

Understanding in Intercultural Encounters

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1. Introduction

The indepth analysis of verbal encounters among speakers of differing cultural background is a field of linguistic investigation which has clear social relevance since it can serve to uncover communicative sources of social problems in our culturally diverse, modern, industrialized societies that would otherwise remain undetected. Yet at the same time it is also of considerable importance for pragmatic theory inasmuch as it provides an ideal testing ground for theories of how cultural presuppositions enter into the interpretation of what we see and hear.

The validity of the first point is readily apparent. We are all aware of the growing importance oral communication in public situations assumes in our daily lives. With the gradual bureaucratization of administrative procedures in government as well as in private sector enterprises, much of the business of modern institutions has come to be carried out through face to face meetings or interviews, where members of the lay public interact with professionals whose background is often quite different from their own. The successful conduct of such encounters is more than just a matter of presenting and evaluating factual information; it also depends on the rhetorical and interactive strategies through which the relevant facts are presented. Rhetorical strategies, by their very nature, rely on indirectness and metaphoric allusions, so that evaluation of what is persuasive and effective talk presupposes shared background assumptions. When there are significant differences in background knowledge, the same message may be interpreted differently by different individuals. Yet the miscommunications that

can arise in such circumstances are rarely recognized as such while participants are involved in a verbal exchange and intent on getting their own points across. Therefore, the problems that researchers relying on post-hoc, indepth analysis may identify as intepretively based are likely to be attributed to speakers' personal characteristics. The result is that culturally different individuals are often less successful in managing and otherwise achieving their goals in public encounters. Repeated miscommunication of this type can lead to mutual frustration, alienation and pejorative stereotyping and, over time, contribute to serious social problems.

The second point — the theoretical import of studies of intercultural miscommunication — is perhaps less well understood. In much of the existing literature on culture and communication, "culture" tends to be treated as a loosely defined term to refer to the group level values, attitudes, beliefs and dispositions which an individual brings to an interaction. Where actual communicative processes are discussed, they are first analyzed solely at the level of content and then interpreted in the light of extralinguistic cultural information. In this paper we would like to illustrate an approach to interpretation that enables us to deal with linguistic and social aspects of language usage within a single unified analytical framework. Along with many other students of discourse, we assume that understanding in everyday encounters is in large part a matter of inferences that rely both on linguistic presupposition and on knowledge of the world, much of which is culture bound. So that the processes by which we assess the validity and persuasiveness of an argument and judge the attitudes of our interlocutors, to the extent that they assume shared cultural presuppositions, are themselves affected by cultural presuppositions. We will begin with a brief outline of our approach to interpretation and then go on to apply this analytical perspective comparatively, with native-born English speakers, with South Asians speaking either English or Hindi and in mixed encounters. In the final part of the paper we will seek to illustrate how and under what conditions misunderstandings can affect individuals' life chances.

2. Data and method

Although our analysis focuses on the interpretation of lexical and non-lexical verbal signs, we take as our point of departure not particular linguistic forms or expressions, that is, grammatically or semantically defined utterances or even speech acts as such, but diadic interviews treated as units

of social interaction or speech events. Ethnographers of communication have shown that speech events constitute miniature social systems that can be described in terms of associated beliefs and values, the social import of what is transacted, norms specifying who can participate and in what capacity, as well as expectations about appropriate themes and topics and about appropriate ways of speaking. Much of the above information can be obtained through established methods of ethnographic observation and interviewing. Yet events themselves, as Goffman has shown, constitute separate social environments where participants respond to each other's moves and engage in types of reciprocity in accordance with situation specific rules of etiquette, norms and expectations. In this way participation in an encounter activates interpretive frames which serve to transform generalized, abstract or context independent cultural knowledge, to generate situated practices in much the same way that syntax frames and transforms dictionary meanings.

Our goal is to reconstruct this process of transformation. Our analytical strategy relies on turn by turn analysis of natural discourse, using methods similar to those made familiar through recent writings in the area of conversational analysis. But, while conversational analysts employ turn by turn analysis as a data source to study recurrent practices, valid for conversations in general and to recover the strategies by which particular interactive regularities are achieved, thus focusing, in principle at least, on universals of conversing, our own analysis deals with the situated processes of online, interpretive procedures on which participants rely in order to interpret what is intended, thereby creating and maintaining conversational involvement. We treat conversational exchanges as sequences of moves and countermoves such that each speaker's contribution, apart from anything else it conveys, also displays that speaker's understanding of what a previous speaker intended to convey. Previous work in discourse analysis has shown that all such understandings are context bound and rely on inferences based on knowledge of the world that goes beyond mere command of grammar and lexicon, inferences that rely to a significant extent on culture bound presuppositions. The claim is that culturally specific conventions and experiences are part of this knowledge (Gumperz 1982, 1989a, 1989b; Gumperz, ed. 1982).

The materials analyzed here were recorded in the late 1970's in the British Midlands in two storefront advice centers, as they are commonly called, conveniently located offices where members of the public can obtain

assistance with any of a range of problems, such as housing, pension or unemployment compensation, or health benefits, that may arise in their dealing with local authorities. The recording sessions were preceded by several days of informal observation. The first center, which we will refer to as the neighborhood center, is part of the local authority social service organization, and is staffed by counselors who have had special training in dealing with problems from the clients' perspective. The second, the Asian Resource Center, was set up by a group of Asian college students, members of the local community, who had chosen to go into social work to help their own inner city community. They had received a private foundation grant to create institutional arrangements which would approximate those that local residents of Asian backgrounds were familiar with from their own native countries, and thus help these residents overcome the difficulties they faced in British urban environments. Videotapes from this center show an environment that looks much like what one finds in South Asia where all clients' business from consultation among counselors to official phone calls to individual interviews is transacted in a single large room where clients and counselors sit around a large table.

Seen in speech event terms, interviews in both centers are similar in form. Clients, who as lay people generally have little detailed knowledge of the workings of the public agencies with whom they must deal, present their cases to counselors, that is, professionals who, relying on their own expert knowledge, interview them to obtain the information necessary to translate the clients' personalized accounts into categories that are institutionally relevant and can thus be dealt with within the context of institutional rules and regulations. When sufficient information has been obtained and the problem has been properly formulated, the counselor either contacts the appropriate specialist agencies to request action or provides detailed explanations, advice and instructions on how the client can deal with the problem himself.

Such descriptive information of what an interaction is about goes a long way in providing the background information we need to understand the individual encounters. It explains the hierarchical role relationship and the differential distribution of power between counselors, on the one hand, who, by virtue of background and their knowledge of the institutional discursive practices, have access to institutional resources and exert control over the encounter, and lay clients, on the other hand, who tend to see their own case largely in terms of what happened to them and have little

appreciation of the institutional constraints that limit the counselors' ability to assist them. But if we look in detail at the interactional characteristics of the encounters, we discover that there is much additional information which emerges in the course of the counseling process that is not provided by the extralinguistic description yet is nevertheless crucial to the interaction. This can only be recovered through detailed, turn by turn analysis of the progress of the interaction. Let us now turn to the data to illustrate the point. (See appendix B for detailed transcripts.)

3. Analysis of neighborhood center encounters

Fragments 1 and 2 (see Appendix B) come from the neighborhood center. In both cases, the counselor is the same and the two clients are old age pensioners. The first client is seeking help in understanding recent changes in her pension and rent rebate payments. She has brought along some notices which seem to indicate that her compensation has been decreased. When the recording begins, initial introductions have already been made. The counselor has just finished an unrelated phone call and initiates the interaction by explaining that he is about to call the pension authorities for information on the client's case. While waiting for a response from the office of the pension authorities, he tries to explain to her the procedures he has to follow. The client listens at first but then directs the counselor's attention to the documents she has brought in. They jointly work through the new figures and after some time the counselor discovers that there has most probably been some confusion in the way her case was entered into the computer. This is apparently confirmed in the course of the telephone call. The counselor then proceeds to explain that the client will be receiving additional rent rebates which make up for the apparent shortfall in her pension payments.

Examination of the turn by turn organization of the question and answer sequences that constitute the above encounter reveals many of the hierarchical characteristics that have been noted in the literature on interviewing (Silverman 1973; Akinnaso and Seabrook 1982). The counselor (B) is generally in control of the interaction. He sets the basic topic and otherwise directs the progress of the encounter, relying on his expert knowledge to interpret the client's account in institutional terms. But the interaction also has many of the characteristics of an informal conversational exchange. Consider B's comments in turns 2-8 of the transcript: "So this is the trouble with the new system, you see. You not only have to deal with us, we've got

to contact the DHHS over lots of things. So I'm just phoning the DHHS now to find out some information." Rhythm and tempo as well as wording here are those of everyday informal conversation. Moreover, the message is delivered by means of a series of brief speaking turns. The client in turn produces regular backchannel responses which serve as feedback to show how each portion of the message has been received. The client, while following the counselor's lead, also introduces her own topics. In turn 11 she breaks into B's self-correction with: "I used to pick up forty-eight pounds a week, and they dropped it down to to thirty-three." Whereupon B responds, abandoning what he had started to say: "Yeah, that's it, you see. They'll be paying most of your rent, you see." A then responds, directly contradicting B: "That can't be, according to that." Although A, as the latter portion of the interview shows, is clearly wrong, B does not attempt to explain; he simply turns back to the phone. While he is talking on the phone, B again interrupts with an off-topic question about two West Indian women who have sat down behind her and are waiting their turn. When B is finished with his phone conversation, he responds to A's question with an informal reply before turning to look at the pension authority letters which A has put on the desk.

