ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA: DEVELOPING A TOOL TO IMPROVE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

A project submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies

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DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this document are mine and are not necessarily the views of my supervisory team, examiners or Middlesex University.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AR	Action Research
App	Software application suitable for smartphone
BELF	Business English as a Lingua Franca
CEFR	Common European Framework
CI or CQ	Cultural Intelligence
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
IBC	International Business Communication
L1	An alternative term for a Native Speaker of a language
LX	A speaker of a language acquired after the first language was acquired
MNC	Multinational Corporation or Company
NS	Native Speaker of English
NNS	Non-native Speaker of English
VUCA	Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In this project, I investigated the challenges of communication in international teams that use English as their lingua franca in a business setting. The project's intention was to develop a training or coaching product (the doctoral artefact) that would help native speakers of English adjust cultural and linguistic aspects of their communication for better relationships and results in international teams. I identified this training need from client feedback in my professional work as a managing director of an international communication training consultancy (AC Ltd.). As such, I planned to design a useful artefact for this field that would directly contribute to my own professional practice.

The research was carried out using an Action Research (AR) approach, starting with a reconnaissance phase where some key root causes of communication breakdowns between native and non-native speakers of English were established. Key behaviours and skills of excellent international communicators were also identified. This knowledge contributed to the design of a range of training and knowledge-sharing interventions that were carried out with research participants over three AR cycles.

My research participants included international professionals from a range of countries and professions, and also consisted of mixed nationality staff at a UK financial institution (Fin A), a UK based team from a technology company (Tech B), and a Japanese online shopping organisation (Online Shopping C). The interventions with these three organisations eventually led to a change in the intention of the artefact; namely, a move away from a prescriptive training course, to a set of cards consisting of questions that were derived from the research outcomes. These cards enable open and honest conversations between individuals and amongst teams.

Thus, the artefact I am presenting alongside this thesis is a flexible development tool for teams where English is the lingua franca. Its aim is to improve collaboration, empathy and inclusion in international teams. The artefact, together with this thesis, provides a unique contribution from a practice perspective to the academic fields of International Business Communication (IBC) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). It does so by highlighting the need for open conversations around the challenges (and joys) of international teamwork in English.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKDROP

I am writing this introduction during the COVID-19 lockdown and reflecting on the original purpose of my Doctorate, and how that sits now, in this extreme volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) world. As such, in this introduction I will discuss both the original, and developed, purpose of the "artefact" I am presenting, and will then discuss how this might now sit in a post COVID-19 world.

1.2 TERMINOLOGY

I have chosen to use the terms native speaker (NS) and non-native Speaker (NNS) (of English) in this thesis, to describe both research participants and expected users of the artefact. This may not appear to align with current scholarly thinking, which advocates new terms such as L1 and LX (Dewaele, 2017) . In fact, I agree that a shift away from the use of NS and NNS would be beneficial in the future. These terms are limited in acknowledging the many ways in which a person can become proficient in a language, other than being born in predominantly English-speaking country. However, for the context of this work, I considered the terms NS and NNS were more recognisable and accessible for my research participants (See Chapter 2).

1.3 PURPOSE

The original purpose of my research was to develop a tool that helped international teams communicate more smoothly and more productively, whilst using English as their lingua franca. The purpose was entirely relevant to my business at the time, that had, as its core product, a training programme that helped international executives improve their English and intercultural understanding. My plan was to make an original contribution to this body of knowledge, by flipping the idea that international communication can be improved by ever-increasing levels of English expertise, acquired by NNSs. This supported my view that NSs can change their communication style (in terms of linguistic and intercultural modifications) and that this would result in significantly enhanced communication in international teams.

Through my research, I was looking to deliver on two levels: firstly, to develop a new product for my business, (which needed to diversify, due to a shrinkage in the world-wide market for face-to-face English language training); secondly to genuinely help our international clients, who frequently told us that the most difficult people to understand in international teams were NSs. (In this context, that would mean colleagues, for example, from the UK, US, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa).

During my research, and in particular the AR phases carried out at Fin A and Tech B, I came to realise that it was important to give space and permission for team members, (irrespective of language and cultural background), to discuss communication and cultural challenges. I found that these discussions increased feelings of inclusion and decreased negative emotions attached to using a different language and working with a different culture.

The resulting tool, or "artefact", presented here as the output of my doctoral studies, is a set of question cards. The cards can be used in a variety of settings, in multicultural/multinational teams where English is the lingua franca. The cards are a significant departure from the original training

programme I was planning to design, which would have been a taught curriculum aimed at native speakers only.

The purpose of the cards is to encourage open dialogue between all members of a multinational team, ensuring that communication difficulties are talked about honestly and openly. In this setting, each team member grows to appreciate the linguistic and cultural differences in a team and sees them as advantageous, rather than barriers to overcome.

1.4 ARTEFACT

The cards are presented as an artefact and represent my contribution to knowledge in this field. This thesis describes the development of this artefact, through AR cycles. A pack is presented alongside this thesis, and a photograph of the pack can be seen below.
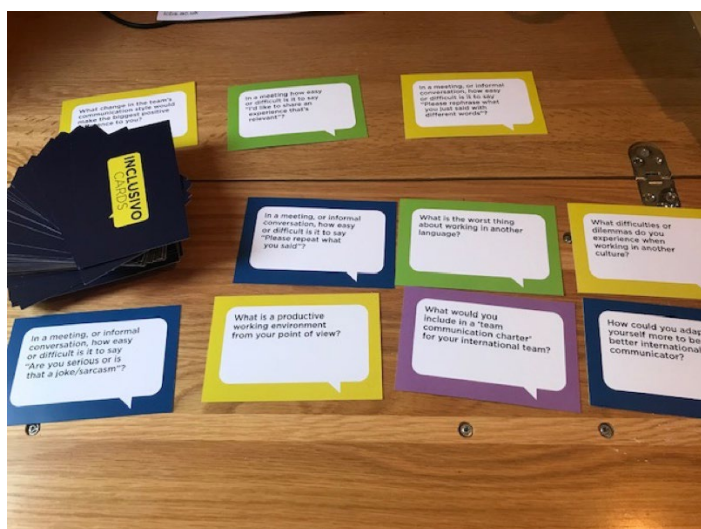
Figure 1: Inclusivo Cards

During the final AR phase, these cards were successfully used at Fin A to open-up dialogue between British, Indian and other European team members regarding their communication difficulties, working styles and cultural assumptions. The cards were well received and feedback that they met their purpose was positive and encouraging. More will be said about this in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

1.5 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE ARTEFACT

I am reflecting now, however, on the place of these cards might have in a Covid-19 affected world. In the light of dramatically increased online working, it could be that a physical set of cards has limited appeal to potential clients. Therefore, I intend to develop an App version that can be used by teams that are not physically present with each other. The card content could also be developed further to address new language or intercultural barriers that might be presented by this new way of working.

I still feel very confident, however, that if a team should ask each other these questions (in the context of moving to this different way of communicating), that the cards would still provide insightful and meaningful discussions. The underlying purpose of the cards, as a facilitator of better communication, is not compromised in these circumstances; rather it is enhanced and potentially

needed even more, given communication can be harder across distance. More will be said regarding the significance and meaning of this project in Chapter 5.

1.6 ARTEFACT DESIGN INFLUENCES

One additional point to note is that I am a qualified, and 20 years' experienced, executive coach and action learning facilitator (influenced by, amongst others, Whitmore, 2002, Kline, 1999, Revans, 2011, Boyatzis, et al., 2019, and Kolb, 1984). As such, the design of a product that uses open, coaching-style questions to facilitate conversation and experiential learning was relatively natural for someone with my background, knowledge and skills. What was not straightforward however, was knowing which questions would be the most pertinent and useful, and this became the real value of the research output. By looking deeper into the content of the qualitative interviews, observations and other research activities, and through using a thematic analysis approach, (see chapters 3 and 4), I was able to get to the nub of the communication and relationship issues mentioned by research participants. This, in turn, enabled the questions for the cards to emerge and form.

Whilst my experience contributed to the idea for, and design of, the cards, the resulting beauty of the tool is in its simplicity. The cards can be used by teams and individuals without an expert facilitator or coach. This key element of the design resulted from a direct request from my research sponsor at Fin A, who particularly wanted a tool which could be used without the need for expensive facilitation experts.

This change in focus regarding the purpose of my artefact came at a certain expense to my own ego. Up until that point, I had assumed that the artefact would require my expert facilitation. De-coupling the artefact from myself allows the product to be autonomous and will lead to a wider distribution and easier access.

A final word in this introduction needs to go to the branding of the cards. The brand went through many iterations, but the final choice was Inclusivo Cards. This name reflects a higher-level purpose behind the cards, namely inclusion. In other words, the original aim to improve communication in international teams spoke to a higher purpose of addressing inclusion issues too. For example, if we feel we are not listened to, that we cannot get our point across, or that others in the team do not appreciate our talents and contributions due to language barriers, we do not feel included. In fact, we feel thoroughly excluded. This feeling of exclusion can result from direct or indirect discrimination, or merely unfortunate misunderstandings; either way the result for the team member is a feeling of exclusion. During this research process, I came to realise that the cards could have a significant positive impact on the feeling of inclusion in a team. Thus, the cards could, and perhaps should, be positioned as a diversity and inclusion tool for organisations, as well as a communication tool. Inclusivo means 'inclusive' in Spanish and the nature of the word ending in 'o' echoes the fun-and-games nature of the cards (i.e. can be found linguistically in other games such as Ludo and Cluedo).

This thesis guides the reader through the AR phases that led to the development of the cards. It also positions the research within the general knowledge landscape of English as a lingua franca and its intercultural and linguistic challenges in international teams (see Chapter 2).

Chapter 2 – Knowledge Landscape

2.1 Relationship to Related Fields of Scholarly Research

My project relates to a wide range of linguistic, cultural, organisational, teamwork, learning and psychological matters. This chapter sets out to provide a deeper understanding of those connected matters by viewing the knowledge landscape through the relevant lenses of International Business Communication (IBC) and the use of English as a Lingua Franca in business/Business English as a Lingua Franca (ELF/BELF).

Connection is made to relevant literature in organisational culture, intercultural communication and linguistics, in turn linking to the day-to-day impact on companies and individuals (positive and negative) of operating in a BELF context. Focus is also drawn to the individual person in the IBC and BELF context, and in particular to the interplay between personality, identity, language and culture.

This project's artefact will sit alongside other products and team development tools that are available which help improve and alleviate some negative aspects of IBC. Whilst a full-market appraisal of other products is outside the scope of this project, some mention is made in this chapter of other tools that have inspired the design of my final artefact in some way.

At the end of this chapter, I discuss the topic of inclusion in international teams, which emerged as a golden thread through my research and resulted in the choice of name for the artefact.

2.2 English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF)

2.2.1 What is ELF/BELF?

As mentioned by Cogo and Dewey (2012), some ELF research assumes that true ELF interactions only include NNSs using English as the common means of communication in the interaction. However, our context at AC Ltd. is different to that. Firstly, many of our clients work in international settings where NSs are present in the team or business environment, and secondly it is indeed our own context for teaching (we are NSs interacting with NNSs). So I prefer Seidlhofer's definition of ELF, namely 'any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option' (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). This definition includes NSs as well as NNSs and best suits the situation in which my clients find themselves at work. I welcome the addition of the 'B' to 'ELF' (BELF) (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010) (i.e. Business English as a Lingua Franca) as this term is used amongst scholars of International Business Communication (see below) and includes communication in business settings which involves both NS and NNSs of English. However, for the purposes of my project, I see no need to distinguish between ELF and BELF as both areas of scholarly research are relevant to my project's context and so hereafter will use ELF as the encompassing acronym.

In Seidlhofer's ELF definition, there is no presumption that the NSs are the 'owners' of the language being spoken, they are merely participants like everyone else. They are present in the interactions for the same purpose as their NNS counterparts, and both NSs and NNSs alike are members of the community that is attempting to communicate with one another using ELF. Jenkins (2006) and Dewey (2010) provide weight to this point of view, as both stress that English is no longer influenced and

controlled by only the native speaking countries (as represented by Kachru's Inner Circle model) (Kachru, 1992).

Whilst Kachru's Inner Circle model provides my study with a working definition of the term 'native speaker' (NS), I do not want to imply that I assume any superiority in international communication skills on the part of the NS. Indeed, I recognise (as does Jenkins, 2006 and Dewaele, 2017) that being a proficient ELF speaker does not rely on being a NS originally. On that basis, I welcome the discussion regarding the potentially anachronistic terms native Speaker and non-native Speaker (Dewaele, 2017) (Śliwa, et al., 2020), and the preference for the terms L1 and LX instead. However, I have continued to use the terms NS and NNS, as they are recognised in my profession. They were also easily recognised by research participants, who included NSs (mono and multilingual), and NNSs. It is my view that NSs have to learn new linguistic and sociocultural behaviours to be a proficient communicator in an ELF context, just as NNSs do. I have also observed in my work that power dynamics between NSs and NNSs are fluid, due to both parties being disadvantaged in different ways in international communication. There is no assumption on my part that either party has a continuous power advantage in NS/NNS communication.

2.2.2 WHAT IS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN AN ELF CONTEXT?

At AC Ltd., we define and ascribe linguistic and communicative competence by using the Common European Framework. The Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 108) describes language competence as three connected, but distinct, competencies: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence. These competences refer to the knowledge of the language system, the ability to communicate one's thoughts using the target language, the knowledge of the cultural and behavioural expectations, the ability to navigate the information given, and the ability to use language strategies appropriate to the situations. Referencing a previous version of the CEFR, Vetrinskaya and Dmitrenko (2017) also mention the additional competence they call "Strategic or Compensatory Competence (the ability to refine one's own speech, improve other types of competencies and close up communication gaps)" (Dmitrenko & Vetrinskaya, 2017, p. 24).

This competence also relates to their tolerance of ambiguity and ability to navigate a spoken language situation, without knowing the full meaning of their interlocutor's speech. An NNS who has high compensatory competence will be able to move easily and quickly, when speaking, away from a forgotten word to using an alternative word with similar meaning. They will also be able to guess the meaning of unknown words, or at least be comfortable with the notion of having to guess. They will also use other strategies such as gestures and facial expressions to convey meaning.

In my research and professional work, I have observed differing levels of NS competence in compensatory strategies in their own language, such as the ability to modify their speech in order to reduce ambiguity, and to be flexible in their choice of words to ensure the best chance of being understood. Another general principle of communication, described in Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Ogay, 2007), (Gasiorek, 2016), shows that individuals adopt linguistic strategies that are similar to their interlocutors to improve relationships and understanding. I have witnessed the successful deployment of these strategies in an ELF context, such as reducing the complexity of words selected, reducing sentence length, matching intonation, and mimicking accent. My project contributed to raising NSs awareness of useful compensatory strategies and the value of

making linguistic accommodations. I have called this combination of strategies, along with general strategies to reduce misunderstandings and miscommunication, Linguistic Collaboration. (See Chapter 5).

Cogo and Dewey state that, "What we understand to be successful communication does not rely on notions of correctness, assessments of performance or similar factors…successful communication is any exchange that proves to be meaningful for the participants and that has reached the required purpose or purposes." (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 36). This concurs with the view we take at AC Ltd.; our focus is not on accuracy and examination performance, but instead we assess whether the language and behaviour served their purpose. If so, we consider the interaction to be successful. My research sought to establish what successful and unsuccessful communication looked and felt like for participants in ELF.

Pitzl (2010) describes miscommunication both in terms of linguistic issues, such as choices of language that lead to partial or total misunderstanding, and in terms of cultural issues, for example a misinterpretation of either language or behaviour (or both) that leads to a breakdown of communication. A breakdown of communication in this context can lead to wrong actions being taken, wrong information being transferred or an unintended adverse emotional reaction to the interaction. Pitzl offers a helpful distinction between two different types of miscommunication, those being "non-understanding" (where the listener is aware they have not understood) and "misunderstanding" (where the listener remains unaware that they have not understood) (Pitzl, 2010, p. 31). NNSs (especially those coming from cultures where face-saving is important), can cover up miscommunication issues and pretend they have understood; some of my research participants confirmed this. An aim of my project was to help NSs and NNSs to overcome such miscommunication in a sensitive and culturally appropriate way.

2.2.3 WHAT ARE THE EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES WHEN COMMUNICATING IN AN ELF CONTEXT AND HOW ARE THEY OVERCOME?

Two key emotional issues that arise in ELF communication are distrust and anxiety. Distrust occurs when low language ability is misattributed as a lack of competence or a personality flaw, or when NNSs switch to their own or another common language (code-switching) to the exclusion of others in the team (Tenzer, et al., 2014). Anxiety occurs when the speaker is concerned about their own competence in speaking another language, and in their ability to understand others linguistically and culturally (Cohen & Kassis-Henderson, 2012 and Aichorn & Puck, 2017). Tenzer and Pudelko (2015) labelled two categories of the emotional effects of speaking another language at work "self-directed anxiety" and "other-directed resentment" (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2015, p. 612). The term "self-directed anxiety" covers feelings of vulnerability, weakness, embarrassment, and the stress of not being able express oneself adequately. It also covers the fear of getting poor performance reviews due to language ability. "Other-directed resentment" covers the feelings of resentment of native and proficient speakers' fluency, resentment to the lingua franca itself, resentment to code-switching and interpersonal issues between speakers of other languages. This anxiety results in code-switching and communication avoidance, which in turn can affect trust, therefore creating a vicious circle of miscommunication and distrust.

Neeley (2013) and Neeley & Dumas (2016) highlight an important source of negative emotions induced in ELF environments connected to status. The accidental gain of status by being competent in ELF, and the loss of status by not being competent in ELF, can result in negative emotions in an individual.

The researchers recommend that language-induced negative emotions can be reduced by managing language barriers in organisations more proactively, such as preventing code-switching, inviting contributions in meetings from the less able or less willing contributors, using humour to break the ice, highlighting common goals, appreciating contributions for everyone, improving understanding and conducting meta-communication training (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2015, Aichorn & Puck, 2017 and Neeley, 2013).

The artefact contributes to the participant's understanding that such proactive measures can be helpful, and encourages the participants to create their own proactive measures. The artefact also facilitates discussion around the positive and negative emotions associated with working in an ELF context, with the aim of increasing empathy and understanding about the underlying causes of the negative emotions.

2.2.4 WHAT LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES AFFECT TEAM PERFORMANCE IN AN ELF CONTEXT?

Chen, Geluykens and Choi (2006) show that linguistic challenges can affect team performance. The two key linguistic issues discussed are semantics and pragmatics, linking to sociolinguistics. In terms of problems caused by semantics, the same word can carry different meanings depending on the context and the understanding of the speaker. Chen et al. (2006) discuss this in the context of a misunderstanding around the word "commitment". I have witnessed similar misunderstandings with clients at AC Ltd., with common business terms like "engagement" and also with seemingly obvious functional words like "agree". The field of pragmatics focusses on how interlocutors decipher meaning from a message. Meaning can be lost due to misinterpretation of the words in context, and due to words being deliberately fudged with vague language to hide the true meaning. Implied meaning in utterances can be culturally contextual and therefore cause issues in multicultural teams, for example, a British manager may say "I would advise you to get that done by 5pm", and would mean it as an order, another nationality may hear it as merely a recommendation.

Chen et al. also recommend that sociolinguistic and anthropological linguistic aspects are considered in international teams: for example, the link between the social expectations and culture of the individuals and the language they use. This has a couple of layers of implications: firstly, there are the cultural and national backgrounds of the team members, and how these affect the way the team speak to each other, and secondly there is the sub-culture of the team itself, and how this affects the language they use with each other. Chen et al. make a link between one of the most famous models of culture (Hofstede, 1980) and how one of Hofstede's dimensions (individualism versus collectivism) can be seen displayed in the linguistic choice of "we" over "I". Also, Chen et al. mention the cultural differences between the use of language for politeness, face-saving and turn-taking.

Cogo and Dewey's work (2012) indicates that NS linguistic norms are not those by which the majority of the participants in ELF interactions are abiding by. As Cogo and Dewey state, "Even when native speakers of English are involved in ELF interactions, they need to be aware that talk is happening in an

environment that is sui generis." (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 115). Whilst, in my experience, NS participants in IBC are not necessarily consciously aware of the uniqueness of ELF interactions, experienced ELF users (both NS and NNS) have a positive attitude to this sui generis environment. This results in language innovation (literally inventing new words and structures); high tolerance of what NSs would deem to be inaccuracies or mistakes; taking time to negotiate meaning during misunderstandings; anticipating misunderstandings and applying more explicitness in the language chosen; increased checking and increased repetitions and reformulations. In essence, proficient ELF communicators "show pragmatic awareness regarding what could be problematic in intercultural communication; thus, they apply pre-empting strategies to avoid non-understanding at its beginning or they engage in negotiation of meaning to overcome the non-understanding and ensure the successful outcome of the conversation." (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 136)

Aichorn and Puck (2017) speak directly to the core purpose of this project by stating that "language training should not only be aimed at speakers with low proficiency but also at near-native and native speakers of English, who may have little if any, awareness of the cognitive and emotional challenges stemming from language standardization" (i.e. the use of a lingua franca) (Aichorn & Puck, 2017, p. 400).

Whilst the resulting artefact from this project is not a language training solution, the artefact contributes to the increase of this pragmatic awareness. It improves strategies to avoid non-understanding and to encourage positive attempts at negotiating meaning, as well as contributing to increasing awareness of the above mentioned "cognitive and emotional challenges", by allowing the space for those challenges to be discussed.

2.3 INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

2.3.1 WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION (IBC)?
IBC is a multi-disciplinary field drawing on a broad body of knowledge from linguistics, intercultural communication and more generalist management research (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2009). At the heart of IBC is everyday practical communication (achieved via a variety of methods), and it is considered from a strategic, operational or person-to-person viewpoint: "communication, or discourse if you like, is seen as the creative force that drives phenomena and processes in organizations" (Charles, 2009).

As well as the field of research within which my project is positioned, the term International Business Communication describes the setting in which my research participants work (i.e. communicating with colleagues of different nationalities and different first languages). It also describes the way in which they communicate (which may have a difference or uniqueness due to the presence of many different nationalities and first languages being present in the communication.) My research took place in, and with participants, from multinational corporations or companies (MNCs). The term MNC is used in this project to relate to both very large corporations and smaller companies; the key is that the organisation operates across international boundaries, and teams can include colleagues of a multinational, multilingual and multicultural nature.

