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Research Article

Conversations in Social Distancing: Breakdown and Repair

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to know the conversational breakdown during the pandemic in the context of social distancing, how it is repaired and what are the barriers that cause the communication breakdown. This is a qualitative research design through the phenomenology approach. This is conducted through extensive focusing and observation of the researchers on the lived communication processes during the pandemic. The study was conducted in the respective barangays, namely: Abihilan of Candijay, Guinacot and Mayuga of Guindulman, Botoc Oriental of Loay, and Hinlayagan Ilaud of Trinidad in the Province of Bohol. The result of the study shows that communication breakdown in instances where there are gatherings, business transactions, and interpersonal conversations. The interlocutor finds ways to repair the breakdown, like repeating their response, modifying their answers by adding and subtracting words or phrases, and recasting. These repair strategies can be done through verbal and non-verbal responses. Based on the findings and conclusions drawn, the researchers were able to make recommendations such as: suggest vendors to put pricelist or any visual attractive communication of the goods that they sell, propose to the Sangguniang Barangay plans for accessibility guidelines like acoustic or visual accessibility guidelines in the public offices or in any of the public spaces, modify the use of hand signals as an awareness disasters and calamities and safety purposes and lastly, future researchers may look at other scenarios where breakdown usually happens and find out strategies of repair in the context of during and post pandemic, election campaign period, school setting, and call center services. In addition

Keywords: *Communication breakdown, Communication repair, Communication barriers, Conversations, Social distancing*

Introduction

In most of today's setting, it is apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic has definitely changed

the nature of social interactions between people in the workplace, as they travel to work on a public utility vehicle, sell or buy products,

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or even the simplest exchange of greetings or compliment with neighbors. With the implementation of health and safety protocols by the government like social distancing, wearing of face coverings, and providing plastic barriers, conversations between two parties become problematic because the other party cannot hear what the other one is saying or may hear other words instead of what is being said. According to Atcherson et al. (2020), using a facemask greatly affects speech intelligibility and verbal understanding, particularly in a noisy environment, which makes communication more difficult among interlocutors.

Mheidly et al. (2020) acknowledge that face-to-face communication is greatly affected by the pandemic. Face masks, face shields and other important protective measures are significant to decrease the spread of the virus, but pose challenges on our interpersonal communication. Similarly, Marler and Ditton (2021) argued that face coverings hinder a clear visibility of facial expression and lip movements, which are necessary components in understanding meaning during conversation.

In this case, not being able to see completely the facial expression and lip movement and the noise brought about by environmental factors contribute to confusion or misunderstanding. Giving or verifying of directions is difficult that one's tendency is to lean over or violate some protocols just to get the message right. These communication barriers may result to conversational breakdowns, significantly in situations where clarity and immediate understanding are necessary (Marler and Ditton, 2021).

People tend to loosen up with the restrictions to allow themselves to be heard by the other party. These situations clearly demonstrate how conversational breakdowns take place and are also repaired by the speakers themselves thus relieving the said problems.

As a communicator and part of the society where pandemic is existing, the researchers propose to study "Conversations in Social Distancing: Breakdown and Repair" to be able to get a glimpse of the current problems in communication in their respective communities as well as the solutions specifically those that are

affected in a way by the government's implemented health and safety protocols. Furthermore, the findings of this study may guide the researchers in improving the channel of communication and suggest possible areas for study in terms of communication breakdown and repair.

Theoretical Background

Several theories, communication models' and concepts are presented in the hope of shedding light on its complexities for people to understand how certain protocols cause communication breakdowns as well as identify ways of how these breakdowns are repaired. First and foremost, this study is anchored on Emanuel Schegloff's Theory of Repair, Min Sun Kim's Conversational Constraint Theory and Berlo's Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR) Model of Communication.

Schegloff's Theory of Repair as discussed by Nguyen and Nguyen (2019) acknowledge that communication **breakdown** occurs in speaking, hearing and understanding the talk, **repair** on the other hand, is used to handle problems in language that is being used in actual conversation. There are three components in repair such as *trouble source* defined as component in a conversation that creates communication breakdown; *repair initiator* that includes strategies which can be self-initiated when the speaker can identify a trouble source by his/her own way of speaking or the receiver in someone's way of speaking or other-initiated repair; and *repair completion* that includes the repair procedure.

