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**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
BREAKDOWNS THAT ELT STUDENTS FACED
WHILE BEING AT A SUMMER CAMP.**

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ABSTRACT

This project took part at a language department of a public university located in central Mexico. The participants were ELT students who had already finished their 5 target language courses and had the opportunity to participate in an American summer camp at least once. The instrument used to collect information was an interview. During the process two different interviews were created taking into account the research questions in order to get the specific information from participants; both of them were recorded to analyze the data. The results showed that all students faced breakdowns the first time they were in another country. It was because of the nervousness and shyness they felt to speak the language with native people. They also felt afraid of not being understood by them. It is important to mention that at the beginning communication in English was difficult and frustrating for some participants because the pronunciation that a native speaker has is different from what they were accustomed to. More results are revealed within this thesis.

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**Intercultural communication: breakdowns that ELT students face while
communicating at American summer camps.**

CHAPTER I:

1.0 Introduction to the problem

Currently we are living in a competitive world in which the use of technology such as internet and social networks help us communicate with foreign people in a few minutes. The use of airplanes helps us travel to different countries in a few hours and interact with people from different cultures, languages, backgrounds, and beliefs around the world.

When we communicate with people from different cultures it is important to take into account that communication and culture are strongly connected and that we cannot separate one from the other. Hall (1959 as cited in Gudykunst & Kim, 2003) maintains that “culture is communication” and “communication is culture”. Thus, to understand what people are communicating we have to understand their culture first. The way we transmit the message will depend on the situation in which we find ourselves but it is also influenced by our background, culture, thoughts, beliefs and the way in which foreign people receive it is also affected by all those factors. In addition, since the first time that we communicate with foreign people we are exposed to other factors that can cause breakdowns when using a foreign language. The accent, fluency and misuse of a word or phrase can influence the receiver’s understanding of the message.

According to the previous information, we could say that intercultural communication is the feasibility we have to interact with people from different cultures who communicate using the same language, in this case English. American Summer camps are a clear example

of intercultural communication. These places hire young people from different countries to work and therefore have the opportunity to communicate, share ideas and interact with people from different cultures.

In the language department where this study was carried out, students who are studying the major in English Language Teaching (ELT) have the opportunity to participate in summer camps in the United States with the purpose of practicing and improving the language learning of that country. Therefore, this research focuses on investigating the communication breakdowns that ELT students faced when attending a summer camp and how they managed to communicate effectively.

1.1 Rationale (justification)

I am an ELT student and I had the opportunity to go to a summer camp where most of the girls who I worked with had different nationalities what made communication difficult in some cases.

I experienced miscommunication when trying to be part of the conversation with people from the camp I attended to; unfortunately, it was my first time in a different country and understanding native speakers was complicated because of the fluency of their speaking. On the other hand, due to the different accent non- native speakers had, I faced some breakdowns when communicating.

It is important to mention that I observed I was not the only one who faced problems when communicating with people from other cultures at a summer camp. Most of my classmates who participated in a summer camp got frustrated because the communication in the new country was not as we expected at the beginning.

Another important reason was that as a future English teacher it would be helpful to know some of the reasons why students get frustrated at the moment of speaking the language they are learning in real contexts. This would help me to find the adequate methodology to fulfill my students' expectations so they can work with the typical breakdowns before they travel abroad or put their language into practice in contexts where they are demanded to do so.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to identify the communication breakdowns ELT students faced when communicating with people from participating cultures at the camp taking into account culture as an important factor in this process of communication.

1.4 Research aims

To identify the breakdowns that students faced during the summer camps.

To analyze those communication breakdowns and find out the role of culture when interacting with different cultures.

To find out how students overcame those communication breakdowns.

1.5 Research questions

This investigation sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1 What communication breakdowns did ELT students face when interacting at summer camps?

RQ2 How did ELT students overcame those breakdowns?

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is important since it adds to our understanding of intercultural communication in the process of message transmission. An important point to take into account when communicating with foreign people is culture which includes beliefs, values, customs and thoughts (Samovar et al. 2009). Thus, our cultural background could be a significant factor in the practice of intercultural communication.

It is also important to be aware that communication is a whole process that involves some components used to create a message, if we understand that culture and communication play an important role in the process of intercultural communication we will be able to understand not just people from our same culture but, also foreign people and the transmission of messages will be easier because we will be conscious about the things that could cause communication breakdowns.

1.7 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter the introduction of the research was developed as well as my research questions and aims were explained taking into account the purpose of this study. In the next chapter some concepts and important information about culture and communication will be explained to understand better the role that intercultural communication plays in this research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

As was mentioned in the previous chapter the objective of this research was to identify the communication breakdowns ELT students faced when communicating with people from participating cultures at the camp taking into account culture as an important factor in this process of communication.

Throughout this second chapter the different elements and concepts that are necessary to understand intercultural communication such as culture, communication and its components, the transmission, interpretation and misunderstanding of messages in order to create an effective communication will be further explained.

Communication is part of our daily life and it is something that we cannot avoid. During the intercultural communication process, we might face some problems when communicating with foreign people. So, it is important to know that the process of communication is not simple and that it includes a series of steps and elements which play an important role and probably the breakdowns in some of the components can make our communication useless.

Within this process there are important factors that affect our performance while communicating. Those influences can cause in many of the cases problems in the transmission of a message. The role that a sender plays is very important because the way in which he or she transmits the message is going to be interpreted by the receiver so; if the

sender does not have a good management of the messages it is probably that the receiver faces misunderstanding of information.

2.1 Culture

Culture plays an important role in our life. The ways we think, behave and interact within the society depend on our culture. When we are born we have no knowledge about the rules of the culture we belong to, but as we grow up, we learn all that information by looking others, imitating and interacting.

Culture is a term used by many authors to describe different ideas. Taylor (2007, cited in Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2009) states that “culture is that whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p.10).

As we can see culture is not an easy concept to understand. In order to make it clear, there is an example of how even when people talk about the same things the perception is not the same.

Stop for a minute and think of the word *football*. What mental picture comes to your mind? Most U.S. Americans will envision two teams of 11 men each in helmets and pads, but someone in Montréal, Canada, would imagine 12 men per team. A resident of Sidney, Australia, may think of two-18 men teams in shorts and jerseys competing to kick an oblong ball between two up rights, while a young woman in San Paulo, Brazil, would probably picture two opposing teams of 11 men, or women, attempting to kick around ball into a net. In each case, the contest is referred to as “football,” but the playing fields, equipment, and the rules of each game are quite different (Samovar et al., 2009:10).

In that example it is clear that a simple word known around the world such as football can be interpreted differently by each culture. Communication may be misunderstood by the members of each culture depending on the perception they have for each concept even though we know the topic we are talking about. The way we think and perceive things around us is

influenced by our beliefs, values, and customs generally our whole background. All those elements are part of any culture. According to Greetz (1973, cited in Samovar et al. 2009), “culture was a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p10).

