

MISCOMMUNICATION BETWEEN ESL WRITERS AND WRITING CENTER CONSULTANTS: A CASE STUDY

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This paper presents a case study of the co-construction of miscommunication during a single writing center consultation involving a native English speaking writing center consultant and a native Hebrew speaking college student. Using a multi-layered qualitative analysis of video and interview data, the paper discusses three moments where cultural expectations and semantic, paralinguistic, and non-verbal factors combined in complex and unpredictable ways to produce miscommunication events. The paper concludes with recommendations for training writing center consultants to work more effectively with ESL writers.

INTRODUCTION

As the number of international students studying at American universities has increased, so has the number of non-native speakers using writing center services, with estimates of their numbers ranging from 30-40% (Cogie, Strain, & Lorinskas, 1999) to as high as half of all consultations (Blau, Hall, & Strauss, 1998). This increase has not gone unnoticed in the writing center literature where a number of writers have discussed the different needs of ESL students and specific strategies to address those needs. For example, Kennedy (1993) lists five potential problems that ESL students have and suggests strategies for dealing with them. Powers (1993) argues that since ESL students typically bring different cultural values, rhetorical strategies, and attitudes to writing center conferences, collaborative conferencing strategies should be adapted. She concludes that tutors should allow themselves to be "cultural informants" and more directive during conferences than they would typically be with native speakers. While acknowledging the basic validity of Powers' approach, Cogie, Strain, and Lorinskas (1999) point out that not all ESL writers need cultural informants. Instead, these students need help to become self-editors; the authors suggest several ways for tutors to do this and, thus, avoid becoming little more than editors for ESL students.

Although all of these writers would identify cultural differences as being one source of the problems they discuss, relatively few writers have discussed the implications for successful conferences when tutors and students come from different cultural backgrounds. Thonus (1993) stresses the need for tutors to negotiate the type of interaction that will occur; however, she seems to assume that once this negotiation has occurred, there will be few problems. Ronesi (1995) is a little less optimistic. Quoting Harris' comment that international students have "habits, behavior patterns, perspectives, ways of delivering information, and other cultural filters" (Harris, 1986, p. 4), Ronesi

points out that "lack of cross-cultural communication strategies on the part of the tutor can result in a bewildering collaboration or an unhappy student" (1995). In a later article, Harris explores the roots of such problems by presenting the results of a questionnaire administered to 85 ESL students (Harris, 1997). Students' responses indicated that their assumptions and expectations often differ from those of tutors with regard to the student and tutor roles, appropriate types of behavior, and goals of learning. Harris suggests that "tutors [. . .] can remedy this lack of overlap [of expectations and assumptions] by becoming more sensitive to cross-cultural differences that may impede ESL students' ability to profit from writing tutorials" (220). However, while the need for a greater awareness of these differences is without question, there is also, I believe, an equally compelling need for an understanding of how these differences produce miscommunication between tutors and students.

To meet this need, we need research that combines analysis of the verbal and non-verbal features of interaction with data which describes the interaction from the participant's perspectives (Gumperz, 1982, p. 6). An excellent example of this approach is found in Tyler's (1995) analysis of a videotaped interaction that occurred when a native speaker of Korean tutored a native speaker of English for the latter's computer programming class. Tyler found that the Korean tutor's transfer of conversational routines from his native language caused the participants to have different interpretations of their roles and status. This mismatch in interpretations was subsequently reinforced by additional differences in discourse management strategies, schema, and contextualization cues. Tyler concluded that the resulting miscommunication was jointly constructed by both participants with the result that each participant judged the other as being uncooperative.

