

# Interaction and the Negotiation of Meaning

From T. Pica (1987). "Second-language acquisition, social interaction, and the classroom." *Applied Linguistics*, 8, 3-21.

## **Signals of comprehension difficulty**

- *Confirmation checks*: Moves by which one speaker seeks confirmation of the other's preceding utterance through repetition, with rising intonation, of what was perceived to be all or part of the preceding utterance.
- *Clarification requests*: Moves by which one speaker seeks assistance in understanding the other speaker's preceding utterance through questions, ... statements such as "I don't understand," or imperatives such as "Please repeat."
- *Comprehension checks*: Moves by which one speaker attempts to determine whether the other speaker has understood a preceding message.

## **Examples of meaning negotiation**

1

### **Learner (NNS English)**

no no I - *what? what you say?*  
(clarification request)

no, alone - from Toronto

### **Interlocutor (NS English)**

so you came here by yourself or did you come with friends?

did you come to the states with friends or did you come alone?

2

### **Learner (NNS English)**

*High marks?*  
(confirmation check)

Oh no in English yes em B

### **Interlocutor (NS English)**

did you get high marks? Good grades?

good grades A's and B's – did you get A in English?

3

**Learner (NNS English)**

*excuse me?*  
(clarification request)

Mmhm

4

**Learner (NNS English)**

and they have the chwach there

the chwach - I know someone that

like um like American people they always go  
there every Sunday

you know - every morning that there pr-  
that-the American people get dressed up to go  
to um chwach

5

**Learner (NNS English)**

like us three months ago that the SEPTA doft  
doft doft

no you lo- you you lend me I am you

Debts okay they debt million of dollars

**Interlocutor (NS English)**

OK, he's dancing with the woman doctor

the the young man doctor is dancing with the  
woman doctor, *right?*  
(comprehension check)

**Interlocutor (NS English)**

*the what?*  
(clarification request)

*what does it mean?*  
(clarification request)

yes?

oh to church - I see

**Interlocutor (NS English)**

*dropped?*  
(confirmation check)

oh owes – debt

oh yeah yeah

6

**Learner (NNS English)**

... so this young woman doctor hope this  
young man doctor drive car, go home ... now  
this young woman boyfriend very angry ... he  
want have a very no- good idea for this girl

can't speak girl. and why? because this this  
girl very angry also. *you know what I mean?*  
(comprehension check)

**Interlocutor (NS English)**

*which girl? the one who can't speak?*  
(clarification request)

Yes

7

**Learner (NNS English)**

I don't like because the people from that  
country - the mens and the womens - the men  
they think too much

my country say the people from there the  
many many times all time they say they are  
the last *aysti* in the Sahara

they say maybe another word.in the Sahara  
*understand?*  
(comprehension check)

they say I am

the last *aysti* in the Sahara

is too hot in the Sahara there are no water

*ays:ti*

or the or the the last very cold coke

**Interlocutor (NS English)**

I've heard others say that also

the last *aysti*? *aysti*?  
(confirmation check)

I understand Sahara, but I don't understand  
*aysti*

Right I am the last

but what's *aysti*?  
(clarification request)

no no but *they're the last aysti*?  
(clarification check)

iced tea! I see

all right I see