2.2 Intercultural communication

Understanding people from our same culture is not an easy task because of the perception they have about the world. So, understanding people whose background and the way they do things are different it could be even more difficult (Pranne, 2010).

Nowadays people decide to learn another language for different purposes; for example, travel, business, trade or studies. The reasons might vary but something that is clear is that leaning another language implies communication in that language with people from diverse cultures but, with the same language in common.

According to Samovar et al. (2009), “Intercultural communication occurs whenever a person from one culture sends a message to be processed by a person from a different culture” (p.7). On the other hand, Pranne (2010) indicates that:

Intercultural communication means that people from different cultural backgrounds interact with one another. Cultural differences can create potential to make intercultural communication very difficult and sometimes impossible. Culture strongly affects values, beliefs, world views, nonverbal behavior, language, and how to have relationship with others (p.7).

Both definitions (Samovar et al. & Pranne, 2009-2010) agree that intercultural communication occurs when people from different cultures and backgrounds communicate with each other.

2.2.1 Intercultural communication competence.

The ability to interact with people from different cultures is an increasing importance competence (Lusting 2005, cited in Deardorff 2009). Beyond the need to be competitive in a global world people travel for diverse purposes. Currently there are more than 200,000 students, who travel abroad to study but, not only is it important for students to be competitive, the new opportunities for employment overseas become an important factor. Competitive business hires intellectually competitive employees to be successful in business (Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009).

Intercultural communication is defined as the degree to which people effectively adapt their verbal and nonverbal messages to the appropriate cultural context (Neuliep, 2009). However, Kim (2005, cited in Jandt 2007), points out that “intercultural communication competence refers to one’s skill in facilitating successful intercultural communication outcomes in terms of satisfaction and other positive assessments of the interaction partner”. Nevertheless, intercultural communication competence is different in each situation, an American could be competitive when communicating with Japanese but, while interacting with Germans he could be incompetent (p.44).

Spitzberg and Cupach (1989 cited in Spitzberg 2000), argue that there are three ingredients of communication competence, skills, abilities and attitude.

On the other hand, Neuliep (2009) mentions that knowledge component refers to how much we know about the culture of the other people who we are interacting to. The affective component involves the level of motivation we have to interact with foreign people. The Psychomotor component includes the verbal and nonverbal language and our ability to

manage both of them, and finally the situational feature is component in which intercultural communication takes place.

Chen (1989- 1990, cited in Jandt 2007) mentions that an effective communicator must be competent in both verbal and nonverbal communication and also be able to adapt and understand the new culture in order to overcome feelings of culture shock.

When we are in another country with strange people the process of adapting to the new culture is not very easy, in the next section I will define communication and some of its components to understand the process of intercultural communication.

2.2 Communicating with foreign people

Communicating with foreign people in a different language might be complicated. When we are in a different country we are confronted with languages, rules, and norms different from our own. There are many factors that affect our development while communicating with foreign people so, to be successful in communication we have to understand this process first.

2.2.1 Communication

According to Griffin (2009, cited in Samovar et al. 2009), “communication is the management of messages with the objective of creating meaning” (p.8). However, Frederick (1993, cited in Jandt 2007) mentions that “communication refers to the study of the trans-border transfer of information, data, opinions, and values by groups, institutions and governments as well as the issues that arise from the transfer” (p.36).

The two definitions above mentioned coincide that communication is the transmission of messages to be processed by the receiver. But, to understand better this concept of

communication the elements and the roll that each one has will be explained in the process of communication.

2.2.2 Process of communication.

The communication process as was mentioned before is not simple. It is important to know that communication cannot be possible if an element is missing so, to be able to understand communication it is necessary to understand the concept first. The first element and the most important is the sender. Samovar et al. (2009) indicate that a sender is someone with a need or desire to transmit information in order to communicate with others. In other words, the person who wants to communicate an idea is called source (Jandt, 2007).

With these two definitions it is clear that a sender could be any person with the intention of communicating something. The second point is the message which is the information that a sender wants the other people to receive, and the way a message can be transmitted could be verbal or non-verbal. (Samovar et al., 2009).

The next element is considered as the channel which refers to the via by which the message is transmitted (Jandt,2007).

However, Samovar et al. (2007) indicate that a channel is a path for moving the message to the receiver. The receiver is the person who interprets and gives meaning to the message, that interpretation may be or not what the sender pretended. So, the receiver might feel offended (Samovar et al., 2009). After the interpretation of the message the receiver formulates a response, which is the next element in this process. Jandt (2007, p.34), states that “receiver response refers to anything the receiver does after having attended to and decoded the message”. According to Samovar et al. (2009), feedback is an important element

that helps us to evaluate the effectiveness of the message just by looking the receiver's reaction. It means if the message was offensive to the other person there is a chance to rephrase or even retract the message.

Wherever communication takes place is considered the context or the environment which could be a school, a coffee shop, a library, an office or a night club among others. Nevertheless, in all those places there are certain distractions and interferences that we consider as the noise. The noise is defined as anything that distorts the message; the noise can be of many forms such as external which means all the sounds that draw our attention away, for example listening to music while reading, and internal noise which refers to our thoughts and feelings. For instance, being hungry can distort the message by paying more attention on what you are feeling than what you are hearing at that moment.

According to Samovar et al. (2009), physiological noise is the well-being of the people, so physiological and internal could be the same thing based on what was written before. This type of noise frequently occurs in intercultural communication especially because of the adaptation to the new culture where people are facing by many changes and can easily cause the misunderstanding of messages.

After reviewing all the elements that a process of communication involves, we have realized that communication is not simple and that we have to keep in mind that if an element is not used correctly, our communication will be misunderstood.

2.2.3 Communication aspects that influence the process of communication with foreign people

According to Gudykunst and Young (2003), there are four main influences when communicating with foreign people, those are cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural and

environmental but, in this section only some of them such as culture shock, stereotyping, uncertainty and anxiety will be explained.

2.2.3.1 Culture shock

People who have traveled abroad, for a period of time, to another country surely have experienced culture shock. When people move to a new culture they take with them their values, beliefs, customs and behaviors of their own culture but, when arriving into the new culture all the background we have clashes with the background of the new culture. This situation can cause disorientation, misunderstandings and conflict while interacting with the new culture. This phenomenon is called by many researchers as culture shock (Neuliep, 2009). Winkelman (2017), maintains that culture shock can occur with immigrant groups, such as foreign students and refugees, international business exchanges, peace corps volunteers and social groups.

During the cultural shock there are stages that people face. Alder and Pedersen (1995, cited in Jandt 2007) describe culture shock as a five-stage process. The first stage is called the honeymoon, where everything is new and exciting. The second stage involves the disintegration of familiar cues. At this stage people may feel confused and isolated because they do not understand people's gestures, signals or even actions. The third stage involves a reintegration of the new cues and an ability to function in this new culture. In the fourth stage, the individual feels more comfortable in the new culture and there are fewer feelings of isolation. The final stage is defined as reciprocal interdependence where the individual has achieved biculturalism, and is able to interact comfortably in both cultures.