In his examination of the materials (in turns 16-22), A proceeds step by step using relatively short phrases terminating in tag questions to leave space for the client's answers: "... if this is going to be right, you may be due some money back in the end, cause you've given-, you've paid that, haven't you?" A, who is looking at the paper with him, points to the desk and replies: "This I paid, for this here". In turn 20 B poses a rhetorical question to which he himself responds with a latched reply: "So what was your old rent? Around 18 pound forty-nine". The two are clearly working together, that is, cooperatively trying to understand the problem, with each partner taking care to give the other the opportunity to follow his/her reasoning and otherwise making sure the other understands. Except for the office setting and B's opener in turn 1, one could argue that this encounter does indeed constitute an informal conversation. If the counselor's goal is to make the client feel at ease and demystify the bureaucratic process, it would seem from this example that he has achieved his intent.

In fragment 2 a widow who is living in public housing has come to talk about moving to new quarters. The recording begins as she is walking up to the desk with an apology: "Sorry to trouble you, love". When she is invited to sit down, she continues: "But I haven't been for a bit". And then after a

brief pause that evokes no reaction, she proceeds to give a narrative account of the difficulties with her next door neighbors which make her want to move.

A's account, as was B's talk in fragment 1, is broken up into small turns of speaking, each bounded by terminal contours designed to encourage active listener participation at every stage of the argument. B regularly reacts with backchannel signals, although his responses are minimal and at times, as for example in the case of his "Yeah, yeah" in turn 8 following B's somewhat emphatic "I'm not happy down there", suggest that her information is not new to him. These minimal responses continue in spite of the fact that throughout the encounter A seems to be going to great effort to elicit more elaborate responses. Note that turn 7 is followed by "I'm not contented down there" in turn 11 and again by "I mean I'm not very happy" in 13. A similar sequence concludes her narrative account in turn 31: "But I'm not happy down there, I don't like it". This is reinforced in with: "I don't like it, if you do, I don't". We can assume that B's response strategy is designed to move the interview into institutionally more productive channels, while at the same time giving A a chance to speak her mind. He does in fact make several attempts to change the topic. In turn 17 for example he takes advantage of an attempted self-repair to break in with a latched "You know what". But A in turn counters with a latched turn claiming token: "Ah- ah- I mean yesterday ..." and presses ahead with her narrative as if she had not heard him. Then in 23, when A mentions having told her social worker that she wants to move, B replies with a direct question: "What did she say to that?" A counters with: "Well, like you said, 'If you're not happy, ask for one'", but in the next turn she once more reverts to her own topic. It is only when A has finally concluded her account that B succeeds in turning the interview around to deal with possible institutionally relevant actions.

Fragments 1 and 2, although they differ in details of content, nevertheless show a number of organizational similarities and thus provide us with a fairly good picture of how the interviews are interactively constituted. Our first impression, based on such features as the colloquial style of speaking, the prevalence of brief speech exchanges punctuated by backchannel feedback, the absence of long, monologic descriptions and the avoidance of lexicalized directives, is one of relative informality such as is characteristic of informal conversation among peers. Yet on closer examination the basic hierarchical nature of the encounters becomes apparent. There is a clear

distinction between the clients whose concern is with their own personal problems and the counselor who as the expert must guide the progress of the interaction. Thus the counselor's informality can be seen as a interactive strategy to put the client at ease that does not, however, change the basic nature of the interaction. It is important to note that the success of this strategy rests in large part on both parties' use of prosody, idioms and formulaic expressions — all of which, as we will argue below, are subculturally specific.

In fragment 3, also from the neighborhood center, the counselor is a young woman of Punjabi background who has a nativelike control of English grammar and pronunciation. The client, an older local woman, has come to complain about the housing authority workmen who installed a new sink in her kitchen but have yet to replaster the holes in the wall. She had been to the neighborhood center a few weeks earlier and was told at the time that the work should have been completed several months before. Yet, when she later checked with the housing authority, she was told that her flat was not on the worklist and that she should check once more with the neighborhood center. Her tone of voice and her demeanor suggest that she is clearly annoyed. As was the case in the previous fragment, A's presentation relies on relatively short speaking turns. After each turn she looks B in the face as if asking for a response. But, whereas in the two previous examples the counselor readily responded to the clients' use of gaze and other signs to elicit comments and gave the appropriate backchannel responses, in the present example B's behavior seems quite unresponsive. When A begins speaking, B's head is tilted down towards her desk, only her eyelids are lifted up towards the speaker. She acknowledges turn 1 with a brief, barely audible "Yeah". After A's "I've got to come here now" in turn 3, B leans forward slightly and in response to B's "I've been in estimate if number 76 is on the list" in turn 5, B looks down as if searching through a list and produces a delayed, again barely audible "Yes". When A then answers her own question with "It isn't, for plastering", B gives a slight nod and then shifts gaze, whereupon A turns her head as if she were disappointed in her expectation for a more elaborate acknowledgement. A then raises her voice and continues with: "When I came down here just a few weeks ago", lifts her hand and points with a jabbing motion to another counselor standing near the computer behind A, and exclaims loudly: "That fellow there tell me it should have been done in March!" B responds in turn 10 with a latched "I'll just check on it, OK?" spoken in accelerated

tempo and soft tone of voice, almost as if she was trying to ward off or deflect an attack. Immediately afterwards, she gets up from her desk and walks away without waiting for A's response. A then raises her head, opens her mouth and looks up, following B with an astonished gaze. She then turns her head and lets her gaze rest on another staff member who, however, does not return her gaze and exclaims: "Tawdry thing". She continues moving her head, adjusts her hat and bag as if she were trying to find someone in the room who would recognize her dilemma. When B returns a minute or so later, A again starts speaking in a pitch register that suggests she is continuing with the explanation she had begun in turn 9: "They were putting a new sink unit in, and we didn't ask for the thing to go in at all. I wish we hadn't have had it in".

After a brief pause which remains unfilled, B lowers her gaze to look at some papers she has found and starts leafing through them without further response. A continues: "And they left it all holes". She moves forward, fixes her gaze on what B is doing, puts her hand under her chin, resting her elbows on the desk and leaning towards B, then adds: "And that was at the beginning of this year, the first fortnight in January". Having finished her account, she closes her lips decisively, lifts her head and exclaims: "It's disgusting". Shaking her head slowly, she leans back and points her finger at B demanding attention. Yet B keeps searching through her papers as if nothing had happened. When A goes on talking, once more pointing her finger at B: "You've been on the computer once, as I come in. You looked for me", B merely goes on with what she was doing for a few more seconds and then gets up once more and walks away, without replying. A then looks up and pulls a face, just as she did in turn 11. Her gaze follows B, who has gone to talk to one of the senior counselors, and who then picks up a second notebook, returns to her desk, rapidly leafs through the book and finally looks up at A asking: "What's your address?"

When A answers, B gives a verbatim repetition of what she has just heard, looks down at the book once more for a second and then leans towards A and looks at her saying: "What I'll do is I'll try to get the clerk of the works set up this week and look at it", lowering her head as she finishes. A stares at B and replies loudly: "The inspector seen it once, love, months and months ago". B quietly corrects her: "Yeah, that'll be the assessors," whereupon A, moving her head as if she were unsure of what she had heard, replies "Yes". B again looks down at her paper and starts writing without responding. While she is writing, A breaks in in a loud,

didactic tone of voice: "And also ask about number (unclear). You got to get in touch with the clerk of works". B looks around on her desk for another piece of paper, writes and then picks up the phone. In the ten seconds that pass A raises her head, moves her lips silently and nods, as if unsure of what to do. B puts down the receiver and calls someone else to take the call and turns to A saying: "OK, I'll see to this". Whereupon A raises her head, opens her mouth wide as if startled at B's unexpected behavior, gets up and walks away without a word.

Clearly, A leaves us in no doubt that she is unhappy with the treatment she has received. She was already acting annoyed when she came in, but what she sees as B's failure to respond and her unpredictable reactions only serve to increase A's anger, so that at the end when B is clearly doing something to deal with her problem, A has little faith that anything will actually be accomplished and walks away as if she had gotten no help.

Yet was B really as unresponsive as A's behavior seems to suggest she was? If we leave aside her verbal and nonverbal behavior and focus on her actions, it is evident that she goes to considerable trouble to find B's records and when she cannot locate them in the center files, she assures her that the plastering job will be put on the work schedule anyway. Given the institutional constraints under which she must operate, there is little more she could have done. A possible explanation for A's behavior is that at least part of what A had really come for was to engage in what Jefferson & Lee (1981) refer to as "troubles talk", that is, to find a sympathetic audience to whom she could present an extended of her difficulties. Thus she may have become annoyed at B's apparent refusal to act as a troubles recipient who would listen with appropriate expressions of empathy. Citing examples from a wide variety of conversations, Jefferson & Lee argue that there is an inherent conflict between troubles telling and advice giving, in that by proffering advice a speaker takes control of the interaction and this may interfere with or abort the troubles talk. There is no question that both the client's presentation in the this example, and those of the previous clients, show many of the characteristics of troubles talk. But one thing that characterizes fragment 3 is the extraordinarily large number of misunderstandings of both nonverbal and verbal signs and the inability of participants to create conversational involvement. In Jefferson & Lee's conversation by contrast, participants communicate smoothly, reacting to each other's often quite subtle and indirect cues. We conclude therefore that in the present case we are dealing with communicative difficulties that have their origins in the fact that client and counselor rely on systematically different contextualiza-

tion conventions to carry out their interactive strategies. So that, whereas in fragments 1 and 2 the counselors' and clients' interactive strategies clearly succeed, in fragment 3 they fail. To illustrate what the relevant differences in what these contextualization strategies are, let us now look at a set of Asian-Asian counseling sessions.

