

The Effect of the Observations that Dutch L2 Speakers of English Make about the Level of
English Proficiency of the Interlocutor on the Explicitness of the Speaker's Speech
Production

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“Our minds are powerful instruments. When we decide that something is true or beyond our reach, it’s very difficult to pierce through this self-created hurdle. In order to become a writer or anything else, the first step is to silence your greatest critic – you.”

(Carison, 1997: 119)

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to research whether Dutch L2 speakers of English modify their speech in terms of explicitness according to what they know (i.e. their observations) about the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor. It was expected that these speakers would be more explicit when they knew that the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor was low. On the other hand, when they knew that the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor was high, it was predicted that the speakers would be less explicit. A multiple-choice discourse completion questionnaire was used in order to test this hypothesis. 37 students of English, all studying at Radboud University, completed the questionnaire. The results showed that, although there was a significant difference between the total scores of the high proficiency scenarios and the low proficiency scenarios, participants did not adjust their speech to the level of proficiency of the interlocutor in terms of explicitness. Rather, it seemed that the length of sentences played an important role in this convergence. This study did, however, find confirmation for the hypothesis that speakers cooperate with their interlocutors, as was stated by the Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 2001; 2007) and Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975; Traxler, 2012).

Keywords: level of proficiency, explicitness, convergence, L1 Dutch, L2 English, Communication Accommodation Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle

1. Introduction

This study wants to research whether Dutch L2 speakers of English modify their speech in terms of explicitness according to what they know (i.e. their observations) about the level of English proficiency of their interlocutor. The aim of this thesis is to find confirmation for the hypothesis that speakers adjust their speech in order to cooperate with their listeners, which is based on theories such as the Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, 2001; 2007) and Grice's Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975; Traxler, 2012). Both theories argue that participants in a conversation will converge their speech to each other. Research has shown that various factors can have an impact on the way in which people converse: factors such as intergenerational differences or gender differences can influence the spoken production of participants during conversation. Furthermore, it has been argued that the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor (for example if they are friends or strangers) also affects the way in which a message is being expressed during conversation. This study, however, will focus on a new factor that might have an impact on the way people express themselves during a dialogue. The emphasis of this thesis is on the observations that speakers make about the level of proficiency of the interlocutor and the effect of these observations on the explicitness of the speaker's speech production. The results of the study might find confirmation for the hypothesis that speakers adjust their speech to their interlocutors, but the results might also provide an explanation for the different levels of explicitness in speech production in relation to the observations made about the level of proficiency of the interlocutor. In this paper, explicitness is defined as a message that is stated clearly and in detail and in which the speaker says more than actually needed. Thus, an explicit message is a message in which the speaker leaves no or hardly any underlying meaning left for the interlocutor to decode. This might lead to verbosity on the speaker's behalf in order for the output to be extremely clear for the interlocutor, especially when the speaker is talking to someone with a low level of proficiency. The term explicitness will be explained in detail later. The paper looks at Dutch L2 speakers of English who have to respond in a conversation with interlocutors who have either a high or a low level of proficiency of English. The hypotheses are based on the idea that speakers converge to the listener and are as follows:

- When the speaker knows that the listener's level of proficiency of English is high, his or her speech production will be less explicit (i.e. the speaker's message still has an underlying meaning left for the interlocutor to decode), since they will not feel the need to make this underlying message particularly clear.

- When the speaker knows that the listener's level of proficiency of English is low, his or her speech production will be more explicit (i.e. the speaker's message is stated clearly and in detail), since they will feel the need to make the underlying message particularly clear in order for the listener to understand the underlying message.

The study aims to answer the following main research question:

Will Dutch L2 speakers of English converge their speech to their interlocutors according to what they know about the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor? If so, what is the effect of the convergence on the explicitness of the speaker's speech production?

Before looking at the previous studies done on this topic, it is important to define a number of significant terms that are discussed in this study.

When speaking of a level of English proficiency of an individual, it is not clear what it means for someone to have a high level of proficiency as opposed to a low level. Since the level of proficiency is vital for answering both the research question and doing the experiment, as will be made clear in the method section of this paper, it is important to give a clear and, if possible, unambiguous definition of the term. In order to achieve this, the terms high and low proficiency of English will be defined according to the CEFR standards in this paper. In short, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) provides basic descriptions of what learners have to know about a language in order to achieve fluent communication. More importantly, the CEFR "defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning" (Common European Framework of Reference, 2001:1). Because different stages in language learning are described, one can make a distinction between a so-called high and low level of proficiency of English. It must be noted that CEFR has a number of tables that take into account numerous fields of someone's language competence, for instance vocabulary and fluency as well as oral/written production. The aim of this paper is to look at Dutch L2 speakers of English and interlocutors of which the latter have either a high or a low level of proficiency of English. The Dutch L2 speakers of English are most important in this study, since they will be the participants in the experiment. Through the scale of overall oral production (c.f. table 1) as provided by CEFR, it can be determined what level of English the participants need to be in order to participate in the experiment. The scale of overall listening comprehension (c.f. table 2) will be used in order to define the terms high and low level of proficiency of English.

These descriptions are needed in order to sketch the scenarios that will be used in the experiment.

Table 1: CEFR scale of overall oral production (Common European Framework of Reference, 2001:66)

	OVERALL ORAL PRODUCTION
C2	<i>Can produce clear, smoothly flowing well-structured speech with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.</i>
C1	<i>Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.</i>
B2	<i>Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail.</i>
	<i>Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples.</i>
B1	<i>Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.</i>
A2	<i>Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines, likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list.</i>
A1	<i>Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places.</i>

Table 2: CEFR scale of overall listening comprehension (Common European Framework of Reference, 2001:66)

	OVERALL LISTENING COMPREHENSION
C2	<i>Has no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, delivered at fast native speed.</i>
C1	<i>Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar.</i>
	<i>Can recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts. Can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly.</i>
B2	<i>Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life. Only extreme background noise, inadequate discourse structure and/or idiomatic usage influences the ability to understand.</i>
	<i>Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can follow extended speech and complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar, and the direction of the talk is sign-posted by explicit markers.</i>
B1	<i>Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent.</i>
	<i>Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives.</i>
A2	<i>Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.</i>
	<i>Can understand phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment) provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.</i>
A1	<i>Can follow speech which is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.</i>

As can be seen in the tables, the differences in both scales between C2 (near-native level of speaking as well as comprehending) and A1 (beginner) are remarkable: both the overall oral production scale and the overall listening comprehension scale make a clear distinction between the highest and the lowest level of proficiency. The overall oral production (c.f. table 1) describes someone at A1 as a learner who has little to no knowledge of English and is not

or hardly able to produce sentences. The C2 level, on the other hand, describes persons who have a near-native level of English in terms of speaking: the speaker can produce fluent and well-structured speech in order for the listener to understand the message. Roughly the same distinction can be found in the overall listening comprehension (c.f. table 2): the A1 level states that the listener is only able to understand speech which is very carefully articulated, i.e. speech that is made explicitly clear by the speaker. The C2 level, on the other hand, describes a listener who has no difficulty in understanding a conversation and who is communicatively competent.