Culture shock is an important issue we have to take into account at the moment of experiencing a new culture. The duration of the cultural shock will depend on the ability to manage it. Some of the strategies to have a good management of culture shock are the following:

Study the host culture: reading about new culture, surfing the net about the climate, government, education, geography and population, interviewing people who have lived or travelled to that culture can be of great help.

Studying the local environment: learning about important places such as schools, hospitals, shops and even how transportation works would help for a better orientation. Learning basic verbal and nonverbal language will facilitate communication in case fluency in the language fails. Developing intercultural relationships can be a good way of interacting with people in the new culture. The strategies to manage culture shock could make adaptation and communication easier to the new culture.

2.2.3.2 Stereotyping

When meeting people for the first time the mind creates attributions and immediately stereotype and categorize them according to the skin color, body size and social roles. Lippman (1922, cited in Gudykunst & Young 2007), refers to stereotypes as “pictures in our heads”. Stereotyping involves members of a group giving attributions to another group; those attributions could be negative or positive and involve some categories such as sex, race, age or profession (Gudykunst & Young, 2007).

Taylor and Porter (cited in Neuliep, 2009) maintain that stereotyping is a normal process that each society develops. Stereotyping influences the way we process information;

sometimes what we see is what we expected to see. In other words, if thinking that communication with strangers is difficult the brain automatically creates a reaction of it (Jandt, 2007).

2.2.3.3 Uncertainty

When meeting someone for the first time, we might feel insecure when starting a conversation but, once we interact with them we starting feeling comfortable in that new situation. Talking to friends they were once strangers we can realize that first time we met them communication was full of uncertainty. If it happens with people from our same culture, it will happen also with foreign people. We have greater uncertainty in the initial interaction with foreign people than in that with a member of the same culture (Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1975, cited in Gudykunst & Young, 2003).

When communicating with people from other cultures, the ability to communicate effectively is based on the management of controlling the uncertainty (Gudykunst, 2009). According to Neuliep (2009), uncertainty is defined as the amount of predictability in a communication situation; in other words, it is the insecurity to handle the language in a proper way. According to Gudykunst and Young (2009), when meeting someone from the same culture the situation makes people feel comfortable when interacting with them, however, this not always happens if the situation does not reduce the uncertainty, we must reduce it ourselves.

Moreover, as we interact with foreign people uncertainty decreases; it means, when starting to interact with them and knowing each other we feel confident to talk without feeling nervous and afraid to commit mistakes (Hubbert, Gudykunst and Guerrero 1999, cited

in Gudykunst & Young 2003). Uncertainty plays an important role while communicating; a good performance depends on the ability to control the uncertainty and anxiety.

2.2.3.4 Anxiety

When interacting with strangers, we are exposed to high levels of uncertainty and anxiety. Anxiety “refers to the feelings of being uneasy, tense, worried, and apprehensive about what might happen” (Stephan & Stephan, 1985, cited in Gudykunst & Young, 2003 p.34). For example, we may have experienced anxiety in the first day at a new college or in a new job. We know we are new in that context and feel out of place, so; we pay too much attention in that feeling and sometimes make common mistakes (Jandt, 2007).

Neuliep (2009), states that “many people experience anxiety when interacting with others for the first time” (p.36). Moreover, interacting with a person from a different culture may be even more anxiety producing. Sugawara (1993, cited in Jandt 2007 p.72), surveyed that Japanese employees working in the United States in Japanese companies faced problems while communicating in English due to many reasons such as nervousness while speaking English with U.S workers, uncertainty because Japanese’s spoken English was poor, some others felt impatient with the accent but most of them believed that language was the problem when interacting with U.S workers because of anxiety over speaking English properly.

When anxiety has a high level is probably that we do not want to communicate with foreign people. When we first meet strangers, anxiety is too high especially if we see others as attractive or as a member from a different culture. Generally, as we get to know strangers, anxiety tends to decreased but, it also can increase in a particular point in the relationship. For us, feeling motivated to communicate with foreign people is a key to communicate in an

effective way. If we are so anxious, we do not perform well. Communicating effectively with people from different cultures is necessary to have a good control of anxiety (Gudykunst & Yung, 2003).

2.3 Problems in message transmission

Everything we communicate has a purpose; however, this purpose is not always achieved. When communicating with foreign people communication could be more difficult because we are not using our mother tongue, and this big difference of cultures produces in communication some breakdowns.

2.3.1 Transmitting messages

All human beings are able to communicate with others by putting messages into codes to be transmitted; the symbols used may be written, verbal, nonverbal, mathematical, or musical (Gudykunst & Young, 2003). Transmitting messages refers to the process of putting thoughts, feelings, emotions, or attitudes, into a form recognizable by others.

Transmitting messages is an important process in communication, the way we transmit messages would be the way how people interpret those messages. Interpreting messages is the opposite of transmitting messages, interpreting a message depends of what other people say.

2.3.2 Interpreting messages

According to Jandt (2007), “interpretation refers to attaching meaning to sense data and is synonymous with decoding” (p.58). Same situations could be interpreted differently by diverse people as the following example, dogs as pets or as food. For some cultures, talking about dogs means talking about a delicious meal; however, for others dogs are cute

and lovely pets. The perception will depend on where you categorize them based on the cultural background.

At this point in the process of communication is where culture plays an important role, because the interpretation each people give to the message is influenced by beliefs, customs, age, social class and background. Interpretation messages “Is the process of perceiving and making sense of incoming messages and stimuli from the environment” (Gudykunst & Young, 2003 p.6). In both definitions the authors agree that interpretation is giving a meaning to the message they receive to be understood.

An important point to take into account is the channel used to transmit a message. A message transmitted face-to-face using the spoken word could be interpreted differently if it is said in the same way on a telephone answering machine (Gudykunst & Young, 2003).

Furthermore, the situation in which we transmit a message also influences the interpretation. Sometimes we use clear and complete sentences to be understood, some others this is not necessary. For example, when talking to a friend we use shorthand and slangs however, with our boss or in an office we would not use the same type of communication; people involved in a conversation also influence in the interpretation of messages.

2.3.3 Verbal messages

Every culture has its own language to communicate with each other, the specific language we speak is learned in our cultures and it reflects what we are. All human languages contain elements and rules that are universal and unique. There are phonological rules that show the combination of sounds to create words, semantic rules that are the relationship between the things and its meaning and the pragmatic rules, which are the way we interpret

the utterances of the language (Gudykunst & Young, 2003). In addition, language is the main channel through we transmit verbal messages.

