

Misunderstandings

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1. Introduction

Misunderstandings are a fact of everyday life. This is true even when we are operating in our native languages, but when we try to communicate in a foreign language the potential for misunderstanding becomes even greater. This can be seen both from the perspective of being a teacher of a foreign language trying to give “student-proof” instructions and to understand what the students in their turn want to say, and from the perspective of being a language learner.

Misunderstandings can give rise to both frustration and humour. Perhaps it is fair to say that frustration arises at the level of an uncomprehended misunderstanding; humour depends on being able to see the discrepancy between what should have happened and what actually did happen in the communication. The realisation that there has been misunderstanding, however, is a positive step in language learning, as only when we become aware of our failure to communicate can we make progress in eradicating the errors in our understanding or in our production of the foreign language which have led to the problems. We become more competent in communicating in a foreign language by learning what does *not* work as much as by being successful in our communication.

Tarone and Yule (1987:50) comment that:

Research on the strategic competence of ESL learners is quite recent. Two broad areas may be investigated:

- (1) the overall skill of a speaker in successfully transmitting information to a hearer;
- (2) the use of communication strategies by a speaker when problems are encountered in the process of attempting to transmit information.

This would seem to be equally true of EFL learners as in the situation in Japan. We judge the success of the language learner by the results achieved in communication. However, when investigating causes of misunderstandings, we would also have to take into consideration the receptive skills of the language learner; that is, the ability to understand what another speaker is saying, and to recognize communication breakdown and take appropriate action. Some degree of misunderstanding is an inevitable part of the language learning process, but a successful language learner can be said to be one who can recognize that there is misunderstanding, discover the causes, and avoid a similar problem in the future.

This paper will discuss different kinds of misunderstanding which may arise between speakers of English and speakers of Japanese. Most of the data is based on a questionnaire completed by students at the end of their second year of study at Kwassui Women's College who went to Pitzer College in California for a three week homestay

and study programme in March 1994 (see appendix). The students were asked to make a note of and comment on misunderstandings that they became aware of during their stay in America. They were also asked to answer questions about the frequency and type of misunderstandings, the reasons for them, and how they might be avoided. Thirty five people responded to the questionnaire.

2. Discussion of the questionnaire results

The students were asked how many misunderstandings they thought they had in America, whether these were of mostly the same kinds or of different kinds, and what they thought the main reason for misunderstanding was.

2. 1 Number of misunderstandings

The first question dealt with perceived frequency of misunderstanding.

In America, do you think you had	
(a) no misunderstandings?	2
(b) a few misunderstandings?	17
(c) quite a lot of misunderstandings?	9
(d) many misunderstandings?	5
	(No answer 2)

Here we can see that almost all of the students were aware of at least a few misunderstandings. What, of course, we cannot tell is to

what extent the students' perceptions accord with reality. Given the students' dislike of making mistakes, they may feel that answer (a) implies success and answer (d) suggests a lack of ability. However, given that even native speakers might well not manage three weeks of communication without any misunderstandings it seems more likely that the students who claimed not to have had any difficulties were unaware of problems than that they were not involved in any misunderstandings. Those who answered (d) may actually be better language learners in that they may have a greater awareness of what is happening in their communications.

2. 2. Kinds of misunderstandings

The second question focussed on variety of misunderstandings.

Were the misunderstandings of mostly the same kind, or of different kinds?

Same	24
Different	5
No answer	6

Again, we cannot tell whether the students really did repeatedly have problems of specific types, or whether it was only in certain areas that they were aware of their problems, leading them to think that their misunderstandings were all of the same kind.

2. 3. Reasons for misunderstandings

The students were asked to comment on the causes of misunderstandings, and gave a wide variety of responses. The question was:

What do you think was the main reason you misunderstood?

32 people responded to this question. This included all of those who responded "same kind" to the question discussed above about the kinds of misunderstandings they experienced, plus eight people who either answered "different kinds" or didn't answer. As some people listed two or three reasons for misunderstandings, there were 48 different responses. These seem to fall into four types: vocabulary based misunderstandings, problems with listening skills, production based misunderstandings and culturally based misunderstandings.

2. 3. 1. Vocabulary based misunderstandings

17 people commented on problems which we can classify as being vocabulary based.