The experiment of this study will be done with Dutch L2 speakers of English. These speakers must have enough knowledge of the language to communicate almost fluently in order to be able to do the experiment. The questionnaire will consist of six scenarios in which the participants have to make clear what they would say in various situations, i.e. situations with interlocutors that have either a high or a low level of proficiency of English. Therefore, it is important that the participants are perfectly able to understand what is being described in the situations. For this reason, the Dutch L2 speakers of English must at least have a C1/C2 level on the CEFR scale for overall oral production. It is institutionally defined that BA 2/3 students of English of the Radboud University of Nijmegen are capable of speaking English on this level. The university states that when students leave secondary school, their level of proficiency of English is on average B2. The aim of the English bachelor programme at Radboud University of Nijmegen is to increase this level of proficiency up to C2. It is expected that BA2 and BA3 students have a C1/C2 level on average. This is why this particular group of students is asked to participate in the experiment.

This study aims to research the effect of the observations that Dutch L2 speakers of English make about the level of proficiency of the listener. The terms high and low proficiency are used to describe the level of English of the interlocutor, but in order to give a clearer definition, these terms will, just as the level of proficiency of the speaker, be defined on the basis of the CEFR scale of overall listening comprehension. It is important for the experiment to make a clear distinction between high or low proficiency levels of the interlocutors, so that the participants are able to make clear observations about the different levels of proficiency. Therefore, it has been decided to define the high proficiency level of English as C1/C2, in which the listener has no problem at all understanding what is being said. In order to make a clear contrast with the low level of proficiency, the A2 level of the CEFR standards is chosen: the listener has some understanding of English as long as the spoken production is very basic. The reason for the A2 level instead of the A1 level is because

the latter group has too little knowledge of the English language to be able to understand an utterance produced by the speaker. Thus, for this study, high and low levels of proficiency are defined according to the CEFR standards, which are defined as C1/C2 and A2. It must be noted that the experiment consists of imaginary interlocutors: no actual spoken conversation will take place. Due to time issues and problems with finding and organising classrooms, simulating real life situations is simply not possible, thus a questionnaire has been chosen instead. However, since the levels of proficiency are defined on the basis of spoken production as well as listening comprehension, it might have an influence on the final results because of the difference between the cognitive processes involved in speaking and writing and in listening and reading.

Apart from the terms of high and low proficiency, it is important to explain the notion of explicitness, as this is a vital part for answering the research question. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term *explicit* as “states clearly and in detail, leaving no room for confusion or doubt” (Explicit, n.d.). The idea is that an explicit message has no or hardly any underlying meaning left for the interlocutor to decode. The hypothesis of the study is that the message of the speaker will be more explicit when he or she knows that the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor is low. When the speaker knows that the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor is high, he or she will be less explicit. Considering the definition of explicitness, it can be said that during a conversation with someone with a low level of proficiency, the speaker’s message will have no or hardly any underlying meaning that the interlocutor needs to decode. In this case, it is possible that the speaker uses more words than needed to convey the meaning of the message. This could also be seen as a kind of overspecification: when the underlying meaning is made more explicit by the speaker, in some case, he or she will use more words and clauses during a conversation with someone who has a low level of proficiency. This underlying message will be less explicit and less overspecified when the speaker is talking to someone with a high level of proficiency. An example of a type of overspecification can be found in (1):

- (1) A male exchange student is looking for the way to the right classroom. You don’t know his name, but you know he has little knowledge of the English language. What do you say in order to help the student?
- a. “Can I help you?”
 - b. “You seem lost, is there something that I can do for you?”

c. “Do you need someone to help you?”

This particular scenario sketches a situation in which the speaker is confronted with an interlocutor who has a low level of proficiency of English (i.e. “little knowledge of the English language”). Sentence (1)c is the least explicit: it still has an underlying message that needs to be decoded by the interlocutor. The phrase is not particularly clear because of the word *someone*, which could confuse the student. Sentence (1)a is more explicit, because it directly asks the interlocutor a question. However, sentence 1)b is the most explicit option. The speaker leaves nothing implied by first mentioning the ‘problem’ that is described in the situation, i.e. the student is lost, and then clearly asking if there is something he or she can do for him. The phrase “you seem lost”, however, is not completely necessary in this case: it merely states the obvious situation of the student. It could be said that this particular clause is a type of overspecification: by drawing an obvious conclusion, the speaker immediately makes clear why he or she is offering help. In other words, the underlying message is made explicit and thus leaves nothing implied. All things considered, overspecification can be seen as a phenomenon that might occur together with explicitness: when the speaker leaves nothing implied, this can lead to unnecessary words and phrases, i.e. verboseness. The expectation of this study is the following: explicitness is significantly higher when the speaker knows that the level of proficiency of English is low as opposed to a conversation with an interlocutor who has a high level of proficiency.

2. Previous studies

The research question as well as the hypotheses are based on the research done by Paul Grice and Howard Giles et al. Grice (1975) developed a theory called the Grice's Cooperative Principle, which states that people will naturally try to cooperate with their listener. This is also known as the cooperative principle. The maxims consist of four principles, of which three are most relevant to discuss in this study:

- Maxim of quality: speakers must not lie during a conversation.
- Maxim of relevance: whatever it is that speakers say, it must be relevant to the conversation.
- Maxim of manner: speakers must be brief and clear about their ideas and meanings.

(Traxler, 2012)

It is important to note that the maxims are not absolute descriptions of what people should do in order to achieve fluent communication. Rather, they are guidelines to which people adhere most of the time, but sometimes ignore. When the Gricean Maxims are violated, there is a chance that miscommunication will occur because the listener was not able to decode the underlying message of the speaker (Traxler, 2012).

In order to achieve fluent communication and avoid any possible miscommunications, speakers often try to take into account the beliefs and knowledge of the listener. This principle is also called the common ground theory: people try to find a platform of shared knowledge in order to achieve communication. That is, if the speaker assumes that the listener is not familiar with certain notions used by the speaker, the latter will first explain these ideas before continuing the conversation. The idea is that most speakers will adhere to this notion, albeit subconsciously. In fact, it supports the cooperative principle: people in conversation will always try to cooperate with one another (Traxler, 2012). In short, language use mostly consists of shared knowledge between the speaker and the interlocutor (Giles and Coupland, 1991). It must be noted that this idea of common ground relates to the content of the message instead of the form. It looks at *what* speakers say as opposed to *how*. In this study, the focus is on the latter rather than the former. The ideas of explicitness and overspecification in relation to the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor do not take into account the content of the message, but the form. Therefore, the outcome of this study provides an answer for *how* speakers express their ideas and underlying meanings, instead of *what* they actually say.

Howard Giles (2001, 2007) developed the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which claims that speakers constantly adjust their speech according to their interlocutor. The CAT has, just as the Gricean Maxims, a number of principles.