2.3.4 Non -verbal messages

Sometimes a simple gesture or signal is enough to communicate something to someone. The messages people transmit without using a word are known as nonverbal communication or non -verbal messages (Jandt, 2007). Those gestures and cues are similar in some cultures but different in others. There are different channels in which nonverbal messages are sent; one of them is the kinesic (Neuliep, 2009). According to Jandt (2007), gesture body movements, facial expressions, and eye contact are terms consider as kinesics. Nevertheless, for Neuliep (2009), kinesic behavior includes face, hands, arms and leg movements which are the most representative channels throughout a message is sent. A very known example of this type of nonverbal message in different cultures is the following. Neuliep (2009 p.252), “Giving someone the finger (making a fist with the hand and extended the middle finger upward) is widely recognized obscene gesture in many parts of the world, including the United States, Mexico, and much of Europe”.

In the example stated above, the signal used is known as an insult in most of the cultures, but as was said before in some cultures the same gesture or signal is understood differently; for example, the “V for victory” sign made popular during World War II by Winston Churchill is appropriately made by showing the palm. In the United States in the late 1960s, the same gesture became a symbol for peace (Dresser, 1996 cited in Jandt 2007). When the British Minister Margaret made a V for victory, she showed the back of her hand. That gesture has at least nine different meanings of obscenities (Jandt, 2007). Each culture has its own gesture and symbols to communicate, although those gestures are the same the

meaning is not. In United States the eye contact must be approximately 1.18 seconds any less than that they may think the people are shy, uninterested or worried; but any more than that they may think the person is communicating for an interest.

The use of nonverbal communication has many useful functions such as replacing spoken messages. Sometimes in a very noisy place words cannot be used so, the use of gestures to communicate something is useful. Some messages are difficult to express in words; using nonverbal communication avoid hurt feeling or embarrassment. For example, in your way going to work a friend stopped you to talk. The message that you want to communicate at that moment is, "not now I do not have time for you". It could be offensive for your friend so, by continue walking you can send the message without hurt feelings. In this way he will understand that you really have to go (Jandt, 2007 p. 101).

When interacting with people from a different culture we tend to make mistakes at the moment to use the nonverbal messages. The inappropriate use of nonverbal communication with foreign people occurs because of the unaware people have about the nonverbal communication of the other culture so, the misuse of nonverbal communication easily creates misunderstanding of messages in most of the cases (Gudykunst & Young, 2007).

2.3.5 Misunderstanding of messages

Through this and the previous chapter it has been mentioned that culture and communication are strongly connected and the perception and interpretation each culture has about the world might be different in each situation. The chance of misunderstanding

between members of different cultures and backgrounds increase when we forget this connection (Jandt, 2007).

All of us are involved in the process of human communication, perhaps because we need it for our life. When communication works everything seems to be orderly; however, when it does not it could be a chaos. Each of us sends and receives messages in different ways but it can result frustrating especially if we cannot be clear and understandable for the others (Johnson,1983, p.62).

When transmitting messages, the objective is communicating something to someone. However, the inappropriate use of words especially with people from different cultures cause the misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the message we intent to communicate. Beck (1988, cited in Gudykunst & Young, 2003 p.8) argues that misinterpretation occurs because we can ever know the attitudes and feelings of the other person, each of us use a different system to decipher the messages.

Spoken communication may be difficult and the reasons for misunderstandings are many but, to understand how it works there is an example about a business man that invites his coworker join him for lunch at Tony's at 12:00 noon. At 12:15 the coworker is sitting at Tony's pizzeria while the business man is impatiently waiting at Tony's Stick House (Johnson, 1983 p.66).

To avoid this type of problems, it is necessary to pay attention in the way you transmit a message. If you do not use complete sentences, the receiver will face misunderstanding of the message he or she receives and the communication would not be effective.

2.3.6 Effective Intercultural Communication

Communication is a process that involves the creation of meanings but, sometimes the individuals attach different meaning to those messages. To make an effective communication depends on how the participants attach similar meanings stated differently, “effective communication involves minimizing misunderstandings” (Gudykunst & Young, 2003).

Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2009) refer to intercultural effectiveness as the ability that a person has to interact with others in an environment. In others words, Intercultural effectiveness is the ability to pay attention to verbal and nonverbal behaviors to the participants.

The components of intercultural effectiveness are message skills, interaction management, behavioral flexibility, identity management, and relationship cultivation Chen et al., (1989, cited in Samovar, Porter & Mc Daniel, 2009). Message skills demand the ability to use both verbal and nonverbal messages. Interaction of management is the ability to initiate, finish and take turn in a conversation. Ruben (1976, cited in Samovar, Porter and McDaniel, 2009) states that a person who has low level of interaction management shows the following behaviors:

Be a part of unconcerned turn taking in conversation; (2) either dominate or refuse to interact; (3) be responsive or unaware towards counterparts’ needs for involvement and time sharing;(4) initiate and terminate discussion without regard for the wishes of others individuals;(5) continue to talk long after obvious displays of disinterest and boredom by others; and (6) terminate discussion or withhold information when there is clear interest expressed by others for further exchange (p.396).

Behavioral flexibility is the ability to select the best strategies to achieve your goals in the interaction process. Relationship cultivation is the last step in intercultural effectiveness. It refers to the relationship that individuals create in order to satisfy the needs

of each other and make a good interaction. To be successful in effective communication we must learn about the new culture, understand why people communicate as they do and finally have a good management of uncertainty and anxiety to create a useful message to be transmitted and understood by the others in order to avoid misunderstanding of messages.

2.4 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, the concepts of culture and communication by citing different authors, making comparisons and contrasting information were provided. In the next chapter the instrument, participants, setting and more details about how data was collected will be explained.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the Intercultural communication breakdowns that a group of ELT students faced when communicating with people from participating cultures at an American summer camp program taking into account culture as an important factor in this process. Therefore, for answering my research questions and collecting the data it was necessary to interview my participants.

3.1 Research methodology.

The data was collected by using a qualitative inquiry. According to Creswell (1998 p.15), qualitative research is “An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting”. This study is qualitative because it is a cultural issue that is representative in each culture which affects learners of a foreign language. Conducting a research in a natural setting helps the researcher to understand the human behavior in different events and situations.

3.2 Instrument

Instruments help to obtain relevant information about the issue in study and there are many alternatives from which to choose (Wilkinson and Birmingham 2003, cited in Maithya 2018 p.212). According to Creswell (1998), qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual information.

In this case the instrument designed to gather information was an interview. This interview was applied to eleven ELT students who had been in summer camps.

3.2.1 Interview

According to Gill et al. (2008), when designing an interview, it is important to have questions related to the topic. To gather more information, open ended questions can be used because the participant can answer beyond a yes or no answer. Interview is a helpful method to collect data because when applying this type of method, the researcher can explore the participants' experiences, points of views and anecdotes of a specific matter. The information gathered from interviews provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. According to Kvale (2009), an interview is a careful questioning with a specific purpose to get information.