To further shed light on communication breakdown, Brady and Halle (2002) as cited by Halle and Meadan (2004), states that communication breakdown is a disturbance of constant flow of turn-taking in a conversation.

Golinkoff as cited by Halle and Meadan (2004), ranging from a "true failure to a feigned failure", communication breakdowns fall on a continuum. An interlocutor either misunderstands other person's message, or also may feign a communication breakdown to encourage them to produce a more sophisticated message. Researchers have described three main types of communication breakdowns: Requests for Clarification, Ignore, and Wrong Response.

Baker and McCabe (2010), mentions *request for clarifications* as a sign of communication breakdown. Further, according to Halle and Meadan (2004), there are two kinds of *request for clarification*. A non-specific request and a specific request. Non-specific request dealt with a person using "Huh?", "I do not understand?" "What?" (Brinton & Fujiki, 1991; Brinton, et al., 1986), and "pardon" (Golinkoff, 1986) which are indicators that a conversational breakdown has occurred. An example of a use of specific request is "Do you want the water?", which indicates that it specifically clarifies if the other interlocutors want a water.

Tomasello et al., (1990) as cited by Halle and Meadan (2004) state that ignore can be seen through verbal or non-verbal non-acknowledgement. An example is if a child is reaching for the cup of water and his mother did not respond to the signal which cause the ignore breakdown to occur because there is no verbal or non-verbal acknowledgement that responds to the child's message.

Wrong response according to Halle and Meadan (2004), occurs when a topic shift is made by either one of the interlocutors which results to misunderstanding. An example of wrong response is when a child asks for help in obtaining an object and the parent tries to redirect the child to a different object or the parent only replied "Yes, I see it" which does not help the child in obtaining the object.

In addition, Genesee and Mendelson as cited by Belgrimet (2020) stated in their study that *inaudible and ambiguous utterances* are other types of breakdown in conversation. It happens when the interlocutor's language is different from the other.

On the other hand, repair strategies pertain to the interlocutor's verbal reply to other interlocutor's wrong, incomplete and silent answer. In addition, interlocutor's responses are included whether it directly repairs the trouble or starts the repair that other interlocutors will pursue.

There are two types of repair according to Schegloff et al. as cited by Nguyen and Nguyen (2019), self-initiated repair and other-initiated repair. Self-initiated repair pertains to the speaker of the trouble source who makes the

repair by digging into the idea through the process of turn-taking in the conversation. In addition, they also examined and systematically illustrate self-repair in conversations such as *error corrections* which fix the phonological, lexical, and morphological unintentional trouble source by searching for a word which aids the speaker to increase time to realize the exact words he/she wants to say.

According to Halle and Meadan, if they have not used the precise words, the interlocutors modify the words they say so that the listeners can understand; *false starts* is a strategy that aids the interlocutors to increase time to reorganize their ideas and look for the words or rephrase to repair it; and *instantaneous repetitions* that consist of repetitions of personal pronouns, conjunctions, indefinite articles and prepositions.

Further, Paul and Cohen as cited by Meadan and Halle (2004), state that Repetition as a repair strategy which is considered to be the most basic type happens when the interlocutors produce the same messages as what has been originally uttered. A precise communication attempts to achieve the original goal of the reference act by using exactly the same communication means as prior act. Meadan and Halle state that in modifying the original message, it includes changes in the original message which is associated into two categories, addition and reduction. Further, addition or augmentation is a repair strategy of adding other communicative behavior while still producing similar gestures and speech. On the other hand, reduction or simplification as a modification tactic occurs when the interlocutors eliminate some topography from the original message.

Brady et al., (1995) as cited by Halle and Meadan (2004) discusses how *recast* happens when the interlocutor creates a repair that is not the same in the original communication act. In addition, Golinkoff as cited by Halle and Meadan (2004) reported that substitution is the only way that builds up the development during the second year of life and as a conclusion he added that substitutions are proofs that infants exercise their communicative repertoire flexibly.