2.3.2 WHAT CHALLENGES ARE CONNECTED WITH IBC AND HOW ARE THEY OVERCOME?

Our AC Ltd. clients often give us anecdotal evidence that organisational performance can be impacted by poor international business communication. For example, a senior manager at a leading French firm told us that a British colleague was deliberately left out of many first-round meetings with clients because they do not understand what he is saying, and they feel he does not understand the French client relationships and sensitivities. This results in the need for two layers of meetings to discuss every issue and denies the British manager the opportunity to learn to adapt both linguistically and culturally. Some of our clients also have told us that they avoid meetings and conference calls if they know a NS is going to be present because they are not confident of their language skills to catch rapid NS speech as well as their ability to intervene, interject, propose ideas and give opinions. They also tell us that NSs often assume that if you are not speaking then you do not wish to contribute. Similar comments were made during the preliminary research stages of this project.

Charles and Marschan-Piekkari (2002) confirm two important aspects that are relevant to the context of my research. Firstly, that NNSs "frequently prefer to communicate with other NNSs rather than with NS" (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002, p. 18) (aligning with what our NNS clients tell us). Secondly, that native English speakers also contribute to communication difficulties by not knowing how to moderate their language for NNSs, and they recommend that NSs should be included in any training programmes aimed at improving horizontal communication in MNCs.

Rogerson-Revell (2008) specifically looks at the communication in meetings conducted in English in a multilingual European context. She found that NNSs had a negative perception of otherwise seemingly productive meetings, due to the NNS speakers being less willing or less able to engage than NSs. Rogerson-Revell proposes that NNSs do not readily admit to a lack of understanding in meetings, and that they are also less willing or able to interject and intervene. She goes some way to making recommendations for the organisation and individual to ensure that communication in international meetings is more productive. There is scope for my project to make a contribution here by encouraging NSs to have more patience, empathy and linguistic skills to help their NNS counterparts.

One of our Japanese clients (working in a Japanese MNC) told us that whilst English is the lingua franca at the Japanese HQ, many of the local offices do not adhere to the rule of speaking English on a day-to-day basis. This leads to the expat managers missing important local information and therefore they find it very difficult to influence change. Charles and Marschan-Piekkari (2002) , Harzing and Feeley (2008) and Reiche et al. (2015), show that, whilst a shared language can assist communication in MNCs, it is not enough in-and-of itself to ensure effective knowledge transfer and social cohesion (a sense of a common identity). This project's artefact aims to improve social cohesion in ELF environments by highlighting the responsibilities of NSs to adapt their communication styles and methods to suit the language skills and cultural expectations of their colleagues and counterparts. It will have an organisational impact through encouraging open conversations about the organisational challenges of communicating through ELF. It will therefore encourage the team members to design new ways of communicating which suit their unique circumstances.

In the MNCs who have a corporate language, Harzing and Pudelko's (2013) research showed that language skills and informal and formal positional power are linked; even more so with MNCs whose headquarters is in an Anglophone country (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013). In our client's experience,

power dynamics can work both ways (as shown by the French firm example above), i.e. both sides in an NS and NNS interaction have some power. The NS has power through better linguistic skills, but the NNS speakers have power through a better understanding of the local culture and ways of working. Thomas (2007) summarises the implications for MNCs: "When adopting a language policy, MNCs should realise that the official choice of language carries with its power implications. Failing to take such factors into account may result in disenfranchisement of personnel and loss of valuable talent." (Thomas, 2007, pp. 95-96). Tenzer and Pudelko (2017) went beyond the straightforward link of expert knowledge of a lingua franca giving an individual more power in an organisation, towards an deeper understanding that language ability (or lack of) also gives more (or less) power to team leaders and professional experts, and exposes other power and language-related issues such as knowledge transfer, trust, team emotional climate, formality and hierarchy. Tenzer and Pudelko call for managerial interventions to reduce power imbalances and misuse. These include monitoring the influence of those with greater language skills, providing language training, sensitive applications of corporate language policies and a sensitive attitude to code-switching (switching from the lingua franca to the local language). This project's final artefact will assist in this arena by encouraging productive dialogue around language power dynamics.

Harzing et al. (2011) list a number of activities that take place in organisations to overcome language barriers, both informal and formal. Formal activities include adopting a common corporate language, proactively using expatriates and inpatriates, and using translators and interpreters. The informal strategies mentioned that are of particular interest to me, in the context of the NS-NNS interaction, include "building in redundancy" (Harzing, et al., 2011, p. 282) (checking and re-checking understanding), code-switching (changing to another common language to ease communication), and changing the mode of communication (for example from face-to-face to email) to provide clarity and to check understanding. These three strategies are used by our clients at AC Ltd. and were mentioned by research participants. This project's artefact encourages the use of language strategies for checking and re-checking understanding and improving information exchange.

2.4 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Given that IBC takes place in MNCs, the culture of the organisation will inevitably impact the style and frequency of communication. For example, the culture of the organisation can drive how people solve problems together, how the corporate brand is communicated to the wider world, how leaders communicate, how the feelings of trust and inclusion manifest, or leader to subordinate communication. Schein (1984) defines organisational culture as "the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaption and internal integration" (Schein, 1984, p. 3), and that these basic assumptions are then "taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein, 1984, p. 3). This definition also aligns with the way I see national culture (see below) and the work of Schein influenced national culture scholars such as Trompenaars (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

Schein's approach to organisational culture and group-belonging helps to distill cultural aspects that prevent integration into a group. Taking Schein's list of "Problems of Internal Integration" (Schein, 1984, p. 11), I have reinterpreted the original table in the context of IBC and ELF:

Schein's Problem of Internal Integration	Examples of related issues in IBC/ELF context
Language	Styles of ELF usage (by NS or NNS), differing levels of ability and confidence in ELF and linguistic solutions such as code-switching, can all affect whether a group communicates effectively or not. "If members cannot communicate with and understand each other, a group is impossible by definition" (Schein, 1984, p. 11)
Boundaries	High level ELF use, or use of jargon, slang or banter can create invisible boundaries as to whether an NNS feels "in" or "out" of the group. Conversations that focus on culturally specific items (e.g. TV programmes, political satire), can also exclude those not privy to the "in" jokes of that culture.
Power and Status	Power and status can be ascribed in ELF scenarios due to language ability rather than hierarchical position. Power and status can also be earned differently according to the rules of the national cultures involved as well as organisational culture. Therefore, identifying who has power, and who hasn't, can be unclear and confusing in ELF scenarios.
Intimacy	Forming friendships can be challenging in ELF environments due to a lack of shared experiences from a common cultural background (e.g. discussing a football match). In addition, NNSs can find contributing to fast-moving friendship-forming conversation challenging (both linguistically and culturally). Banter and humour which help to form friendships can be difficult to translate and navigate.
Rewards and Punishments	Comfortable groups know what is "good" and "right" behaviour, and also know what behaviours and actions tend to get rewarded. NSs can disguise the notion of what is considered good by using sarcastic or ironic language. For NNSs it can be difficult to decipher what is genuinely considered "good" in a sarcastic statement. National cultures can give kudos to different aspects of work (such as who gets to sit next to the boss, who gets to go home first), and it can be difficult for other cultures to understand these unwritten rules of reward.
Ideology	Meaning is given to events in organisations: meaning may be historic and unknown to newcomers, the significance of some events may be obvious to members of some national cultures but not others. Meaning of organisational events and artefacts may be difficult to decipher by NNSs and NSs alike who have not been taught their significance.

Figure 2: Schein's Problems of Internal Integration Reinterpreted for IBC/ELF

Schein's conviction that organisational culture can be taught means it can also be learned. Senge's seminal leadership text The Fifth Discipline places learning as the key to positive organisational change (Senge, 2006). A newcomer to an organisation has to learn the new ways of doing things and may attempt (successfully or otherwise) to try to understand the basic assumptions on which these

ways of working are based. A newcomer to an international team has a great deal to learn about how that team, and its individual members, communicate and operate. This project's final artefact contributes to that learning by facilitating conversations around some, or potentially all, of the Internal Integration issues mentioned above.

2.5 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

2.5.1 INTERCULTURAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL

The terms cross-cultural and intercultural communication are often interchanged in every day speak in MNCs. However cross-cultural tends to describe how two (or more) different cultures may interact with each other and reach understanding (Gudykunst, 2003); for example, a sales team from India meeting a manufacturing team from the UK. Intercultural communication, on the other hand, is "interpersonal communication between people from different cultures" (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 3). Both play a key role in IBC. This project's artefact can be used to improve communication and understanding in both cross- and intercultural communication, however it will be more likely used in multinational teams, therefore in an intercultural scenario.

2.5.2 INTERCULTURAL THEORIES IN PRACTICE

I have observed differences in national culture by noticing outward similarities in behaviour amongst colleagues of the same national culture. These behaviours relate to Hall's (1959, 1976) observations of context (high/low), time, and personal space e.g. ways of greeting another, display and considerations of politeness, respect for rules and procedures, respect for hierarchy, punctuality (or not) and physical proximity of individuals in discussion. I have also observed that individuals from the same organisation (irrespective of nationality) have similar attitudes and expectations regarding how things should get done, and so note that organisational culture also has a bearing on behaviours and attitudes of teams and individuals in MNCs. In addition, I understand Toth's (2020) challenge regarding cultural differences being also significant within countries (e.g. generational differences) not just between countries. That said, in my practice, I have seen clients learn some useful and sensitive new behaviours and attitudes from learning about models of national culture and so maintain respect for them as a learning tool.

Hofstede initially identified four dimensions (power distance, collectivism versus individualism, femininity versus masculinity and uncertainty avoidance) that enable countries to be characterised and differences to be identified (Hofstede, 1980) (Hofstede, et al., 2010). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) identified seven dimensions (universalism-particularism, individualism-communitarianism, specific-diffuse, neutral-affective, achievement-ascription, time orientation, and internal-external control) based on "society's differing solutions to relationships with other people, time and nature" (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012, p. 37). The underlying assumption to these models is that we all face the same problems, however it is our approach to these problems that result in cultural differences. My experience of working with international executives and international teams leads me to concur with this way of seeing culture and cultural differences. We are all trying to achieve common goals or objectives at work, but the way in which we try to achieve these may differ significantly based on our value-set and our notion of what is appropriate, good, right or wrong. In effect there is an invisible spirit or value-set to which people appear to be

subscribing to either intrinsically or extrinsically. Hofstede refers to these as "mental programs" or the "software of the mind" (Hofstede, et al., 2010, p. 5).

I have also observed that individuals and groups are able to adapt to new expectations of behaviour and to create new and unique cultures as a space to operate comfortably together in an international team. This is resonant with Kramsch's idea of Third Place (Kramsch, 1993) and the notion of Hybrid Team Culture (Fleischmann, et al., 2020). This does not mean that individuals totally discard their cultural upbringing, but they learn and adopt new ways of thinking and behaving that enable them to exist more comfortably in their new environment. Cultural influences, once recognised and evaluated, can be viewed more objectively and an individual or group can renegotiate the environmental conditions and personal expectations established by those influences.

Considering my lived experience, I do not have a purely subjectivist or objectivist approach to intercultural communication; I accept that elements of both positions play a part in my own appreciation of the notion of culture (Gudykunst, 2005). My primary interest in my professional work, and in this research, is how individuals and groups engage in communication and how, during this communication, the aforesaid renegotiations take place in a said or unsaid manner. I am therefore drawn to constructivist theory in the context of intercultural communication. (Applegate & Sypher, 1988).

The degree to which an individual is adept at navigating cultural differences is addressed in work by scholars of cultural reflexivity and cultural intelligence which is covered in the following section.

2.5.1 CULTURAL REFLEXIVITY AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

Plum et al. (2008) state that a culturally intelligent individual needs to have a high-level of self-awareness about one's own cultural background, and awareness and respect of the differences in others, and the ability to be self-aware in the moment to observe the intercultural communication from a meta-level and react and adjust accordingly. In other words, one needs to be both reflective and reflexive in one's intercultural practice. Cultural reflexivity is a notion well known to anthropologists (Hastrup & Hervik, 1994) and psychotherapists (Daniel, 2012) and has similarities to the concept of cultural transcendence, which involves an individual being able to reflect objectively about their own culture, and be open and appreciative of other cultures. (Jonson, et al., 2020).

Neyer and Harzing (2008) showed that culture can affect interactions negatively (especially when individuals are under time pressure), and that the cultural effects can be more readily overcome when individuals in a team have experience of working with other cultures and other languages. The authors provide a useful distinction between "strong" and "weak" intercultural situations (Neyer & Harzing, 2008, p. 332), i.e. in strong situations individual cultural differences are not significant in the interaction and in weak situations they are. I find Kramsch's redefinition of her 1993 "third place" concept as "symbolic competence" (Kramsch, 2009, p. 200) a useful idea to consider in this context. Having symbolic competence means having the ability to navigate a comfortable position for all interlocutors between the languages and cultures at play by reading the symbolic nature of the language and cultural references successfully. This concept is reflected by Baker's (2015) work which reaches an understanding that ELF is not culturally neutral, but different cultural identities are negotiated and renegotiated in ELF interactions.

This project's artefact contributes to turning weak intercultural situations into strong ones, and also, I propose, weak linguistic situations, i.e. where the language is a barrier, into strong linguistic situations. The artefact also seeks to give participants a deeper understanding of the cultural aspects of ELF, challenge the notion that language is culturally neutral. Moreover, whilst Kramsch's notion of a "third place" was specifically placed in the language classroom, the artefact creates a "third place" by creating dialogue between participants of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds resulting in new understanding and meaning.

The concept of cultural intelligence has informed my work, as the construct is designed to help explain "effectiveness in cross cultural interactions" (Thomas, et al., 2008). Some authors, for example Earley et. al (2006), Livermore (2015), Plum (2008), provide useful checklists of certain behaviours and mind-sets that enable cultural intelligence (denoted either as CI or CQ). In their 2008 article, Thomas et.al provide a useful definition for CI as "a system of interacting knowledge and skills, linked by cultural metacognition, that allows people to adapt to, select, and shape the cultural aspects of their environment." (Thomas, et al., 2008, p. 127). Gudykunst (1998) linked effectiveness in intercultural situations to one's ability to manage the uncertainty and anxiety felt in these situations. This ability to manage uncertainty and anxiety also relies on metacognition. The notion of metacognition emerged as an important theme in my research.

Experience has shown me it is important to approach intercultural communication with a relativist approach, in that "there are no scientific standards for considering the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of one group as intrinsically superior or inferior to those of another" (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 25). In so doing, judgement can be suspended as to what is the right way of going about things or solving a problem, often resulting in an emergent and useful third way, initially unimagined, that is acceptable to two opposing cultural viewpoints. One example of such an approach is the Dilemma Reconciliation method (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012) which encourages teams to map seemingly irreconcilable cultural differences to find creative solutions for a way forward that is not a compromise situation, but is a true reconciliation of the differences. This approach advocates that there are four steps to achieving true reconciliation. Firstly, an international manager needs to recognise the cultural differences; secondly, they need to respect the diversity of these differences; thirdly they need to reconcile the differences by reaching workable and agreed solutions; lastly, they need to embed these solutions into day to day practice. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). This project's final artefact seeks to encourage participants to adopt a relativist approach to culture and a reconciling mindset, a combination I have called Cultural Collaboration (see Chapter 5).

2.6 THE INDIVIDUAL IN IBC AND ELF: INTERPLAY OF PERSONALITY, IDENTITY, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Recently, I was commissioned to coach a client to improve his ELF skills and cultural integration with UK-based colleagues. On meeting the individual, I quickly established that his ELF skills were excellent and whilst exploring what these "cultural issues" were with the client and his manager, I felt they were not consistent with my experience of the Japanese trying to navigate the British culture: he was accused of being rude, dismissive and quick-fire. By asking for feedback from his Japanese colleagues, as well as his British colleagues, I established that this was also his natural communication style in Japan and his Japanese colleagues also found his style difficult. As a result of this triangulation, I

helped him understand the pros and cons of his style by using a personality-type psychometric tool in the coaching, as opposed to an intercultural tool. Meyer (2015) advocates making distinctions of this nature and says an international manager needs "to be able to determine what aspects of an interaction are simply a result of personality and which are a result of differences in cultural perspective" (Meyer, 2015, p. 252).
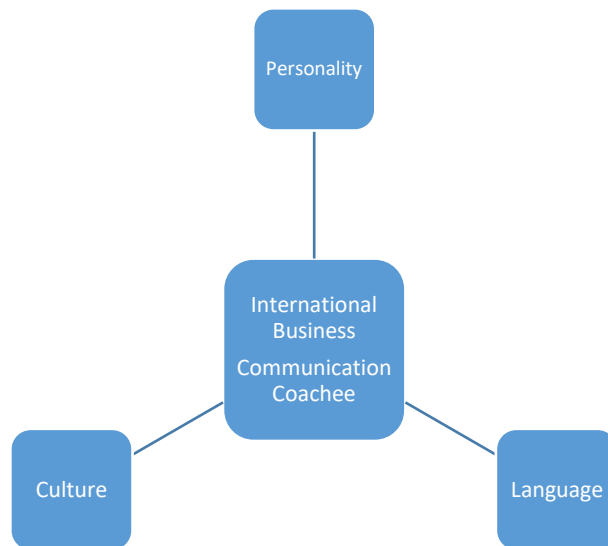
Figure 3: Sources of Feedback Required in International Business Communication Coaching

Other literature discusses how national character and philosophy is maintained or diluted when individuals speak English as an NNS, and to what extent using English as a bridging language between cultures overcomes (or not) any potential culture clashes. Ramirez-Esparza et al. (2006) suggest that aspects of a person's personality can change, depending on the language in which they are communicating in. Akkermans et al. (2010) used the Prisoner's Dilemma Game to test whether Dutch speakers adjust their behaviour when speaking English; that is whether they adopt more Anglophone behavioural characteristics. The authors provide evidence that using a language different to one's own can cause changes in communication style and behaviour. These results correlate with the earlier work of Ervin-Tripp (1964) with Japanese-American women, who were shown to exhibit different personality or behavioural traits depending on the language they were using. In their comprehensive review of research into language and culture issues in international business, Tenzer et al. (2017) also support the notion that, when speaking another language, NNSs adopt the cultural practices of the language being spoken (cultural accommodation).

However, in research to establish whether cultural accommodation affects leadership styles and decisions, Zander et al. conclude that "leadership decisions and reactions depend more on the context of the situation than on the language in which the situation is presented or interpreted" and that "managers' leadership reactions will vary from one country and cultural context to another, but will not vary depending on the language used." (Zander, et al., 2011, p. 302).

Tenzer et al. (2017) promote the need for more research into the interplay between language and culture. One of the aims of this project's artefact is to help NSs understand that the interplay exists, and enable all parties to navigate their way successfully through these tricky issues of culture and identity being expressed in a non-native language. I agree with Tenzer et al. and Baker (2015) that there are multiple identities at play (personality, cultural, job role etc.) in international communication, and I was conscious of those whilst designing the artefact.

To distil the literature research, and assist my thinking around these issues, I produced the following "Components of ELF Communication" diagram to show the interconnectedness of the knowledge-landscape themes.
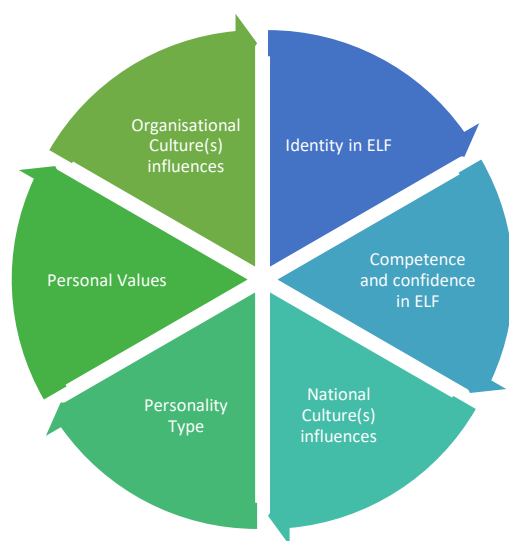
Figure 4: Components of ELF Communication

2.7 TOOLS AND LEARNING MATERIALS THAT ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

There are many such materials available on the market, so I will limit this discussion to tools that I have found effective in my own practice, and in turn my experience with these tools will have inevitably shaped this project's artefact. To illustrate the use of such tools, I will briefly describe three case studies from my own practice with AC Ltd., a language training company, T. Inc., an MNC (mechanical engineering) based in Thailand and W. Ltd. a small British MNC in the drinks market.

AC Ltd. had a group of talented language trainers who requested training for a deeper understanding of Asian cultures to avoid misunderstandings and frustrations between them and their clients. I ran an exercise called Emperor's Pot (Batchelder, 1996), which establishes experientially differences in relationship-building, concepts of time and communication styles between Eastern and Western cultures. The game deliberately creates tension and confusion based around an objective of obtaining a valuable artefact. This game explores how to approach different cultures with sensitivity and a develops a mindset of cultural reflexivity.

Also at AC. Ltd, the language trainers use both the Seven Dimensions of Culture model (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012) and Lewis's diagrams of communication flows in meetings and management (Lewis, 1996) to open up honest conversations with clients about communication styles they find difficult. Whilst the Lewis models could be criticised for stereotyping, at AC Ltd. we find that when presented without the country label on the diagram, our clients can regularly guess which country it represents, suggesting there are some recognisable communication features in the pictures.

T.Inc., had communication problems in the leadership team. The Thai were very quiet in meetings, which were dominated by the British and Americans. Given that the Thai were subject matter experts, their contributions were essential to the successful running of the business. Alongside facilitative and coaching techniques, I used a personality-profiling tool called Insights Discovery (Insights Group Ltd., 2018) and an Intercultural Awareness tool called Intercultural Awareness Profiler based on the Seven Dimensions of Culture (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). The outcome of using these tools was a significantly increased understanding of the diversity of communication and thinking styles in the group, and increased inclusion and participation in team meetings.

W. Ltd had identified communication problems between their sales leaders (based in the UK) and their clients, (particularly a growing client base in Japan and China). It was identified internally that their sales teams did not have a relativist approach to culture, or a reconciling mindset, so I used two tools, the game of Barnga (Thiagarajan & Thiagarajan, 2006), a game which deliberately creates culture clashes by changing the rules of the game without the participants knowing and Dilemma Reconciliation (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012), a tool which takes a cultural reflexive approach to reach mutually agreed decisions from opposing cultural viewpoints. The result of these exercises was that the team realised that their way was not the only way, and that embracing the diversity of cultural approaches enabled more productive client relations.

Seeing at first hand that such tools and games can shift mind-sets and open dialogue about difficult or even taboo subjects, gave me the appetite to create an artefact that was experiential in nature, improved intercultural dialogue and understanding and created more productive relationships in international teams.

