Chapter 5
The Role of Fast Speech in Misunderstandings in Brunei English

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5.1 Introduction

Over the last two decades, there have been a growing number of studies on Brunei English. Early research provided basic descriptions of its features, such as the description by Mossop (1996) of phonological features and the analysis by Cane (1996) of syntactic features. More recently, Deterding and Salbrina (2013) have explored Brunei English in a wider scope, including a detailed analysis of the phonology, and they report that there is a tendency to use [t] and [d] for the voiceless and voiced TH sounds, to reduce consonant clusters in final position, to realise the FACE and GOAT vowels as monophthongs, to use a full vowel rather than [ə] in unstressed syllables, and to adopt spelling pronunciation such as having [ɒ] in the first syllable of *company*. They also show that some Brunei speakers do not differentiate between long and short vowels, and that about half of young Bruneians have a rhotic accent.

In terms of syntax and discourse, some features of Brunei English have been claimed as typical of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), such as pluralising uncountable nouns like *furnitures* and *stuffs*, the omission or addition of articles, the use of a preposition between some verbs and their objects, the intermittent absence of the -s suffix on third person present tense verbs, and the fronting of topics (Deterding and Salbrina 2013, p. 70).

However, there has been little research on how intelligible Brunei English is in international communication. Deterding and Salbrina (2013, p. 122) briefly note that, according to the suggestions of Jenkins (2000), some features of pronunciation may cause misunderstandings, such as the lack of distinction in vowel length and the uncertain placement of the intonational nucleus. They also suggest that

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non-standard syntactic features, such as pluralising uncountable nouns and topic fronting, are unlikely to be problematic, but their suggestions about intelligibility need to be investigated.

In his study of misunderstandings in ELF spoken in Southeast Asia, Deterding (2013) found that one of the most common causes of loss of intelligibility is when participants speak fast and at times not very loudly. The current study investigates misunderstandings in Brunei English in ELF communication that may be caused by the fast speaking rate of some of the speakers. Feedback obtained from non-Bruneian participants is used to identify tokens in which intelligibility in Brunei English conversational speech is impaired by the Bruneians speaking rapidly.

5.2 English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

Jenkins (2009, p. 143) defines ELF as 'English as it is used as a contact language among speakers of different first languages'. According to this, which is in agreement with the definition of Seidlhofer (2011, p. 7), native speakers of English may be included when they are talking to speakers whose first language is not English.

Actually, the concept of a native speaker is rather hard to define (Davies 2003). When dealing with Bruneian speakers of English, classifying them as native or non-native speakers can be problematic, as some Bruneians grow up speaking the language at home although they also regularly speak Malay (Deterding and Salbrina 2013). If English is the first language they learn, should they be classified as native speakers? This study investigates Bruneian speakers talking in English to people from elsewhere without worrying about whether they are native speakers or not.

5.3 The Lingua Franca Core (LFC)

Jenkins (2000) suggests that not all features of English are important for intelligibility, and she proposes a Lingua Franca Core (LFC) of essential pronunciation features that are necessary for ensuring mutual intelligibility in ELF communication. The core features include all the consonants of English except dental fricatives, a contrast between long and short vowels, the avoidance of consonant deletion in word-initial clusters and only certain deletions permissible in word-medial and final position, and the placement of nuclear (tonic) stress (Jenkins 2009, p. 147). Features that are regarded as non-core include the dental fricatives, small shifts in vowel quality, lexical stress, rhythm and intonational tone, because they are not important for intelligibility.

In their corpus of ASEAN speech, Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006) found examples of pronunciation features that led to misunderstandings, including omission of [r] in *three*, the use of [n] at the end of *holes*, initial [ʃ] in *sauce*, and the occurrence of [t] in *us*, all of which would be core features in the LFC. However, other features shared by speakers from the various countries did not result in a break-down in communication. Some phonological features found among many new varieties of English which do not seem to cause a problem include the use of [t] for voiceless TH, reduction of final consonant clusters, and the use of syllable-based rhythm; and some grammatical and discourse features include the absence of past tense marking, regularisation of the count/non-count distinction on nouns, use of the invariant *is it* tag, and topic fronting (Kirkpatrick and Deterding 2011).