The instrument used to collect information was an interview. During the process two different interviews were created; both of them were designed taking into account the research questions in order to get the specific information from participants (See Appendices A and B). During the piloting phase, the total number of items in the interview applied were nine which were open ended questions focused on cultural problems, so students could answer them based on their experiences while being at a summer camp. It is important to mention that each interview was recorded in order to analyze the data. In this piloting the participants were three ELT students who shared some characteristics as my real participants, this interview was applied using Facebook; however, after analyzing the results obtained of this piloting it was necessary to redesign the instrument.

3.3 Setting

According to Creswell (2014), the setting in a qualitative research can be people's homes, company workplaces, streets and another public places or services such as schools or health clinics. My project took part at a language department of a public university located in central Mexico. The chosen setting was this because according to Creswell (2014), qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field where participants experienced the issue in study; he also mentioned that qualitative researchers gather information by face to face interaction and observing the participants behave in their context; that is why this setting was the best option to develop my study.

The main goal of this faculty is to train professionals in English Language Teaching and develop their linguistic, communicative, sociocultural and technological abilities in order to be able to teach the language in different contexts.

ELT students in this setting are between the ages of 18 years and 20. They learn English as the target language of the curriculum, and also learn other languages as part of their professional training. Those languages could be French, Italian, German, Japanese, Chinese and Portuguese.

3.4 participants

An important aspect in qualitative research is the selection of participants because the information required is obtained from them. In other words, in qualitative research the researcher focuses on the meaning that participants hold about the issue or problem in study (Creswell 2007, p.39). On the other hand, Creswell (2009, cited in Sergeant, 2012) states that

the participants chosen are those who best answer the research questions and inform the researcher about the phenomenon under study.

In this research the total number of participants in this study was eleven; they were 4 males and 7 females from different ages. They were ELT students who had already finished their 5 target language courses which are English subjects where students learn the language. All the participants had already had the opportunity to participate in an American summer camp at least once, and they experienced communication breakdowns while being there.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure.

According to Creswell (2014), the data collection procedure includes the establishment of limits to collect information using different sources and specify the protocol to record the information.

When collecting data, it is important to take into account different steps. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, cited in Creswell 2014), there are four steps in the procedure of data collection, those are the setting where the researcher is studying the problem, the actors who will be interviewed, the events what actors are going to do, and the process how the actors behave in the setting during the interview.

Following the steps before mentioned the first step done to develop this procedure was to create an instrument based on the characteristics of participants, in this case the instrument chosen was an interview. The second step was to find the participants in the setting previously chosen. Those participants needed to be students who shared a particular characteristic, in this case the experience of being at a summer camp. When all participants were ready the instrument was applied. Fortunately, during this process most participants

were willing to participate. Finally, every single detail was recorded to analyze the information into categories and get the most important facts in each interview to obtain the results.

3.6 Data analysis

When doing qualitative research an important step is the analysis of data. Creswell (2007) states that this process consists of organizing the data for analysis, then separating the information into themes or categories and finally represent it in tables or figures.

It is important to mention that although different interviews were applied, the information obtained from both of them was useful to accomplish the new purpose and answer the research questions. After collecting all the data, the information from the interviews was analyzed. First of all, the entire interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word. Once all the transcripts were ready, they were read in order to find specific information related to the research questions so they could be answered.

The research questions were answered by using some abstracts of the interviews and in some cases a graph to show the results better.

4.0 Chapter conclusion.

Through this chapter information about participants, setting, instrument and the steps in data collection process were explained, giving more details of each one so the reader could understand why it was a qualitative research. In the next chapter the results of the interviews will be shown.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

Through this chapter the information gathered from the interviews will be presented. Those results are related to the research questions. In section 4.1 those research questions are presented in order to help the reader to remember them. This chapter is divided in the communicative problems that ELT students faced while interacting at the summer camp, how those affected them, the strategies they used to communicate and overcome breakdowns and how culture played an important role during the process. Finally, some comments and participants' opinions were presented to support the results.

4.1 Research Questions

It is important to mention that the three main questions which guided this work were the following:

RQ1 what communication breakdowns did ELT students face when interacting at summer camps?

RQ2 How did ELT students overcome those breakdowns?

4.2 Communicative problems

As stated before, the results are strongly related with the research questions because all the participants faced communication breakdowns while being at a summer camp. Thus, to find out the main problems that affected participants' communication, the most relevant responses are presented below. It is important to mention that to preserve the participant's anonymity, they will be referred as P1, P2 for the first interview and participant 1, 2 and so

on for the second interview in order to make a comparison but at the same time a relation in both interviews.

4.2.1 Frustration and nervousness when interacting for the first time

When we interact for the first time with people from other cultures whose language is not our mother tongue, we might face difficulties at the moment of communicating with them. To have a better understanding about those difficulties that affected student's first interaction with native speakers when travelling to the summer camp, some examples are shown below.

P9 stated the following:

The first time I arrived to the airport I did not know what to do. I decided to ask to the police who- was there. He said too many things that I did not understand, it was really frustrating. The police was a black man and the way he spoke was too fast and it was hard for me to understand him. At that moment I thought that my summer will be the worst.

Another student said “at the beginning I felt frustrated because I did not understand native speakers” (P7).

Some others faced problems of communication because of nervousness. “I felt nervous so I couldn't even communicate in English” (P7). Another participant said “I was nervous so, when I had to communicate, I felt confused because I did not know what to say” (P1). “I felt nervous to talk to people because although they were so kind, sometimes they talked too much and I did not know what to answer” (P8).

One of my research questions was to know why LEI students faced communicative problems at a summer camp. As was shown in section 4.2.1 some of the factors that affected participants' performance while speaking the language and caused them breakdowns in communicating were nervousness and insecurity what made them feel confused and

frustrated in the new culture. Based on the participants' experiences, there are some comments about why students' mood is important at the moment to communicate to avoid breakdowns.

4.2.2 Mood, lack of vocabulary and accent when communicating

Our mood is important because if we are feeling nervous, we might forget the words we want to say. According to Stephan (1985), feelings of being uneasy, tense, worried, and apprehensive about what might happen focus our attention on that feeling and not in the communication transaction.

Participant 4 said "you cannot pay attention to what you are listening and do not understand when you feel mad or nervous" (P4.1). P2.1 mentioned that our mood has to do with the tone of voice we use to communicate; if we use a high tone of voice, the receiver of the message could misinterpret the message.

According to the interviews applied to the participants another interesting factor was the lack of vocabulary. For instance, P9 mentioned "I did not have too much vocabulary about idioms that is why I did not talk". Another opinion was "I did not know how to speak very well the language, so it was difficult to ask for something and when they talked to me, I did not know what to answer" (P2).

In the case of the different accent each culture has, three participants' opinions were the following: "I had problems with British people because the way they speak English is different to the American so, it was hard for me to understand them" (P2). Participant 5 mentioned "sometimes when I communicated with British people, they did not understand

what I said because of my accent.” The last participant commented “I had problems with British people because they sometimes spoke too fast” (P10).