2.8 INCLUSION

During my research, the theme of inclusion (or not) was mentioned by research participants (for example, feeling excluded from a conversation due to language difficulties or cultural differences or feeling included when language accommodations are made successfully). Inclusion is currently a hot-topic in the Human Resources field, but the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's current focus largely relates to matters such as gender, sexuality and race (CIPD, 2019). Its report "Building Inclusive Workplaces" (CIPD, 2019) shows that inclusion can be considered on both an individual and organisational level. At an individual level it "relates to feelings of belonging, having a voice and being valued for your unique and authentic individual skills and abilities" (CIPD, 2019, p. 6). In other words, embracing uniqueness not conformity, and creating an apparent paradox of "belongingness versus uniqueness" (Jonson, et al., 2020, p. 124). At organisational level, inclusion "involves valuing difference, allowing all employees the opportunity to develop, participate and use their voice to effect change, irrespective of their background." (CIPD, 2019, p. 6).

Essentially inclusion at work is about an employee's experience, but interestingly nothing is said in the above mentioned CIPD report about language and national cultural differences, despite the large number of UK citizens being employed by MNCs. That said, research does exist regarding cultural inclusivity and Jonson, et al., (2020), highlight such research in the context of global leadership and they also raise awareness of the "profound ethical, intellectual, and managerial challenges involved in managing dilemmas and paradoxes in global leadership" (Jonson, et al., 2020, p. 121). They detail inclusive leadership behaviours as supporting group members, ensuring justice and equity, promoting shared decision-making, valuing uniqueness through encouraging diverse contributions and helping group members to fully contribute (Jonson, et al., 2020, p. 123). Neuroscience developments support the fact that people need to feel part of a group; that feelings of rejection genuinely hurt, that social exclusion affects a person's ability to think, and that feelings of togetherness create positive feelings (Scarlett, 2019). Anecdotes from my research participants confirm that these feelings of exclusion occur due to linguistic issues and the feelings associated with this exclusion can be very strong. Research carried out in English teaching settings has highlighted the negative effects of linguistic discrimination (Vanegas Rojas, et al., 2016). However, research into linguisitic inclusivity in organisations appears not to be well developed (Śliwa, et al., 2020). In addition, I note that no studies into linguistic discrimination were mentioned in a "systematic review" of implicit prejudice/unconscious bias (FitzGerald, et al., 2019). I therefore conclude that research into linguistic discrimination and linguistic inclusion is currently limited and would warrant further investigation outside the scope of this project. However, I believe my project does indeed make a contribution to this body of work, by highlighting the linguistic practices that can exclude, and creating an opportunity for such matters to be discussed and overcome, hence giving the artefact the name Inclusivo.

CHAPTER 3 – APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

As the spirit of my enquiry was to improve my own practice for the benefit of my clients and their wider society, I selected Action Research (AR) as my methodology. In doing so, I acknowledged the suitability of "the cyclical nature of action research as well as all its purposes, which transcend mere knowledge generation to include personal and professional growth, and organizational and community empowerment." (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 1). Collaboration within my chosen community (international business teams) was essential and my approach took inspiration from the emancipatory nature of Participative Action Research (PAR) as described by Herr and Anderson, 2015, and the collaborative nature of Heron's Cooperative Inquiry (Heron, 1996). However, my approach was largley one of Traditional Action Research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) where AR "involves a collaborative change management or problem solving relationship between researcher and client aimed at both solving a problem and generating new knowledge" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005, p. 14).

3.1 WHY DID I FIND ACTION RESEARCH SUITABLE FOR ME AS A RESEARCHER AND FOR THIS PROJECT?

According to McNiff & Whitehead (2009), an AR practitioner connects their own values to the knowledge development that is happening in action and those values are challenged and reviewed alongside the changes in professional practice that occur as a result of the AR. My personal values include equity (creating equal opportunities for all in society), respect (respecting and valuing differences), love (taking action from a position of love and empathy for others) and honesty (finding shared truths and acting ethically). The general ontological stance of Action Research is congruent with these personal values. As McNiff puts it "Action researchers believe that all people are equal and should enjoy the same rights and entitlements…They try to find ways of accommodating different values perspectives...They try to find ways of living together in spite of possible differences" (McNiff, 2013, pp. 27-28).

I share the same epistemological stance with Action Researchers, in that I believe knowledge is created in practice and that it emerges from finding new ways of doing and being. I believe knowledge is fluid and "never static or complete" (McNiff, 2013, p.29). I am drawn to the Rajesh Tandon quote "making the road while walking" (Wicks, et al., 2008), and I am also drawn to Heron's notion that knowing is solidified through cycles of inquiry and action. (Heron, 1996).

An AR approach was suitable for this particular project because "it is a form of on-the-job research" and "involves you thinking carefully about what you are doing, so it becomes critical self-reflective practice" (McNiff, 2013, p. 23). I engaged in AR, having identified a need from my own practice, and then by developing the artefact/product through a number of iterative cycles which led to the continuous improvement of the product and of myself as an individual delivering the product. An AR approach provided me with the flexibility to adapt my approach to be ethically and culturally sensitive, as self-reflection and improved professional practice is integral to AR.

Whilst initially my approach was more that of "Individual engaged in reflective study of professional practice" (Quadrant 3 of Coughlan's Focus of researcher and system model) (Coghlan, 2019, p. 21), the AR approach allowed me to engage with other people who also shared a desire to develop similar aspects of their practice (at Fin A, Tech B and Online Shopping C). Whilst not trainers or coaches like

myself, these people were still practitioners of both IBC and ELF in their own fields and were seeking a team-wide improvement to their own practice by engaging in the research with me. Thus, the AR process shifted from Coughlan's quadrant 3 to quadrant 4 "where both the researcher and the system are engaged in intended study-in-action. The system has made, or is making, a commitment to change." (Coghlan, 2019, p. 25). I believe the inherent flexibility of AR is well placed to allow a research process to evolve in this way, and to allow research participants themselves to gain learning and change from the research process.

3.2 How Did I Carry Out This Project?

3.2.1 Intended Research Process

In terms of a process, I initially imagined an Action Research process flow as recommended by Elliott (1991) interpreted by Kemmis and based on the Lewin model (in McNiff, 2013, pp.60-61). (See Figure 5 below and its accompanying description below):
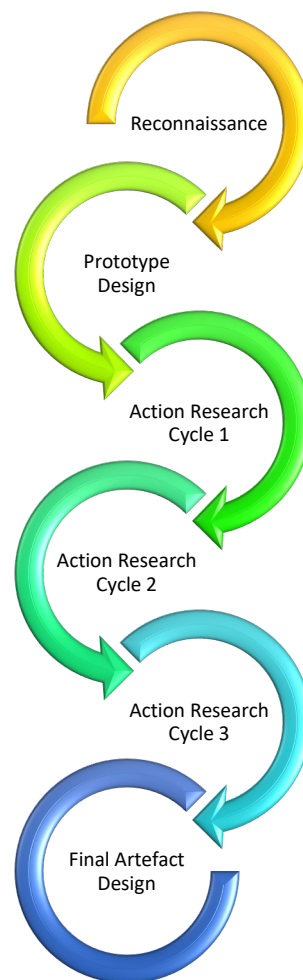

Figure 5: Proposed Project Approach

1) *Reconnaissance Phase*: Establish the ideal content for such a training/coaching programme by undertaking:

a. Semi-structured interviews to identify "best practice" models of the meta-level behaviour that facilitates communication in an NNS/NS context i.e. to have practitioners in the field identify "who does this well and what do they do that works?"

b. Ethnographic observation techniques to watch and learn from examples of poor and excellent practice (not pre-judged though in that sense). This will include observations with our own trainers at Abbey Communication, who represent NSs who need to make linguistic accommodations and demonstrate cultural reflexivity in their work with NNSs

c. Critical Incident reflections from clients and colleagues to ensure that all elements of communication breakdowns are captured in my research.

2) *Prototype Design:* The first configuration of the "artefact" (i.e. training or coaching programme) will be designed to reflect the evidence gathered at the Reconnaissance Phase.

3) *Action Research Cycle 1:* Trial and test the efficacy of that content with a trial cohort of course participants, evaluate both the programme content and transfer of knowledge and skills to the workplace through surveys and interviews. Re-establish the best content and approach for such and training/coaching programme i.e. re-configure the "artefact".

4) *Action Research Cycle 2:* Test the resultant coaching and training programme(s) on a new cohort of course participants. Evaluate as above. Re-configure as necessary.

5) *Action Research Cycle 3:* Further testing of the coaching and training programme with a new cohort of course participants. Evaluate as above, and establish final content of training/coaching programme.

6) *Product (artefact) final production*

3.2.2 THE EMERGENT RESEARCH PROCESS

In reality, the AR process was less linear than my initial project plan, and included additional reconnaissance at each cycle, (as indeed recommended by Elliott (in McNiff, 2013, p.61)), and considerable revisions of what was to be the "prototype". In fact, the protype emerged in bits and parts to start with, included elements of co-design input from research participants, then evolved into a draft (and tested) full day training programme, and then eventually was abandoned in favour of a non-training approach which emerged through participant feedback and my own reflective work.

In addition, I encountered limitations in carrying out ethnographic observations with my own staff, (due to power dynamics i.e. me being the boss, affecting the naturalness of the behaviour of my staff member during the observations) and indeed abandoned this idea in favour of ethnographic observations at a research client company, Fin A. Moreover, the timescales of the activities were shaped by participant availability and research opportunities presented to me by Fin A, Tech B and Online Shopping C.

The process was therefore not as neat and tidy and linear as I had first imagined. However, in the spirit of Action Research, each cycle did indeed include reflection on previous activities, planning further activities based on that learning, carrying those activities out, reflecting on the impact of those activities and starting the cycle once more. I was continuously reflective, reflexive and reactive.

My process resembled Coghlan's action research model, consisting of an initial "Context & Purpose" phase, (named Reconnaissance Phase in my project), followed by cycles of "Constructing", "Planning Action", "Taking Action" and "Evaluating Action" (Coghlan, 2019, p. 9). Though there are many similar

models in Action Research texts, (for example McNiff, 2013), I am drawn to Coghlan's model simply for the word "Constructing", as I was most definitely creating/constructing something new at each stage (e.g. a short training exercise, a full training programme, or the final artefact, a set of cards). In addition, during each cycle, I experienced what Coghlan describes as Meta-Learning (Coghlan, 2019, p. 12), whereby I was not only evaluating the impact of my project, but also reflecting on the process of the Action Research itself and simultaneously learning from the learning.
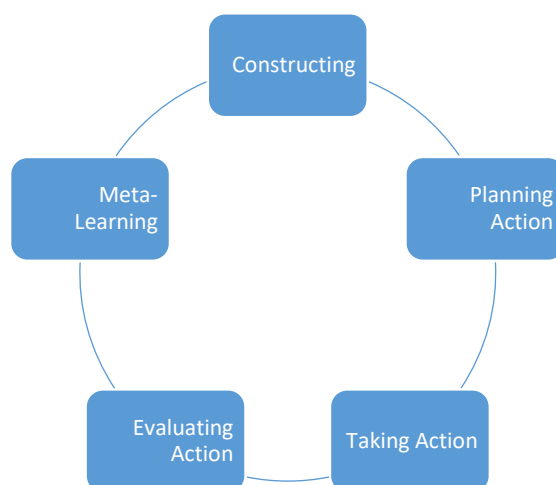
Figure 6: In-cycle flow (influenced by Coghlan 2019)

I found that the meta-learning was multi-faceted and deep; not confined to learning about the process of the Action Research, but also included ideas, ah-ha moments, creative thinking, heart-stopping "I've just realised what might have been going on there" moments, and significantly increased self-awareness in myself as an IBC/ELF coach and trainer. This complexity of both Reflection in Action and Reflection on Action (Schoen, 1983) resulted from simultaneously paying attention (and having attention drawn to) the subject (ELF/IBC), the human experience (myself and others experience of the experience), the process (the Action Research process itself), the project (the development of my artefact), and the contribution to knowledge (the expansion of my own expertise and contribution to knowledge in the field generally). This complex reflection was as challenging as it was rich, akin to spinning plates of learning, dropping some occasionally, keeping others afloat, and occasionally deciding to repair broken ones into something new. Figure 7 attempts to describe this process.
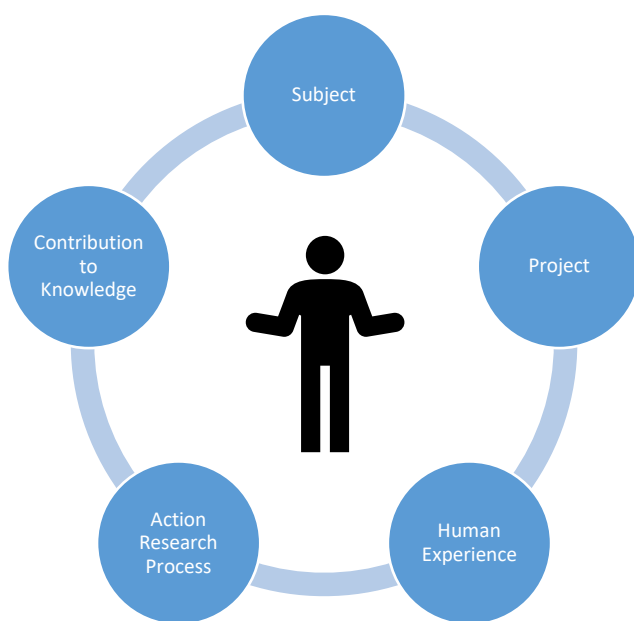
Figure 7: The spinning plates of Meta-Learning

3.2.3 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING

My person-centred and transformative approach to coaching and training practice has been particularly influenced by the works of Heron (1999 and 2001), Whitmore (2002), Downey (2001), Gallwey (2000), Kline (1999) and Rogers (1951). These experts helped me to develop a non-judgemental acceptance and empathy, which are demonstrated in deep listening skills, and the ability to help people explore goals, choices and options, and gain commitment to action. Over the years I have adjusted my own facilitation and coaching practices to include a deep appreciation of others, reflective silence and more powerfully intuitive coaching questions. These skills have very much become part of my professional identity, and therefore I use them frequently whilst facilitating groups, teams and delivering training. I combined these skills with guidance from qualitative research experts regarding how to gather information about feelings, sensitive issues, experiences and culture. (Denscombe, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Silverman, 2000)

I approached the interviews in a semi-structured way as there are key themes I wished to discuss, but I allowed the conversation to develop unique points relevant to the speaker. (Robson, 1993). The questionnaires (Set 1 and Set 2) can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2.4 ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

Aligning with the view that "Researching people means "stepping in" to the worldviews of others" (Chiseri-Strater & Stone Sunstein, 1997), I saw observation as providing a balance to qualitative interviewing and an opportunity to see the real worlds of my research participants. "You do not ask people about their views, feeling or attitudes; you watch what they do and listen to what they say" (Robson, 1993, p. 191). As the language and behaviour used by people is an integral part of my research, the opportunity to simply listen to the words people choose and watch their non-verbal

behaviour without others providing opinion or judgement was important to ensure that I have a rounded collection of evidence at the reconnaissance stage. I was aware that I would be bringing my own background and experience to the act of observation, and agree with Denscombe that "it is not a voyage of discovery that starts with a clean sheet" (Denscombe, 2003, p. 88).

The role of observer gave me a different and useful perspective. I found this change of perspective beneficial, resulting in benefits such as seeing the interlocutors as part of a wider system, and seeing how this system affects the interaction and quality of communication. Fine et al. (2009) confirm that an ethnographical approach to research in organisations produces "penetrating analyses of informal relations in organizations, organizational meaning systems and culture,…and power relations" (Fine, et al., 2009, p. 616). These elements are directly relevant to my research and to the artefact. I sought to create a tool which ameliorates informal relations, meaning systems, culture and power relations in international teams, and thus observing these elements ethnographically was an appropriate research method.

I took a interpretive-interactionist approach (Emerson, et al., 2011) by not only writing verbatim notes of meetings, but also making interpretations of the actions and interactions that occurred. My presence inevitably had an impact on the participants, and I recognised this when the participants asked for feedback after the observations and showed signs of wanting to improve their practice simply by me being present. That said, the discussions that ensued after the observations were very rich and reflexive, and so I saw this as an integral part of the AR process. In other words, the act of sharing my observations with the research participants created important reflections from the participants which then fed directly into the design iterations of the artefact.

3.2.5 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS:

As Kemmis puts it, to be effective, AR must "work in the conversations and communications of participants about crises and difficulties confronted by social systems and the lifeworlds in which people find meaning solidarity and significance" (Kemmis, 2008, p. 123). In the context of my research project the collection of critical incidents gave insights into the crises and difficulties of the ELF social system. In particular, I wanted to find out how the ELF social system engages in practices which "may be irrational, unjust, alienating or inhumane" (Kemmis, 2008, p. 125).

In my approach to collecting critical incidents, I took inspiration from Flanagan (1954) and Tripp (2012), and collected data on critical incidents in two key ways:

- Memories of a critical incident were volunteered during the qualitative interview stage
- Other written critical incidents from past clients and other research participants using a structured question set (see Appendix 1)

The key purpose of collecting and analysing critical incidents in NS-NNS interactions was to examine and understand the interlocutor's feelings at the time of the incident. In this way, I added to evidence of what behaviours could be changed for the better as a result of my project, and the impact of making those changes on trust, empathy and performance in international teams.

3.2.6 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Following the initial reconnaissance interviews and critical incident reviews, I was keen to quickly identify and collate initial themes, from which I would be able to begin to create the material for the first prototype training programme. Speed was of the essence, as I wished to maintain interest within my research pool; particularly with research participants at Fin A, and to take advantage of prototype trialling opportunities available to me with Tech B and Online Shopping C. So, in preparation for AR Cycle 1, I did not attempt to codify the data, I went about "sensing" themes, (Boyatzis, 1998). This was an attempt to notice common elements in the transcripts, and group these elements into themes, which, taking inspiration from Boyatzis (1998), I called Sensed Themes.

A more systematic thematic analysis was carried out during AR Cycle 2 by revisiting the interview and critical incident transcripts, creating codes and then grouping these codes into themes. For this piece of work, I was informed by the work of Braun and Clarke (2013) and Maguire and Delahunt (2017). The themes significantly informed the creation of the final artefact cards, and as a checking process the cards were cross referenced against the original codes, to ensure the cards covered each code at least once.

All of the above activities formed my Action Research process and the outcomes are detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH ACTIVITY AND OUTCOMES

4.1 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Reconnaissance Phase (Summer 2018)

My overarching research question for this project was: How do I help native speakers of English communicate better with non-native speakers of English? So, the aim of the reconnaissance phase was to get a better understanding of the issues arising in NS:NNS communication. This involved qualitative research interviews (see Appendix 1) with participants from a number of different companies, as well as an ethnographical observation at a meeting between Indian partner organisations and leadership team at Fin A (see section below: *Who were my research participants?*). I sought to identify not only what excellent international communicators do, but also key "pain-points" in international communication and teamwork, and to identify the source of misunderstandings and miscommunication in these interactions. These elements of "best practice" and "pain-points" then informed my actions in cycle 1.

AR Cycle 1 - (November 2018 to mid-January 2019)

This cycle involved the design and delivery of a workshop with the Fin A team. This workshop created a feedback loop from the initial ethnographical observation, initial research findings and involved a newly developed linguistic exercise regarding idiom. A linguistic exercise was developed using material from the previous ethnographic observation at Fin A. (See Appendix 2). The key purpose of this cycle was to test prototype exercises designed from my research for learning impact and relevance to my target trainees.
In addition, further qualitative interviews (with a revised question set) (see Appendix 1) were carried out with Fin A team members (including a team of Indian partners) and other research participants from other organisations. The interview data was collated into a collection of Sensed Themes which informed AR Cycle 2.

AR Cycle 2 (mid-January 2019 – July 2019)

The purpose of this cycle was to test whether the Sensed Themes gathered from the AR Cycle 1, and the AR Cycle 1 activities at Fin A, could inform an effective training programme for other organisations. This cycle included the design and delivery of online and face-to-face sessions of a prototype training course for native speakers for two research client companies (Online Shopping C in Japan and Tech B in the UK).   A deeper interrogation of the research interviews, using a thematic analysis approach, was carried out. This thematic analysis, and the learning from other activities in AR Cycle 2, informed the design of the final artefact, which was then trialled in AR Cycle 3.

AR Cycle 3 (August – November 2019) – Designing and Testing the Cards in 3 Sessions with Fin A

Cycle 2 found that the training approach was effective for native speakers; however, feedback from participants suggested that they would have liked non-native speaker colleagues to have been in the training. This would have enabled them to ask each other questions and to practice the skills learned

immediately. Moreover, research participants suggested that a tool applicable to both native and non-native speakers would be better for team building. This led then to a period of reflection which resulted in the design of a completely different product/artefact, namely the Inclusivo cards. In other words, the original idea of designing a training course was abandoned in favour of a set of cards which enabled open conversations between NSs and NNSs regarding linguistic and cultural differences. Therefore, the main purpose of this cycle was to hone team conversation cards and making them into a pack suitable for production and publication.

4.1.1 SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The table below summarises the research questions being addressed at each phase and the activities undertaken as a result.

Date	Cycle Name	Research questions being addressed *(in addition to the overarching research question of How do I help native speakers of English communicate better with non-native speakers of English?)*	Research activities undertaken
Summer 2018	Reconnaissance	Do others share my perception that native speakers need to improve their international communication skills? If so, what are the consequences of poor NS communication in international teams? What else is important in international business communication for those that participate in it regularly?	Reconnaissance interviews (question set 1). Ethnographic Observations at Fin A. Literature search for creation of Knowledge Landscape. Sensed Themes drawn from Reconnaissance Stage interviews.
November 2018 to Mid-January 2019	Action Research Cycle 1	How do I identify best practice in international business communication? (i.e. what constitutes successful or unsuccessful international business communication?). How will knowledge of that best practice inform the design of the artefact? How does an understanding of the problems that occur in international business communication contribute to improving it? What are the key themes that are occurring in my research and how do I apply those to the design of my artefact?	Further qualitative interviews (question set 2). Sensed Themes developed with new interview data. Presentation of data from Reconnaissance interviews to research participants at Fin A (member checking exercise). Design and delivery of new linguistic exercise regarding idiom. Ethnographic observations.

			Further literature research to build knowledge landscape.
Mid-January to July 2019	Action Research Cycle 2	What themes are important to cover in a training programme for NS? Is the linguistic exercise trialled at Fin A as impactful in other settings? What else can I learn about improving international communication through trialling this training event?	A deeper, more systematic thematic analysis of qualitative data. Creation of key themes from codes. Design and delivery of two prototype training events (prototype artefact 1) with Tech B and Online Shopping C. Member checking conversation with Fin A. Further Literature Research to build Knowledge Landscape.
August 2019 to November 2019	Action Research Cycle 3	How can I design a new artefact that meets cycle 2 feedback? (i.e. that Fin A and Tech B prefer a learning solution that includes both NS and NNS) How can I take my own expertise out of the artefact? (i.e. how can it stand-alone without my skills and experience?)	Design of protype artefact 2 (cards). 3 x trials of the artefact 2.
November 2019 to April 2020	Refining Artefact for Market	How do I turn 200+ cards into a product that can be produced and marketed? What is the product called?	Creation of Inclusivo branded cards.