On 2017 Min-Sun Kim developed a theory that elaborates how conversational strategies differ from one culture to another, why it is different from one another and how does it take effect to the various culture, this is the Conversational Constraint Theory. The theory is based on Social Science communication approach that deals on how culture motivates communication. The theory enumerates five communication constraints such as clarity, minimizing imposition, consideration for the others feelings, risking negative evaluation by the receiver and effectiveness.

Clarity that pertains to how the message is delivered clearly by the way the speaker pronounces and utter the words so that listeners can perceive the right intention of the message. Another important factor in conversational constraints is a person's capacity to *minimize impositions*. The empathic approach of feminine individuals connotes less value towards imposing their message while the opposite applies to masculine individuals which are likely to put less value in minimizing their impositions. *Consideration for others' feelings*, as interlocutors express their thoughts one must observe how the others feel about the topic or the situation. *Avoiding negative evaluation* by the hearers occur when a speaker aims to avoid the negative evaluation that the receiver will give after the receiver perceived the message. *Effectiveness*, this constraint is universally accepted and plays significant roles in most of the culture.

Muyanga and Phiri (2021) used Berlo's Model of Communication in their study. The model emphasizes the role of the four elements of communication which are the Source, Message, Channel and Receiver (SMCR). This model justifies how a conversation between the sender and receiver can be affected largely by the elements of message and channel.

Communication as a part of one's day to day routine especially during this time of pandemic, involves a more complex process. Looking into each component of the four elements mentioned, one is able to understand that several of these components directly influence communication breakdown and repair. In the observance of the protocols implemented during this pandemic, both the **Sender** and **Receiver's**

Communication Skills, specifically their listening and speaking, are greatly affected. Conveying the message will not be possible if either the sender or receiver has poor communication skills most especially if the distance also plays a part in the conversation. *Attitude* pertains to how one relates to the other communicator. If one is apprehensive, uncomfortable or awkward towards someone when in a conversation, then communication will likely result to unclear messages, confusion and eventually misunderstanding. *Knowledge* is also a factor because it pertains to what the speakers are talking about. If one of the two parties in a conversation do not understands the subject matter then most likely the other one will resort to clarifying that becomes even more difficult to understand with mouth or lip coverings. *Culture and Social Systems* maybe distinctly differentiated in this model but is generally understood as the way people live and relate with one another in a specific place or community. These involve the language spoken, their practices, beliefs, rules, and traditions. Naturally, when new ways are being introduced, people tend to be indifferent or disturbed. In the context of the pandemic, the wearing of masks or face shields and social distancing have greatly affected the ways of life of the people in the community.

Message as one of the four components of communication in Berlo's Model is defined by Janse (2018) as "the package of information or meaning that is sent from sender to receiver" that can be conveyed through verbal, written or multimedia. It has to be understood that what the speaker is conveying should also be interpreted the same way by the receiver. The factors that comprise Message include Content, Elements, Treatment, Structure, and Code. And these are apparently associated with the scenario during this pandemic.

Content pertains to the meat of a specific conversation. Any misunderstanding boils down to the specific words and the definite meaning that the sender uses and conveys must be the same thing that the receiver deciphers. However, Content is also accompanied with the specific *Elements* such as the non-verbal gestures or expressions that are actually *Codes* along with language. With vague codes,

the message can be distorted. The source's intention is therefore translated into a coded message.

Channels are the ways messages are being delivered. However, with the implementation of the health protocols, conversation breakdown just the same is affected. Juneja (2021) explains that codes in the form of gestures, body movements, language, and facial expressions affect the decoding of the message and the message can be wrongly construed if codes are wrongly demonstrated.

Kapur (2018) comprehensively enumerates the kinds of barriers to effective communication. The major categories include: 1) Environmental and Physical Barriers which covers time, space, place, and medium of communication; 2) Semantic Barriers which envelopes the importance of complementariness and appropriateness of utilized words, language, and vocabulary of conversing individuals; 3) Cultural Barriers which include the communication challenges primarily due to the differences in nationalities, religion, socio-economic status, races, ethnicities, orientation, and the likes; 4) Psychological Barriers such as the independent mindset and mental capacities of the talking individuals; and 5) Perception of Reality which emphasizes the dissimilarities in perceiving a situation or a problem talked about in the conversation. Content barriers are also included in the study.