As a summary of the difficulties that students faced a complete and interesting answer was said by the participant 3.

When arriving to the customs of that country the first difficulty that you face is that you are in a totally different context with native speakers, everything is in English nothing in Spanish, they speak too fast not so slow as we are accustomed to hearing in our classes, and the pronunciation between an American and Mexican people is very different.

In the following graph the factors that affected participants’ communication are shown. Those results were based on the interview 1, having as a result some important factors that affected students when using the language and at the same time a repercussion in the socialization with cultures.

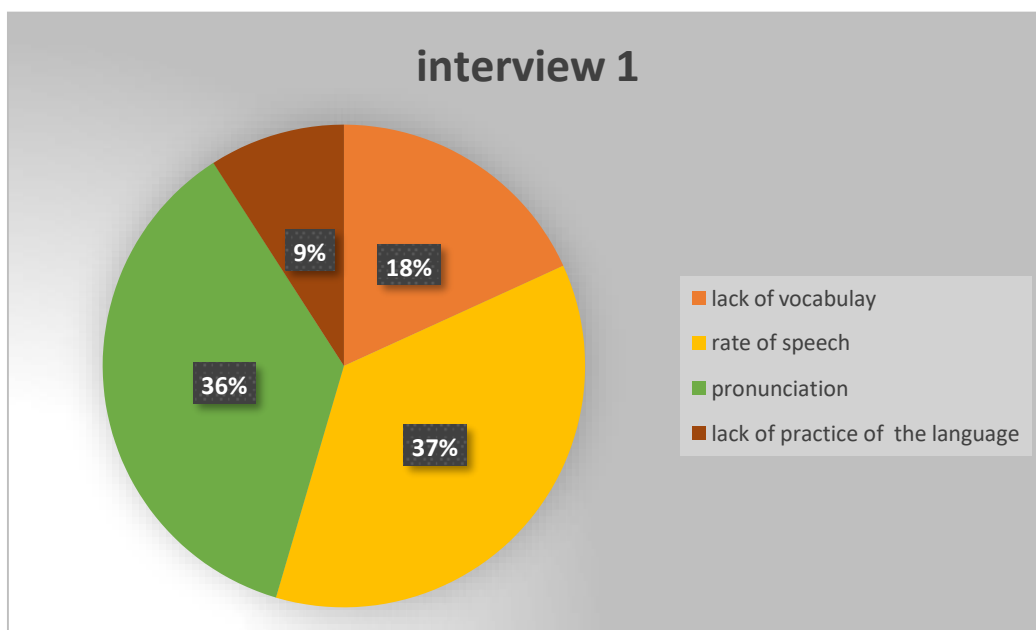


Figure 4.1 Factors that affected ELT students’ communication.

As an example of how the factors showed in the graph affected students in their performance participant 11 mentioned:

My socialization was affected because I was afraid to talk, I thought that if I spoke I will make mistakes and I won't know how to continue with the conversation that is why I decided not to interact with the others.

Also, the same participant said the following:

I think I had more problems of communication with the Hungarian and the Czech girls. One of them spoke better English than I so my interaction with her was not good and with the other girl, because the British accent she had, I could not understand her that is why I always tried to avoid her.

The next graph shows the results of interview 2 focused on communicative problems and it presents the main factors that caused participants' breakdowns. Those were the lack of vocabulary, especially idioms, the accent that each culture has, the speech rate from native speakers, nervousness, insecurity and shyness from participants.

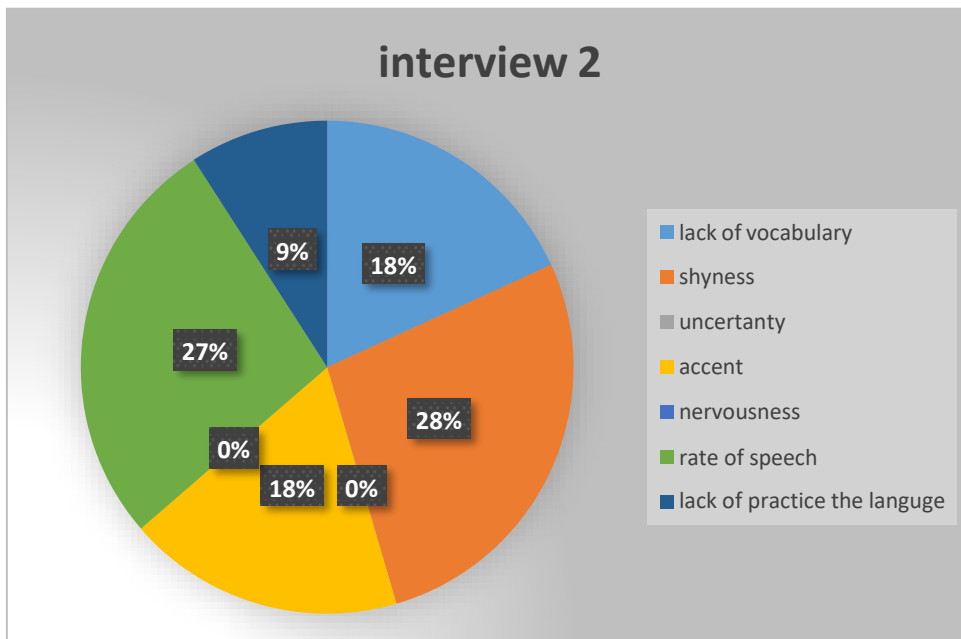


Figure 4.2 Factors that caused students' communicative breakdowns.

As seen in figure 4.2 most students faced breakdowns because of the rate of speech that native people have and the shyness they felt to talk in a language different to their mother tongue and that made them sometimes not take part in conversations. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that all those breakdowns they experienced were just at the beginning.

According to the interviews both of them showed similar results although the questions were different. Making a comparison of both graphs it can be concluded that breakdowns in ELT students occurred mainly because of the lack of vocabulary, rate of speech, pronunciation in both cases and shyness.

4.3 Strategies used by ELT students while being at a summer camp

As has been explained, during the beginning of the chapter participants experienced some breakdowns when speaking the language. However, those were not barriers to communicate with their classmates and coworkers. In order to communicate efficiently participants used some strategies to understand and communicate the message. The main strategy was the used of non-verbal language to communicate when participants did not know the meaning or did not know how to name an object. 100% of students used non-verbal language as a strategy to encode a message.

All the students agreed that the use of non-verbal language makes communication easier especially when the word used is not known in the language. The transmission of message can be possible by using non-verbal language; in this case, signals, gestures or mimics could be a way to transmit the message so the receiver could understand it. For example, P10 mention the following: sometimes British people did not understand what I say so I had to do signals, those signals made easier the interaction.

But, an important aspect to point out when using this strategy is that the misused of a signal, sound or gesture can affect our communication and at the same time causes misunderstandings and breakdowns. It happens because of culture, the way in which non-

verbal language is used could not be the same in the culture we are interacting in and the meaning of it might be offensive in some cases.