5.4 Intelligibility

In defining the concept of 'intelligibility', Smith and Nelson (1985, p. 333) note that understanding is not just speaker- or listener-oriented but is an interactional process between both interlocutors. Smith (1992, p. 76) posits three levels of understanding: 'intelligibility' which refers to word or utterance recognition; 'comprehensibility' which represents knowing the meaning of the word or utterance; and 'interpretability' which concerns understanding the intended meaning behind the word or utterance. However, Nelson (2011, p. 37) and Deterding (2013, p. 10) point out the difficulty in using the concept of interpretability, as it is often hard first to be sure of the intended message behind an utterance and second to determine if it is understood or not.

Kaur (2010, p. 195) differentiates between a 'misunderstanding', which occurs when the listener interprets a word or utterance with a meaning that is not intended by the speaker, and a 'non-understanding', when the listener is unable to make sense of a word or utterance. However, Deterding (2013, p. 13) argues that in reality it is difficult to classify instances based on these two terms, as listeners may make a guess about the meaning of words or utterances but not be certain. The current study similarly does not try to differentiate between misunderstandings and non-understandings.

In her study of ELF communication in an academic setting, Mauranen (2006, p. 135) found that misunderstandings rarely occur and that there is a tendency for the speakers to prevent misunderstandings by rephrasing their utterances and by providing additional explanations. We should however note that there is a possibility that some misunderstandings that occur in her data were not identified because the analysis was based on instances of misunderstanding that were sig- nalled by the interlocutors.

5.5 Data

The corpus used in this study consists of ten audio recordings collected over a period of 6 months in late 2013 and early 2014. Each recording involves two speakers, a Bruneian and a non-Bruneian, and we are concerned with how well the latter understands the former. A total of seventeen participants took part in the study and they are identified by their gender (F or M) followed by a two-letter code representing their country of origin. Details of the participants are listed in Table 5.1. Sixteen of the participants were students at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) and one was a visiting researcher at the university. All participants listed English as either their second or foreign language. They were asked to rate their fluency and proficiency in English which showed a range from 'very good' to 'fair'. These participants were selected because they were able to come back and meet the researcher to help identify areas of misunderstandings and also to clarify speech that was unclear to the researcher.

In each recording, the Bruneian speaker was being interviewed by the non-Bruneian participant. The researcher prepared a set of questions for the non-Bruneian participants. However, this only served as a guide to help give some ideas to the non-Bruneians, as many of them were able to come up with their own questions spontaneously and did not use the questions prepared by the researcher. A total of 3 h and 39 min of data was collected, with each recording lasting an average of about 22 min.

Table 5.1 Speakers

Speaker	Sex	Country	Age	L1	Occupation
FBr1	F	Brunei	33	Malay	Undergraduate student
FBr2	F	Brunei	31	Malay	Undergraduate student
FBr3	F	Brunei	24	Malay	Undergraduate student
FBr4	F	Brunei	19	Malay	Undergraduate student
FBr5	F	Brunei	19	Malay	Undergraduate student
MBr1	M	Brunei	24	Malay	Masters student
MBr2	M	Brunei	26	Malay	Masters student
MBr3	M	Brunei	30	Malay	Undergraduate student
FCh1	F	China	28	Cantonese	PhD student
FCh2	F	China	21	Cantonese	Exchange student
FCh3	F	China	21	Mandarin	Exchange student
FCh4	F	China	19	Mandarin	Exchange student
FMd	F	Maldives	32	Dhivehi	Masters student
FOm	F	Oman	33	Arabic	Masters student
FVn	F	Vietnam	28	Vietnamese	Masters student
MFr	M	France	30	French	Visiting researcher
MKo	M	Korea	23	Korean	Exchange student

