand instructions immediately."(18/10)

"No, only with tests and comprehension tests. They don't understand the questions. They'll ask 'What is question 3?'. "(12/09)

"Now when I give instructions, I code switch to Afrikaans to make sure they understand."(12/09)

"Yes, I will repeat the question, or say it differently." (17/10)

"My instructions aren't always clear." (14/09)

#### 4.3.4 Presentation of data from questionnaire

The first seven questions covered biographical information of the student teachers and the sites (cf. section 3.5.1; figure 3.2). Based on the answers provided to questions 8 to 17, it seemed as though participants, in general, encounter misunderstandings on a daily basis. In response to question 8, which asked whether they encountered misunderstandings in their classrooms, 83% of participants stated that they did. In response to question 9, which

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asked whether they tried to determine the source of the misunderstanding, all participants (100%), from 25 returned questionnaires, stated that they would try to determine the source of the misunderstanding. When participants were asked how they knew that misunderstandings had occurred, they stated that misunderstandings were evidenced in learners' non-verbal behaviour, such as blank stares and frowns (100%) (question 10), and shrugs (88%) (question 11), or when learners asked questions (83%) (question 12).

Question 13 sought to determine the extent to which student teachers believed the learners' lack of vocabulary contributed to misunderstandings. In response to the question, 98% responded that it did play a role. This confirmed what participants had claimed in the focus group interviews. They mentioned that learners' vocabulary was problematic and that learners did not have enough opportunity to use the target language at home. I found this interesting as I had not observed this to be a problem during the observation of lessons. On the contrary, my observations showed that it was the student teachers' language usage that was below standard and not that of the learners.

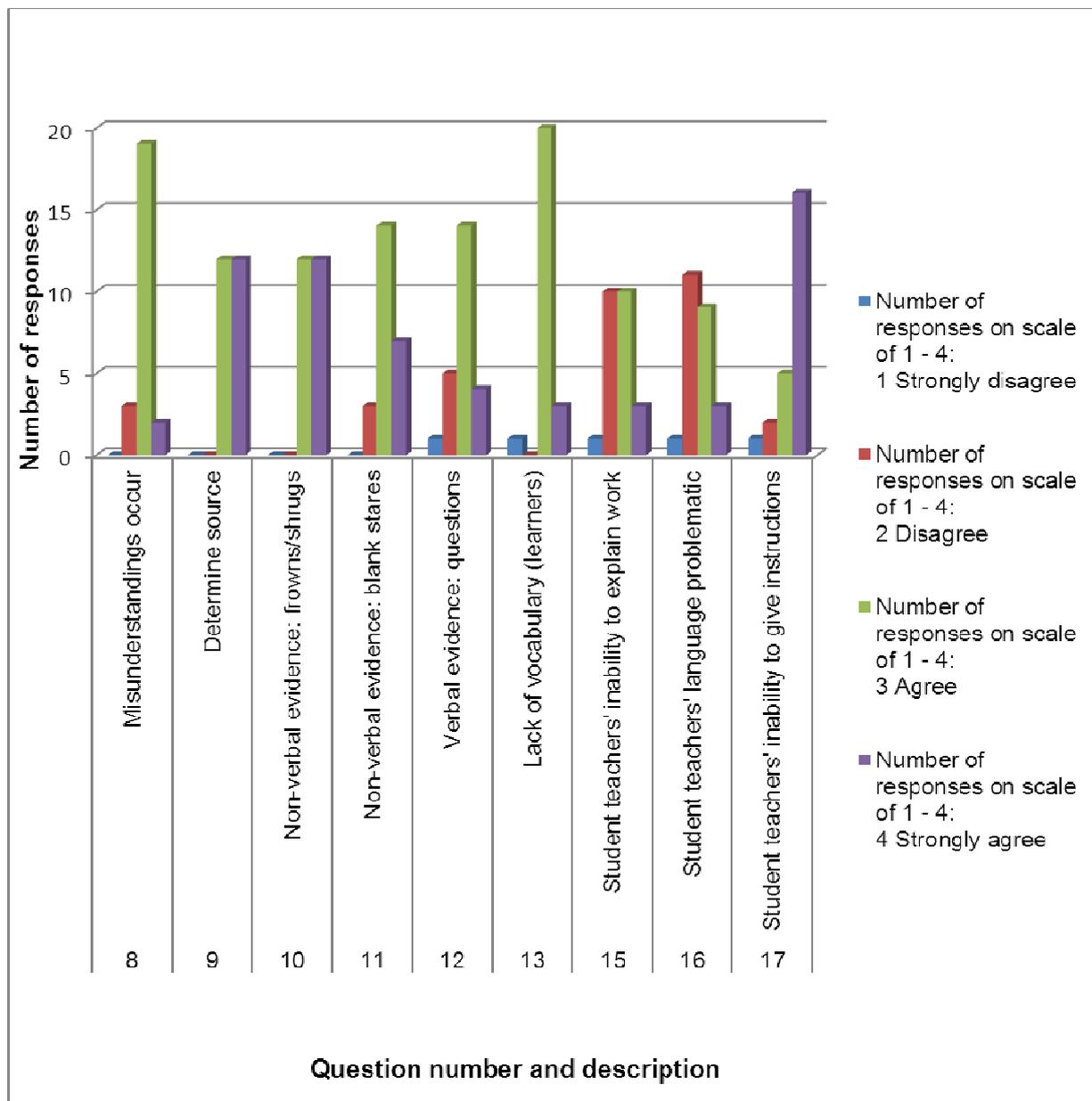
Question 14 asked whether or not the participants perceived differences in cultural norms or socio-linguistic competence, to play a role in learners' misunderstanding. Seven participants (29%) agreed, seven (29%) disagreed and 12 (48%) were uncertain. My assumption was that cultural differences between student teacher and learners could trigger misunderstandings, but the participants were not as aware of this aspect as I had assumed they would be. This was also confirmed in the focus group interviews, where participants stated that differences in cultures had not resulted in misunderstandings.

Questions 15 and 17 asked whether the student teachers' (in)ability to explain the work or to give instructions caused misunderstandings. Eighty percent of the participants agreed that it did. This was confirmed in the focus group interviews where 88% of participants felt that in many instances it was their own inability to give clear instructions or to explain content that caused misunderstanding. Although 96% of participants acknowledged that the teacher's own proficiency may play a role, they pointed out that it was the learners' lack of vocabulary and knowledge of idiomatic expressions in the target language that had caused many of the misunderstandings.

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Question 16 asked whether the student teachers' use of language was too advanced for the learners to comprehend. In this case, 56% of participants agreed, admitting that it might play a role in misunderstandings and 44% disagreed, saying that their language use was not too difficult and did not cause misunderstandings. Figure 4.3 indicates the responses for each question (questions 8 to 17, excluding questions 1–7 [as they covered biographical details only]) and question 14 [as it required a yes/no response].

**Figure 4.3: Data gleaned from the questionnaire**



In terms of oral proficiency, 44% of participants did not acknowledge that their own oral proficiency was inadequate. However, 98% of participants stated that the oral proficiency of the learners was poor and cited this as the reason for misunderstandings. The participants were, however, willing to acknowledge that poor methodology, such as inability to explain and give instructions played a role.

## 4.4 Data analysis – emerging categories

### 4.4.1 Emerging categories from observations

After each of the 26 summaries had been completed, they were carefully scrutinized. What follows next is an explanation of the initial categories that emerged from the first combing of the data. The summaries of the recorded lessons provided an overview of all the salient points which relate to the research questions. I was able to identify segments of texts which were noteworthy and which helped me gain an understanding of the possible categories that were emerging. I divided these categories into two sections. On one level, an indication of the idiosyncrasies relating to oral proficiency could be extracted, namely:

Pronunciation errors (**P**), which include:

- enunciation
- influence of L1 accent

Grammatical errors (**G**), which include:

- concord
- use of tense
- sentence structure

Direct translation from L1 errors (**DT**), which include:

- word order
- vocabulary
- sentence length

These categories conform closely to those identified in a study by Roberts, Moss, Wass, Sarangi and Jones (2005:465) where patients with limited English and culturally different communication styles consult with general practitioners in English. Their study showed that 20% of the patients who were video recorded presented major misunderstandings. Another study conducted by Nel and Swanepoel (2010:53) provides a similar classification of errors. Their study was a document analysis of student teacher portfolios by means of error analysis. Error analysis is commonly held as a good starting point when studying learner language and second language acquisition (Ellis 2002). The two classifications by Roberts et al (2005) and Nel and Swanepoel (2010) are shown in table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Classification of errors**

Researchers	Roberts, Moss, Wass, Sarangi and Jones (2005:465)	Nel and Swanepoel (2010:53)
Type of study	Video recordings: speech	Portfolio: written
Categories	Pronunciation and word stress	Phonological errors
	Intonation and speech delivery	Syntactic errors
	Grammar, vocabulary and lack of contextual information	Grammatical errors
	Style of presentation	Tense errors
		Transfer errors
		Punctuation errors

Although I endorse the classification made by Nel and Swanepoel (2010), I am of the opinion that some of their categories could be collapsed as they cover the same type of error, e.g. grammatical errors and tense errors. I, therefore, adapted the classification made by Nel and Swanepoel (2010) to include the categories that I had identified (see previous page) and to group together all items that are seemingly of similar type. This adaptation led to the following personalised classification which was subsequently used to code the idiosyncrasies in my study:

- phonological errors (**P**) (including pronunciation, enunciation and influence of L1 accent)
- grammatical errors (**G**) (including concord, tense and syntax)
- transfer from L1 errors (**T**) (including word order and vocabulary errors)

It would seem that the above categorization could cover the most important language factors that influence proficiency and effective communication. At this point in the analysis procedure I also applied the second tool, the IELTS band descriptor evaluation (cf. section 3.5.4.2; 4.3.2) in tandem with this step. My evaluation of the student teachers' oral proficiency correlated with the type of language error made and which was observed in the lessons.

It became clear from my combings of the data that, contrary to what was initially anticipated, poor oral proficiency and inadequate speech act realization were not the only reasons for the misunderstandings that were observed. Based on my analysis of the

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observations, the following codes also emerged as contributing factors to the occurrence of misunderstandings in this study:

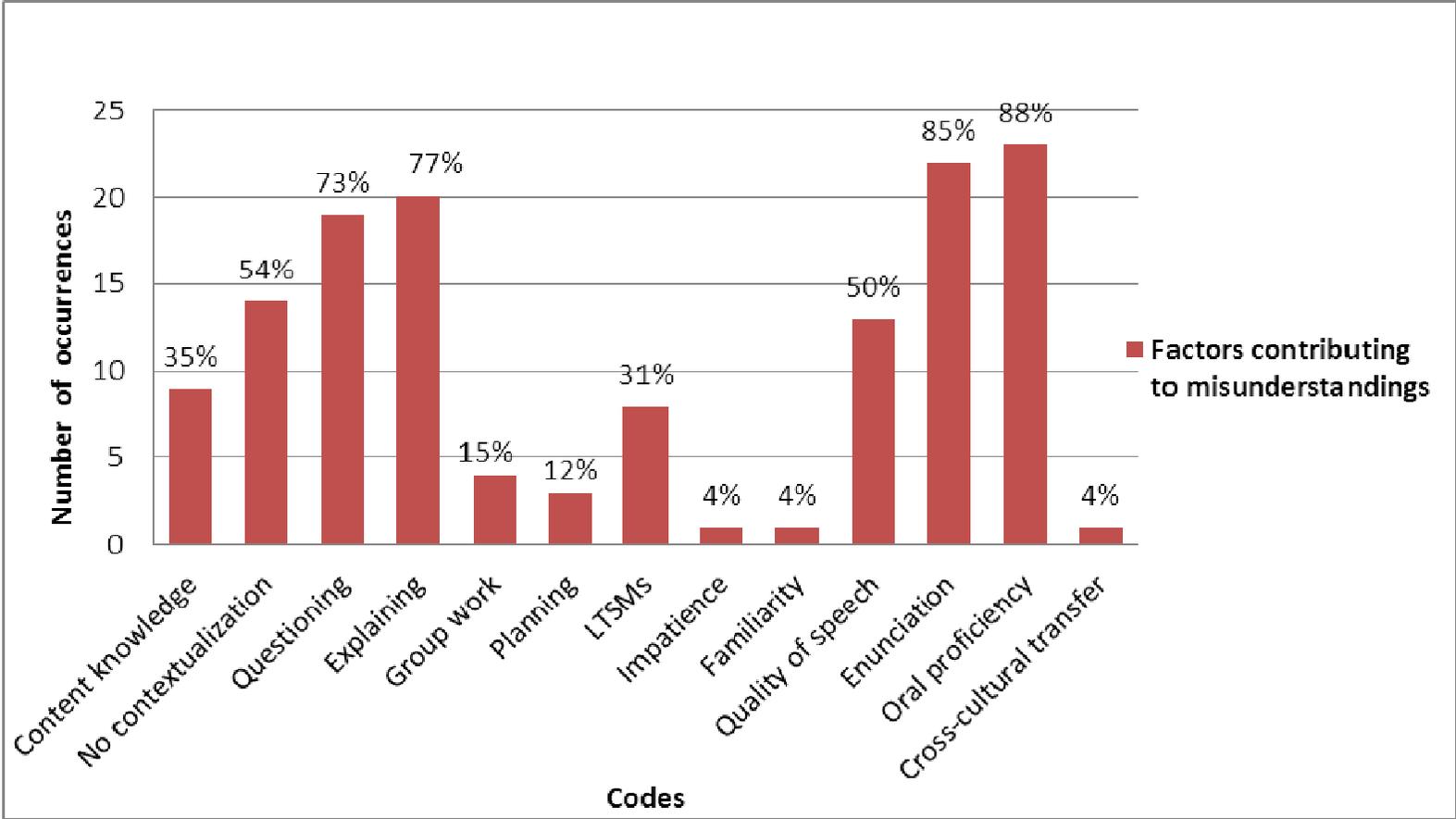
- content not mastered by student teacher
- no contextualizing of new content
- inadequate questioning techniques
- inadequate explaining of concepts and/or content
- inability to manage group work
- poor planning and lesson design
- inadequate quality and design of LTSMs<sup>10</sup>
- impatience with learners
- familiarity with learners
- timid speech and explanation
- quality of voice, e.g. shrill, loud
- speed of delivery
- quantity of teacher talk, verbosity
- problematic enunciation
- cross-cultural transfer problems, e.g. direct translations, poor vocabulary, context
- inadequate understanding of differences in cultural beliefs and traditions

Figure 4.4 on the next page offers a visual presentation of the codes emerging from the analysis of the recorded lessons and observations pertaining to the abovementioned aspects, related to oral proficiency and communication, methodological issues and teacher personality.