In spite of the recognition by the authors cited above of the need to adjust writing center tutoring practices to meet the needs of ESL writers, I am aware of only two studies of the interaction between native-English speaking writing center tutors and non-native speaker students. The first study (Blau et al., 1998)—an analysis of the linguistic cues underlying tutor/student interactions—includes data from tutoring sessions involving non-native speakers and suggests that non-native speakers may be more likely to mirror their tutor's syntax as a means to develop linguistic competence. However, this study does not systematically compare native with non-native speaker across the three rhetorical strategies investigated (use of questions, echoing, and qualifiers). Nor does the analysis include an integration of non-verbal behavior, though the authors acknowledge that doing so would provide "a more in-depth and holistic analysis" (p. 21).

In the second study, Moser's (1993) analysis of videotaped consultations and follow-up interviews allow her to suggest that the five Haitian students in her study resisted peer tutoring because of a culturally-grounded authoritarian view of the teacher and a culturally-conditioned stigma towards the notion of tutoring. When combined with a lack of fluency, the

discomfort felt by students and their frequent silence produced a one-sided relationship in which the tutors offered rather than elicited explanations.

While Moser's research is certainly a valuable contribution to our understanding of the role of cultural factors in determining levels, it portrays such factors as a barrier to overall communication rather than as a cause for more localized instances of miscommunication. As such, it ignores the important ways in which miscommunication may be jointly constructed that Tyler (1995) describes. There are no cross-cultural studies of writing center tutoring sessions which are comparable to Tyler's research in terms of the detailed examination of interactions and miscommunication at multiple levels of analysis. This study attempts to fill this gap, and, because it focuses on interactions between a native speaker consultant and a non-native speaker student, it at least partially answers Severino's call for writing centers to serve as sites of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic research (Severino, 1994).

DATA COLLECTION

The data was collected during a regularly scheduled consultation at the University of Arizona's Writing Center between a 26-year-old, male, native Hebrew-speaking student called David and a female, undergraduate, native-English speaking consultant called Sarah (both names are pseudonyms). David had never visited the writing center prior to his participation in this study. Sarah had been consulting at the writing center for almost three years and claimed to have a lot of experience working with ESL students since the majority of her consultations tended to involve non-native speakers of English. Like all consultants at the writing center, she had participated in a year long internship which provided basic training in writing center theory and practice, including limited discussion of the 'problems' involved in working with ESL students.

Data collection followed the methodology of Tyler's (1995) study. The participants were videotaped as they discussed a draft of a reflective paper that David had already received feedback on from his freshman composition teacher. The videotape was viewed several times by the researcher to identify moments in the exchange which seemed to show discomfort or apparent contradictions in content. These moments provided the content for the subsequent video playback sessions where each participant individually viewed the videotape of the consultation and was asked to comment both on the moments identified by the researcher and on any other moments that they felt were significant.

In general, both the consultant and the student reported that they were very satisfied with the results of the consultation. The consultant reported that the student had been significantly more communicative and had taken greater initiative than most ESL students, and even some native speakers, usually do. The student reported that he had felt that the consultant had been extremely successful in asking the right questions which allowed him to develop his thoughts. However, after reviewing transcripts and videos of the consultation

and of the playback sessions, it became clear that there were at least three key moments where communication broke down. These moments were transcribed broadly using the conventions (see Appendix A) outlined in Du Bois et al (1993). The remainder of this article will present the ensuing multi-layered qualitative analysis of these miscommunication events¹ and discuss their implications for the training of writing center tutors.

Miscommunication Event 1: "Background"

When the consultation starts, the student (David) and the consultant (Sarah) enter the room and the following exchange occurs (from the camera's viewpoint, the consultant sits on the left and the student on the right):

