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MODELLING OF (MIS)COMMUNICATION

The purpose of the paper is to present a multi-layered model of (mis)communication., substantial step forward in research on (mis)communication. In order to reach such a goal we are going to create a multi-layered model of communication, enabling one to define and classify different types of communication failures. Before giving a short overview of research on this issue, a clarification of the topic is needed. Non-understanding is a wider concept than miscommunication. Consider the examples (1)–(3).

> 1) *John doesn't understand Mary / US foreign policy / modern art.*
> 2) *John didn't understand the play he watched.*
> 3) *John didn't understand what Mary said.*

Example (1) demonstrates non-understanding at an abstract level; we are not dealing with a particular situation of communication, but with John's more or less permanent opinions, attitudes, or abilities (he dislikes Mary's behaviour and US foreign policy, or is unable to understand modern art). Example (3), on the contrary, is clearly connected to a concrete situation of communication which took place in the past. Example (2) stands somewhere between (1) and (3): it refers to a real occurrence in John's life, but here it is not just a single utterance that John failed to understand, but a larger fragment of communication (in this case, a play). The scope of the Project is restricted to cases like (3), but the approach and model which will be introduced below may be modified so as to be applicable to the description of cases like (1) and (2) as well.

We must further clarify our classification of the different degrees and forms of communication failures, and the terminology used in this connection. As a matter of fact, the existence of a variety of different terms reflects the complexity of the phenomenon. Even more confusingly, researchers tend to use the same terms with different meanings (for reasoning about these and other terms, see, e.g. Grimshaw 1980, Coupland & al. 1991; Foppa 1995, Weigand 1999, Tzanne 2000). The main cases are misunderstanding (the recipient understands the utterance differently from what the speaker meant) and non-understanding of a phrase (the recipient fails altogether to understand what the speaker said). Miscommunication and communication failure are a wider concept, also including, among others, non-listening, mishearing, and non-hearing. However, what is really happening from the point of view of successful communication is not always clear. I will discuss the borderline cases later in the text. Further terms used in this context are breakdowns / discomfort / disturbances in communication, misinterpretations, non-successes in talk. At this stage we will not go into details of terminology, but will use the following working definitions. Miscommunication takes place when the interpretation made by the recipient significantly differs form what the speaker meant. There are two main cases of miscommunication. We use the term communication disturbance when the message – for some reason or other (non-listening, non-hearing) – doesn't reach the recipient or reaches her/him in the wrong shape (slips of the tongue, mishearings). Communication failure occurs when the message reaches the recipient's cognition in the right form, but (s)he handles it in a way which leads to misinterpretation of the message.

Zaefferer (1977) was one of the first researchers who tried to classify communication failures by

using a matrix with 3 x 8 theoretically possible types of misunderstandings. As Falkner (1997: 32-33) has shown, the systematization made by Zaefferer is interesting as such, but many important factors remain unnoticed. Grimshaw (1980) differentiates possible outcomes of communicative events: non-hearing, understanding as intended, non (or partial or ambiguous) understanding, mishearings and misunderstandings. Bazzanella's and Damiano's works (1997, 1999) are important due to statistical data on the frequency of different types of failures, though they deal only with failures based on linguistic features (cf. also Yus Ramos 1998). This is an important view, but it ignores many other aspects of miscommunication. Unconventional, rather formal models are provided by Anolli (2001) and Adrissono et al. (1998).

There are interesting studies on classification of miscommunication in languages other than English. The classification presented in (Ermakova & Zemskaja 1993) impresses by the amount of factual material and detailed analysis. Working on Ukrainian material, Bacevič (2006) provides a detailed taxonomy of causes of miscommunication, differentiating three basic types: those caused (1) by the interlocutors, (2) by the speech situation, and (3) by the code (language). One of the most sophisticated analyses of types of miscommunication is Falkner's study (1997) where he differentiates a variety of causes: (1) articulative, auditive or acoustic ("lautlich"); (2) cultural differences; (3) differences in knowledge; (4) intentional communication failures; (5) special expectations on the basic of *scripts*; (6) cotext.