Figure 8: Research Questions and Activities

N.B. I am not presenting a perfectly market ready product as the final stage as part of this research project. However, it is important to note that the product is being refined and the intention will be to market the product in 2021.

4.2 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The individuals (36 in total) who participated in qualitative interviews and observations comprised the following:

Speaker Classification (self-classified)

Native Speaker	Non-native Speaker
19	17

Nationality

British	Chinese	Danish	Dutch	French	German/US	Indian	Japanese	Polish	Russian
18	2	1	1	1	1	8	2	1	1

Industry

Agricultural Vehicles	Air Rescue	Finance	Chemicals	Civil Engineering	Defence	IT	Telecoms	Online shopping	Science	Railways	Logistics	Management Consultancy	Pharma	Energy
1	1	13	1	1	1	5	1	2	1	2	2	1	3	1

Gender

Male	Female
19	17

Figure 9: Research Participants

In addition to individual research interviews, the following participants also took part in my research activities:

5 members of the Senior Leadership team of Fin A, who originally participated in the research interviews, put themselves forward as a team to work with me extensively throughout 2018 and 2019, and these activities formed and informed a considerable part of my research. (see next chapter).

9 members (all British native speakers) of the company Tech A participated in a workshop where the first complete prototype training course was trialled.

5 members (all Indian non-native speakers) of the company Fin A participated in a research workshop.

1 AC Ltd. client (German) participated in my research by helping me test and design a training activity.

In addition to research participants, I also engaged with learning participants to trial my artefact. These were contacts of some of the above research participants. These participants were aware that I was trialling a tool and were volunteers on that basis, however they did not constitute part of the original research pool. Their feedback was gathered as if they were participants in a training programme, rather than research participants.

4.3 Tensions During The AR Process

One significant tension that arose a few times in my research is that participants sought my advice regarding their difficult intercultural/international communication issues. Initially I felt a dilemma between acting as a researcher and acting as an advisor. As a response to these moments, I drew on Coughlan & Coghlan (2002) who state "action researchers are outside agents who act as facilitators of the action and reflection within an organisation….The action researcher is acting as an external helper to the client system". They go on to make clear that the relationship is not one of expert to non-expert, but it is where "helpers work in a facilitative matter to help the clients inquire into their own issues and create and implement solutions." (Coughlan & Coghlan, 2002, p. 227). I, therefore, grew comfortable in distinguishing between being a facilitative helper using my own coaching and facilitative approach (Downey, 2001) (Heron, 2001) (Whitmore, 2002), and being a researcher. To add clarity at these points in discussions, I told the research participant(s) that I was "taking my research hat off" and putting "my coach/advisor hat on". I found legitimacy in this approach as denying the client the learning would have made me "other" and "outside" the process and learning experience which is contradictory to the ethos of Action Research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). In addition, those discussions added a richness to my understanding of what was needed in international teams, and thus formed a contribution to the research in-and-of itself.

Another tension arose from the very nature of doing research in organisations. Research opportunities arose organically, and this dictated the pace (often rapid) of the movement within and between cycles. Additionally, research participants were limited by diary availability, and so I needed to be responsive and flexible to gain access to participants. These factors led to a very small gap in time between the reconnaissance phase and cycle 1, as well as between cycles 1 and 2. This resulted in limited reflection time between cycles and restricted the time for data mining opportunities with the reconnaissance research interviews. These limitations were counterbalanced adequately in my view through the depth of relationship, openness and access received from the organisations with which I worked.

4.4 Research Outcomes Per Cycle

4.4.1 Reconnaissance Phase: Noticing Idiom, Indirect Language and Humour And Creation of Sensed Themes

The Reconnaissance Phase research activities enabled me to draw some initial themes that appeared important to others in ELF/IBC communication, (see Sensed Themes below). It also enabled me to notice the potentially exclusionary effects of the use of idiom and humour in ELF/IBC, and potential misunderstandings caused by indirect (in this case overly polite) language.

Idiom, Indirect Language and Humour

An extract from my reflective notes (written after the observation using observation scribblings as data) shows me considering the effect of using idiom, humour and indirect overly polite language.

"I was struck from the beginning of the meeting by how many idioms and colloquialisms were being used, I wondered if these idioms were barriers to understanding. Examples included: "I was literally gobsmacked", "They didn't have the bandwidth to take this forward", "That was the biggest takeaway for me", "X was quite flaky", "Who is in the hot seat?"

I am also wondering how easy it is to understand the British cultural tendency to be indirect or overly polite when giving instructions e.g. "I would challenge the team to…" (As an observer I wondered whether he actually wanted something done and if so, when, or is this just food for thought?) and "we need to take a more pragmatic view of response time" (I wondered whether this meant she wanted response time improved, by how much and when? Or did this mean she wasn't worried so much about the response time?)

Humour was used to break the ice and to lighten the mood; however, the majority of Indian colleagues did not react to the humour, whereas the British colleagues did. It was impossible to tell whether this was because they didn't understand or whether they didn't find the jokes funny, however either way it didn't seem to be a useful rapport building tool at the time."

Sensed Themes

The sensed themes were drawn from the reconnaissance stage interviews (and subsequently developed in AR Cycle 1) to help me make sense of the data. It was at this stage a kind of mental organising for myself, though I saw later that this work had started the journey towards the Inclusivo cards by being the spark that led to the more systematic thematic analysis later. The sensed themes that emerged are as follows:

Sensed Theme 1: Culture shapes international business communication

Not only did research participants mention behavioural aspects, such as showing respect for cultural celebrations and greetings, responses also covered the deeper behavioural cultural challenges, such as direct versus indirect communication styles (e.g. feedback giving), punctuality, showing emotion, degrees of politeness and group versus individual thinking (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

Different working styles were also mentioned, such as communication breakdowns caused by a hierarchical work system (e.g. India) and hierarchical seating arrangements (Japan).

The challenges of receiving a "yes" response and not knowing whether that was agreement, stalling, non-agreement or a simple verbal acknowledgement were highlighted by participants. This links to another issue mentioned, that speaking ELF does not require NNSs to adapt or adopt western culture (i.e. culturally specific behaviours remain even though a different language is spoken.)

Additionally, visiting, or working in, off-shore teams can give you an insight into the personal challenges of colleagues, such as how life is for them in their own country (e.g. India). This increases respect for NNS's commitment to their job and company, as well as helping to gain an insight into cultural and company issues, like hierarchical dynamics and communication flows.

For example, research participants said:

"Things like, within a culture, it being acceptable to, within a meeting..to take telephone calls, play with your phone, get up, leave the room and come back" (NS)

"Please and thank you" isn't a normal part of those interactions (customer service) in Poland (NS)

If something's not right they'll tell you "that's not right"..you just have to get used to not getting offended (re: German feedback style) (NS)

There is a lot more of an introduction before you actually go into the work bit...the Germans don't do that. They'll do the greeting line, then straight to business (Regarding US and UK email introductions) (NS)

Western cultures might, within business, like to hit the ground running, be business oriented and quite professional, whereas Middle Eastern cultures, it's about establishing trust, taking things slowly, sitting down....tea, chatting (NS)

Northern Europeans get on better together as a culture..they say southerners are bolshy/emotional..southerners say northerners are too blunt (NS)

If you speak to somebody who comes from a high context culture, such as Japan, India, Taiwan, they may well say "yes" to you, but that doesn't mean they're agreeing with you, it just means they are hearing you. (NS)

Philippines is the country with the highest power-distance, they really will say "yes" when they mean "no" (NS)

They will say "yes" due to cultural issues and due to the shame factor, because they don't want to seem embarrassed or shamed in front of their other colleagues by saying "no" (NS)

The French will be very direct in one of our meetings, but the Japanese will not (NS)

We've got a Dutch engineer here at the moment, I know I can give him very direct feedback, and I can interrupt him because they are very direct. (NS)

I will open the door for them and just bow my head, it seems like the right thing to do (NS)

He didn't want me to sit at his desk with him (re: Japanese boss) (NS)

The Japanese of course will turn up on time, but the operator, which is predominantly French, will turn up late. The Japanese always make it known that they don't like it. (NS)

A lot of my German colleagues say they think I must be quite closely related to them ..because I tend to speak quite directly (NS)

Sensed Theme 2: ELF competence shapes communication experience

NSs identified some challenges with the way NNSs use ELF, or their level of competence in ELF; namely lack of vocabulary and L1 (first language) interference, as well as the desire, or need to code switch. Some issues can cause misunderstanding, be misinterpreted as impolite or inaccurate, or

potentially result in serious safety breaches. Other aspects, like code-switching or seeking other NNS help, were not necessarily seen as negative. Experience in an NS country appeared to make a positive difference to the NNS's ability to communicate in English. Participants said:

She can't quite vocalise it the way the other person needs her to (NS)

She focuses too much, maybe, on some of the key words in the verbal conversation and doesn't pick up on small inferences (NS)

The biggest thing is they have gaps in sentences sometimes…missing some of the, sort of, linking words out (regarding Chinese speakers) (NS)

I found that she doesn't understand idiomatic language…or necessarily humour or sarcasm…or irony (NS)

If they don't understand something in English, they would ask one of their colleagues (NS)

Sensed Theme 3: Fear of judgement

Mention was made of how people make judgements of others due to nationality and language capability. Occasionally participants mentioned a fear of a judgemental response as opposed to having experienced one in reality. Examples of real, and feared judgement include:

It appears a more abrupt conversation…that can offend people when there's no intention to (NS)

People who haven't got a lot of patience with being served by a foreign national will use that as an excuse to be rude to her (NS)

I was destroyed (re: being told he was not a good team member because his language difficulties prevented him from taking part spontaneously) (NNS) (relates also to Sensed Theme 5).

Sensed Theme 4: Strategies used to improve international business communication

Research participants offered plenty of advice as to how international meetings and other group interactions should be handled. Examples included: more advance planning and preparation (for example sending presentations, agendas and any accompanying notes before the meeting); regularly checking understanding and making short summaries of the conversation; ensuring agreed actions are confirmed both in the meeting and with follow-up emails; using video in conference calls, as this aids NNS understanding because they can see lips move, and read eyes and body language; writing notes in meetings to help you remember the questions you want to ask and checking understanding; considering the needs of the other parties involved in advance; improving conference call etiquette, such as announcing your name, increasing your voice volume, speaking one at a time and using individual headsets; forming team charters/agreements and avoiding over-correction.

Experienced NS international workers mentioned that they use a variety of adaptive techniques that they considered would make them (and others) better international communicators. Adaptive techniques mentioned included: showing respect for the other language (for example, saying hello,

please and thank you in your host's language, or added snippets in emails of your recipient's language); avoiding rephrasing but instead repeating; being clear and excluding redundant or complicated words; adapting the level of your ELF use to that of your interlocutor; slowing down speech speed and increasing patience levels.

For example, participants said:

When you first say something to people and they don't understand, we tend to rephrase it, and sometimes it's best just to say the same sentence again so they can listen (NS)

I have to be very clear and direct in conversation (NS)

To assist them in what you are saying, speak slowly, distinctly, enunciate your words..
I would tend not to use particularly obscure words or uncommon words (NS)

Use the simplest and most accurate term. Don't use long-winded terms just for the sake of it. (NS)

With an email, they can show it to another colleague and say "what does this word mean" or use Google (NS)

If someone says "yes" to me, I will say "have we got an agreement on that?" (NS)

If they are struggling, they'll just write the German words, and I can just Google it (NS)

Sensed Theme 5: Emotional cost of ELF use

Research participants also mentioned the emotional cost of things going wrong in meetings and group settings, such as: feeling foolish or disappointed when you don't understand; feeling frustrated at the time things take or lack of outcomes; embarrassment at cultural faux pas (or fear of making them); embarrassment about lack of, or using wrong, vocabulary.

It holds up the meeting, it is of little importance as long as they know what they mean….if you carry on down that road we (NS) become editors not contributors (NS) (Re: correction)

Try to speak slower than normal, though this gets a little difficult when you get involved in the actual debate (NS)

I feel disappointed with myself (re: not being able to understand) (NNS)

It's the stuff that goes round in circles that gets you frustrated and annoyed (NS)

Because people have been concentrating in a second language for couple of hours, and they need to break out of that (NS)

Sensed Theme 6: Vocal barriers

Accent was mentioned as a barrier to understanding by both NSs and NNSs, as was pronunciation and voice volume. Regional UK accents were picked out as difficult to understand, and advice was given regarding tuning in to accents over time and understanding the stress patterns used by both NSs and

NNS. Generally speaking, differing pronunciations seemed to be accepted in ELF use and a focus on an NNS to acquire a perfect NS accent was not required. It was also mentioned conversely that a good accent does not necessarily mean the highest level of ELF.

He worked in the UK for quite some time, so he's got really good language skills, but I find him difficult to understand myself..because of his accent (NS)

My issue with his communication, honestly, he's so softly spoken..softly spoken and accent mean I struggle with what he says (NS)

Filipino and Indian people tend to speak in their language very quickly, and when they speak English they also try to speak English very quickly....so 14 or 40 sound very similar..it nearly caused the derailment of a train! (NS)

Sensed Theme 7: NNS confidence changes with setting

Both NSs and NNSs mentioned that informal settings could be more linguistically challenging than formal settings. Other important settings, that affect how ELF could or should be used, which were mentioned as difficult or challenging, include high-safety environments (rail, air etc.) and performance regulated environments (e.g. HR related conversations, giving feedback and giving bad news). Examples include:

Face to face communication, particularly in/when it's an a relaxing/relaxed environment...it can be challenging (NS)

It could have been something really interesting about that person and I like to learn about the people I work with (Re: lack of vocabulary breaking a flow in an informal conversation) (NS)

Sensed Theme 8: Inclusion and Exclusion through ELF use

Some participants alluded to inclusivity issues attached to ELF usage; namely different language levels, different cultural requirements, use of exclusionary language and having a collaborative inclusive mindset.

I try my hardest to include everyone (NS)

When I'm writing an email after the meeting, I make an effort to write the email in English and then in French (NS)

An individual may choose to communicate (a sensitive matter) in English in order that the non-English speakers aren't aware that it's being communicated (NS)

Sensed Theme 9: National pride as a negative

A couple of participants mentioned that national pride could be a barrier to speaking ELF willingly and comfortably. One participant thought that this pride can be a source very negative emotions resulting in poor team spirit and cooperation and gave a confidential example of a near-miss safety breach.

The French in general are proud of their nation and language and they use it all the time. So, tension arises because other nationalities prefer English (NS)

Most nationalities are proud of where they are from and who they are, there are some cultures who clash and it may be some kind of superiority complex, almost like a pride in their nation. The way your country acts as a state may influence the way you act with someone from another state (NS)

Sensed Theme 10: Time pressures in ELF meetings

Getting agreement in international meetings appears to take more time than in a mono-culture meeting. Factors that contribute to time loss include: the need to translate important information accurately (which can result in having to leave the meeting and reconvene another time); the need for breaks because of ELF fatigue; the uncertainty (due to linguistic and cultural differences) around whether agreement has been reached or not, and the extra language processing time needed (for example to digest a presentation or participate fully in a Q&A session).

We can't come to an agreement until everyone has put into their own English what has been discussed. That is quite a time/performance gap. (NS)

We end up having to take things back to the Home Nations to come back again, because they want to make sure they can articulate it back to their own people in their own language..That's quite a performance issue for the way the group works. (NS)

Sensed Theme 11: Lost in translation

Both NS and NNS consider that the choice of English words and how they are translated in to L1 is crucial to understanding, and also affects relationships. Mention was made of the pleasant flow of interesting informal conversations being interrupted in a jarring fashion by an interlocutor having to find a translation of a word. Participants also mentioned the difficulties arising from the fact that some English words have no direct translation or many translations in other languages, and translation can be a time-consuming process (see **Time** above). Nuances and subtle messages conveyed with voice tone or body language can sometimes be missed by NNSs, as can attempts at humour. Idiomatic language is seen as a barrier to understanding. Suggestions were offered on how NS can help NNS with translation issues, such as encouraging them to ask about synonyms and allowing code-switching.

Although English may be the common language there are so many differences in how it is used internationally (e.g. interpretations of words, sentence structure, body language, nuances) and these differences result in a lack of certainty. This ambiguity was a common area of concern amongst research participants.

The English speakers will then translate into non-English for the limited English speakers. That can become difficult around the nuances when there isn't a word in the other language..a single word that conveys the meaning (NS)

"I'm fine" (sarcastic) can be misunderstood. I have to be very clear and direct in conversation. (NS)

I've seen arguments between translators with regards to the meaning of specific words in customer presentations (NS)

It can be frustrating if … a conversation or thread is broken up by someone having to get a clarification…especially if it's really interesting, technical conversation. (NS)

A German word can be eight English words rolled into one..they use a pile of words that they then have to break up and think about how/what each of them means..doesn't directly translate into English (NS)

It's interesting to see the Swiss work with four languages to make sure they understand, because one word in English will have three different translations in English and French (NS)

Ask "what does that mean?" "what is a synonym of that?" (NS)

She (NNS) doesn't understand idiomatic language, humour or sarcasm (NS)

There are nuances in natural speaking English people that, if you aren't embedded in that culture, society, require explanation, clarification. There is a language that is used that we take for granted that may have a completely different meaning in a different society or culture. (NS)

Sensed Theme 12: Relationship building

Whilst many of the language and cultural issues mentioned above impact relationship-building, some relationship-building aspects were specifically mentioned by research participants, in particular small-talk. Issues mentioned included the requirement (or not) for small talk in some cultures; appropriate topics for small-talk and the appropriate register. It was recommended to get to know your international colleagues personally, such as knowing their birthdays, interests and hobbies. It was also recommended that interlocutors avoid, or use sparingly, culturally based conversations about TV, politics, films etc. These topics can be exclusionary to those with no knowledge of the subject matter. Should those conversations arise, it was recommended that NSs could involve the NNSs by asking for parallels from their own country.

As mentioned above, NNSs find it easier to understand and build relationships when they can see the team (so consider video conferencing rather than audio). Otherwise, face-to-face meetings are considered beneficial as one can picture one's international colleagues, and get to know their mannerisms, their sense of humour, the way they interact and the way they respond to methods of communication.

Adapting your behaviour both linguistically and culturally was seen as an important part of the relationship process. These accommodations appeared to reap benefits in terms of building trust and achieving objectives.

It's about humility, it's about being respectful, the establishment of relationships in order to have a common purpose and a goal (NS) (re: making linguistic and cultural accommodations)

To turn down an offer like that was bordering on insulting. Subsequently a lot of hard work had to be done to repair a lot of relationships and a line of business was actually turned off. (NS) (re: lost business due to declining a dinner invitation from an Arabic client).

Sensed Theme 13: Self-awareness and awareness of other

Participants recommended that NSs should recognise they might be responsible for some of the communication problems in ELF exchanges. In addition, they made recommendations to improve listening skills and be more aware of one's own attitudes, body language and how actions might be interpreted, as well as be more observant regarding the interlocutor's body language.

One participant talked about "System 2" (Kahneman, 2012) level of thinking, which can help in intercultural situations, i.e. being more self-aware of one's own mind and body, being very careful about how actions are perceived.

I move to System Two where I am more perceptive; I try to increase levels of awareness to do with body language – my own and other people's; I am more selective in what I wear as well as how I behave. More careful in my selection of language and I am more careful with regard to how my actions are perceived. (NS)

Two ears, two eyes, one mouth: do more listening and looking than speaking (NS)

Conclusions from the Reconnaissance Phase:

Having worked with international clients and colleagues for many years, there were elements of what was reported to me in the interviews and critical incident reviews that were neither new to me nor a surprise. However, it was really important to me that I heard these things being said by ELF/IBC practitioners to prove that the issues I had informally identified actually existed. My inquiry at the end of the reconnaissance phase left me with the following questions:

Linguistic: What kinds of linguistic elements are the most challenging and need to be omitted or controlled in ELF? How exclusionary is the use of idiom in ELF? How difficult is it to understand overly polite language?
Cultural: How do we learn about the important cultural aspects of our interlocutors and make appropriate accommodations? Is humour a rapport builder or a rapport breaker? Can sharing cultural models and my own knowledge of cultures help ELF speakers?
International Business Communication: What does communication best practice in an international team look like? How do international communicators know when their communication has been successful?
Value of reconnaissance research: Does my reconnaissance research hold some new and interesting information in-and-of itself for my research participants? Is it worth sharing? Can my research be distilled into a list of "top-tips" that can easily be shared and be useful to ELF speakers?

These questions **led to AR Cycle 1**. The related research activities and results are detailed in the next section.

The diverse nature of the activities undertaken in AR Cycle 1 reflected the variety of questions raised at the end of the Reconnaissance Phase. The second set of interviews sought to get more clarity on what constitutes successful international business communication. The member checking exercise helped me to understand whether knowing what other IBC/ELF practitioners thought and felt was useful learning for Native Speakers. The idiom exercise confirmed that idioms are indeed difficult to understand and that in turn helped my research participants take notice of using idioms. The ethnographic observation revealed evidence of learning amongst my research pool and allowed me to notice additional factors (such as room-setting and relationship-building) which can affect IBC.

Successful (or not) international communication (2nd Question set and Ethnographic Observation)

The second question set (see Appendix 1) revealed that success is judged by whether the communicator has been able to communicate meaning and intentions. Success is witnessed/inferred when others engage with questions and success is felt when agreed follow-up actions seem appropriate and can be more easily judged if positive feedback is received shortly afterwards. Free-flowing conversations (and information-flows) also indicate a successful conversation, as does the interlocutor drawing appropriate parallels, or using appropriate examples.

Unsuccessful international communication involved technical problems (e.g. phone line, weak internet connection), mismatching of expectations, inability to solve a problem or meet the interlocutor's needs, or agreed actions not seeming relevant, or not being taken.

Key barriers to communication mentioned in the research included: strong accents, fast speech, different sentence structures, different intonation and stress patterns, not understanding idiom and colloquialisms, and indirect language.

Several cultural barriers to communication mentioned including: differing approaches to saying no/pushing back, different approaches to giving feedback, different approaches to the amount of background context needed, culturally specific references that exclude others from conversation and culturally specific humour/banter.

My field notes from the second ethnographic observation aligned with some of the results from the second question set, examples of unsuccessful communication include communication breakdown caused by technology (*"X tries a couple of times to signpost for Y, but she doesn't respond from the other end of the line"*); agreed actions not being taken (*"X seeks to make the point that the issue was "bounced 15 times…it can't be someone else's problem, it needs to be all of our problem"..I'm left not feeling sure that X made his point about accountability and owning problems"*); speed of speech *("X speaks with high energy, and very fast. There was evidence of his intentions being misunderstood")* and use of idiom (*"he uses a couple of idiomatic expressions – "the media are joining the dots" – "we need to up the ante". Do all the NNS colleagues understand I wonder?"*).