Table 5.2 Recordings

Code	Participant 1	Participant 2	Duration (min:s)
Br + Ch1	MBr2	FCh1	20:48
Br + Ch2	FBr3	FCh2	22:46
Br + Ch3	FBr4	FCh3	20:56
Br + Ch4	FBr5	FCh4	20:27
Br + Fr	MBr3	MFr	22:28
Br + Ko	MBr3	MKo	21:04
Br + Md1	FBr1	FMd	21:45
Br + Md2	MBr1	FMd	21:31
Br + Om	MBr1	FOm	22:29
Br + Vn	FBr2	FVn	25:12
			Total: 3:39:26

The recordings are listed in Table 5.2. The identifying code for each recording is labelled with a two-letter code representing the speakers' countries of origin, the first country listed being the country of the interviewee and the second being that of the interviewer. Three participants took part in two separate recordings: MBr1 in Br + Om and Br + Md2; FMd in Br + Md1 and Br + Md2; and MBr3 in Br + Ko and Br + Fr.

5.6 Methodology

Data collection was conducted in a quiet room at UBD, using a Handy H4n recorder to record the conversations which were saved in WAV format. The recordings were then transcribed by the researcher following the conventions adopted in VOICE (2007). Where there are unclear and uncertain words and phrases, the researcher met up with the participants to ask for clarification. As noted by Deterding (2013, p. 25), it is essential to be able to obtain feedback from participants because it allows one to correct transcription of speech that is not clear, and it also enables the researcher to identify instances of misunderstanding that are not signalled in the recordings. In fact, the majority of instances of misunder- standings in ELF communication such as this do not result in any obvious com- munication breakdown, as speakers have a tendency to adopt a 'let-it-pass' strategy in the hope that failure to understand a few words will not matter in the long run (Firth 1996).

The primary aim of the study is to identify instances of misunderstanding in Brunei English, so the researcher relied substantially on feedback from the non-Bruneian participants. In obtaining feedback from them, instances were selected in which misunderstandings may have occurred. This was done by selecting short extracts from the recordings and asking the non-Bruneians to listen to them and transcribe what they heard.

Following Deterding (2013), misunderstood words and phrases are identified as 'tokens'. A total number of 152 tokens of misunderstanding are identified from the corpus. These tokens are numbered 1 to 152, but only those that involve fast speech (based on what the non-Bruneians said) are discussed in this paper. From their feedback, the non-Bruneians indicated that fast speech was a factor in causing a problem in 26 of the tokens (17 %). As such, it represents one of the most frequent factors that seem to interfere with the intelligibility of the Bruneian speech.

5.7 Data Analysis

The 26 tokens in which fast speaking rate was reported by the non-Bruneians to have been a factor in causing words or phrases to be misunderstood are listed in Table 5.3. In the 'Heard as' column, '?' is used to indicate tokens for which the

Table 5.3 Misunderstandings involving fast speech

Token	Speaker	Listener	Word(s) said	Heard as
13	MBr2	FCh1	leisure	?
21	FBr1	FMd	education area	educationary
37	FBr2	FVn	further	final
41	FBr2	FVn	cooperating	?
45	FBr2	FVn	although	look
50	FBr2	FVn	accommodation	conditions
59	FBr3	FCh2	major	?
62	FBr3	FCh2	i don't know i	?
63	FBr3	FCh2	hopefully	probably
74	FBr3	FCh2	experience	many
75	FBr3	FCh2	studied	said
79	FBr4	FCh3	intimidated	stimulated
90	FBr4	FCh3	fun	quite
92	FBr4	FCh3	national day	?
97	FBr5	FCh4	forgot	don't know
98	FBr5	FCh4	so i'm	some
100	FBr5	FCh4	ridden	in
106	MBr3	MKo	both of	but if
112	MBr3	MKo	accommodation	?
114	MBr3	MKo	comment	can
125	MBr3	MFr	d y (= discovery year)	d 1
129	MBr3	MFr	what do you call that	mahkota
135	MBr3	MFr	i've taught	after
136	MBr3	MFr	five	four
138	MBr3	MFr	food technology	? technology
144	MBr3	MFr	furthering my study	foreign master