Taking into account the importance of non-verbal language at the moment to communicate there are some participants' opinions:

“I had breakdowns sometimes because in each culture every signal means something different” (p2.1). “Sometimes I was confused because in my culture the meaning of some things was not the same for them”. Finally, the opinion of P2 who had a bad experience when she tried to communicate using non-verbal language she commented:

Once, my friends and I went to a mall, one of my friends was driving, an American person stopped so we could pass, my friend did a signal with his hand to thank him, unfortunately that signal was an offensive way to say thank you, so the other person answered us with another offensive signal.

Although, all participants used non-verbal language as a strategy to communicate, for some of them it was not a good solution to avoid breakdowns in their communications that is why they mentioned some other strategies to have a good performance while being in that culture. Those strategies are shown in the next graph.

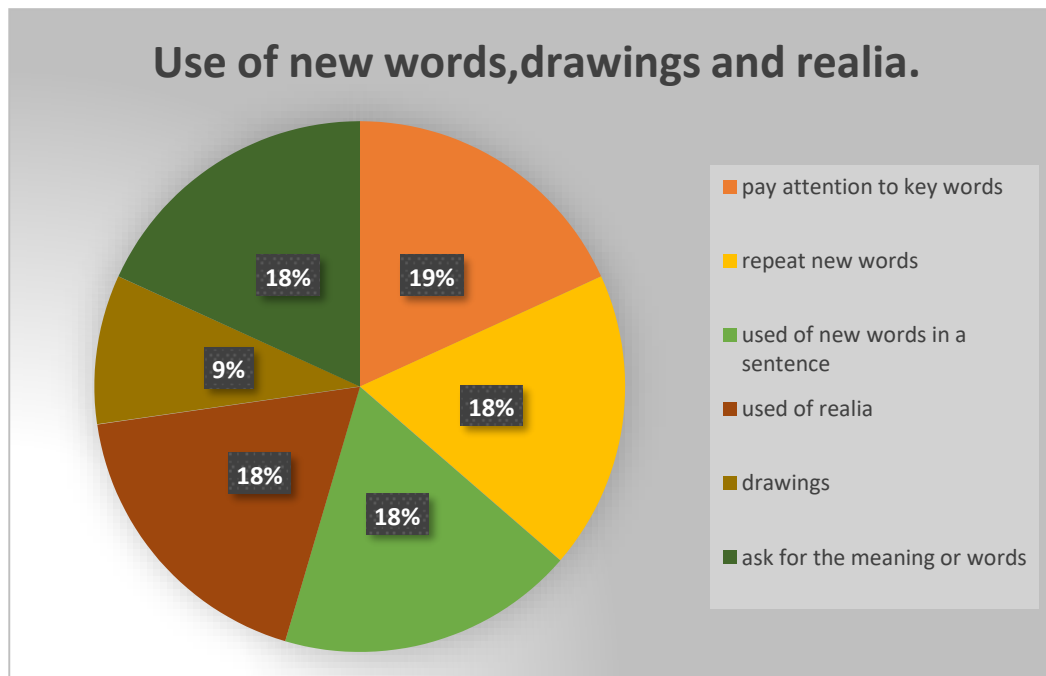


Figure 4.4 Use of new words, drawings and realia.

According to figure 4.4, paying attention to key words or phrases was the most useful strategy for students, so they did not have to understand the whole sentence when communicating in English. For some others asking for the meaning of words they did not know and then repeating it was another strategy they used the most to understand the conversations.

In order to improve their vocabulary, the majority of participants used the new words they learned in sentences so they could not forget them easily. An interesting point to consider was the use of realia as a strategy to communicate. Depending on the situation, students communicated by pointing out some objects. Moreover, drawing to interact with foreign people was the last strategy used by participants while being at the camp; however, not all of them had the chance to try this useful strategy.

As a conclusion of this section it is important to state that communication between different cultures could be possible by using strategies. Nevertheless, as it has been commented, culture plays an important role in the communication process because of the way each culture uses the language to communicate.

4. 4 Culture as an important factor when communicating with foreign people

As was seen in the previous section culture is an important factor to keep in mind at the moment to communicate and interact with different cultures because the lack of knowledge can affect our performance. So, according to the results of the study all the participants said that culture is an important factor when interacting with others.

P1 said “I think culture is important because it helps you to understand why people used the language in that way”. Another participant mentioned the following:

“Culture is important because you feel more comfortable when knowing about that culture and help you to be sure and do not feel afraid to make misunderstandings” (p4).

“Culture is important when communicating especially because the way each culture express themselves is different from others so if people do not understand this, they might misunderstand things that for them is normal but for others is not” (p5).

For participant 1 culture was important because when you are learning a foreign language you need to travel to the country where that language is spoken so you can know how the language is used. Although in your country you learned the language, the pronunciation is not the same.

All the participants agree that culture is important but the most interesting answer was said by P10.

I think culture is an important factor because there are specific things that we as a Mexicans do, and if we do this kind of things in another country those could be offensive for others. For example, here in Mexico we call someone “Gordito” as a way to let him know that we love him. But if you say that in the United States they are going to think you are a rude person. So, there are several things you should know, what things you can do and say and which you cannot because if you do not know this you can hurt someone’s feelings although it is not your intention. Thus, it is very important to keep in mind the knowledge of any culture because even in your own culture there could be differences.

4.4.1 How culture helped students while being at a summer camp

As it can be seen knowing about culture helped students to communicate and socialize with the others. For instance, P7 mentioned how culture helped him in the new country “I knew about American culture because of the teachers and classmates’ experiences, so the knowledge I had helped me to understand them better”. P8 said “I knew something about the United States because of the books I read and the TV programs or movies, so I think it helped me because I had an idea about what to do or how to behave”.

For participant 4, culture was helpful because it helped her to take different situations in a relaxed way. Another participant mentioned “knowing about the culture helped me too much especially in the aspect of following rules because it helped me to interact with foreign people trying to avoid misunderstandings” (p9).

According to the participants’ comments, culture is important when traveling to a place and when interacting with people from different countries.

4.4.2 How culture affected students while being at a summer camp

Sometimes when we are in another country, we do things in the way we know however, for others it could be weird. That was what students faced while being at a summer camp. For some participants, culture affected them either negative or positive. For instance, P1 said “when I arrived, I greeted the American girls in the way in Mexico do it. We shook hands and gave them a kiss on their cheeks their reaction was not bad but they said so cute!!”

For that participant the situation made her feel embarrassed to continue interacting with them at that moment. Another participant said “Culture is a very different aspect. I could say that we have many traditions and celebrate things that Americans do not, our beliefs are different and an important aspect that was difficult for me was religion” (P3). In this case, religion was obstacle to have a good interaction with people from the camp due to the rules they had, so even if the participant wanted to talk and practice the language he did not want to say something inappropriate for them. It is important to mention that not all the participants were in a Jewish camp so participants experienced different cultural differences depending of the camp they were.