Furthermore, as particularly stated by Smith (2015), non-assertive behavior, emotional state, personal biases, diversity, lack of confidence, inappropriate priorities, organizational structure, distractions and interruptions, tunnel vision, rank differences and task pre-occupation are detrimental factors which affects effective communication (Kapur, 2018). They supplemented elimination of differences in perception, usage of simple language, reduction of physical distractions, active listening, stabilizing emotional state, avoidance of information overload, and constructive feedback to mediate the above-mentioned communication barriers.

Language or semantic barriers arise when many words have more than one meaning, a sender and a receiver try to communicate in a language, which themselves do not understand

properly, hence, communication is not successful.

Lunenberg (2010) also says that the semantic barriers occur because of the words that the communicator chooses and how they use them, the meaning that they want to put to it can create many barriers as we communicate. Moreover, Buarquob (2019) also states that there may be some barriers in communication system that can block the message to its desired destination, it generally appears in the five areas: how the message created and delivered by the sender, the environmental factors, and the way how the message perceived by the decoder. Communication barriers are present during this pandemic not just because of the restrictions that has been implemented by the government but the pandemic added the struggle of the people in communicating.

This pandemic has changed the usual way of communicating into a new normal way of communicating. It depicts the idea of communication where people must observe the proper protocols intended. According to Dixon as cited by Lindberg (2020), 90% of communication is nonverbal, then the pandemic becomes a great factor that hinders the unsaid remains stagnant and become unseen for so long. Most of the people rely to nonverbal communication between verbal languages. To maintain and observe the safety among the individuals both from home and visitors, people wear mask even when talking to someone. Dixon said that "because of the things that we wear our ability to interpret critical facial expression was lost and the ability to interpret the emotions through facial cue are lessen."

People with hearing impairment or even those who have no hearing impairments look for facial cues and lip movements from the sender known as expression reading and lip reading in order to perceive the right message in the flow of conversation. Non transparent facial coverings obscure the facial features and emotions that the sender wants to express, hindering the speech perception conveyed by the speaker. It also alters the speech, making sounds less audible or would actually result to wrong perception of words. Distance, face coverings made from non-transparent materials,

and other factors make the speech hard to understand by the listener. As a result, communication becomes weaken and increase of stress and isolation may happen (Tucci, 2020).

Vaughan et.al (2009) as cited by Abu-akel in (2020) mentions that beyond the content of the message, the person who relay the message is one of the significant factors that could determine the effectiveness of the message during this time of pandemic where there are a lot of barriers that cause communication breakdown.

Skvarenina et. al. (2021) states that having an effective communication is crucial in the midst of the pandemic where protective measures and restrictions imposed can possibly have a negative effect in the speech perception during communication which results to communication breakdowns. Some of the strategies for optimizing communication includes anticipation, repair and maintain strategies in order to avoid communication breakdown and maintain mutual understanding from both speakers as partners in conversation.

Similar concepts are acknowledged in the study of Eugwaja (n.d.) regarding the communication breakdown in an association context. He expresses that generic breakdown in communication in associations features the fracture in upward and downward communication (i.e., hierarchical and organizational structure) and poor listening skills. Barriers in association communication include perceptual, emotional, cultural, language, retention, and physical barriers. The main tasks of the interlocutors, as they both share responsibilities in the process, are to overcome the avoidable barriers, whilst if unavoidable, it is necessary for them to face these breakdowns and initiate a more adaptive communication strategy.

Bakar et al. (2020) explains that communication is one of the functional elements of life and that people are socialized through efficient communication skills. The effectiveness of communication process and learning depends to what extent there are communication barriers among the public, which are the stakeholders. Moreover, communication barriers exist in different sectors or organizations and these barriers may be environmental or noise, and

cultural differences as well as bias within the organization

Mheidly et al. (2020) acknowledges the effects of COVID 19 in interpersonal communication. Although face masks and social distancing are preventive measures for the spreading of virus, it also had disruptive effects towards communication. Facial expressions and gestures play a significant part in communication by aiding people's understanding on situations and making appropriate verbal or emotional feedback. They cited, as examples, its applicability to: physician-patient relationship (in determining the patient's current feelings and emotions and lessening their anxiety to treatment); and people with disabilities who rely to sign language (which also accounts facial expressions in the relay of message).