non-Bruneians were unable to make a guess about the word(s). Nine tokens occur in the speech of MBr3 and five in the speech of FBr3, while the other twelve tokens occur in the speech of five of the other speakers. Of all the Bruneian participants, only MBr1 did not give rise to any misunderstandings as a result of fast speech (though there are some tokens of misunderstanding in the two recordings in which he participated that arose from other features of his speech). Moreover, there is only one token each from the recordings of FBr1 and MBr2. It is therefore clear that not all Bruneians regularly cause problems by speaking fast.

In many of the tokens that are listed in Table 5.3, other features such as lexis and syntax may also have an impact on intelligibility, and in many cases, these were probably the main factors that caused the problem. In fact, Pitzl et al. (2008) suggest that determining the precise cause of a misunderstanding is often difficult and that multiple factors are regularly implicated. These issues are discussed in the sections below. First, however, let us consider fast speech.

5.8 Fast Speech

Abercrombie (1967, p. 96) notes that 'speed of speaking … is best measured by rate of syllabic succession', so this study focuses on measurement of the speaking rate using syllables per seconds. Roach (1998, p. 153) reports that speaking rate in English varies between 3.3 and 5.9 syllables per second, while Fletcher (2010, p. 571) claims that speech rate can range from 5.2 to 5.9 syllables per second. However, Deterding (2013, p. 81) argues that these rates represent English in the inner circle (where English is used as the first language), and it may be different for interactions in ELF. He therefore suggests that we should adopt the midpoint of the range from Roach, which is 4.6 syllables per second, and this rate is used as a benchmark in this study. We may also note that avoiding vowel reduction may result in a slower speaking rate, so for Brunei speech, we may expect a lower figure than that suggested by Fletcher (2010).

Stretches of speech excluding pauses surrounding the tokens are identified. The duration of these stretches of speech and the calculation of speaking rate are presented in Table 5.4. Out of the 26 tokens, 12 tokens are classified as fast speech being the main reason behind the misunderstanding. These tokens are 21, 50, 62, 90, 97, 98, 112, 114, 129, 135, 136 and 138. All of these tokens except Token 136 have a speaking rate above the benchmark of 4.6 syllables per second. The other 14 tokens are classified as mainly involving other features of speech that play a bigger role in the misunderstanding, and they are analysed separately in subsequent sections.

There are 23 tokens with a speaking rate above the benchmark of 4.6 syllables per second, and only three tokens (Tokens 21, 74 and 136) that are in line with it. The token with the fastest speaking rate of 10.4 syllables per second is Token 129, because it represents a fixed phrase. The phrase *what do you call that* has five syllables and it is spoken rather fast. In his feedback, the listener MFr guessed it to

Table 5.4 Duration (s) and speaking rate (syllables per second)

Tok.	Spk.	Words	Syl.	Dur.	Spk.rate
13	MBr2	time do to any leisure	7	1.06	6.62
21	FBr1	education area for ten years	9	1.93	4.66
37	FBr2	the chance to further your	6	1.07	5.61
41	FBr2	as a cooperating teacher	9	1.48	6.08
45	FBr2	although it's a small country but	8	1.51	5.30
50	FBr2	there's accommodation also there	9	1.54	5.84
59	FBr3	a major in linguistics	7	1.15	6.09
62	FBr3	i don't know i	4	0.48	8.33
63	FBr3	hopefully it will	5	0.66	7.58
74	FBr3	experience different things	6	1.30	4.62
75	FBr3	i studied there right	6	1.05	5.71
79	FBr4	i feel intimidated so i started	11	1.51	7.29
90	FBr4	well actually it's fun it's	7	1.38	5.07
92	FBr4	choir national day it's	6	1.01	6.93
97	FBr5	i forgot what she drew	6	0.87	6.90
98	FBr5	so i'm just saying	5	0.74	6.76
100	FBr5	i've never ridden a motorcycle before	12	1.83	6.56
106	MBr3	both of my parents	5	0.92	5.43
112	MBr3	accommodation and the meals	8	1.08	7.41
114	MBr3	i comment one of the	6	0.95	6.32
125	MBr3	before my d y	5	0.75	6.67
129	MBr3	what do you call that	5	0.48	10.40
135	MBr3	i've taught in primary school so	8	1.05	7.62
136	MBr3	i have five siblings	5	1.10	4.55
138	MBr3	she has a degree in food technology	11	1.47	7.49
144	MBr3	furthering my study here	7	1.00	7.00