Examples of successful communication include: providing structure and flow to an interaction *("X does a lot of helpful signposting language "right so slide 13"/"yes we will come to that in a moment")*;

clarifying due to different use of language (*"Z details an incident where that data wasn't right, I notice he's talking in the present simple tense, and I wonder if this is something that happened in the past and is now over, or whether it is still happening. Do the others know? W then says, "have we picked somethings up already?"*); and positive reception to questions (*"When discussing the organisational change, Z says, "I have one question here" and then asks a very detailed question..it didn't appear to cause any frustration to X."*)

Hearing the Truth about Idiom (*Design and Delivery of Linguistic Exercise):*

The previous ethnographic observation carried out with the Fin A team, led me to wonder whether the use/overuse of idiom in NS speech was a contributing factor to unclear communication. To follow this line of enquiry, I designed an exercise to ascertain the impact of English idiomatic language on NNSs. I used real idiomatic language used by the Fin A colleagues during the reconnaissance stage observation and asked a German colleague (an advanced speaker of English) to ascertain the meaning of the idioms. (See Appendix 2). I recorded her reactions to the idiomatic language and then played back this recording to the Fin A team. (She found most of the idioms and colloquialisms difficult to understand and the recording showed her thinking out-loud to try to decipher meaning).

In designing this exercise, my key objectives were to firstly highlight how difficult idiom can be to understand. Thereafter I wanted to see whether the team would rid their language of difficult to understand expressions and whether this in and of itself improved communication in their international team. If the exercise was successful, I had planned to include the exercise in my artefact.

As a supplementary exercise, I also carried out a short exercise with the group where they had to guess German idioms, so that they could experience deducing idioms for themselves.

The reactions to the idiom exercises included quite strong emotional responses, which I interpreted as a sudden feeling of guilt, combined with an increase in self-awareness: *"The idiom exercise was really powerful"* (Team member 1), *"The exercise hit home"* (Team member 2). In addition, the group engaged in immediate redesign of communication strategies for future implementation: *"Maybe I need to be less hung up on accent and be more careful with idiom. Think more about the words I choose rather than my accent."* (Team member 3).

The team mentioned that they had not appreciated how difficult idiomatic expressions were for non-native speakers to understand and how culturally specific they were. They discussed needing an understanding of context and culture to understand the idiom. The team were also struck by how even a high level of English spoken by an NNS does not mean that the speaker will understand all idiom or expressions that the team felt were quite common.

The Role of Empathy in IBC (*Member-Checking Exercise):*

As participation and engagement was very good with this particular team at Fin A, I felt they would be receptive to being involved in a member-checking exercise regarding my research thus far. So, I presented the team with raw quotes from interview transcripts that were all anonymised, and some were edited to protect confidentiality. I did this to gauge their reaction, both emotionally and intellectually, to the research output.

I asked the group to read through the comments silently, but to raise any points or make any reflective comments out loud at any point, and I would capture those thoughts and comments. Afterwards, we then had a more open discussion about what they'd learned from reading the research.

The reactions to the raw research from the team included both strategy design (i.e. what can be done about the issues mentioned in the research) and increased self-awareness regarding their own communication style and skills, leading to noticeably increased empathy for NNS.

 Strategy examples included: "*Should we consider forming a team charter? We did this in the early days with "team X" (team name excluded for confidentiality); do we need to revisit that?*" (Team member 4), "*Shall we have a team agreement when we don't understand and how to get over the embarrassment when we don't understand?*" (Team member 3), "*How do we establish a way that works really well?*" (Team member 1).

Examples of increased empathy included: "*I'm going to have to explain Brexit in Flemish to my family over the holidays, it's going to be impossible to express my true feelings and the detail of Brexit, so I can understand how NNS of English feel when dealing with sensitive subjects*" (Team member 1). "*We need to be more careful and show respect on both sides*" (Team member 3)

NSs Learning New Behaviours: *Reflective Discussion Following Ethnographic Observation:*

This particular observation took place immediately after the team carried out the idiom exercise and half-way through the member-checking exercise above. This led to the team having a post-observation discussion regarding their own behaviour in the meeting that I had observed. This discussion was rich in learning and reflection and showed an increase in awareness regarding the use of idiom in the meeting, "*Ha we were playing idiom bingo with you at the start!*" (Team member 1), as well as an increase in awareness of the team's own communication skills, "*I thought I had done a good job, I found myself hesitating and reframing and was going to use a colloquialism and stopped myself.*" (Team member 5). This led to a belief that the meeting had gone better than it usually did: "*I don't know why but I felt there was greater engagement today*" (Team member 5).

There was also some debrief discussion regarding the importance of relationship-building: "*We've spent a lot of time with them. So, is that the reason we have a better relationship? Does knowing us better give them a better platform?*" (Team member 5).

The concluding discussion saw the team creating potential strategies for improved team communication and performance, as well as considering some cultural sensitivities: "*I'd like to see me asking more if they've understood*" (Team member 3), "*Maybe we should be better at setting expectations in meetings, be more conscious of it*" (Team member 1), "*Yes, be clear about expectations – what we think is obvious isn't necessarily. Say something upfront rather than assuming it.*" (Team member 3), "*Regarding being more culturally sensitive – what could we do about holidays, celebrations? Is it our cultural thing that we don't make a fuss?*" (Team member 3).

During this discussion, the Fin A team themselves identified relationship-building as the key to better understanding and communication and asked for a joint intervention as the next research phase,

(together with their Indian colleagues, rather than on their own). This was the first indication I had received that my intended artefact (a training solution for NSs only) was being seen as a limited response by research participants. At this stage however, I still wanted to pursue the idea of a NSs only intervention.

Conclusions from AR Cycle 1

I left this cycle feeling confident that I had three key exercises that would be included in the final design of my artefact: the idiom exercise, presenting anonymised verbatim comments from my research results to increase awareness of the challenges that NNSs face, and eliciting from learners their own version of what constitutes successful or unsuccessful communication in international teams. The latter was inspired by the match between the second research question set results and my observation results i.e. if a team can articulate what makes successful international communication, they can then enact it. I was also significantly encouraged that such exercises can indeed change behaviour in a positive way, having noticed (and they themselves reported) that the Fin A NS team chose to make differences to the way they communicated, and developed increased empathy towards the challenges faced by NNSs.

Whilst I can see now that I had received the message in this cycle that a relationship-building intervention (joint NS and NNS) was being asked for, I had yet to let go of my plan to design an NS-only intervention only. In hindsight, I am now aware that there were three key reasons as to why I stuck to my course: Firstly, I felt vindicated that NSs can indeed change their language and behaviour for better communication results, and therefore an NSs intervention could be justified on that basis. Secondly, with the beauty of hindsight, I can see that a particular personality flaw of mine, of not liking to divert from a plan already made, was playing a part in my not hearing the message loud enough. Thirdly the speed at which I was moving between cycles 1 and 2, in order to take research opportunities being offered, did not give me the time and space to revisit AR 1 Cycle activities in a more deeply reflective manner.

So, as I entered AR Cycle 2, my plan was to test out the afore mentioned exercises in a longer training event. This would be supplemented by other training exercises designed from my knowledge landscape work regarding culture and other linguistic barriers and aligned to the Sensed Themes listed above. As such deliver what I considered to be the prototype of my artefact. During AR Cycle 2, however, I also decided to engage with the interviews and critical incidents on a deeper level, using thematic analysis. This process proved key to the total redesign of my artefact in AR Cycle 3.

4.4.3 AR Cycle 2: Knowing Who My Artefact Is For, Yasashii Communication, Knowing My Artefact Is Lacking, Time to Pivot, Going Deeper

During this cycle, I designed and delivered two training programmes to NS groups: the first via video conferencing to a Japanese company (Online Shopping C), where the team involved were all teachers/trainers of English in the organisation, the second to a company (Tech B), a face-to-face session with a UK-based team that deals on a daily basis with international colleagues and clients. The Online Shopping C programme was a series of short online sessions, equivalent to a full-day's training. The Tech B programme was a full-day workshop (face-to-face) with mixed levels of experience in international communication, but the majority of the group who had no formal training in language and intercultural matters.

My time-schedule for delivering these training programmes was dictated by the companies involved, so what I delivered was not meant to be a perfect training product, but rather a work in progress. I delivered an open and evolving workshop using a slide deck as a guide and reference point. During the workshop, I was reflective and reflexive, observing the participants' reactions to the material, and at the same time considering other ways of getting to the same desired outcomes.

Knowing who my artefact is for *(Training trial with Online Shopping C)*

My material was not wholly well received by the Online Shopping C group. It appeared that there had been a mismatch of expectations. I had planned to test out the above-mentioned learning exercises, whilst the participants (a mix of NS and NNS language trainers) had expected me to share significant insights from a doctoral process. Feedback included: *"It was useful information for native English speakers, but as an English trainer it didn't contain a lot of new insights"*. *"As an ESL person I think I was subconsciously familiar with some of this content, but having it actually laid out in front of me did give me a couple of pointers".* The key learning for me from this experience was that experienced ELF trainers were not my ideal audience for my artefact. My artefact was aimed at those who were less experienced and knowledgeable about linguistic and cultural accommodation in IBC.

Yasashii Communication *(A change of engagement with Online Shopping C)*

That said, the connection with Online Shopping C led to a fortuitous change of engagement with them. They specifically asked me to provide a slide deck with hints and tips (see Appendix 3) to assist their "Yasashii Communication" ("Easy and Friendly Communication") project, led by their language training department. Yasashii Communication is a concept growing in popularity in Japan since the 1990s (Steger, 2019) and is a push to make Japanese more linguistically and culturally accessible to NNSs of Japanese; for example making emergency notices less honorific and polite, and therefore less complex linguistically. Online Shopping C, in response to the less than empathic behaviours displayed by Japanese NSs to NNSs, introduced the project to their company and had decided to extend the concept of Yasashii Communication to their English-speaking community (i.e. provide some training to make English more accessible to non-native speakers). The intent of their project was very similar to my objectives. In the spirit of collaboration, I provided Online Shopping C with a slide deck (Appendix 3), which they then used to design a "Yasashii" training course aimed at both native speakers of Japanese and English.

Online Shopping C shared feedback from these sessions with me, to show the usefulness of the material I had designed for them. The feedback showed that 76% of the recipients of the training felt that communication between colleagues had improved as a result of the training. Having been disappointed with the initial engagement with the group of language trainers, I saw this feedback as vindication that, at the very least, the course content was relevant and useful for the non-expert ELF community. I also noticed that Online Shopping C's training programme had been delivered to all colleagues, irrespective of first language or culture. The notion of making my artefact a shared experience between NS and NNS (as recommended by Fin A participants) was beginning to resonate more.

Knowing my artefact is lacking and nearly time to pivot *(training trial with Tech B).*

The Tech B workshop proved to be the more useful experience. Firstly, the participants were my target audience, and secondly, the content was designed for the way I was intending the course to be delivered; that is, with an intact team of NSs who need help to communication with international counterparts.

The agenda for the Tech B workshop was as follows:
- Why do non-native speakers of English find native speakers difficult to understand?
- What other communication difficulties arise in international teams?
- What can you do to improve your international communication skills and increase team understanding and efficiency?
- Why does understanding intercultural differences help international communication?
- What can you practically do in meetings, conference calls, and presentations, to improve international communication?

These questions were answered via exercises on idiom and colloquialism, (using the same German-speaker exercise as Fin A), an anonymised and generalised presentation and discussion regarding my research findings so far; an additional exercise around the challenges of indirect language; a short tutor-led session around other linguistic challenges (e.g. crashing, contracting and chopping), and a session on cultural differences using Trompenaars Hampden-Turner's Seven Dimensions of Culture Model (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). (See slides in Appendix 3).

After the course, I asked the group for feedback about what they would do differently as a result of the course, the impact of the training, and style of the workshop. The feedback from the group included deciding that video, rather than audio calls, would be better for building relationships and for enabling better understanding (through lip reading and body language cues). The group also considered that their corporate culture should trump national cultures in terms of the way to do things. They considered it to be helpful to publish and discuss the "Tech B way" of going about meetings, video calls and other communication, and they decided to use more diagrams and pictures in communications. At the same time, they acknowledged that the Tech B corporate recommendation of only using pictures, not words, in presentations could be unhelpful and excluding for NNSs. Individuals in the group also committed to speaking more slowly, using less idiom, using headsets on calls and checking and rechecking for understanding. They also committed to ensuring there is a meta-narrative to discussions, such as commenting on the process and progress of a discussion, as

well as the content. The group members also commented that they had a deeper understanding of what culture is, felt that that understanding gave them more empathy in team communication and found the Seven Dimensions model useful to facilitate that reflection and learning.

In terms of the process and content of the workshop, whilst the members of the group agreed that the it had been useful, and thought provoking, and was likely to result in improvements in practice, they also had some important reflections on the power of feedback. They felt that the key to improving their performance was getting feedback from colleagues regarding how easy, or difficult, their English was to understand, and whether or not their culturally influenced behaviour, such as use of humour, was enabling or disabling. They felt that because the workshop I had designed was aimed at NS speakers only, it did not give them the opportunity to practice and get feedback from NNS colleagues. One participant suggested that the programme could be two days long and include the use of NNS colleagues or actors in this regard.

This suggestion that a collaborative approach to learning between NSs and NNSs, resonated entirely with the feedback from Fin A and the approach taken by Online Shopping C. I had begun to take notice that this approach could be more beneficial than my original plan.

In terms of my own reflections regarding the Tech B course, I noticed that I experienced a trio of roles during the Tech B workshop; those of trainer, expert, and researcher. Experiencing this trio of roles made me reflect on how I might make the final artefact stand apart from my professional experience and the additional knowledge I had gained from the research. In other words, how would I make the business model for this training programme sustainable and not reliant on my delivery of every programme.

In addition, I noticed that during the more informal conversational moments of the Tech B course, the participants were reviewing their own performance in international communication. The group shared techniques that they considered to be effective, and that they had learned through experience. Examples include triangulating the understanding of key terms (e.g. asking a French, German and British person to say what they mean by the term "cost centre" highlighted differences in meaning); having patience when developing relationships via phone calls (it can take two or three calls to build rapport) and, moreover, how important relationships are in international and cross-cultural groups (e.g. taking time to have a drink with colleagues). In addition, the group shared that they find Slack a very useful tool in international team communication; they find it informal, immediate and the written form of communication gives NNSs time to understand and respond. This informal sharing seemed very rich and useful, and whilst the course content had led to these conversations, I began to wonder whether the real learning was happening in the conversations themselves, and that knowledge and experience sharing via conversation was useful in and of itself.

Thus, three key learning questions emerged following the Tech B workshop: Firstly, how do I create an artefact that will stand apart from my own presence/expertise in the room? Secondly, how do I include more informal sharing via conversation in my artefact? Thirdly, how do I change my plan to include both NSs and NNS in the same learning experience?

Going Deeper *(Thematic Analysis)*

As described above, during this cycle a further review was made of all interviews and critical incident reviews that had been collated up until that point. This enabled me to go beyond the initial reconnaissance stage themes and move to a more structured thematic analysis. A process that is at the same time intuitive, yet objective, is difficult to describe. However, the key to my approach was to set aside what my expectations of what was meant by the words spoken in the interviews. Instead, I wanted to look precisely at the words being said, and analyse them for the speakers' meaning, rather than my own surface level assumptions.

I did not cross-reference the codes in terms of NS versus NNS, or other identifiers, such as nationality and gender as I considered all responses to be equally interesting in the intercultural and multi-lingual/interlinguistic research space. If NSs had useful strategies to make themselves understood, these were considered as no more or less important than NNSs who had strategies to make themselves understood. I worked systematically through the whole dataset noticing something new, giving it a name (the code), and noticing the re-occurrence of the code. I reached completion with the exercise when no more new codes were identified. The coding was an act of focus and clarification, and an insurance that my prior experience had not resulted in any pre-formed assumptions regarding what the dataset would tell me. I saw no need to quantify the codes (i.e. analyse how many of each code were present in the dataset) as I had not approached the interviews with a positivist mindset. That is, I did not consider that codes that happened more frequently were necessarily more important than others. In my view, some very important research outcomes were mentioned only once or twice, but with my experience in the field, I could see that the incident being described was deeply significant.

The following is the resulting code set:

Code Name	Code Abbreviation
Strategies to understand	SU
Strategies to make self understood	SSU
Evidence that understanding has been reached	EUR
Evidence that misunderstanding or miscommunication has happened	EMUR
Methods of creating meaning	MCM
Collaborative behaviours across language differences	CBL
Attitudes to race	AR
Attitudes to gender	AG
Importance of relationship building	IRB
Offending (or not) through language choice	OF
Technical barriers	TB
Strategies to deal with misunderstandings	SMU
Attitudes to nationality	AN
Attitudes to hegemony of English	AHE
Syntax differences (causing confusion or misunderstanding)	SYD

Importance of checking understanding	ICU
Barriers caused by accent	BA
Barriers caused by mode of speech	BM
Importance of direct communication	IDC
Importance of indirect communication	IIC
Attitudes to politeness	AP
Collaborative behaviours across cultural differences	CBC
Importance of understanding cultural differences	IUCD
Importance of showing respect for other cultures	IRCD
Negative emotions caused by ELF use	NELF
Negative emotions caused by cultural differences	NCD
General communication skills transferred to ELF context	GCELF
Importance of context	IC
Personality related	PR
Other power dynamics at play	PDP
Desire to give positive response (during research interview)	DPR
Underplaying seriousness of incident (during research interview)	USI
Emergent learning through interview process	EL
Previous learning reflected upon through interview process	PL
Reporting previous learning	RPL
Time-related learning (i.e. learning over time)	TR

Figure 10: Coding

Examples of interview output relating to a code can be found below:

EMUR: *"there's not a warm feeling that anything's going to change and you're likely to have this conversation again in a few weeks' time."*

CBC: *"you're there for a common purpose. I try to identify commonality with individuals. It's about building rapport with respect.."you're a person, I'm a person…we both like coffee!""*

CBL: *"You'll tailor the information to be delivered so that it's predominantly pictorial..conversations will occur about the content and there'll be clarification questions after. The English speakers will then translate into non-English for the limited English speakers. That can become more difficult around the nuances when there isn't a word in the other language."*

N.B: The last 6 codes are related to the qualitative interview process, rather than the content of the responses. For example, as the interviewer I noticed when an interviewee was potentially giving an overly positive view of a serious incident, such an incident that involved racism, or that there seemed

to be a congenial air of positivity in the responses which was perhaps due to the interviewee trying to establish a good relationship with me as the interviewer. I also became interested when learning took place, either during the interview process itself, or reflecting on previous learning (such that new learning was still emerging), or when the interviewee was simply reporting on previous learning moments. As my artefact was intended be a learning tool, the learning codes became significant in the final design. The interviewer/interviewee relationship-related codes were also kept alive in the final artefact design as they were considered to be examples of behaviour that can occur in ELF contexts (i.e. the interview itself was taking place in that context); the codes therefore became guides as to what kind of behaviour can disguise or dilute responses to questions. I looked for common themes in the codes to make my approach to the dataset more manageable and holistic:

Theme (and definition)	Relevant codes
Linguistic Collaboration: Knowledge and experience of linguistic strategies that can be employed to improve understanding resulting in improved teamwork, knowledge sharing and other activities that require collaboration.	• Strategies to understand • Strategies to make self understood • Evidence that understanding has been reached • Evidence that miscommunication has happened • Methods of creating meaning • Collaboration across language differences • Importance of checking understanding • Strategies to deal with misunderstanding • General communication skills transferred to an ELF context
Inclusive Mindset: Ways of thinking that can have a negative impact when there is a mismatch between interlocutors resulting in an exclusionary effect, in conversation or in teamwork. Conversely, this theme also includes ways of thinking that can have a positive impact on conversation and teamwork.	• Attitudes to race • Attitudes to gender • Attitudes to nationality • Attitudes to hegemony of English • Attitudes to politeness
Barriers to Communication: Physical (e.g. technological) barriers to international communication, as well as linguistic barriers (e.g. accent) that make understanding very difficult or impossible.	• Technical barriers • Syntax differences • Barriers caused by accent • Barriers caused by mode of speech • Other power dynamics at play
Meta-level Thinking: Taking a reflective or meta-level viewpoint in order to learn reflectively or reflexively, and implement learning to improve international communication.	• Importance of context • Emergent learning through interview process • Previous learning reflected on through interview process • Reporting previous learning

Emotional Impact: Connecting ELF usage to negative emotions experience in international communication and teamwork.	• Negative emotions caused by ELF use • Negative emotions caused by cultural differences • Offending or not through language choice • Desire to give positive response • Underplaying seriousness of incident • Time-related learning
Intercultural Collaboration: Knowledge and experience of different cultures (both national and organisational) that contribute to a person's or team's approach to work and relationships. Knowing when a style/approach is related to culture or personality. Applying that knowledge for improved teamwork, knowledge sharing and other collaborative activities.	• Importance of direct communication • Importance of indirect communication • Importance of relationship building • Importance of understanding cultural differences • Collaborative behaviours across cultural differences • Personality related

Figure 11: Themes

These 6 key themes became highly significant in the design of the final artefact, the Inclusivo cards. However, at this stage in AR Cycle 2, the journey was not yet complete, and so the thematic analysis was approached with a genuinely enquiring mindset, without an underlying agenda of any potential outcome from it.

Naming the themes was quite challenging as some themes included codes that dealt with both positive and negative aspects of the theme. However, these working titles adequately described the collection of codes to my satisfaction at the time. To cross-reference and sense-check the themes to potential training/learning outcomes for my developing artefact, I asked: So What? Why is this Important? (See Figure 12 below).