- Socio-historical contexts during interaction can influence communication
- Participants in a conversation have certain expectations/assumptions about the interlocutor concerning the levels of accommodation, which is one's communicative behaviour. These expectations are mostly based on stereotypes
- Various communication strategies are used during conversation by the speaker and the listener to signal their attitudes towards each other

(Giles and Ogay, 2007)

The speaker's communicative behaviour, i.e. his or her level of accommodation, can be either convergent or divergent. The former states that the speaker adapts to the communicative behaviour of the interlocutor during conversation. A motive for convergence is that it contributes to the effectiveness of communication, despite a higher level of complexity during speech production. People that use the convergence strategy will adjust their speech to the listener, even if this will lead to some difficulty in their own speech (Giles and Ogay, 2007). Thus, during convergence, the addressor as well as the addressee will take into account the other's language competence. Convergence is something that most people do rather subconsciously, because they want to achieve fluent and clear communication. The divergence strategy, on the other hand, states that speakers will not adjust their speech to the interlocutor. Rather, they will accentuate their own speech and the "nonverbal differences between the self and the other" (Giles and Ogay, 2007:295). This means that the speaker wants to adhere to his or her own social identity, rather than adjusting himself or herself to the social identity and competence of the interlocutor. Divergence especially happens when people are from different ethnic backgrounds or when they have very strong social identities. By accentuating the differences between them and their interlocutors, they adhere to this own identity. Thus, rather than adjusting their speech to the listener, they emphasise the differences in speech (Giles and Ogay, 2007).

Several studies (among others, Giles and Coupland, 1991; Giles and Ogay, 2007) found that a number of factors can influence the way speakers communicate with their listener. A significant factor is the relationship that exists between the speaker and the interlocutor: speakers adjust their speech on the basis of their own relationship with the

listener. In other words, the way we speak is influenced by the knowledge we have about the listener. First of all, research (Giles and Coupland, 1991; Giles and Ogay, 2007) has found that the way of conversation differs during intergenerational communication. This involves participants in a conversation from different generations, e.g. communication between younger and older adults, such as a student and a teacher. This might have an effect on the way they communicate with each other. It was found that older adults underestimate the speech of the younger participants in these conversation, whereas younger adults do in fact overestimate the level of speech of the interlocutor, i.e. they are overdoing it (Kemper, Vandeputte, Rice, Cheung & Gubarchuck, 1995). Giles and Ogay (2007) make a distinction between underaccommodation and overaccommodation, in which the former states that the older adults underestimate the level of speech production of the younger adults and thus use simple and basic structures. The latter states that the younger adults can overestimate the level of speech production of the older adults, thus using extremely polite language. This shows that language use and the way people communicate depends largely on the relationship of the speaker and his or her interlocutor.

Another example of factors that can influence conversation is the communication between different genders. Research (Coates, 1986) has shown that women and men communicate in different ways. Giles and Ogay (2007) state that women use more polite language and are cooperative speakers. They use back channels, i.e. words such as “uh huh” and minimal responses as “mmmh”, in order for their interlocutor to know that the message being expressed is understood. Male participants in a conversation, on the other hand, are more eager to keep the control of the topic. It is also shown that both women and men adjust their speech according to the gender, or gender-like (i.e. more man-like or woman-like), of the listener. Thus, women speak differently to men than to women and vice versa (Fitzpatrick, Mulac, & Dindia, 1995; Hannah and Murachver, 1999; Giles and Ogay, 2007). This suggests that the relationship of the speaker and his or her interlocutor is a significant factor in the way people communicate.

All in all, people adjust their speech in order to cooperate with their listener (Giles, 2001; Grice, 1975, Traxler, 2012). A significant factor in this process of cooperation is the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. Research has shown that, among other things, intergenerational communication and communication between different genders can affect the way speakers in a conversation express and convey meaning. Of course, many other kinds of relationships can also affect the communication between people, such as conversations between friends (Wilmot and Shellen, 1990). This study, however, will focus

on a new factor that might affect the way in which people express themselves during conversation. As mentioned in the introduction, the paper's emphasis is on whether speakers modify their speech in terms of explicitness according to what they know about the level of proficiency of the interlocutor. The participants of this study are Dutch L2 speakers of English who have to make clear how they would respond in certain scenarios with interlocutors who have either a high or a low level of proficiency. On the basis of previous research, which found that speakers adjust their speech and converge to their interlocutor, the following research questions have been constructed:

- Do speakers adjust their speech on the basis of what they know about the listener?
- Can the level of proficiency of the interlocutor be seen as a factor that causes the speaker to adjust his or her speech?

As mentioned in the introduction, the main research question is as follows:

Will Dutch L2 speakers of English converge their speech to their interlocutors according to what they know about the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor? If so, what is the effect of the convergence on the explicitness of the speaker's speech production?

It is important to note that the focus of this study will be on the linguistic *form* of production, rather than the *content*. Thus, the emphasis will be on *how* people express their message in terms of explicitness, instead of *what* they will actually say.

On the basis of previous research, it is expected that speakers will adjust their production (i.e. be more explicit) when they know that the level of proficiency of the interlocutor is low, whereas they will be less explicit once they know that the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor is high.

The following section in this study is the method section, which will discuss the design of the study as well as the participants and the procedure of the experiment. Section 4 will discuss the results and deal with the statistics of the experiment. Subsequently, section 5 will interpret the outcome of the experiment in relation to the research questions and the hypotheses and summarise the study.

3. Method

The experiment consists of a multiple-choice discourse completion questionnaire. This particular task was opted for since it provides an explanation for the speaker's pragmatic competence, which is relevant for this study. It is also designed in particular to elicit responses from participants (Aufa, 2014; Pavaresh and Tavakoli, 2009). The questionnaire for this particular study consists of a description of the task, followed by a demographic consent with questions about the study and year of the participant, as well as his or her age and gender and the L1 and L2. All these data are gathered anonymously, and the questions asked are necessary for analysing the data. The multiple-choice discourse completion task (MDCT) itself consists of six questions in total, of which 2 questions are used as filler items. The description of the experiment does not mention what the aim of the study is, since this could influence the answers chosen by the participants. It makes clear, however, that the participant has to choose the answer of which he or she thinks that will lead to the 'listener' understanding him or her best. This sentence was added after a mini-pilot study done before the actual MDCT. In the pilot study, two participants filled in all questions. It became clear that they would choose an answer not only depending on what was easier to understand for the interlocutor, but also on politeness. Since politeness is not a significant factor in the research, the description has been changed into a more detailed one that would exclude extraneous factors such as politeness.

3.1. Participants

A total of 37 participants completed the multiple-choice discourse completion questionnaire, of which 13 were male and 24 were female. All participants reported that their L1 was Dutch and their L2 was English. 29 participants were students of the BA 3 programme of English Language and Culture, whereas the other 8 were students of the BA 2 programme of English Language and Culture. All participants studied at the Radboud University Nijmegen.