In the next fragment, also from the neighborhood center, the young counselor of fragment 3 deals with an Asian man in his early thirties, accompanied by an older woman, most probably his mother or other relative, and a boy. They have a question about the old lady's rate (i.e. local tax) rebates. The young man does most of the talking initially. His English, like the counselor's, is near native; the older woman speaks only in Punjabi. What is of interest here is that counselor's modes of response and her general interactive style are identical with those she uses in fragment 3. Yet the very behavior that has caused such problems in the earlier situation is here evidently accepted as unexceptional. Participants clearly understand each other and the encounter proceeds quite smoothly.

As the recording begins, the clients have just entered the office and are looking around for someone to talk to. B asks if she can help them, and they come over to her desk. The young man (A) sits down in the only chair while the older woman and the boy stand up. A introduces his problem by stating that he had been to the office before to ask about a general rate bill and has been told to come back if he got another request. He then goes on to say that he has brought a new letter that he has just received and hands it over without further explanation. B accepts it, also without comment, and begins looking through it. While she is reading, A explains that he would like to find out whether or not the older woman has to pay the bill now. The woman (C) then addresses A, evidently to ask if she can talk to the counselor herself. After a brief exchange between the two women in Punjabi, B proceeds to explain the situation, talking for several minutes. When she has finished, the clients leave, evidently satisfied with what they have learned.

Of particular interest in this fragment are the counselor's and the clients' use of gaze and eye contact as well as their ways of contextualizing talk. When asking the clients to come over to her desk, the counselor raises her voice and looks up, but as soon as they are settled, she shifts gaze to her desk. While the clients are talking she provides minimal backchannel responses, as for example in turn 5 and 7, without, however, making eye contact. When she is handed the letter, she takes it without comment and

continues looking down. In turn 23 she responds to C's question of turn 22 while maintaining gaze on the paper on her desk. But in turns 14 and 20, on the other hand, when asking a question, B looks up briefly until the addressee starts answering before returning her gaze to the papers on her desk. The two clients' gaze behavior as well as their mode of talking shows much the same pattern. We have some initial evidence here therefore to suggest that, while English is used for much of the interaction, nonverbal signaling as well as the speech etiquette used here are Punjabi or perhaps generally South Asian in origin. So that we could perhaps attribute the communication difficulties in fragment 3 to culturally specific differences at the level of both nonverbal and contextualization conventions. The final two fragments involving Asian clients and Asian counselors from the Asian Resource Center provide more detailed information on the nature of what, for the purpose of this paper, we will refer to as Asian interviewing conventions.

4. Analysis of Asian Resource Center encounters

In fragment 5 the client is a middle-aged Bangladeshi man who has come to seek help in finding out what happened to the sickness benefit checks he was expecting but has not received. The client is seated next to the counselor at a large square table in the center of the storefront office along with several other counselors and clients, also engaged in interviews. The two young sons, who have accompanied him, are standing next him to and slightly behind. A number of other clients and their family members are seated in chairs along the wall while waiting for a place at the table. Most of the interview is in Hindi/Urdu which is here translated into English for the sake of exposition in such a way as to preserve as much as possible the original Hindi/Urdu prosodic pattern and phrasing.

As the recording begins, B finishes talking to the preceding client on his left and then turns to A, who is on his right. A begins by pointing out that his problem is quite complicated. He says that he has tried to come in before but had been unable to see the counselor, so that now he is in great difficulty. In answer to B's question "What is the matter?" in turn 11, A turns to his son who hands him a document which A unfolds with slow, deliberate motions, repeatedly briefly glancing up as if to ensure that B is following him. He spreads the document out on the table between himself and B without verbal comment. B follows A's actions with his gaze and nods, as if confirming A's answer to B's opening question. When A then

begins speaking with "This is a calendar" (turn 14), B again nods in acknowledgement. A goes on unfolding the paper and points to a particular spot. B holds down one corner of the paper and looks at it, whereupon the following sequence ensues. (We reproduce here part of the transcript from the appendix to illustrate both the sequential organization and the specifics of contextualization strategies employed.)

1. B: yes/ what can i do for you//
2. A: [Hindi, translated into English and transcribed keeping the Hindi prosodic pattern]
[*head inclined towards B, eyes briefly glance up to look at B as he begins talking and then move down towards the table*]
[*inbreath*] {[hi] my work} is very complicated/ [*opens hands*]
3. B: [*gazing down at the table*] ah:: =tell=
4. A: [*briefly gazing at B and then down at the table*]
= {[hi] two times-} =
5. B: [*briefly looking at A and then gazing down again*] me/
6. A: {[hi] two times} (i) came here/
7. B: [nods]
8. A: [*A looking at B and then down*] {[hi] but you} weren't available//
9. B: [*after briefly looking up to B and then down*] [nods]
10. A: [*briefly gazing at B and then down again*]
{[hi] considerable trouble} is befalling me// ("i am having a great deal of problems.")
11. B: [*looking down and then briefly up*] what is the matter/
12. A: =[*briefly looks at B and then turns toward his son who hands him a document which A puts on the table between himself and B*]=
13. B. =[*follows A with his gaze, the two children do likewise*]= [nods]
14. A. [*looking down at the paper*] {[hi] this} is a calendar//
15. B: [*looking down*] [nods]
16. A: [*unfolds the paper and points to a particular spot*]
17. B: [*holds down one corner of the document, gaze following B's movement*]
18. A: [*briefly gazing at B and then down*] [hi] on the twenty-five i,)
[*looks up to B briefly before continuing*] .. signed//
19. B: [*gazing at A and then down, head and torso moving in an arc-like movement with the talk, the arc reaching its apex at the comma, and then follows another arc-like movement on the second phrase*]
{[hi] you signed,} twenty-five//
20. A: {[hi]hhmm,} twenty-five//
[*slight arc-like movements accompany the two phrases*]
21. B: hmm/
22. A: {[hi] hm/ .. on june eight,}
[*briefly looks up to B and then down*] .. is my signing time/
.. [*pen in hand, pointing at a spot on the calendar*] {[hi] on the seventh,}
.. [*looks briefly at B and then down*] i went to the hospital//

23. B: [*finger on the calendar, moving in direction of the spot B is indicating*]
 ==hang on/
 24. A: [*looks up briefly to B and then down*] {[ac] [lo] i went to the hospital/}
 25. B: {[hi] you sign- you sign} when/
 [*arc-like head and torso movements on the two phrases*]
 {[ac] [hi] first of all,} .. signing when//
 26. A: [*looking down*] {[lo] twenty-five//}
 27. B: [*similar arc-like movement on the phrase before and the one after the pause*]
 {[hi] you signing} twenty-five/ .. {[extra hi] may?}
 28. A: {[hi] after two weeks it is necessary,} .. sign//
 29. B: no eh- .. one minute/
 [*arc-like movements*] .. you sign twenty-five/{[hi] may?}
 or twenty-five {[lo] june?}
 30. A: [nods] .. emm {[lo] eight june//}
 31. B: [shifts to Hindi] ... {[hi] sign given when} by you// (“when did you sign?”)
 32. A: [*slight arc-like movements on the two phrases*]
 {[hi] on twenty-five may,} ... i gave one signature//
 33. B: ... you signed/ twenty-five may?
 34. A: (xxxx)
 35. B: ==which month?
 36. A: in may/
 37. B: may// right/ .. ok?
 38. A: may//

Seen from the perspective of the English-English interviews, what happens here seems strange indeed. Instead of saying what it is he wants as others in the preceding fragments have done, the client exhibits a calendar which then becomes the focus for a joint attempt to establish a chronology of specific actions. While A had begun the encounter by stating that he is in great difficulty and he has a lot of problems, he makes no attempt to be more specific and describe the problems he is facing. B seems to accept this behavior as normal. He follows every one of A's actions with the calendar, and joins A in examining the document without requesting explanations. We must assume that B is relying on his experience as a counselor to deduce what is at issue. Yet there is no indication that he has met A before, or knows anything more about him than has so far emerged in the interview. In turn 23 when B breaks in with “Hang on”, we suspect that he is having some difficulty in following A's reference to going to the hospital. Yet it subsequently becomes clear that he is only trying to get the chronology straight. Moreover, in turn 51 the fact that he anticipates what A is about to say indicates that he has understood the complexities of A's situation and knows what A is after. The interaction goes on a bit more until turn 56.

56. A: ah {[hi] my- .. money,} wasn't given//
57. B: no money/
58. A: they didn't send any/
59. B: {[hi] from signing place, hospital,} no money//
60. A: [*nods*]

Saying "My money wasn't given" is the closest that the client has come to identifying his problem. But again he is not asked for any additional explanation. The counselor simply repeats part of what A said as if to confirm that he has understood and after one final confirmatory exchange, the facts of the case are treated as established. The counselor then proceeds to telephone the authorities to establish what went wrong.