Other than hampering talking, face masks only allow focus on the upper facial muscles (instead of the whole face). Focusing only on the eyes induces uncomfortable feelings such as unintended interest or aggression. Not having nose, mouth and cheeks requires individuals to go extra lengths to further adapt in the situation. They conclude that it is important to identify the challenges that one may encounter while wearing face mask and formulate adaptive strategies to adapt in the current communication problem which includes: 1) raising awareness; 2) effectively using upper face; 3) highlight the importance of nonverbal communication; 4) improved focus in interpersonal communication; 5) talking louder and slower; 6) purchasing of transparent face masks/shields; 7) utilization of technology for interpersonal communication; and 8) further communication and crisis studies.

The following related studies highlights factors or elements that are identified as causes of breakdown and means of repair for interlocutors in their conversations. Communication experiences in the time of pandemic were investigated by Schlögl et. al, (2021). Specifically, it looked into mask-related communication barriers of healthcare professionals.

According to the 226 healthcare professionals who participated in the study, the communication challenges they had experienced mainly during the pandemic is the lack of time in clinical encounters, uncertainties in turning

to adaptive communication, lack of personal protective equipment (which requires the professionals to comply to social distancing to protect themselves), lack of communication skills and lack of knowledge how to adapt their own communication skills during the pandemic, with the young participants being expressive to their lack in training for communication. They also found out that wearing of masks hinders or limits their ability to recognize emotions and acquire information consistent to language in their consultations with patients. The research also proposed ABC mnemonics (Attend mindfully, Behave calmly, and Communicate Clearly) as a strategy to aid the healthcare front liners to communicate effectively, and unambiguously.

In case study of Meadan and Halle (2004) presents communication breakdown and repair of a two-year and four-month old boy with autism and language delay. The study is split into two different conditions, natural and structured observations. In the natural condition, communication is observed during reading activities. It tries to demonstrate how the subject communicates his request for a book and how he repairs it. The boy's mother initially taught him to channel his request by hitting but later on shifted her strategy to grant the request only when the boy vocalizes. The boy also used leading and reaching as his topographies. After several days, the percentage of the boy's hitting to repair has lessened from 82% to 48%.

On the other hand, during the structured observation of the boy's one-on-one encounter with the researcher, when the boy requests the researcher to read a book, his topography is pointing. However, the repeated utterance of "what" by the researcher when the boy requests him to read resorted to increase in his vocalization. The tendency for the boy to resort to pointing diminished. As a whole, for both natural and structured conditions, the boy's tendency to resort to vocalization and leading become more evident every time his requests are misinterpreted.

With Schegloff's Theory of Repair, Min-Sun Kim's Conversational Constraint Theory, Berlo's SMCR Communication Model and the different related literature and studies, the

study has a clearer background on which elements cause the breakdown as well as the repair strategies that interlocutors make while conversing to each other especially living in the time of the pandemic while observing the new normal.

There is indeed a need to understand Berlo's flow of communication to be able to understand where breakdown and repair take place. Further, Schegloff's Theory of Repair as well as Halle and Meadan's Study show the repair strategies that are used by the interlocutors during the occurrence of breakdown in a conversation while Conversational Constraints Theory describes how the message is delivered as well as gives a clearer picture of how the breakdown and repair transpired.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore communication breakdowns and repair strategies experienced by residents during the pandemic. A phenomenological approach was used in this study, as it focuses on understanding and describing individuals' lived experiences of a particular phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon centers on communication breakdown and repair during social interactions under the health and safety protocols implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were gathered through observation of lived communication processes in selected barangays in Bohol: Abihilan in Candijay, Guinacot and Mayuga in Guindulman, Botoc Oriental in Loay, and Hinlayan Ilaud in Trinidad. In addition, the aforementioned places are also where the study has been conducted. These communities were chosen because they were centers of commerce, tourist destinations, and community interaction during the pandemic, while still adhering to prescribed health protocols such as face mask use, limited dine-in capacity, and regulated store entrances and exits.