“Something that made me feel surprised was that after breakfast they say something like the pledge of allegiance. It was strange for me because I did not know what to do while they were doing that” (P8). For P8 adaptation to the new culture was also difficult at first but as days went by, those differences in cultures made him share and learn about cultures’ traditions.

The aspect of culture could be one of the factors that affect negatively especially if people do not know much about the new cultures where they are interacting or communicating, thus this lack of knowledge made students do things that were not allowed to do. In other cases, participants did things as they were accustomed in their countries and sometimes they could be offensive or the message was interpreted differently by the others.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

5.0 Introduction

As it was already stated, the intention of this study was to know why students faced breakdowns when communicating with foreign people at a summer camp. The study intended to show students' opinions and experiences about being at a summer camp.

In Chapter IV, the findings were shown using some abstracts from the interviews and the research questions were answered too. In this final chapter the general conclusions of this research project will be presented. The significance of this study and an explanation of how the research aims were accomplished will also be explained. Finally, my personal reflection, limitations and directions for further research will also be described.

5.1 Research Findings

The aims of this study were to identify the reasons why ELT students faced breakdowns while being at a summer camp and analyzed the importance that culture has in interacting with different cultures. The instrument used to collect specific data was an interview divided into two parts.

According to the data analysis presented in the previous chapter (IV) there are many factors that affected students' communication while being at a summer camp. Some conclusions were drawn after analyzing the instrument. The first point to take into account is that all students faced breakdowns the first time they were in another country. It was because of the nervousness and shyness they felt to speak the language with native people. They also felt afraid of not being understood by them. It is important to mention that at the beginning

communicating in English was difficult and frustrating for some participants because the pronunciation that a native speaker has is different from what they were accustomed to. However, this problem was easy to solve using some strategies such as asking to repeat again, using phrases like what was that? What did you say? And paying attention in the main ideas so they could know what they were referring to. But, the most complicating part of this was culture; all the participants agreed that culture is a very important factor when interacting with foreign people because it helps o affects depending on the situation they were for example, participant 9 mentioned:

At the beginning culture was a problem, the religion people had made me feel aware in paying attention in the things I said, how to behave and what to do with people due to the lack of knowledge about Jewish religion. Once I understood their rules it was easier for me to interact and communicate.

5.3 Limitations of the study

During the process of doing this research, there were some limitations that affected in some aspects. At the beginning of this project the lack of information about intercultural communication and the areas related to this study made the process of writing complicated and confusing and it took me too much time to understand the information. Defining the main purpose of the research was a limitation too.

Another limitation was the collection of data because the instrument designed for the piloting was not as expected. To have all the participants ready was complicating too because our schedules did not match. I think it was the hardest process because it took many days to interview the participants.

5.4 Further Research

My research was about communication breakdowns that ELT students face while being at a summer camp. So, I would like to give some suggestion for further research. First, it would be interesting to investigate the same topic but with different participants for example with people who have traveled not only to the United States and analyze whether the communicative problems that students faced are the same or not.

Another suggestion that would be very interesting could be to investigate the opinion of foreign people. What they think about being in another country if they face problems with language and culture and how it affects their performance and compare this with Mexican people's opinions.

5.5 Personal reflection

During this thesis project, I have gone through different experiences of which I would like to talk about. First of all, I will talk about the beginnings of this research project. At the beginning of this project it was hard to find out what I really wanted to investigate. I did not know anything about the topic and also because it was hard to look up information related to this area. I had no experience in doing research., but once I started to investigate it was easier and interesting. Writing the first two chapters was complicated especially because I had to be very careful to use the correct words to write academically; that is why sometimes I got confused when trying to explain what I wanted to say.

I have to mention that while writing a thesis I learned a lot of things I did not know; for example, I learned how to cite authors and new vocabulary about synonyms to avoid repetitions of words. I enjoyed doing this project because I improved my writing skill, I

noticed that because at the beginning it was difficult to organize all my ideas in a text but in this last chapter it was easier to write. About the topic my understanding of intercultural communication has increased because at the beginning I had no idea of this concept. Now it has helped me to understand better the behavior of cultures among the global world and also helped me to understand people from different places who are in my country as foreign people.

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Appendix A Interview 1

1. ¿Cómo fue tu comunicación al inicio de la llegada en la nueva cultura?
2. ¿Cómo te sentiste cuando interactuaste con personas de otras culturas dentro del campamento?
3. ¿Crees que por pertenecer a una cultura que tiene como idioma Español hubo más problemas de comunicación?
4. ¿Durante el proceso de adaptación a la nueva cultura ¿qué sentimientos experimentaste?
5. ¿Durante el proceso de adaptación enfrentaste problemas culturales que afectaron tu comunicación y socialización dentro del campamento? Si /No
6. ¿Cuáles fueron las cuestiones culturales por parte de tu cultura que afectaron tu comunicación y socialización?
7. ¿Cuáles fueron las cuestiones culturales por parte de otra cultura que afectaron tu comunicación y socialización?
8. Con cuantas personas de diferentes culturas interactuaste y con cual hubo mayor problema de comunicación o socialización.
9. Podrías contarme tus experiencias y anécdotas dentro del camp.
10. ¿Antes de llegar a vivir en la nueva cultura conocías algo de esta?
11. ¿El conocer la cultura con la cual interactuaste te ayudo a entender mejor las situaciones en las que te encontrabas?
12. ¿Crees que la cultura es un factor importante al momento de interactuar ya sea con tu misma cultura u otras?

Appendix B interview 2

1. ¿Crees que la cultura es un factor importante al momento de comunicarte con personas de otras culturas?

Si/ no ¿Por qué?

2. ¿Cómo te sentiste al inicio del campamento ante la necesidad de iniciar una conversación con algún compañero de campamento? (nervioso, inseguro, contento etc.,) ¿por qué?
3. ¿Tomabas la iniciativa para entablar conversaciones con tus compañeros de campamento o esperabas que otro tomara la iniciativa? Si tu respuesta es negativa explica él porque.
4. ¿Qué factores afectaron tu comunicación? (falta de vocabulario, fluidez al hablar, timidez, no entender hablantes nativos etc.)
5. ¿Consideras que esos factores son importantes tanto para quien envía como para quien recibe el mensaje? Si /no ¿Por qué?
6. ¿Crees que la forma en que nos sentimos (nuestro estado de ánimo) al momento de entablar una comunicación con otros cause fallas en la misma?
Si/no ¿Por qué?
7. ¿Si hubo ruido (problemas para expresarte en el idioma ingles) en la comunicación utilizaste el lenguaje no verbal como estrategia para solventarlo?
Si/no ¿Por qué?
8. ¿Hubo ruido en la comunicación aún con el uso del lenguaje no verbal?
Si/no ¿por qué?
9. ¿Qué otras estrategias utilizaste para entender y comunicarte en el idioma?