The actual details of what transpires in the encounter can only be understood by bringing in extralinguistic knowledge of the local British conditions governing unemployment compensation. Since the counselor clearly has this knowledge, we assume for example that he took A's "On the twenty-fifth, I signed" in turn 18 as intending to convey that, having lost his job, A had applied for unemployment compensation and, complying with the rules, had gone to the unemployment office to certify that he had looked for a new position but had not found one. Compensation recipients are required to return to the office every two weeks and sign a statement to the effect that they still have not been successful in finding a new job in order to continue receiving their check. When A mentions that he has gone to the hospital, therefore, B had reason to suspect that A had most probably missed a signature date. Thus he needed an exact record of the actual signatures given to make sure that A had complied with the regulations so that the failure to receive the compensation check could not be said to have been A's own fault. Unusual as the style of this interview may seem to an outsider therefore, what the counselor did was in fact a necessary preliminary to dealing with the case.

In the final example, also from the Asian Resource Center, the same counselor is dealing with a group of Asian clients. The main speaker, a young woman (A) in her late teens, is sitting across the table from B. Several older, female relatives are sitting behind her, as well as two young men, one of whom is her brother or cousin and the other a distant relative who has been visiting them. The latter has been allowed to enter England without a formal visa for a few weeks. He has now been asked to report to the immigration officers who have kept his passport and are about to send him back home. The young woman is most probably a native speaker of Eng-

lish, and her English seems better than her Punjabi. The interaction begins as B has just finished with another client.

1. A: [*without saying anything, hands B a piece of paper*]
2. B: [*accepts paper without speaking, looking down at the table, he continues writing up the previous interview*]
3. B: [*briefly lifting his gaze towards A and looking down again, he picks up the paper*]
what's happened//
4. A: [*follows B's movement with her eyes, head towards the table*]
they're going to send him back tonight to (xxx)//
5. B: [*looking up at A and then down again*]
now tell me right from the beginning/ when he first came//
6. A: he came- [*looks back in response to mumble from behind*]
he came here to (xx), on the twenty- twenty-eighth of may/
7. B: [*looking down*] mhni/
8. A: for a visit// and, eh- .. they want to send him back tonight//
9. B: he came on the twenty:.,
10. A: [*gazing up briefly at B and then down*] eighth of may//
11. B: twenty-eighth of may//
12. A: [nods]

A hands B a piece of paper without comment which B accepts without verbal acknowledgement. B then turns to his notebook to record the interview he has just completed. When he is finished, he picks up the paper, briefly turns his gaze to A and asks, "What's happened?" Without looking up, A replies, "They are going to send him back tonight to (unintelligible)". When B breaks in to ask her to start over again from the beginning, A responds as follows, "He came on the twenty-eighth of May for a visit, and they want to send him back tonight", whereupon B proceeds to check the facts: "He came on the twenty?" A replies, "Eighth of May". And B acknowledges, "Twenty-eighth of May".

13. B: and, .. how old is he?
14. A: [*without speaking, looks back to the other family members*]

The other young man turns to C and talks to him, but the talk is unintelligible on the tape.

15. B: he's- they're asking him//
16. A: [nods]
17. B: {[hi] can he come and-} can he sit next to you?
18. A: [*turns back towards relative*]
19. B: [*addressing C in Punjabi*] {[hi] [f] sit down over here//} [*pointing to the table at A's right*]

As C moves up to sit closer to the table, A turns her head briefly towards him. As he draws near her, she quickly turns back to center but follows with her eyeballs while keeping her head angled downward towards the table. C sits down next to and slightly behind A, about 1 foot from the table.

20. B: so he came here on the twenty:
 21. A: [*looking down as she begins speaking and then up briefly as if to monitor B's reaction*]
 twenty-eighth/
 22. B: eighth of may//
 23. A: {[hi] for,} .. {[lo] what/} ... {[ac] for the purpose of a {[hi] visit?}}
 24. A: just for a visit//
 25. B: just for a visit//
 26. A: [nods]

The Asian clients' mode of presentation in the above three examples contrasts sharply with what we have seen with the British clients. The latter, as a rule, begin their interviews with a general introductory statement of what they have come for, a statement that explicitly identifies a problem for the counselor to deal with. In their accounts, they cast themselves as actors who are affected by the actions of other actors, and, as in the case of the woman with the troublesome neighbors, they are often quite explicit about how they feel about what happened. While the British clients personalize their situation, highlighting the "I", the Asians present themselves as victims of circumstances and organize their accounts around the facts of what happened to them.

The British counselors, on the other hand, tend to take the role of the mediator who, as we have pointed out before, reformulates the clients' problems in institutional terms. In fact, when a client fails to present them with a problem, they often explicitly ask "What is your problem?"

Consider the following fragment from a recording, made in a British Housing Office, of an Asian woman client who is asking to be moved to a new apartment, which dramatically illustrates this point.

- Client: my children/ out in the street/ they beat them//
 Officer: what do you mean//
 Client: my children/ in the street/ they beat them// they throw things at them//
 Officer: what's the problem//
 Client: when they're in the hallway/ they shout at them//
 Officer: do you have a housing problem//

5. Comparative analysis

Clearly, the differences that we have noted between the Asian-Asian encounters and the British-British encounters are not just idiosyncratic but systematic and, most probably, culturally based. Moreover, these differences occur at a number of levels of discourse organization. To begin with, there are systematic differences in Asian and British definitions of what activities are involved in interviewing and in what interpersonal relationships are implied. Asian clients almost universally view the interview in as involving a relatively sharp, hierarchical distinction between the client's and the interviewer's roles. Clients represent themselves as victims of circumstances. Their actions are in many ways like those we associate with patients afflicted with an illness going to see the doctor, who then proceeds to elicit symptoms until he has enough information to infer a diagnosis. Like patients in the Western medical tradition who do not expect to have to identify their illness in categorial terms, Asian clients in the interviews analyzed here and in others we have analyzed are quite reluctant to offer information that they have reason to suspect the counselor already knows, so that problems are identified only in the most general terms, with the expectation that details will be elicited by the counselor. In fragment 6, for example, A begins *in medias res*, so to speak, with: "They're sending him back tonight". without any other attempt to identify who she is talking about. When she is subsequently asked to be more specific, she replies: "He came here on the twenty-eighth of May for a visit and they want to send him back tonight", still leaving out most of the kind of detail that a Western client, such as the woman in fragment 2, would have automatically supplied. The client in fragment 4 does start with a statement of what he has come for: "I want to see somebody about rate rebate", but then in continuing he immediately jumps to an account of a specific happening: "We had a general bill before, and we came to this office", without further background information. In other words, in identifying what they want, clients are either too general or too specific for Western expectations. Another recurrent Asian strategy is the presentation of documentary evidence, like the calendar in fragment 5, the letter and the wedding announcement in fragment 6, which is given to the counselor, leaving the counselor to infer how it relates to the problem at hand. Since the counselors do not request clarification, we must assume that they accept this as

expected behavior. Asian counselors themselves, both in their own actions and in their questioning strategies, tend to focus on eliciting background facts, as if they saw their own role as one of establishing the factual evidence of the client's case. Consider the following passage from fragment 4.

5. A: ... i've been in estimate, eh- if number 76 is on the list/
6. B: .. yes/
7. A: it is- .. it isn't/ ... for plastering//
8. B: [*slight nod, no other response although A is clearly expecting something more*]
9. A: ... and eh- {[hi] when i came down here before.} just a few weeks ago,
.. [*lifts her hand and points with a jabbing motion to someone standing behind A*]
that fellow there tell me/ {[f] it should have been done in march//}
10. B: =={{[ac] i'll just check on it o.k.?} [*gets up and walks away without waiting for A to respond*]}

As we pointed out in our analysis, the client in this fragment is clearly unhappy with what she sees as the counselor's failure to react appropriately. But the counselor does in fact respond to the client's giving of factual information in turns 6 and 8. She fails to react only when the client offers her own interpretation of what the authorities should have done. It is as if she were trying to restrict the scope of the interview to what she sees as appropriate factual information and avoid being in put in the position of "troubles recipient".

English clients, by contrast, are quite careful to be lexically explicit in providing background information of how the problem came about. In their accounts, they represent themselves in personalized terms as agents who are affected by the institution's or its representative's actions. The difference between the two ways of perceiving the situation is reflected in pronoun usage. Note the prevalence of "I" and the high incidence of transitive verbs in the English-English encounters. In the Asian-Asian encounters, we find an equivalently high number of passive constructions. Consider the following passage from fragment 5.

6. A: {[hi] two times} (i) came here/
7. B: [nods]
8. A: [*A looking at B and then down*] {[hi] but you} weren't available//
9. B: [*after briefly looking up to B and then down*] [nods]
10. A: [*briefly gazing at B and then down again*]
 {[hi] considerable trouble} is befalling me// ("i am having a great deal of problems.")

A's talk here is translated from Hindi, and in the Hindi original we find no agentive first person pronoun. We have tried to capture this in our translation of turns 8 and 10. In turn 6 we parenthesized the "I" to capture the fact that, while it is obligatory in the English translation, "I" is not lexicalized in the original.