be *mahkota*, which has only three syllables. (This is a Malay word which means 'crown' in English. We may note that MFr is fluent in Malay.) However, MBr3 utters all five words without omitting any consonant or vowel sound, though perhaps the /l/ at the end of *call* is omitted as a result of L-vocalisation. We can therefore conclude that the listener finds this utterance difficult to understand just because the speaker MBr3 is speaking rather fast.

The second fastest is Token 62 with a speaking rate of 8.33 syllables per second. The utterance *i don't know i* is hard for the listener FCh2 to decipher because the speaker FBr3 is speaking fast. Furthermore, she does not pronounce the initial consonant [d] in *don't*, and this is most likely a major contributing factor to the misunderstanding.

The third fastest with a speaking rate of 7.58 syllables per second is Token 63. Although this token has a fast speaking rate, it is suggested that the elision of the

medial consonant [f] in *hopefully* may have been the biggest problem here. In both these tokens, we can say that the fast speaking rate led to the omission of consonants.

Several other tokens of fast speech are found to have elided consonant and vowel sounds that caused misunderstanding such as in Tokens 21, 112, 135 and 136. Of course, the elision of sounds is likely to have occurred partly because of the fast speaking rate.

Tokens 21, 74 and 136 have a speaking rate of 4.66, 4.62 and 4.55 syllables per second respectively, which is in line with the benchmark rate. Even though the listeners identified fast speech as a problem, the real issue may actually have been something else about the pronunciation. Segmental features that may have contributed to the problem are discussed in the next section.

5.9 Pronunciation of Segments

In this section, the analysis of segments is discussed in subsections based on the classification of the probable cause of the misunderstanding. These subsections include analyses of consonant reduction, TH sounds, vowels, and syllables.

5.9.1 Consonant Reduction

Simpson (2013, p. 158) notes that the phonetic patterns and shapes in conversational speech tend to be reduced compared to citation forms. Reduced consonants and vowels also have a shorter duration than in words that are spoken in citation form. He states that the most common form of reduction is elision, which occurs when a vowel or consonant in citation form is no longer present in conversational speech.

There are a number of tokens in this data in which a consonant sound is omitted. The following sounds are omitted: medial [f] sound in *hopefully* (Token 63), medial [d] in *studied* (Token 75), initial [d] in *day* (Token 92), and final [t] in *taught* (Token 135).

Simpson (2013, p. 159) also notes that elision is the most extreme form of lenition, or weakening, where lenition refers to 'a range of consonantal reduction patterns in which some aspect of the articulation or the voicing of a consonant in the spontaneous speech form appears weaker than it is in its corresponding citation form'. In Token 59, the medial affricate [dʒ] in *major* is reduced to the fricative [ʒ]. In Token 136, MBr3 does not pronounce the final [v] in fi*ve,* but uses a glottal stop instead, pronouncing the word as [fʌʔ]. This illustrates an example of another form of lenition called debuccalization, where there is a loss of the oral component of an obstruent, thus leaving behind just the glottal component (Simpson 2013, p. 160).