- 1 Sarah: Have a seat.
 ((long pause as they sit down and organize papers))
- 2 I'm Sarah by the way.
- 3 David: I'm David.
- 4 Sarah: Hi.
- 5 Nice to meet you.
- 6 Okay.
- 7 ...Is this your first time here?
- 8 David: [Yeah.]
- 9 Sarah: [Out] of curiosity.
- 10 David: And I don't know if Julian wanted it like that,
 11 ... but uh I didn't go into a lot of details,
 12 so I'm probably going to be very natural.
 13 But uhm...I don't have a--
 14 ... Do you.. do you need a background,
 15 ... of what's going on?
- 16 Sarah: Go ahead and tell me about the assignment.
 17 I see that it's for English 107.
- 18 David: Okay, Um... Now we're dealing with reflective essay,
 19 [so, uh...]
- 20 Sarah: [Uh-huh.]
- 21 Oh.
- 22 David: I'm in English 107.
- 23 Sarah: Ok I know a little bit about this one.
- 24 David: I'm kind of just--
 25 ... two days ago--
 26 like er... reconstruct my re- my reflective essay.
 27 so, er... I'm still thinking about directions.
 28 I got a rough draft,
 29 and I checked it with my teacher.
 30 But... I don't know where--
 31 to which direction to take it.
 32 And that's basically what I need most of the help.
- 33 Sarah: Okay, well... what did your teacher say?

In the follow-up interviews, it emerged that the participants had a different view of how the consultation would begin. For Sarah, the goal was to complete the demographic information—name, class, type of assignment, date, time, whether this was the first visit to the writing center or not—that all writing center consultants must record on a conference note. This was the typical way of starting all consultations for her. David, however, believed that there would be a more prolonged introduction. In the follow-up interview, he commented on the brevity of the introduction, stating "it was like 'OK let's go, get to the business' and... I thought it would be more of a slower pace." He also commented that "there was no kind of introduction... and I missed it." He believed that there should have been "maybe 2 minutes of [introduction]... I just thought we needed to break the ice."

This difference in expectations duplicates one of the findings of Harris' questionnaire research (Harris, 1997). Just like David, the students that Harris surveyed expected a few minutes of conversation before starting to discuss their writing. What makes the finding in this study interesting is that the difference in expectations manifests itself during the consultation both verbally and non-verbally. The initial introduction is very friendly. As Sarah and David introduce themselves, they shake hands, and both of them smile and maintain eye contact. Next, Sarah turns away from David and begins completing the conference note. At this point, she is sitting quite square to the desk, with her left hand holding the paper which she is writing on. When David says *I don't know if Julian [the researcher] wanted it like that... but uh I didn't go into a lot of details... so I'm probably going to be very natural* (lines 10-11), he turns the pages of the draft that he brought with him. Sarah gazes intermittently at David while he says this, but because he is focussing on turning the pages, he does not notice. When he does turn to her (during the *but...uhm* in line 13), she is once again looking at the conference note though she now has her right hand under her chin and has turned slightly towards him. The only point in this period of the exchange when the participants maintain eye contact is when they introduced themselves. Even though both gaze at the other for brief periods of time, their gazes are not mutual. David has tried to introduce a personal aspect to the consultation--the fact that he's not sure what's going to happen--but as far as he can tell this has not produced an interest in him personally. In fact, because of his own focus on his paper, he has missed Sarah's non-verbal interest in him and may even have sent messages that the paper should be the focus of the consultation at this point.

David's attempt to remedy this situation is also not successful. When he asks *do you need a background?* (line 14), he is again trying to engage Sarah's interest in him at the personal level. Sarah admitted to being confused by the student's use of *background*:

Actually I remember kinda thinking that it was a strange way to phrase it. I didn't know quite what he was asking... I kind of interpreted it as 'do you need to know something about the paper?', 'do you need to know something about me before we start'... And so I

figured I'd finish the conference notes, get the demographics out of the way, and have him explain the assignment.

Although Sarah identified the possibility that David was asking if she would like to know more about him as a person, she chose to adopt a less personal approach. In fact, this was exactly the opposite of what David wanted. He defined *background* as:

Kind of a little more time to ask where I was from... and how long I've been in the States... A little bit more background on my English... how long I was studying... I think it will be more easier for her to locate me... to locate me on a scale of how English I know and what she should expect from me because then it's kind of hard if you don't know where to start.

