The Impact of Linguistic Misunderstandings in Conflict Situations in International Contexts

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English as a global academic language: a tool for *connection*?

Or *exclusion*? ..

Check-in

- Share a moment in which your encountered a linguistic misunderstanding, either funny or embarrassing

- In subgroups -

On the Menu

1. English – The Lingua Franca of Academia
   - Advantages
   - Challenges

2. Linguistic Misunderstandings – manifestations of Conflict in different levels
   - Intrapersonal
   - Interpersonal
   - Intragroup
   - Intergroup

3. Illustration with case study

English – The Lingua Franca in Academia

Advantage: facilitating collaboration and knowledge dissemination across cultures

- **Global exchange of ideas**
  - *Contributions from diverse backgrounds*
- **Skill Development**
  - *Improvement of linguistic competences*
  - *Cross-cultural communication skills*
- **Unique perspectives**
  - *Richness of diverse cultural and intellectual perspectives*
- **Adaptability and creativity**
  - *Navigating a second language often leads to increased adaptability and creative problem-solving, as speakers find ways to articulate complex ideas despite linguistic limitations.*

English – The Lingua Franca in Academia

Challenges: the use of English by non-native speakers also introduces linguistic, cognitive, and cultural dynamics that can impact communication and understanding

- Linguistic limitations
  - *Vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency*
- Cognitive load
  - *Additional mental effort, making it harder for non-native speakers to express complex ideas effectively*
- Confidence and Anxiety
  - *Anxiety about making mistakes may affect confidence and willingness to participate in discussions or presentations*
- Cultural barriers
  - *Cultural norms regarding politeness, argumentation styles, expression of dissent,…*
- Bias and Perceptions
  - *Linguistic skills are sometimes unfairly equated with intellectual capacity*

The ‘Profound Disadvantage’ of Non-native English Speakers – an illustration

- Respondents from nations with **moderate** English proficiency spent **47% more time** than native speakers **reading scientific literature**, while their **low**-proficiency counterparts invested **91% more time**—excess effort that persisted throughout their careers
- In **preparing conference presentations**, non-native speakers spent up to **51% more time** than native speakers in writing journal articles and sought **proofreading help** around **50% more often**
- Non-native speakers were almost three times as likely to have **papers rejected for linguistic reasons**, and more than a dozen times as likely to be **asked to rewrite** papers
- Many respondents said they **sidestepped conferences** altogether, apparently because of language issues rather than cost. Three in 10 early-career respondents from Japan and Spain said they customarily avoided English-language conferences

The research team surveyed more than 900 environmental scientists on the time required for routine academic tasks such as reading, writing and rewriting journal articles. The subjects, who had all published at least one first-authored, peer-reviewed paper in English, came from eight countries with varying levels of English language proficiency and income.

The "profound disadvantage" of nonnative English speakers

Levels of conflict

Intrapersonal

- This level refers to an internal dispute and involves only one individual. This conflict arises out of your own thoughts, emotions, ideas, values and predispositions. It can occur when you are struggling between what you “want to do” and what you “should do.”

Interpersonal

- This conflict occurs between two or more people. It can result from different personalities or differing perspectives on how to accomplish goals. Interpersonal conflict may even occur without one party realizing there was ever conflict.

Levels of conflict

Intragroup

- Between members of a single group when there are multiple people with varying opinions, backgrounds and experiences working toward a common goal. Even though they may all want to achieve the same goal, they may disagree about *how* to reach it. Intragroup conflict can also occur when team members have differences in communication styles and personalities.