3.2. Materials

In this multiple-choice discourse completion questionnaire, participants receive a description of a particular situation with an interlocutor, in which they have to describe what they would say in a certain situation with interlocutors with a level of proficiency that varies from low to high. As described in the introduction, explicitness of speech production is defined as a message that leaves nothing implied, which can be seen as a kind of overspecification, since more is being said than needed. Every question in the MDCT consists of three possible

answers (i.e. multiple choice), in which one answer is a minimal expression (i.e. not explicit), the second has little explicit meaning and the third option is most explicit. The possible answers are summarised here:

minimal (no explicit meaning)	0
more explicit (little explicit meaning)	1
most explicit (very clear explicit meaning)	2

The scores behind the possible answers indicates the number of points a participant ‘earns’ for the various possibilities. As can be seen, the answer which is most explicit will give the participant the most points, whereas an answer with no explicit meaning at all (i.e. minimal) gives the participant a score of 0. The scores are important for further analysing the data in SPSS. This will be explained later. The multiple choice answers thus vary from very explicit to not explicit at all. An example of this can be found in (2):

- (2) During one of your courses, the teacher asks you to form pairs with someone. A male student, who studied English for four years at university, looks like he has found no partner yet. What do you say in order to form pairs with him?
- a. “Do you want to form a pair?” (1)
 - b. “Shall we team up?” (0)
 - c. “It seems that you do not have a partner yet. Do you want to work together?” (2)

In this particular scenario, the participant is ‘talking’ to a male student, who is assumed to have a relatively high level of English, considering the fact that he has been studying English at university for four years. In this question, answer c) has the most explicit meaning, which, as explained in the introduction, can be seen as a form of overspecification. With this particular sentence, the speaker would first draw a rather obvious conclusion (i.e. “It seems that you do not have a partner yet”). This is already clear from the scenario, so it is not really needed to express this observation. Furthermore, the phrase “do you want to work together” can also be seen as explicit when comparing it to the other possible answers. Answer a), which has some explicit meaning, is more concise than c), but in fact says the same thing. However, because the obvious observation made in c) is left out in this answer, this particular

option gets only 1 point. Answer b) is not explicit at all: first of all, the ‘speaker’ is really concise and uses no more words than needed. Besides this, the phrase *team up* already requires some knowledge of English of the interlocutor. This is why option b) gets zero points, meaning it has no explicit meaning (i.e. minimal). Because this scenario describes an interlocutor with a high level of proficiency, the hypothesis is that the participant will opt for answer b): the higher the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor, the less explicit the message of the ‘speaker’.

3.3. Design of study

The six situations that are described in the questions contain each a particular ‘listener’, which is the dependent variable in the experiment. These variables are as follows:

male	high proficiency (C1/C2)
male	low proficiency (A2)
female	high proficiency (C1/C2)
female	low proficiency (A2)
teacher	high proficiency (C1/C2)
child	low proficiency (A2)

As can be seen, the questionnaire has two situations with male interlocutors and two situations with female interlocutors. This is because, as explained in the previous section, gender can play an significant role in conversation. Since this study focusses on proficiency rather than gender, an even number of male and female interlocutors is chosen, so that gender will not have an unwanted effect on the final analysis. Both the male and the female variables are described as having a high and low level of proficiency of English. The last two variables, i.e. the teacher and the child, are the filler items. Previous research (Giles and Coupland, 1991; Giles and Ogay, 2007) has shown that communication can be affected by intergenerational differences. Again, this effect is not taken into account in this particular study. This is why a child and a teacher are chosen as variables in the questionnaire: they are used as filler items, in order to make sure that the participant has hardly any knowledge about the ‘real’ purpose of the questionnaire. If the filler items had been left out, there might have been a chance that the participants sensed a pattern in the particular variables, something which could affect the way in which they respond to the questions. The scores of these particular situations will not be taken into account in the final analysis.

Every question in the questionnaire is followed by an open question in which participants are asked to account for their answer. This is done in order to have some control in the answers picked by the participants: because they have to argue in favour of their answer, it becomes clear whether they have picked the answer deliberately or not. It could always be the case that they just chose an answer because the other two did not suit them. When adding a control question, answers that are picked randomly can be eliminated from the test, so that only the data that has been accounted for remains for the final analysis.

The questions as described above are randomised in order to prevent a possible impact on the final analysis. Three different versions are constructed. The situations are the same in every version; the only thing that is different is the order in which the questions appear. This order is as follows, in which the numbers are linked to the numbers of the questions as can be found in the appendix:

Version A: 4 – 6 – 1 – 3 – 2 – 5

Version B: 2 – 6 – 4 – 5 – 1 – 3

Version C: 3 – 4 – 2 – 5 – 6 – 1

Thus, all six questions have three multiple choice answers, that vary from not explicit (0 points) to most explicit (2 points). The questions are followed by an open question for the participant to make clear why he or she chose the particular answer. The hypothesis is as follows:

- The scenarios that describe a variable with a high level of proficiency of English will have significantly lower scores than the scenarios that describe a variable with a low level of proficiency of English.

All individual scores of the participant will be added up to compare the two factors that are significant for this study: high and low proficiency of English.

3.4. Procedure

BA 2 students were asked during a lecture whether they wanted to participate in a short BA thesis experiment. The teacher handed out the questionnaires during the seminar on the same day, following clear instructions about the division of the questionnaires regarding the various versions. The participants were asked to hand in the filled in questionnaires two days after

they received the questionnaire. In total, 8 students responded, which was far too little to achieve normal distribution. This is why BA 3 students of English Language and Culture were asked to fill in the questionnaire. Instructions were the same as for the BA 2 students. No indication was given about the purpose of the experiment, in order to avoid extraneous effects in the final analysis. A total of 29 participants filled in the questionnaire. During the analysis of the data, it became clear that the versions were almost equally divided: 14 participants filled in version A, 12 participants filled in version B and a total of 10 participants filled in version C of the multiple-choice discourse completion questionnaire.

3.5. Data analysis

Once all questionnaires had been gathered, the information about the participants (e.g. gender and age) as well as the scores for the four scenarios that were relevant for the study were put in Excel. Six columns were created to fill in the number of points the participants received for each question (i.e. 0, 1, 2). The six columns were as follows:

Male high proficiency
 Male low proficiency
 Female high proficiency
 Female low proficiency
 Total of high proficiency
 Total of low proficiency

As can be seen, the last two columns added up the scores of male and female high proficiency and male and female low proficiency. The variables of child and teacher have been left out, since they were merely used as filler items in the experiment. Once all the data had been put in Excel, it was copied to the statistics programme SPSS. The initial idea was that both male and female situations would be described in the experiment to avoid possible effects of gender. This is why the final analysis only took into account the total number of points for high proficiency and the total number of points for low proficiency. In other words, the columns that have been compared in SPSS were the total of high and low proficiency. Both columns can be seen as interval variables, since the scores mean something (e.g. 2 is higher than 1, etc.). This is why a t-test was opted for. The participants all filled in the same questionnaire, despite a different order of questions, so that the experiment was a within-subjects design. Therefore, a paired t-test has been used for the final analysis of the data in

SPSS, in which the x variable (i.e. total of high proficiency) and the y variable (i.e. total of low proficiency) were compared. Besides this, descriptive statistics were used in order to describe the frequencies of the participants. In this analysis, the gender of the participants, the year of study and the age have been taken into account. The results section will provide the relevant tables and figures for these data.