His body language mirrors his desire to talk more openly about himself. As he asks the question in line 14, David opens his whole body. He moves his left hand, which had been held against his cheek, to the side of his head and shakes it a little. Meanwhile, his right hand, which had been hanging at his side moves up to the table, moves up slightly, and the palm is turned towards the consultant. However, Sarah's non-verbal response to his question reinforces the fact that she is not going to ask personal questions. She moves her hand from her chin, puts it on the table so that it comes between herself and the student, and focuses once again on the conference note. At this point, David moves his right hand to the table and begins tapping his fingers, perhaps showing some frustration at the way that the question has been interpreted. Sarah's verbal reply to his question—*Go ahead and tell me about the assignment* (line 16)—is said a little faster and in a very business-like manner. The business-like direction that the consultation has taken is reinforced by the fact that Sarah moves to start writing on the conference note again and gestures to David's paper. Clearly, the writing and not the student will be the current focus of the consultation. Indeed, it is only when David mentions his teacher's feedback in line 29, that Sarah adopts a completely open posture. She pushes the conference note away, turns her body towards David so that she is sitting perpendicular to him, and places her left elbow on the table and her right elbow on the chair back.

I do not want to imply from the above analysis that Sarah had no interest at all in David as a 'person'; later exchanges between the participants clearly show the opposite. However, it should be clear that Sarah did not view the exchange of personal information as being an important part of the earliest stages of the consultation, and that she was able to communicate this both verbally and non-verbally. In fact, I would argue that this miscommunication was co-constructed. David's uncertainty about how a consultation should begin—this was, after all, his first visit to the writing center—can be seen in his comments in lines 10-12 where he appears to be asking for some clarification of what will happen, but his focus at this time is on his paper. When no clarification comes, he uses a word that is unambiguous for him but which contains ambiguity for Sarah. This ambiguity allows Sarah to make a

decision which is in accordance with her typical manner of starting consultations but different to that intended by David.

This early miscommunication did not seem to influence the overall effectiveness of the consultation because David managed to adjust quite easily to it; the next example of miscommunication also proved to be not particularly damaging, though for a different reason.

Miscommunication Event 2: "Plastic... sticky"

The second example of miscommunication occurs much later in the consultation. Having completed a discussion of how to write a good title, Sarah and David have decided to start outlining how the essay will continue. David wants to write about signs in his past that directed him towards his true vocation and also about how others see signs but ignore them in favor of other goals such as money. At this point, the following interchange occurs:

- 1 David: Okay, so here I need to elaborate on the signs.
(long pause while writing))
- 2 Sarah: Ok.
- 3 David: And then... money and--
- 4 Okay, so maybe here I will discuss... why people ignoring signs.
- 5 Sarah: Good.
- 6 David: <Q Ignore the signs Q> ((dictates to self while he's writing))
- 7 I just hope it won't be like kind of plastic,
- 8 ... sticky.
- 9 Because I don't know if a lot of people think like me,
- 10 and I don't want to lose a lot of people that--
- 11 You know,
- 12 what does it mean about signs?
- 13 Well it's kind of... prophecy or what... or what he is talking about?
- 14 Sarah: Oh, I see what you're saying.
- 15 ... That it might be a little too--
- 16 [Oh yeah.]
- 17 David: [Because] people are sometimes so blind to these kind of signs that--
- 18 So eh I don't know.
- 19 Sarah: Well now they've convinced themselves,
- 20 that being a business person was more important than being a teacher,
- 21 or whatever it was that they--
- 22 Being a geologist,
- 23 or whatever it was that they originally wanted to do.
- 24 Without even realizing that they were ignoring it.
- 25 Um... yeah it is dangerous that you might get too--
- 26 ...too fake... too artificial.
- 27 But... I think that if up here you're able to give concrete

- 28 examples,
 29 of the kind of signs that you saw as a kid,
 30 and the signs--
 31 You already gave an example of the kinds of signs you saw
 later in life.
 32 That those aren't just things that happen when you're a kid.
 33 They happen all the time,
 34 and we just sometimes ignore them.
 34 David: Okay, so maybe to speak about--
 35 before even--
 36 why people decide to say that,
 27 to bring a definite--
 38 ...a definition of what is... is signs in my--
 39 Sarah: Good.
 40 That these aren't magical things.