Theme (and definition)	So What? Why is this important?
Linguistic Collaboration: Knowledge and experience of linguistic strategies that can be employed to improve understanding resulting in improved teamwork.	So that NS-NNS communication and NNS-NNS communication becomes more productive and relationships feel good. So that everyone has a voice. So that everyone can contribute to idea generation, problem-solving and decision-making irrespective of ability in ELF. So that language induced power dynamics are smoothed out. So that ability in ELF use is not the only criterion used when judging someone's performance in the job.
Inclusive Mindset: Identifying ways of thinking which can have a negative impact on IBC by having an exclusionary effect in conversation or in teamwork. Identifying ways of thinking which can have a positive impact on conversation and teamwork.	So that non-inclusive mindsets can be challenged and that inclusive mindsets can thrive. So that positive attitudes to diversity in language and culture help to develop ways of working that are inclusive. That inappropriate power dynamics are smoothed out, such that power is not associated

	with any particular language or cultural background.
Barriers: Physical (e.g. technological) barriers to international communication, as well as linguistic barriers (e.g. accent) that make understanding very difficult or impossible.	So that everyone can join and in contribute. So that individuals can learn to overcome barriers proactively and sensitively.
Meta-level Thinking: Taking a reflective or meta-level viewpoint in order to learn reflectively or reflexively, and implement learning to improve international communication.	So that using ELF is a continuous learning process. So that mistakes can be recognised and remedied. So that best practice can be recognised and flourish.
Emotional impact: Connecting ELF usage to negative emotions experienced in international communication and teamwork.	So that difficult moments can be discussed and the emotional impact alleviated. So that the stress of ELF scenarios can be recognised, and attention can be paid to the well-being of international team members. So that the exclusionary effects of these negative emotions can be avoided.
Intercultural Collaboration: Knowledge and experience of different cultures (both national and organisational) that contribute to a person's or team's approach to work and relationships. Applying that knowledge for improved teamwork, knowledge-sharing and other collaborative activities.	So that diverse backgrounds and cultures are recognised as strengths, and that the diversity is leveraged positively. To ensure cultural influences are understood, and that the resulting preferred ways of working and communicating are valued as positive differences, not diluted or ignored.

Figure 12: Theme Definitions

Whilst the branding of the cards (Inclusivo) seemed to come (during AR Cycle 3), as a somewhat "eureka" moment, in hindsight, I can see that the theme of inclusion was already emerging in AR Cycle 2, during this sense-checking process.

Now It's Time to Pivot *(Member Checking Exercise at Fin A)*

AR Cycle 2 also included a further member-checking exercise with members of the original Fin A NS research team, where I found the members in a reflective mood discussing what could be ideal outcomes for any kind of further training intervention in this ELF/IBC context.

They listed behaviours they would see if they considered communication to be effective in their international team: being honest, seeking clarification, asking questions, managing the process of the meeting/presentation well, being clear about agreement or disagreement, engaging freely in discussion, having a clear start and finish to the communication, and being clear about the purpose of meetings (and how to contribute to the meetings). Their evidence for the need for improvement was cited as: presentations are not set-up well (i.e. no clear idea of why presenters are presenting on the topics or what they want to get out of the presentation), debate is lacking after the presentations, people appear to be answering emails during meetings, and presentations often lack context.

After this member-checking exercise there was a period of disengagement from Fin A research participants due to organisational changes. However, upon re-engagement I found them to be very clear about what they wanted to experience next. I was asked to run a team session to help teams understand positive behaviours, (both linguistic and cultural), when working with a mixed-nationality team. The end result, for the team, would be fewer misunderstandings, and more use of proactive, accommodating language and behaviour. I was specifically asked if the team session could consist of an activity/game that would elicit both problems and solutions for multi-lingual and multi-cultural teams, with plenty of time for relationship-building and discussion.

Conclusions from AR Cycle 2

When reviewing the activities from this cycle, it is clear that a collaborative learning experience between NSs and NNSs was being suggested earlier than I had heard it. Though, if I am honest, it took Fin A's express and direct wish for such an experience, to make me realise that it was time to pivot and to take my artefact in that new direction. I had the sense that the themes and codes that emerged from the thematic analysis would prove useful in AR Cycle 3, but could not imagine at this stage quite how directly they would influence the final artefact. I was somewhat lost in the learning. I heard the need to pivot but I did not react quickly; realising the richness of the research data, but not knowing how to move forward with it. I had to take a break from activity, and so I took time for reflection and thought before I was able to create the final artefact.

4.4.4 AR CYCLE 3 EUREKA, TRIALLING CARDS AND LETTING GO, QUALITY CONVERSATIONS AND INCLUSIVO IS BORN
Eureka:

I had previous experience of using cards in coaching and training, and had noticed their positive effect in generating conversation about difficult, personal or emotive subjects; "Coaching Cards for Teams" (Morgan, 2015) and "At my best, Strengths Cards" (Work Positive Limited, 2014). So, when asked to design a game or activity, cards sprang to mind. At the same time, I rejected the notion of designing a game (e.g. a board game), having had no experience or prior knowledge of designing games.

So, during this cycle, I set about creating a card deck consisting of questions which elicited conversation about issues that had arisen during my research, and in particular, the themes elicited from the thematic analysis. I hoped that the cards, would encourage learning from the conversation generated, in the same way that I had seen successful conversations generated by the card decks mentioned above.

Designing the questions themselves was a relatively straightforward task for me, as, through my coaching, training and facilitation practice, I am well-versed in designing and asking powerful questions. In fact, questioning is a fundamental part of my pedagogical approach, having had over twenty years' experience and being influenced by great practitioners in this field (Kline, 1999) (Revans, 2011) (Rogers, 1951) (Whitmore, 2002), (Schein, 2013), (Gallwey, 2000) (Heron, 2001) (Heron, 1999). I consider questions to be key to reflective learning and to enhancing self-awareness, so I sought to establish a learning tool that could elicit both of these practices. I also consider

questions to be key to creating open dialogue; dialogue being the process through which respectful relationships can be built and learning from others can happen (Freire, 1972).

Initially, I gave myself the mental space to write the questions intuitively, (springing from the prior knowledge mentioned above). I then crossed-referenced the questions I had written with the themes and codes from my thematic analysis, thus ensuring I had covered all the points that my research participants had raised as important. (See extract in Figure 13). Where a code had not been addressed, I created an additional corresponding question. The resulting card deck is shown in Figure 14.

|	Code							
Card Content	SU	SSU	EUR	EMUR	MCM	CBL	AR	AG
Describe a recent time when you felt you were misunderstood because of language differences.				■				
When you have lived or travelled abroad, what behaviours or actions have you found the most confusing?								
When you speak and work in another language do you notice any changes in your communication style?	■					■		
When you don't understand someone fully, what do you do?			■		■			
How are the values of equality and diversity addressed in your international team?							■	■

Figure 13: Cross Referencing Card Content to Codes
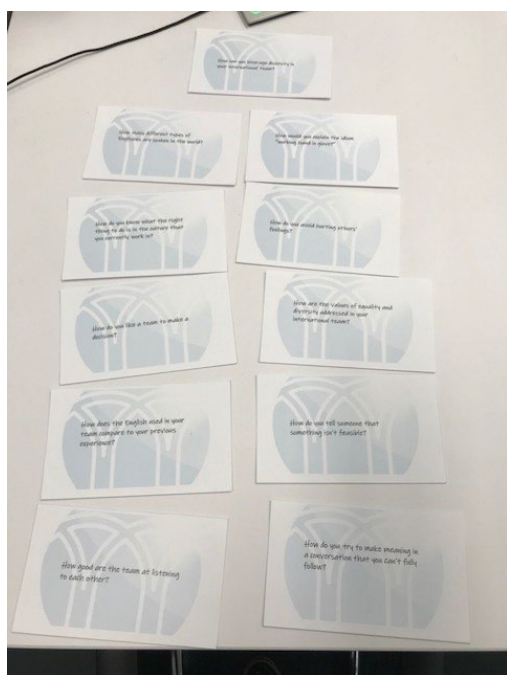
Figure 14: Trial Card Deck

Initially, I had over 200 cards in the deck. This was eventually whittled down to 100 over the course of this AR Cycle, in the context of trying to achieve a deck that would be commercially viable to produce. The whittling-down process was reasonably straightforward, as many of the cards, (with the benefit of hindsight and reflection), appeared to either have the same intent or to generate similar responses. The resultant deck of 100, was further cross-referenced against the themes and codes to ensure coverage of all elements.

Trialling the Cards and Letting Go

Fin A agreed to my running 3 sessions to trial my cards and garner feedback on both the cards themselves and the conversations they generated. The participants in the sessions were mixed nationality (British, Indian, South African, Spanish) all working in an ELF context. The groups were told that they would be engaging in a short learning session, to help them understand positive behaviours (both linguistic and cultural) when working with a mixed nationality team.

Given that the groups were given relatively little information about the sessions, the participants appeared positive and open-minded. They mentioned that they would like to know more about how to work better together, and in particular language and intercultural issues. Each group was keen to leave the session with commitments to communicate better with each other and with some precise learning outcomes. Each session was scheduled to last four hours, but in reality, took little more than three hours. Each trial followed a similar process, and this consisted of a ten-minutes session set-up (clarifying participants' hopes for the session and desired outcomes), followed by twenty minutes of pair work discussion using the cards, then thirty minutes of group debrief, to discuss their experience of the cards. I then asked them to swap pairs and repeat the process again.

Whilst the process was similar across all three trials, (with minor differences such as using trio work in trial 2, as opposed to pair work, (as numbers suited trios) and trying out groups of four in trial 3, I adapted my own style from trial 1 to 3 quite considerably. In trial 1 and trial 2, I added some "expert input" during the debrief sessions; sharing knowledge on body language cues from different nationalities; sharing different cultural approaches to meetings; discussing power dynamics in language and the difficulties surrounding idiom use; cultural approaches to separating (or not) work and home life; the relationship between personality and language use; and cultural theories. However, during trial 3, I refrained from doing so, having begun to appreciate that the cards could, and should, stand apart from my presence and expertise. Interestingly, I did not perceive a significant difference in the quality of the conversation and learning that happened in trial 3 without my "expert input". By acknowledging that my expertise and research contributed to the creation of the cards, but did not need to pervade through the use of the cards, was a significant moment of "letting go" on my part.

Once I had let go, I observed with joy the effect of the cards. I noticed that having a large number of cards enabled them to be spread randomly, without repetition amongst the pairs, thus resulting in a richly diverse debrief session after the pair/small group work. As each of the pairs had been discussing something different, the debrief session covered a wide range of subjects that everyone could learn from. Participants enjoyed the flexibility of having no time limit per question, which allowed them to really expand on interesting subjects; the act of turning over to a new card helped to keep the conversation going, and also helped to introduce difficult or sensitive topics as if by accident, giving comfort for the discussion to be "allowed".

Quality Conversations

Anecdotal feedback received during and at the end of the sessions showed that the conversations increased self-awareness ("I didn't realise how often we say things they don't understand"), were relationship building, ("It was very useful to have the partners here"/ "Our clients are also human,

we've had personal conversations"), and were informative ("We should avoid using idioms and short forms"/ "I've learned radical things – there's no need to fear hierarchy"). Moreover, the cards themselves were valued ("The questions were always there, but these cards helped us ask them"), as was the conversation ("The impact was in the conversation"/ "It was encouraging. Open conversations, issues discussed").

The anecdotal feedback also confirmed that the cards had an inclusionary effect, and helped individuals to value the diversity in the group: "There was a recognition of cultural differences, being different is OK"/ "Differences always remain, we just have to accept them"/ "Talking helps to break down assumptions/ "Learning about differences is fascinating and interesting, keep what we talked about today alive"/ "I like to know it's not just me. It gives me more confidence. I can now speak more openly and confidently".

In terms of the content of the conversations generated, topics covered included:

Idioms: the meaning and purpose of frequently used idioms was discussed, e.g. Swings and Roundabouts. One NNS queried jokingly "Why roundabouts, why not slides?". The joke helped everyone to realise how difficult it is to interpret idioms. Another group began to self-check the idioms they used which included "touch wood"; "the wrong end of the stick"; "dropped a clanger" and "put all the cards on the table". NSs began to ask NNSs whether they understood the idioms being used, and the majority of the time they said no. In fact, I only remember them saying they could understand "put all the cards on the table".

It was very interesting to note, from my perspective, that these simple conversations had the same effect as the more sophisticated idiom exercise I designed in AR Cycle 1.

Slang/Colloquialisms: One group agreed that this can also be intergenerational, and trying to translate their teenagers' use of slang and colloquialisms can give them in insight into how difficult it is to decipher slang in another language.

Ideas: One group agreed that they need to find new ways of generating ideas in groups that can take into account the different language levels and different cultural approaches to meetings and brainstorms. Also, it was noted that they should take into account different personality types, .such as introverts and extraverts.

Hierarchy: One of the NNSs was working in a pair with an NS senior manager noted that this interaction itself broke down barriers. However, they also had an explicit discussion about cultural differences to hierarchy, which led to the senior manager revealing a dislike for formal hierarchies and their barriers to communication. This, in turn, led the NNS to have quite an "ah-ha" moment about being able to move more freely up and down the hierarchies in NW than previously imagined.

Avoiding Offending and Being Polite: One group admitted that they are often inhibited in discussions for fear of offending; the cards gave them permission to explore boundaries of politeness.

Greetings: One group mentioned that there are many different ways to greet people that are both culturally, socially and personality dependent. There didn't seem to be a strong problem associated with this discussion

Agreeableness/Saying No: One group discussed the cultural need to be agreeable that both the Indians and British have, as well as the client/partner relationship, which causes the partners to feel they have to be agreeable and not say no. The Fin A employees were open about the problems this can cause, such as agreeing to achieve something/carry out a task and then not being able to.

Saying "I don't understand": There was agreement across all groups that this is a difficult thing to say whether it is due to linguistic issues or lack of technical knowledge. This agreement seemed to increase the camaraderie in the room and generated "oh, I'm glad it's not just me" thoughts and utterances.

Identifying Emotions: One group discussed how difficult it is to identify the right emotion in communication, especially in emails. Some liked the use of emojis in texting and online chat, although there did not seem to be a firm conclusion about this in the group.

Body language and Facial Expressions: One group discussed the cultural differences to smiling. One group member suggested that the British sometimes "smile without purpose". They also discussed Indian nodding/shaking of the head and how it can be misleading to other cultures.

Accents and Dialects: One group discussed how difficult regional British accents are, (even for other British people), and also the same was said of the many Indian accents and dialects. An Indian colleague also shared that there are at least 18 different languages in India, which was a real point of interest to non-Indian participants. There was realisation from the British participants that there are also language barriers Indian-Indian and that, when speaking English, the partners could be in fact speaking not just a second language, but more likely a third or fourth language. Some embarrassment was shared about how weak the British are at learning other languages.

Humour/Sarcasm/Banter: NNSs (Indian and Spanish) mentioned how hard it is to understand sarcasm and humorous banter. One British NS team member also expressed that she finds it hard in her own language and culture to decipher the "dry" sense of humour. An open discussion was had in another group about how hard it is to enter into banter-heavy conversations, and how hard it is to notice humorous sarcasm or irony in another culture/language. A British team member asked an Indian colleague whether sarcasm was a particularly British thing, or whether it happens in their culture. They said it happens all the time in India, but the difficulty is in understanding it in another language. Again, the dry sense of humour, for which the British are apparently famous, was considered to be difficult for many people to understand not just non-native English speakers. Banter around sports and "the match" was considered to be difficult for anyone to join in with, who is not party to the topic being discussed.

Attitudes to Work and Home life: One group discussed whether this was personality-driven (e.g. introverts need more personal space and like to separate work and home more) or whether this was cultural. A British NS remarked that Indian colleagues appear to like celebrating together, and also like to share food with each other, and also seem to like going out together. The Indian participants agreed that this was the case, but also said they think the desire to separate work and home life is more personality driven than cultural.

Misreading Body Language: One group discussed challenges with misreading body language cross-culturally (again the Indian nod was mentioned). Also, one group member mentioned that the British are very reserved when showing joy, and that it is not easy to see their expression of joy.

Linguistic pitfalls: Examples of misunderstandings were discussed e.g. a British NS employee admitted that he had not really understood an Indian colleague when the colleague said: "I'll try to do that by the end of the day". In fact, it had been a good misunderstanding, as the British employee interpreted it as "I won't be able to do that", but had been pleasantly surprised when the task had actually been done. An Indian NNS mentioned that when he was new, he had misunderstood the meaning of "I would do that". He read it as the colleague saying they would do something, when in fact it had been a strong recommendation that he should do something himself.

Written Versus Verbal Communication: One group discussed that emails are used to provide clarity and certainty when verbal communications had not provided either. The group agreed this was still a good strategy, but that face-to-face communication is also beneficial for relationship-building.

Relationship-building: One British team member mentioned what a difference it had made to relationships and to his own attitude to his Indian colleagues, when he visited them in India.

Direct or indirect Communication: One group mentioned how you have to read between the lines of email communications and how difficult this is to do in another language.

Meetings: Discussion arose about what meetings are for, such as decision-making, ratifying, ideas-generating, relationship-building, and that the differences can be cross-cultural, but also due to organisational culture. The group reflected that Fin A meetings are often set up poorly, in that no specific purpose is mentioned, or no specific outcomes are achieved. One member of the group reflected that it had only just dawned on him that there is an important relationship-building purpose to meetings and that he had been too task-focussed about them.

Festivals and "Red Flags of Culture": One group member mentioned that they would have liked more information about the Indian culture before they started working with partners, as they did not know what they "red flags" were. For example, for British people a "red flag" would be "don't expect me to work at Christmas."

Cross-cultural Training: The Indian NNSs revealed they had received cross-cultural training about the British, including the use of sarcasm and humorous banter, and they had found it very useful. The Fin A employees said they had received no such training to be able to understand Indian culture and they wished they had. A related comment was made: "we should have had a session like this 5 years ago!"

Politeness: An Indian colleague mentioned the greater need to say "Please" and "Thank you" in Britain. I felt I could have developed this conversation further, as there was a look of curiosity among the British participants that could have been interpreted as "why wouldn't you say please and thank you"? This would have been worth exploring but the conversation got diverted.

Decision-making: One Indian colleague said that part of their cross-cultural training regarding the British had been about how long it takes to make decisions; and they said this had been borne out with their experience in Fin A. The Fin A colleagues agreed that it was a Fin A issue, but did not seem

to wholly agree that it was a British issue. Again, this could have been explored more before the conversation diverted.

Culturally Specific References: One group discussed the use of TV slogans or jokes from TV programmes of the past and how not everyone understands them. This came up because someone used the phrase "Noddy language", and another participant mentioned another colleague's phrase "Give me the Fisher Price version".

Political Correctness: The group wondered whether fear of offending their Indian colleagues had actually prevented them from asking these fairly straightforward questions, (as per the cards), to find out more about each other, and to find out where the misunderstandings were.

Adapting Your Language: One group discussed how "techies" are asked to adapt their language to suit their audience's level of technical knowledge, and also discussed how people naturally adapt their language depending on whether they are talking to their grandmother or best friend etc. This conversation led the group to conclude that making linguistic adaptions/accommodations should not be too hard; it just needs to be made more conscious.

Language Skills: One group discussed how weak the British are about learning other languages. The Indian partners made mention there are eighteen different Indian languages, and in particular mentioned that Indian children learn at least three languages, English, Hindi and their local language. It was also mentioned that not all Indians are taught in "English medium" (in English-speaking school), and therefore some have different levels of English when entering adulthood.

Diagrams and Pictures: One group discussed how much easier communication is if a picture or diagram is drawn.

Drawbacks of Audio Calls: Indian partners mentioned that audio calls are the most difficult way to communicate in English, and that they prefer face-to-face or written communication.

Culturally Specific Behaviour: One group talked about queuing and how it is specifically British. The Indian partners shared humorously their view on British queuing and the Fin A employees shared how surprised they are when their Indian colleagues do not stay in line in the bus queue.

Inclusivo

From the trials, I saw that the real power in the cards was their simplicity and accessibility, and so I also abandoned any idea I had of developing a complex "trainers manual", or instruction booklet, to accompany my artefact. Instead, I settled on simply including some basic instruction cards in the pack.

Following the above trial, I decided, for commercial reasons, to reduce the number of cards from over 200 to 100. This process was reasonably straightforward, as there were a number of doubles or similarities. The final 100 were cross-referenced against the themes and codes to ensure all research output had been covered. Initially, the cards were branded with our AC Ltd. logo; however, in the spirit of the cards, I decided to give them a life of their own and give them an independent brand. This also suited my business arrangements, as I run two businesses and planned for the cards to be sold through both. The brand Inclusivo evolved from a brainstorming with a marketing agency to search

for a name that created an instant message regarding the purpose of the cards. The ending in "o" is common amongst fun games e.g. Cluedo, Ludo. In addition, Inclusivo means inclusive in Spanish. So, the final activity for AR Cycle 3 was to reproduce the card deck with 100 cards with 3 instruction cards, branded as "Inclusivo".

Conclusions from AR Cycle 3

The AR phase of trialling and testing the cards proved very successful on a number of levels. The cards provide an entry point/trigger for discussions around a number of communication issues in international teams, and proved popular as a result. The groups responded positively and cooperatively and saw the experience as both a learning and team-building opportunity. The cards work well across different levels of experience and different levels in the hierarchy. The conversations appeared to be natural, and free-flowing and not inhibited by differences or status/rank issues. Whilst, in my expert assessment, most participants had a minimum of B2 level of English, the cards appeared to be accessible to everyone. There was no criticism regarding the content or syntax of the cards except for two, which have now been excluded from the pack. The resulting conversations from the cards were the type of conversations that were intended when I designed the cards. Some examples are: how to clean up your language to be clearer and more succinct; how to change meeting and informal behaviours to be more inclusive of differences; the importance of informal discussions in teams about personal and career backgrounds; how to be respectful yet authentic in international teamwork; how to ensure all areas of expertise are included despite language or cultural differences; and how to make your communication more accessible for others. The random nature of picking cards helped the conversation to flow and there was a sense of fun and expectation regarding what was going to be the next topic. Whilst I offered some expertise/teaching with the first two trials, the third showed me the cards could have a life of their own. This was confirmed by my key contact at Fin A, who has asked for her own deck of cards, as she sees them as being effective as a team tool without the need for expert facilitation.

CHAPTER 5 – SIGNIFICANCE, MEANING, AND IMPACT OF THE PROJECT AND ARTEFACT

The physical outcome of this project was the artefact: the Inclusivo cards. So, firstly, I will review the impact of the cards themselves, and then review the significance and meaning of the overall project.

5.1 IMPACT OF ARTEFACT

In the trial sessions with the cards, I witnessed colleagues discussing matters to do with ELF usage, general communication, and culture that, they admitted, had not been discussed before in the team. A longitudinal study of the impact of those conversations is outside the scope of this project. However, the agreements made at the end of the sessions, alongside immediate verbal feedback after the sessions, and some anonymised email feedback from participants following the sessions, suggested that the cards had indeed facilitated conversations that this international team had not talked about before: "cards raise the issues that we normally do not discuss, specially *(sic)* in client and partner relation *(sic)*".

The cards also enabled conversations that increased empathy and understanding: "I think it was really powerful for our partners to hear that we have issues too – that it isn't all one way and we don't expect them to know everything. They are perfectly entitled to say they don't understand"; "Talking about the questions on cards really helped the conversation and understand how the other party thinks and their experiences on the same things".