- | | |
|--|------------|
| (a) lack of vocabulary | (9 people) |
| (b) ambiguity | (2 people) |
| (c) wrong choice of word | (1 person) |
| (d) Japanese English; loan words | (1 person) |
| (e) come/go | (2 people) |
| (f) slang | (1 person) |
| (g) difficulty of level of vocabulary | |

leading to wrong guessing (1 person)

Judging by the level of English expression of the students giving these responses, vocabulary based difficulties were perceived by students at all levels of fluency. For example, under (a) above, lack of vocabulary was expressed both as, "I realized I didn't know many words," and, "I have little vocabraries [sic]." The problem of dealing with ambiguity was expressed by one student as, "I only knew one meaning of those words," and by another as, "There are many meanings each word."

2. 3. 2. Problems with listening skills

11 people commented on problems arising from poor listening skills.

- (a) "listening skills" (5 people)
- (b) "hearing skills" (4 people)
- (c) "I couldn't understand English well." (1 person)
- (d) "Listeners do not listen carefully." (1 person)

The student who gave response (c) seems, in the context of her other answers, to be referring to her listening skills. Response (d) may be a comment on the student's own ability or a complaint about perceived lack of attention on the part of those she was speaking to. With reference to responses of type (b) we may note in passing that whereas "my poor skill of hearing," although not the way a native

speaker would express it, is clear as a reference to poor listening skills, the student who wrote “bad hearing” as the reason for her misunderstandings is herself liable to be misunderstood out of context as having a tendency to deafness.

2. 3. 3. Production based misunderstandings

13 people mentioned problems which we can classify as arising from the production of English, mostly in connection with either pronunciation or speed, but also with regard to difficulties with the expression of ideas – the gap between thought and production. Problems were perceived in the following areas.

- (a) pronunciation of Japanese students (6 people)
- (b) pronunciation of native speakers (1 person)
- (c) either way? (1 person)
- (d) rate of speech of native speakers (3 people)
- (e) expressing ideas (2 people)

The student who gave response (b) citing the pronunciation of native speakers as causing difficulty commented, “Their pronunciation wasn’t what I learned at school.” This is indeed a potential problem, and whereas the native English speaking instructors at Kwassui include four nationalities and a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds, and although commercially produced materials increasingly add variety to the types of English used for listening practice, it is still impossible to expose the students to anything like the range of accents and

speech styles that they may encounter in California.

Responses (c) and (e) were rather vague. Under (c), "Speakers do not utter clearly which makes listeners miss the words," could be a comment on inaccurate pronunciation by Japanese students or a complaint about the reduced forms found in relaxed, rapid English speech, or even about mumbling. The responses classified under (d) were expressed as, "I could not answer well," and, "I couldn't express what I wanted to tell," but the reasons are vague and could be due to difficulties with vocabulary, grammar, etc.

2. 3. 4. Culturally based misunderstandings

Five people gave responses which could possibly be classified as referring to culturally based difficulties.

- (a) culture - no examples given (2 people)
- (b) jokes (1 person)
- (c) reluctance to admit failure to understand ... (2 people)

The responses classified under (a) above were expressed as, "I think it is a view of thinking and a style of life," and, "I think that it came from culture difference." Jokes, as mentioned in (b), may be a problem because they are linguistically difficult, but they are also likely to be culture-bound, that is, dependent on a knowledge of the culture. Students have also reported difficulties in realising when Americans are joking and not to be taken seriously, a potentially hurtful source of misunderstanding. This particular student wrote, "They liked to

joke, but at first I couldn't understand joke and I felt bad." Under (c) above, the student who wrote, "Japanese students pretend to understand what Americans say," may be referring to a cultural tendency which is a source of perpetuating misunderstanding. (The writer would have to admit, however, that occasionally "a British teacher pretends to understand what Japanese students say!") On the other hand, the student who wrote, "When I didn't understand, I couldn't say I don't know more than 3 times," may be expressing a universally understandable embarrassment rather than a culturally influenced reluctance to admit failure to understand.

3. Linguistic causes of misunderstanding

Having considered the reasons suggested by the students for the misunderstandings that they became aware of, let us now turn to a discussion of the linguistic bases for misunderstanding which appear in the examples which they provided.

3. 1. Phonologically based misunderstandings

Under the general heading of phonologically based misunderstandings we can consider difficulties due to poor pronunciation and misplaced stress and/or intonation.

3. 1. 1. Difficulty due to poor pronunciation.

Examples provided by the students focussed on confusion created by mispronunciation of /l/, /v/, /h/ and /z/, and by giving full stress to unstressed vowels.