5.9.2 TH Sounds

Previous studies have found that the TH sounds in Brunei English are commonly realised as the plosives [t] and [d] rather than the dental fricatives [θ] and [ð] respectively (Mossop 1996; Salbrina 2010; Deterding and Salbrina 2013), and Deterding (2013, p. 34) notes that this is also salient in Singapore and Malaysia. Jenkins (2009, p. 147) excludes the dental fricatives from the LFC, arguing that substitution of these sounds does not result in loss of intelligibility in ELF communication (Jenkins 2000, p. 137), but the current study suggests that the pronunciation of TH sounds may be a factor in a few tokens.

Four tokens in this corpus of fast speech are identified with pronunciation of a TH sound as the probable main cause of misunderstanding. In *further* (Token 37), *although* (Token 45) and *furthering* (Token 144), the medial voiced TH is realised as [d], and in *both* (Token 106), final TH is realised as [d]. The analysis therefore indicates that use of [d] for TH in medial and final position can sometimes cause misunderstandings. Deterding and Salbrina (2013, p. 121) propose that [t] for initial voiceless TH and [d] for initial voiced TH in Brunei English may not be problematic for international intelligibility; and there are no tokens in the fast speech analysed here that contradict their suggestion.

5.9.3 Vowels

Early studies of the vowels of Brunei English suggested that long vowels tend to be shortened and that some vowels with diphthongal quality are realised as monophthongs (Mossop 1996), and later studies have confirmed this (Salbrina 2006, 2010; Deterding and Salbrina 2013). These tendencies are also found in this study of fast speech, and it is suggested that they can cause misunderstandings.

The shortening of long vowels is found in two tokens. In Token 45, FBr2 pronounces *although* [ʌldɒ] with the short vowel [ʌ] in the first syllable rather than with [ɔ:] which is expected in the standard RP pronunciation [ɔ:lðəʊ] (Wells 2008, p. 24), and in Token 138, MBr3 uses the short vowel [ʊ] in *food* for the long GOOSE vowel.

Other tokens illustrate the use of monophthong vowels for sounds that are diphthongs in standard RP English. In Tokens 41, 45, and 63, the Bruneian speakers use the short vowel [ɒ] for the GOAT vowel that is pronounced with the diphthong [əʊ] in RP. This occurs in the first syllable of *cooperating* in Token 41, in the second syllable of *although* in Token 45, and in the first syllable of *hopefully* in Token 63. In *education area* of Token 21, the speaker FBr1 has [ɪ] in the second syllable of *area* rather than the expected diphthong [ɪə] for the NEAR vowel (Wells 2008, p. 41) thus pronouncing the phrase as [ɪdʊkeʃənerɪ]. In Token 136, the vowel in fi*ve* is realised as [ʌ] rather than the expected diphthong [aɪ] for the PRICE vowel. For Token 98, FCh4 heard *some* instead of *so i'm* because FBr5 has the long

monophthong vowel [ɑː] rather than the expected diphthong [aɪ] in *i'm* because she is speaking fast.

In Token 13 of *leisure*, there seem to be a number of factors that contribute to the misunderstanding. The speaker, MBr2, pronounces the first syllable with the long vowel [iː] following the General American pronunciation [liːʒər] (Wells 2008, p. 458). In fact, the listener FCh1 is not familiar with this pronunciation and is only familiar with the alternative RP pronunciation [leʒə] (Wells 2008, p. 458). She further claimed that MBr2 was speaking very fast, and indeed the speaking rate of the phrase *time to do any leisure* is 6.62 syllables per second, which is higher than the suggested benchmark rate of 4.6 syllables per second. Therefore, although fast speech may play a role in the misunderstanding, it seems that the difference in pronunciation is more important here and that the problem also lies with the listener who is not familiar with American pronunciation.

Although shortening of long vowels may be expected for fast speech, in most of these cases there is a change in quality as well, for example with [ʊ] in *food* and [ɒ] in *hopefully*.