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<sup>10</sup> Learning and teaching support materials such as posters, pictures, flash cards, PowerPoint presentations

Figure 4.4: Presentation of codes obtained from recorded lessons



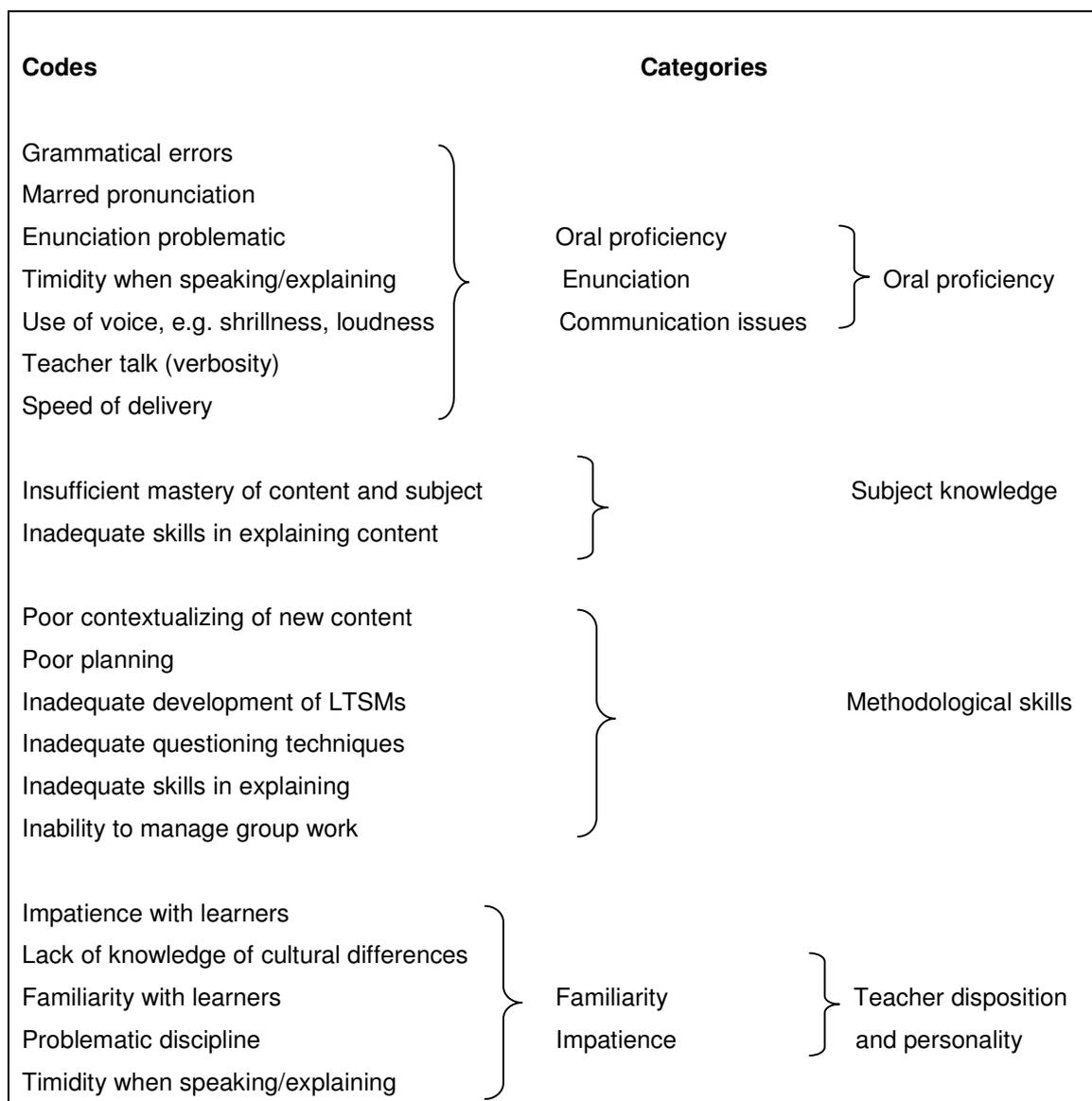
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The codes in table 4.2 were further collapsed into four main categories, namely:

- 1) communicative issues
- 2) methodological skills
- 3) subject knowledge
- 4) teacher disposition and personality

Figure 4.5 offers a visual presentation of the categories into which the codes were collapsed.

**Figure 4.5: Observation categories based on codes**



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Utterances made by the student teachers during lesson presentations contained notable idiosyncrasies. These idiosyncrasies contained the errors made as identified in section 4.3.1 and were grouped together and indicated on the template summary of the lessons. When employing SAT, the interest is usually with the illocutionary force of utterances, because this is mostly where evidence of speaker intent being incorrectly interpreted by the hearer is evident.

I, therefore, identified all of the illocutionary acts (**ILAs**), but added to this selection those locutionary acts (**LAs**) and perlocutionary acts (**PLAs**) where communication was thought to be problematic, or where misunderstandings (**MUs**) occurred. Although many more idiosyncratic utterances were evident,

I chose the following 26 from the data set for analysis, as they represent the most prominent idiosyncrasies. I included utterances which were idiosyncratic in one way or another, although they not necessarily caused misunderstandings. Table 4.4 on the next pages provides a list of the utterances identified as containing idiosyncrasies.

**Table 4.4: Idiosyncratic utterances produced by student teachers**

Identification	Utterance number	Function (speech act)	Hearer (learner) interpretation	Consequence	Repair
01/09	1. "What questions do we have?"	LA (IF) (wrong word)	Could not interpret	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	Repaired by student teacher
01/09	2. "What questions do we ask here?"	LA (IF) (wrong word)	Could not interpret	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	Repaired by student teacher
01/09	3. "You've read the book, people!"	ILA (command)	Interpreted incorrectly as an interrogative or question	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
02/09	4. "What is 'of'?" Rephrased as: "What does 'of' mean?"	LA (IF)  LA	1. Could not interpret  2. Interpreted correctly	<b>Misunderstanding</b>  Effective communication	Repaired by student teacher
03/09	5. "Why Zola did not look before cross the road?"	LA (IF)	Interpreted correctly	Effective communication	N/a
06/09	6. Incoherent mumbling when explaining sums.	LA (IF)	Could not interpret	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
08/09	7. "Yes, I will come for you."	ILA (promise)	Interpreted incorrectly by learner as a threat	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
09/09	8. "Which culture are you?"	LA (IF)	Confused terms "culture" and "religion"	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
10/09	9. "Keep your eyes on your own work."	ILA (command)	Interpreted incorrectly as command to read from their own books	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
10/09	10. "I'm going to do the second part."	ILA (warning)	Interpreted incorrectly as merely new information	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
12/09	11. Continuous tense incorrectly explained (content knowledge), mumbling, unfinished sentences.	LA	Interpreted correctly (but wrong information)	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair

Identification	Utterance number	Function (speech act)	Hearer (learner) interpretation	Consequence	Repair
12/09	12. "What do we call the word in brackets?"	LA	Interpreted correctly but wrong answer provided by student teacher	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
14/09	13. Poetic devices incorrectly explained.	LA	Interpreted correctly (but wrong information)	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
15/09	14. "Thank you."	ILA (agreeing)	Interpreted correctly as acknowledgement of correct answer	Effective communication	N/a
15/09	15. "There we go."	ILA (agreeing)	Interpreted correctly as acknowledgement of correct answer	Effective communication	N/a
15/09	16. "I think you should write this down."	ILA (request)	Interpreted correctly as request to write down information	Effective communication	N/a
16/10	17. "Sad?" (inside or outside - classification of character)	ILA (interrogative, question)	Interpreted incorrectly as directive, asking for definition of the word "sad"	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	Repaired by student teacher
17/10	18. "What preposition is 'over'?"	LA (IF) (question)	Unable to interpret	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	Repaired by student teacher
17/10	19. "I can't hear you."	ILA (request)	Interpreted correctly as request to speak louder	Effective communication	N/a
17/10	20. "X, you're not looking."	ILA (directive)	Interpreted correctly as directive to look at chalk board	Effective communication	N/a
17/10	21. "I'm hearing your voice."	ILA (directive)	Interpreted correctly as directive to be quiet	Effective communication	N/a
19/10	22. Unclear explanation of prepositions.	LA	Interpreted correctly but could not provide answers	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
19/10	23. Unclear/poor instructions for activity.	LA	Could not interpret	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	Repaired by student teacher
20/10	24. Incorrect explanation for shift in pronunciation.	LA	Interpreted correctly (but wrong information)	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair
21/10	25. Instructions for "Think-Pair-Share".	ILA (directive)	Misinterpretation of instruction	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	Repaired by student teacher

Identification	Utterance number	Function (speech act)	Hearer (learner) interpretation	Consequence	Repair
24/10	26. Definition of "cut-throat dog".	LA (WF) but incorrect	Interpreted correctly (but incorrect information)	<b>Misunderstanding</b>	No repair

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The utterances were selected to represent the most prominent and typical idiosyncrasies made by the student teachers in this study. After scrutinizing the context in which these utterances were made, I identified possible reasons for the idiosyncrasies for each category. These reasons are provided in table 4.5.

**Table 4.5: Summary of idiosyncrasies and their reasons**

Type of idiosyncrasy	Reason errors are made
<b>Phonological errors</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pronunciation</li> </ul>	The sound, stress, rhythm and intonation patterns of the L1 influence pronunciation in the L2; perpetuated in the instructional setting because student teachers are also L2 speakers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enunciation and accent</li> </ul>	L1 influence in accent; speed of delivery and mumbling influenced enunciation
<b>Grammatical errors</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concord</li> </ul>	Inadequate understanding of singular and plural structures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tenses</li> </ul>	Inadequate understanding of verb tenses; over use of continuous tense
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentence structure</li> </ul>	These errors seem to be a result of transfer from L1 to L2 (although seemingly also belonging to the next category; "transfer errors", I placed these errors in this category as they correspond with grammatical errors)
<b>Transfer errors</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Word order</li> </ul>	Interrogative pronouns ("which", "what") expressed incorrectly; word order transferred from L1 to L2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocabulary</li> </ul>	L1 influence to address lack of vocabulary in the target language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentence length</li> </ul>	Sentence length is usually longer than native speaker's sentence length

The most prominent features identified in the student teachers' idiosyncratic utterances include the following:

- Non-use of the third person present tense -s ("He climb onto the chair")
- Use of uncountable nouns as countable ("equipments"; "our involvements")
- Finite form of verb **to be** completely omitted ("She very ill"; He in class today")
- Omission of obligatory definite and indefinite article
- Insertion of definite and indefinite article where they do not occur in native English
- Incorrect use of relative pronouns **who** and **which** (" the book who"; the boy which")

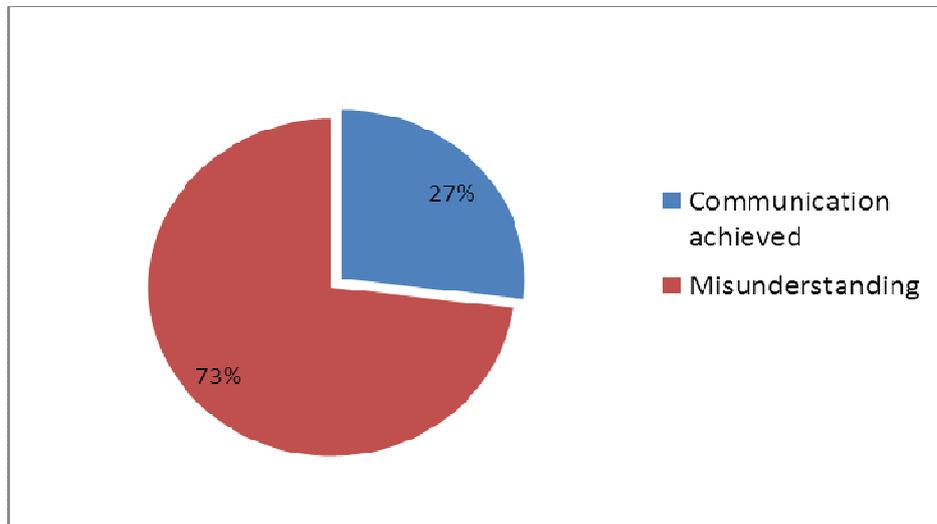
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- Use of question tag **is it?** or **isn't it** to form all question tags ("You should do homework regularly, isn't it?")
- Inserting redundant words such as prepositions ("You have to discuss about the simile")
- Using words to increase explicitness ("red colour" instead of "red"; "How long time?" instead of "How long")
- Use of that-clauses instead of infinitive constructions ("I want that we discuss the poem")
- Incorrect placement of stress, often with pronouns or at the end of sentence ("and HE has been in Durban for a week" "This is the correct WAY")
- Lack of/avoidance of reduced vowels where obligatory, in unstressed vowels, resulting in a full vowel rather than a schwa ("cQntinue" instead of "cintinue")

The above-mentioned features seem to correspond closely to Lowenberg's (2002) examples of English usage considered standard in its local context (Outer circle). However, even though the features mentioned above abounded in the utterances, it would seem as if these utterances did not necessarily lead to misunderstandings.

As stated earlier, effective communication is said to have been achieved if there is a match between speaker intent and hearer interpretation (cf. sections 2.3; 2.4). Of the 26 utterances noted as idiosyncratic (ill-formed [**IF**]) (cf. table 4.5), misunderstandings occurred in 19 utterances, or in 73%. Communication, although considered problematic, was nevertheless effective in the remaining seven utterances or in 27%, as indicated in figure 4.6.

**Figure 4.6: Misunderstandings due to idiosyncratic utterances**



In an effort to identify the occurrence, nature, frequency and consequence of misunderstandings, the 19 misunderstandings were analysed. I have already indicated possible reasons for the misunderstandings on the template summary of each lesson observed. The type of misunderstandings and the reasons for the misunderstandings will be presented together.

When scrutinising the 19 misunderstandings, I found that 12 of the 19 misunderstandings were the result of locutionary acts (**LAs**) of which six utterances were ill-formed (**IF**) (utterances 1, 2, 4, 6, 8 and 18). The learners in these instructional settings were unable to interpret speaker intent. In utterances 1 and 2 the misunderstanding occurred due to an inappropriate word choice and in utterances 4 and 18 misunderstanding was due to an error in the structure of the utterance. In utterance 6 the learners were unable to interpret the student teacher's incoherent and mumbled speech. In utterance 8 the student teacher confused the learners by using the words "culture" and "religion" incorrectly. The remaining six utterances, 11, 12, 13, 22, 23, and 24, were well-formed (**WF**) and interpreted correctly. The misunderstanding occurred because the student teacher provided incorrect information. The misunderstandings in utterances 1, 2, 4 and 18 were repaired by the student teachers within the next two turns. The misunderstanding in utterances 6 and 8 went unnoticed by the student teacher and the learners, but was clear to me as observer.

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Six more misunderstandings were the result of illocutionary acts (**ILA**). These are utterances 3, 7, 9, 10, 17 and 25. In these instances the speech acts employed were incorrectly interpreted and, therefore, misunderstood by the learners. In utterance 3 the speech act of commanding was used, which was incorrectly interpreted by the learners as an interrogative (question). In utterance 7 the speech act of promising was used, which was incorrectly interpreted by the learner as a threat. In utterance 9, the speech act of commanding was used as a warning for learners not to cheat, which learners incorrectly interpreted as a command to look at their own work. In utterance 10 the speech act of warning was used, which the learners incorrectly interpreted as a declarative (of new information). In utterance 17 the speech act of interrogative was incorrectly interpreted as a directive to provide a definition. Utterance 25 was not as a result of any error or ill-formed utterance, but of learners' incorrectly interpreting or mishearing the instructions from the student teacher. When the learners made a mistake in the activity set for them, the student teacher immediately repaired by saying: "No, you misunderstood. Let me explain again". In only one other instance was the misunderstanding repaired, namely in utterance 17. When the learners provided a definition for the word "sad", the student teacher realised that they had misunderstood and rephrased her question.

Where misunderstandings occurred, it was often when student teachers asked questions and learners did not understand for some reason. Usually, when questions are asked an answer is expected, so any misunderstanding would immediately be evident, either by long pauses before an answer was offered or by asking for clarification. Both were observed during the recorded lessons and often learners would just ask for the question to be repeated. It was clear to me, however, that in only a very few instances did the inadequate pronunciation or incorrect grammar usage of the student teachers cause the misunderstanding. Mostly, the cause was lexical. Student teachers would use an unusual word or an idiomatic expression which the learners did not understand, e.g. "What **questions** do we have here?" instead of "What **themes/issues** do we have?". Table 4.6, which differs from table 4.4 in that the **classification** of each misunderstanding is included, provides a summary of these misunderstandings as identified from the idiosyncratic utterances (cf. table 4.4).