The participants were residents and individuals involved in business transactions in commercial establishments, street scenarios, street peddling, the church, and public offices within the selected barangays. Moreover, since the data gathering reached the time of Typhoon Odette's aftermath, situations like charging in

charging stations were also included in the data gathering. There are thirty (30) participants chosen purposively based on their involvement in observed conversations where communication breakdowns and repair strategies occurred. 3 participants for street peddling, 6 participants for street scenarios, 6 participants for commercial buildings, 6 participants for household scenarios, 2 participants for church scenarios, 5 participants in Typhoon Odette aftermath, and 2 participants for public offices. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was strictly observed through the use of codes and the protection of personal information. The researchers used observation notes, pen-and-paper documentation, real-time encoding through electronic devices, and audio or video recording when available. In cases where recording was not possible, the researchers relied on ethnographic memory to document observed conversations. After the conversation occurred, the observers directly wrote what had happened during the conversation, which was validated by the participants afterward.

The study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis as the method for the analysis of the gathered data. This method was suitable for the study because it allows the researchers to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns or themes within qualitative data. Since the study utilized a phenomenological approach, the researchers highlighted the lived experiences and communication situations of interlocutors who encountered conversational breakdowns as health and safety protocols were continuously implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers examined the interactions through observation that were affected by face masks, social distancing, environmental noise, and limited facial visibility, where the aftereffects are communication barriers such as mishearing, repetition of stated sentences, unclear speech, and the use of nonverbal gestures or clarification strategies. As the data analysis continues, Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis are being used to familiarize the data, creating of initial codes, looking for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and cre-

ating the final analysis-the researchers logically organized the observed behaviours into meaningful themes analogous to conversational breakdowns and repair strategies. The method helped the researchers to give an in-depth interpretation of communication experiences while still conserving the very essence of the interlocutor's lived experiences observed in the study.

The study maintained ethical standards by following specific protocols of the data-gathering process. Permission to conduct the study was sought by sending letters to the barangay captains of the chosen communities. Before the conduct of the observation, informed consent was obtained from the participants, and participation in the study was strictly voluntary, and there was no forced participation involved. The participants were also informed that they have the right to withdraw from participating in the study at any point or whenever they feel uncomfortable without facing penalties. To respect their privacy, disclosure of personal information was strictly implemented, and codes were used in presenting the data. Confidentiality was ensured, and all gathered data was used for research purposes only. Since the study happened during the height of the pandemic, health and safety protocols were still observed by the researchers as well as the participants, such as wearing face masks, maintaining physical distancing, and proper sanitary procedures.

The researchers observed conversations in community and household settings for two months while following health and safety protocols. Observations were coded according to types of communication breakdowns and scenarios, and interviews were conducted when needed to validate the observation notes.

Declaration of AI Use in Research Methodology and Manuscript Writing

This research employs artificial intelligence (AI) methodologies, including AI-assisted manuscript writing. The AI tools used, such as Chat GPT and Quillbot, are integrated into stages encompassing data collection, analysis, interpretation, and manuscript composition review.

This integration upholds transparency and ethical standards, aligning with established guidelines.

Niño Rey Otara, Ethel S. Doria, Jay L. Galimpin, the researchers, affirm full responsibility for the ethical use of AI throughout the study. In manuscript writing, considerations include transparent authorship attribution, disclosure of AI tools to peer reviewers, ensuring clarity and coherence, and safeguarding data security. Integrating AI-generated and human-authored content is approached with diligence, emphasizing review, quality assurance, and commitment to openness and reproducibility.

Result and Discussion

This section presents the interpretation and analysis of the observed conversational breakdowns and repair strategies that occurred in different community-based interactional settings. The conversational scenarios were categorized into Street Peddling, Street Scenario, Selling, Household, Church, Odette Aftermath, and Public Office transactions. The observed communication breakdowns were classified into four types: request for clarification, wrong response, ignore, and inaudible or ambiguous utterances. Repair strategies were analyzed using the categories of repetition, modification or augmentation, and recast or substitution, while communication barriers were identified as physical and environmental factors.

The findings revealed four major themes: clarification as immediate repair, misinterpretation of heard messages, divided attention as communication breakdown, and repetition as repair for inaudible utterances.