Another approach to miscommunication is demonstrated by Linell (1995; cf. also Hinnenkamp 2001, 2003). While the researchers mentioned above classify its causes, Linell wants to clarify how communication failures occur in a flow of dialogue, how "visible" they are. He therefore divides them into three main categories: "overt", "latent", and "covert" ones. So, we are dealing with the reactions of the interlocutors to the situation they are involved in. In overt misunderstanding there is an immediate recognition of a misunderstanding. A covert misunderstanding takes place when the interlocutors gradually recognize that they have misinterpreted each other at an earlier stage of conversation. A latent misunderstanding remains unrecognized, but an outside observer notices it or the interlocutors themselves have a feeling that everything in the conversation was not as it should be.

This short (and far from complete) overview shows that there are several attempts to define and classify communication failures (overviews of Western theories and classifications of miscommunication can by found, among others, in Dascal 1999, Tzanne 2000, Olsina 2002). They are, as such, important and valuable, but, as a rule, they take into account only a small fraction of the relevant elements of communication. Thus, we need a more comprehensive theory of communication, simultaneously covering various features of the phenomenon.

As to Western research on miscommunication carried out until now, it seems to be biased in two ways. First, a lot of attention has been paid to situations where communication failures lead to fatal consequences; the most favoured topics of this kind are aviation and health care. A second typical theme of research has been intercultural communication (usually between native and non-native speakers); in recent years this interest has expanded to the use of English as lingua franca (i.e. in a conversation between two or more non-native speakers). Thus, there is much less research on normal everyday communication between native speakers of that language. There are no good reasons to neglect the vast majority of communication situations, because communication failures

seem to be as frequent in conversation between family members as in contacts with foreigners. I will come back to this paradoxical claim later.

In order to study different situations of (mis)communication we will demonstrate a new multi-layered model of communication (MLMC). The model itself is still at a tentative stage. However, it already seems to have more exploratory power than previous models. The starting point of the model may be summarized in the following claims.

A. To explain the causes of miscommunication we have to pay systematic attention to two layers:

(1) at the message transfer level we answer the question of where (in which phase) of the message flow from the speaker to the recipient a disturbance takes place;
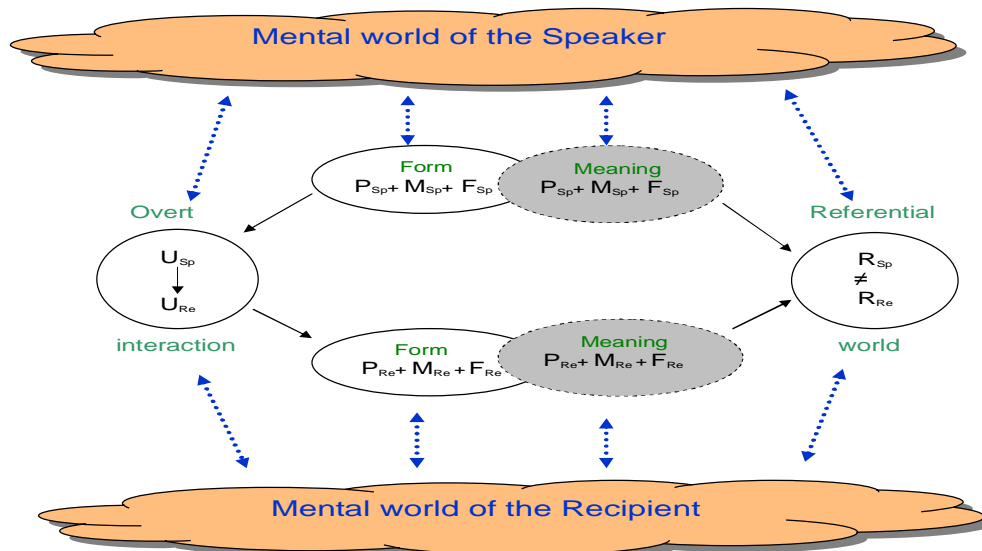
(2) at the mental world level we answer the question of how the interlocutors' mental worlds influence the process of producing and comprehending a message.

B. To explain what really happens in (mis)communication we have to take into account the behaviour of the communicants in that particular discourse (dialogue). At this discourse level we meet questions like how failures of communication actually occur and what the interlocutors do in order to guarantee successful communication.