Two examples of misunderstanding arose from mispronunciation of /l/. The first student wrote:

I gave a cloth wrapper for my host family. It was a design of sumo wrestler. I said to her, "This is sumo wrestler. Do you know sumo wrestler?" But she said, "Sumo restaurant?"

Here the misunderstanding due to /l/ being heard as /r/ would appear to have been compounded by the student's not pronouncing the final *r* of *wrestler*. The second student also described a misunderstanding with confusion about an /l/ sound and the end of the word.

I said to host mother, "Today is cloudy day," but she answered "Yes, very crowded, we must wait so long" (in the car).

Other examples similarly seem to involve misunderstanding arising from more than one problem in the pronunciation of a single word. One student reported:

I said *vanilla* but they thought I said *banana*.

Clearly there is a problem here of the student's pronunciation of /v/ being perceived as /b/, but she may also have been giving full stress to vowels in an unstressed position, making the word more difficult for the hearer to recognise.

Another student reported:

There was a sheep meadow near my host house, and I wanted to know the owner of the field, so I asked my host mother that "Whose sheep?" I meant, "Who owns the field?" but my host mother said that, "Not foods sheep."

Here not only is the student's pronunciation of /h/ being perceived as /f/ (the normal Japanese pronunciation before /u/), but her pronunciation of /z/ may be being perceived as /dz/, although it is possible that the host mother was just trying to make sense of a word she heard as /fuz/.

3. 1. 2. Difficulty in distinguishing different phonemes

As well as misunderstandings due to their own pronunciation problems, students also reported difficulties when they could not make out sounds in the speech of English speakers. One student reported difficulty distinguishing between /ʃ/ and /dʒ/.

"He said *measure* but I thought it was *major*."

Three students reported difficulties in distinguishing between the *-y* and *-een* endings in numbers. One student was distressed when her host mother wanted to leave at 8:15 when the student had understood that she must be ready at 8:50.

3. 1. 3. Difficulty due to stress or intonation errors

Difficulty due to misplaced stress and/or intonation seems to be responsible for the following misunderstanding.

I said, "How old are you?" but children thought, "How are you?"

It seems likely that the student stressed *How* and *are* instead of *old* (which, if she had difficulty with the /l/ sound may have been mispronounced anyway), and the children therefore understood *How* and *are* to be the important words in the sentence.

3. 2. Grammar based misunderstandings

Students reported difficulties with two types of grammar based misunderstandings, related to negative questions and to tenses.

3. 2. 1. Difficulty with negative questions

Negative questions were a frequent source of difficulty, as in the three examples cited below.

She said to me, "Don't you want to go with me?" I wanted to go with her, but I said, "No." If I wanted to go, I should have said, "Yes."

Here the student, following the Japanese pattern of agreeing and disagreeing, says "No" to disagree with the negative "not" of the

question. (I don't *not* want to go → I want to go.) The host mother, however, understands on the basis of the English pattern of agreeing and disagreeing, which means that the student's "No" qualifies the main verb of the question, regardless of whether that question is asked with an affirmative or a negative verb form. ("Do/don't you want to go with me?" "Yes." → "I want to go with you." "No." → "I don't want to go with you.") A similar difference in logic is seen in the following example, which the student goes on to explain.

Host father: Didn't you lock the door?

I: No, I haven't yet.

HF: No?

I: Yes (I mistooked).

In Japan, when we asked "Don't you~?" usually we answer "Yes" when we don't agree. Difference between "Yes" and "No" is very difficult.

The student who provided the third example agrees that negative questions are difficult.

When my host father asked me "You don't have enough time?" I answered "Yes." (In fact I don't have time) Then he asked me "Yes? You don't have?" I think negative question is difficult to answer quickly.

3. 2. 2. Difficulty with tenses

Two students gave examples of misunderstandings which arose from problems with tenses.

I asked my host mother "Is it fine tomorrow?" She said "For what?" I asked about the weather but she didn't under[stand] me.

Here the problem of the student's use of a present tense verb when a native speaker would use a future form is compounded by the fact that *It is fine* to refer to the weather without specifying that the weather is the topic is primarily a British usage and not recognised as such by the American host mother.

In the second example, the student still seems to be confused.

I thought that "How long have you been staying here?" meant the length of my stay in the U.S. by that time, but actually it means the whole length of my stay in the U.S.

One wonders what led to the confusion here, as the student is correct in her initial understanding of the question as referring to the length of her stay in the U.S. until that time. (The question "How long are you staying here?" would be needed to refer to the length of the whole stay.)