A second set of differences appear at what we call the level of sequential organization. (See Gumperz 1989a and 1989b for a discussion of levels of inferencing.) Note that fragment 5 as well as, to a large extent, fragment 6 shows what is basically tripartite organization. That is to say, information is packaged in terms of move, countermove, acknowledgement. Acknowledgements, moreover, frequently take the form of verbatim repetitions of what the previous speaker said, repetitions which copy the original's prosodic pattern. The English-English fragments, on the other hand, show a bipartite move, countermove organization.

There are, furthermore, significant differences between the Asian and the English speakers' use of prosody to chunk phrases in a turn at speaking. These differences have been described in some detail elsewhere (Gumperz ed. 1982; Gumperz 1989a). Perhaps the most striking feature of the material analyzed here is the phrasing in fragment 5, here simplified for ease of exposition.

1. A: on the twenty-five i; signed.
2. B: you signed; twenty-five.
3. A: on june eight; is my signing time.
4. on the seventh; i went to the hospital.
5. B: you signed; when?
6. first of all; signing when?
7. you signing twenty-five; may?

Each line here is prosodically divided into what in terms of content count as two information units, here separated by semicolons. The strategy here resembles what Lambrecht (1986) in his analysis of French informal conversations calls a presentational cleft construction. This division has clear interpretive import inasmuch as it leads us to look for two distinct items of information, the first of which counts as a topic, the second as the comment. Thus we might be led to paraphrase line 1 as "It was on the twenty-fifth that I signed", and line 2 as "OK, you signed, and that signing took place on the twenty-fifth", etc. Of particular interest is line 7, where the fact that the single word "May" makes up the second information unit

suggests the paraphrase: "So you did sign on the twenty- fifth, but was it in May?" In a way the discourse strategies employed here have a functional similarity to the counselor's strategy of dividing up his explanation in turns 1 to 8 in fragment 1 into short units, contextualized in such a way as to elicit confirmatory backchannel responses. As the detailed transcript in fact shows, the two units of a line are often bounded by body movements, eye movements and other nonverbal requests for confirmation.

Finally, there seem to be significantly different uses of nonverbal signaling. To find out what the Asian system is will require detailed analysis which is beyond the scope of this paper. Here we will confine ourselves to pointing out what on preliminary analysis seem to be some of the most salient features. Asian speakers use gaze to monitor interlocutor's reactions, to determine possible turn transition points or to ask for the floor and call attention to new information. This contrasts with the way English speakers seek to meet the interlocutor's gaze when they are addressing them or listening to what they are saying.

Our use of the term "culturally different" in the above discussion requires some explanation. We seem to be dealing with two different rhetorical traditions involving different ways of categorizing interactional exchanges in terms of specific activities defined on the basis of expected outcomes, interpersonal relationships and expected styles of speaking. In other words, the two traditions have different ways of categorizing context with reference to which what is said is to be interpreted. They also have different ways of contextualizing talk in general, that is, marking it as reflecting or representing one or another activity. Previous work in this area has led us to assume that these rhetorical traditions are learned in the course of previous interactive experience and thus are to some extent both language and culture specific.

However, there is not a one to one relationship between language as linguistic structure and rhetorical strategy. Note for example that several of the Asian speakers in the encounters analyzed here have almost natively like control of English, yet in the situations at hand they map their Asian language based rhetorical strategies onto their English speech. This is particularly true of the counselor in fragments 3 and 4, and of the client in fragment 6. The counselor in 5 and 6, on the other hand, seems to be bilingual with respect to rhetorical strategy. His rhetorical strategy in fragment 5 is clearly Asian, but in 6 his prosody and other aspects of his speech are basically English. It is this lack of correspondence between grammatical

and lexical usage and rhetorical strategy which leads to most serious problems of miscommunication.

6. Cultural differences and life chances

We now turn to the issue of the consequences of such cultural differences in interethnic encounters. Materials discussed here come from several sources: interviews in a housing department in West London and job interviews for work as busdrivers. These are encounters where the role of institutional talk is critical in people's life chances so that counselors can be said to act as gatekeepers, that is, arbiters of an individual's advancement. As we have suggested above and elsewhere (Gumperz, ed. 1982), neither applicants nor the gatekeepers are aware of the importance of the crucial role of talk in institutional decision-making. People are concerned with getting houses, services, etc. They are worried about mistreatment, misinformation, discriminatory outcomes. That is, they pay attention to content and take form for granted.

Language and rhetorical strategy are the invisible elements. Both in the sense that they are not attended to at all — what has been called “the invisibility of everyday life”, and also in the sense that the representatives of institutions use institutional talk assuming it to be both natural and neutral. So that both the level of linguistic structure and the level of contextualization conventions have to be made visible and treated critically, as scholars concerned with critical discourse analysis would argue (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, Trew 1979; Fairclough 1989). Failing that, successfully getting through the interview with a gatekeeper means passing through an invisible gate.

Of course, talk is only one element in the inferential process on which evaluations are based. Public service institutions are centrally concerned with eligibility based on external factors, e.g. the number of points you need before you are eligible for state housing — in other words, there is a laid down policy. But the reality is that the written and spoken detail of the bureaucratic process becomes, *de facto*, the policy, i.e. only those get housed that the system can deal with.

In addition to culturally based strategies, there are two additional inputs in the inferential process: organizational knowledge and pre-existing personal attitudes. Attitudes which clients bring to the service encounter are derived, directly or indirectly, from the past experiences of such

encounters. The gap between the stated institutional policy and the expectations of the clients, on the one hand, and the actual experience and outcomes of the bureaucratic process, on the other hand, leads frequently to perceptions of unfair treatment. Perceived discrimination can be as damaging as real discrimination.

These attitudes are particularly critical in relation to power and trust. Ethnically determined background expectations about the power of individual gatekeepers and how far they can be trusted will have a differential impact on individual encounters. This, in turn, will structure the experience for individuals in their future encounters. The cultural differences described in the first part of this paper may either directly affect the progress and outcomes of an interaction or may do so indirectly through attitudes brought to the encounter, even where there are few or no surface cultural differences.

For the clients, therefore, the social, political and cultural baggage they bring to an interaction consists of attitudes, organizational knowledge and culturally based knowledge and which includes their their command of rhetorical and contextualization strategies for managing the emergent interaction. So, when we look at interethnic communication, we need to identify where there is a fundamental difference in cultural/organisational knowledge. But, also, we need to study individuals whose recurrent experiences of such encounters is negative and whose cumulative feelings of frustration and anger enter into their self-presentation and inferential processes. Mr. O, whose interview we discuss below and who appears unusually hostile, is a case in point. Gatekeepers who deal with such individuals are faced with a paradox. As professionals, they are expected to be factually, that is, task oriented, cool and instrumental in their approach. But as individuals they may want to be empathetic, or at least are prepared to be empathetic under certain conditions. We are once more confronted with the classic contradiction that Jefferson & Lee have explored in their work on service encounters and troubles telling (1981). The conditions for empathy have essentially to do with how comfortable the gatekeeper can be in this paradoxical role.

Although every interaction is a unique encounter, from our data certain typical patterns of interaction emerge. In some cases, clients present their information in the style which mirrors the organization's cool, factually oriented approach. In other cases, clients simply tell their story, and gatekeepers extract bureaucratically significant facts. In both of these cases, the paradox is minimized. In yet other cases, the client waits for the

gatekeeper to infer, thereby inviting the gatekeeper to become involved in troubles telling. In these cases, the paradox is maximized. In still other cases, the gatekeeper's role is challenged. We see examples of minimized paradox in intra-ethnic encounters. Inter-ethnic encounters, on the other hand, maximize the paradox. The point is that where the paradox is maximized, the gatekeeper is more uncomfortable and so judgment of the client is more likely to be negative. This individual judgment then feeds into existing negative ethnic stereotypes. Consider the following exchange from a housing office interview between Mr. O, and a housing officer (H. O.).

The housing interview

Fragment 7: Mr. O

1. H.O.: hallo/ [*lowers gaze*]
2. Mr O: hi .. how do ("do you") do/
3. H.O.: right. what is the situation? [*looks down*]
4. Mr O: situation ... is that .. er ... what sort of situation is that/
5. H.O.: =sorry .. can you speak up a bit?=
6. Mr O: =about housing= what situation/ which situation/
7. H.O.: why have you come in to see us now/
8. Mr O: well ... i've been on the waiting list .. and the housing list
.. so (xx) i ("I've") just come to check up what is happening,
about five months now, six months,
9. H.O.: y- you're living in the ... Glencairn at the =moment?=
10. Mr O: =yes//=
11. H.O.: is that right?
12. Mr O: yes//
13. H.O.: is there just yourself?
14. Mr O: (six months) and {[hi] my wife//}
15. H.O.: and your wife is there as well/
16. Mr O: yes//
17. H.O.: and you filled in a ... form for Glencairn Hotel?
18. Mr O: [*lowers gaze*] <1>
19. H.O.: are we aware that you are in fact living there?
20. Mr O: you {[ff] put me there//} .. {[hi] i don't know about Glencairn/}
they sent me there from here () ...
21. H.O.: the Homeless Person Sections put you there did =they?=
22. Mr O: =yeah= yeah/
23. H.O.: and you have been there ever since?
24. Mr O: yeah/
25. H.O.: right//

Mr. O has visited the Housing Department several times and is currently in poor hotel accommodation (one room and no cooking facilities), while he and his family wait for a council house or flat to become vacant. The chances of his getting accommodation depend upon the number of points he is rated as having. The housing officer instead of opening with the usual request "How can I help you?" opens with what appears to be a challenging question. As a result the first seven turns of the interaction seem to lead nowhere and there is little sign of cooperative conversational involvement. The housing officer's opening question is both confrontational and impersonal and throughout the encounter he relies on an impersonal, indirect strategy. When Mr. O explains he has come to check up on his situation, the H.O. responds bureaucratically by establishing the facts. Unlike the narrative accounts of the white clients described above, the interview becomes a question and answer interrogation until Mr. O is provoked by the housing officer's bureaucratic indirectness into exclaiming loudly, "you put me there". The housing officer's indirectness reveals how uncomfortable he is: "Are we aware ..?". It is quite extraordinary to ask another person whether you, the speaker, are aware of something. By using the corporate "we", the housing officer may be implying that he is there to give advice but not as a troubles telling recipient.