**Table 4.6: Summary of misunderstandings identified from idiosyncratic utterances**

Participant number	Utterance number (cf. table 4.5)	MU	Function (Speech act)	Reason	Classification
01/09	1. "What questions do we have?"	MU 1	LA (IF)	Wrong choice of word	Oral proficiency
01/09	2. "What questions do we ask here?"	MU 2	LA (IF)	Wrong choice of word	Oral proficiency
01/09	3. "You've read the book, people!"	MU 3	ILA	Command interpreted as interrogative	Speech act realization
02/09	4. "What is 'of'?" Rephrased as: "What does 'of' mean?"	MU 4	LA (IF)	Incorrect sentence structure	Oral proficiency
06/09	6. Incoherent mumbling when explaining sums.	MU 5	LA (IF)	Incorrect information, content not mastered, mumbling	Methodological principles; communication
08/09	7. "Yes, I will come for you."	MU 6	ILA	Promising interpreted as threat	Speech act realization
09/09	8. "Which culture are you?"	MU 7	LA (IF)	Incorrect sentence structure	Oral proficiency
10/09	9. "Keep your eyes on your own work."	MU 8	ILA	Warning interpreted as command	Speech act realization
10/09	10. "I'm going to do the second part."	MU 9	ILA	Warning interpreted as merely new information	Speech act realization
12/09	11. Continuous tense incorrectly explained.	MU 10	LA	Incorrect information, content knowledge not mastered	Methodological principles
12/09	12. "What do we call the word in brackets?"	MU 11	LA	Incorrect information, content knowledge not mastered	Methodological principles
14/09	13. Poetic devices incorrectly explained.	MU 12	LA	Incorrect information, content knowledge not mastered	Methodological principles
16/10	17. "Sad?" (inside or outside	MU 13	ILA	Interrogative interpreted as	Speech act realization

Participant number	Utterance number (cf. table 4.5)	MU	Function (Speech act)	Reason	Classification
	- classification of character).			directive	
17/10	18. "What preposition is 'over'?"	MU 14	LA	Interrogative incorrectly interpreted	Speech act realization
19/10	22. No explanation of prepositions.	MU 15	LA	No explanation of information	Methodological principles
19/10	23. Unclear/poor instructions for activity.	MU 16	LA	Unclear instructions for activity	Methodological principles
20/10	24. Incorrect explanation for shift in pronunciation.	MU 17	LA	Incorrect information, content knowledge not mastered	Methodological principles
21/10	25. Instructions for "Think-Pair-Share".	MU 18	ILA	Mishearing/ misinterpreting instructions	Methodological principles
24/10	26. Definition of "cut-throat dog".	MU 19	LA (WF)	Incorrect information, content knowledge not mastered	Methodological principles

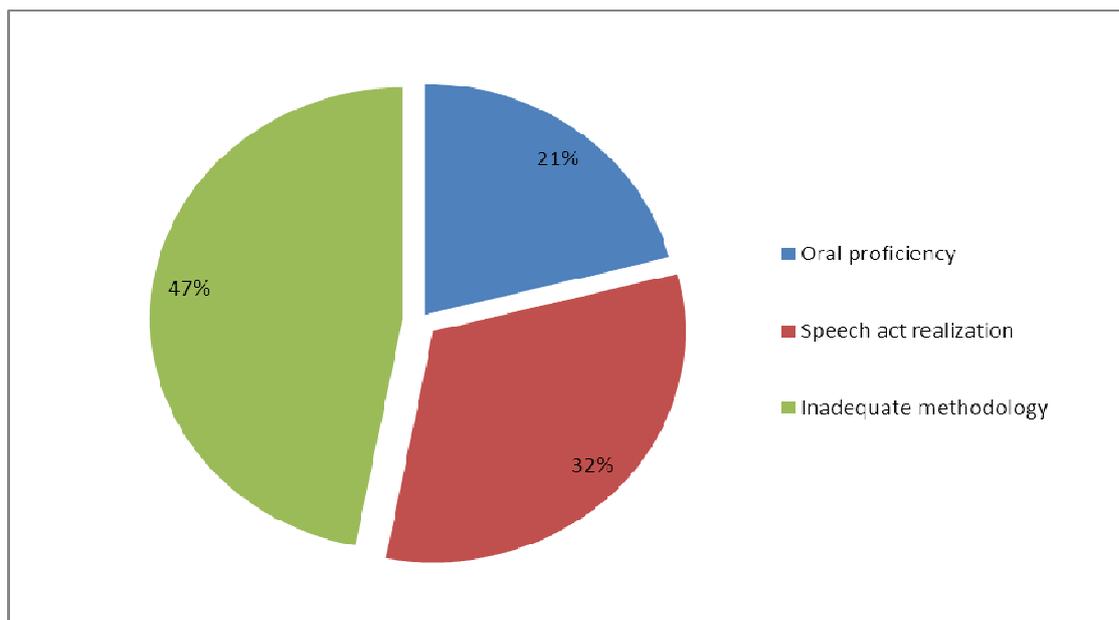
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4.4.2 Reasons for the identified misunderstandings

In this study 19 (73%) of the 26 idiosyncratic utterances selected resulted in misunderstandings. Of the 19 misunderstandings, 21% were a result of poor oral proficiency, 32% were a result of inadequate speech act realization patterns and 47% of misunderstandings were a result of inadequate methodological principles or skills.

This was contrary to what I had anticipated at the start of the study. My assumption was that poor oral proficiency and inadequate speech act realization patterns would be the cause of all misunderstanding. The fact that 47% of misunderstandings occurred as a result of inadequate methodological principles was not anticipated. In seven (37%) of the 19 instances of misunderstandings, the misunderstandings were recognised and repaired and the "status quo" (Hinnenkamp 1999) again achieved. This implies, however, that in 63% of the cases, the learners experienced ineffective communication and/or received unsatisfactory information, which is regarded as communicative dissonance which may have serious implications for teaching and learning in that setting. Figure 4.7 indicates the distribution of the reasons for the misunderstandings that were identified.

**Figure 4.7: Reasons for misunderstandings**



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#### 4.4.3 Emerging categories from focus group interviews

The participants were all able to provide reasons for the misunderstandings that they had encountered and explained what strategies they would employ when addressing the misunderstandings. Table 4.7 indicates the possible reasons for misunderstandings as expressed by the participants.

**Table 4.7: Reasons for misunderstandings as expressed by participants**

Reason	Number of participants claiming this reason	Evidence	Strategies used by participants to address misunderstandings	Researcher response
Learners' lack of vocabulary in target language	26 (100%)	Non-verbal language: frowns, blank expressions, slumped shoulders	Code switch to vernacular; Ask directly: "Do you understand?"	Disagree: not observed
No opportunity for learners to speak target language	23 (89%)	Learners' lack of response to questions from the student teacher	None	Disagree: not observed
Student teacher's instructions not clear	14 (54%)	Learners raise their hands Learners ask questions Learners frown	Code switch to vernacular Explain again Rephrase instructions	Agree: observed in lessons of participants 06/09, 16/09, 19/10, 22/10 and 25/10
Student teacher's teaching strategies inadequate	6 (23%)	Learners shout out (interjections) Learners frown	Explain again Try a different approach	Agree: observed in lessons of participants 06/09, 16/09, 19/10, 22/10 and 25/10
Student teacher's subject knowledge lacking	20 (77%)	Learners start talking to friends Learners look bored	None	Agree: observed in lessons of participants 05/09, 06/09, 09/09, 12/09, 14/09, 15/09, 18/10, 20/10 and 22/10
Student teacher's assessment techniques inadequate	16 (62%)	Learners start playing with something	None	Agree: observed in lessons of participants 06/09, 16/09, 19/10, 22/10 and 25/10
Student teacher's content knowledge lacking (inadequately prepared)	7 (27%)	Learners challenge teacher with correct information	None	Agree: observed in lessons of participants 05/09, 06/09, 09/09, 12/09, 14/09, 15/09, 18/10, 20/10, 22/10

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From the data I compiled a list of codes representing the answers to each of the questions as related to the causes and occurrence of misunderstanding. Most (66%) of the causes of misunderstandings related to the student teachers' inadequacies as identified by the codes and 33% of the causes of misunderstandings related to the learners, but in each case the codes related to the learners, were directly in response to the inadequacies of the student teachers. For example, one of the codes is learner interjections. Although this relates to the learner and not the student teacher, it is directly in response to the student teachers' inadequate content knowledge or poor delivery that the interjection took place. The codes identified are listed below:

- learners' questions
- learners' interjections
- learners' inattention
- learners' lack of proficiency
- learners' failure to understand instructions
- student teachers' repeat explanation
- student teachers' rephrasing
- student teachers' teaching strategies poor
- student teachers' assessment techniques poor
- student teachers' content knowledge poor
- student teachers' inability to explain content
- student teachers' inability to give clear instructions
- student teachers' planning and preparation poor
- student teachers' strategies to repair
- student teachers code switch

I then scrutinized these codes to determine whether any categories were evident.

The following categories emerged:

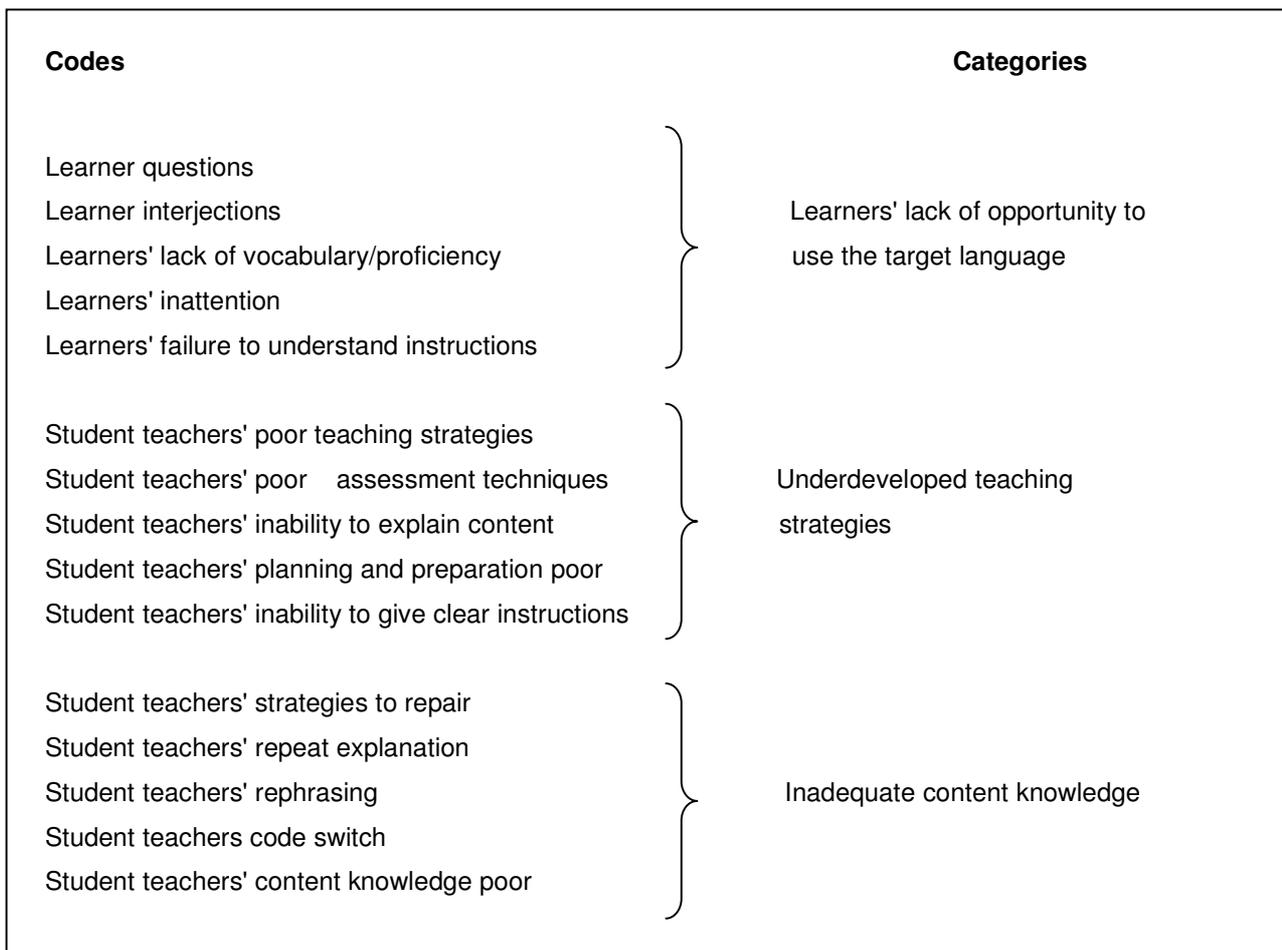
- student teachers' inadequate content knowledge
- student teachers' underdeveloped teaching strategies

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- learners' lack of opportunity to use the target language
- learners' lack of vocabulary in the target language

Figure 4.8 offers a visual presentation of the categories into which the codes were collapsed.

**Figure 4.8: Categories which emerged from the focus group interviews**



Although the participants were aware of misunderstandings, and could provide possible reasons for these misunderstandings, it was evident that they were not as aware that their own oral proficiency was inadequate, even though this was clear from the observations. The participants tended to blame the occurrence of misunderstandings on the learners' lacking oral proficiency or lack of vocabulary in the target language. Most were, however,

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willing to acknowledge that their own poor methodology played a role. They admitted that they did not always know how to explain concepts, or give clear instructions. They did not, however, offer any solutions to these problems. Although they were aware of the problem, they did nothing to address it. From my observations of the recorded lessons I came to the same conclusion, namely that the student teachers did not possess adequate methodological skills. It is thus safe to say that the information gathered from the focus group interviews corroborated the findings from the observations with regard to my impressions of participants' oral proficiency and methodological skills. However, the focus group interviews also revealed that contrary to what I had found, student teachers did not acknowledge that their own inadequate oral proficiency caused misunderstandings; some believed it was the learners' lack of language proficiency that caused the misunderstandings.

#### 4.4.4 Emerging categories from the questionnaire

Based on the data gleaned from the questionnaire, the following categories of the reason for misunderstandings emerged:

- inadequate content knowledge
- underdeveloped teaching strategies, especially the ability to provide clear instructions
- inability to explain content well

These categories conformed closely to those that had emerged from the focus group interviews (cf. section 4.4.3). The information gathered from the questionnaires thus corroborated the findings from the observations and focus group interviews. Table 4.8 on the next page offers a visual presentation of the data analysis of and findings gleaned from the four data sets.

**Table 4.8: Data analysis and findings**

Instrument	Analysis	Findings	Research question addressed
Observations (video recordings)  n = 26 lessons	Qualitative analysis to determine categories and themes	Idiosyncratic utterances and poor oral proficiency  Inadequate content knowledge  Underdeveloped teaching strategies Inadequate/inappropriate communication skills  Inability to address cultural differences and traditions	<b>How/when do misunderstandings occur?</b> Misunderstandings occur frequently, due to inadequate oral proficiency, inadequate realization of speech acts and inadequate methodological skills.  <b>What level of oral proficiency is required to ensure minimal understanding?</b> The level of oral proficiency required to ensure minimal understanding correlates with IELTS average level of band 6.
IELTS rubric  n = 26 students	Qualitative analysis to determine level of oral proficiency	Average to below average  Mostly levels 3–5 (small number on 2, small number on 6 & 7)	<b>What level of oral proficiency is required to ensure minimal understanding?</b> The level of oral proficiency required to ensure minimal understanding is band 6 on IELTS rubric.
Focus group interviews  n = 7 focus group interviews	Qualitative analysis to determine categories and themes	Inadequate content knowledge  Underdeveloped teaching strategies  Rephrase or repeat questions  Learners' lack of use of target language	<b>How/when do misunderstandings occur?</b> Misunderstandings occur frequently, due to inadequate content knowledge and methodological skills.  <b>What strategies do student teachers employ to compensate for distorted communication?</b> Student teachers rephrase, repeat and code switch to vernacular.
Questionnaire  n = 25 respondents	Quantitative analysis to determine categories and themes	Inadequate content knowledge  Underdeveloped teaching strategies/ inability to explain content	<b>How/when do misunderstandings occur?</b> Misunderstandings occur frequently, due to inadequate content knowledge and methodological skills.

