An Investigative Study of Perceptual Mismatches Proposed by
Kumaravadivelu in Postmethod Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Human ideas, conversations and interactions have a huge potential to contain ambiguities and mismatches not only in everyday life, but also in language classrooms where everyday teaching is bound to have exceptions and mismatches. In the 21st century language classrooms, there have always been contradictions between the learner's understanding of the content and the teacher's perception of teaching the content It is an everyday challenge for teachers to make classroom teaching innovative and interesting. The reason is that learners do not look at the monotonous classroom teaching as a potential learning event. Successful learning in the classroom happens only when the teacher's intention of teaching a given task matches with the learner's proper interpretation of it. Any kind of difficulty in understanding teacher's intentions becomes learner's potential mismatches. Kumaravadivelu identified ten potential sources of mismatches that generally occur in ESL classrooms. He says, "The gap between teacher and learner perceptions of the aims and activities of classroom events can easily increase the gap between teacher input and learner intake." (Kumaravadivelu, p. 77)

The present study attempts to:

1. Study the Mismatches identified by Kumaravadivelu.
2. Explore those perceptual mismatches in the UG General English classroom.
3. Suggest measures to minimize the mismatches.

KEY WORDS: Post method Pedagogy, Perceptual Mismatches, Macrostrategy.

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Introduction

'An ESL Teacher used to handle 'conversations' class by going in with a dialogue which the learners first practice and then build into a more general discussion. One day he went in with a dialogue on paper as usual, but his learners immediately started a conversation on some topical issue. After twenty minutes or so of lively discussion- just what the teacher always wanted but rarely got from these learners – one member of the class puts up her hand and asked: "Please, when are we going to start the conversation" (1987, P.99).

This anecdote tells us that teachers and learners do not look at the classroom event as a potential learning event. In other words, there can be, and often are, mismatches between teacher perceptions and learner perceptions of what is available to learn. At least for the particular learner mentioned in the anecdote, twenty minutes of student-initiated, lively, authentic conversation did not constitute conversational practice. She was impatiently waiting for the conversation to start. This shows that the gap between teacher and learner perceptions of the aims and activities of classroom events can easily increase the gap between teacher input and learner intake.

Results and Discussion

Kumaravadivelu in his Post method pedagogy, proposed a Macrostrategic framework which includes 10 different macro strategies. One of the macro strategies, 'Minimizing Perceptual Mismatch', identifies sources of potential mismatches between teacher intention and learner interpretation by exploring learners and teachers' perceptions of the nature, goals and demands.

In order to examine sources of potential mismatches between teacher

intention and learner interpretation, Kumaravadivelu (1991) conducted a research study on the low intermediate level ESL learners in the United States, to explore the nature, the goals, and the demands of a selected language-learning task and identified ten sources of potential mismatches between teacher intention and learner interpretation. They are:

1. **Cognitive mismatch**: This source refers to the incapability of the learner to understand or recognize a particular item in a foreign language. In fact, it "refers to the general, cognitive knowledge of the world that adult language learners bring with them to the classroom. It pertains to the mental processes such as, remembering, perceiving, recognizing, and inferencing" (p. 81).

2**. Communicative mismatch**: This mismatch occurs when the learner is able to understand but is not confident of talking. This source "refers to the communication skills necessary for the learners to exchange messages or express personal views because, the learners have only a limited command of the target language, they struggle to convey their message" (p. 82). For example, the learner might be unable to communicate the ideas clearly because of the limited communicative ability. Hence, they might try to employ the familiar communication strategy of circumlocution to get the message across. However, the teacher may fail to get the learner's intended message and end the interaction by saying "OK."

3**. Linguistic mismatch**: It refers to a situation in which the learner is able to understand, but not having enough knowledge of the language. "This source refers to the linguistic repertoire - syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic knowledge of the target language - that is minimally required to do a task, and to talk about it" (p. 83). The teacher may not expect that a very familiar linguistic item

might be a source of problem for the learner.

4**. Pedagogic mismatch**: This mismatch refers to a situation in which learner is not clear about the main purpose of a lesson in the class. Therefore, there might be a confusion about what is going on in the classroom. It "refers to the teacher and learner perceptions of stated or unstated short - or long - term instructional objective(s) of language learning tasks" (p. 83). The perception of the learners' in terms of the purpose of the lesson may not match each other's or that of the teacher.

5**. Strategic mismatch**: This mismatch refers to a situation in which the learner is not clear about the overall approach to be followed in order to work on an intended subject. It "refers to learning strategies: operations, steps, plans, and routines used by the learner to facilitate the storage, retrieval, and use of information, that is, what learners do to learn and to regulate learning" (p. 84). The mismatch might

happen between the strategies the teacher expects the learners to use and the ones they actually use. The learners might prefer to use the simplest possible strategy of elimination and solve the problem within a few minutes and without much negotiation. It is noteworthy that when strategic mismatches occur, they do not necessarily involve all the students in the classroom. While some students were observed to be performing an activity different from the teacher's expectations, simultaneously other students were observed to be performing the activity as intended.

6. **Cultural mismatch**: This mismatch is likely to occur when the learner has not enough cultural knowledge about a particular subject in a foreign language. "This source refers to the prior knowledge of the cultural norms of the target language community minimally required for the learners to understand and solve a problem-oriented task" (p. 85). Students

come from different cultural backgrounds and due to the fact that the native speaker teacher comes from different cultural background, the learners might not be clearly aware of the cultural nuances that exist.

7. **Evaluative mismatch**: This mismatch points to the attempt made by the learner to find out whether what he/she already knows about something is correct or not. "This source refers to articulated or unarticulated types of self-evaluation measures used by learners to monitor their ongoing progress in their language-learning activities" (p. 86). What the learner tries to learn might influence and conflict with the prior knowledge learnt in previous classes and the teacher might be unaware of this self-evaluation. This can consequently lead to mismatches between the teacher and the learner.