Before presenting the model, it is important to note the position of modelling in science in general. Models are supposed to be reflections of the phenomenon we are trying to understand and describe. On the other hand, a model can never be an exact copy of reality. Despite its incompleteness, a good model should help us to better comprehend the elements and essence of the phenomenon concerned. Thus, the model in figure 1 is far from being an exact presentation of the process of communication and factors influencing it. To avoid misinterpretations I mention here only two obvious points of inaccuracy. First, in reality the different phases of the process do not follow each other in a linear order, but make up a tangled skein of parallel actions. We often start to speak before we have fully decided what to say, and the recipient may start to create the message (s)he is listening to even before the speaker has expressed him/herself. Second, as is clearly shown in (Sinclair & Mauranen 2006), we handle elements of speech in chunks. These chunks can be related to the basic parts of the message (proposition P, various modal elements M, speech function F), but this is not necessarily the case in all speech acts. Nevertheless, in order to understand the semantic (and functional) structure of an utterance, we have to differentiate regular components of meaning.

The first two levels of description are shown in a schematic way in the Figure 1.

Figure 1

Mental world of the Speaker

Overt

Form
$P_{Sp} + M_{Sp} + F_{Sp}$

Meaning
$P_{Sp} + M_{Sp} + F_{Sp}$

Referential

U_{Sp}
↓
U_{Re}

R_{Sp}
≠
R_{Re}

interaction

Form
$P_{Re} + M_{Re} + F_{Re}$

Meaning
$P_{Re} + M_{Re} + F_{Re}$

world

Mental world of the Recipient

Let us first pay attention to the inner part of the figure, the message transfer level. As can be seen, it has some similarities with Shannon's (and Weaver's) famous information theory model. Some newer concepts (e.g. Dobrick 1985: 97, Falkner 1997: 88) are even closer to our model. However, there are three features in the MLMC which make it more powerful in describing different blocks of (mis)communication. (1) To my mind, the form of a circle better reflects the essence of communication than previous linear presentations. One cannot deny the fact that communication takes place in time which flows forward linearly, but on the other hand, from the point of view of its needs and goals communication is more like a circle: the speaker begins from some ideas which are meant to be "reborn" in the recipient's mind. (2) A relevant part of the circle is the distinction between Meaning and Form. As such the distinction is similar to the old observation about the difference between *what is said* and *what is meant*. Researchers modelling communication do pay attention to this issue (e.g. Dobrick 1985: 56), but nevertheless leave it out of the model they present. The asymmetry between Meaning and Form is so crucial both for producing an utterance and for understanding it correctly that it is worth including it in the model itself. In the Functional Syntax Model demonstrated in (Mustajoki 2006a, 2007), this distinction forms the basis of the entire description of language. The third (3) distinctive feature of the picture is as important. As will be shown later, one cannot describe the process of communication without attention to the mental worlds of the communicants.

The operation of the message transfer level may be demonstrated by the following simple example. Imagine a situation where one person wants to ask another to open a window, referring to a certain object in the world R_{Sp}. At first the speaker decides what to say about it. In a formalistic presentation the meaning is of the following type: P (Proposition) = "YOU OPEN THE WINDOW", M (Modality) = the speaker's mood and attitude towards this expression, and F (Speech Function) = "I REQUIRE". Using her/his ability, then, the speaker – more or less unconsciously – goes over different possibilities for expressing this meaning: *Open the window, please; Could you be so kind as to open the window, It's terribly hot here* etc. In the next stage (s)he gives the expression a verbal (and/or non-verbal) shape.

A clarification is needed. Although Figure 1 describes the process of producing an utterance in an ostensibly prompt way, there are moments of uncertainty in all its phases. Some examples of this kind: It is a well-known fact that, from the ontological point of view, various "worlds" can be differentiated. In (Mustajoki 2004), three main types of "worlds" are defined: real world, virtual world (fiction, fairy tails, dreams etc.), inner world (feelings, sensation etc.). The "Meaning" (what we are aiming to say) is in many cases a rather sketchy plan for expressing something. Further, there are more "Meanings" than words in languages. Therefore, it is far from being a rule that a suitable "Form" can be found for our "Meaning". "Every utterance is only an approximation to the very thought the speaker has in mind" (Junker & al. 2003: 1742). Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 277, 360) provide a similar statement, but their conclusion is wrong. The fact that conceptual systems are much richer and vaster than linguistic possibilities does not disprove the process where the speaker has something in mind and then tries to express this using linguistic (and other) tools. Finally, in pronouncing the Form out loud, various slips of the tongue are also possible.