3. 3. Lexically based misunderstandings

The misunderstandings reported by the students which can be classified as having a lexical basis arose from problems of ambiguity, incorrect understanding of meaning, and two specific difficulties: the difference between *come* and *go*, and the difference between *what?* and *how?*

3. 3. 1. Ambiguity

Problems may arise when a student hears a word which she thinks she recognises being used with a meaning which she has not in fact learned. One example overheard at Pitzer involved a member of staff telling a student which door to go through.

It's on the left — right beside the stairs.

Whereas this would tell a native speaker that the door being sought was adjacent to the stairs, the student recognised *right* as the opposite of *left* and still did not know where to go.

Another example involved a student who did not know that *to drive* may mean being driven by someone else as well as driving oneself.

He said "Do you want to drive around here?" Actually he asked me if I wanted to look around here by a car. I thought he asked me if I tried to drive the car, so I answered "No!" In fact, I wanted to look around here.

3. 3. 2. Incorrect understanding

Misunderstanding may arise from a simple wrong idea about what a word means, or from too wide or too narrow a concept of the scope of the meaning of a word. Three students commented on misunderstandings of this type.

I thought that *naughty* meant *active* but actually it means *bad*.

'Active' may actually have been a reasonable guess at the meaning of *naughty* in context if the student was encountering the word for the first time. The second example would seem to involve an adjustment of meaning in context.

I thought that school meant school, but actually it meant high school.

The third student comments that:

I thought that city and town have different meaning, but they have same meaning.

Again, depending on context, this may or may not be true.

3. 3. 3 *Come and go*

The usage of *come* and *go* is a source of difficulty as the rules governing the choice between them differ in English and in Japanese,

at least in the standard dialects. Students may therefore be uncertain which one to choose, even in cases where both languages would use the same one. The matter is further complicated as the Japanese verb *kaeru* may be translated into English as *come back* or *go back* depending on context. One student reported:

My host brother came back to the home. I wanted to ask him, "When will you go back to your dormitory?" But I said, "When will you come back to your dormitory?" He seemed not to understand what I said.

3. 3. 4. *What? and How?*

There are utterances in English in which either "What?" or "How?" may be used interchangeably without seriously affecting the meaning; for example, "What do you feel about...?" and "How do you feel about...?" However, as the following student's example shows, sometimes the wrong choice may lead to misunderstanding.

I've been taken by a host grampa to school. He lives next door. The other day, I said to him, "What did you spend yesterday?" He seemed to be in trouble for a short while, and he said, "Do you mean~~~?" I couldn't understand well, so I answered, "Yes, yes." So he began to talk. "I live with my wife and my daughter, so we spend 15 dollars for a day. We make a lot of economies." At that time, I noticed I have mistaken. He took my question about "money" but [I meant]

“time”. I was verry sorry to be too personal for him. I should have asked “How did you spend the time (yesterday)?” Next day I told him about that, and I could clear up misunderstanding.

3. 4. Translation based misunderstandings

The students found that misunderstanding may arise both from literal translation from Japanese to English, and from use of words which have been borrowed from English into Japanese and have changed their meaning or the way in which they can be used in the process. The first example cited below involves the use of the word *pair* in a way that is possible in Japanese but not in English.

When I tried to buy watches, I had a misunderstanding. I wanted to buy two watches for me and my boyfriend, so I said to the clerk, “Please show me pair watches,” and the clerk said, “Pierre watches? Just a moment . . .” I had to say to her, “Please show me matching watches.”

The second example, which might be said to involve lack of understanding rather than misunderstanding, is based on literal translation.

I said, “I’ll take a shower from now.” I repeated many times, but my host sister couldn’t understand. After that, she told me that they didn’t have the expression “from now”. In

Japanese we say *imakara*. I didn't know that I translated Japanese to English directly.

4. Non-linguistic causes of misunderstanding

Although from general experience we know that there may be many non-linguistic causes of misunderstanding, the students provided relatively few examples, perhaps because they understood the focus of the questionnaire to be on linguistic causes.

Misunderstanding may be perpetuated through lack of language sensitivity—an inability to guess. It seems that some people are able to deal with non-standard utterances whereas others are not. In the second example cited in 3. 4. above, we do not know the age of the host sister who was unable to understand “from now.” Perhaps she was quite young, as we would expect an older person to be able to work out a connection with “from now on,” which, while it would not be used naturally by a native speaker in the context given, would make sense.