4. Results

As mentioned in the method section, a total of 37 participants ($N = 37$) participated in the discourse completion questionnaire. Of these participants, 29 were BA 3 students of English and 8 of them were BA 2 students of English. 13 male students participated in the experiment and 24 female students completed the questionnaire. Of the 13 male students, 12 followed the BA 3 English programme and 1 followed the BA 2 programme. Of the 24 female students, 17 followed the BA 3 English programme and 7 followed the BA 2 programme. These data can be found in figure 1. All participants studied at the Radboud University Nijmegen.

Of the 37 participants, 36 students wrote down their age ($N = 36$). The age ($M = 21.75$, $SE = 1.98$) varied from a minimum of 19 to a maximum of 27, with a range of 8 (table 3).

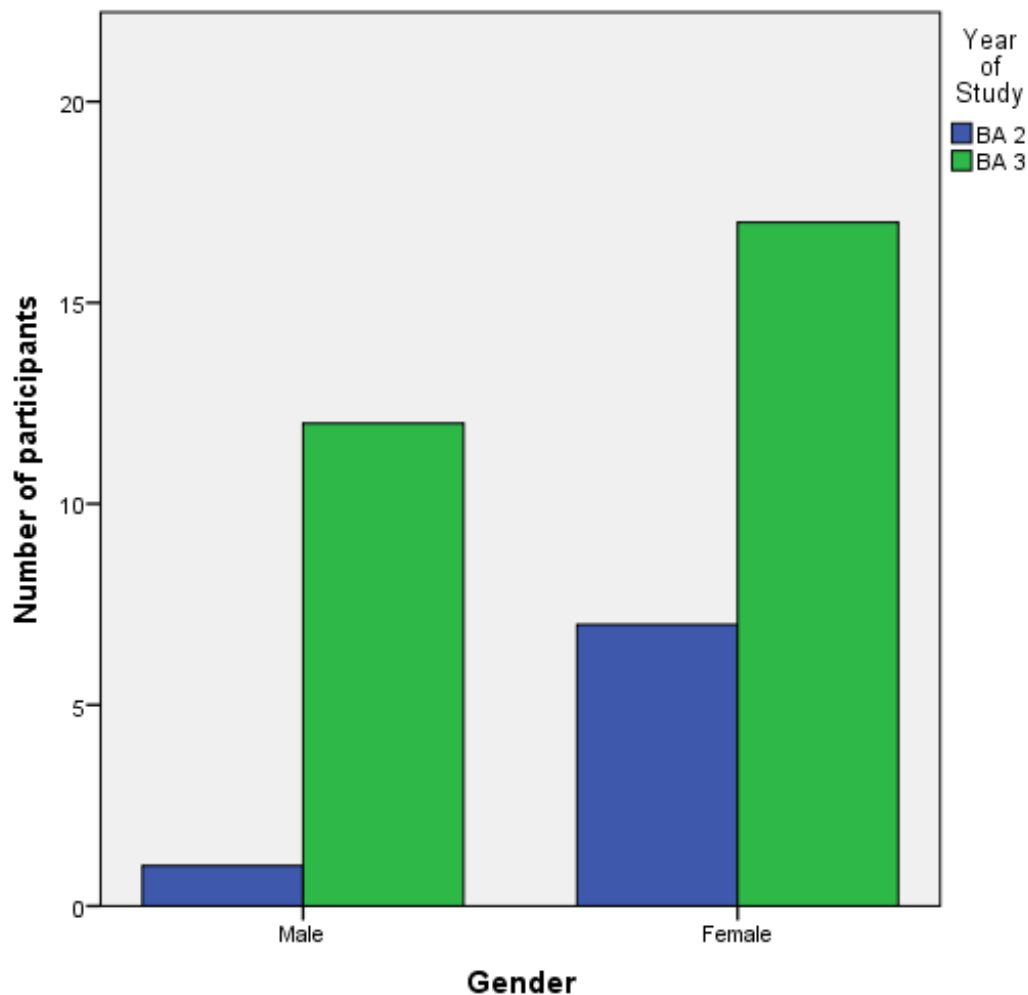


Figure 1: Total number of participants as well as their gender and their year of study.

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation, Range and minimum and maximum of the age of the participant

Age of the participant

N	Valid	36
	Missing	1
Mean		21,75
Std. Deviation		1,977
Range		8
Minimum		19
Maximum		27

Table 4: Paired t-test Samples statistics: comparison between the total score of high proficiency and the total score of low proficiency of English.

Paired Samples Statistics							
			Statistic	Bootstrap ^a			
				Bias	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Total of high proficiency	Mean	,73	,01	,14	,46	1,00
		N	37				
		Std. Deviation	,871	-,012	,086	,691	1,037
		Std. Error Mean	,143				
	Total of low proficiency	Mean	2,81	,00	,09	2,62	2,97
		N	37				
		Std. Deviation	,569	-,016	,091	,372	,747
		Std. Error Mean	,094				

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

Table 5: Paired samples t-test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Total of high proficiency - Total of low proficiency	-2,081	,983	,162	-2,409	-1,753	-12,883	36	,000

Table 6: Bootstrap for paired samples t-test

Bootstrap for Paired Samples Test							
		Mean	Bootstrap ^a				
			Bias	Std. Error	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Pair 1	Total of high proficiency - Total of low proficiency	-2,081	,007	,151	,001	-2,378	-1,784

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 bootstrap samples

As can be seen from the tables 4 to 6, a paired t-test was conducted to compare the mean of the variable of total scores of high proficiency of English and the mean of the variable of total scores of low proficiency of English. Bootstrapping is used to ensure that the models as described above are reliable and will produce the most accurate results (Field, 2013). The following results have been found:

On average, the scenarios that described an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English had a higher score ($M = 2.81$, $SE = 0.09$) than the scenarios that described an interlocutor with a high level of proficiency of English ($M = 0.73$, $SE = 0.14$). This difference, -2.08 , BCa 95% CI $[-2.38, -1.78]$, was significant $t(36) = -12.88$, $p < 0.001$.

This report can also be found in figure 2, in which the mean of the variable of the total scores of high proficiency and the mean of the variable of the total scores of low proficiency are compared.