When we proceed to the recipient's role in the situation, we face possibilities for miscommunication. A special case of it occurs when the recipient does not listen to the speaker (non-listening) or fails to hear U_{Sp} (non-hearing); in other words the message does not reach the recipient. It means that in such a situation there is no U_{Re}. A different case is when $U_{Re} \neq U_{Sp}$, i.e. the utterance heard by the recipient does not correspond to the utterance expressed by the speaker (mishearing). If this phase goes correctly, the recipient creates from U_{Re} (a chain of vocal (and other) components) the Form as $P_{Re} + M_{Re} + F_{Re}$. Then the recipient decodes it to the Meaning. Here again there is space for a misinterpretation of the message: e.g. if the speaker says *It's terribly hot here*, it is possible that recipient takes it literally and fails to notice that the statement is a hint to open the window. Such communication failures can be caused by cultural differences as in Moeschler's example (2004: 51), but they often occur in simple everyday conversation between people. There are also risks of misinterpretations concerning the reference of the message.

It is obvious that the description outlined demonstrates only the formalistic part of the process of communication. To reach a better equivalence to authentic conversation, real persons with their backgrounds and abilities should be added to the model. In Figure 1, various subjective components have been assembled under the notion of Mental World (MW). One of our main hypotheses is that differences between the speaker's and recipient's MWs play a decisive role in communication. This is a not a new point of view as such, but we argue that the significance of MWs can be seen in communication failures which have traditionally been regarded as "linguistic". A simple example is needed to show this. At first glance, occurrences of syntactic ambiguity (a syntactic structure can be interpreted in more than one way) can be explained from a purely linguistic point of view. A more careful analysis of these situations shows, however, that as a matter of fact it is not the ambiguous structures themselves that cause misunderstandings, but the differences in the MWs of the speaker and of the recipient. Thus, the interlocutors, as a rule, have the same interpretation of the phrase (1) *John studies Chinese language and literature*, on the one hand, and of the phrase (2) *John studies Chinese language and biology*, on the other hand: it is obvious that John studies Chinese literature but not Chinese biology. By contrast, an obvious ground for misinterpretation is present in the phrase (3) *John studies Chinese language and philosophy*. The option for two readings of (3) is based on differences in people's MWs concerning the connection between these disciplines: for some people *Chinese language and Chinese philosophy* is a natural combination of studies, for others it is not – and therefore they interpret the phrase differently. Thus, ambiguity itself never causes

miscommunication; differences in MWs are also needed.

Mental issues also play a crucial role in the willingness of the recipient to listen to the speaker. Not only external disturbances (noise, darkness, etc.) but also a lack of motivation on the part of the recipient may prevent the message from reaching her/his attention. On the other hand, a strong motivation enables the recipient to complement elements which (s)he doesn't hear – for some reason or other – with the necessary linguistic units.

Different elements of the phenomenon we call Mental World have been widely discussed in scientific literature. There are numerous terms, notions and approaches having something in common with our concept. The theory of mind is one of the rather popular concepts here. What we are trying to do is to clarify the components of MW from the point of view of communication and difficulties in it. As the concept of MWs is so important for explaining and preventing miscommunication, special attention has to be paid to this issue. MWs are supposed to consist of the following (partly overlapping) components: (a) communicative (linguistic) ability; (b) cultural and intellectual background; (c) the cognitive systems of the interlocutors; (d) the relations between the interlocutors; (e) the emotional (and physiological) state we are in; (f) contextual elements. The first four of these are rather stable, but not permanent: in other words, they are in constant movement, but the changes are gradual. The last two are situational: they are different in each communication situation. Let us now take a closer look at the five elements of MW.

(a) The communicative (linguistic) ability of a person consists of traces of all the situations where (s)he has learnt and used language(s) as a tool of communication before the moment of the current situation of communication. This statement does not deny the possibility of creativity in producing speech, but we are able to ne creative only on the basis of knowledge gathered in our mind through conscious or unconscious learning and observation (cf. Joseph 2003). Producing speech is much the same as repeating, in one way or another, what we have heard before (Gasparov 1996). We compare what we are going say and what we should understand with the linguistic storage we have. As Kecskes (2004, 2008) points out, in a communication situation there always occurs a clash (and competition) between the current and the old. The large role played by communicative ability appears at its clearest, of course, in cases with substantial defects, e.g. in the speech of children or non-native speakers. However, adult native speakers may also come up against words or constructions they don't know. The communicative (linguistic) abilities of two native speakers are, as a rule, very similar (figure 2), especially in comparison with a possible case involving a native and non-native speaker (figure 3). However, the communicative abilities of two native speakers (and this is true even for identical twins) can never be exactly the same for the simple reason that people have read different texts and taken part in different communication situations during their lives. All this has a certain influence on their linguistic and communicative ability. Slight differences can also be fatal, because in a normal lively conversation it is not enough that you know the linguistic units you hear; you also have to be able to recognize them immediately in a flow of speech even if you don't hear all the words correctly.
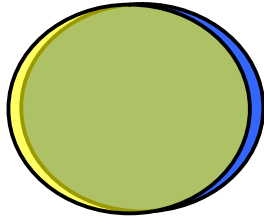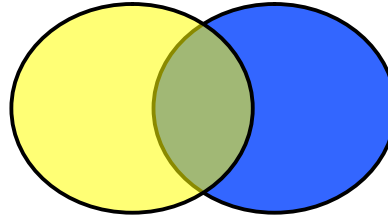
Figure 2.   Figure 3.