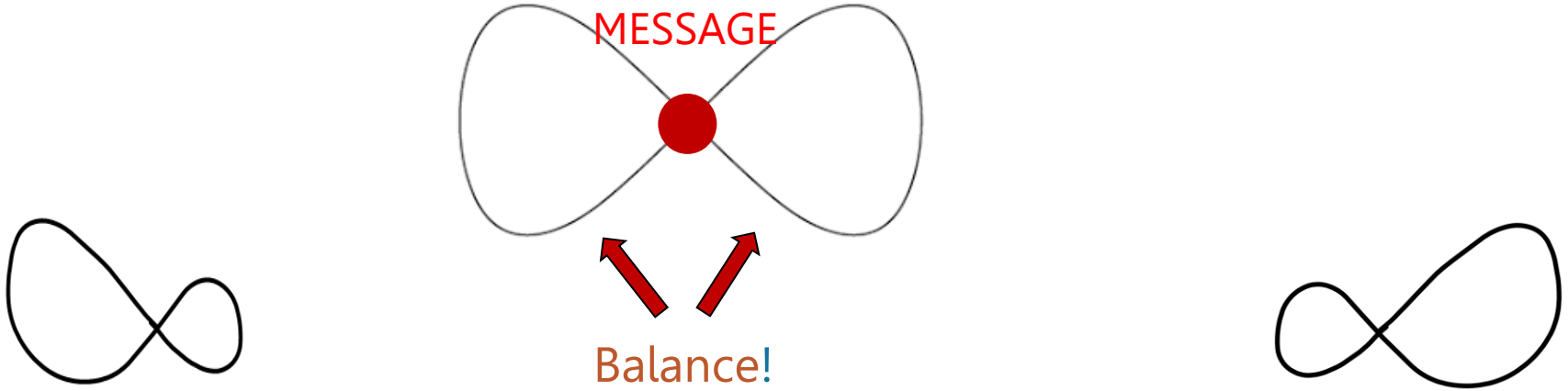
Intergroup

- This level of conflict occurs between different groups within a larger organization or those who do not have the same overarching goals.

https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/levels-of-conflict

Connective Clarity

CONNECTION **CLARITY**



One-sided focus on CONNECTION =>

- Unclarity
- Lack of frame and structure
- Too much overlap professional-private
- Cautious communication
- …

One-sided focus on CLARITY =>

- Rigidity
- Too much task orientation (results, efficiency, effectiveness)
- Too little attention to individual well-being
- Too little attention to social cohesion

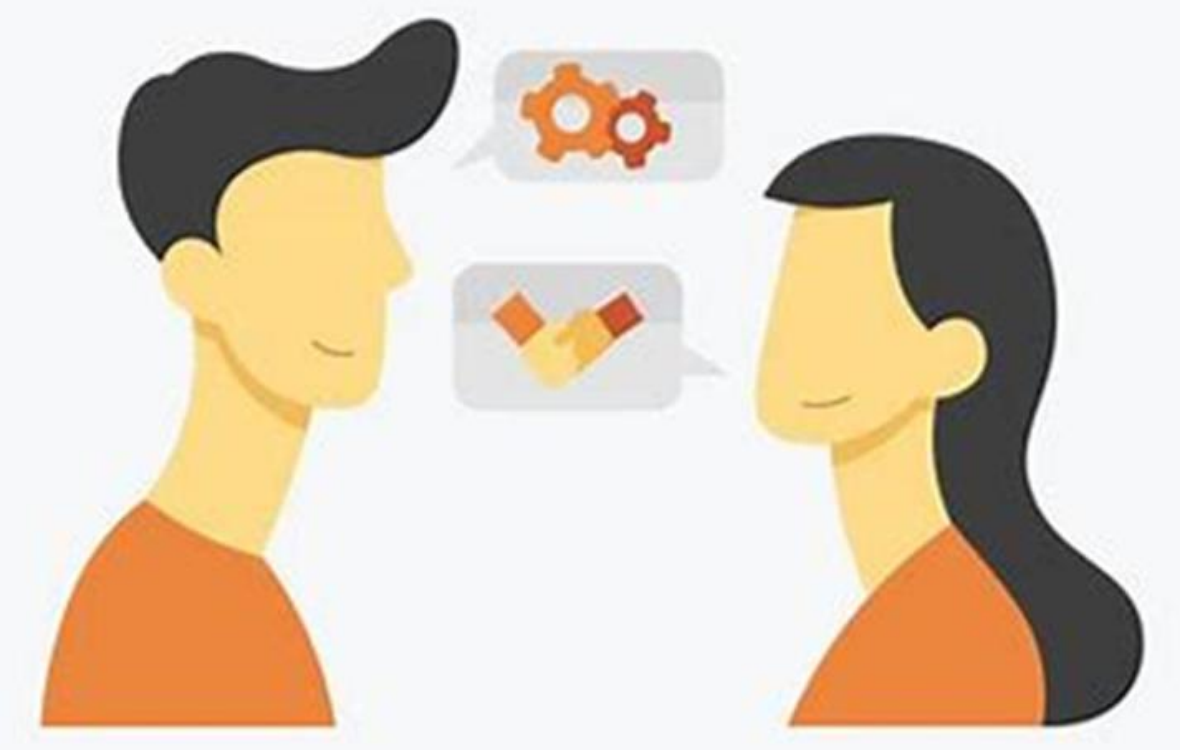
Managing INTRAPERSONAL CONFLICT in dealing with linguistic misunderstandings