By now each side seems to be challenging the other. Later in the interview, Mr. O provides a further challenge by breaking the taboo of confronting the gatekeeper with the paradox he is in.

Fragment 8: Mr. O

H. O.: ... the only other way you're going to get an increase in points
 .. is .. through a change in circumstances
 .. basically through your accommodation becoming worse
 .. or .. something =like that/=

Mr O: ={{hi} what is worse?= how can i make it worse?
 bring the two children in {{f} one} room
 and me and my wife/ [[f] all} of us in {{f} one} room/
 .. will that make it worse?}

H.O.: [*looks at Mr O but shows no listening response*] <1.5>

Mr O: no if that is the s- you know the points you need/
 {{hi} i can get that done today}
 if all sleep on the floor in one room/
 is that how you crea- how you increase the points?

H.O.: [*lowers gaze*]

Here Mr. O confronts the H.O. with the absurdity of the system in which clients have to make their circumstances so intolerable that the

Department has to respond. Naturally, as a representative of the Department, the housing officer cannot encourage this, and his only response is silence. But his silence is also the logical conclusion of his increasing indirectness. As Mr. O becomes more direct and raises the pitch of his voice, so the H.O. responds less. This interview is a classic case of what Bateson has called complementary schismogenesis (1972). That is, the progressive increase of interpersonal distance that can emerge in the course of an interaction. Compare the above with the following encounter, also from the Housing Office.

Fragment 9: Ms. T

1. H.O.: morning/ how can i help you/
2. Ms T: er well, i'd like to apply for a council house
in a hard-to-let housing area/
3. H.O.: right/ you're filling- you've filled in an application form/
4. Ms T: yeah, i've filled in a form for an ordinary council house,
and rather than take it to the ordinary office,
they said to bring it here with me/
5. H.O.: right/

The client here is a middle class, white, native English speaker who apparently has some knowledge of the housing system. Her organizational knowledge means that she is aware of the limitations of the system. Her behavior suggests that she trusts the information she gets. Where Mr. O struggles to make sense and get a direct response and the H.O. resists, here Ms. T and the gatekeeper swing into a cooperative discourse mode in which questions like: "What does that mean?" and the answer given suggest the discourse of two equal partners. The outcome of both interactions is likely to be the reinforcement of previous perceptions.

The Job interview

We now move to a set of job interviews where crosscultural factors are even more critical, and the interview itself is, if anything, even more stressful. Several factors contribute to this: Interviews are more directly dependent on shared goals and expectations, the interviewee has little, if any, control over the proceedings and the gatekeeper's evaluation of the interview can be critical for the interviewee's life chances. By the time they reach the interview stage, applicants' eligibility for the position is no longer an issue; what is at stake is their suitability or their acceptability for the position. This is judged by one criterion, the way the applicant talks. Talk in

which, given its position within his turn at talk, is unlikely to convey strong motivation. It seems at odds with his opening statement. In his next statement, he admits to already having failed in a previous application. Throughout, the personnel officer who does the interviewing gives little feedback or, at best, non-encouraging feedback and even feedback consisting of negative inferences. In the second schematic mismatch, Mr. B interprets "offer you" literally, and lists the real benefits of the bus company rather than answering the indirectly conveyed message, "What can you offer the bus company?" Compare this now with Mr. A's interview below.

Fragment 10: Mr. A

1. I: ... so what leads you to want to go to
much larger vehicles then? what idea =was=
2. A: =well= i've been- ...
i've been on smaller cars for about years now teaching people/
.. and it's driving/ i love to do/
.. and it was buses i wanted to get on in the first place
but .. never had the ... heart to apply for it .. until recently//
3. I: so you literally
.. well obviously you've got to enjoy driving =to be/=
4. A: =that's it/=
5. I: a driving instructor yes, because it's quite hard work,
so that's what's led you and you'd =now=
6. A: = {[lo] that's it/ }=
7. I: like to go for larger vehicles/

By contrast with Mr. B, Mr. A picks up on the hidden messages and makes the interviewer comfortable. Mr A makes the right inferences and, in turn, the interviewer's feedback is positive.

To sum up, negative outcomes in interethnic encounters are likely to occur in the following types of situations. First, when there are mismatched expectations as to how personal or fact oriented an account is to be. Depending on the particular case, an individual may be seen as either unnecessarily emotional or hostile or as lacking in personal motivation. Second, when there are mismatched expectations as to how concrete the account is to be or how much and what kind of detail to present, speakers are likely to be seen as either vague or overly general or impersonal and not knowing their business, or uncooperative. Other differences arise over expectations of which topics to bring in and which topics to avoid, with the result that speakers may be accused of being irrelevant. The use of or failure to use narrative justification can also lead to communicative problems. Such perceived problems which are partly due to differences in cultural

knowledge and partly to differences in rhetorical conventions provide rich pickings to justify negative evaluations and refusals.

7. Practical Applications

Videotape material of the type discussed here is beginning to be used in the training of white gatekeepers as well as in teaching English based rhetorical skills to job searchers and other adult in further education programs. By isolating concrete communicative problems as sources of misunderstanding, it is possible to build skills, increase sensitivity to intercultural problems, and examine processes by which unfair treatment comes about, while at the same time avoiding potentially threatening references to individuals' psyches. In this way, video analysis can be used to make the invisible visible. It provides insights into what happens in everyday contexts, using language and modes of presentation that lay people can understand. Trainees can learn to diagnose the communicative issues that need working on and can develop their own analytic language for discussing them, that is, they can be empowered, to use Paolo Freire's word, to deal with their own situations in ways that are socially and politically effective.

If real changes are to take place which challenge the discrimination faced by ethnic minorities, then practical training must be focused on the white majority in key gatekeeping encounters. It is also crucial that such training is linked to institutional targets. The aim of the training is to develop an awareness of how differences in interethnic communication contribute to discriminatory decisions, but the training can only be judged as effective if it has helped to bring about institutional changes. Examples of such changes would be increased numbers of ethnic minority members promoted, more ethnic minority clients being allocated better housing, an increase in perceived satisfaction in medical care.

The analysis of naturally occurring video sequences and the simulation or re-creation of interviews by participants provide real evidence of how decisions are constructed from interaction. They provide opportunities to shake participants out of their taken for granted ways of doing things and provide them with a set of analytic tools for monitoring their own behavior. This kind of awareness training can and should persuade professionals that there is a cultural and linguistic dimension to discrimination which they cannot ignore.

Appendix A

Transcription System Key

In what follows we present the transcription system used in the paper. The intent is to give as faithful as possible a description of the rhythmic flow and the prosodic and turn-taking characteristics of the exchange in question. Italics are used for descriptions of body movements not having readily describable lexical content. Note that we use the system to bring out certain aspects of the talk. So that not all features that could be transcribed are always represented. For a more complete description of the transcription system see Gumperz & Berenz (1990).

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Significance</u>
//	Final fall
/	Slight fall indicating "more is to come"
?	Final rise
,	Slight rise as in listing intonation
—	Truncation (e.g. what ti- what time is it/)

..	Pauses of less than .5 second
...	Pauses greater than .5 second (unless precisely timed)
<2>	Precise units of time (= 2 second pause)
=	To indicate overlap and latching of speakers' utterances e.g. R: so you understand =the requirements= B: =yeah, i under=stand them/ R: so you understand the requirements? B: ==yeah, i understand them/ R: ==and the schedule? B: yeah/ with spacing and single "=" before and after the appropriate portions of the text indicating overlap and turn initial double "=" indicating latching of the utterance to the preceding one.

::	Lengthened segments (e.g. wha::t)
~	Fluctuating intonation over one word
*	Accent; normal prominence
CAPS	Extra prominence
{ [] }	Nonlexical phenomena, both vocal and nonvocal, which overlays the lexical stretch e.g. {[lo] text//}
[]	Nonlexical phenomena, both vocal and nonvocal, which interrupts the lexical stretch e.g. text [laugh] text//

()	Unintelligible speech
di(d)	A good guess at an unclear segment
(did)	A good guess at an unclear word

- (xxx) Unclear word for which a good guess can be made as to how many syllables were uttered with “x” = one syllable
 (“ ”) Regularization (e.g. i’m gonna (“going to”) come soon/)
 # # Use hatchmarks when extratextual information needs to be included within the text
 (e.g. R: did you ask M #surname# to come?)

