English as a Lingua Franca in a Dutch Multinational Organization

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Abstract

This paper investigates the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in the Global team of Atradius. ELF is used as a 'contact language' for speakers with different native languages. In this international organization, there is a variety in proficiency and no language policy is currently instated. The study answers the following question: *To what extent is successful and efficient communication reached when English is used as a Lingua Franca within the Global team of Atradius Amsterdam?* This research shows that while participants may indicate that there are no challenges in the communication, a deeper look into the use of ELF, communication strategies and cultural differences can prove otherwise. Additionally, the extent of efficient and successful communication largely depends on the participants' ability to solve these issues presented. Two English native speakers, three non-Dutch non-native speakers, and five Dutch speakers are interviewed about their experiences with cultural differences and using ELF, and how this results in challenges or conflict. The results of the interviews reveal that challenges such as high expectations, confidence levels and native languages can complicate the communication process. Dutch is often used amongst Dutch employees as a result of having no language policy. Additionally, while non-native speakers focus both on correctly sending and receiving of messages by using linguistic competencies, native speakers focus more on sending a message intelligibly. Furthermore, Dutch directness can be a source of misunderstanding as Dutch and non-Dutch people seemingly have different perceptions of 'face'. In the Global team, participants indicate that all challenges in communication are solved, and misunderstanding is hardly ever severe enough to result in conflict. Participants are able to adapt to the other speaker's level, can fix miscommunication, and transfer any message, despite challenges in ELF and cultural differences. This implies that the team reaches efficient and successful communication. Suggestions for multinational companies include bringing awareness to ELF use and cultural differences, assessing newcomers on their proficiency and implementing a language policy to further improve the in- and external communication.

Preface

Recently, I found an old report from primary school in which I stated that when I was older, I'd want to learn all about languages. I wanted to learn English, Spanish, Italian, and many others. This fascination around languages and culture started when I had my first English class at age 10 – I was sold right away. I went to high school and followed bilingual education, went to Australia for an internship, and eventually ended up choosing a bachelor's in English Language and Culture at Utrecht University. Needless to say, this fascination for the English language never left. It offered me a different way of looking at the world and seeing connectivity all around.

When I started my master's in Intercultural Communication, I quickly decided that English as a Lingua Franca was what I wanted to write my thesis about. I was intrigued by the idea of non-native speakers finding a way to communicate by using this common language, and wanted to investigate what this was like in international organizations. Researching the communication at Atradius had thus been a long time coming – all of my educational career, I had been preparing for this.

I would like to give special thanks to the Global team of Atradius for being so welcoming and open. Thank you to the participants for making this research possible by providing their honesty and experiences, to which I listened with great excitement. It was fascinating to listen to their stories and get an inside view of the communication at Atradius. Thank you also to my thesis supervisor Ashley Micklos, who offered me an abundance of time, feedback and encouragement to complete this research. The writing of this thesis did not go without bumps in the road – especially with the COVID-19 currently taking hold of the Netherlands. Therefore, I would like to thank the other ICC teachers and supervisors for being so open and flexible throughout this process. Lastly, thank you to myself, for my continued interest and perseverance while conducting this research.

Kirsten van Enk, Utrecht, April 2020

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Please note that appendices 6 and 7 are not included in this document and are added as the corpus in a separate file.

1. Introduction

There is a continuous rise in labor migrants in the Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek, 2018) and people from in- and outside of Europe are employed at international organizations based in the Netherlands. As Dutch is a relatively unknown language for expatriates, there is a need for a common language in the workplace: a lingua franca. From Roman to Renaissance times, Latin served as the lingua franca across Europe, but nowadays educated Europeans are expected to speak English as a second or third language (Wilton & De Houwer, 2011, p. 5), resulting in English as a lingua franca (ELF). As there are numerous organizations in the Netherlands with both Dutch and international employees, many are using ELF as the business language. Some employees might have little experience speaking English coming into an international organization. This could lead to difficulties in speaking the language and understanding other employees while avoiding miscommunication. Firth (1996) has stated that ELF is merely used as a 'contact language' between people of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This enables the users to communicate through ELF, which is used as a bridge to overcome different backgrounds (p. 240).

An example of an organization with multicultural teams is Atradius – a multinational company of Dutch origin with offices in 54 countries, one of which is located in Amsterdam. They assist the client in determining the buyer's reliability, provide credit insurance for transported goods and work with international trading companies and clients such as Philips. The employees' job requires daily contact with other offices around the world (Atradius, n.d.). A phone conversation with the contact person within Atradius Amsterdam was held on January 8, 2020. He explained that the Global team, of which he is head, manages accounting for international clients. The team is thus in daily contact with clients from all over the world as well as Atradius offices in other countries. Within this team, 5 out of 18 employees are non-Dutch, with varying nationalities. As a result, the primary language used is English, both within the team itself as over the phone and through e-mail with clients and other offices.

During the phone conversation, it was mentioned there are no rules or regulations regarding language use and that there is a varying proficiency of English within the team. When asked about a language policy, the contact person simply said: "we're just doing whatever, really". It is therefore possible that the lack of a language policy and variety in levels of English sometimes result in misunderstandings or inefficiency in the in- and external communication. Although there has been research into how this variation of English is used (Firth, 1990; Firth 1996; Jenkins, 2009a; Jenkins, 2009b; Lochland, 2017), very little research concerns ELF use in a primarily Dutch environment, which could mean that it is applied

differently. This research shows that while participants may indicate that there are no challenges in the communication, a deeper look into the use of ELF, communication strategies and cultural differences can prove otherwise. Additionally, the extent of efficient and successful communication largely depends on the participants' ability to solve these issues presented.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section contains a literature review of the main theories that are used to investigate ELF use within Atradius. Firstly, an overview of ELF is presented. Afterwards, communication strategies are linked to ELF use and expand on how it is used in conversation, after which language policy and conflict resolution theory is introduced. Next, theory about cultural aspects and the concept of face is discussed. Lastly, the research questions are presented.