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The data gleaned from the four data sets, namely the observations, IELTS assessment, the focus group interviews and the questionnaire, indicated some overlapping; in all data sets methodological skills and subject knowledge emerged as causes of misunderstanding. Tension was evident in student teachers' perceived oral proficiency and my assessment of their oral proficiency based on the IELTS rubric. Data from the questionnaire suggest that the participants believed learners' vocabulary to be the cause of misunderstanding. However, this was not corroborated by the observations. Only focus group interviews indicated that learners' opportunity to use L2 led to misunderstanding. The overlapping categories found in all four data sets are represented in figure 4.9.

**Figure 4.9: Categories from the four data sets**

<b>OBSERVATIONS AND IELTS</b>		Communication skills	<b>FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS</b>	
Oral proficiency	Teacher personality		Learners' opportunity to use L2	
	Non-verbal communication	Methodological skills	Learners' language use	
		Subject knowledge		
<b>QUESTIONNAIRE</b>				
Learners' vocabulary				

#### **4.5 Data analysis – discussion**

The data produced by the observations, IELTS rubric, focus group interviews and questionnaire provided evidence that misunderstandings were caused by the inadequate English oral proficiency of the student teachers. Moreover, content knowledge had not been adequately mastered and methodological aspects, such as inadequate instructional skills, acted as contributing factors to the occurrence of misunderstandings. In fact, 19 of the 26 utterances identified for analysis, caused misunderstandings, making up 73% of the time spent on teaching. The misunderstandings that were observed resulted in communication being distorted, and caused dissonance. Valuable time that should have been spent on teaching and learning was spent on repeating instructions and rephrasing statements, and in two instances on repairing misunderstandings. The utterances were misunderstood because the student teachers did not have the ability to convey messages adequately, or negotiate meaning within a given context – social or cultural (Hymes 1972b). As a result, learners were unable to interpret the student teachers' messages. In communication situations more than just a shared language is required, since the hearer must be able to interpret a speaker's intent. Failing to reach the intended meaning leads to misunderstandings, as is indicated in this study. In an instructional setting, the implications for practice and learning are serious.

Based on the utterances analysed, it would seem that misunderstandings occurred because of the surface structure of the utterances, the imperfection of words and the intersubjectivity of understanding. The student teachers' language use displayed some form of idiosyncrasy and their oral proficiency was inadequate, which was confirmed by the IELTS rating. The implication is that this aspect of communicative competence, namely grammatical competence, needs attention. This, however, was not the only cause of the misunderstandings.

On the one hand, 32% of the misunderstandings were caused by a mismatch between speaker intent and hearer interpretation, which points to a failure in the social aspect of communicative competence, of how and where to use utterances properly (cf. section 2.3).

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The utterances were misunderstood because the function of the utterance (or speaker intent) was misunderstood. When scrutinising discourse, attention should be paid to either the form or the function of an utterance. But the impression should not be created that paying attention to form implies meaning, particularly with a second language environment, such as the context of these utterances. Meaning is not possible with a formless utterance. In fact, stringing words together cannot be called an utterance unless it has some form recognisable to the users (cf. section 2.4). As was declared at the outset, the utterances used for analysis in this study contained structural flaws or idiosyncrasies (syntactically, semantically and pragmatically). The assumption would then be that these utterances should be incapable of creating meaning or understanding. The analysis showed, however, that despite these flaws, 27% of the utterances did in fact create meaning, to such an extent that they were interpreted correctly.

On the other hand, 47% of misunderstandings were caused by inadequate instructional skills or lack of knowledge in methodological principles. This number is considerably higher than those caused by a mismatch between speaker intent and hearer interpretation (32%). Furthermore, what seemed to be misunderstandings initially, were more likely to be what Weigand (1999:770) calls "non-understanding", i.e. not understanding or having difficulties in understanding, which is different from misunderstanding. Someone who is subject to non-understanding is aware of it, as opposed to someone who misunderstands, who is not always aware of having misunderstood. This study showed that 31% of the identified misunderstandings were in actual fact not misunderstandings (as the term is understood and applied in this study), but non-understanding. Usually this non-understanding was related to the student teacher's lack of content or subject knowledge and the poorly formulated instructions or questions, or inadequate or even incorrect explanations given to learners. Although this was something I had not expected, it represents a major reason for possible misunderstandings which may impact learning. It would seem, therefore, that a range of instructional skills had not been adequately mastered by the student teachers and aspects of the subject content had not been adequately developed, which increased instructional dissonance and cannot be overlooked.

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From the observations, focus group interviews and questionnaire, the categories that emerged were reviewed and regrouped to eliminate overlapping. These categories can be linked to the manifestation of misunderstanding and non-understanding in the instructional settings of the participants and relate to inadequate

- oral proficiency and frequent idiosyncratic utterances
- subject or content knowledge
- instructional skills and strategies (methodological skills)
- teacher disposition and personality

The abovementioned categories will each be explained in detail.

#### 4.5.1 Oral proficiency, idiosyncratic utterances and speech act realization

Based on my observations, it is evident that the utterances made by the student teachers in this study contain idiosyncrasies. The idiosyncrasies noted were divided into three broad categories (as adapted from Nel and Swanepoel [2010]), namely pronunciation, grammar and direct translation errors (cf. section 4.4.1), which provided an indication of the oral proficiency of the participants. The student teachers' oral proficiency was then measured against the IELTS band descriptors, which indicated that 58% of student teachers' oral proficiency lay on bands 3 and 4, which is considered far below the average band 6. In total, the oral proficiency of 77% of student teachers was considered poor to very poor, while only 23% lay on bands 6 and 7, and was considered good to very good. The deduction made is that the idiosyncratic language usage of the student teachers could point to the multiple competences inherent in communicative competence (cf. section 2.3), of which oral proficiency is one.

As explained in chapter 2 (cf. section 2.3), communicative competence entails four competencies, which are commonly referred to as grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence, (Canale 1983). The student teachers in this study displayed grammatical flaws in their choices of words and sentences. They also used mainly code-switching to promote grammatical competence. Often the code-switching was to make up for their lack of vocabulary or lack

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of knowledge of the correct structure to be used. In only one instance did the code-switching assist in enhancing learners' knowledge of the L2. For example, Participant 17/10, when explaining prepositions, reverted to the learner's L1 to ensure understanding:

"Ja, in Afrikaans sê ons kom kyk na my prentjie, but in English it's look at..."

Participant 01/09, 10/09, 14/09 and 26/11 reverted to the vernacular to explain difficult literary concepts. However, since the participants' own grammatical competence was inadequate, they were unable to use carefully chosen words and well-formulated sentences.

Appropriate use of the language requires attention to socio-linguistic constructs such as the culture-specific context embedding the norms, values, beliefs and behaviour patterns of a culture. This competence was not observed with some participants of this study. In certain instances, the opportunity to explain socio-linguistic appropriateness arose, but the participants failed to follow up with an explanation. For example, in the grammar lesson of Participant 20/10, the appropriate use of idioms was drilled and not explained.

Strategic competence requires knowledge of communication strategies that one can use to compensate for imperfect knowledge of rules, or for factors such as fatigue, inattention and distraction, which limit the application of such rules. From the observations it seemed as if the participants had not acquired this level of competence, since few attempts were made to determine whether the learners had actually understood, other than asking "Do you understand?" Even in instances where student teachers recognised a problem, they ignored it and went on with the lesson. Strategic competence is crucial in understanding communication because it is the way in which we "manipulate language in order to meet communicative goals" (Brown 1994:228). The participants in this study failed in this regard.

Discourse competence is the ability to deal with the extended use of language in context and is often implicit. This level of competence was not mastered as many (in fact 53%) of the misunderstandings observed were on this level.

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Poor communication skills which influenced learners' behaviour and contributed to misunderstandings were identified. This is different to communicative competence as applied in this study, but refers to personal communication skills that are inadequate or inappropriate in an instructional setting, as they contribute to communicative dissonance. Participants used clumsy expressions (Participant 17/10) or spoke carelessly or too fast, or spoke too much (Participant 18/10). These behaviours caused dissonance and misunderstanding or non-understanding. Three participants, (Participants 12/09, 16/10, 25/10), often repeated themselves, not because of any misunderstanding that had to be repaired, but as part of their communication skills. They also tended to answer their own questions, not giving enough opportunity for the learners to provide answers. Four participants (Participants 14/09, 18/10, 22/10, 25/10) did most of the talking, resulting in teacher talk dominating, with learner talk restricted to the minimum. Two participants (Participant 13/09, 19/10), spoke in a shrill voice which caused aural discomfort. Often coupled with very fast speech it contributed to misunderstandings. Three more participants (Participants 04/09, 13/09 and 17/10) also spoke too fast and caused misunderstandings. Two participants mumbled when they spoke (Participants 05/09, 06/09) and spoke inaudibly. This left the learners confused. I also observed discomfort in the learners' body language caused by participants becoming easily frustrated (Participant 01/09, 15/09) when the learners failed to provide a correct answer. The frustration was evident in the student teachers' communication with the learners. The learners were sensitive to this and tended to be unresponsive, which exacerbated the problem.

Interestingly, the participants did not perceive their own oral proficiency to be inadequate. They were convinced that their oral proficiency was adequate and claimed that the reason for misunderstanding occurring was the learners' inadequate proficiency. Tension, therefore, existed between my observations and the student teachers' perceptions regarding their own oral proficiency in English. This points to the existence of different conceptions of the "successful English second language speaker" (Coetzee-Van Rooy & Verhoef 2000). Educators might be informed about Cummins' theory of BICS and CALP, and as a result distinguish between different types of proficiency, while students do not. Students might only be aware of one type of English proficiency and might regard this as

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sufficient (Coetzee-Van Rooy & Verhoef 2000), explaining their high perceptions of their oral proficiency.

#### 4.5.2 Inadequate content knowledge

Lack of content knowledge was a variable that was evident in the observations. During the focus group interviews the student teachers mentioned that this aspect played a role in their teaching strategies, although they agreed that this was something that could be rectified with proper planning. I disagree because in my observations I came across instances where fundamental content had not been mastered and would not be easily rectified through planning alone. This knowledge should already have been internalised early in the participants' academic training and in my mind could only be rectified through a concerted intervention of some sort. The recent spate of mergers in Higher Education with former teacher training colleges and the problems related specifically to the depth and quality of content as well as the limited cognitive demand made on students could be causal in this regard. It is possible that current restructuring of undergraduate programmes, could be regarded as an intervention that may address this problem. However, this would require further investigation, as it is still too soon to evaluate the effects of the new programmes. The lack of content or subject knowledge was particularly evident in the lessons of Participants 05/09, 06/09, 09/09, 12/09, 14/09, 15/09, 18/10, 20/10 and 22/10. As the student teachers were not aware that they had made mistakes or imparted incorrect knowledge, the misunderstandings caused by inadequate subject or content knowledge were not repaired. This lack of content or subject knowledge caused some student teachers to, among others, choose a poem too difficult for the learners' level of understanding, choose to teach difficult poetic and literary devices inappropriate for learners at the particular level (grade 4 in this case), and explain difficult grammatical structures, such as relative clauses and tenses, incorrectly. McCroskey (1992) suggests three primary dimensions of credibility: competence, trustworthiness, and perceived caring. Competence involves teachers' knowledge or expertise of a particular subject. If teachers are perceived as competent, they are perceived to know what they are talking about. Competent teachers explain complex material well, have good classroom management

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skills, have the ability to answer learner questions, and communicate effectively (Teven & Hanson 2004). The student teachers in this study failed in this regard, as they did not display the requisite content knowledge to be perceived as credible, which contributed to instructional dissonance

#### 4.5.3 Inadequate instructional (methodological) skills

The inadequate instructional skills observed included, among others, aspects such as poor planning and preparation, the inability to formulate clear questions, to explain new concepts, to give instructions about activities, or to give feedback. While the participants were reluctant to admit that their oral proficiency was below par and could possibly be the reason for misunderstandings, they readily admitted that their instructional skills were inadequate. Participants claimed that their ability to provide instructions was poor and that they did not always impart knowledge correctly. They often had to rephrase or repeat something they had said. Participants failed to contextualise their lessons, often starting the lesson without any appropriate introduction or link to prior knowledge. In some instances, inadequate planning (Participant 18/10) was also evident and could have contributed to the misunderstandings. Inadequate instructional skills were particularly evident in the lessons of Participants 06/09, 16/09, 19/10, 22/10 and 25/10. In my observations, these poor instructional skills were the cause of non-understanding and not misunderstanding. Added to this, I observed instances of inability to discipline learners and failure in task management (Participant 18/10), which also contributed to instructional dissonance.

#### 4.5.4 Teacher disposition and personality

In the initial combings of the data this category seemed to be important and therefore needs to be mentioned, but on careful scrutiny teacher disposition and personality seemed to influence understanding of utterances in only three instances. From the observations it seemed as if a few participants had not acquired the level of competence to deal with their own emotions, since limited attempts were made to counter impulsive reactions to stress

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factors. In three of the lessons observed, factors such as impatience (Participant 15/09), frustration (Participant 01/10) and even boredom (Participant 22/10), contributed to misunderstandings.

Teacher disposition and personality would need further investigation, however, as teachers are expected to cope in instructional communication situations and the responsibility to keep the communication channel open lies with them (Alptekin 2002). This requires being emotionally mature and to compensate for factors such as fatigue, distraction, and irritation that may influence their ability to cope. The second dimension of McCroskey's (1992) credibility is trustworthiness. Within the instructional environment, trustworthiness is the degree to which learners trust a teacher. A teacher high in trustworthiness offers rational explanations for marking, treats learners fairly, gives immediate feedback, and never embarrasses learners or is verbally abusive towards learners. If learners perceive that their teacher is not being truthful, that teacher would likely be regarded as less credible (Teven & Hanson 2004).

Perceived caring is the third component of McCroskey's (1992) credibility of teachers. Perceived caring is seen as a means of opening communication channels more widely (McCroskey & Teven 1999). Teachers must be able to communicate to their learners that they do care about them in order for learners to perceive them as caring. A teacher who relates well with learners is more likely to be perceived as a credible source.

Communication is the process by which teachers employ verbal and nonverbal messages to stimulate meaning in the minds of their learners (McCroskey 1992). While communicating in class, teachers also send messages about their level of competence, trustworthiness, and caring for those learners. The verbal and nonverbal behaviour of teachers provides information to learners that generate meaning within the context of an interpersonal relationship. Teachers will generate more positive learner perceptions of credibility by being more nonverbally immediate in the classroom and using more explicit, verbally caring messages directed towards their learners (Teven & Hanson 2004). It is a reasonable assumption that most teachers attempt to create environments that enhance

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and encourage learners and learning. However, if they do not have the pedagogical disposition or the literacies required, whether it is competence, trustworthiness or caring, they will fail in their endeavours.

To summarise, this study showed that misunderstandings were primarily caused by student teachers' inadequate content knowledge and methodological skills. If one were to map the misunderstandings identified onto the existing models of Hinnenkamp (1999), it would seem that five types of misunderstandings (MU 11, 12, 13, 22 and 24) did not fit a corresponding category from Hinnenkamp's classification (cf. section 2.6). These misunderstandings were locutionary acts where incorrect information was provided to the learners or information was incorrectly explained. Table 4.9 provides a repeat of table 4.6 but with an indication of correspondence with Dascal's (1999) four categories and the non-correspondence with Hinnenkamp's (1999) seven categories of misunderstandings (cf. section 2.6).