How to deal with linguistic misunderstandings on an intrapersonal level

- Role / Person distinction
- Clarity regarding ‘What DO I want / need?’
  - *Solution Focus approach*
- What do I have imact on? What not?
  - *Distinguishing between problems & Limitations*

Illustration: case Regan

- Role / Person distinction
  - Regan:
    - Lack of self-confidence as a person because of inability to fully be himself in his professional role
    - Additional difficulty: family moved to the Netherlands => increases feeling of pressure and responsibility on Regan
- Clarity regarding 'What DO I want / need?'
  - Regan:
    - Was a difficult question to answer for him: focus on what was bothering him, on what he didn't want anymore:
      - (partially self-imposed) pressure of having to be good at speaing Dutch
      - Self-evidence of the context regarding speaking Dutch
- What do I have impact on? What not?
  - Regan:
    - Was a difficult question to answer for him: he felt totally steered by the context; he didn't give himself the mandate to have and express his expectations & needs

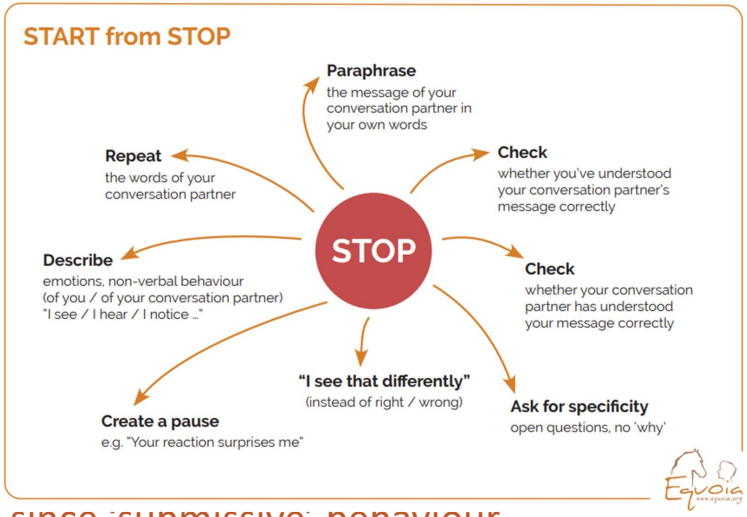


Managing INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT in dealing with linguistic misunderstandings

How to deal with linguistic misunderstandings on an interpersonal level

- Doing away with self-evidence
- Impact of behaviour on behaviour
- Creating exploration time through ‘STOP’ moments
  - *Mindset of curiosity instead of judgements, assumptions, interpretations,…*
- Giving and receiving feedback