2.1 English as a Lingua Franca

ELF allows the Expanding Circle of English-speaking countries to seek connectivity in the modern world (Pakir, 2009, p. 233), where the Expanding Circle is the sphere of countries teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) as a means of communication with Inner circles (where English is a native language) and Outer circles (where English is not the mother tongue, but one of the main languages) of Englishes (Mollin, 2006, p. 41) (see Figure 1). This need for connectivity and ELF providing a bridge in communication between speakers with different native languages explains why mistakes in ELF are not deemed important, as efficiency is often deemed more important than linguistic accuracy. Additionally, interference from the speaker's first language or other known languages, as well as features that are generated during language acquisition, often characterize the formal features of ELF (Backus et al., 2013, p. 193). This variety of English therefore differs from Standard English in such a prominent way that external expectations to "adhere to native speaker norms" (Backus et al., 2013, p. 193) do not apply.

Although speakers' native languages have an effect on ELF, the variation is still often compared to Standard English and some sociolinguists see it as "an inferior kind of English" (Jenkins, 2011, p. 926). It is therefore unsurprising that American and British English remain the most desirable forms (Jenkins, 2011, p. 926). These expectations can also be present for non-native speakers in their use of ELF. However, while it is often believed that native
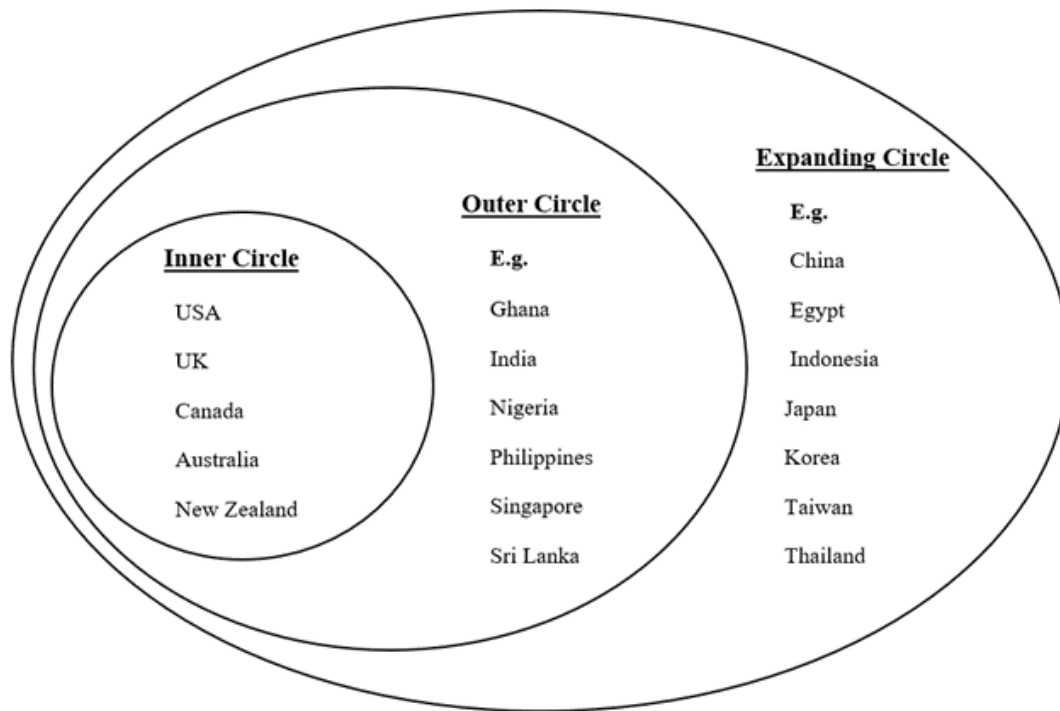
Figure 1: Circles of English

speakers do not participate in ELF, it is suggested according to the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE) that ELF is "an additionally acquired language system which serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages" (as quoted in Jenkins, 2011, p. 929). This means that for native speakers, this extra language system can be acquired and can differ from their native English use. They are thus also expected to make accommodations, according to the ELF language system, in order to facilitate successful communication with non-native speakers.

It has been established that even though ELF is a variety of Standard English, the standards for ELF are not as high. However, Keto (2019) argues that native speakers agree a standard of English should be maintained. They express their appreciation towards non-native speakers' efforts, along with the idea that it is hard to learn a foreign language perfectly. This reflects a "prescriptive ideology" of the use of English (Keto, 2019, pp. 53-54), meaning they believe that Standard English is the norm. In the study, a slight majority of native speakers also agree that non-native speakers' mistakes should be corrected, which indicates that these native speakers see non-native speakers as learners of English, instead of ELF speakers (Keto, 2019, p. 55). Keto (2019) concluded that native speakers do not realize there is a difference between ELF and EFL, meaning they think all non-native speakers are users of a foreign language instead of speakers of a separate language system (pp. 84-85). Overall, certain expectations can be placed upon non-native speakers to adhere to Standard English norms.

This can also be seen in English language teaching (ELT), where mostly General American (GA) and Received Pronunciation (RP) are taught. According to Jenkins (2009b), there is a fascination around RP and it is the preferred accent by non-native speakers (p. 11), even in ELF contexts where no native speakers are participants in the communication. This expectation, which has become accepted in society and education, can make non-native speakers critical of their own use of English. Speaking with an RP accent might be considered more professional and educated. However, non-native speakers have found GA and RP accents more difficult to understand than other non-native speaker accents (Jenkins, 2009b, p. 12), which has the potential to damage intelligibility in the communication process. The Lingua Franca Core identifies four features of ELF that are linked solely to pronunciation and can influence intelligibility: consonant sounds, vowel length, consonant omission (e.g. at the beginning of or in the middle of words) and stress production and placement (Jenkins, 2000, as quoted in Jenkins, 2009b, p. 12). These pronunciation features are often influenced by a speaker's native language and can lead to more difficulty in understanding if the other speaker is not familiar with the linguistic properties of that particular language.