Theme 1: Clarification as Immediate Repair

Request for clarification emerged as the most evident type of communication breakdown across several community scenarios, including Street Peddling, Street Scenario, Selling, Household, Church, and Odette Aftermath. This type of breakdown occurred when interlocutors were unable to clearly hear or understand the message and therefore asked for clarification.

In the observed scenarios, clarification requests were commonly expressed through utterances such as “Ha?”, “Unsa Ma?”, “Unsa?”, and “Sani?”. These expressions indicated that the listener did not fully perceive or understand the speaker’s message. Physical and environmental barriers, particularly the wearing of face masks, distance between interlocutors, obstructing objects, and noise from running vehicles, contributed to this breakdown.

Repair was commonly achieved through repetition and modification. For instance, in the conversation between a mother and daughter, the word “payong” was repeated in a louder voice to clarify the message. In another scenario, the utterance “aring suba” was modified into “adtung suba,” showing that the speaker adjusted the message to make it more understandable. These examples show that clarification requests functioned as immediate repair mechanisms during unclear exchanges.

This theme suggests that conversational participants actively attempt to restore meaning when communication is interrupted. Rather than ending the interaction, interlocutors use short clarification prompts and repeated or modified utterances to maintain the flow of conversation.

Theme 2: Misinterpretation of Heard Messages

Wrong response was observed in Street Peddling, Street Scenario, Selling, Household, and Odette Aftermath. This type of breakdown occurred when an interlocutor responded differently from the intended topic or question because the message was misheard or misinterpreted.

The selling scenarios provided several examples of wrong responses. In one interaction, the word “tissue” was heard as “sigarilyo.” In another, “sigarilyo” was heard as “litro,” which led the store owner to ask, “Pila imo ka litro?” Another case involved a customer asking for green Creamsilk, but the vendor handed green Sunsilk instead. In the bakery scenario, “sixteen pesos” was misheard as “sixty pesos.” These examples show that wrong responses were often caused by similar-sounding words, unclear pronunciation, and noisy surroundings.

The main barriers contributing to wrong responses were face masks, physical distance, motorcycle noise, and generator noise. These barriers affected the accuracy of listening and caused interlocutors to respond based on what they thought they heard rather than what was actually said.

Repair was commonly done through modification or augmentation. Speakers corrected the misunderstanding by restating the message in a clearer or more specific form. For example, “Te naa mo’y sigarilyo?” was modified into “sigarilyo te, dili litro.” This repair strategy helped narrow the meaning and correct the listener’s mistaken interpretation.

This theme indicates that wrong responses do not necessarily result from lack of attention alone. Instead, they are often caused by the listener’s attempt to interpret incomplete or unclear auditory information in a noisy or physically restricted communication environment.

Theme 3: Divided Attention as Communication Breakdown

Ignore was observed in street and selling scenarios. This type of breakdown occurred when one interlocutor failed to respond or gave attention to another person during the interaction.

In one street scenario, an older woman asked a man where he was going, but the man only turned around without giving a verbal response. In the restaurant scenario, a customer stated what he wanted to buy, but the vendor was also entertaining another customer. As a result, the first customer’s message was not immediately attended to.

The observed barriers included distance, face masks, and environmental noise from other customers. However, unlike the previous themes, this breakdown was not caused only by unclear hearing. It was also caused by divided attention and competing interactional demands.

Repair was achieved through modification or augmentation. In the street scenario, the older woman modified her question from “asa ka padung gaw?” to “asa ka padung?” In the restaurant scenario, after attending to another customer, the vendor returned to the first customer and asked, “unsa ra gali toy uban doy?”

This shows that the repair happened when the interlocutor redirected attention back to the original speaker.

This theme shows that communication breakdown can occur not only when speech is unclear but also when attention is divided. In community conversations, interlocutors often engage with more than one person or stimulus, making attention an important factor in maintaining communication.

Theme 4: Repetition as Repair for Inaudible or Ambiguous Utterances

Inaudible or ambiguous utterances were observed in the Public Office transaction. In this scenario, Woman 1 asked about the payment for a barangay certification. The secretary responded, “tag singkwenta ma’am,” but Woman 1 did not clearly hear the response and asked, “Pila ma’am sinto-singkwenta?” The secretary then repeated the answer by saying, “Singkwenta ra ma’am.”