(b) Cultural and intellectual background is, like communicative ability, based on the personal histories of the interlocutors. This part of MW has been a popular topic in research literature especially in works on intercultural communication. Terminology and concepts vary. In the Western tradition, commonly used terms are *presupposition, stereotype, script, mental set, thought structure, scene,* and *schema.* They see the issue from different points of view, but as a whole all of them are connected with the notion of MW. In Russian linguistics and ethnography, a lot of attention has been paid to culturally dependent *concepts* and the notions of *kartina mira* (world picture) and *jazykovaya kartina mira* (linguistic world picture) (Stepanov 2001, Šmeljov 2002, among others; cf. "images of the world" in Campos 2007). Studies on *cognitive basis, individual* and *collective space* (prostranstvo) by a number of scholars (Krasnyh 2002, Gudkov 2003, and others) adapt and develop the ideas of the Russian psychological school (Vygotsky, Luriya, Leontjev) in the framework of intercultural communication. In most cases, the notion of cultural and intellectual background is used in contemporary research for describing the differences between interlocutors in intercultural (interethnic) conversation. Less attention has been paid to differences between people within the same language community. Our everyday experience confirms that the role of differences in cultural backgrounds is extremely important also between native speakers. To be convinced about this, one needs only to imagine a situation where a specialist or lover of a certain activity (surgeon, violinist, football fan) tries to explain details of her/his object of interest to an ignorant person. Differences in the MWs of the interlocutors cause communication failures even in conversation between family members. A very typical case is like the following: one is asked to bring beer / chocolate / bread from the shop, and is then blamed for non-hearing of the request because the beer / chocolate / bread that one brought was of the wrong kind from the point of view of the person who made the request. The obvious reason for communication failure is the dissimilarity of representations of beer / chocolate / bread in the interlocutors' MWs.

A further explanation helps us to comprehend the essence of this factor. People's intellectual and cognitive backgrounds are, in fact, very similar. All people around the world possess a huge number of similar pieces of knowledge, such as "people are mortal", "if you jump up, you will fall down", "you use ears for hearing", "all animals have to eat and sleep". It is impossible to count the amount of such shared knowledge, but there are good reasons to estimate that it makes up the clear majority of the knowledge we possess. Such a claim is against our common impression of the great variety in people's world pictures. This contradiction can be explained by the way people's senses work: we don't notice things which are common and regular, but pay attention to dissimilarities and differences. In a way we face a similar effect in genes: although the number of genes that are

different between human beings is very, very small (something like 0,1 %), we see in humans mainly those features whereby we differ from each other.

(c) The cognitive systems of the interlocutors are more or less permanent patterns and stereotypes of thinking. One cannot totally separate them from cultural and intellectual background. But what is meant here are deeper cognitive processes and patterns, which are more closely connected to people's personal traits. There is clear evidence of differences in cognitive processes between people (Sloman 1996, Lieberman 2000, Stanovich & West 2000, Nisbett & al. 2001). These features cannot be ignored in seeking explanations for some problems in human interaction. The possible role of these factors has been examined, e.g., in the context of differences between representatives of different research fields (Rapoport 1974: 259, Berger 2007, Nichols & Ulatowski 2007: 363).

(d) The relations between the interlocutors are also an obvious factor in communication and difficulties in it. A widely used casual word in this connection is *chemistry.* Positive chemistry between interlocutors foster mutual understanding, negative chemistry inhibits or hinders it. An example of the former case is conversation between lovers; the latter case is seen in hostile contacts with enemies. These are extreme examples. Less dramatic but still remarkable influence of this factor can be seen in most communication situations.