2.2 Communication Strategies

The communication process between employees in multicultural teams yet goes beyond just their ELF. According to Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009), the language is not the most important part of getting a message across in an intercultural interaction. They state that in an intercultural setting, the sending and receiving of the message comes with challenges, because the inferring of meanings can differ due to culture and background, whereby speakers arrive at different meanings according to the clues they picked up that comply with their cultural framework (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 82), since much of a verbal message has to be deciphered by the recipient. Having a different cultural framework can lead to another interpretation of what was said, instead of what was meant by the speaker. Chen, Geluykens and Choi (2006) state that in global teams, the "conceptual schemes or word associations" (p. 684) are linked to the linguistic backgrounds of the team members, and will thus elicit different associations with a word as well as different understandings of what was said. The associations from the native language are even carried along when using a common language (Chen et al., 2006, p. 684) such as ELF. For example, Flory (1998, as quoted in Chen et al., 2006) describes how in a multilingual research team, the term 'commitment' was causing problems: "We thought that 'commitment' meant the same to everybody […] After I asked each member to describe what commitment meant to him or her, I received a different

definition from each one of them" (p. 684). A common frame of reference built by negotiation can prevent these mismatches of interpretation that result in miscommunications.

To achieve successful message communication, Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) argue that there are a few competencies that can help, such as linguistic accommodation (simplifying), structuring and highlighting of information (repetition or clarification), discourse markers (such as *next* or *first*), and active listening (asking for clarification, checking for correct understanding or repairing misunderstandings) (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, pp. 85-87). Additionally, they acknowledge that native or fluent speakers of English often accommodate to the proficiency of the other speaker, for example by avoiding contractions (such as *I'll* or *shouldn't've*), increasing redundancy and repetition, speaking slower and clearer than usual, restricting the range of their vocabulary, and avoiding slang or idioms (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 86). Backus et al. (2013) argue that ELF users often adjust their way of speaking according to the other speaker's level by constantly monitoring the interaction and changing their pace or grammar, in order to reach mutual understanding (p. 194). This could help increase effectivity in the communication as the less proficient interlocutor is more likely to understand the message. Using these methods in an intercultural interaction can then help both speakers to reach successful communication. Linguistic competencies therefore play a considerable part in interaction between different cultures in a lingua franca.

Another challenge could be that the organization this takes place in might consist of a lot of 'new speakers', which Darquennes and Soler (2018) define as "active users of a minority language that did not acquire that language as a native language" (p. 2). New speakers who lack confidence regarding their proficiency might also have trouble partaking in meetings or discussions held in the minority language (House, as quoted in Chen et al., 2006, p. 683). In a study on Korean students learning English as their second language (L2), it was shown that low confidence levels correlated to lower oral performance levels and that self-image of language potential and communication confidence in particular influenced the performance (Park & Lee, 2005, pp. 205-206). This can end up being a vicious cycle, as low performance in turn can cause more doubts in one's own ability to use a language.

2.3 Language Policy

When multiple nationalities work together, an aid for effective communication is that the organization uses a clear language policy. Spolsky (2007) describes the goal of a language policy as to "account for the regular choices made by individual speakers on the basis of

patterns established in the speech community or communities of which they are members" (p. 1). He explains that this is necessary for speakers who tend to shift to another variety, or in this case, another language (Spolsky, 2007, p. 1). Multiple people with the same native tongue might prefer communicating in this language rather than in ELF, especially if the latter is not easy for them.

The language policy within multinational companies (MNCs) often consists of a parent company language, which is spoken by the majority of employees in the headquarters of the company and is often the language of the country the company was founded in; a common corporate language, which nowadays is often ELF; and multiple foreign (local) languages primarily spoken by employees in subsidiary offices in other countries (Thomas, 2007, p. 83). Within Atradius, it could be the case that Dutch is often spoken in the office, as a majority of employees are native Dutch speakers. As external contact (such as e-mail and telephone conversations with offices in other countries) happens in ELF, this is the common corporate language.

This language switching, converting from one language to another, is often unintentional, but can result in language-based exclusion, negative feelings amongst coworkers and a negative effect on knowledge-sharing within a team (Kulkarni, 2015, pp. 139-140). Ahmad and Widén (2018) argue that there can be a negative view on language switching because the corporate language is the norm – if this is deviated from, some interlocutors are omitted from the conversation (pp. 358-359). They can feel excluded or like they are being talked about, according to Hinds et al. (as quoted in Ahmad & Widén, 2018, p. 359). In an organization such as Atradius, the majority of employees could have a tendency to speak Dutch amongst each other. This could thus harm the knowledge-sharing within the team and create a language based in-group (Kulkarni, 2015, p. 131), as information that might be important will not be transferred to internationals and it can elicit negative emotions and distrust amongst colleagues.

2.4 Conflict Resolution Strategies

Establishing set rules on what languages can be spoken in what instances might therefore reduce the chances of conflict and challenges in the communication. In case of conflict, Miller (2015) shows that taking cultural background into account can be crucial to the resolution. She states that culture and ethnicity can play a role in how the conflict is enacted and managed, as people with certain cultural values might be more direct, while others might want to avoid conflict (Miller, 2015, pp. 170-171). Thomas (1976, as quoted in

Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, pp. 123-124) suggests there are five orientations towards conflict resolution:

- Neglect: avoidance or indifference towards the conflict
- Appeasement: high concern for the interests of the other
- Compromise: least satisfactory for both parties; intermediate between appeasement and domination
- Domination: represents a desire to win at the other's expense
- Integration: a problem-solving orientation with a desire to integrate concerns of either side

It is suggested that these orientations can be influenced by culture. For instance, East-Asian countries can have a preference for neglecting conflict – however, this can result in a satisfactory resolution of the issue in the long term (Friedman, Chi & Liu, as quoted in Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 125) by taking notes for future reference. Dutch people, according to Tjosvold and De Dreu (1997) prefer talking openly to discuss and combine opposing views to "solve underlying problems" (p. 2223), which suggests a more integration-focused approach. The five orientations can thus be preferred by people of varying backgrounds and result in people in an international organization having a different approach in conflict resolution.