8. **Procedural mismatch**: This mismatch refers to a situation in which learner is not clear about specific steps to be followed in

order to fulfil a particular task or obtain a specific result in the class. The teacher may not be aware of the path chosen by the learner to achieve the immediate goal. "This source refers to the state or unstated paths chosen by the learners to do a task. The procedural source pertains to locally specified, currently identified, bottom-up tactics that seek an immediate resolution to a specific problem, whereas the strategic source, discussed earlier, pertains to any broad-based, higher level, top-down strategy that seeks an overall solution in a general language learning situation" (p. 87). A learner, for instance, might attempt a detailed, bottom-up explanation of how to go about solving a problem. This procedural thinking on the part of the learner might not fit the expectations of the teacher, although it might be correct.

9. **Instructional mismatch**: This mismatch occurs when the learner is unable to understand the direction given by the teacher about a particular task or piece

of work in the class. Hence, teacher's directions are not clear to the students. "This source refers to instructional guidance given by the teacher or indicated by the textbook writer to help learners carry out the task successfully" (p. 88). Even straightforward instructional guidance can produce unintended effects. In some cases, when teachers ask learners to work on language activities in groups or on their own, they are often concerned with giving explicit instructions. This concern comes from the fact that it is impossible for teachers to be present when students actually perform the assigned activity. Thus, at times, the process that students follow may not match the teacher's expectations.

10. **Attitudinal mismatch**: It refers to a situation in which the learner is not happy or satisfied with the performance of the teacher in the class. "This source refers to participants' attitudes towards the nature of L2 learning and teaching, the nature of

the classroom culture, and teacher-learner role relationships. Adult learners, by virtue of their prior experience, have fairly well-established attitudes toward classroom management, and these preconceived notions can easily contribute to the mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation" (p. 88). In addition, there can be various types of attitudinal mismatches arising out of preconceived notions about factors such as participant expectations, classroom management, learning strategies and cultural stereotypes.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) believes that these mismatches are not exhaustive and further research might reveal more of them. At the same time, these mismatches do not have any distinct boundaries. He puts emphasis on the fact that mismatches are 'unavoidable' but they are identifiable' and 'manageable'. He opines, "If mismatches are identified in time and are correctly addressed, they can be converted into a learning opportunity in class. The

mere recognition of the source of a mismatch could help both the learners and the teachers understand that there is an underlying reason for the difficulties the learners may have encountered in making sense of a classroom event" (p. 90). In fact, in order to maintain a considerable degree of understanding between the teachers and the learners about the aims and activities, staying vigilant about perceptual mismatches between teacher intention and learner interpretation carries a paramount importance in the classroom.

In order to explore possible mismatches between learner and teacher perceptions, proposed by Kumaravadivelu, in a UG classroom, a research study was conducted to investigate the perceptual mismatches between two groups (group A and group B) of Under Graduate learners on the text titled "Refund". Group A was taught by using chalk and talk method, and group B was made to watch the play. There were approximately thirty students

in each class. An open ended questionnaire comprising ten questions was administered to both the groups after the class and was asked to give their responses.

The analysed data of responses from both groups of varied imbibing styles of the same text revealed insights into the mismatches between teacher intention and learner interpretation. For example, in one case, group B understood the theme of the text "Refund" better than group A, because they enjoyed the visual effect of the play rather than mere play of the imagination. This refers to the 'attitudinal mismatch' proposed by Kumaravadivelu. In another instance when the groups were asked to list out the important vocabulary of the Play, the group 'A' came out with the lengthy list in contrast to group 'B'. This is called 'strategic mismatch'. In another case, the students were supposed to talk about different questions the teacher posed to Wasserkopf in the play. Having a limited proficiency in English language,

some of the students were unable to express their ideas clearly. The teacher did not understand what they said, nevertheless; terminated the conversation. In fact, this case was a 'communicative mismatch' between the teacher understanding and the learner's intended message. In the classroom, students were asked to paraphrase a few lines of the play. However, the instruction given by the teacher was unclear to the learners of group B, who did not read the text line by line but witnessed visually. So, 'instructional mismatch' happened between what the teacher expected the learners to do and what they actually did in the classroom. In another instance, students of both the groups failed to identify the usage of words like 'schwefler' and 'loafers' leaving them with 'Cognitive mismatch'.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The difficulties that learners may face in understanding the aims and activities of the classroom are due to potential mismatches between their interpretation and their teacher's intention. Because mismatches are based, at least partly, on learners' interpretations of what happens in class, teachers can play an important role in identifying them. They can minimize the mismatches by following the following:

1) Introducing the students to possible mismatches between teacher intention and learner interpretation of classroom depending on the proficiency level of the students.

2) Allotment of two mismatches each, two groups of five and enabling them to talk about the allotted mismatches in their groups by encouraging them to share their understanding of mismatches and coming up with examples drawn from their own classroom experiences.

3) Having a representative chosen from each group, allowing them to present their examples to the class, followed by a discussion and a feedback by the teacher.

4) By designing a survey questionnaire by the teacher on the aims and activities of a particular lesson or topic to elicit much more probable mismatches in a classroom which might in turn help teachers to work upon them.

This paper tried to bring out the possible mismatches that can take place in a UG classroom and suggested a few measures to overcome those mismatches. However, apart from the observed mismatches, other kinds of mismatches were also discussed. It is not only important to understand the importance of minimizing perceptual mismatches in a language classroom, but also is challenging to identify and analyze them. Perceptual mismatches are hidden; they are not easily revealed. The aim of creating an awareness of the perceptual mismatches in the language classroom can be achieved only through negotiated interaction among participants in the classroom event.

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