Illustration: case Regan

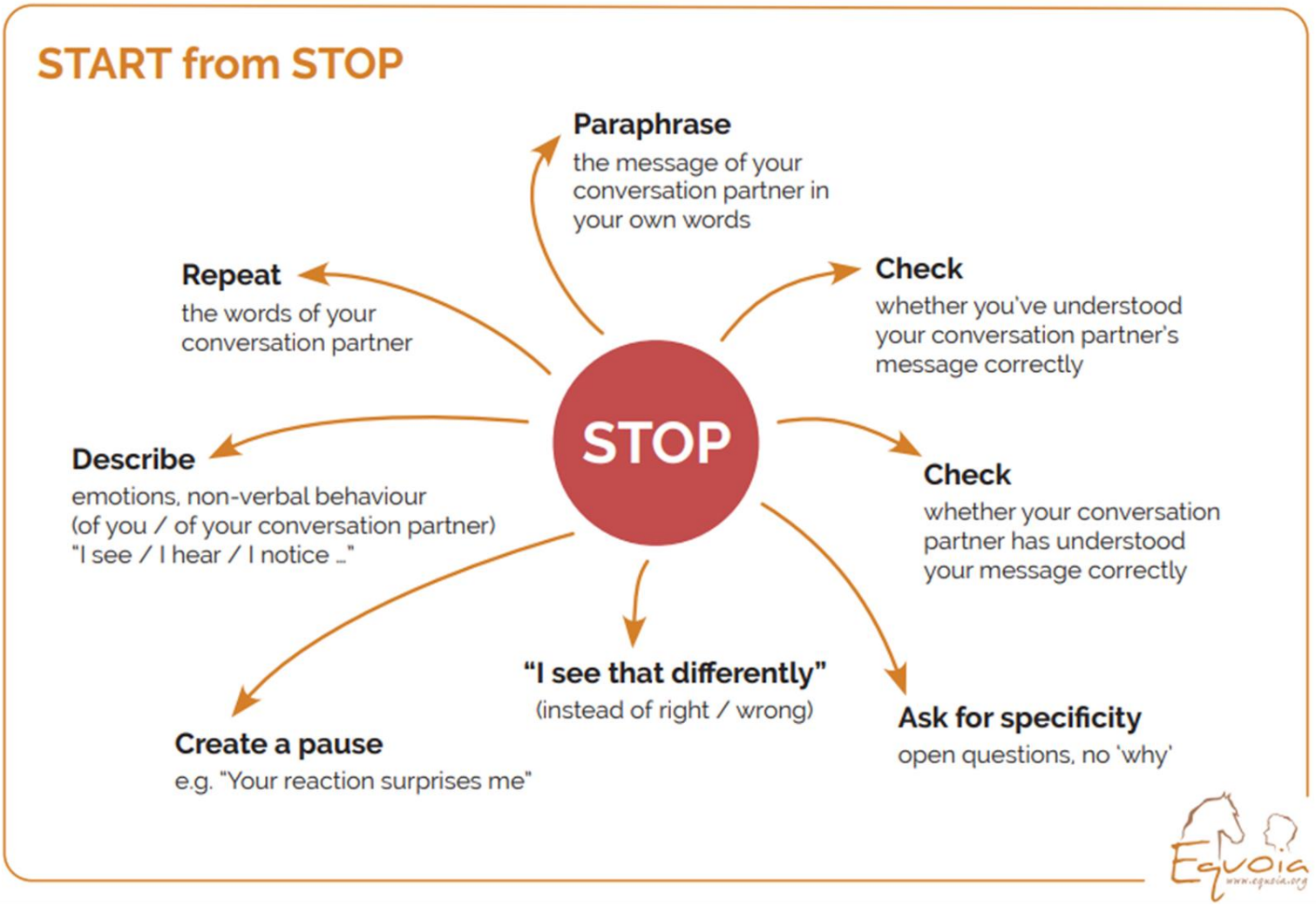


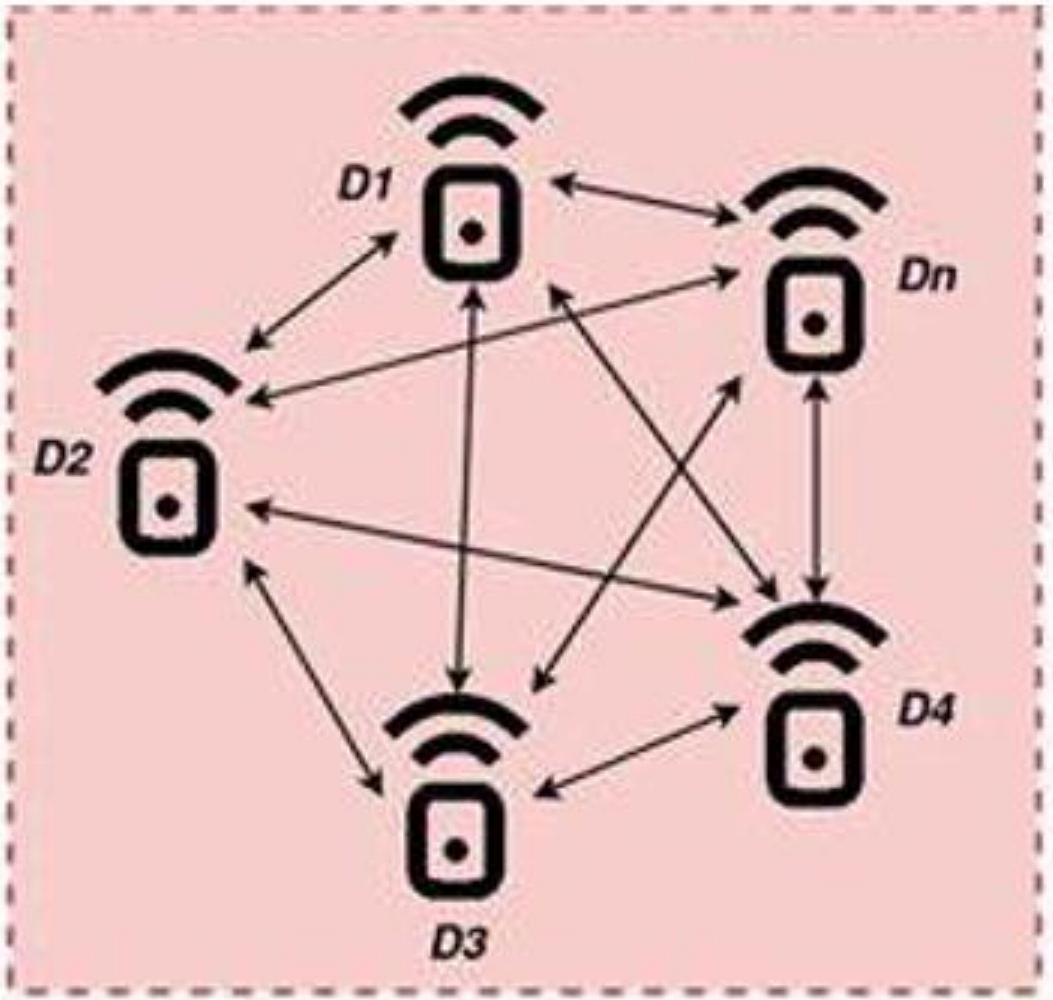
- Impact of behaviour on behaviour
  - ✓ Regan:
    - ✓ Awareness of the necessity of explicitly surfacing his needs, since 'submissive' behaviour triggers 'dominant' behaviour in others. In other words, needs can only be taken into account if you make them visible

- Creating exploration time through 'STOP' moments
  - ✓ Regan:
    - ✓ Instead of automatically 'disappearing' into his 'flight mode' (= reactive communication), Regan learnt how to interact more proactively, hence gaining more visibility and being seen as more thorough, more professional

- Giving and receiving feedback
  - ✓ Regan:
    - ✓ By learning a structure, a frame regarding how to give feedback, Regan managed to create more awareness amongst his colleagues of their communication and its impact. As a result, interactions became more tuned

START from STOP





Managing INTRAGROUP CONFLICT in dealing with linguistic misunderstandings

How to deal with linguistic misunderstandings on an intragroup level

- Insight in the building blocks of effective cooperation, as a necessary context for constructive interactions