**Table 4.9: Summary of misunderstandings identified from idiosyncratic utterances with an indication of correspondence to the classifications of Hinnenkamp (1999) and Dascal (1999)**

MU	Utterance number	Participant number	Speech act	Source (P/R): Dascal's categories of MU (1999:754)	Type (T): Hinnenkamp's categories of MU (1999:3)
MU 1	1	01/09	LA (IF) wrong choice of word	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	MU 2 (Immediate recognition of MU, repaired, but no return to the <i>status quo</i> )
MU 2	2	01/09	LA (IF) wrong choice of word	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	MU 2 (Immediate recognition of MU, repaired, but no return to the <i>status quo</i> )
MU 3	3	01/09	ILA command interpreted as interrogative	Reception (R) (MU was a result of hearer's interpretation)	MU 6 (No obvious recognition of MU, although outside observer will regard it as a MU)
MU 4	4	02/09	LA (IF) incorrect structure	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	MU 1 (Immediate recognition of MU, repaired and returned to <i>status quo</i> )
MU 5	6	06/09	LA (IF) incorrect information, mumbling	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	MU 4 (Gradual recognition of MU, indicated by disturbances in communication, but not treated as in MU1 and MU2)
MU 6	7	08/09	ILA promising interpreted as threat	Reception (R) (MU was a result of hearer's interpretation)	MU 6 (No obvious recognition of MU, although outside observer will regard it as a MU)
MU 7	8	09/09	LA (IF) incorrect structure	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	MU 6 (No obvious recognition of MU, although outside observer will regard it as a MU)
MU 8	9	10/09	ILA warning interpreted as command	Reception (R) (MU was a result of hearer's interpretation)	MU 6 (No obvious recognition of MU, although outside observer will regard it as a MU)
MU 9	10	10/09	ILA warning interpreted as merely new information	Reception (R) (MU was a result of hearer's interpretation)	MU 6 (No obvious recognition of MU, although outside observer will regard it as a MU)

MU	Utterance number	Participant number	Speech act	Source (P/R): Dascal's categories of MU (1999:754)	Type (T): Hinnenkamp's categories of MU (1999:3)
MU 10	11	12/09	LA incorrect information	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	<b>No match</b>
MU 11	12	12/09	LA incorrect information	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	<b>No match</b>
MU 12	13	14/09	LA incorrect information	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	<b>No match</b>
MU 13	17	16/10	ILA interrogative interpreted as directive	Reception (R) (MU was a result of hearer's interpretation)	MU 2 (Immediate recognition of MU, repaired, but no return to the <i>status quo</i> )
MU 14	18	17/10	LA interrogative incorrectly interpreted	Reception (R) (MU was a result of hearer's interpretation)	MU 3 (Gradual recognition of MU, repaired)
MU 15	22	19/10	LA no explanation of information	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	<b>No match</b>
MU 16	23	19/10	LA unclear instructions for activity	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	MU 3 (Gradual recognition of MU, repaired)
MU 17	24	20/10	LA incorrect information	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	<b>No match</b>
MU 18	25	21/10	ILA mishearing/ misinterpreting instructions	Reception (R) (MU was a result of hearer's interpretation)	MU 1 (Immediate recognition of MU, repaired and returned to <i>status quo</i> )
MU 19	26	24/10	LA (WF) incorrect information	Production (P) (MU was caused by speaker)	MU 6 (No obvious recognition of MU, although outside observer will regard it as a MU)

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The five misunderstandings that did not fit any of the categories in Hinnenkamp's classification were examples of non-understanding. Although it can be argued that non-understanding should not be classified as misunderstandings, in the instructional context the effect is the same as if it were a misunderstanding. The learners experience confusion and the teacher has to initiate repair.

4.5.5 New knowledge: extending Hinnenkamp's (1999) model of classifications of misunderstandings

Hinnenkamp's model does not adequately present the classification of misunderstandings in an instructional setting, since it does not provide for instances of misunderstanding due to transfer of incorrect content leading to non-understanding. A new model for the classification of misunderstandings in the instructional context proposed by this study will adequately provide for the categories identified that do not fit Hinnenkamp's classification. Table 4.10 offers additions and changes proposed by this study to propose a new model for the classifications of misunderstandings in an instructional setting.

**Table 4.10: New model: changes to Hinnenkamp's (1999) classification of misunderstandings**

	Hinnenkamp (1993:3)	New model
MU8		No obvious recognition of misunderstanding, although an outside observer will regard it as non-understanding.
MU9		No obvious recognition of misunderstanding, either to interlocutors or outside observers, but when knowledge is tested, non-understanding is evident.

Teachers tasked with developing learners' oral proficiency and communication skills may wish to apply the proposed model of this study in an effort to avoid not only misunderstandings but also non-understandings.

#### 4.5.6 Consolidation of discussion

The above-mentioned four broad categories, namely oral proficiency (including idiosyncratic utterances and speech act realization patterns [cf. section 4.5.1]); inadequate content knowledge (cf. section 4.5.2), inadequate instructional (methodological) skills (cf. section 4.5.3); and teacher disposition and personality (cf. section 4.5.4) were the key factors that contributed to misunderstandings in an instructional setting. These four categories were evident from all the data sets, the observations, the IELTS rating, the focus group interviews and the questionnaire.

I had anticipated that inadequate oral proficiency and speech act realization would play a role in the occurrence of misunderstandings. Although this was confirmed in the study, it had only marginal influence on the misunderstandings identified; 21% of misunderstandings were as a result of inadequate oral proficiency and 32% as a result of inadequate speech act realization patterns. The reason why student teachers' idiosyncratic utterances and speech act realization patterns did not necessarily lead to misunderstandings could possibly be found in the multilingual nature of the South African school context and particularly the unique position of English in the mix of languages in this context. As explained in chapter 2, the majority of English users in the country do not speak English as a home language and they have no aspirations to learn to speak English as a native speaker would (cf. section 2.2). They use English merely as a communication tool and as a vehicle for academic learning, as English is the LoLT in most schools in South Africa. The various accents of, and dialects used in the English language have served as enrichment and have made understanding of each other easier. It would seem as if the L2 speakers of English in multilingual contexts may actually be at an advantage precisely because of their knowledge of the multicultural social conventions. The view that communicative competence (cf. section 2.3) is a prerequisite for appropriate use is, therefore, not applicable in this context, as the findings of this study have shown. It may not be a question of finding out how non-native speakers of English should be appropriately equipped with the skills to teach through this medium, but rather how we activate the

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multilingual benefits brought by student teachers and learners to enhance learning through the medium of English in South Africa.

Much more evident in the cause of misunderstandings in this study were inadequate content knowledge and inadequate methodological skills (47%). This very important finding points to the possibility that the transition from theory to practice has not been adequately mastered or that institutions of higher education do not pay adequate attention to knowledge generation in the various subjects taught. Student teachers are, therefore, not equipped to deal with learner questions or explanations of key concepts or theories. As discussed in chapter 2 (cf. section 2.1) the majority of teachers in South Africa are under-qualified or not qualified to teach (Hofmeyr and Hall 1996). If newly qualified teachers lack the skills or the content knowledge to teach, as this study seems to indicate, then the dire situation in the country cannot be addressed and the problem will be perpetuated. As discussed in chapter 2 (cf. section 2.4), Dwyer (1991) mentions four domains in which good teachers excel, namely content knowledge; teaching for learning; creating a classroom community and teacher professionalism. Excelling in these domains would provide the learner with optimal chances of success. The student teachers in this study failed in two of these areas, namely content knowledge and teaching for learning. Following Vygotsky's (1986) theory of the ZPD (cf. section 2.2), the teacher is supposed to assist the learner in achieving a level of performance within the ZPD which the learner would be incapable of whilst acting independently. This implies that learners need to be supported in their complex task of learning as they interact with the teacher, but can only be possible if the teacher fulfils the role of more competent adult. If the teacher does not have the required skills or content knowledge, as is the case with the participants in this study, the complex task of learning cannot take place. In identifying the misunderstandings, I saw learners often using non-verbal gestures which conveyed their misunderstanding and confusion, however, in most cases the student teachers did not act on these cues. There are three possible reasons I can suggest for student teachers not following up on these non-verbal clues, namely, they just didn't see or recognise them, they did not know what to do or how to intervene, and they did not have the knowledge or skills required to intervene.

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It would thus seem that not only poor oral proficiency and inadequate communication skills, but also poor methodological principles, such as inadequate instructional skills and content knowledge, as well as socio-linguistic and cross-cultural differences contribute to the manifestation of misunderstanding (and non-understanding) in instructional settings. When the teacher is not sufficiently in command of the LoLT, communication between teacher and learner is seriously hampered to such an extent that teachers cannot develop their learners' basic communicative skills or their cognitive ability because they themselves do not have the required oral proficiency (Evans and Cleghorn 2010).

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

From the lessons presented by student teachers, utterances analysed indicated successful communication in 27% of the utterances. The analysis showed that 73% of the utterances resulted in misunderstandings. The key findings point to three distinct areas of failure. On the one hand the misunderstandings identified point to a lack of pragmalinguistic knowledge, or pragmatic failure (as the utterances were misunderstood because speaker intent and hearer interpretation did not match). Student teachers did not display adequate skill in speech act realization skills or communicative competence. Their oral proficiency was below par and contained many idiosyncrasies and their communication skills (including speaking too fast, speaking too much, speaking unclearly, and repeating themselves) were inadequate. Even though most participants were not aware of the fact that their own oral proficiency was below par, they did admit that their lack of the necessary pedagogic strategies could have possibly contributed to the misunderstandings that had occurred. They were aware of problems in their teaching, but since no efforts were made to solve these problems, as a consequence misunderstandings ensued. This area of failure is inherent in the student teacher, however, with self teaching and practise through available developmental programmes, including software programmes, the student teachers should be able to improve.

Secondly, the misunderstandings point to inadequate mastery of content knowledge. Student teachers were unable to explain terminology or major aspects related to the

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subject such as use of tense, relative clauses or poetry. This area of failure cannot be contributed solely to the student teacher.

If an increased cognitive demand is executed by lecturers and content delivery sharpened, and if appropriate development and packaging of undergraduate programmes are implemented, this failure could be addressed.

Lastly, the misunderstandings point to inadequate mastery of methodological principles, such as instructional skills (including asking questions, explaining new concepts, giving instructions, giving feedback, planning and preparation), and content knowledge. In the few instances where misunderstandings were avoided (especially by Participants 21/10, 24/10), it was due to the participants being well prepared and enthusiastic, knowledgeable about the subject and proficient in the second language.

The different interpretations of the term "culture" and the difference in opinion as to its role in misunderstandings were in itself a form of misunderstanding. This aspect, namely cross-cultural transfer problems, may have played a role in some instances of misunderstandings, but was not exploited in of this study. Aspects such as the time of day of the lesson, the subject content and prior learning were taken into account when analysing the data, but no obvious relation to the occurrence of misunderstandings was found. These could, however, be avenues for further research.

In this chapter the procedure for analysing the data produced by each protocol, as well as a presentation of the findings, was provided. The key findings were interpreted and discussed and the extent to which the research questions were addressed was provided. My initial proposition, that misunderstandings in instructional settings may be caused by poor oral proficiency, was affirmed by this study to a limited extent. However, misunderstandings were also caused by unanticipated variables namely, the inadequate application of sound methodological principles and surface content knowledge. In the next chapter the implications of this study are examined, recommendations are made and possible avenues for further research are suggested.

## **Chapter 5: Significance and implications of the study**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter concludes the study by describing the significance thereof and suggesting the implications of the findings from the collected data. Recommendations for new channels of inquiry are also suggested. Prior to the study I assumed that the only reason for the occurrence of misunderstandings would be the participants' inadequate pragmatic competence and non-native speaker English. I further assumed that the inclusion of a stronger focus on the realization of speech acts in the South African school curriculum for second language teaching and learning, would greatly contribute to the achievement of the multidimensional level of literacies required in a second language. This in turn would result in a higher level of proficiency in the language use of teachers, subsequently resulting in fewer incidences of misunderstanding. My assumption was that a simple adjustment to the curriculum, one that focuses on expanding the language and thus improving the oral proficiency of the learner, would address these shortcomings. These propositions were confirmed to some extent, since speech act realization and inadequate oral proficiency both accounted for the occurrence of misunderstandings found in this study, but the participants' level of English usage proved to be an even graver issue than had been anticipated. Furthermore, what was not anticipated, and what emerged as a significant finding, was the scant content knowledge which the participants displayed, coupled with their inadequate methodological skills.

### **5.2 Synopsis and significance of the study**

The discussion in this chapter is informed by the main research focus articulated in chapter 1, namely describing the occurrence, type, frequency and causes of misunderstandings that manifested during classroom instruction and whether such misunderstandings related to the oral proficiency of student teachers. To do so, 26 student teachers were observed teaching in authentic settings using English as LoLT. The resultant misunderstandings were described and the student teachers' oral proficiency was rated

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using the International English Language Testing Score (cf. section 3.5.4.2). The student teachers' perceptions about the occurrence, type, frequency and consequence of misunderstandings were probed through focus group interviews and a questionnaire. These data sets provided an answer to the main research question, namely: To what extent are misunderstandings the result of English second language student teachers' oral proficiency? Since the nature of the research question was exploratory, the inquiry was grounded in qualitative research and classified as a case study (cf. section 3.3).

In chapter 1 I described the problem statement and rationale for the study, I outlined the research design and methodology chosen for the investigation, as well as the theoretical framework underpinning the study. I defined my use of terminology as applicable to this study and provided a delineation of the scope of the study. I also provided an overview of the study. Chapter 2 offered a review of the relevant literature related to the concepts "second language acquisition", "communicative competence", "speech acts" and "LoLT", providing the basis for the conceptual framework underpinning the study. Rival theories on communicative competence, classification of speech acts and the creation of meaning were also discussed.

I also consulted sources on the theory and classification of misunderstandings and instructional communication. Chapter 3 presented a detailed description of the research design and methodology pertaining to the study. The qualitative inquiry was framed against Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, particularly his ZPD, placed within an interpretivist paradigm and followed the case study design in evaluating misunderstandings. I motivated my choice of case study method within the qualitative research domain. I also declared my role as researcher and highlighted potential biases related to the study. A full description of the research strategies, selection of the sample, the data collection instruments and analysis techniques was provided. I explained the process for data collection, which started with the observations of recorded lessons, an analysis of oral proficiency based on the IELTS rubric, followed by focus group interviews and a small-scale questionnaire survey. In chapter 4 I discussed the analysis of the four data sets, namely observations of recorded lessons, the IELTS evaluation, focus group interviews and the questionnaire. The chapter

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offered an interpretation of the findings obtained in the analysis, in accordance with Speech Act principles and models of misunderstanding. The key findings point to an overarching theme of failure, particularly in three distinct areas. Firstly, the misunderstandings identified point to inadequate oral proficiency on the part of the student teacher in the LoLT and a lack of pragmalinguistic knowledge, or pragmatic failure. Speaker intent and hearer interpretation did not match and the student teachers' English oral proficiency and classroom communication skills were inadequate as demanded by the instructional context. Secondly, the misunderstandings point to underdeveloped content knowledge. Thirdly, the misunderstandings point to inadequate mastery of methodological principles, such as instructional skills (including teacher personality and attitude). The findings were used to answer the research questions articulated in chapter 1.

The main research question and the three sub-questions were all answered by the study in that it was evident that not only did misunderstandings in fact occur in the instructional settings used in this study, but also that three causes for these misunderstandings were identified, namely the inadequate English oral proficiency and pragmatic incompetence of student teachers; inadequate content knowledge; and inadequate methodological skills.

Chapter 5 provides interpretations of the findings and conclusions drawn from the study point to the overarching theme of interlocutor failure within an instructional context. The chapter concludes with recommendations for policy and practice, and interested stakeholders, such as curriculum planners, policy makers and education specialists.

The significance of this study lies in its identifying factors, which if left unaddressed, have far-reaching consequences for the education system as a whole and learners in particular. The implication for teaching and learning is dire; the serious nature of these inadequacies is disconcerting and requires political attention beyond curriculum and support interventions at institutional level. These implications are described below.

### **5.3 Implications of the study**

The implications of the failures identified in this study seem dire. The initial proposition which guided this study was that inadequate communicative competence would be the primary reason for misunderstandings in instructional settings. The study showed that the student teachers' oral proficiency in the language they would use to teach upon graduation was problematic and so too their pragmatic knowledge, thus contributing significantly to the occurrence of misunderstandings during instruction. Only 23% of the sample was rated at IELTS band 6 or higher, implying adequate personal language proficiency required to facilitate their learners in the exposition of content. The implication is thus that the remainder of the student teachers who participated in the study (77%) were not proficient users of English.