The breakdown was caused by face masks, physical distance, and surrounding sounds in the barangay hall. These factors made the secretary’s response unclear to the listener. Unlike wrong response, where the listener interpreted the message incorrectly and responded differently, this case involved uncertainty about what was heard.

The repair strategy used was repetition. By repeating the amount more clearly, the secretary was able to clarify the message and resolve the breakdown. This shows that repetition is an effective repair strategy when the original message is not clearly perceived.

This theme highlights the role of repetition in restoring understanding during formal or transactional conversations. In public office settings, where accuracy is important, repeating key information helps avoid further misunderstanding.

Synthesis of Findings

Overall, the findings show that conversational breakdowns in community interactions were shaped by both physical and environmental barriers. The most prominent type of breakdown was a request for clarification, while the most frequently used repair strategy was modification or augmentation. Face masks, social

distancing, physical obstruction, and environmental noise from vehicles, customers, generators, and public surroundings were the major factors that affected message clarity.

The analysis further reveals that communication breakdown is not only a linguistic problem but also a situational one. The success or failure of interaction depended on how clearly the message was heard, how much attention the listener gave, and how quickly the speaker repaired the misunderstanding. The identified themes show that interlocutors used practical strategies such as clarification, repetition, and modification to restore meaning and continue the conversation.

Moreover, even though restrictions have been lifted as the pandemic ended, the findings developed into adaptive behaviours and left as a lasting imprint on the interlocutors in this post-pandemic era. Strategies such as recasting, repetition, modification, increased voice modulation, and looking for nonverbal cues have been part of the communicative adjustments where clarity, accuracy, and immediacy are important. In offices such as institutions, public offices, stores, service counters, community transactions, and schools, interlocutors may continue to use these strategies to avoid misunderstandings that will result in communication breakdown. This shows that these learned communication practices during the pandemic did not just remain as a study but became an awareness of message clarity, listeners' feedback, facial cues, spatial distance, and the need to repair whenever communication breakdown happens.

Thus, the study demonstrates that conversational repair plays an important role in everyday community communication. Even when communication is disrupted by physical and environmental barriers, speakers and listeners actively negotiate meaning to maintain understanding. In the post-pandemic context, these findings became more relevant as it is still being used and more relevant especially in institutional and client communication and interaction where miscommunication can affect service delivery, public transactions, and interpersonal trust.

Conclusion

The communication breakdown is a common occurrence in community interactions, especially when physical and environmental barriers affect the clarity of messages. These breakdowns show that successful communication depends not only on the speaker's message but also on the listener's ability to hear, interpret, and respond appropriately within a given situation.

The findings further indicate that interlocutors do not simply allow communication breakdowns to continue. Instead, they actively repair them through verbal strategies such as repetition, modification, and recasting, as well as non-verbal adjustments such as moving closer or improving voice clarity. These repair strategies help restore understanding and maintain the flow of conversation.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of conversational repair in everyday community communication, particularly in situations affected by masks, distance, noise, and other barriers. In addition, the study also highlights the continuing importance of the strategies of conversational repair in daily conversations. The adaptive behaviours observed during the pandemic including recasting, repetition, modification, increased voice modulation, and looking for nonverbal cues are still useful in post-pandemic interpersonal interaction especially in an institutions or public spaces where effective communication should be achieved for a smooth, effective, accurate, and mutual understanding in the delivery of services.

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The main findings (novelty) and why they are important and useful:

The main novelty of this study is its focus on how ordinary community members experienced and repaired conversational breakdowns during social distancing in real-life barangay settings. The findings show that communication breakdowns commonly occurred

through requests for clarification, wrong responses, ignoring, and inaudible or ambiguous utterances. These breakdowns were mainly caused by face masks, physical distance, noise, and divided attention. The study also found that interlocutors repaired these breakdowns through repetition, modification or augmentation, recasting, and non-verbal adjustments such as moving closer or improving voice clarity.

These findings are important because they show that communication problems during the pandemic were not only medical or technological issues, but also everyday social and linguistic concerns. The study is useful because it provides practical insights for improving communication in community transactions, public offices, selling situations, and interpersonal conversations, especially in settings where masks, distance, noise, or barriers affect message clarity.

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