(e) Emotional and physiological state: personal feelings such as sorrow or delight, and states like illness or tiredness, inevitably have a certain influence on the way we communicate. Are they also possible causes of miscommunication? Here, again, commonsense experience gives grounds for an affirmative answer. It is obvious that it is hard for a tired, depressed, frightened, or seriously ill person to concentrate on her/his own or another person's speech. Selective hearing or non-hearing are also typical of a recipient after (s)he has been offended by the speaker. In such a situation, the modal part of the message (M) takes the whole scene and the other elements (P) and (F) are lost from view.

(f) Contextual elements consist of the environment we are in, what we see and hear. They may have various consequences for the flow of communication. If the recipient sees something interesting happening behind the speaker, (s)he may concentrate on that instead of listening. If the speaker says that a certain John is going to join the company, the recipient can make the mistake of assuming that the man approaching at the moment is John. As a whole, the communicants may make different interpretations about the environment they are in. Sometimes, when the speaker is just talking and the recipient is pretending to listen, both communicants are happy with the situation if the speaker has an urgent need to tell somebody what (s)he has experienced. One can ask whether non-listening means miscommunication here. The same can happen at a noisy party where people are small-talking about this and that. In such a situation the speech function (F) is given the major role instead of the content of the message (P). In such situations, one can regard as miscommunication only cases where the communicants' aims are different. If the speaker expects careful listening from the recipient, non-listening leads to miscommunication.

We have now outlined the process of communication and the role of MWs in it. The next step is to go to the discourse level. Let us start with the first question mentioned above: how failures of communication in fact occur, or, in other words, what their concrete distinguishing features are in the flow of dialogue. In trying to answer these questions, we come closer to the definition of communication failures. As a starting point we can use Linell's classification mentioned above. In an

overt case the interlocutors notice the failure immediately: the recipient asks for clarification and the speaker repeats or repairs (says in other words) what (s)he has said. In a covert case the communication failures become clear later in the conversation. If the previous cases can easily be regarded as communication failures, a more difficult situation from the point of view of definition is a case where the communicants do not recognize miscommunication, in other words it is latent. To solve the distinction problem we have to return to the definition we gave at the beginning of the proposal. According to this definition, we are dealing with miscommunication regardless of whether it has been recognized or not.

Consider further definition problems. We often use the so called "let it pass" mode (cf. Firth 1996) in conversation. We may thus occasionally ignore phrases or words that are unfamiliar to us, and in most cases this is harmless enough because (a) their meaning will become clear later during the conversation, or (b) they are not relevant to the main substance of the discussion. Let us take a simple example. John is telling Mary that Harry plays squash. Mary is not familiar with this game. The relevance of the lack of understanding depends on the situation. In many cases it is enough to understand that Harry plays something. A precise understanding is needed if John asks Mary to buy a squash racket for Harry. In examining such examples we have to give the word *relevant* a concrete meaning.

A special case is various situations where people cheat (lies, "deviations from the truth"). If the teacher says that an ant has six feet or if John lies to her mother that he was with a friend, are we dealing with a case of miscommunication? According to our definition the answer is no, if the recipient understands the message in the same way as the speaker has meant. Irony is another interesting case. If Peter says with a special tone to Laura that she has a beautiful hat, and means the opposite, a communication failure takes place only if Laura understands the phrase literally.

One more fundamental question of definition. A further interesting question is whether we also have to take into account the consequences of communication. Coming back to the "open the window" example, we can ask whether it is a case of miscommunication when the person who is asked to open the window understands the message but will not open the window. From the point of the speaker it is a failure in the sense that her/his needs will not have been satisfied. Another situation: we ask in the street how to go to the railway station, and get a wrong answer. We understand everything correctly, but again from our point of our needs the communication has led to undesirable results. Nevertheless, according to our definition, these cases do not represent miscommunication, because the recipient understands the message in the same way as the speaker has meant; maybe we could use the term unsuccessful communication in such cases.