2.5 Cultural Aspects and Face

Cultural background can influence what people consider to be 'polite'. It is often said that Dutch people are direct and straightforward, and since the Global team consists of mostly Dutch employees, this could cause problems for internationals. Mellaard (2008) states that in Dutch organizations, informality is seen as the norm (p. 49). Voicing one's opinion or asking others to do so is common, and Dutch people tend to prefer directness in personal opinions as this shows honesty and virtue (White and Boucke, as quoted in Mellaard, 2008, p. 51). Directness could thus be linked to a need for effective communication. However, this mismatch of expectations regarding politeness and directness could threaten the face of non-Dutch employees. Brown and Levinson (1978) describe the concept of 'face' as "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (p. 66). It entails the public self-image of speakers, which consists of two aspects: negative face (the desire to not be imposed upon by others) and positive face (the desire to be liked, admired or related to positively by others) (Brown &

Levinson, 1978, p. 67; Brown, 1980, p. 84). This means that politeness corresponds with negative face, as one does not want to be imposed upon. This can be prevented by polite phrasing, such as 'You couldn't by any chance tell me the time, could you?' instead of 'Tell me the time' (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 64). Phrases such as the latter could be considered rude, as it contains a command form rather than a tag question (*could/couldn't you*), and result in a face-threatening act (FTA), meaning one speaker might be embarrassed or offended, which causes face-loss. Acts that threaten a positive face could include disagreements, disapproval or criticism, expression of emotion or bringing of bad news, whereas a negative face can be threatened by unwarranted suggestions and advice, requests to do something, or warnings and dares. Some of these FTA's overlap and threaten both the positive and negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1978, pp. 70-72). Furthermore, rational interlocutors attempt to avoid FTA's or minimize the threat, since the face is mutually vulnerable. This process occurs in regular conversations as well as in conflict-like contexts. Dutch people are considered straightforward and unafraid to voice their opinion, which can mean that there is a different sense of face compared to those of other cultures, especially those that are known for their indirectness, such as Great-Britain. This can cause mismatches in strategies to minimize FTA's and how misunderstandings are solved according to the unspoken politeness rules of each culture.

Cultural backgrounds can thus have an effect on communication in an intercultural context. When employees cross borders to work in another country, this sudden change of environment can result in a culture shock. According to Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) this can result in a sense of loss with respect to status or friends, feelings of helplessness, irritation about practices in the new environment, and feelings of isolation (p. 152). This can occur if the new culture differs substantially from the culture that one is accustomed to and carries psychological ramifications. However, when people of multiple cultural backgrounds are working together, there is a possibility of forming a discursive interculture. This is a separate culture derived from those of the employees, in which interculture is defined as "an intermediate culture which shares properties of both home culture and host culture, independent of whether those properties are shared between the cultures-in-contact" (Ekstrand et al., as quoted in Koole & ten Thije, 2001, p. 575). This phenomenon can be formed over time by "the actors' interactive construction of a discursive common ground" (Koole & Ten Thije, 2001, p. 583), and results in a new kind of culture that has aspects of all cultures involved in this process.

2.6 Research Questions

Since the Global team within Atradius consists of primarily Dutch people as well as internationals, the use of ELF determines a large part of their daily communication in- and externally. In order to investigate this, the following research questions have been formulated:

To what extent is successful and efficient communication reached when English is used as a Lingua Franca within the Global team of Atradius Amsterdam?
1. *What kinds of challenges in the communication can be identified?*
2. *What processes are used to solve these challenges?*

The two sub-questions will aid in answering the main research question, as they will reveal how challenges in communication appear, and how employees fix them. This overview of challenges and solutions then provides a clear depiction of the extent of successful and efficient communication. However, to facilitate answering the main research question, successful and efficient communication must be defined. In this study it is determined by the participants' ability to adapt to each other's linguistic level, to fix failure in communication, and to correctly transfer the message to another speaker in the end. If these three requirements are met, successful and efficient communication will have been reached. This definition is based on the theory discussed above.

This research can provide insight into the use of ELF in international organizations based in the Netherlands, specifically Atradius in Amsterdam, and will contribute to a better understanding of how ELF is used in organizational settings.

3. Method

This research was carried out in ten weeks. For this reason, only a qualitative analysis was used to investigate the issue at hand. With the use of semi-structured interviews, important topics could be addressed and this allowed the researcher to go into depth on specific topics. Kvale (1997) argues that this method of research is structured and contains a purpose "to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (as quoted in Dörnyei, 2007, p. 134). The experiences of the participants with regards to the difficulties and communication strategies using ELF were therefore the main focus of the interviews. For this research, an inter- and multilingual approach was adopted. Ten Thije (2016) states that this approach is often used to learn "how speakers and hearers cope with linguistic norms and how the maintenance of these

norms determines mutual understanding" (p. 7). Due to a diverse range of languages within the Global team and the use of ELF to communicate, the inter- and multilingual approach can shine light on how communicative challenges in ELF appear, how they can be solved, and thus, what determines effective communication.

3.1 Participants

Ten employees within the Global team of Atradius Amsterdam were interviewed during this research (see Table 1). Atradius Amsterdam was found as a research location as an acquaintance of the researcher had previously followed an internship there, and had shared information about the use of ELF within the team. Through e-mail contact, the team was asked if they would consider participating in the research. Upon agreement, ten participants were selected to be interviewed.

Five of the interviewees were non-Dutch, in order to provide insight on perspectives of the different nationalities within the team. Two of these were native English speakers, one being from Wales, and the other from South Africa. The other three non-Dutch participants were Spanish, French and Albanian. The last five participants were Dutch. The participants were randomly selected by the head of the Global team, with the requirements that half would be non-Dutch.

Participant 3 has been working at Atradius for seven years and was the first international added to the team. Some Dutch participants have been working there for over 15 years and have experienced the shift from Dutch to English on the work floor. This has also been addressed during the interviews. The team consists of 18 people, which means more than half have been interviewed. This offered more depth to the analysis.

Participant	Nationality	Native Language
Participant 1	Welsh	Welsh/English
Participant 2	South African	English
Participant 3	Spanish	Spanish
Participant 4	French	French
Participant 5	Albanian	Albanian
Participant 6	Dutch	Dutch
Participant 7	Dutch	Dutch
Participant 8	Dutch	Dutch
Participant 9	Dutch	Dutch
Participant 10	Dutch	Dutch

Table 1: Participants

3.2 Materials

The interviews were transcribed using Word 2016 and coded with NVivo 12 Pro. A coding tree was developed with the help of the topic list and added to throughout the process of coding inductively, in order to analyze the main categories from the coding tree: the use of ELF, communication difficulties, and cultural differences.