The interesting part of this exchange is David's use of *plastic.. sticky* in lines 7-8. Prior to this point, he is focused on the sheet of paper where he is organizing his ideas. When he says these words, he sits back, moves his left hand to the side of his head, shakes it beside his head (which from other examples during the consultation appears to indicate slight uncertainty), and looks at Sarah as if he is checking that she understood what he meant by this. In fact, her initial reaction was one of slight confusion. In the follow-up interview, she stated that she wasn't initially sure what the student meant by these terms. Her non-verbal language gives the signal that she is listening and interested—she smiles when David looks at her—but when David continues, she stops smiling, looks down, grimaces slightly, and half closes her eyes, all of which suggest that she is struggling to understand what the student meant by these terms. It is only when David says the word *prophecy* (line 13) that Sarah shows clear signs of having understood. She sits back, visibly relaxes, and becomes a lot more animated as she starts to explain what she thinks. When she says *Oh, I see what you're saying* in line 14, she puts the most emphasis on *oh* and *see*, thereby showing that her comprehension was not immediate. However, she is unable to find the word that expresses what she understands by *plastic.. sticky* and has to resort to hand gestures.

Following this, a period of prolonged eye contact begins, which continues until Sarah says *more important* in line 20, at which point David looks away and begins focusing intently on his paper. This posture continues until Sarah says *too fake... too artificial* in line 26. She pauses before she says this, which suggests that she is still struggling to come up with words that adequately reflect her understanding of *plastic...sticky*. David's reaction to these words suggests that these words do not reflect his meaning: He blinks rapidly several times, raises his eyebrows, moves his lips as if to start saying something (but is cut off by the consultant's *But... I think that* in line 27), and frowns.

In fact, the consultant and the student do have very different meanings for these words. In the follow-up interview, David contrasted his use of signs to the metaphysical use of signs in the novel *The Alchemist*:

It's like... I don't know if you read the book *The Alchemist*? Alright, so they talk there about signs like eh... you need to observe every day of life... like... they need to direct you, that are kind of metaphysics... you cannot really... you can't feel them, or you can't see them... It's totally something inside you, and I didn't want to be dragged into this direction... It's totally philosophic... so that's what I meant by plastic.

Sarah, on the other hand, constructed a much less idealistic meaning for these words: "I interpreted sticky to mean, so sweet and wonderful that it gushes [...] and I interpreted the plastic part to be like "fake", overly emotional, maybe not even emotional...but, uhm, overly done." Although both participants are working with different meanings for these words, David stated in his interview that he felt that the consultant had understood his meaning, though this did not occur immediately. What might explain this feeling?

One possible reason suggested by David is that the examples Sarah gave showed comprehension. Turning to the transcript, we see that, in fact, Sarah's discussion (lines 27-33) of solutions to the potential problem encompassed both meanings. Her suggestion that the student *give concrete examples* (line 27) gives the essay a dimension that would be neither 'overly emotional' nor 'sweet' and 'gushing', and it also addresses David's concern, expressed in the follow-up interview, that the essay "will still be down to earth and still... straight to the people and not like... eh... floating above normal human beings." In combination with her use of *magical* in line 40, this suggestion may have implied to David that she was concerned with the problems of signs being metaphysical and thus, may have allowed the effects of this miscommunication to have been diminished.