The second question we meet at the discourse level is this: what do the interlocutors do in order to guarantee successful communication? This angle of view is very important in seeking explanations for miscommunication. Let us start with a claim which is commonly confirmed by most people. According to our commonsense experience, communication failures occur as often in speech between people who are close to each other (e.g. family members) as in communication between a native speaker and a foreigner (cf. Ermakova & Zemskaya 1993). One could even argue that the number of communication failures is a constant. This observation seems to contradict the role of interlocutors' mental worlds. The explanation for this observation seems to be found in the different modes we use in communication. This is not a new finding. As a matter of fact there are some terms

and theories which try to confront this phenomenon. One of them is *recipient design* introduced by Schegloff (see, e.g., Sacks & Schegloff 1979). Another, more psychological term used here is *altercasting* (Malone 1995). A further term is *negotiation* (see e. g. Thomason 2001, Winford 2003, Mauranen 2006). Within the *communication accommodation theory* (e.g. Giles 1973) the term *convergence* has been introduced; it refers to the speaker's strategy to adapt her/his communicative behaviour to the recipient. "There is a general propensity for communicators to converge along salient dimensions of speech and non-verbal behaviour in cooperative social encounters" (Ylänne-McEwen & Coupland 2000: 193).

The accommodation theory and recipient design are relevant to many communicative encounters. Further terms have been introduced for situations where it is apparent: for example, *baby talk* (*motherese*) and *foreigner talk* are special registers or styles which native speakers use if they realize that the recipient has only a restricted language command (see e.g. Freed 1981). However, it would be wrong to think that speakers always adapt their speech to the recipient. As a matter of fact, one of the main grounds of miscommunication is that recipient design fails. If we exclude disturbances as a cause of miscommunication, a communication failure takes place especially when (or only if?) we have failed to adapt our speech to the recipient's mental world. Levinson's (2006: 46) claim that I call my neighbour "Dick" only if "I think you will recognize who I mean under that appellation" is not true in all situations of communication for the simple reason that we as speakers do not think about that. Our automatic speech processor doesn't help here either. As pointed out in (Barr & Keysar 2005: 23; Keysar 2007), communication tends to be rather egocentric. People are inclined to concentrate on what they are saying without thinking of whether it will be understood or not. "When people communicate they do not routinely take into account the mental states of others, as the standard theory assumes" (Keysar 2007: 72). Therefore, for me, adaptation / accommodation / recipient design is not the rule of communication, but rather an exception.

In this connection a note is needed. In the Multi-layered Model of Communication one may find connections to the Relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson (1986 and later). Indeed, it is a very fascinating theory, which helps interpret many standard cases of communication, but when we start to analyse real dialogues and problems in them, we inevitably encounter instances which are hard to determine using relevance as the only explanation. The behaviour of the Speaker is one these issues. If (s)he doesn't take into account the recipient's mental world, although the speaker could and should do so, one cannot explain her/his behaviour by using the relevance principle.

As clearly pointed out in (Vinokur 1993), the roles of the speaker and the recipient are different in every single act of dialogue – despite the fact that in the next turn the roles will change. It is therefore better to differentiate the roles of the speaker and the recipient in the communication; this can be done by using the terms adaptation and cooperation.

Thus, in certain situations we apply the adaptation mode to ensure a more or less normal communication. This is the explanation for the controversial observation we made above. In talking with a foreigner we realize that our mental worlds are different and this is why we simplify our speech in order to be understood. But talking with family members we don't use the adaptation mode because we "think" (not consciously) that our mental words are similar. Of course, they have a lot of common features, but also enough differences to provide much ground for misunderstandings. Confidence in speaking in "the same language" leads also to a rather short and

cryptic speech – a further reason for miscommunication. Another example of the role of adaptation mode: researchers commonly complain how difficult it is to do interdisciplinary cooperation because "we don't understand the language they use". Researchers in different fields certainly do have different terminologies and background knowledge, and possibly even a different way of thinking. But I think that a no less important reason for difficulties in communication is that researchers fail to realize they should use the adaptation mode, or that they dislike using it or fail in their efforts to use it.

The recipient, in turn, can adopt the cooperative mode. According to widely existing opinion, cooperation is a normal part of any communication (see e.g. Davies 2007). However, observations of real communication show that this view does not correspond to reality. Only in certain situations does the recipient make special efforts to help the speaker to express himself/herself in a proper way. Here again intercultural conversation may provide a good example, as shown in (Kurhila 2003). In problematic conversation the use of the cooperative mode is very important. The recipient can also use a clearly uncooperative mode, e.g. (s)he may have some reasons to pretend to understand or to pretend not to understand, as shown in (Mustajoki 2006b: 61-65).

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