3.3 Procedure

Firstly, a topic list was be developed (see Appendix 1) that was based on literature on ELF and communication strategies, conflict resolution and cultural aspects. From this topic list, the interview questions were developed (see Appendix 2). The goal of the interviews was to have participants reveal how they deal with communication difficulties when using ELF, for instance, whether the competencies mentioned by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, pp. 85-87) are applied in conversation, and how they deal with instances where they feel they are being misunderstood. Other questions addressed if miscommunication has ever led to conflict in the team and explored the effect of cultural differences. Resolving conflicts could i.e. involve the five orientations mentioned by Thomas (1976, as quoted in Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, pp. 123-124). This information aids in finding answers to sub-questions 1 and 2, and therefore leads to answering the main research question.

All participants were presented with an information letter (see Appendix 3) and an informed consent form (see Appendix 4) to inform them of the anonymization of all results, their right to withdraw from the research at any time, and to provide them with any information required. All interviews were conducted in English in order to maintain an equal standard for all participants. Since the researcher only speaks Dutch and English, allowing Dutch participants to use their native language when international employees would not be able to, would have created an uneven standard. However, all Dutch participants were allowed to elaborate in Dutch if they felt they were not proficient enough to clarify in English. None of them did, and the interviews were held in English completely.

Two visits to the office were planned, on the 14th and 17th of February, 2020. During both visits 5 interviews were held to optimize the time of both the researcher and the participants. The interviews were between 20 and 30 minutes in length and were recorded using a laptop. After transcription, NVivo 12 Pro aided in analyzing the interviews.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered during the interviews was first transcribed and coded. The initial coding tree was developed deductively from the previously mentioned theory that led to the topic list – however, it was altered and added on to throughout the process of coding to ensure that it would encompass all information and contain the correct (sub)categories. This also led to the three main categories of participants: the Dutch participants, the native English speakers, and the non-Dutch, non-native English speakers (hereafter referred to as 'non-Dutch' participants). This distinction was made to compare the three categories: since the research takes place in the Netherlands, the experience of the Dutch participants might differ from the other participants. Additionally, the experience of using ELF likely differs between native speakers and non-native speakers. In order to account for these differences, the interviews were coded separately, then compared to explore differences in answers.

The deductive coding tree was used as a basis for the separate coding trees for the three participant categories (see Appendix 5). All three coding trees were added to during coding. Three main categories emerged: ELF use, communication problems and cultural differences. The first main category, ELF use, addressed the view of participants on ELF - what their expectations were, how important mistakes and the general level of English were, and the influence of the native language. The second main category, communication problems, involved conflicts, misunderstandings and how the participants resolved these. This category included how participants made themselves understood under 'competencies'. The last main category, cultural differences, addressed the main cultural aspects that were mentioned by participants with respect to communication. This also encompassed 'Dutch directness'. The full transcriptions of the interviews and examples of the coding and categorization can be found in Appendix 6 and 7, respectively.

The analysis of the data was done through the comparison of the three sets of participants and their answers regarding the main categories.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

The results of this research are limited in terms of validity in the sense that they are not generalizable. Golafshani (2003) mentions in regard to validity in qualitative research that "the quality of a research is related to generalizability of the result and thereby to the testing and increasing the validity or trustworthiness of the research" (p. 603). Since there was only one organization considered and only ten participants were interviewed, there is no possibility of generalizing these results and obtaining the same results in a different study cannot be

guaranteed. However, the topic list and interview questions can aid in duplicating this study in another setting. The reliability of the study was ensured by recording and transcribing the interviews.

4. Results

In the following chapter, the results of the interviews are outlined. The three different categories of participants mentioned are native English speakers (participant 1 and 2), non-Dutch (participants 3-5) and Dutch (participants 6-10). The examples provided have not been altered after the transcription process and might therefore be grammatically incorrect. Any changes made are shown in square brackets. The examples will be shown according to the three main categories that emerged through coding the interviews: the use of ELF, communication difficulties and cultural aspects.

4.1 The Use of ELF

Firstly, how ELF is used on the work floor is demonstrated. This section outlines what the expectations of the participants are, both for themselves and for others, how the level of English is perceived, how confidence influences the ELF and what role the native language plays.

4.1.1 Expectations

When asked about their expectations of ELF during the interviews, the non-Dutch participants indicated a certain level of frustration when the other speaker's level was not up to par:

(1)
P3: I don't say anything to them, but yeah I get pissed. Because yeah, I had to learn English to work here, why didn't they? That's a little bit what I think. I think everybody should speak, if you're working in an international company, where English is a requirement, everybody should have in my views, a minimal level.

Two Dutch participants, when asked about this same issue, explained why the expectations might be high, as they are working at a certain level:

(2)
P6: But it's also because you're on a certain level, hè. […] Because the language is English of course. So I assume that they understand me. And we're the global department so a lot of the companies are multinationals, so yeah. I assume that they understand me.

(3)
P8: The selection for us to work for our global department is already that <u>you are at least able to understand English. And that you're able to write English. And talk English</u>.

It is a necessity for employees to have a certain level of English since they are in daily contact with international clients and offices, as mentioned by this native speaker:

(4)
P1: Everybody is like expected to be able to speak quite good English. Because everybody's dealing with other offices around the world, either by phone or email.

Participant 10, a Dutch participant, mentions why it is so important for the team to make themselves understood, as the success of the negotiation depends on it:

(5)
P10: Every day we have to get messages across, hè, we take decisions on behalf of our clients every day. So it's not once a year that we negotiate something, it's every day, we talk about the cover that we provide to the clients, and <u>how you get that message across is whether you will be successful or not. If you cannot bring your argument across in a professional way, then clients are unhappy</u>.

This person also indicates that the expectations for themselves are to be at the level of a native speaker. Because of the magnitude of the clients, participant 10 expresses there is no room to be careless:

(6)
P10: So there you cannot afford to be a little bit sloppy, or not quite spot on.

Both Dutch and non-Dutch participants indicate certain expectations of themselves to speak at this level. Participant 8, one of the Dutch participants, mentions that it is very important, as the Netherlands is only a small country:

(7)
I: How important do you feel it is to be as good at English as [native speakers]?
P8: How important it is? <u>I think it's very important, because we're just like a small country, and we have to do business with other countries</u>, so, Dutch is not a world language, at all, unfortunately. So yeah, that's why <u>I think for us it's really important to master the English language</u>. As good as possible.

Non-Dutch participant 3 indicates that this could be because of a linguistic disadvantage non-native speakers have:

(8)
P3: <u>If you meet with people from UK, you see that you are a little bit below</u>, but not because you cannot say what you want, […] you just don't use the same words that they do. <u>So you have a little bit of a disadvantage, not being native</u>.