Particularly evident was the fact that misunderstandings were also caused by inadequately developed content knowledge and methodological skills (which contributed to 47% of the identified misunderstandings), as indicated in section 4.3.4 and figure 4.7. Although the findings in this study relate to student teachers at one institution and can thus not be generalized, I agree with Creswell (2005) who claims that the findings may be transferrable to similar teacher education contexts. I will now discuss the implications of the three areas of failure separately.

#### **5.3.1 Pragmatic or communicative competence and oral proficiency in instructional settings**

It is evident from the data analysis that the identified misunderstandings did, in fact, occur because of the imperfection of words in the surface structure of the samples. I declared my assumption at the start of this study, that the utterances made by student teachers contain flaws (syntactical, semantic and pragmatic in nature), and would thus probably not be understood. Despite these flaws, some of the utterances carried sufficient meaning to be interpreted correctly by the learners. To me this is a fair indication that structural codes may not be the only criteria for measuring communicative competence and understanding,

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but that other factors, such as socio-cultural norms, are involved and account for interlocutors' ability to communicate effectively in order for the hearer to understand sufficiently. However, the remaining utterances were misunderstood due to either poor oral proficiency or inadequate speech act realization.

The findings in this study, therefore, as discussed in chapter 4 (cf. section 4.5), corroborated my assumptions in so far as problematic oral proficiency and communicative competence are evident in the communication of English second language student teachers. Evidence of poor oral proficiency was found in, among others, inaccurate pronunciation, problematic use of concord and tenses, clumsy idiomatic expressions, direct translations from the mother tongue and incorrect word order. Evidence of inadequate speech act realization was found in the idiolectic nature of utterances made by student teachers, as the hearers were unable to interpret speaker intent accurately. The misunderstandings that occurred were, therefore, as a result of pragmatic incompetence. The notion of pragmalinguistic and socio-pragmatic failure (Thomas 1983) as discussed in chapter 2, deserves research attention since the boundary between these two types of failure is not clear-cut. No absolute distinction can be drawn between the two since they are not opposites but lie on a continuum (Kaburise 2005). How to address these failures, however, may prove problematic. Raising the awareness of the speakers to the possible misinterpretation of their utterances and providing opportunities to practise grammatical structures, could prove productive. Non-native language speakers usually do not mind having pragmalinguistic failures pointed out to them, in the same way they do not mind having grammatical errors corrected. They are usually willing to conform to the pragmalinguistic norms because they are prepared to learn the language. Therefore, helping second language speakers to recognise and apply the pragmatic norms of the target language could be one of the ways of ensuring that they become competent speakers of the target language (Kaburise 2005; Thomas 1983).

A natural reaction to the findings of this study would be to recommend the enhancement of second language speakers' communicative competence. Usually, individuals who use a language, particularly those for whom it is a second language, are allowed a certain

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amount of latitude in their performance and idiosyncrasies are tolerated. Nevertheless, in order to be considered pragmatically competent, these individuals should perform linguistically in such a manner as to avoid being misunderstood. It seems clear that communicative language competences, particularly sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences, may be enhanced if a pragmatic awareness approach to teaching is adopted (Trim 2005). Such an approach to teaching develops learners' language awareness so that they know how the target language is typically used in communication in order to achieve their communicative goals (Povolná 2009; Tomlinson 1994). This approach aims at developing a gradual awareness of the mismatch between the learners' performance and that of proficient users of the language. The features of appropriate language use considered to be problematic may thus be identified and their acquisition improved (Mey 2001; Tomlinson 1994). This may prove difficult as it requires the contextualization of language use. Therefore, in order to improve learners' pragmatic awareness, the focus in the classroom should be on meaningful interaction in the target language and authentic discourse made accessible. This will enable them to evaluate their own language performance, as well as the language performance of other speakers, which is a crucial aspect of their work as teachers (Povolná 2009). A pragmatic awareness approach to teaching raises students' awareness of the fact that "making meaning is a dynamic process, involving the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social, and linguistic) and the meaning potential of an utterance" (Thomas 1995: 22).

One of the tenets of the communicative approach to teaching languages is that the language in the classroom should be as authentic as possible. This will expose learners to the reality of native speaker language use. Authentic communicative behaviour in this context is defined in terms of the "parochial milieu and the fuzzy notion of the native speaker" (Alptekin 2002:61). As such, the variety of uses of English taking place around the world with encounters between native speakers and non-native speakers, but also between non-native speakers and non-native speakers, is often ignored. As Widdowson (1998) observes, the language which is real for native speakers is not likely to be real for non-native speakers. Authentic language use needs to be localized within a particular

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speech community. It is thus obvious that the more the language is localized for the speakers, the more they can engage with it as discourse. A useful way to address this would be to contextualise the theme or topic that the teacher wishes to use for teaching content. The student teachers in this study failed to contextualise their lessons, often starting with the marking of homework and continuing with de-contextualised exercises. There was often no link to authentic examples, let alone authentic examples for the non-native speaker. These inadequacies also relate to inadequate methodological skills (cf. section 5.3.3) but are closely linked to the student teachers' own communicative competence. If they do not have the language (or even the words), they will not be able to create authentic contexts in the classroom.

It is evident that when speaking of real communicative behaviour, it should be seen in relation to the reality of English as an international language. This implies taking into consideration the English that is real for native speakers in English-speaking countries, but also English that is real for non-native speakers in environments where languages other than English are spoken. Only then will we be able to speak of autonomous language learning which takes into consideration the particular background of the indigenous language and culture of the learner. If teachers are made aware of the need for autonomous language learning, and if the authentic contexts employed in the classroom for language learning and acquisition are selected in such a way that they are authentic to the non-native speaker, communicative competence may be easier to achieve. Poor communicative competence in English leads to perpetuating mediocrity in all L2 learners' acquisition of English.

Perhaps a radical rethink of a modified and expanded definition of the traditional notion of communicative competence is required, as this study has shown that the role of communicative competence in avoiding misunderstandings represented roughly a third of the causes of misunderstandings. Therefore, perhaps it is time that communicative competence is no longer viewed as the only way of enhancing second language communication. SAT research evaluates discourse from the speaker's perspective and misunderstanding is said to have occurred if the hearers fail to match their interpretation

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with speakers' intent. Research with a different approach, where the hearer also becomes a dominant creator of meaning, could yield interesting results. Since the hearer has to interpret the speaker's utterance for communication to take place, it ensures that the hearer does have a role to play. Pragmatics is not about one-directional meaning; it is the creation of meaning through negotiation by the interlocutors. When misunderstanding occurs, speakers will have to explain and justify their choice of codes and speech function or intent. Such research would examine the created meaning and work backwards to determine the negotiations by both interlocutors (Kaburise 2005).

Teacher educators know that language is often a barrier to learning, but how non-native speaker teachers of English should be appropriately equipped with the skills to teach through this medium remains elusive. Situations in which speakers may fail pragmatically can be illuminated, which in turn, may help to develop curricula to address these problem areas. While all misunderstandings may not be eliminated completely, they may be reduced by well-planned, critical language awareness and consciousness-raising education that focuses its attention on the pragmatic meanings behind speech act behaviour. The only way to minimize pragmatic failure is to acquire pragmatic competence, i.e. "to use language effectively in order to understand language in context" (El Samaty 2005:341). Ming-Chung (2004:114) states that studies of pragmatics and speech act behaviour contribute to existing research in that they help to analyse patterns of social behaviour, and thus provide insights into the forms and rules that speakers use.

On the other hand, the tendency to view language as a communication tool only, suggests that communicative competence in L2 may not be that important, especially since this study has shown that communicative competence was not the main cause of misunderstandings. Given the multilingual context of classrooms in South Africa, determining how to activate the multilingual benefits brought by student teachers and learners to enhance learning via English could prove beneficial. In this regard, I support Kirkpatrick (2007:193) who suggests adopting a "*lingua franca* model" for classrooms in the "outer circle" (Kachru 2009; 1985). Such a model is based on the goal of successful cross-cultural communication and can be advantageous to both teachers and learners as they

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would not be asked to aim for unattainable or inappropriate L1 standards. The focus of English language teaching and learning would then shift to "teaching and learning English in ways that would allow for effective communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The focus thus moves from the acquisition of norms associated with a standard model to learning linguistic features, cultural information and communicative strategies that will facilitate communication" (Kirkpatrick 2007:194). This implies that L2 speakers are judged by L2 standards. The teaching of English thus has as its goal creating bi- and multilingual citizens, and is not equated with learning about, for example, British culture. Following an approach to English language teaching and learning such as described above will move us beyond viewing non-native English as deficit or inferior<sup>11</sup>, to viewing it as different<sup>12</sup> and part of a "pluricentric approach" (Jenkins 2009:70).

### 5.3.2 Content knowledge

The misunderstandings identified in the study were related to instances where fundamental content had not been mastered and would not be easily rectified through planning alone. What is further disconcerting is that the student teachers were not aware that they had made conceptual mistakes or imparted incorrect facts. Their lack of content knowledge and poor execution of lesson design led the student teachers choosing unsuitable content, often too difficult or too easy for the grade level. They also explained difficult grammatical structures, such as relative clauses and tenses, incorrectly. The subject knowledge found lacking should already have been internalised early in the student teachers' academic preparation and in my mind could only be rectified through a concerted intervention. If student teachers were subjected to deeper levels of thought processing and an increased cognitive load by academics who expect more than note taking and reproducing of lectures, perhaps this failure could be addressed. Furthermore, if lecturers' content delivery skills are sharpened, and if appropriate development and packaging of undergraduate programmes are implemented, the student teachers may benefit and improve their own skills, as aptly stated by Killen (2003:3), "knowledge is constructed, rather than discovered

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<sup>11</sup> cf. Quirk 1991:6–10

<sup>12</sup> cf. Kachru 1991:5–10

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and teaching/learning should focus on learner understanding rather than memorisation". Killen (2003:5) asserts that "having content knowledge is simply not enough". Gore, Griffiths & Ladwig (2001:5) claim that "pedagogy based on promoting high levels of intellectual quality", a "quality learning environment" and an "explicit sense of the significance of the work" are contributing factors to student teacher success. The focus of teacher education programmes ought to be on "deep knowledge" (Hall 2004:8). At the institution where this study was conducted, attempts to address the issue of inadequate content knowledge have recently been initiated by means of restructuring the BEd-programme and setting in place more stringent entrance requirements. It is too soon to gauge the effects of these interventions but a consistent monitoring of student teachers' academic and internship achievements may suggest positive changes.

### 5.3.3 Methodological skills

A range of instructional skills had not been adequately mastered by the student teachers. Perhaps these skills had not been explicitly taught. Some misunderstandings that were identified were due to inadequate methodological skills which included aspects such as poor planning and preparation, the inability to explain new concepts, to give instructions for activities or to give constructive feedback, and inadequate questioning techniques. In fact, upon close scrutiny, almost half (47%) of the misunderstandings were non-understandings. The underdeveloped methodological skills as theme were not anticipated. I had assumed that the student teacher's training and experience through teaching practice sessions would have addressed this issue. However, its occurrence was so prevalent that it could thus not be dismissed.

Student teachers as beginner teachers also struggled to discipline learners, not only due to ignorance of sound teaching principles, but also due to inappropriate pedagogic distance from the learners. Failure in setting teacher-learner boundaries and clumsy task management also caused instructional dissonance and contributed to misunderstandings. Development of methodological skills would have to start much earlier in the education programmes of pre-service teachers and should include not only the range of instructional

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skills found lacking in this study, but also aspects of appropriate professional behaviour in the classroom. Furthermore, education programmes with a heightened focus on methodological skills would go far in addressing the problems identified by this study. Research has indicated that it is the quality of methodology and pedagogy which directly and powerfully affects the quality of learning demonstrated by student teachers (Gore 2001; Gore et al 2001; Newman 1996). Some of the misunderstandings identified took place in classes where the student teachers were considered orally proficient (IELTS band 6 and 7). It would thus seem that being able to speak English well does not automatically mean that one can teach it well. There is a distinct need for teachers to "have substantial education in pedagogy" (Jenkins 2009:120).

In summary, the findings of this study have practical educational implications for student teachers in learning the LoLT. These implications are threefold; on the one hand, L2 student teachers will have to understand pragmatic factors of the target language and culture better in order to speak grammatically and appropriately and also to interpret accurately what they hear. Practical opportunities where these competences can be sharpened need to be created and made available, either in lecturing opportunities or through assistive electronic sources. On the other hand, direct instruction in methodological principles will have to be foregrounded in teacher education programmes where the various skills can be practised and monitored, perhaps through micro teaching. A sharp focus on how to assist in the transition from theory into practice may yield improved results.

In addition, the competence levels of teachers already in the field need to be upgraded. Universities could provide a range of additional short courses for in-service teachers so that they are able to acquire oral and academic proficiency, as well as enhanced methodological skills in utilising the language as medium of instruction. Since such courses will, of necessity, have to be offered after hours, it will place a heavy burden on both the university and the schools where the teachers have been appointed. This will require commitment and investment from Government in terms of funding and producing materials (Foley 2008). It could, however, become part of the continuing professional development points system. It would seem as if the political will of policy makers in higher education and

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Government to intervene is currently lacking, perhaps because they are not aware of how widespread the proficiency problem is or perhaps due to the costly nature of implementing intervention programmes and support. Certainly, the urgency of delivering sufficient numbers of teachers into the field prevents lengthy and costly intervention programmes.

#### **5.4 Recommendations for further research**

After having completed the study, I identified certain constraints. Firstly, the oral proficiency of the student teachers in this study was assessed using the IELTS rubric, which is used in Britain and Australia. Perhaps a different rubric would have yielded different results. Furthermore, had I undergone training in applying the IELTS evaluation my interpretation of the student teachers' abilities and proficiency may have been different. Secondly, the sample for this study was small. Perhaps a larger sample would have yielded different results. Thirdly, the student teachers in this study were final year pre-service teachers and have had minimal teaching experience. A fair assumption would be that with more experience of teaching as their careers progress they would acquire the required linguistic and methodological competences to facilitate learning effectively. During the internships students are placed at schools with a mentor teacher who is required to guide and assist them in their experiential development. However, due to the experienced teachers' practical commitments at the school, the student teachers are often left alone for the lesson period without guidance from the teacher. The question arises whether this is adequate, or whether the internship model should be revisited.

The outcomes of this study suggest potential applications particularly for scholars, linguists, education specialists, teacher educators, curriculum planners, institutional management teams and policy developers.

##### **5.4.1 Pre-service teacher development courses**

Based on the findings of this study, there seems to be a need for the development of student teachers' competence, both linguistically and methodologically. Providers of

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teacher education have a particular responsibility to ensure that oral and pragmatic proficiency are addressed in their pre-service programmes. Pragmatic failure usually occurs when a hearer perceives the purpose of an utterance as something other than what was intended by the speaker (Nelson, Carson, Batal & El Bakary 2002). L2 speakers, if not competent enough in the target language, may borrow expressions from their mother tongue, to facilitate their communication. Such borrowing may lead to misunderstanding and communication breakdown. To address this problem, researchers have been advocating teaching functional or pragmatic language since the 1980s (Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei 1997; Kasper 1997; McCarthy & Carter 1995; Dörnyei & Thurrell 1994; Scotten & Bernsten 1988; Pearson 1986). The teaching of pragmatic language is more effective if taken from naturally occurring discourse for different areas of language teaching, ranging from grammar and vocabulary to pragmatic and socio-linguistic competence (Kasper 1997).

Koester (2002) argues that conveying communicative purpose through the use of speech acts in spoken interactions will enhance pragmatic competence and claims that to teach speech acts adequately in the classroom, a discourse approach is required. The implication is that student teachers need to learn appropriate responses for initiating different types of utterances (Koester 2002:178). To attain success, teachers need to provide exposure to the target language and opportunities to practise the discourse patterns of different types of interactions, such as giving advice or directives, making suggestions, agreeing and disagreeing, including how to close and open conversations. The focus, therefore, is on naturally occurring speech, which could include recordings or transcripts of actual conversations. When teaching communicative functions one should avoid merely teaching a list of phrases. Speakers need to be able to cope with the discourse dimension of speech acts, but should also develop awareness of the differences between various realizations of the same speech act, e.g. between explicit performatives and more indirect ways of communicating the same meaning (cf. section 2.4).