5.9.4 *Syllables*

In two tokens, fast speech resulted in a loss of syllables. For example, in Token 112, the third syllable in *accommodation* seems to be elided. It is, however, noted that this syllable contains a sonorant consonant, the nasal [m], and therefore syllabicity may be carried by this consonant. Furthermore, this is an unstressed syllable and it has been noted that vowels in unstressed syllables are most likely to be elided (Simpson 2013, p. 158). Therefore, although it seems that the speaker MBr3 has missed out a syllable, it may have just been an extreme case of a syllable being unstressed.

In Token 41, *cooperating* is pronounced [kɒpretɪŋ] with three rather than the five expected syllables [kəʊˈɒpəreɪtɪŋ] (Wells 2008, p. 184), so FBr2 merges the first two syllables and drops the vowel [ə] in the third syllable.

5.10 Lexis

In his analysis of 183 tokens of misunderstanding, Deterding (2013, p. 92) found that lexical usage is quite a common problem. In his data, there are 17 tokens of words and 8 tokens of phrases that the listeners are not familiar with, where shifted meaning occurs, and where words have more than one meaning and the listener understands the wrong one. This study identifies five tokens involving fixed phrases or words that the listeners subsequently stated they did not know but which they also claimed involve fast speech.

Extract 1 shows Token 41 where FBr2 uses the phrase *cooperating teacher*, a phrase which FVn is not familiar with. In her feedback, FVn subsequently told the researcher that she knew the word *cooperating*, but did not understand it when it was used in this phrase. (In the extracts, the misunderstood words are shown in bold font and underlined. In this transcription, the use of uppercase letters in *upper* indicates unexpected emphasis.)

Extract 1 Br + Vn: Token 41
Context: FBr2 is talking about her role as a helping teacher.

FBr2: but ah as a cooperating teacher to help the main teacher? but i am ah an english teacher for ah lower secondary UPPER secondary

In Token 79, shown in Extract 2, FCh3 subsequently explained in her feedback that she did not know the word *intimidated* and therefore guessed a word that she is familiar with: *stimulated*. (In this transcription, '(.)' is used to indicate a pause in the speech.)

Extract 2 Br + Ch3: Token 79
Context: FBr4 is talking about how she started reading English books.

FBr4: i was in secondary school like i saw my friends reading like english books i feel intimidated so i started to read english books but the young teens (.) young teens for the books for young teenagers

Extract 3 shows Token 100, in which FBr5 uses the word *ridden*, and afterwards FCh4 told the researcher that she was not familiar with this past participle form of *ride*. (In this transcription, '<1> … </1>' indicates overlapping speech.)

Extract 3 Br + Ch4: Token 100
Context: FBr5 is telling FCh4 that she had never experienced riding a motorcycle.

FCh4: he just took me home using his motorcycle <1> ah yeah </1>
FBr5: <1> ah motorcycle i've never been </1> you know i've never ridden a motorcycle before or ever (.) you know sat on it

In Token 125, shown in Extract 4, MBr3 uses the initialism *d y*, referring to Discovery Year, which is a student exchange programme or internship programme for third-year students at UBD. Being a visiting researcher from France, the listener MFr was not familiar with the structure of the academic programmes at UBD. (In this transcription, '<spel> … </spel>' is used to show individual letters that are spelt out, and the question mark '?' which occurs at the end indicates rising intonation.)

Extract 4 Br + Fr: Token 125
Context: MBr3 is telling MFr that he is going to study in the United States for a year.

MBr3: ah this is my second year before my <spel> dy </spel> i will be going to (.) michigan?

In Token 138, shown in Extract 5, MBr3 uses the phrase *food technology* which the listener MFr is not familiar with. (In this transcription, '<tsk>' indicates an alveolar click that probably indicates some frustration in being unable to think of the term.)

Extract 5 Br + Fr: Token 138
Context: MBr3 is telling MFr about his sister's academic qualifications.