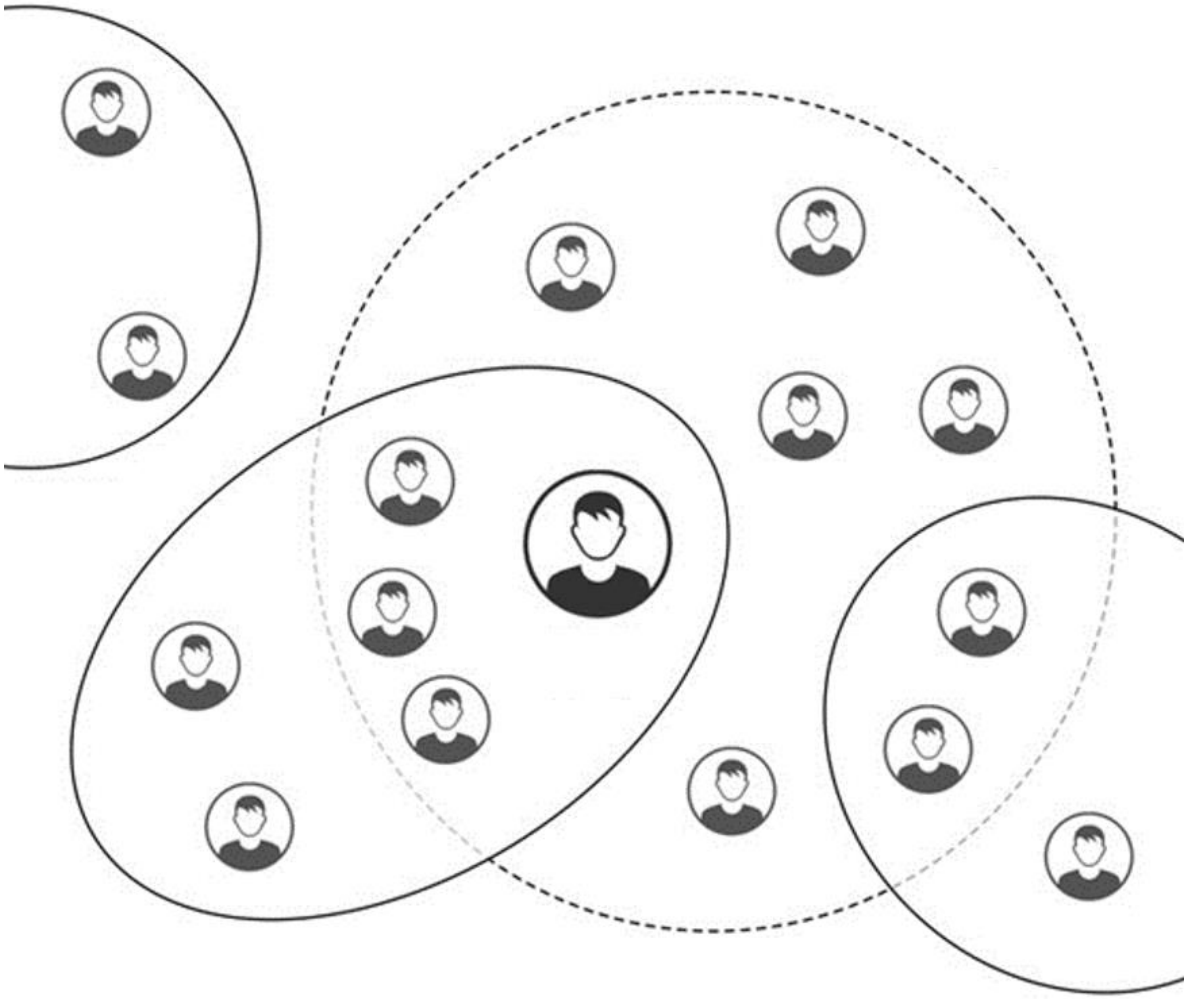
- The importance of team arrangements

Illustration: case Regan

- Insight in the building blocks of effective cooperation, as a necessary context for constructive interactions
  - ✓ Regan:
    - ✓ ‘Goals’ (Purpose) - Team identity: big focus on internationalisation
    - ✓ ‘Roles’ - Explicit expectations towards people, coming from the team identity: people (individual and as a team) take ownership in fostering internationalization. Each team member has the responsibility to guide their actions towards ‘welcoming the world in the team’
    - ✓ ‘Procedures’ - In order to make the above happen, one of the ways to get there is setting up clear team arrangements regarding the use of English in meetings, in one-to-ones, in social activitiesn…
    - ✓ ‘Interpersonal Relationships’ - Open interaction must be insured, to make sure the above remains tuned to what reality needs