Non-native speakers who choose to become teachers of English or who will teach through English as the LoLT should be sensitised to specific speech acts and the accompanying

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linguistic features that are necessary to produce appropriate and well-received speech acts. This would be the task of the relevant teachers and lecturers involved in language teaching. As pragmatic competence includes illocutionary competence (or knowledge of speech acts and speech functions), as well as socio-linguistic competence (or the ability to use language appropriately according to context), the task of the teacher and lecturer is complex. Specific speech act instruction could lead to greater pragmatic or communicative competence for non-native speakers and allow them to familiarise themselves with the target language, thus enabling them to exploit it as a communication tool (Kaburise 2005; Kasper 1997).

Pragmatic development requires activities aimed at raising students' pragmatic awareness, such as recognition of how language forms are used appropriately in context, e.g. for apologizing (Kasper 1997). A discourse completion task (DCT) (cf. section 2.4) would work effectively for these kinds of activities. It would also be useful to include examples of miscommunication or misunderstanding and present these as problematic interactions to students for discussion (Rose 1999). Although second language speakers are usually afforded a certain amount of latitude in their performance, they should still be able to perform linguistically in such a manner as to communicate their intentions accurately, as well as being able to avoid being unintentionally offensive. Pragmatic failure or inappropriateness is not as widely discussed in linguistic literature, perhaps due to the ambivalence of appropriateness and the vagueness of terminology (Kaburise 2005). It is, therefore, not immediately obvious how pragmatic proficiency can be enhanced in English second language speakers and as such deserves research attention.

Currently, no standardised South African oral proficiency tests exists that can be used to gauge oral proficiency. Uys, Van der Walt, Botha & Van der Berg (2006) developed a model for the design of such a course, derived from the Outcomes Based model for course design as advocated by the South African Department of Education (DoE 2002) and the Backward Design model proposed by Wiggins and McTighe (1998). This model for course design proposes a framework for a language development course for teachers who are second language speakers of English and integrates a development of what

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Uys et al (2006:69) call "Classroom English"<sup>13</sup> language skills with training in both methodology and presentational skills. Such a course will result in teachers being capable of consciously promoting the development of functional language skills in the classroom (Uys et al 2006). Such a support course is vital considering the important role that teachers should play in their learners' attainment of not only English oral proficiency, but also academic literacy (Klaassen 2002; Short 2002; Marland 2001; Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Crandall 1998). Figures released by Horne (2002; 2005) indicating the low level of functional literacy of South African learners is evidence of this need.

Since globalisation has brought about a visible demographic change in classroom composition in most countries, it is probable that a student teacher may not be using her mother tongue as a medium of instruction but the dominant local language or possibly even English as it increasingly becomes a *lingua franca* in many multilingual classrooms. An appropriate place to start with developmental programmes is perhaps already in the early years of schooling so that when student teachers enter tertiary education, their competence in the medium of instruction (most likely their second language) has been established. Cummins's (2003) theory of BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) and CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) provides useful insight into the acquisition of language which could form the basis for developmental programmes. Cummins (2003) claims that it takes approximately two years of constant exposure to attain fluency in a language on an oral and conversational level (BICS), but to gain academic proficiency (CALP) in a new language requires between five and 10 years (Cummins 1999). He further maintains that when a learner has bilingual experience and has established the underlying principles of his/her first language, this conceptual knowledge can be transferred across languages (Cummins 1999). To achieve transfer of knowledge across languages, learners need the ability to develop their academic skills in the L1. Using a learner's L1 in all contexts provides the perfect medium for teaching, learning and expression (Thwala 2007). The learner will then be able to facilitate the development of the appropriate conceptual skills so as to be competent at using these skills in the L2. The

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<sup>13</sup> Classroom English refers to the specific English proficiency required by teachers who use English as the medium of instruction and includes the English used for teaching and learning (Uys et al 2006)

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competency of L2 learners to develop the appropriate cognitive academic skills is largely dependent on their level of competency in their first language (King & Jordaan 2005).

The conclusion drawn from the study is that student teachers' BICS were adequately developed in most instances, but that their CALP proved to be problematic. Introducing specific exposure in this regard could develop the required competence for L2 acquisition and for the mastery of acceptable Classroom English (Uys et al 2006) for teaching through the LoLT. Uys et al (2006:80) propose that "administrators and programme organisers should realise that at least for the immediate future, extensive training in English as main L2MI [LoLT] in South Africa should prevail".

As shown above, teacher education and development programmes should include issues related to how language is used in instructional settings, but moreover, should make methodological adaptations to ensure effective learning. The two cannot be mutually exclusive. Extensive training in using English as a language of learning and teaching could be beneficial if this preparation underpins teacher education programmes. The linguistic, methodological, and presentation skills required for teaching effectively through the medium of English should be included. Klaassen (2002) states that native speakers often do not know that their sentences are complex or that their rate of delivery is fast. This emphasises the importance of also training native speakers in the methodological and presentational aspects of teaching. Language skills may become dormant and generally deteriorate unless frequently used (Klaassen 2002). The implication is that language courses need to be extensive and ongoing, and should span the full four years of training required for obtaining a professional teaching qualification. An integrated course which includes training in language development, methodological, and presentational skills, should be of such a nature that consistent and intensive language training is ensured. The teacher in the language classroom needs to model appropriate proficiency in the LoLT and as such needs focussed oral proficiency practise in the target language.

#### 5.4.2 Cross-cultural and cross-linguistic competence

The notion of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic transfer has only superficially been touched on in this study and merits further research. It seems that cross-cultural issues in transfer play a role in the occurrence of misunderstanding, but other aspects and interpretations of culture are also at play. Teachers will need to incorporate many cross-cultural pragmatic factors into their teaching but also consciously develop their own pragmatic competence in order to address learners' possible communicative problems. The key to following a balanced approach is to "be culturally sensitive to the diversity of contexts in which English is taught and used" (McKay 2002:128). The variety of English taught should be based on the teaching context, the teachers and their abilities as well as the learners' educational and cultural needs (Farrell & Martin 2009). The outcomes of my study may guide discussions about how to teach English by teachers who themselves are second language speakers of English, taking differences in cultural backgrounds into consideration and as such, can be used to select instructional methods to suit the specific characteristics of the second language learner.

Previous research (McCroskey, Richmond, & Bennett 2006; Mottet, Richmond & McCroskey 2006; McCroskey 2003) has determined that a number of teacher communication traits (clarity, non-verbal immediacy, assertiveness and responsiveness) are strongly related to instructional success in the classroom. But even more effective in ensuring learner success is when these traits are performed collectively. McCroskey et al (2006:8) claim that "when teachers communicate information clearly, engage in non-verbal immediacy behaviours, and respond assertively and responsively, learners are more likely to succeed and be motivated to learn". Furthermore, focussing on teaching speech acts in a language teaching programme could provide a rich opportunity for exploring socio-linguistic and cross-cultural issues. The appropriate realization and level of directness of any speech act is highly sensitive to the socio-cultural context (Koester 2002). Comparing speech acts in the target language with the learners' language and culture and making use of particular classroom tasks could be used to develop awareness of such socio-cultural issues.

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I conclude this section by presenting further recommendations in terms of the questions which arose during the study. This study did not investigate the recipients of the instructional message, i.e. the learners' oral proficiency or their perceptions of the misunderstandings that had occurred. The student teachers did not perceive their own oral proficiency to be problematic. In fact, they claimed that it was the learners' poor oral proficiency that was to blame for the misunderstandings. Testing the learners' oral proficiency may yield thought-provoking results and it would be interesting to compare their views on misunderstandings with those of the student teachers. It is also possible that learners experienced misunderstandings that were not observed as such.

In conclusion, in this study, incidences of instructional dissonance due to poor oral proficiency, misunderstandings and instructional noise, were evident. However, the effect of such dissonance on the learning experience was not investigated. How such dissonance could be minimized needs careful research attention. Perhaps a stronger focus on the notion that every teacher is a language teacher may minimize the effect of language as a barrier to learning. Implementing Content-based Instruction (CBI) and Content-based Language Instruction (CBLI) as foundation for learning may remove some of the language barriers in the classroom.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In conversations with others, communication can fail for various reasons and result in misunderstandings. Misunderstandings are described in the literature as, among others, pragmatic failure or breakdown in communication (Thomas 1983). Misunderstandings occur so frequently that they are accepted as "all-pervasive and ubiquitous in all kinds of encounters" (Hinnenkamp 1999:9). In an instructional context, however, such pragmatic failure may negatively impact the learning experience.

This study was conducted to establish whether misunderstandings occur in an instructional setting and whether they relate to the oral proficiency and communicative competence of student teachers. The analysis of utterances showed that misunderstandings do indeed

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occur in an instructional setting, and that they can be related to poor oral proficiency. However, the study has shown that inadequate oral proficiency is not the sole cause of misunderstandings. Misunderstandings are also caused by lack of content knowledge in subjects, as well as inadequate instructional skills (such as poor questioning techniques, poor explanations of content and ineffective instructions). Underdeveloped methodological skills, therefore, also accounted for misunderstandings.

Inadequate pragmatic competence of English L2 speakers can be addressed when the focus of instruction is on meaning rather than on linguistic form of the target language (Krashen 1982). When the focus in instructional communication is on meaning, the interactions are more natural. It is through these natural conversations that learners receive the necessary input and structures that promote English second language acquisition allowing them to become orally proficient or communicatively competent (Garcia 1993). Instructional contexts, such as the language classroom, are socio-linguistic environments in which interlocutors make use of various functions of language to establish a communication system. Input for language acquisition and language proficiency is expected to be generated by means of classroom interaction. Learners' English second language proficiency may then develop sooner, especially when it is primarily focused on the development of communicative competence and not only on linguistic or grammatical fluency (Sage 2003; Canale & Swain 1980).

Research to improve practice within the teaching and learning context needs to be ongoing, especially where a diverse group of multilingual speakers (such as is found in most South African classrooms) come together to create meaning from instructional communication. In daily conversations with others, communication often "go[es] awry" (Forster 1924:269) for various reasons and results in misunderstandings, usually without dire consequences. However, the formal context of the classroom does not tolerate such instructional dissonance easily. It remains imperative then that even pre-service teachers have a sound command of the language of instruction, possess the required content knowledge and demonstrate basic methodological skills in order to embark on their careers as teachers.

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## Addenda

### Addendum A: The Inferential Model

The Inferential Model of communication proposes that learning to communicate successfully involves acquiring a variety of beliefs or "presumptions", and a system of "inferential strategies", which the speaker and the hearer must share (Akmajian et al 1995:353). These presumptions allow us to presume certain helpful things about the speaker/hearer. The inferential strategies include steps taken to help us explain how hearers arrive at the most likely meaning of an utterance. The hearer is thus able to infer the intended message of uttered words by drawing these inferences by means of certain strategies (Akmajian et al 1995:368). This will help the hearer to determine speaker intent, and provides the basis for successful communication.

According to this model there are four presumptions that need to be in place, viz.:

Linguistic Presumption:	It is presumed that the hearer is capable of determining the meaning of an expression in its context.
Communicative Presumption:	It is presumed that a speaker is speaking with a specific communicative intent.
Presumption of Literalness:	It is presumed that a speaker is speaking literally, unless there is evidence to prove otherwise.
Conversational Presumptions:	It is presumed that the speaker's remarks will be relevant, sincere, true, appropriately informative and provable.

When people share the above presumptions in communication, the chances of communication being successful are fairly good. This success is based on the fact that the hearer has certain expectations of how a speaker will speak and the speaker has certain expectations of how a hearer will interpret. For example, a speaker can speak literally and directly – the words s/he utters mean exactly what s/he intends, without any added or ambiguous meaning. What is said is thus contextually appropriate.

A speaker can also speak non-literally – mean something other than what his words mean, e.g. when making use of irony, sarcasm or figures of speech. What is said will then be judged contextually inappropriate.

A speaker can also speak indirectly (will mean more than s/he says directly), e.g. "Have you finished reading?" asking whether s/he has finished reading, but implying to ask in addition whether the light can be switched off.

The distinction between direct and indirect, and literal and non-literal speech is simply that when we speak directly and literally our words mean just that which is spoken, e.g. "I have blue ribbons in my hair". When we speak indirectly and/or non-literally, our words mean more, or something other, than that which is spoken, e.g. "I feel blue". It is not possible to feel blue, literally. Therefore, a person uttering these words in this context must mean something other than his words, namely feeling depressed.

For each of the above forms of communication there are inferential strategies which the speaker/hearer regularly uses to ensure success in communication. An inference is the "ability to derive additional knowledge from the original knowledge base" (Fromkin & Rodman 1993:490), and a strategy is a method or tool applied by the hearer to understand each type of communication. These inferential strategies, therefore, are used by the speaker or hearer to ensure successful communication.

Since communication is so complicated, we need notions like "intended inference", "shared contextual beliefs" and "presumptions" to explain what words mean (Akmajian et al

1995:354). Akmajian et al (1995) further state that all of these rely on the following "inferential strategies" for communication, viz. the direct strategy, the literal strategy, the non-literal strategy and the indirect strategy, which will be explained below:

### **The Direct Strategy**

This strategy enables the hearer to infer, from what is being said, what the speaker is directly communicating. If s/he mishears the words, the message will not be understood.

There are four steps to be taken:

- Step 1        Recognising what expression is uttered
- Step 2        Recognising which meaning of what is uttered is relevant
- Step 3        Recognising what the speaker is referring to
- Step 4        Recognising the speaker's intent

### **The Literal Strategy**

This strategy enables the hearer to infer, from what the speaker is directly communicating, what s/he is literally communicating.

There are two steps to be taken, following from step 4:

- Step 5        Recognising the contextual appropriateness for speaking literally
- Step 6        Recognising the speaker's intent to speak literally

A hearer who follows these strategies (steps 1–6) can infer what the speaker is literally and directly communicating. If the hearer is correct in this inference, communication will have been successful. If not, the hearer will revert to the **Non-literal Strategy**. Then contextual inappropriateness enables the hearer to infer that the speaker is communicating non-literally.

This requires that two alternative steps need to be taken, following from step 4:

- Step 5        Recognising contextual inappropriateness for speaking literally
- Step 6        Recognising that the speaker is communicating non-literally

If a hearer reaches step 6 correctly, communication will have been successful. However, if not, the **Indirect Strategy** will be followed. This strategy enables a hearer to infer that a speaker is communicating indirectly. Indirect acts can be performed either literally or non-literally.

There are two steps to be taken, following from step 6:

- Step 7        Recognising contextual inappropriateness for speaking directly and initiating a search for the indirect message
- Step 8        Recognising that the speaker is communicating indirectly

When the hearer reaches step 8, communication will have been successful. These steps are explained in figure 1 on the next page.

Figure 1: Inferential strategies for communication (Inferential Model [Akmajian et al 1995])





**Addendum B: Observations**

**Observational field notes: Misunderstandings in an instructional setting**

**Participant:**

**Subject:**

**School:**

**Grade:**

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Length of period:**

.....

**Notes**

.....

**Reflection**

**Addendum C: Observation checklist**

**Observation checklist: Misunderstandings in an instructional setting**

**Participant:**

**Subject:**

**School:**

**Grade:**

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Length of period:**

.....

**OBSERVATION CHECKLIST**

v1

**Determine the type and frequency of errors made which may lead to misunderstandings in the classroom.**

- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| 1 | Yes   |
| 2 | No    |
| 3 | Other |

- Vocabulary  v2
- Word order  v3
- Sentence structure  v4
- Choice of words  v5
- Pronunciation  v6
- Enunciation  v7
- Concord  v8
- Tenses  v9
- Sentence length  v10
- Requests  v11
- Apologies  v12
- Directives  v13
- Thanks  v14
- Other  v15



## Notes

.....