Appendix B

Complete Transcripts of Fragments 1-6

Fragment 1: Pension Payments

1. B: {[hi] right/ .. let’s get on the other phone//}
 <6>
 2. B: so this is the *trouble with the new system/ you see//
 3. A: hm/
 4. B: you not only have to deal with us,
 5. A: hm/
 6. B: you’ve gotta- we’ve gotta contact the DHHS over lots of things/
 7. A: oh?
 8. B: .. so I’m just phoning the DHHS now to find out some information /
 9. A: ye:s/
 10. B: and- <1.5> but a- it’s- ..
 11. A: {[hi] i used to pick up forty-eight pounds a *week/}
 and they dropped it down to thirty-*three:/
 12. B: yeah that’s it/ .. you see//
 they’ll be- they’ll be paying most of your rent/ you see//
 13. A: that can’t *be/ according to ~*that?
 14. B: [*picks up the phone, dials and talks on the phone for about 2 minutes*]
 {[hi] i have someone in military pension by name of eh- .. Cox please// ...
 yeah/
- [A turns to look at clients seated near her who are waiting their turn, two West Indian women with a small baby who is making noise, then turns back to B, likely attempting to give additional information about her name. Her utterances are not clear on the tape.
15. A: is that you-, () .. hear?
- [B does not respond but keeps talking on the phone. Finally, B turns to A with a brief explanation, also unclear on the tape.]
16. B: it’s one of ()- one of these people/
 [2 sec pause while B shifts gaze to paper on the desk and points with finger]
 {[hi] [ac] cause you may-,}

- if- if this is gonna be right, you may be due some money *back/ in the end//
cause you've given- () [*turns the sheet toward A who looks at the sheet with
him*]
17. A: {[hi] you've paid *that/} {[lo] [ac] haven't you//}
18. B: == {[ac] yeah *that's right/} the old one/
19. A: {[hi] ~ye:s?}
20. B: ==yeah/ [*moves his finger to another sheet*] ... {[hi] yeah//}
[3 sec pause while B is looking at the new sheet]
[lo] [ac] so what was your old rent/
==around {[dc] *eighteen *pound forty nine//}
21. A: ... and you see () to de*cide? .. {[ac] i'd go down and} pay four *pou:nd/
22. B: yeah/ [*writing on his sheet*] yeah that's right//
that's eh- that's the wrong *letter/ .. {[lo] that's probably wrong//}
[2 sec pause while B keeps looking and writing]
[hi] it's a terrible system,} because you've gotta deal with not only-
[talks into the phone which had remained off the hook] {[hi] yes?}
23. A. {[hi] ()}
24. B: [*talking into the phone*] seventy-eight/ ... you're sure it's not seventy-four?
[keeps writing] ta/
[starts writing again and talking into the phone for about 15 sec]
25. A: i mean () if i knew what i was *doing-/
26. B: [*talking into the phone for about 1.5 sec*]
[hi] thanks very much indeed} .. cheers/ .. ta/ .. ta/
[puts the phone down and turns to A]
[hi] right// ... ~now/} i'm just going to check on the com*puter,
... {[ac] we might be able to work something *out for you//}
27. A: [*taking out another sheet of paper and turning the sheet towards B*]
you see that's what they sent me/ () to pay me/
28. B: yeah/ what's happened you see is that ah- ...
we've got- we've got two Lilly Coxes on the computer/ you see//
29. A: {[hi] oh i see/}
30. B: they're both for you:/ but you know-
.. {[ac] this one's got} you know/ an extra one for- for no reason at all/
and the extra one is *this one you see/
31. A: {[hi] oh i see/}
32. B: and the real Lilly Cox/ in fact gets more money/ you see/
33. A: oh i see/
34. B: because y- .. ah- under the s-
[hi]because you were on the social before/ .. the social are topping up your
rebate/
() some extra rebate called housing benefit supplement/ you see/
so you're- .. {[hi] although you're not getting any-}
although you're only getting a basic pension,
35. A: i know/ yes/

36. B: ==y- you're still on supplementary benefit =()/=
37. A: =well they tell= me i ()-
38. B: pardon?
39. A: they owe me really/
40. B: well it's- it's this- it's a complex system/
41. A: {[dc] they *owe me money/ *really//}
42. B: the- .. the social do/
 .. well that is you'd be- you should be getting a better rebate
 because they are topping up the rebate/
 social are giving you another three pounds and two-,
43. A: yes that's what I'm saying/

Fragment 2: Troublesome Neighbors

1. A: ah- i'm sorry to trouble you love/
2. B: ==that's alright/ have a seat//
3. A: but I haven't been for a bit/ now listen/ in () before Steve left,
4. B: yeah/
5. A: well i asked for a move/
6. B: hmm/
7. A: == {[ac] you know/ because you know i'm not happy down there//}
8. B: yeah, yeah/
9. A: you know, eh- it's been turning on twelve months/ just in the (woo)/
10. B: yeah/
11. A: and i'm not making it up/ but, in fact i'm not contented down there/
12. B: yeah:/
13. A: i mean i'm not very happy,
14. B: .. yeah/
15. A: at *all down there// i can't- i mean i can't get on with the two neighbors,
16. B: mhm/
17. A: {[hi] i mean *yesterday-}
18. B: == {[hi] you know what ah-}
19. A: ==ah- ah- i mean yesterday, .. they was talking, .. him and eh ..the next
 door neighbor was/
20. B: hm/
21. A: and i don't know what was going on/ because m- i mean, i don't mix up with
 them/
 {[ac] cause you know i don't//}
22. B: ==hm/ hmm/
23. A: but eh .. i mean, i told my social worker, that i want to move/
24. B: what did *she say to that?
25. A: well she eh .. like *you said, ... if you're not happy, .. {[hi] ask for one//}
26. B: yeah:, yeah/

27. A: ==you see what brought me down there/ you see my house was old/
we lived there for over forty- for forty one years/
28. B: yeah/ that's right yeah/
29. A: well, my husband was alive then and Steve knows my husband and (
30. B: yeah/
31. A: and and of course, .. i used to get on .. alright/ and (xxxxxxx)
but i'm not happy down there/ {[shakes head] (xxxxxx) {[f] i don't like it//}}
32. B: yeah/
33. A: {[shakes head] [hi] i don't *like it, if *you do, i don't//}
34. B: oh no, it's not nice/ i mean obviously not-
35. A: ==i mean-
36. B: ==not as bad as having your windows broken//
37. A: ==i know/
38. B: ==but it's still not =nice//=
39. A: =i know/= but, .. when he cuts the privet, mr m
40. B: ..hm/
41. A: he's putting it all on my part//
42. B: hm/
43. A: and of course, and eh- .. if i (tarred) me garden, he's watching me//
he's watching me all the way down (xxx)// but i don't want to say anything//
44. B: hm/
45. A: but it's me wants to move//
46. B: have you filled in a *transfer form yet?

Fragment 3: Unplastered Sink

1. A: i went down to (xxxxx) on that site,
2. B: {[head tilted down but gaze on A] yeah/}
3. A: in eh- (beskeday)/ .. i've got to come here now/
4. B: [bends forward towards A]
5. A: ... i've been in estimate, eh- if number 76 is on the list/
6. B: .. yes/
7. A: it is- .. it isn't/ ... for plastering//
8. B: [slight nod, no other response although A is clearly expecting something more]
9. A: ... and eh- {[hi] when i came down here before,} just a few weeks ago,
.. [lifts her hand and points with a jabbing motion to someone standing behind
A]
that fellow there tell me/ {[f] it should have been done in march//}
10. B: =={[ac] i'll just check on it o.k.?} [gets up and walks away without waiting
for A to respond]

11. A: [*opens her mouth and looks up to follow B with her gaze as if surprised, then turns away with sweeping gaze which comes to rest on another staff member*] {[hi] tawdry thing/}
 [*keeps turning her gaze as if she were looking for someone to acknowledge her dilemma meanwhile adjusting her hat and her bags; as B is again sitting down behind her desk, A speaks in a pitch register that suggests that she is continuing her story as if she had been interrupted*] they were putting a new sink unit in, ==and we didn't ask for the thing to go in at all/
 i wish that we hadn't have had it in/
12. B: [*lowers gaze to look at papers and starts turning pages without meeting A's gaze*]
13. A: ... and they left it {[f] all?} um holes/
 [*moves forward, fixes her gaze on what B is doing, puts her hand under her chin, resting her elbow on the desk and bends down towards B*]
 and no plastering now underneath the sink/ [*raises her head*]
 ==and that was at the {[points at B] beginning} of this year/
 ... the first fortnight in january/ [*closes her lips decisively and moves head up*]
 ... {[f] it's disgusting/} [*shakes head slowly*]
14. B: [*continues looking through papers*]
15. A: [*fixes her gaze on B*] you've been on the {[pointing] computer once, as i come in/ {[f] *you looked *for me/}}
16. B: [*looks through papers for 3 sec then gets up once more and walks away without responding*]
17. A: [*looks up and away again with similar astonishment as before then returns her gaze to B*]
18. B: [*goes to talk to one of the senior counselors, then goes to another desk and looks at another notebook, then returns with a notebook and sits down looking down at paper*]
 what's {[hi] your address/} [*looks up for a response*]
19. A: seventy six (xx) street/
20. B: seventy six (xx) street/ [*looks down and starts leafing through book*]
21. A: [*staring at B*] {[f] the inspector *seen it once love/} eh- eh- months and months a*go//
22. B: {[p] yeah/ *that'll be the assessors/}
23. A: yeah/
24. B: [*moves toward B looking at her*] what i'll try and do is,
 ... i'll try to get the clerk of the works set up this week and let him have a look at it/
 [*then lowers her head*]
25. A: [*looking up expectantly, moves her head as if unsure*] ye:s,
26. B: [*looks down to paper and goes on writing without responding*]
27. A: {[hi] and also ask him about number,} you got to- ... {[lo] get in touch with the clerk of the works/}
28. B: [*lifts book looking for another paper without responding, writes, then picks up phone*]

29. A: [*raises her hand and moves her lips silently while nodding her head*]
 <10 sec>
 30. B: [*calls someone else to the phone then sits down again*]
 ok/ i'll see to this/
 31. A: [*raises her head, opens her mouth wide, startled by this apparently unexpected behavior, gets up and moves away without saying anything*]

Fragment 4: Rate Rebate

[A youngish Asian man, "A", accompanied by an older lady, "C", and a young child have come into the office a minute or so before and are walking around, apparently looking for someone to talk to.