The native speakers, however, do not mind that others are not a similar level:

(9)
P2: It's not their native language, so you just need to understand that.

Even though the level of English should be high according to the Dutch and non-Dutch participants, most indicate having no issues with any sort of mistakes by their peers, largely by reflecting on their own abilities. They mention that they are not native, so they would not expect others to be either:

(10)
I: Do you ever get annoyed with someone else's use of English, if it's not, either grammatically correct or the pronunciation is wrong?
P7: No.
I: Why not?
P7: <u>Because maybe they have the same issues with me. So I'm not perfect, I do my best, but uh, if somebody is doing his best, what can he do to make it better?</u>

(11)
I: Do you ever get annoyed at someone else's use of English? When they're not using it correctly?
P4: No, not at all. <u>Not at all because myself I'm not using it correctly most of the time</u>.

Non-Dutch participant 5, nonetheless, indicates frustration at times, when people do not use correct English and missing context is crucial to the understanding of the message:

(12)
P5: In the moment, you get frustrated. But you cannot really say anything because you cannot be annoyed that he used uh, 'the' and not 'that'.

When asked about the importance of correct language, Dutch participant 10 expressed that it can determine the success of the communication:

(13)
P10: It's very important. Because it makes or breaks how serious your message is taken. <u>You can have a really serious message to get across, and if you use the wrong words for that, it's totally, it loses the weight of the message</u>. Spoken, and written, it applies in both situations.

Both native speakers indicate that mistakes in face-to-face communication were not important to them, as they feel mostly appreciation towards non-native speakers:

> (14)
> P2: I actually, I more have an appreciation towards the fact that they're attempting to speak English for me.

The expectations of participants overall are high. They expect their peers to speak correct English and compare themselves to a native speaker level, but they indicate mostly not being displeased by any mistakes made, as long as the message is sent and received correctly. Native speakers are more tolerant to a lower level of English as they feel appreciative of the fact that people are attempting to adapt to 'their' language.

4.1.2 The Level of English

Regarding the general level of English within the Netherlands, all non-Dutch and native speaker participants agree that the standards are high compared to other countries:

> (15)
> P3: I would say here in Amsterdam, the level of people is very good. Both Dutch and non-Dutch, English is fantastic. It's more when you're calling people from other units, from other countries. You know, if I call another team.

> (16)
> P2: I find the people here with the English being very good.

When asked about their own proficiency however, most Dutch and non-Dutch participants were critical. Some indicate needing to improve their English:

> (17)
> P7: I will follow this year, an extra course from business English, talking and writing, so I can find out where I can improve myself.

> (18)
> P4: More professional, but yeah, I want to improve my, uh, my vocabulary, I want to use different kind of words and, so yeah. I need to improve it.

Dutch participant 10 mentions why he feels it is important to improve, as a low level of English can be linked to unprofessionalism:

> (19)
> P10: I also think that people are unprofessional when they speak crappy English.

Even though these non-native speaker participants feel the need to improve, none of them took a course provided by the company at the start of their employment. Dutch participant 7 is the only person to mention any kind of assessment:

> (20)
> I: Did you receive any training or an assessment?
> P7: No, not really. <u>We just had uh, a job interview, we did it in Dutch and halfway, the interview was switched to English</u>. If my English was good enough.

In addition to this, Dutch participant 8 mentions why taking a training or being assessed on the level of English is not common in the global team, as it is expected that English skills are adequate:

> (21)
> P8: I think when you apply for a job within global, <u>they expect that you are able to speak English</u>.

Overall, the level of English is thought to be quite high, but non-native participants feel they need to improve to avoid being seen as unprofessional. There is no assessment of the English level with new employees, however, courses are made available by the company if there is a wish to take one.

4.1.3 Confidence

While most participants judge the level of English to be quite good, some non-Dutch participants mention that their confidence can obstruct communication at times. Participant 4 and 5 explain that when they started at Atradius, they were facing difficulties and not participating in communication as much:

> (22)
> P4: The lack of confidence, and I was less uh, <u>I was engaging less in conversation, I was maybe a little bit more shy, you know, in meetings at the beginning because I did not have the level of confidence I have now</u>. I was not sure about my English.

> (23)
> P5: I was the typical girl that was shy, and that before saying anything, I was thinking it like uh, twenty times or something like that.

Both participants indicate that this improved the longer they worked there and that experience with speaking English daily was helpful. Non-Dutch participant 3, however, mentions doubts about his own level that are still relevant:

(24)
P3: I can say what I want, I just cannot be a brilliant maybe as I would like to.

This statement was made in comparison to a native speaker. This participant also mentions that when he receives an opportunity to use his native language, he feels more confident because he has more control:

(25)
I: You would switch to [native language] when you're on the phone with them?
P3: Yeah.
I: And do you feel like that makes a difference?
P3: Yeah, sometimes it of course, […] if I get to do it in my own language then I can shine more than in English, because you have more control.

This seems to be a more efficient way of communicating for non-Dutch participant 5 as well, who mentions the fluency of communication:

(26)
P5: I have two other colleagues who are [nationality], but they are in different departments so sometimes when I need something from there I just pick up the phone and then [native language], quick, fast, done.

Participants indicate that a lower confidence level in a second language (L2) influences their engagement levels in conversations and discussions, but this seems to reduce with experience. However, when they have the opportunity to switch to their native languages, they feel it is more efficient and they are more confident.

4.1.4 Native Languages

Just as the non-Dutch participants use their native language at times, the Dutch participants do too. Participant 6 mentions doing this when he is having trouble expressing himself in English:

(27)
P6: The majority in our department in the Netherlands speaks Dutch so. If it's really something difficult you can just use Dutch.

Non-Dutch participants mention that language switching between Dutch and English happens quite a lot. Dutch participant 10 also indicates that this happens unintentionally at times:

(28)
P10: What happens sometimes, that we are on a call for instance, with a client, and it's always in English, and <u>afterwards we're sitting still in the office with two or three Dutch people, and we continue to talk in English</u>. Because we forget that it's just us.