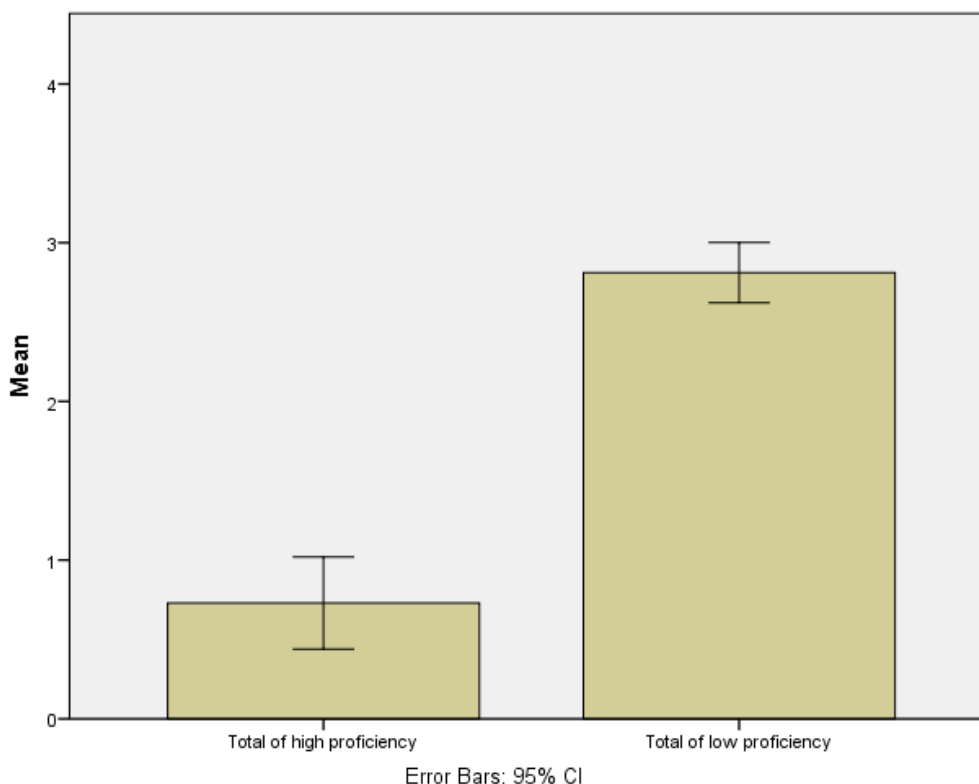


Figure 2: Mean of the total scores of high and low proficiency of English

5. Discussion

Before interpreting the data and looking at the hypotheses and research questions, it is important to note that this study has focussed on data that was collected via questionnaires, rather than recordings of real life situations. This was because of issues of both time and organisation, but it will of course have an impact on the outcome of the experiment. People act differently when filling in a questionnaire than when having a conversation in real life with real people interacting. Admittedly, the questionnaire was used as a tool to sketch real life situations, but the difference between both will still be present. The outcome of this study might thus say something about the way in which speakers will have a conversation with interlocutors who have either a high or a low level of proficiency of English, but since these situations were described on paper and did not take place in real life, it is difficult to say whether the outcome indeed says something about ‘real’ conversations. Furthermore, the questionnaire did not ask the participants what they thought the experiment was about. It might be the case that some participants knew what the purpose was of the MDCT, despite the filler items. In this way, they could have been able to manipulate their answers according to the implicit meaning of the experiment.

5.1. Results

As described in the method section, the questionnaire consisted of three multiple choice options, i.e. utterances that were most explicit, a little explicit or not explicit at all. These options were given points to indicate the level of explicitness per choice: the most explicit option received 2 points, a little explicit received 1 point and no explicit meaning at all received 0 points. Scenarios that were given high scores could thus be regarded as scenarios with more explicit answers as opposed to the scenarios which had the lowest scores. It was expected that the scenarios with the highest scores described a situation with an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English.

As can be seen in the results section, the data that has been analysed, i.e. a t-test to compare the total scores of the high proficiency scenarios and the total scores of the low proficiency scenarios, has been found significant ($p < 0.001$). This would mean that the participants chose the more explicit and most explicit options in the questionnaire significantly more when the question described a situation with an interlocutor who had a low level of proficiency of English. The scenarios that described a situation with an interlocutor who had a high level of proficiency of English received the fewest points.

However, on the basis of the open question in which the participants had to describe *why* they chose a particular option, it became clear that this significant difference cannot be explained in terms of explicitness. Rather, the participants chose the predicted options for entirely different reasons. First of all, the scenario that described a female interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English was given a score of 2 (i.e. most explicit) by almost every participant (N = 30). The question can be found in (3). The points behind the utterances indicate the level of explicitness of that utterance. The answer that has been chosen by the majority of participants has been put in bold.

- (3) A female student gives a guest lecture about her current research. Her English is, however, not very clear. She uses a lot of short sentences and lacks the ability to give her presentation a clear structure. You want to help her to improve her English. What do you say?
- a. **“I noticed that you had some trouble expressing yourself in English. Do you want me to help you?”** (2)
 - b. “Can I help you with your spoken production?” (0)
 - c. “I think I can help you with your English. Is that alright?” (1)

The initial idea was that the most explicit answer would be chosen when the participant knew that the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor was low. In this situation, the interlocutor has little knowledge of the English language (i.e. “Her English is not very clear. [...] You want to help her improve her English”), so it was already predicted that the participants would indeed go for option a), which is the most explicit utterance. However, the reason why these 30 participants opted for the most explicit answer was not because they thought that explicitness would help when talking to someone with a low level of proficiency. Rather, option a) seemed to be the least direct and most polite way of telling someone that you want to help them with their English speech production. Politeness, then, played a crucial role in the final score of this particular scenario. This might be a reason why the scores of the low proficiency scenarios are significantly higher than the scores of the high proficiency scenarios. However, it could be that the reason for this politeness comes from an idea to be less direct when someone is not familiar with the language that one is speaking. Maybe politeness in this case also indicates that the participants took into account the level of proficiency of English, and therefore chose the less direct option. Nevertheless, the open

question only made clear that the most explicit answer was chosen because it was less direct and more polite than the other options. A possible implication that participants indeed chose answer a) because of the low proficiency level of the interlocutor can thus not be proved. In other words, the most explicit answer, as it became clear from the arguments that the participants used, was chosen for its indirectness and its politeness, rather than its explicitness and the possible idea that an explicit answer would be easier for an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English.

The answers to the question that described a male interlocutor with a low level of proficiency were also striking. Instead of choosing for the option that had the most explicit meaning, as was predicted before the experiment was done, a majority of the participants (N = 34) chose the option that was just a little bit explicit. The question can be found in (4). The answer that has been opted for by the majority of participants has again been put in bold.

(4) A male exchange student is looking for the way to the right classroom. You don't know his name, but you know he has little knowledge of the English language. What do you say in order to help the student? Choose the answer that suits you best.

- a. **“Can I help you?”** (1)
- b. “You seem lost, is there something that I can do for you?” (2)
- c. “Do you need someone to help you?” (0)

The most striking part of this question is not only that an enormous number of participants opted for the same utterance, but also that almost every participant gave the same reasoning for why they chose this particular option. It was said that the utterance that was a little explicit, i.e. option a), was the easiest for the male interlocutor to understand, since he had little knowledge of English and a short answer would be easiest for him to comprehend. So instead of choosing the most explicit answer, the shortest utterance was chosen. However, the majority of the participants did take into account the level of proficiency of the interlocutor. They knew that the level of proficiency of English was low (i.e. “he has little knowledge of the English language”) and therefore they chose the shortest answer, assuming that this would be the answer that would be the easiest to understand for the exchange student. In other words, the participants adjusted their speech to their interlocutor's level of proficiency of English, but not in terms of explicitness. However, because the scenario in (3) still has been

given 1 point by a lot of participants, the particular question received a significantly number of points. This might be another reason why the data that was used in the t-test turned out to be significant.