"B", a young Asian woman, is standing behind her desk, having just returned from talking to another staff member who is working on the computer near the desk.]

1. B: {[*addressing the newcomers*] ()}
 2. A: i want see someone about rent rebate//
 3. B: {[hi] would you like to come *here/} [*A walks over to the desk and sits down; the older lady and child follow and stand next to him. His English is native.*]
 4. A: a:h we had a general bill/ be*fore// right? and we came to this office/
 5. B: [*without looking up*] aha/
 6. A: and they said if we can get another letter/ we're supposed to see *you//
 7. B: {[*without looking up*] yes/}
 8. A: and this is the letter {[hi] we *have/}
 9. B: [*takes the letter without comment and starts leafing through it, looking down*]
 10: A: what we want to know is {[lo] does she have to pay::} .. the general rate {[hi] *now//}
 11. C: [*inclines her head slightly toward the young man and talks to him in Punjabi, apparently asking him to let her talk*]
 12. B: ha/
 13. C: [*lifts her head, looks forward to talk to B who is still looking through the papers*]
 14. B: [*looks up and asks a question, then looks down again*]
 15. C: [*answers while B looks at her*]
 16. B: {[*looks down*] yeah/}
 17. C: [*continues talking*]
 18. B: [*answers in Punjabi*]
 19. C: [*continues speaking, covering her mouth with her hand without looking at B who is looking down*]
 20. B: [*looking up ever so slightly, asks A a question*]
 21. A: [*smiles and hands B a paper*]
 22. C: [*asks B another question*]

23. B: [*keeps looking at the paper while giving a brief answer*]
 24. C: [*continues talking*]
 25. B: [*looking up asks C a question, then starts explaining what the situation is while C keeps her head level but focuses her gaze toward B*]

Fragment 5: Sickness Benefits

1. B: [*finishes talking to preceding client and turns to A*] yes/ what can i do for you//
 2. A: [*Hindi, translated into English and transcribed keeping the Hindi prosodic pattern*]
 [*inbreath*] {[hi] my work} is very complicated/ [opens hands]
 3. B: ah:: =tell=
 4. A: = {[hi] two times-} =
 5. B: me/
 6. A: {[hi] two times} i came here/
 7. B: [nods]
 8. A: {[hi] but you} weren't available//
 9. B: [nods]
 10. A: {[hi] considerable trouble} is befalling me// ("i am having a great deal of problems.")
 11. B: what is the matter/
 12. A: =[turns toward his son who hands him a document which A puts on the table between himself and B]=
 13. B: =[follows A with his gaze and nods]=
 14. A: {[hi] this} is a calendar//
 15. B: [nods]
 16. A: [*unfolds the paper and points to a particular spot*]
 17. B: [*holds down one corner of the document and looks*]
 18. A: [[hi] on the twenty-five i, } .. signed//
 19. B: {[hi] you signed,} twenty-five//
 20. A: {[hi] hmm,} twenty-five//
 21. B: hmm/
 22. A: {[hi] hm/ .. on june eight,} .. is my signing time/
 .. {[hi] on the seventh,} .. i went to the hospital/
 23. B: ==hang on/
 24. A: {[ac] [lo] i went to the hospital/}
 25. B: {[hi] you sign- you sign} when/ {[ac] [hi] first of all,} .. signing when//
 26. A: {[lo] twenty-five//}
 27. B: {[hi] you signing} twenty-five/ .. {[extra hi] may?}
 28. A: {[hi] after two weeks it is necessary,} .. sign//
 29. B: no eh- .. one minute/ .. you sign twenty-five {[hi] may?} or twenty-five {[lo] june?}
 30. A: [nods] emm {[lo] eight june//}

31. B: [*shifts to Hindi*] ... {[hi] sign given when} by you// (“when did you sign?”)
 32. A: {[hi] on twenty-five may,} ... i gave one signature//
 33. B: ... you signed/ twenty-five may?
 34. A: (xxxx)
 35. B: ==which month?
 36. A: in may/
 37. B: may// right/ .. ok?
 38. A: may//
 39. B: {[hi] you signed on twenty-five may/} and then?
 40. A: then .. {[hi] on june 8,} .. my signature was due//
 41. B: hmm/
 42. A: {[hi] that signing appointment i,} .. missed//
 43. B: hmm/ you missed a sign/
 44. A: hmm seven- seven-
 45. B: == {[hi] you go to hospital,} .. seven june// =ri:ght?=
 46. A: = {[hi] seven- = seven june,}
 47. B: right,
 48. A: i went to hospital/
 49. B: hmm/
 50. A: {[hi] thirteen june,}
 51. B: {[lo] out of hospital//}
 52. A: [*in English*] {hi} come back,} .. home//
 53. B: [[hi] come back home} right,
 54. A: ... ah .. [[hi] then the hospital,} .. sent a message, .. to the social security/
 55. B: ri:ght,
 56. A: ah {[hi] my- .. money,} wasn't given//
 57. B: no money/
 58. A: they didn't send any/
 59. B: {[hi] from signing place, hospital,} no money//
 60. A: [nods]

Fragment 6: Visitor from Punjab

A young Punjabi woman, “A”, who came in approximately 15 or 20 minutes before the beginning of the interaction accompanied by several older women relatives and two young men — one, her brother or cousin and the other, a visitor from Punjab, “C”. She is sitting at a large rectangular table alongside other clients, facing the main counselor, “B”, and a second counselor, “D”. B is just finishing with another client.

1. A: [*without saying anything, hands B a piece of paper*]
2. B: [*accepts paper without speaking, continuing to writing up the previous interview*]
3. B: [*picking up the paper*] what's happened//

4. A: they're going to send him back tonight to (xxx)//
5. B: now tell me right from the beginning/ when he first came//
6. A: he came- [*looks back in response to mumble from behind*]
he came here to (xx), on the twenty- twenty-eighth of may/
7. B: mhm/
8. A: for a visit// and, eh- .. they want to send him back tonight//
9. B: he came on the twenty:.
10. A: eighth of may//
11. B: twenty-eighth of may//
12. A: [nods]
13. B: and, .. how old is he?
14. A: [*without speaking, looks back to the other family members*]

The other young man turns to C and talks to him, but the talk is unintelligible on the tape.

15. B: he's- they're asking him//
16. A: [nods]
17. A: {[hi] can he come and-} can he sit next to you?
18. B: [*turns back towards relative*]
19. A: [*addressing C in Punjabi*] {[hi] [f] sit down over here//} [*pointing to the table at A's right*]

As C moves up to sit closer to the table, A turns her head briefly towards him. As he draws near her, she quickly turns back to center but follows with her eyeballs while keeping her head angled downward towards the table. C positions himself about 1 foot from the table.

20. B: so he came here on the twenty:
21. A: twenty-eighth/
22. B: eighth of may//
23. A: {[hi] for,} .. {[lo] what/} ... {[ac] for the purpose of a {[hi] visit?}}
24. A: just for a visit//
25. B: just for a visit//
26. A: [nods]
27. B: did he have a eh- um:: r- raidali? .. sponsorship with him?
28. A: [*turns her head towards C without speaking or looking at him*]
29. B: did he send him eh- somebody send him a sponsorship? saying i'll look out for him?
30. A: ==yeah//
31. B: ok/ .. fine// [*looks down then looks up towards C, addressing him in Punjabi*]
are you married?
32. C: yet to be (married)//
33. B: yet to be// ... what do you do? (what's your profession?)
34. C: agriculture//
35. B: you do agriculture// ... are you intending to go to some wedding?
[*turns to A, addressing her in English*] any marriage? any- any special function?

36. A: [*looks down and picks up a card she has been holding on her lap and without speaking shows it to B*]
 [*Audible although unintelligible talking from the relatives behind A*]
37. B: [*reaches for the card*] he did- he *did come for a wedding//
38. A: [*nods slightly*]
39. B: [*looks down to read the card*] <2 sec> [*reads out name and address in Punjabi, keeping eyes down*]
 [*looking at A*] is that a relative of yours?
40. A: [*angles head towards C without really looking at him and says a word or two which are unintelligible on the tape*]
41. B: [*addresses C in Punjabi*] is that a relative of yours?
42. C: (xxx)
43. B: [*addressing C*] (what is the relation?)
44. C: that's my uncle//
45. B: that's your uncle// so you want to attend a wedding? huh?
46. C: [*in Punjabi*] yes//
 <1 sec>
47. B: the wedding been arranged for the fourteenth of july?
48. D: it's on the fourteenth of July//