The card also contributed to improved team relations: "Cards initiated the discussion on the topics that we normally would not have discussed and this helped us understand the point of view from client side on how it is perfectly fine with them if we do raise concerns or raise points as and when we think."; "I think they were really effective. It offered a really good opportunity to chat in a relaxed way about the challenges we all face."

In addition, as I had begun to conclude myself, the cards contributed to inclusion: "Team is about working together with equal opportunity and empowerment to individual"; "Biggest thing we learn is that hierarchies are there for the company to operate in a particular manner and not for the any *(sic)* individual to think small or big in respect to others". The cards also had a de-inhibiting effect, which in turn would contribute to inclusion: "I think these learnings will make feel more free when I have to share anything or raise anything in a client partner environment because I did learnt *(sic)* that our views are welcomed openly"; "sharing an idea without hesitation, raising your hand if you have a query or suggestion is always welcome"; "from the discussions I did learn that I should say I appreciate your help or I liked your work/idea/suggestion more often".

The cards also opened conversations about cultural differences and intergenerational and interhierarchical dialogue: "Most of the aspects with respect various cultures (English culture, Indian culture, Spanish culture) around communication were discussed"; "group had a good mix from seniors to juniors, it has helped to understand the "language" perspective from seniors as well as

juniors. The summary is everybody wants to help each other but we hesitate to ask/ say and those barriers need to be removed whatsoever from the minds and we should not hesitate to ask questions."

There was also an expressed desire for similar conversations to continue "We should have more casual discussions/ outings with the teams which gives us opportunity to talk about casual/ trivial stuff which will help in understanding more about the culture. And these can be utilised to feed back into the work and build a stronger relationship." "I also think we need to just have more informal situations where it's not always a formal meeting".

The commitments made by the groups at the end of the sessions (see Figure 15 below) also highlighted increased empathy, increased desire for inclusion (as well as desire to reduce exclusionary language and behaviour), and a desire for more relationship-building activities.

Figure 15: Group Commitments from Trials

A review conversation with a Fin A member who had seen the development of the project from the start, elicited the following feedback regarding the power of the cards themselves: "I think the conversations they prompted were really powerful", and that the cards had facilitating greater understanding in relationships that are complex due to language, culture and client/supplier

dynamics: "I think the greatest value was for me doing that session was with the partners. Because I think they've probably got three barriers to try and overcome. They've got the language barrier; I think there's a cultural barrier with the Indian nationality. I also think there's an added barrier because there's client and customer. And for me, it was quite enlightening to see them realize we don't expect them to understand it all." In addition, she alluded to a greater need in the wider organisation for similar sessions "! think there needs to be more than just that one session with a few people to get that message, because it's so cultural with the organization. You know the managers would be encouraging them to say, I don't understand. And what we do to kind of spread that more and just make it less hierarchical, less awkward, less liable not to always understand."

Whilst my project does not prove increased productivity as a result of these conversations elicited by the cards, there was certainly evidence to show the conversations in and of themselves engendered feelings of empathy. They gave rise to ideas for greater inclusion (linguistic strategies and cultural appreciation activities) and showed the positive nature of relationship-building, (with simple get-to-know-you type information being shared). My project therefore provides clarity regarding the contribution of such conversations to feelings of belonging to a team, positive working relationships and improving communication. I summarise those factors in the term "team spirit", and Figure 16 below shows the composition of team spirit in international teams.
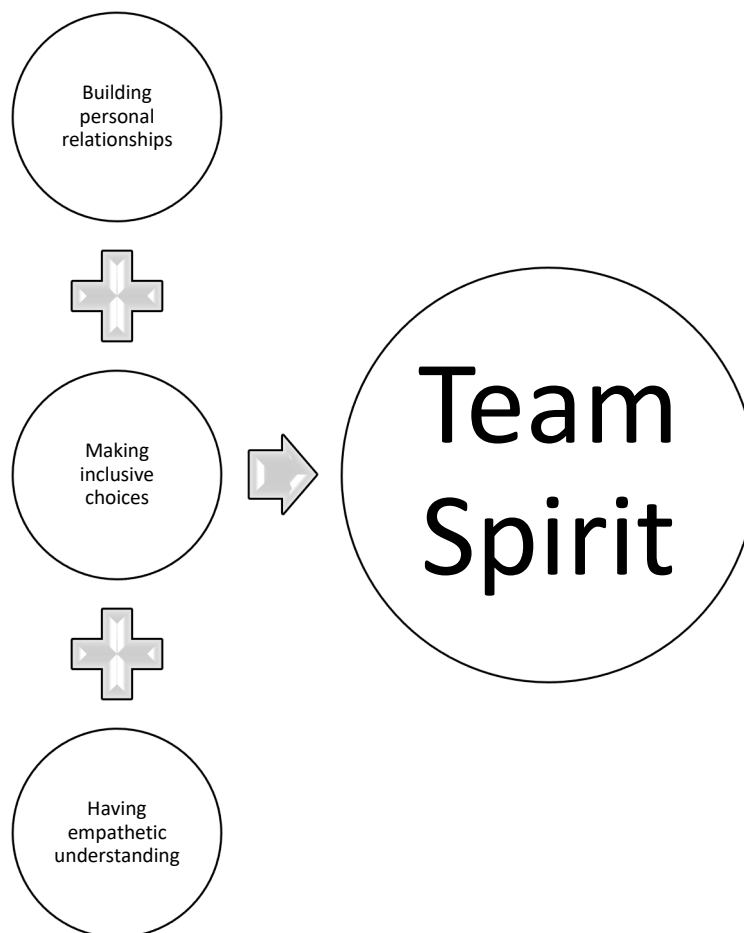

Figure 16: The Composition of Team Spirit in International Teams

5.2 IMPACT OF OVERALL PROJECT

As I have mentioned previously, my initial intention was to design a learning tool for Native Speakers only, however, during the course of this project there were calls from participants for me to create a tool which was collaborative; something where everyone in the team was included, irrespective of language or cultural background. I believe the Inclusivo cards serve this purpose well and also provided learning in the knowledge, skills and attitudes identified during this project as beneficial for international business communication, as well as developing inclusion in international teams.

In the early stages of this project, the theme of inclusion rang softly, like a small, gentle bell in the background, i.e. I could hear it but had not taken much notice of it. The theme occurred in various places, and at various times, through the AR Cycles. It tried to make itself heard in louder and louder peals, until it clanged incredibly loudly right next to my ear, (in the form of being directly asked to create a more collaborative and inclusive tool.) This meta-level learning is, I believe, a significant contribution that my project has made. That is, inclusion is genuinely desired in international teams. Typically, team members do not want to exclude. They may do so by mistake, by lack of skill or by necessity to get a job done in the short term, but they do not generally desire it. An inclusive atmosphere, with activities and behaviours that support it, is what is preferred. A "them and us" situation is not favoured.

In addition to identifying that inclusion is desired, this project has made a contribution to understanding what behaviours, attitudes and actions are required to create an inclusive atmosphere in international teams (detailed in Figures 11 and 12, Chapter 4). To further illustrate the impact of my project, and to show the links between my practical research and the knowledge landscape explored during this project, I have created a model from my research regarding how, I believe (based on this research) an inclusive atmosphere can be achieved in international teams. (See Figure 17 below).
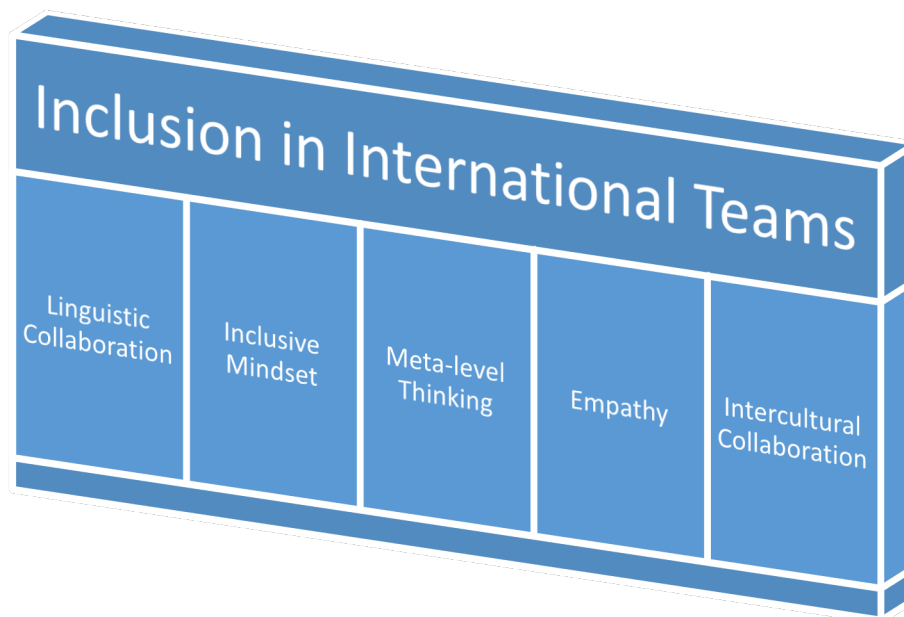

Figure 17: The Five Building Blocks of Inclusion in International Teams (Alexandra Morgan 2020)

In the model, I maintain the use of the terms Linguistic Collaboration and Intercultural Collaboration (initially used in the thematic analysis, Figures 11 and 12). These terms have been used in educational settings (Prasad & Lory, 2019), and I re-purpose those terms for IBC settings. Regarding Linguistic Collaboration, this building block represents the skills of compensatory competence (Dmitrenko & Vetrinskaya, 2017), and convergence (Giles & Ogay, 2007) which in turn, would include many of the straightforward and practical collaborative methods mentioned by my research participants e.g. slowing speech, eliminating idiom, using shorter sentences and eliminating jargon, repeating not rephrasing, listening for context, offering or asking for synonyms. Also included, is the knowledge that linguistic challenges do indeed affect team performance (Chen, et al., 2006) and are therefore worth rectifying.

Within the building block called Intercultural Collaboration, I include those communication strategies required to bridge international communication gaps e.g. reconciling (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012) (which is the skill of working advantageously with difference as, opposed to trying to overcoming the difference.) I also include the practical suggestions from the research e.g. recognising and working with different approaches to time and understanding whether direct or indirect communication is preferred. Also, in this block I include the awareness of whether a communication breakdown is indeed cultural at all, or whether it may be personality-related (Meyer, 2015).

Whilst these linguistic and cultural strategies need an element of metacognition, (Thomas, et al., 2008), I have included this skill in the model under "Meta-level Thinking", and this also includes reflective and reflexive practices (Schoen, 1983), and the ability to learn experientially (Kolb, 1984). This meta-level thinking requires observational skills to notice what is happening in international relationships and adjust accordingly, as well as the desire to reflect on IBC/ELF interactions and continuously learn how the interactions might go better next time. As one research participant put it, this skill needs "System 2" type thinking (Kahneman, 2012), such as analysis, reflection and problem solving. The issue of "barriers" raised in the thematic analysis (e.g. physical barriers such as poor audio connections and linguistic barriers such as difficult accents) is omitted from this final model, as I contend that the desire to overcome barriers would be addressed through Meta-level Thinking and a problem-solving mindset. Hence a meta-level observer and thinker would notice that a colleague is struggling to keep up with a presentation, and put in place strategies, such as stopping to summarise and checking for understanding, to enable understanding to resume. This level of noticing may also depend on a level of empathy (see below).

In terms of the building block called Inclusive Mindset, I not only see this as valuing differences and enabling participation (CIPD, 2019), (Jonson, et al., 2020), I have also noted, (based on this research), a very strong *desire* to include and be included, which can be thwarted by a lack of awareness of another's linguistic or cultural needs. Positive manifestations of this building block would include seemingly small conversational adjustments such as avoiding culturally specific informal conversation, or practical solutions such as allowing NNSs time to decompress after a long meeting in English, or code-switching for relationship-building or translating purposes. This building block also requires increased self-awareness regarding discrimination, (examples mentioned in the research included race, gender, nationality/culture) as well as newly the concept of linguistic discrimination (Vanegas Rojas, et al., 2016).

Lastly, Empathy sits as one of the key building blocks in the model. This term is a re-work from Figures 11 and 12, where I discussed "Emotional Impact". I see empathy as the skill that one deploys to notice, understand and help to mitigate a negative emotional experience in another person; the ability to see a situation from another's point of view, and therefore be able to access an appreciation of their emotional state. (I draw on the work of Goleman, 1996 and Kline, 1999 to reach this definition of empathy).

From the AR Cycles, I conclude that ELF/IBC communicators, and in particular NSs, benefit from understanding that there can be negative emotions attached to ELF use (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2015), including high anxiety (Gudykunst, 1998, Aichorn & Puck, 2017). An empathetic understanding of the potential stress involved in speaking another language and/or working in a different culture, should provide the open mind required to adopt the behaviours and attitudes required of the other building blocks. In this way, empathy provides the catalyst for the desire to include and engage in collaborative behaviours.

To further develop this model, so that other IBC and ELF practitioners can benefit from the outcomes of this project, I have created "descriptors" that enable others to identify and articulate these recommended behaviours.

Five Building Blocks of Inclusion in International Teams (Descriptors)
Linguistic Collaboration: Knowledge and experience of linguistic strategies that can be employed to improve understanding resulting in improved teamwork.
Inclusive Mindset: The strong desire for creating an inclusive atmosphere in an international team, reflected in behaviours and actions that result in others feeling included.
Meta-level Thinking: Reflexive thinking in-the-moment about how to improve communication, and also reflecting on previous interactions. Looking for ways to improve communication for next time
Empathy: Understanding that communication in international teams can generate negative emotions. Taking action to alleviate negative emotions attached to ELF usage or perceptions around cultural differences.
Intercultural Collaboration: Knowledge and experience of different cultures (both national and organisational) that contribute to a person's or team's approach to work and relationships. Applying that knowledge for improved teamwork, knowledge-sharing and other collaborative activities.

Figure 18: Descriptors of Five Building Blocks of Inclusion in International Teams

The model and descriptors are a new contribution to the fields of ELF and IBC by providing a synthesis of this practitioner research, and previous academic research in ELF and IBC, whilst realising the importance of the overarching theme of inclusion. The model could be used in a range of settings including: as a curriculum source for other training programmes in the field of IBC; as the inspiration to design a set of IBC competencies for international business professionals; as a diagnostic tool for

international teams who wish to improve their communication; as a teaching tool for ELF teachers looking to improve their clients' IBC; as a diagnostic tool in 1:1 coaching with international business professionals experiencing communication problems.

The model can also be used in conjunction with the Inclusivo cards in coaching and facilitation settings, and I plan to write an optional additional support text for the Inclusivo cards that includes this model and its applications. This would enrich the experience with the cards for those that are interested in the theory and research that supports the cards.

Whilst this model represents the key impact of this project, I would also like to draw attention to the fact that this was the first time many research (and cards session) participants had participated in detailed discussions around the challenges of ELF/IBC in an open forum. These discussions appeared cathartic, and I believe that this catharsis was a result of being able to admit to challenges in a safe environment. The group realised that there was an organisational desire to overcome these challenges, and they could see the possibility of their international business life becoming better as result of these conversations. As such, I advocate that international businesses encourage such open conversations, so that the matters arising from this research are acknowledged, addressed and overcome. In addition, with IBC now being shaped by increasing virtual communication due to COVID-19 restrictions, continued dialogue is essential to ensure new and emerging challenges affecting inclusion in IBC are identified and mitigated.

CHAPTER 6 – PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Action research is an enquiry into practice, and in this case mine. My work is training and development in international teams, and therefore this project has been a legitimate inquiry into my practice. Not only have I designed a learning tool for organisations, I have also increased my understanding on the nature of empathy, inclusion and relationship-building. However, my learning was not limited to the project itself, and I have benefitted from the multi-layered learning afforded by Action Research. My learning has included observations on the role of the expert, blockages caused by ego and the need to have a plan. I also have learned that inclusion is a very active process, requiring meta-level thinking resulting in active inclusionary choices. Going forward I am now more conscious of when I must make these inclusionary choices, and how I might do that. Lastly and most importantly for me personally, I have come to realise that the desire to improve inclusion for others and for me, has been a significant theme throughout my career. It has emerged as the fundamental reason why I engage in the coaching, learning and training activities that shape my professional life.

6.1 THE ROLE OF THE EXPERT

Doing a doctorate shows, in-and-of itself, that I have a strong desire to be considered an expert in my field. This in turn, is driven by a combination of a desire to help people, and the desire to make a difference to the world. However, my notion of "expert" has shifted significantly during this process. Before this project I would have defined an expert as "someone who shares their high level of knowledge or skill with people who feel a need to have this knowledge or skill for their own practice". In terms of behaviours, this kind of expert is generally prescriptive and informative (Heron, 2001). Now, I define it as "someone who, through their high level of knowledge and skill can create learning experiences for others that result in their acquiring the knowledge and skill they desire". In other words, I appreciate that my level of knowledge, (both prior and acquired through the project), around matters linguistic and cultural was integral to the design of the cards. However, I also now see that my expertise in learning itself created the tool, which, in turn created an experience which enabled others to learn what they desired or needed to learn; in other words, a non-prescriptive style of expertise. I believe, for myself, this approach required a simultaneous diminishment of ego.

6.2 BLOCKAGES CAUSED BY EGO AND INFLEXIBILITY

As I entered this research project, I considered myself to already be more knowledgeable in IBC and ELF than most international team workers. I felt I was going to enjoy creating an artefact from my expertise, which at the same time proved my expertise. In AR Cycle 2, working with equivalent experts in Online Shopping C, my ego was challenged. I realised that my level of knowledge at that stage did not offer such individuals any new insights. This was a useful challenge, as it made me focus on who my artefact was for (i.e. international team members rather than ELF instructors), but it also stripped away a layer of ego that helped me see and hear my research participants more freely; making me look for their insights rather than my own. I was able to see that all participants in IBC and ELF have valid and unique experiences worth sharing, which could have provided the first kernel of the idea for creating an intervention that was more collaborative, with a sharing intent.

I also learned that my desire for a plan, and to stick to it, was counterproductive in this research project. When I released that desire, (pivoting away from a NS-only solution), I believe I created a much more profoundly impactful artefact.

6.3 Inclusion is an Active Process

This project has helped me appreciate, on a much deeper level, that inclusion is about both mindset/attitude and making active inclusionary choices (i.e. proactive behaviours that foster inclusion).

Those choices can be made by an individual to enhance their own chances of being included, or can be made to actively ensure others are included. I recognise that I have actively engaged in both, over the years, (e.g. by becoming more assertive when communicating with male board room members, as well as inviting contributions from less forthright team members). Nevertheless, I have also recognised that when I have concentrated on just one type of inclusion, there is a detriment to the other, such as giving others a platform and taking a back seat myself. I, therefore, conclude that inclusion is a holistic process, with a focus on both others and me, and is, therefore, a "We" process.
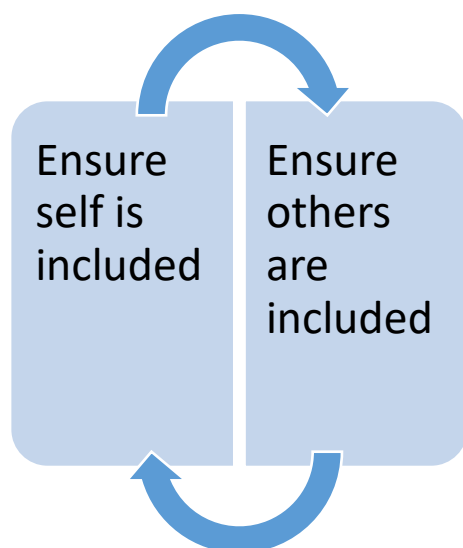
Ensure self is included

Ensure others are included

Figure 19: Holistic Inclusion (Alexandra Morgan 2020)

6.4 The Desire to Improve Inclusion drives my professional life

There has been a recent "ah-ha" moment for me as I have been completing this write-up, where I said to myself "it's always been about inclusion". By that, I meant that I have realised that my mind was synthesizing my career to date, the outcomes of this project and my core values and drivers. I have concluded that a golden thread of my professional life has always been to improve inclusion for others and myself. I think the source for this could be found in 1970s suburban life where, despite a highly encouraging family, I was still subject to wider societal norms of the time; these norms prioritised male contributions over female contributions in almost every other aspect of my life. I was

also aware, as I was growing up, that there were other destructive schisms in society created by racism and classism in particular. In order to test this "ah-ha" moment and look for the existence of this golden thread, I have referred back to previous reflective writing complete during this doctoral process. I found the following:

I wrote that my career has been dominated by the desire to "help others to learn, help others to communicate and cooperate better, help others to work more productively and respectfully with people from different backgrounds and cultures". In terms of my values and drivers, I wrote: "I want to contribute to making society and work communities more equal, by delivering training and coaching solutions that help individuals access previously difficult to reach goals. I want to contribute to increasing cooperation amongst individuals and groups, thus eliminating communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. I want to contribute to making the world a safer place by building bridges across linguistic and cultural differences."

I find it difficult now, to see why I did not see the golden thread of inclusion in these statements at the time. Now it seems to jump out of the page, and I feel a satisfaction that I can articulate my raison d'être as a professional and can see a circle closing in terms of my research journey.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion

In summary, I have made a contribution to my field by creating an artefact that facilitates conversation within international teams, resulting in learning, and a deeper appreciation of how to be more inclusive in international teams. This inclusion results from a shift in mindset due to increased empathy, and improved social relationships, and a shift in skill level by being able to make linguistic and cultural adaptions that improve communication. Through this process, I have also made personal observations regarding the nature of inclusive behaviour, seeing that it involves the simultaneous inclusion of self and others. There is scope beyond this research to investigate the manifestation of this more deeply.

The study is limited in its time frame, as there is no longitudinal evidence of change in the research participants, and the cards have not been trialled on a commercial basis, in an organisation that was not already a willing participant in the research process. However, the positive reception to the cards from individuals, who had no prior knowledge of the research process, has allowed me to assume that the cards would be a catalyst for positive change.

So, how do I know that my project has been ultimately successful? McNiff (2017) has collated various forms of "validity" by which I can assess my contribution claim. Those are: catalytic, construct, face, ironic and rhizomatic validity (McNiff, 2017, p. 208). McNiff (2017) states that "Validity refers to testing and establishing the truth-value or trustworthiness of a claim" (in Action Research) (McNiff, 2017, p. 205). In the context of this project, I prefer the expressions "truth-value" and "trustworthiness" to "validity", as they seem more congruent with the ethos of Action Research. Throughout this project, I have been reporting on my own truth (as it was discovered in my research), as well as the truths I heard others speak of their own experiences. I therefore use McNiff's table of "Forms of Validity" (McNiff, 2017, p. 208) in the context of "truth-value" and "trustworthiness".