It must be noted that the other two questions, i.e. the scenarios that described a male and female interlocutor with a high level of proficiency of English (see appendices), still received significantly fewer points than the scenarios with an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency. The scores of the former, however, have a lot of individual variation. Therefore it is hard to say whether the correct utterance was indeed chosen because the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor was taken into account. Admittedly, some participants mentioned that they would opt for the least explicit answer because they had the feeling that the interlocutor (who had a high level of proficiency) would understand them, but since this argument was only mentioned a couple of times, it does not seem to play a crucial role in terms of explicitness.

All things considered, the data that has been analysed showed that the total scores of the scenarios that described an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English were significantly higher than the scores of the scenarios that described an interlocutor with a high level of proficiency of English. This was also predicted. However, because of the arguments that the participants used to explain *why* they had chosen a particular option, it became clear that this significant difference can hardly be explained in terms of explicitness. Rather, particular answers were chosen because of a crucial role of politeness. Furthermore, it seemed that not explicit answers, but the shortest answers were chosen in order for the speaker to adjust himself/herself to the interlocutor's level of proficiency. Therefore, most participants did indeed take into account the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor, but not in terms of explicitness, as was predicted in the beginning of this study. Section 5.2. will elaborate on these predictions in relation to the outcome of the experiment.

5.2. Research questions and hypotheses

It has been found that, although the results of the data turned out to be significant, explicitness does not seem to play a crucial role during conversation. On the other hand, it seems that participants do take into account the level of proficiency of the interlocutor, albeit not for the reasons predicted. First, the research questions as posed in the introduction will be answered. After this, it will become clear whether the hypotheses are borne out or not and finally, it becomes clear whether the main aim of this study can be confirmed.

The first research question was: do speakers adjust their speech on the basis of what they know about the listener? It has become clear that Dutch L2 speakers of English indeed adjust their speech on the basis of the information they have about the listener, i.e. their own observations about the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor. The majority of participants argued that they would opt for the shortest answer, because it would be easier to understand for someone who has little knowledge of English (i.e. a low level of proficiency). So it seems that they indeed adjust their speech on the basis of this knowledge. However, the question as described in (4) is the only question in which a majority of participants made explicitly clear that they would accommodate their speech to their interlocutor. Other answers also made clear that Dutch L2 speakers of English indeed seem to adjust their speech. These answers, however, had a lot of individual variation and therefore the only question that seems to give a clear answer on the research question is the scenario as can be found in (4).

The second research question was: can the level of proficiency of the interlocutor be seen as a factor that causes the speaker to adjust his or her speech? As mentioned above, participants indeed made clear that they take into account the level of proficiency of the interlocutor. They would opt for a short utterance, because they thought that such an option was easiest to understand for an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English. Some participants also chose a more implicit answer when they knew that the interlocutor had a high level of proficiency of English. This last option, however, was not argued for by the majority of participants, so one can only speculate about the rest of the participants. The former, i.e. choosing the shortest answer, did on the other hand show that participants adjust their speech to the level of proficiency.

The main research question of this study was the following: will Dutch L2 speakers of English converge their speech to their interlocutors according to what they know about the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor? If so, what is the effect of the convergence on the explicitness of the speaker's speech production? As mentioned earlier, the only question that made explicitly clear that Dutch L2 speakers of English indeed take into account the level of proficiency of the interlocutor is question (4). The reasoning of the participants makes clear that they indeed adjust their speech on the basis of their own observations about the level of proficiency of the interlocutor. There is, however, no (visible) effect of this convergence on the explicitness of the speaker's speech production. As explained earlier, the significant difference between the scores of a high level of proficiency and the scores of a low level of proficiency might have been the result of extraneous factors, such as politeness and less direct options. Because participants viewed the most explicit answer as the most polite

utterance, the scenario with an interlocutor who had a low level of proficiency got a really high score. Thus, explicitness, as concluded from the arguments that the participants gave for choosing a particular answer, does not seem to play a role in adjusting their speech to the interlocutor. On the contrary, participants think that short utterances are easier to understand when communicating with an interlocutor who has a low level of proficiency of English. So Dutch L2 speakers of English do adjust their speech on the basis of what they know about the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor, but it seems that explicitness does not play a role in this convergence. Rather, the length of the utterance seems to be important.

Now that the research questions have been answered, it can be found out whether the hypotheses as stated in the introduction and in the method section can be confirmed. The hypotheses were as follows:

- The scenarios that contain a variable with a high level of proficiency of English will have significantly lower scores than the scenarios that contain a variable with a low level of proficiency of English. ✓
- When the speaker knows that the listener's level of proficiency of English is high, his or her speech production will be less explicit (i.e. the speaker's message still has an underlying meaning left for the interlocutor to decode), since they will not feel the need to make this underlying message particularly clear. ✗
- When the speaker knows that the listener's level of proficiency of English is low, his or her speech production will be more explicit (i.e. the speaker's message is stated clearly and in detail), since they will feel the need to make the underlying message particularly clear in order for the listener to understand the underlying message. ✗

As mentioned earlier, the scenarios that described an interlocutor with a high level of proficiency of English were indeed found to have significantly lower scores than the scenarios that described an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency (i.e. $p < 0.01$). This means that the first hypothesis can be confirmed. However, the significant difference between the scores

of high and low proficiency cannot entirely be explained in terms of explicitness, as was initially thought. Rather, extraneous factors such as politeness and indirectness played a crucial role in the final outcome of the experiment. Therefore, it can be said that the other two hypotheses as described above are not borne out.

All things considered, the aim of this study was to research whether Dutch L2 speakers of English modify their speech in terms of explicitness according to the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor. Initially, the results seemed to support this claim. However, thorough research of the arguments behind the choices of the participants showed that explicitness does not play a (clear) role in a conversation with L2 interlocutors of English. The reason for the significant difference might be the result of extraneous factors (i.e. politeness and indirectness). Furthermore, the majority of participants seemed to think that not explicitness but the length of utterances played an important role when talking to someone with a low level of proficiency. It was thought that short sentences are the easiest sentences to understand for an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English, instead of explicit sentences. Nevertheless, this finding shows that participants do adjust their speech to the interlocutor's level of proficiency, albeit for other reasons than explicitness. In this way, this study might indeed have found conformation for the idea that speakers cooperate with their interlocutors and thus supports previous studies of, among others, Howard Giles (2001, 2007) and Paul Grice (1975).