Miscommunication Event 3: "Ignorance"

The exchange discussed in the previous section continues a few turns later as follows:

- 1 Sarah: Defining them is a good idea.
- 2 David: Define signs. ((writes this on outline))
- 3 Why people ignore signs.
- 4 what's the--
- 5 I think... what's the outcome--
- 6 what's the outcome of ignoring them.
- 7 Sarah: Uh- huh.
- 8 David: Why it's bad, yeah.
- 9 Sarah: Yeah.
- 10 Good enough.
- 11 ... For now.
- 12 David: So er... next point.
- 13 ... Negative aspects of ignorance.
- 14 Sarah: @ Don't use that in your paper.

- 15 You don't want to insult your audience.
 16 David: Okay
 17 Negative, er...
 18 Sarah: Uhm
 19 David: Negative?
 20 Maybe not negative.
 21 Why to be negative?
 22 Sarah: Let's see.
 23 ... Well they're not positive. @@
 24 Uh, why people ignore the signs.
 25 David: What's this... ignorance... can... create?
 26 Sarah: Okay.
 27 David: Right. ((starts writing))
 28 Create. ((dictating to self))
 29 ... Create. ((corrects spelling))
 30 ... And then it will be enough because--
 31 [Am I missing something?]
 32 Sarah: [Really, by the time you get to that point] you'll be fine.
 33 What ignorance can create. ((reads from David's outline))
 34 And then you're going to finish up with some questions.

David is still focused on finishing his outline when he says *next point... the negative aspects of ignorance* (lines 12-13). This produces laughter from Sarah along with the comments *don't use that in your paper... you don't want to insult your audience* (lines 14-15). In her follow-up interview, Sarah commented that she thought the use of *ignorance* was "an accurate term he was saying there... Ignoring the signs and ignorance and lack of knowledge about the benefits of following the signs." However, she was concerned that the audience's reaction to the word's connotation would be "Whoa! Ignorant! You're calling me stupid!" which is why she told him not to use the word. However, it is clear from the transcript and from the follow-up interviews that David did not understand what Sarah's concerns were. When asked whether he was aware that *ignorance* would insult his audience, he said "No... Even now I still don't know what's the exact meaning of ignorance." For him the word meant "to ignore things because you think you're above it" without having the meaning of calling someone "uneducated." The reason for his continued confusion can be found in a combination of the language he and Sarah employed, the paralinguistic features of that the exchange, and non-verbal cues.

When David uses *ignorance* in line 13, he is not looking at Sarah. His gaze is fixed on the paper on which he is writing, and he has missed Sarah's nod when he says *negative aspects*. At this point he has received no non-verbal cues about which word he shouldn't use but he does know that he has made a mistake because Sarah stresses *don't* and *that* in line 14 as well as *don't* and *insult* in the next line. David is receiving a lot of prosodic cues that he has committed a faux pas, but his reaction in line 17, where he tries to find

alternatives to *negative*, suggests that he has not comprehended the nature of his mistake. This is hardly surprising. In lines 3 and 6, David uses *ignore* and *ignoring* without comment from Sarah; for him, the use of *ignorance* is simply a continuation of the meaning he has just employed. However, there are clear non-verbal signs during lines 17-21 that Sarah is confused by the direction that the student's thoughts have taken. There is a long pause here during which David is obviously trying hard to redirect his thoughts. He is hunched over the desk, moving his head slightly from side to side, resting his left arm on the table with his hand held to his mouth and his finger rubbing under his nose. He is clearly having difficulty, which is why Sarah's *let's see* in line 22 causes him to sit back and relax a little. However, the feedback he gets is not what he's expecting. Sarah stresses *not* in her comment *well they're not positive* (line 23). She then uses *ignore* in her next comment (line 24).