Misunderstandings may also be perpetuated by pretending that you understand when you do not. The student who provided the example of a misunderstanding arising from a confusion of *how* and *what* cited in 3. 3. 4. above admitted that she said, “Yes, yes,” although she did not know what she was agreeing with. There are times when saying, “Yes . . . yes . . . yes . . .” even when you are not completely sure that you understand allows you to work out what is being said as the conversation progresses. At other times, however, giving the impression of understanding may lead to confusion and

misunderstanding. One student reported:

Even if I didn't understand what they told me, I also said "Yes" at first, and said "No" when they told me again. They confused, but it was not very important.

We might hope that this refers to an isolated incident, and not to the student's regular way of dealing with situations where she did not understand!

One example of a culturally based misunderstanding arose from a student trying to avoid a direct refusal in English as she would when speaking Japanese.

For example, when my host mother would take me to go shopping, I wanted to refuse, but I could not easily say "No" So I was asked if I wanted to go by her, and I said, "Yes, but I . . . I." It took my mother long time to understand that I didn't want to go, so I let her feel bad.

Another Japanese would have understood that in "Yes, but I . . ." the important part of the utterance was "but," meaning, 'but actually I don't want to go,' and contradicting the "Yes" which is said for the sake of politeness and not for its literal meaning. The American host mother, with no way of knowing this, focussed on the "Yes" and assumed that the student really meant that she wanted to go.

5. Possible strategies to improve communication

Given that all foreign language learners are involved in misunderstandings from time to time, is there anything which can be done to reduce their frequency? Although we may feel some sympathy with the student who, in response to the question, "What do you think would help you to have fewer misunderstandings?" wrote, "Sorry, I have no idea," most of the students were more positive in believing that there were measures which they could take. They tend to focus on language skills, with only three people commenting on the need for cultural knowledge. In the currently available commercial materials for EFL and ESL teaching, however, there is an increased awareness of potential culturally based misunderstandings and the need for consciousness raising.

5. 1. Suggestions from the questionnaire

29 people responded to the question, "What do you think would help you to have fewer misunderstandings?" giving a total of 36 answers.

- | | |
|---|------------|
| (a) Repetition | (8 people) |
| (b) Good pronunciation | (3 people) |
| (c) Increase vocabulary | (4 people) |
| (d) Study slang | (1 person) |
| (e) Study more | (2 people) |
| (f) Study English conversation | (1 person) |
| (g) Practice speaking and listening | (4 people) |

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| (h) Talk to foreigners | (3 people) |
| (i) Listen very carefully | (1 person) |
| (j) Non-verbal clues | (2 people) |
| (k) Cultural knowledge | (3 people) |
| (l) Attention to context | (1 person) |
| (m) Use a dictionary | (1 person) |
| (n) They spoke slowly | (1 person) |
| (o) Sorry, I have no idea | (1 person) |

We see here that the most popular suggestion for solving misunderstanding is to ask for repetition. One student advocated:

To ask again and again.

Another advocated persistence until the point is established:

It is the discussion until we understand each other.

Asking for repetition, however, implies that you *know* there is a problem, which is more likely to be the case when there is a communication breakdown due to non-comprehension than when there is a misunderstanding which may initially go unnoticed. The same applies to answer (m), "Use a dictionary." First you have to realise that you *need* a dictionary.

Many students focussed on the need to improve their own skills and practise using English more, with the need for good pronuncia-

tion and more vocabulary being the most popular specific suggestions. Answer (e), "Study more," is, although vague, at least practical in that overall improvement is likely to lead to greater ease in communication, although one wonders just what the students think it would be helpful to study. Similarly one wonders how the writer of (f), "Study English conversation," plans to go about it. A conversation class would be of considerably more help, one suspects, than studying printed English dialogues. Knowing *about* English conversation is very different from actually being able to communicate in English. Suggestion (g), "Practice speaking and listening," and suggestion (h), "Talk to foreigners," show a willingness to learn from experience which may be more effective than isolated individual study.

Fewer people focussed on paying attention to the context of a conversation. The student who answered (i), "Listen very carefully," is aware of the need for action *in* the situation, as are those who suggested watching for non-verbal clues (answer (j)). They advocate looking for gestures, and watching facial expressions, particularly in the context of joking. One student specifically mentioned the need to pay attention to context, and ask questions if an exchange does not seem to be making sense. She recommended:

To think about situation and to ask him what he mean.

