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

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

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,

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

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

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

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

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[11], to viewing it as different[12] 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

[11] cf. Quirk 1991:6–10
[12] cf. Kachru 1991:5–10

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

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

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

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

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

Uys et al (2006:69) call "Classroom English[13]" 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

[13] 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)

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.

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

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.