David has now received negative feedback about his attempt to change the word *negative*, which is the word whose use he thought Sarah was advising against. He has also just heard Sarah use *ignore* from which he is deriving his meaning of *ignorance*. Since there were no other content words in the sentence to which Sarah reacted, where is he going wrong? His uncertainty about where he is erring can be seen in the next line. When he says *ignorance can create?* (line 25), he says it slowly, with clear articulation and a slight pause after each word. While he says this, he is watching Sarah closely, trying to see which words she reacts to. At this point, he receives no negative feedback from Sarah. She says *okay* quietly and nods her head, all the time looking at his paper rather than at him. Perhaps she has decided by this time that David knows and intends the meaning that she has advised against. In her interview, she said:

I think if it had been a native speaker, I might not have made that comment because... Well, I probably would have thought about it... I probably would have said that comment real quick like I did... But with the native speaker, they might have meant it that way, and I might have said it more like 'Don't use that word, remember what people will think' rather than 'don't use that word, people might think'.

What is interesting about this quote is that at the end she implies that she would tell a non-native speaker what the connotation was but would merely remind the native speaker of its existence. In fact, she tells David neither what word might offend the audience nor why it might offend them. With such little feedback, it is no wonder that he remained confused a full week after the consultation.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TUTOR TRAINING

The above discussion has demonstrated that semantic, paralinguistic, and non-verbal factors combine in complex and unpredictable ways to produce miscommunication between non-native English-speaking students and native English-speaking writing center consultants. Thus, while all the miscommunication events discussed here arose from the use of a word—or

words—whose meaning(s) were either unclear or ambiguous to at least one of the participants, whether the initial miscommunication was resolved or maintained depended on the interaction of a wide range of factors. Given the number of factors and the complexity of their interactions, how can we sensitize writing center tutors to the process of cross-cultural miscommunication?

One possible starting point is to increase tutor's awareness of the causes of miscommunication through viewing videotapes of miscommunication events, preferably in conjunction with segments from follow-up interviews. The consultation described here showed several elements which contributed to miscommunication: differing expectations of tutors and students; non-standard use of language by non-native speakers who are attempting to fit their available linguistic resources to the communicative task at hand; use of language with meanings (denotative or connotative) that are not shared by interlocutors; contradictions between verbal and non-verbal language; and failure to notice the non-verbal cues which would allow participants to interpret verbal messages more effectively. By asking tutors to try to identify the causes of a miscommunication event, to follow its co-construction by participants, to watch for non-verbal aspects of communication, and to compare their assumptions and analyses with the perspectives presented by the interlocutors, we can help tutors to become more reflective about how they communicate or fail to communicate with non-native speakers.

This training goes beyond the sensitization described in Szpara (1994). Szpara's training program aims to develop tutors' awareness in three areas (their own and others' attitudes to writing, different writing styles, and forms of non-verbal communication in other cultures) by encouraging tutors to hypothesize how a particular cultural difference may affect communication. While this type of training program is certainly valuable, it may result in tutors having a fragmentary understanding of how cultural differences interact. By examining real examples of miscommunication and discussing how multiple elements interact to produce them, tutors may develop an awareness that is deeper, more organic, and less hypothetical.

A corollary of this point is that the greater the range of miscommunication events that tutors view, the greater the range of insights they are likely to garner about the nature of cross-cultural communication. A study such as this one—which examines just a few miscommunication events involving the same two individuals—only begins to scratch the surface of the many ways that miscommunication can and does occur during interactions between native-English speaking tutors and ESL students. It cannot provide the variety of events and participants necessary for an extensive understanding of the problems of cross-cultural communication. This suggests a need for many more studies such as this one, not just to broaden our knowledge of the process of miscommunication during writing center consultations, but also to provide the materials with which to train tutors.

Notes

- ¹ Although it is obvious that a number of factors such as gender, age, and social class may contribute to interpersonal communication, the focus of the present paper on the cross-cultural causes of miscommunication has necessitated limiting the analysis to a discussion of linguistic and non-linguistic behavior.

APPENDIX A

Symbols Used in Transcription (from Du Bois et al, 1993)

Discourse Feature	Symbol
Intonation unit	carriage return
Truncated intonation unit	--
Word	space
Truncated word	-
Speaker identity/ turn start	:
Speech overlap	[]
Pause	...
Laughter	@
Quotation quality	<Q Q>
Researcher's comments	(())

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