Only one person put the onus for helping to eliminate misunderstandings on to the conversation partner, although it is not clear whether answer (n), "They spoke slowly," is a fact which aided com-

prehension, or a recommendation — ‘I would not misunderstand *if* they spoke slowly.’

Three people mentioned cultural knowledge as an aid to avoiding misunderstanding (answer (k)). One of them was aware that this should ideally be two-way understanding, with both Japanese and Americans learning about each other’s cultures. This is a point to which EFL and ESL textbooks are increasingly paying attention.

5. 2. Consciousness raising

In recent years a number of second and foreign language textbooks which focus on cultural sources of misunderstanding have appeared on the market for learners of both English and Japanese. For example, Levine, Baxter, and McNulty (1987) focus on cultural miscommunication and ask students to discuss what went wrong before explaining what was probably happening and why. An example is given below.

Read the situation and choose the appropriate explanation or explanations. There may be more than one possible answer.

Situation: An American, Diane, invited her Japanese friend, Michiko, to come to her house one afternoon. Michiko couldn’t come and said, “No, I can’t come. Please invite me again to your house.” Diane was surprised by what Michiko said.

Why do you think Diane was surprised? (p. 58)

Three possible answers are given.

Conversely, Higurashi (1987) bases her book for Japanese language learners on texts which describe misunderstandings involving foreigners living in Japan. John, for example, complains to his Japanese friend that Japanese people are nosy, only to discover that he has understood *dochira e* ('Where are you going?') to be a real question (and therefore answered it and developed a conversation), whereas it is actually being used as a greeting which only requires a response like *chotto soko made* ('Oh, just there') (Higurashi, pp. 19–21). He has misunderstood phatic communion to be real conversation.

Texts such as these can provide important background to help with the avoidance of (or at least the awareness of) culturally based misunderstandings.

6. Conclusion

Even with increased cultural awareness, however, the potential for numerous linguistically based misunderstandings remains. One of the students who responded to the questionnaire realised that there were probably more misunderstandings than she became aware of. She comments:

There were many misunderstandings that were not noticed.

Smith (1978:67) defines comprehension as "a state of having no unanswered questions." He is talking about reading, but it is also true

of oral dialogue that a participant who does not question that a satisfactory exchange has taken place will believe that both sides have understood, no matter how many misunderstandings have in fact occurred.

Communication involves negotiation of meaning. This is true of dialogue within a language, and becomes more complicated cross-culturally. Barnett and Kincaid (1983) define communication as "a process of convergence in which two or more participants share information in order to reach a better mutual understanding of each other and the world in which they live," and they call for "a model of communication that focuses on the mutual relationship between participants" (p. 173). Misunderstandings, then, may be seen as a mutual problem, and both (or all) of those involved in the communication are responsible for discovering and resolving problems which arise. As one of the students quoted in 5. 1. (a) above said, we need "discussion until we understand each other."

Overcoming misunderstanding, then, requires awareness that there is a problem, and effort to resolve it. In the face of all the potential misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication, it may be tempting to say, as some people do, that understanding is not possible between people of different cultures who speak different languages. A Third Year Communication class at Kwassui was asked, "Is it possible for Japanese to understand foreigners, and foreigners to understand Japanese?" Some were doubtful, but one student said, "Yes, if we really want to." At one level this is a simplistic answer, relying as it does on the desire to communicate successfully as the means of

overcoming misunderstandings, but at another level it may be seen as the only solution.

Appendix: Questionnaire About Misunderstandings

I am doing research into the causes of misunderstandings between Japanese speakers and English speakers. I would be grateful if, while you are in America, you would make a note of misunderstandings that you become aware of, and give this paper to one of the escorts on the last day at Pitzer. (If you have misunderstandings in San Francisco, please let me know about those too!) Thank you.

There are many kinds of misunderstanding, but for example:

I thought (s)he said... but later I found out that (s)he said...

I said... but they thought I said...

I meant... but they thought I meant...

I thought that "... " (word or expression) meant... but actually it means...

In Japan in such a situation we would say... so at first I didn't understand when (s)he said...

I thought... was written on the notice, but actually it was...

Please answer these questions.

In America, do you think you had

- (a) no misunderstandings?
- (b) a few misunderstandings?
- (c) quite a lot of misunderstandings?
- (d) many misunderstandings?

If you answered (b), (c) or (d):

Were the misunderstandings of mostly the same kind, or of different kinds?

What do you think was the main reason that you misunderstood?

What do you think would help you to have fewer misunderstandings?

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