According to non-Dutch participants, Dutch employees are quite skilled at regulating this use of Dutch. They express that this hardly ever caused issues, as Dutch people can separate the situations:

(29)
P5: When it's not work related they speak in Dutch. Because probably it's easier for them. <u>When it's something that they would like us to hear as well, it's in English of course. They know how to separate the situations</u>.

When asked if the non-Dutch participants were displeased by their colleagues using another language, all indicated that this was not the case. They feel that it is necessary that the Dutch are allowed to use their own language:

(30)
P4: I'm living in your country, they are obliged to speak English when I'm in a meeting only with Dutch persons, […] <u>I mean if they want to speak Dutch between each other and I don't understand, I mean, it's perfectly fine for me, it's normal, they're in their country, they need to speak their language as well</u>.

(31)
P2: I've actually found it quite nice to have dialogues around me in a different language where <u>I can kind of, can switch off a little bit because I know it's not regarding me</u>.

All participants agree that Dutch speakers make a constant effort to switch languages when a non-Dutch speaker is present:

(32)
P1: Usually if you have someone who is an English speaker at the table, or non-Dutch speaker at the table, they would switch to English, that usually causes no trouble.

(33)
P9: I think that has something to do with the culture here. <u>When someone international is present, we just talk English.</u> It doesn't matter if there are like five Dutch guys, or. It doesn't matter, no.

Dutch participant 7 claims that this switch was easy to make out of respect for the other person. Despite this, he also indicates having trouble separating the two languages:

(34)
P7: You think Dutch and I have to translate it in English, so the way you make the sentences is not always correct. So I notice for myself I don't think English. If you think English, the words will come out easier. So the constant translation in your mind.

This is similar for other Dutch participants. The non-Dutch participants also feel that their native language has some influence over their use of English, that shows in their speed or accent:

(35)
P3: As a [native language] speaker, you tend to speak very fast, because that's how we speak.

(36)
P4: People accept my [native language], very [native language] accent, and I'm not ashamed of it. At the beginning I was like, I'm going to try to work on my accent, and have a better, an English accent, you know. But now I don't care, I like my [native language] accent, it's cool.

Non-Dutch participant 4 mentions that while his accent plays a role in his pronunciation, it is part of his identity. This is agreed upon by non-Dutch participant 3. While native languages seem to have an influence over English use, and Dutch participants express using Dutch quite a lot, this does not seem to have effects for the communication.

4.2 Communication Difficulties

The following section outlines any communication difficulties participants have had, whether this has resulted in conflicts or irritation and how they have dealt with this.

4.2.1 Conflicts

Most participants indicate conflicts and irritations are rare in their department. However, non-Dutch participant 4 mentions that misunderstandings can sometimes cause frustration:

(37)
P4: It depends on the situation of course, but of course it gives you irritation because I'm like, I want to finish this as soon as possible, but if I'm having trouble understanding you, then you try to, most of the cases it's not me, it's just the language that they, the accent that they use.

Dutch participant 6 states that irritation hardly ever happens, but hypothetically it could occur when understanding takes too much time:

(38)
P6: Why should you be irritated about it. <u>Maybe it's when you ask for the fiftieth time, I don't understand, can you explain again, maybe that's an irritation</u> but nah, I never felt irritation or something.

When asked how participants would resolve these hypothetical kinds of conflicts, native speaker participant 2 reveals quite an indirect approach by giving hints that he would prefer his colleagues to speak English:

(39)
P2: I would probably go up to the person, <u>let's say when two people are speaking Dutch and I've felt that I would prefer them to be speaking English at that time</u>, I would probably let the conversation end and then <u>afterwards I would go up to my colleague and I would just be like, would you mind filling me in on what you guys just spoke about?</u> And then that would maybe <u>give him the hint that, next time speak English</u>.

In contrast, Dutch participant 7 states that conflicts are mostly solved quickly, and shows an indirect approach:

(40)
P7: If there's a problem, <u>we don't sit on it […] for two, three weeks, and then say, hey, do you mind if I tell you something now?</u> Like, hey, this is not, you made a mistake or this, or that. So it is nice, because nothing stays in the air.

Although conflicts and irritations are not frequent in the Global team, the participants thus indicate that it is possible when the communication takes too long. Resolution could consist of either an indirect or a direct approach. Since the examples given were hypothetical, this is not a direct representation of the experiences of the participants.

4.2.2 Misunderstandings

Almost all participants state that miscommunication mostly happens in phone conversations. Most have difficulty in communication with other countries, and Dutch and non-Dutch participants struggle with strong accents in particular:

(41)
P4: I have issues with uh, sometimes with people who are from Wales, when I call them on the phone, <u>people from Cardiff, the accent is difficult sometimes. And with also Indian people</u>, I'm struggling big time.

(42)
P8: <u>When I talk to a colleague from Asia, or from south of Europe, more like that, like Spanish colleagues, they talk quite fast, and then I'm like, uh, what?</u> Can you slow it down, or can you just repeat it, because this is ridiculously fast.

In resolving these kinds of misunderstandings, some Dutch and non-Dutch participants prefer taking the meaning from the context of the conversation or asking for clarification:

> (43)
> P4: <u>I try to catch as much words as possible, to make a link between the words</u> and to understand what the person is saying.

> (44)
> P7: You ask what, I missed what you just said. Or if I miss only one word, the rest of the sentence can fill in the word that I missed.

The native speakers indicate that there could be misunderstandings when they used slang:

> (45)
> P2: You know you have your slang of different countries, so it's not really the English language I think uh, <u>sometimes the slang gets misinterpreted</u>.

They state that this can be resolved by restricting their language and sticking to phrases that were more known to non-native speakers. Additionally, if a misunderstanding with a Dutch person would occur, the native speakers mentioned they would contact someone familiar with English as well as Dutch to facilitate mediation:

> (46)
> P1: Somebody who knows, <u>who obviously is native Dutch and can explain it in that language, but would understand what I was trying to say</u> as well.

In resolving misunderstandings, native speakers tend to focus most on simplifying their language, speaking slowly and clearly and structuring the information:

> (47)
> P2: <u>I try to target the key facts of the conversation</u>, so, bring it down to like a business chat, so <u>mention things that they'll be aware of</u>, that, you know even if, because they work in Atradius they'll know of the terms.

Dutch and non-Dutch participants, however, focus more on asking clarification and checking whether the other person has received the message by active listening:

> (48)
> P8: Just ask, do you understand? Do you understand what I say? Can you repeat what I said? Can you explain to me what I explained to you?