## Reflection



## Addendum D: International English Language Testing Score (IELTS)

### IELTS Speaking band descriptors (public version)

Band	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction; any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar</li> <li>speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics</li> <li>uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately</li> <li>produces consistently accurate structures apart from 'slips' characteristic of native speaker speech</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety</li> <li>sustains flexible use of features throughout</li> <li>is effortless to understand</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction; hesitation is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language</li> <li>develops topics coherently and appropriately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning</li> <li>uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully, with occasional inaccuracies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a wide range of structures flexibly</li> <li>produces a majority of error-free sentences with only very occasional inappropriacies or basic/non-systematic errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a wide range of pronunciation features</li> <li>sustains flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses</li> <li>is easy to understand throughout: L1 accent has</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence</li> <li>may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics</li> <li>uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility</li> <li>frequently produces error-free sentences, though some grammatical mistakes persist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>shows all the positive features of Band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 8</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation</li> <li>uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriacies</li> <li>generally paraphrases successfully</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a mix of simple and complex structures, but with limited flexibility</li> <li>may make frequent mistakes with complex structures, though these rarely cause comprehension problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control</li> <li>shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained</li> <li>can generally be understood throughout, though</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going</li> <li>may over-use certain connectives and discourse markers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility</li> <li>attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy</li> <li>uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>shows all the positive features of Band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 6</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction</li> <li>links basic sentences but with repetitious use of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice</li> <li>rarely attempts paraphrase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences but subordinate structures are rare</li> <li>errors are frequent and may lead to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a limited range of pronunciation features</li> <li>attempts to control features but lapses are frequent</li> <li>mispronunciations are frequent and cause some</li> </ul>



Band	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• speaks with long pauses</li><li>• has limited ability to link simple sentences</li><li>• gives only simple responses and is frequently</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information</li><li>• has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorised utterances</li><li>• <del>makes numerous errors except in memorised</del></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• shows some of the features of Band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 4</li></ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• pauses lengthily before most words</li><li>• <del>little communication possible</del></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• only produces isolated words or memorised utterances</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• cannot produce basic sentence forms</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• speech is often unintelligible</li></ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• no communication possible</li><li>• <del>no rateable language</del></li></ul>			
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• does not attend</li></ul>			

**Addendum E: Focus group interview protocol**

**Interview protocol: Misunderstandings in an instructional setting**

**Time of interview:**

**Date:**

**Interviewer: L de J**

**Interviewee(s):**

**Venue:**

.....

**Questions:**

To establish rapport and allow participants to relax, a few general questions about their lessons and teaching are asked. This is followed by the leading question:

1. Do you find that learners sometimes misunderstand you/How often do misunderstandings occur in a typical lesson? If so, how would you deal with such misunderstandings?

The following questions were added where relevant to keep the interview flowing:

2. How do you know that a misunderstanding has occurred/What do learners do to indicate that they do not understand?
3. How often do learners indicate their misunderstanding?
4. How often do learners react non-verbally to a possible misunderstanding? Can you describe these?
5. What do you do to make sure that learners do understand?
6. What factors do you think play a role in these misunderstandings? What do you think could be possible reasons for these misunderstandings?
7. How often is the misunderstanding related to language ability? How do you know?



8. How often is the misunderstanding related to factors other than language? Can you provide examples? For example, do you think that your culture or the learners' culture plays a role in their misunderstanding you?

.....

**Reflection**



**Addendum F: Questionnaire**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MISUNDERSTANDING IN AN INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING**

Please fill or mark the appropriate space.

**SECTION A – BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

1 Respondent number

2 Gender:

1 Male	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------	--------------------------

2 Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
----------	--------------------------

3 Grade of class \_\_\_\_\_

4 Type of school:

1 Public school (Afr)	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Public school (Eng)	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Private school (Afr)	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Private school (Eng)	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Other (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

5 Mother tongue/Home language: .....

6 Time of lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

7 Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION B**

8 I encounter incidents of misunderstanding in my classroom.

9 I try to determine the source of learners' misunderstanding.

**For office use only**

V1

V3

V4

V5.1

V5.2

V5.3

V5.4

V5.5

V6

V7

V8

1 Strongly disagree					
2 Disagree					
3 Neutral					
4 Agree					
5 Strongly agree					

V8





		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree		
15	Misunderstandings occur because of my skills in explaining the work.						V15	
16	Misunderstandings occur only when the language I use is too difficult for the learners to understand.						V16	
17	Misunderstandings occur because of my skills in giving instructions.						V17	

**Addendum G: Ethics certificate (UP)**

Clearance number: AL 08/11/01

Date approved: 28 September 2011

Chairperson of ethic committee: Prof L. Ebersohn

(Certificate only available in hard copy)

**Addendum H: Ethics approval (GDE)**



**UMnyango WezeMfundo  
Department of Education**

**Lefapha la Thuto  
Departement van Onderwys**

**Enquiries: Nomvula Ubisi (011)3550488**

**Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research**

<i>Date:</i>	<i>25 November 2008</i>
<i>Name of Researcher:</i>	<i>De Jager Lizette Johanna</i>
<i>Address of Researcher:</i>	<i>9 Tiger Road</i>
	<i>Monument Park</i>
	<i>Pretoria</i>
<i>Telephone Number:</i>	<i>0124604740/0835542088</i>
<i>Fax Number:</i>	<i>0124205637</i>
<i>Research Topic:</i>	<i>Misunderstanding in the classroom: the relationship between the oral proficiency of teachers and the learning experience</i>
<i>Number and type of schools:</i>	<i>15 Secondary Schools</i>
<i>District/s/HO</i>	<b>Gauteng North</b>

**Office of the Chief Director: Information and Knowledge Management**

Room 501, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2000 P.O.Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000  
Tel: (011) 355-0809 Fax: (011) 355-0734

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

*Permission has been granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met, and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted:*

- 1. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s concerned must be presented with a copy of this letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.**
- 2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.**
- 3. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.**
- 4. A letter / document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.**
- 5. The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.**
- 6. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.**
- 7. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year.**
- 8. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.**

## **Office of the Chief Director: Information and Knowledge Management**

Room 501, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2000 P.O.Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000  
Tel: (011) 355-0809 Fax: (011) 355-0734

9. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
10. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
11. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
12. *On completion of the study the researcher must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and one Ring bound copy of the final, approved research report. The researcher would also provide the said manager with an electronic copy of the research abstract/summary and/or annotation.*
13. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
14. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

Pp Nomvula Ubisi

CHIEF DIRECTOR: INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

<b>The contents of this letter has been read and understood by the researcher.</b>	
<b>Signature of Researcher:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	

**Office of the Chief Director: Information and Knowledge Management**

Room 501, 111 Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, 2000 P.O.Box 7710, Johannesburg, 2000  
Tel: (011) 355-0809 Fax: (011) 355-0734

**Addendum I: Letters of informed consent: participants**



**Department of Humanities Education**

**Faculty of Education, Groenkloof Campus, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA, 0002**

**Republic of South Africa**

**Tel: +27 12 420 5639 Fax: +27 12 420 5637**

.....

**05 May 2009**

Dear Participant

**LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ON:  
MISUNDERSTANDING IN AN INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING**

You are invited to participate in a research project on **misunderstandings that occur in the classroom**. The aim of my study is to investigate the occurrence of misunderstanding in the classroom.

The main question driving this research is:

**To what extent are misunderstandings the result of English second language (L2) student teachers' oral proficiency?**

The following sub questions will further guide the study:

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

As a participant, you are asked to present a lesson of approximately 45 minutes for your internship at the school where you are placed. This lesson will be observed and **video recorded**. These observations and recordings will be done in such a way as to be as non-disruptive to your classroom practice as possible. The recordings will be scrutinised and divided into sections in order to search for misunderstandings. The sections where misunderstandings occur will be analysed and described in the final results. You may receive the results if you so wish.

You are also asked to take part in a **focus group interview before** the recording of your lesson which will probably last about an hour. The interview will be conducted as a discussion about your awareness of misunderstandings, their type and their causes. To ensure the accuracy of responses, the interview will be recorded using an audio and video recorder. The interviews will be transcribed and participants who wish to review these transcripts before they are included in the study are welcome to do so. It might also be necessary for a **follow up interview** to clarify or expand on certain aspects which I may have identified. You are also asked to complete a **questionnaire** which will serve to inform the interview questions. If you are interested you will have the opportunity to receive the final written results if you so wish.

Participation is entirely **voluntary** and no one will be coerced or manipulated in any way to participate or provide certain information. You may at any time decide to withdraw if you feel you no longer wish to be part of the study and your wishes will be respected. The information provided by you will then also be withdrawn from the study.

All information gathered during the questionnaires, interviews and video recordings will be kept in the strictest confidence and will only be used for the purposes of the research. You are not required to provide your name or contact details and will remain **anonymous** by choosing a pseudonym.

The findings of this study will be presented in a doctoral thesis, articles and conference presentations. The thesis will, therefore, become public domain for scrutiny by examiners and other academics. However, I am bound by rules of integrity and ethical conduct as prescribed by the University of Pretoria and promise to abide by those rules. I will thus use the data collected for the purposes of research only.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the accompanying letter as a declaration of your consent and that you participate in this project willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw from the research project at any time. Participation in this phase of the project does not

obligate you to participate in follow up individual interviews, however, should you decide to participate in follow-up interviews your participation is still voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. You will also have the opportunity to review the findings prior to publication and be able to provide advice on the accuracy of the information.

Yours sincerely

L J de Jager

PhD student

Tel: 012 420 5527

Cell: 083 554 2088

Dr R Evans (Supervisor)

Tel: 012 420 4272



## LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

I, ..... have read the information contained in the *Invitation to Participate* and would like to voluntarily participate in this research study. I am aware of what is expected of me and that I have the right to withdraw at any time should I so wish, without having to provide a reason.

By signing this form, I give consent to the recording of any discussions relevant to this study and to the video recording of the lesson that I will present. I acknowledge that I am participating of my own free will and have not in any way been forced, manipulated or coerced into taking part.

.....  
Signed: participant

.....  
Date

Tel. ....

Email: .....

**Addendum J: Letters of assent: learners**



**Department of Humanities Education**  
**Faculty of Education, Groenkloof Campus, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA, 0002**  
**Republic of South Africa**  
**Tel: +27 12 420 5639 Fax: +27 12 420 5637**

.....

**05 May 2009**

Dear Learner

**LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ON:  
MISUNDERSTANDING IN AN INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING**

Sometimes when we want to find out something, we ask people for information to help us explain what we need to know. We then do what is called a project. I would like you to take part in this project so that you can help me find out what I need to know.

Let me tell you about the project first. This project will give me the chance to find out what kinds of misunderstandings happen during a lesson in class and what the possible reasons for them are. To help me do this I need to video record a lesson where you will be in class.

I would like to ask you to be part of this project as your parents/guardians/caregivers have already agreed that you can be part of this project if you want to. If you don't want to you don't have to. Everything was explained to your parents/guardians/caregivers and they said you could take part if you wanted to. You can talk to them or your teacher or any other adult you trust first before you decide if you want to take part or not.

This is what will happen: I will video record the lesson and so people will be able to see your face and hear your voice if I decide to show the video footage at discussions. If you wish to, you may choose a pseudonym and I promise not to tell anyone your name. You can also decide to let me use your real name if you want to. Just let me know.

If you do not want to ask or answer questions during the lesson, you don't have to. If you do, all of your answers will be kept private. No one, not even someone in your family or any of your teachers will hear your answers.

You can ask any questions about this project any time. If you agree to take part and you have questions later that you didn't think of now, you can phone me at 083 554 2088 or Dr Evans at 012 420 4272, or you can ask me when I visit your school next time.

You do not have to take part in this project. No one will be upset or angry if you don't want to do this. If you don't want to be in this project you just have to tell me. You can say yes or no and if you change your mind later you can quit any time. It's up to you.

Writing your name here means that you agree to take part in this project and that you know what will happen during the project. You also agree that I can take video recordings of you during the project and share these images during discussions as well as reports that I write about the project. If you decide to quit the project, all you have to do is tell me<sup>14</sup>.

Signature of learner: ..... Date: .....

Name: .....

Name of parent/guardian/caregiver: .....

Tel.: .....

Email: .....

---

<sup>14</sup> Letter template provided by Prof. L Ebersöhn

**Addendum K: Letters of consent: parents**



**Department of Humanities Education**

**Faculty of Education, Groenkloof Campus, University of Pretoria, PRETORIA, 0002**

**Republic of South Africa**

**Tel: +27 12 420 5639 Fax: +27 12 420 5637**

.....  
**05 May 2009**

Dear Parent/Guardian/Caregiver

**LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT ON:  
MISUNDERSTANDING IN AN INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING**

I am conducting research on **speech act performance and misunderstandings that occur in the classroom**. The aim of my study is to investigate the reasons for the occurrence of misunderstanding in the classroom.

The main question driving this research is:

**To what extent are misunderstandings the result of English second language (L2) student teachers' oral proficiency?**

The following sub questions will further guide the study:

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

My focus in this study is on the student teacher interacting with the class in which your child is a learner. The student teacher will present a lesson to the class which will be video recorded. As such your child may be video recorded. Although I am not concerned with the biographical detail of any child as such, I will study **facial expressions and gestures, as well as verbal responses** as they relate to the student teacher and the learning that takes place in the classroom.

Participation is entirely **voluntary** and no one will be coerced or manipulated in any way to participate or provide certain information. A participant may at any time decide to withdraw if they feel they no longer wish to be part of the study and their wishes will be respected. In such an event the child will still remain in the class and not lose out on any teaching and/or learning, but will be placed outside of the line of vision of the camera and not be recorded. The information provided by the child so far will then also be withdrawn from the study.

All information gathered during the video recordings will be kept in the strictest confidence and will only be used for the purposes of the research. Participants are not required to provide their names or contact details and will remain **anonymous** throughout the study by choosing a pseudonym. Where possible, faces will be blocked out, unless this causes important information to be lost. Permission will be requested from you and your child before using any video footage in presentations.

The findings of this study will be presented in a doctoral thesis, articles and conference presentations. The thesis will, therefore, become public domain for scrutiny by examiners and other academics. However, I am bound by rules of integrity and ethical conduct as prescribed by the University of Pretoria and promise to abide by those rules. I will thus use the information for the purposes of this study only.

If you are willing to allow your child to be present in class during the filming of the lesson, please sign the accompanying letter as a declaration of your consent and that you allow your child to be present as part of this project willingly and that you understand that you may withdraw your child from the research project at any time.

Yours sincerely

L J de Jager

PhD student

Tel: 012 420 5527

Cell: 083 554 2088

Dr R Evans (Supervisor)

Tel: 012 420 4272



**LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT**

I, ..... have read the information contained in the *Letter of Informed Consent* and give permission that my child may be captured on video during a lesson presented by the student teacher. I am aware of what is expected of my child and that I have the right to withdraw my child at any time should I so wish, without having to provide a reason.

By signing this form, I give consent to having any verbal and/or non-verbal information possibly provided by my child relevant to this study video recorded. I acknowledge that I am allowing my child to be present voluntarily and that I have not in any way been forced, manipulated or coerced into giving that permission.

.....  
Signed: Parent/Guardian/Caretaker                      Date

Name: .....

Tel.: .....

Email: .....

**Addendum L: Permission: access to schools**



24 April 2009

Dear Principal

**Permission to conduct research in your school**

Thank you for allowing me access to your school and to the student teachers involved in my research. I really appreciate your goodwill and support.

As stated in our informal meeting, the learners and parents in the classes involved have all received letters of information and letters of consent. As soon as all these signed letters have been received, I will start with the research.

Please be assured of my ethical conduct at all times. If you require further information, please contact me or my supervisor.

Regards

L J de Jager  
[lizette.dejager@up.ac.za](mailto:lizette.dejager@up.ac.za)  
0835542088

Dr. R Evans  
[revans@postino.up.ac.za](mailto:revans@postino.up.ac.za)  
0124204272