MBr3: erm she has a degree in (.) <tsk> what you call that she has a degree in food technology

Uttering these unfamiliar words and phrases suggests that sometimes the Bruneian speakers fail to accommodate to the needs of the listeners. Therefore, although pronunciation and fast speech may have contributed to the misunderstandings, lexical usage can also sometimes cause loss of intelligibility.

There are many other tokens in this study with unfamiliar words and phrases, but only the five shown above involve unfamiliar expressions which the listeners claimed were spoken fast.

5.11 Syntax

In his study, Deterding (2013) reports only a few tokens of misunderstanding caused by grammatical issues, such as omitted verbs and unusual word order, while other unusual grammatical features are not problematic.

In the current study, only one of the fast speech tokens is found to have non-standard grammatical features which may or may not have played a part in the misunderstanding. In token 114, shown in Extract 6, MBr3 describes a past action but does not use the past tense of the verb *comment* by adding the –ed suffix, an omission that is common in Brunei English (Deterding and Salbrina 2013, p. 59).

Extract 6 Br + Ko: Token 114
Context: MBr3 is talking about pictures he had seen on social media.

MBr3: i think i comment one of the
MKo: ah
MBr3: erm i think one of the f- pictures?

Furthermore, *comment* is an intransitive verb, so the preposition *on* is expected if there is an object. In this token, the speaker includes an object *one of the pictures* but does not use a preposition after *comment*. It is not clear whether this

non-standard usage of the word in terms of tense, and also the absence of a preposition, play a role in the misunderstanding, as the listener MKo only explained that he could not understand it because MBr3 was speaking fast.

5.12 Miscellaneous

In token 74, shown in Extract 7, the listener, FCh2, hears *many* instead of *experience*. However, it is perhaps the overlapping speech that is the problem here. Liddicoat (2011, p. 123) points out that having more than one person speaking at a time can cause an interactional problem. In this case, the overlap shows FCh2 providing backchannels to agree with FBr3 while the latter is still talking.

Extract 7 Br + Ch2: Token 74
Context: FBr3 is talking about travelling by ferry.

FBr3: yeah it's good to: go erm boat riding or other than just go on airplanes (that) like you get to
FCh2: <1> mm mm mm </1>
FBr3: <1> <u>experience</u> different </1> things yeah

This token is included in fast speech because the listener, FCh2, claimed that she misheard this token because FBr3 was speaking fast, even if overlapping speech may have been the bigger problem here. The speaking rate of the utterance is 5.38 syllables per second, which is just a little faster than the benchmark rate.

5.13 Conclusion

Altogether, 26 tokens of misunderstandings have been identified as involving fast speech, but the pronunciation of vowels and consonants seems to be a factor in many instances. In some cases, the reduction of vowels and consonants may arise as a result of the fast speaking rate. In addition, lexical choice, syntax, and overlapping speech are implicated in seven tokens. However, in twelve of the tokens, speaking rate is either the only or the probable main cause of the misunderstanding.

It seems that fast speaking rate is found in the speech of seven out of the total of eight Bruneian speakers. In Deterding's (2013) study, many of the tokens involving fast speaking rate are from one speaker who was from Indonesia. Perhaps there may be a pattern here involving native Malay speakers with a fast speaking rate, though this suggestion should be treated with caution. In fact, Yuan et al. (2006) show that there is a correlation between a speaker's native language and their speaking rate in English, giving the example of Japanese speakers having a slower speaking rate in English which may be influenced by their culture of politeness. It is possible that Bruneian speakers are accustomed to speaking fast and some non-Bruneian participants may not habitually speak so fast when speaking in English.

Furthermore, as English is a second language for most Bruneians, and as current university undergraduates have been exposed to English as a medium of education since the fourth year of primary school (Jones 2007), we may assume that their level of proficiency in English is higher than those who speak English as a foreign language. Brunei English speakers should therefore be aware that when speaking to others whose English proficiency may not be as high as theirs, they should speak clearly, avoid speaking fast, and avoid using words and phrases that are uncommon or have special local meanings.

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