Illustration: case Regan

- The importance of team arrangements
  - ✓ Regan:
    - ✓ Instead of seeing it as a personal struggle, a 'team charter' was developed, in which agreements were made regarding the use of language in the work context. Examples:
      - His teaching remained in English
      - In one-on-ones: researchers can speak Dutch, Regan can answer in English
      - Group meetings are in English
      - Faculty meetings etc remain in Dutch, with explicit checks for understanding (also helpful for native speakers…)
      - Preparation for meetings is sent at least 3 days in advance, so that Regan has the opportunity to use an app to translate them, hence being better prepared
      - …



Managing INTERGROUP CONFLICT in dealing with linguistic misunderstandings

How to deal with linguistic misunderstandings on an intergroup level

- How is your organization already providing a frame for constructively and proactively dealing with linguistic misunderstandings?

- What could make it (even) better?

- What do you have impact on? What not? (Problem / Limitation)

Illustration: case Regan

- How is your organization already providing a frame for constructively and proactively dealing with linguistic misunderstandings?

- What could make it (even) better?

- What do you have impact on? What not? (Problem / Limitation)

=> based on the principles of Antwerp University, we are currently talking about this in Regan's personal coaching trajectory

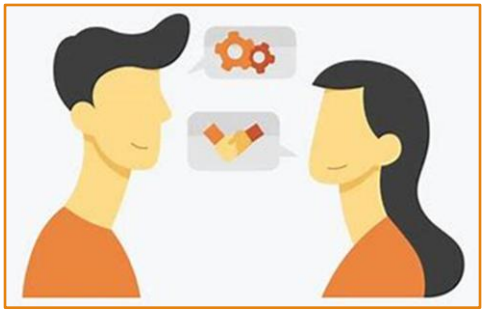
In short…

… dealing with the Impact of Linguistic Misunderstandings in International Contexts doesnt start with finding solutions for all the **individual issues** you encounter;

it starts with creating a **sound foundation in the different levels** (intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup), from where solutions for individual issues can emerge.

intrapersonal

What do you do, on the different levels?

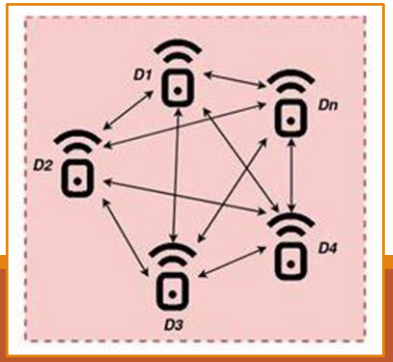


interpersonal

A colleague / collaborator has been living in Germany for over 10 years. He/she speaks German pretty well; however, you notice that he/she sometimes misses the nuances in what is being said. What do you do?

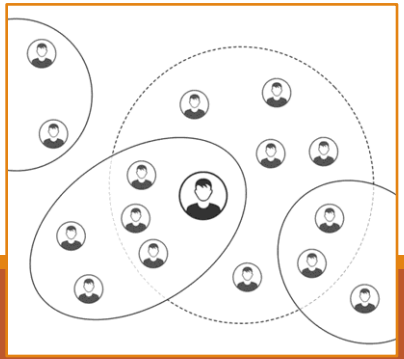
Of the 25 people in the team, 7 are non-native speakers. During work, English is being spoken, during breaks and during social activities, the majority speaks German. The non-native speakers are often invited to join their conversation, but if they do, the native speakers still switch to their mother tongue. What do you do:

intragroup



- Being one of the non-native speakers?
- Being one of the native speakers?
- Being the leader?

intergroup



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- https://www.editage.com/insights/the-challenges-of-being-a-non-native-english-speaker-in-academia