Finally, it must again be noted that a questionnaire does not entirely reflect a real life situation. In real life, people communicate very differently. This study used a multiple-choice discourse completion questionnaire because of time and organisation issues. However, this choice might also have affected the outcome of the experiment. Apart from this, it might be possible that a certain Hawthorne effect was present among the participants. This means that participants do not choose the answer they honestly want to choose. Rather, participants might opt for an answer that is politically correct and not offensive to anyone. This might be a reason why politeness played a huge role in the experiment. It is possible that participants chose the answer which they thought was most correct to choose. This effect can never be completely omitted in cross-sectional studies, because they are all set up as experiments. The only possibility to avoid a possible Hawthorne effect is to do a longitudinal study. However, these particular studies do not give a valid reflection on the population as a whole. This is why quantitative studies, such as cross-sectional research, are done more often: the samples done during quantitative research give a more correct indication of real life situations (Gass et al, 2013).

5.3. *Further research*

Although this study might have found conformation for the hypotheses of both Howard Giles (2001, 2007) and Paul Grice (1975), some of the hypotheses are not confirmed. This might be because explicitness does indeed not play a role when talking to an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English, but it could also be that too many extraneous factors influenced the outcome of the experiment. First of all, it could be that a different questionnaire that takes into account extraneous factors such as politeness and indirectness might provide different results.

Secondly, a follow-up study could be done with an experiment that reflects real life conversation better than a questionnaire. A new experiment could show participants videos in which interlocutors are shown with either a high or a low level of proficiency of English. In this way, participants can again make observations about the proficiency level, but the conversation might seem more realistic because of the videos. This might result in a different outcome. However, it must be noted that such experiments are also possibly influenced by the Hawthorne effect, in which participants give a politically correct answer in order not to offend other people.

Finally, a new study could be done about the effect of the observations that speakers make about the level of proficiency of the interlocutor, but with a focus on short sentences, rather than explicitness. This paper found that Dutch L2 speakers of English do indeed adjust their speech to the level of proficiency of the interlocutor. However, explicitness did not seem to play a role. Instead, participants argued that they would opt for short sentences in order for an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English to understand the utterance. A new study could thus focus on the length of sentences in relation to a high or low level of proficiency. This study, either with an experiment that gives a better reflection on real life conversations or a questionnaire, should also include questions that ask participants what they thought was the exact purpose of the experiment. In this way, it becomes more clear whether participants were able to manipulate their answers because they knew what was being researched.

5.4. *Conclusion*

The aim of this study was to research whether Dutch L2 speakers of English modify their speech according to what they know about the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor and its effect on the explicitness of the speaker's speech production. The hypothesis was that, when speakers knew that the level of proficiency of English of the

interlocutor was low, their speech production would be more explicit than when talking to someone with a low level of proficiency of English. The results showed that the scenarios that described an interlocutor with a low level of proficiency of English had significantly higher scores than the scenarios that described an interlocutor with a high level of proficiency. However, in-depth research of the experiment found that this significant difference was not due to explicitness of speech production. Rather, the participants opted for the 'right' answers because of extraneous factors such as politeness and indirectness. Furthermore, it is possible that the participants chose the most politically correct answer, in order not to offend people. This is also known as the Hawthorne effect. It turned out that, despite these extraneous factors, participants do modify their speech according to what they know about the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor, but not in terms of explicitness. The experiment showed that the length of utterances seems to play an important role in accommodating one's speech to the level of proficiency of the interlocutor.

All things considered, this study did find conformation for the hypothesis that speakers adjust their speech to the interlocutor (Giles, 2001, 2007; Grice, 1975). It also might have found evidence that the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor does play a role in this convergence. However, this accommodation cannot be explained in terms of explicitness. Rather, the length of utterances seems to play a role in adjusting one's speech. Further research could thus focus on whether Dutch L2 speakers of English indeed use shorter sentences when they know that the level of proficiency of English of the interlocutor is low.

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Appendices

i. Demographic consent

Dear participant,

First of all, thank you for helping me with my BA thesis! On this page, you will find some questions regarding your study and year as well as your gender. Please fill them in correctly. You do not have to put your name there, since the test will be anonymous.

On page 2, the ‘experiment’ starts: the questionnaire has three multiple choice answers, of which you may choose *one*. The most important thing for answering the questions is that you choose the answer that will, in your opinion, lead to the ‘listener’ *understanding* you best. Furthermore, every question gives you a couple of lines to argue *why* you chose the particular answer. Please be as concise and precise as you can. Of course, there is a chance that you do not completely agree with all answers, so choose the answer *that suits you best*. Please take your time and do the test individually.

If you have any questions concerning the test, or if you want to know what the outcome of the experiment is, please contact me: rowie.vaessen@student.ru.nl.

Thank you!

These questions will be dealt with anonymously, but please fill them in correctly.

Gender: 0 male 0 female

Age:

Native language:

Second language (choose the language that you know best):

Study:

Year of study (e.g. BA 1/2/3/, MA):

ii. Questionnaire

- (1) A male exchange student is looking for the way to the right classroom. You don't know his name, but you know he has little knowledge of the English language. What do you say in order to help the student? Choose the answer that suits you best.

- a. "Can I help you?" (1)
 b. "You seem lost, is there something that I can do for you?" (2)
 c. "Do you need someone to help you?" (0)

Why did you choose the particular phrase?

- (2) During one of your courses, the teacher asks you to form pairs with someone. A male student, who studied English for four years at university, looks like he has found no partner yet. What do you say in order to form pairs with him?

- a. "Do you want to form a pair?" (1)
 b. "Shall we team up?" (0)
 c. "It seems that you do not have a partner yet. Do you want to work together?" (2)

Why did you choose the particular phrase?

- (3) A female student gives a guest lecture about her current research. Her English is, however, not very clear. She uses a lot of short sentences and lacks the ability to give her presentation a clear structure. You want to help her to improve her English. What do you say?

- a. "I noticed that you had some trouble expressing yourself in English. Do you want me to help you?" (2)
 b. "Can I help you with your spoken production?" (0)
 c. "I think I can help you with your English. Is that alright?" (1)

Why did you choose the particular phrase?

- (4) A female classmate seems to be annoyed with the terrible weather outside. Her spoken English production is on the same level as yours and you know that she recently passed an English proficiency test. How do you make clear that you agree with the terrible weather?

- a. "It certainly is horrible out there." (0)
- b. "The weather is truly awful today." (1)
- c. "It is raining a lot today so the weather is indeed terrible." (2)

Why did you choose the particular phrase?

- (5) A young child around the age of seven looks lost at the airport. From the passport you deduce that his/her nationality is neither Dutch or English. However, you are not familiar with the first language of the child. What do you say?

- a. "Hey there, you look like you lost your mommy. If you follow me, we can find her together." (2)
- b. "You look lost. Shall I help you finding your mother?" (1)
- c. "Is there someone you are looking for?" (0)

Why did you choose the particular phrase?

- (6) Your English teacher wants to open the door, but his/her hands are full with papers. What do you say in order to offer your teacher some help?

- a. "Shall I help you, Sir/Madam?" (0)
- b. "I can open the door for you if you want me to." (1)
- c. "Shall I carry the papers so that you can open the door?" (2)

Why did you choose the particular phrase?