Type of Validity	Evidence
Catalytic	I believe that I "enabled people to move to new, more productive positions" (McNiff, 2017, p. 208), by producing the artefact that provided a catalyst to open, honest and productive conversations. Also, that the content of the conversations was catalytic in nature; i.e. participants committed to change behaviour and attitudes were changed during the conversation.
Construct	My research showed that it was possible to create an artefact that could contribute to improving communication and relationships in international teams, and that fostered a greater understanding in NSs of the issues faced by NNSs in international teams. Thus, both my research and research approach aligns with the requirement that "what a researcher says they are doing really can be shown to be the case" (McNiff, 2017, p. 208)
Face	There is a basic common-sense truth behind my research; that conversations between individuals generally lead to improved social relationships and increased understanding of the other. In that sense, my research is aligned with a fundamental human truth.

Ironic	I believe through the thematic analysis, ethnographic observations, and reshaping the artefact through the AR Cycles, I interrogated "underlying assumptions" (McNiff, 2017, p. 208), both my own and those of others.
Rhizomatic	This validity refers to the "interconnected nature of human enquiry and the power of a study to have influence in multiple directions" (McNiff, 2017, p. 208). From the beginning of my study, I was aware of the connectedness with many other fields of knowledge (e.g. linguistics, national culture, organisational culture, general communication, teamwork, etc.). During my study the theme of Inclusion emerged as a golden thread, which was the connectivity through these themes. I believe my enquiry was fundamentally human, and that its influence could extend to improving understanding in other diverse teams, not necessarily in the IBC/ELF context.

Figure 20: Validity of Project

On this basis, I believe my project successfully demonstrates each kind of validity; however, on a more practical level, I also need to ask myself, did I achieve what I set out to do? That is, did I answer my question: How do I help native speakers of English communicate better with non-native speakers of English?

I can answer this on two levels, firstly as a trainer and coach in the field, yes, I successfully designed a product that helps NSs and NNSs communicate better, as witnessed particularly in AR Cycle 3. Secondly, I can answer this from my own practice perspective. I am an NS of English in an ELF environment, and my own practice has benefitted from this project. As a result of this project, I have re-witnessed the power of questions to build relationships, (Schein, 2013) and I have acknowledged that inclusion is an active process, which requires both a mind-shift and behavioural change. I also more readily engage in meta-level thinking when communicating with both NSs and NNSs, to ensure I am clear and uncluttered in my communication.

Moreover, I further developed my approach to intercultural differences, acknowledging that understanding can be reached in open communication, and that having to second-guess what another might be thinking and why, could be alleviated by just asking simple, straightforward and human questions.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUESTION SET 1,2 AND CRITICAL INCIDENT QUESTIONS

Question Set 1:

1. In what international contexts do you speak English and with whom?
2. Do difficulties arise in these interactions that are a result of linguistic differences? If so, what are they?
3. Do difficulties arise in these interactions that are a result of cultural differences? If so, what are they?
4. Do you change anything about yourself or your communication style in these interactions? If so what and how?
5. If you make changes or accommodations, do you see a benefit in doing so?
6. Out of 100%, what percentage of time spent in these interactions leaves you feeling positive about the interaction, and what percentage leaves you feeling negative?
7. What is the reason behind those positive and negative feelings?
8. If you could make sure all such interactions result in a positive feeling for you and your interlocutors, what would you have happen? What would you change?

Question Set 2:

1. In what context do you use English with international colleagues at work?
2. Do you consider yourself to be a native speaker of English or non-native speaker of English
3. What communication tools do you use when communicating in English at work?
4. What percentage of your communication with international colleagues in English is spent using each tool?
5. Describe a recent verbal international interaction in English that you considered to be successful
6. Describe a recent verbal international interaction in English that you considered to be unsuccessful
7. Describe a recent non-verbal international interaction in English (e.g. by email) that you considered to be successful
8. Describe a recent non-verbal international interaction in English that you considered to be unsuccessful
9. Please list the criteria that have contributed (in your opinion) to the success or not of those interactions.
10. Please give some basic biographical information about yourself that may be relevant to this research: (Age, nationality, languages spoken, position in your company)

Critical Incident Questions:

Incident: (date, time, brief description)
Who was involved? (nationalities, job roles, relationship to you etc.)
What happened?
What were your thoughts at the time?
What did you feel at the time?
What else was important to you about this incident?
What are your reflections now this incident has passed?

Sheet 2: Idiom and Colloquialism Exercise

Using idiom and colloquialisms which I noted from my previous meeting observation with your team, I asked a German colleague to decipher the meaning of those phrases. Please listen to the recording where she narrates her thoughts while she is deciphering the meaning. Please note down your thoughts and reflections as you listen to the recording. Below are the instructions given to my German colleague:

Objective:

To test the intelligibility of phrases used in a meeting.

Please tell me what you take to be the meaning of the following phrases (I'm not looking for a "translation", I'm looking for what meaning/message you think is being delivered). All these phrases were used in an international meeting by UK based native speakers of English. The meeting objective was to seek agreements about how to improve an IT related service.

| Phrase	Meaning
I was literally gobsmacked	
Robert was quite flaky	
They didn't have the bandwidth to take this forward	
Who is in the hot seat?	
It's a moving/moveable feast	
You've hit the nail on the head	
That was the biggest takeaway for me	

I would challenge the team to improve those figures	
We need to take a more pragmatic view of response time	
They should forge ties with business colleagues	
We need to take a deep dive to take this forward	
She had to sit down with Angela yesterday	
We need to surface pockets of good practice	
This is where conversations need to be had	

Online Shopping C

TOP TIPS FOR NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH
WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

Author: Alexandra Morgan, Doctoral Candidate, Middlesex University
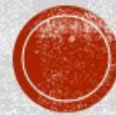
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TWO KEY THEMES

LINGUISTIC TIPS   INTERCULTURAL TIPS

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LINGUISTIC TIPS

🚫 Avoid idiom and colloquialisms

💬 Speak in shorter sentences

☑️ Check frequently that understanding has been reached

✖️ Rid your language of unnecessary and incorrect words
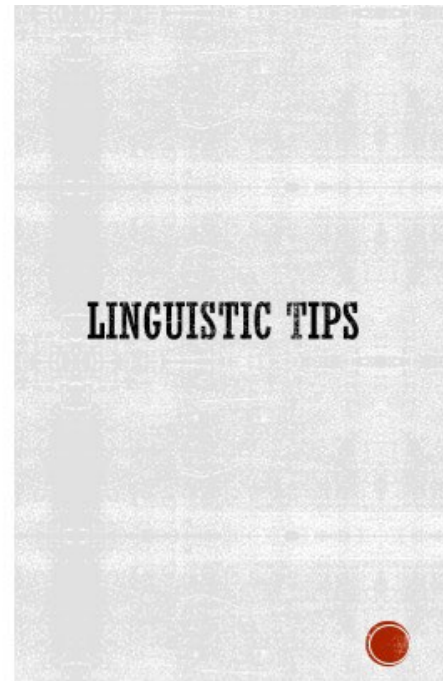
AVOIDING IDIOM AND COLLOQUIALISMS

Ask your friends and colleagues to play "idiom bingo" with you i.e. every time they hear an idiom they should point it out. Immediately rephrase by eliminating the idiom from the sentence. (Use the same technique for colloquialisms)

Listen carefully when you are in conversation with native speakers, notice idioms being used and imagine how the sentence could have been said without the idiom

Ask your international colleagues to share idioms and colloquialisms from their languages – notice how culturally specific they are, and notice how difficult it is for you to fully grasp the meaning (and to know how to use the idiom effectively)

Notice idiom and colloquialisms used on the TV, Internet and Radio – challenge yourself to rephrase what's just been said without the idiom

SPEAK IN SHORTER SENTENCES

Practise this at first with written work. Challenge yourself to write in sentences no longer than 12 words.

Take a paragraph from a newspaper or magazine, rewrite it in shorter, less wordy sentences.

Say one idea at a time e.g. The client liked your presentation. They have given some useful feedback for our next meeting with them. Let's get together on Tuesday to discuss their ideas.

Avoid making side comments e.g. The report you gave me on Monday, or was it Tuesday? Never mind, it doesn't matter which day it was, in fact it was probably Monday because I wasn't in the office on Tuesday, anyway, as I was saying, the report you gave me was really good = Your report is good.

Frequently use paraphrasing and summarising e.g. So, to summarise our conversation../I understand the key points from this discussion as…

Frequently use checking strategies e.g. So, just to check I've understood correctly../Let me check I've remembered everything you've said…

Frequently check that you've been understood e.g. What are the key points you've taken from this discussion/ How does what I've said affect you?/ What are the key action points from your point of view?/ Please could you playback what we've just discussed so I can make sure I've communicated well

CHECK FREQUENTLY THAT UNDERSTANDING HAS BEEN REACHED.

RID YOUR LANGUAGE OF UNNECESSARY (OR INCORRECT) WORDS

Typical examples in English are: "sort of" "kind of" "you know" "like"

e.g. he is like, you know, he's sort of like, you know, kind of bossy = he is bossy

---

Listen to yourself and others, challenge each other to avoid these unnecessary words – make a game or a challenge out of it!

Record yourself speaking, notice the unnecessary words. Rephrase each sentence without them.

Avoid misleading tenses:

e.g. I **was** thinking that it would be nice to go to the pub after work = Let's go to the pub after work

e.g. I **was going to say** that we need to finish the report = We need to finish the report

INTERCULTURAL CHOICES

Be observant and wonder "how do they do things around here?"

Read intercultural texts e.g. Hofstede, Meyer, Trompenaars-Hampden Turner to understand the key themes of cultural differences

---

Know that all humans are trying to solve the same social, economic and environmental problems, it's just that their solutions and approaches are different

---

If someone's behaviour puzzles you, do not judge, share your observation and ask questions e.g. I notice you don't put your knife and fork together at the end of a meal like the British do, is that typical in France?/ I notice you wanted to pour my wine, is it uncommon in Japan for someone to pour their own drink?

Know that behavioural differences can also be due to personality, not everything is a cultural difference

---

Narrate your cultural habits e.g. In my company we always stand when the boss enters the room, what happens in your company?

Check behavioural expectations for meetings, presentations and conference calls – do not assume that the way you do things is the way your colleagues do things

| | Communication is a joint responsibility, if you don't understand say so |

| | If you think others in the room don't understand, paraphrase and summarise to help them |

| | A good accent is not necessarily an indicator of a high level of English (many non-native speakers have very strong accents but their English is excellent and vice-versa) – ensure you are aware of your colleague's language level |

| | Fast speech is also not necessarily an indicator of a high level of English |

| | There are many valid forms of English around the world (i.e. British or American English are not the only "correct" versions e.g. Indian English is different but equally "correct") – know which version of English your colleague speaks and learn about the differences |

OTHER KEY TIPS

Agenda

◻ Why do non-native speakers of English find native speakers difficult to understand?

◻ What other communication difficulties arise in international teams?

◻ What can you do to improve your international communication skills and increase team understanding and efficiency?

◻ Why does understanding intercultural differences help international communication

◻ What can you practically do in meetings, conf calls and presentations to improve international communication?

Communicating with international colleagues

◻ What are your international communication contexts?

◻ What nationalities do you deal with?

◻ When is communication successful and when is it not?

◻ What are the real "GRRRR" moments?

Why are NS so difficult to understand?

- What you say
- How you say it
- The cultural and business context
- What they say
- How they say it

Your English

The Context

Their English

Why are NS so difficult to understand?

- What you say
- How you say it
- The cultural and business context
- What they say
- How they say it

Understanding

Your English

The Context

Their English
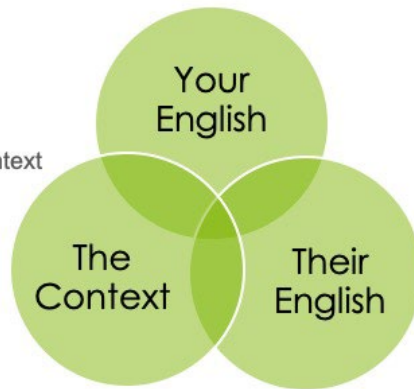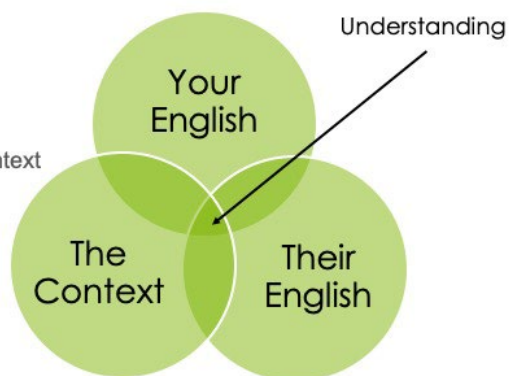
What you say..Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHg_M_zKA6Y

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNz82r5nyUw

What you say and how you say it

- ☐ Idiom and colloquialism

- ☐ Indirect speech

- ☐ Crashing, Contracting and Chopping

- ☐ Unnecessarily complicated words

- ☐ Fast speech

- ☐ Quiet speech

- ☐ Accents and dialects

- ☐ Intonation and stress patterns

What you say.. Idiom/Colloquialism/Indirect Speech..exercise

- I was literally gobsmacked
- Robert was quite flakey
- They didn't have the bandwidth to take this forward
- Who is in the hot seat?
- It's a moveable feast
- You've hit the nail on the head
- That was the biggest take-away for me

- I would challenge the team improve those figures
- We need to take a deep dive to take this forward
- She had to sit down with Angela yesterday
- We need to surface pockets of good practice
- This is where conversations need to be had

How could you interpret the following:

- Your guess is as good as mine
- It's a piece of cake
- They don't see eye to eye
- Speak of the devil!
- Let's cross that bridge when we come to it
- How long is a piece of string?

Understanding Idioms

Guess the meaning of the following German idioms:

- ☐ Do you have tomatoes on your eyes?

- ☐ Don't talk around the hot porridge

- ☐ You can take poison on that

- ☐ The bear dances there

- ☐ I can only understand "train station"

- ☐ Leave the church in the village

Indirect speech

- ☐ Linguistic and cultural

Consider the meaning..

- Are you going past the post office on your way home?

- Those biscuits look nice!

- Can I borrow you for a moment?

- It's pretty good, just needs a few small changes..

Crashing, Contracting and Chopping

- He has already told me

- He's already told me

- Sready told me

C,C,C..

- What are you doing? - Waddayadooin?
- Wait a minute – Waydaminnit
- See you soon - seesoon
- He should have gone to Specsavers
- Shuddavgon t Specsavers
- Would you like a cup of tea?
- Cupeh tee?

Their use of English

- "Translate" the following uses of English:

Better planification is required

We need to precise these objectives

They decided to supress ad-hoc fees

We need to control all transactions

(adapted from Gardner 2016)

Cultural issues

"Yes" may not mean agreement
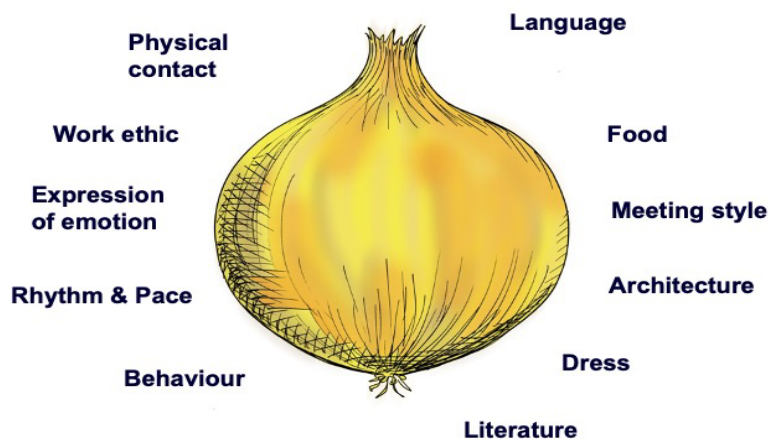
Varying approaches to hierarchy

Varying approaches to formality/informality

Varying needs for small talk/relationship building in meetings
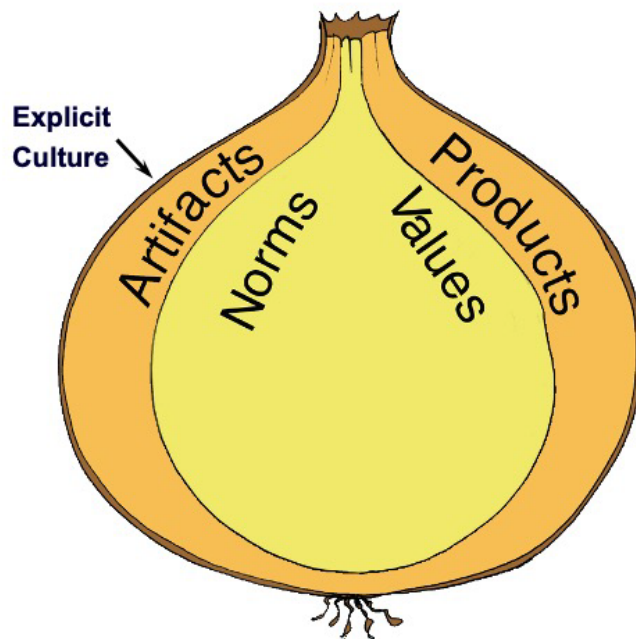
Varying approaches to turn-taking in meetings

Varying styles of giving feedback

Varying styles of reacting to a problem or mistake
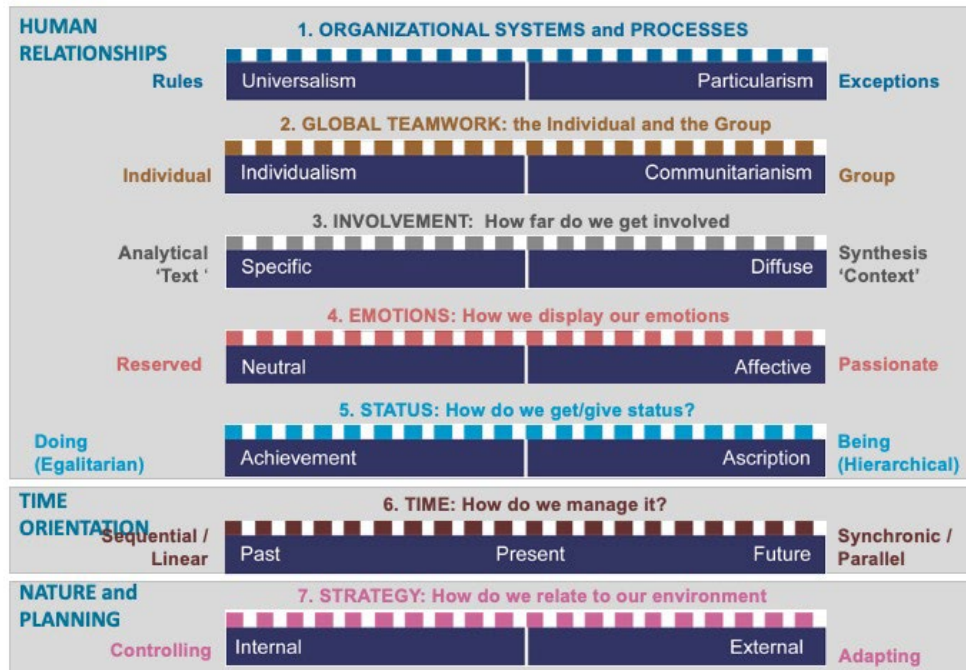

Source: THT Consulting

Culture is a shared systems of meanings and patterns of behavior. It is expressed in the solutions that people have chosen to solving human problems/dilemmas in the areas of:

- **Human Relationships**
- **Time**
- **External environment**

Source: THT Consulting

The Seven Dimensions of Culture — Source: THT Consulting

Cultural Models – how can they help you?

- Onion model
- 7 Dimensions

So what?

- ◻ Meetings
- ◻ Presentations
- ◻ Conf and Video Calls

Successful communication – suggestions for best practice

- ◻ Know your recipient and how they like to receive information

- ◻ Know the terminology used by your recipient e.g. company jargon, words used a lot

- ◻ Send slides/ppt in advance so people can prepare

- ◻ Accurate minutes help to know if everything has been understood. Actions in minutes help to know if information was received appropriately.

- ◻ In a ppt, move sequentially, allow for clarification point by point

- ◻ Be clear on your expectations of the interaction

- ◻ Use video conferencing in preference to just audio – it's easier to build relationships and understand if you can see the person

- ◻ If video/audio conferencing have everyone using a headset

Successful communication – suggestions for best practice

☐ When a NNS doesn't understand don't rephrase immediately, say the same thing again first

☐ Don't use obscure or uncommon words

☐ Keep things simple, don't waffle, be concise

☐ Filter your communication according to the English level of your colleague

☐ Speak slowly, clearly and enunciate your words

☐ Consider forming team agreements as to best practice when something isn't understood in a meeting or presentation

☐ Pay attention to non-verbal cues as well as verbal

☐ Rid your language of slang and colloquialisms, use plain English

☐ Know the national characteristics of the country you are dealing with

Please also consider NNS views:

☐ My language may be structured differently to yours e.g. is that a question or a statement?

☐ I might not understand your humour or banter sometimes, and so I stay quiet

☐ Sometimes I don't understand your colloquialisms or idiom

☐ It can take time to "tune in" to your accent

☐ Sometimes my language does not convey my full meaning, or nuanced meaning

☐ Show interest in our holidays, celebrations and important events

☐ Know that feedback is delivered differently by different cultures (e.g. level of directness)

☐ Knowledge of the English language does not infer a knowledge of UK culture

☐ Speaking in English as a NNS is tiring and challenging

☐ Know there isn't always a direct translation of a word in another language that carries exactly the same meaning

☐ Joining in group discussions, especially informal ones, can be challenging even for a very proficient speaker

Native Speakers of English in international teams would benefit from…

- Being aware of negative emotional effects of having to speak another language, taking action to show empathy and build trust

- Improving linguistic accommodation skills i.e. the ability to adjust language according to the language proficiency of interlocutors (avoiding non-understanding and misunderstanding)

- Improving cultural accommodation skills i.e. the ability to adjust behaviour (verbal and non-verbal) to create a positive and productive intercultural interaction

- Addressing power imbalances due to language proficiency differences

- Recognising that communicating in another language can affect one's behaviour (and others' perception of one's personality)

- Implementing language strategies used proficiently by NNSs e.g. checking, re-checking, negotiating meaning, anticipating misunderstandings, using repetition

- Recognising that NNSs use English creatively and make language innovations

Group work

- How can you improve communication in your international teams during:

Conference and Video Calls

Face to face meetings

Presentations

General team work

Conclusions

- Have you learned anything useful today? If so what?

- What difference do you imagine that making to your practice?

- What else would be interesting for you to know in the context of the NNS/NS interaction?

- What other thoughts and comments would you like to share that are connected with my research?

- What actions will you take as an individual/team based on this workshop?