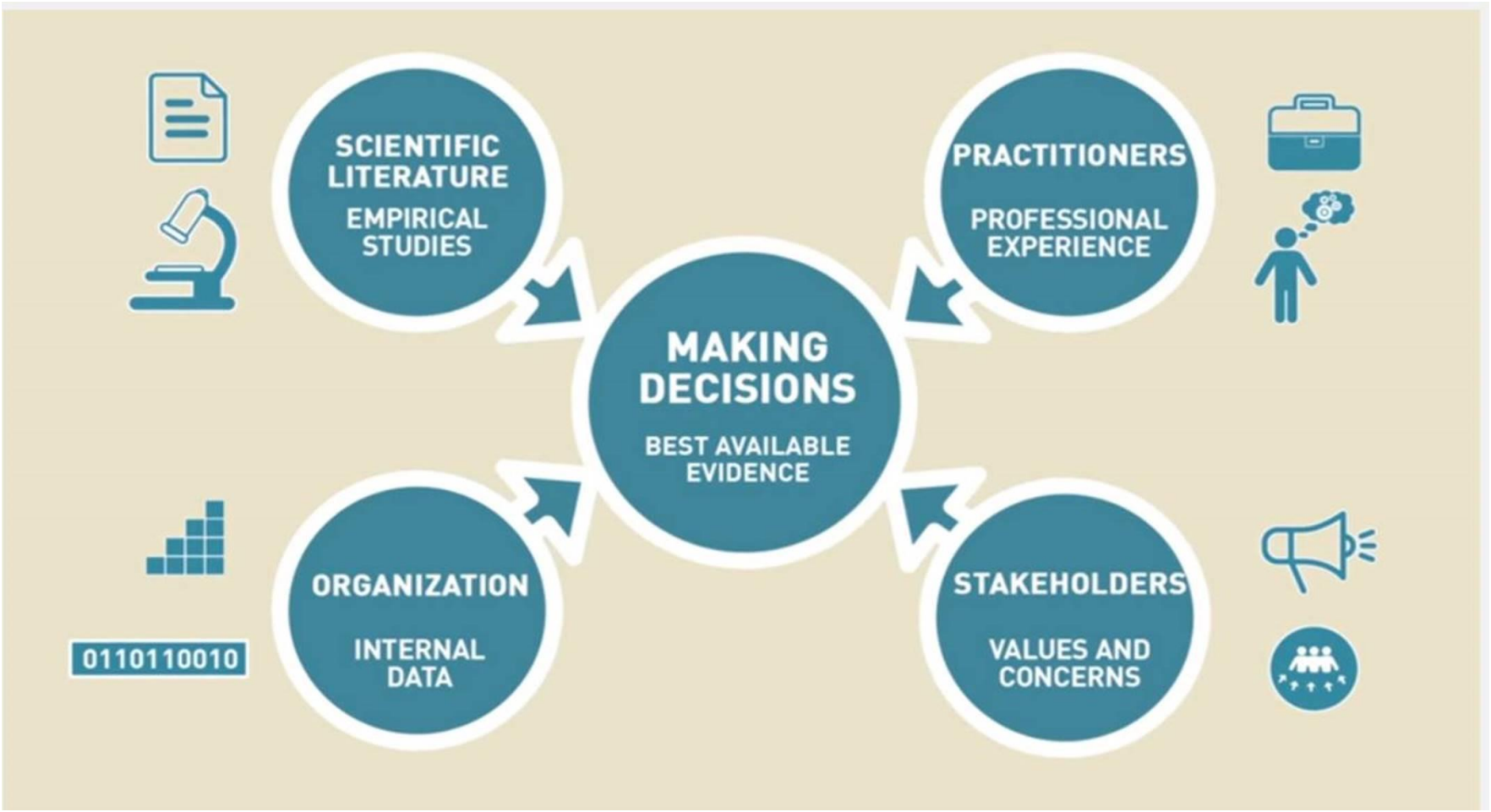
Our approach: Best Available Evidence

"Integration of practitioner's experience and relevant scientific literature in an approach that enables participants to bring insights they gained into practice, by

- learning them how to apply the tools and insights
- giving them the opportunity to get to know themselves better as vehicles of the desired change."

(source: Center for Evidence-Based Management: www.cebma.org)

Best Available Evidence



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