> (49)
> P3: You have the feeling that he's not getting it, <u>you ask him basically do you understand?</u>

Furthermore, they repeat or rephrase what they said and ask the other person to do so as well. Simplifying the language is also visible in the non-native speaker group:

> (50)
> P5: Usually <u>my English is very, very simple</u>. It's not that I use like, big words, or like uh, say something out of context that they would not understand. <u>But I try to keep it as simple as possible.</u>

> (51)
> P10: Do not use too complicated words, that's really something that I say to my team too, because some of them are very good, and they want to show that they are very good by using a lot of complicated terms and long sentences, et cetera. <u>So my advice to them is always, for emails, email is very important here, keep it simple. If you make it too good, it's not good.</u> It's not a work of art, <u>you have to keep it simple. Short and simple. And also, the same applies when you speak to people.</u> I try to be clear.

Another method of solving miscommunication, which is not seen with the native speakers, is that Dutch and non-Dutch participants tend to switch to another medium to ensure the message is received correctly:

> (52)
> P4: If I don't understand something and it's important, I would always ask to receive an email or something.

Miscommunications are thus mainly caused by strong accents when speaking on the phone and the use of unknown language by native speakers. Non-native participants solve this by listening to the context, ensuring both sides have understood what was said, simplifying their own language and switching to another medium. Native speakers tend to focus on simplifying and speaking slower and clearer, as well as restricting their language by not using slang. All participants indicated rephrasing and repeating what they said. These tactics are claimed to aid in solving miscommunications on the work floor as well as in external communication.

4.3 Cultural Aspects

Lastly, cultural aspects and how these influence communication are outlined. This section features 'Dutch directness' in particular, and shows the differences in perception between Dutch, non-Dutch and native speaker participants.

4.3.1 Cultural Differences

General cultural differences within the Global team were hardly noticed, although Dutch participant 10 states that for international employees, coming to Amsterdam can be quite a culture shock:

> (53)
> P10: I know that it wasn't easy for (P3) at the beginning to work here. <u>I can't say that that was only because of the language, it is also, it was a massive culture shock for him</u>. Because coming from a [nationality] environment, into this very Dutch environment, even though it's international, <u>the way we are open to each other and very direct</u>, it's also an Amsterdam thing, it's a really Amsterdam company.

Some participants indicate noticing a variety of culture in the external communication:

> (54)
> P4: <u>People from the UK are not direct persons</u>. Uh, they tend to turn around the topic, you know, they don't come directly to the point. Uh, <u>if you're in a meeting with an Indian manager, Indian person, they are quite straightforward</u> as well.

> (55)
> P1: I guess <u>you could say there's a cultural difference between Dutch people and British people, but I don't really notice much of a difference.</u> […] I mean everyone has their own kind of culture, yeah, I think it's all very similar.

Some participants mention a few times was that there is a specific kind of culture that developed within the team itself:

> (56)
> P6: <u>There's another type of culture in there, in our department</u>. So it's not only the Dutch, well of course we're with a lot of people who are Dutch, […] but we work all with each other, so <u>another kind of culture developed in our department</u>.

> (57)
> P5: There is a lot of cultural differences, but <u>when it comes to the work environment and the struggles that we are facing somehow, it's kind of like, the same</u>.

Although general cultural differences in the team are not noticed much, international employees can experience a sense of culture shock. Furthermore, differences in communication are mostly apparent externally rather than within the team, which has developed a new culture together.

4.3.2 Dutch Directness

One element that is quite prominent throughout the interviews is Dutch directness. Some non-Dutch and native speaker participants express that this was quite a culture shock:

(58)
P3: <u>When I came here I was very shocked for how direct they were</u>, how nasty the jokes can be as well, and <u>this thin line between Dutch humor and Dutch offensiveness, basically they're insulting you, and they're calling it a joke</u>.

While non-Dutch and native speaker participants were warned or taken aback by this phenomenon at first, they indicate having grown accustomed to it:

(59)
P2: I was warned about it before I moved to the Netherlands. At the moment the directness, I feel a little bit taken aback, but then <u>after a while I just remind myself, of like, that's maybe how they have their dialogue</u>.

(60)
P4: <u>It can be seen as very rude and very aggressive</u>, but actually it's just the way they are doing business. So yeah <u>I just think it's the way Dutch people are, and I think it's great, it works</u>.

The Dutch participants seem quite aware of the directness in their way of working:

(61)
P7: <u>They know we are direct, everyone knows it</u> and, of course you try to be as polite as possible, but there's only one thing that's important and that's the customer.

(62)
P8: <u>I'm quite direct, and especially to other colleagues, because I think that's the most easy way to work</u>, although, not every colleague really respects my way of directness.

When asked to elaborate on this, Dutch participant 8 stated that he had once received negative feedback on being too direct during a meeting, but that he had only wanted the team to be more efficient:

(63)
P8: My direct colleague told me like, did you really have to say that, because it really offends him and I'm like, <u>it's the way it is, it's the truth, nobody says anything about it and it will just keep going on</u>, this should change. And <u>we can't go on like this, because we need to change, and we need to do it quick.</u> And they say yeah, but maybe just not in this meeting, maybe just outside the meeting.

Dutch participant 9 mentions that this cultural difference causes Dutch employees to approach their contacts differently:

(64)
P9: When they are talking to the client they uh, <u>you see some international people who are just making a quick chat first</u>, with the client, <u>whereas the Dutch people most of the time just go straight to business.</u>

According to native speaker participant 1, the Dutch employees should take caution with this:

(65)
P1: I'd say more <u>people from like London, where people are a bit more careful about how they say things</u>, or maybe a bit more posh, you know, <u>are more easily offended by the directness</u>.

The directness that Dutch people thus often use in their communication could lead to problems with clients or other contacts. Within the team the non-Dutch employees can initially experience shock, but indicated adjusting to it quite quickly.

5. Discussion

In this section the results of the interviews are discussed. The aim is to answer the two sub-questions of the study:

1.   *What kinds of challenges in the communication can be identified?*
2.   *What processes are used to solve these challenges?*

The questions are answered by discussing the three main categories: ELF use, communication difficulties, and cultural differences. Each of these subsections will discuss the different kinds of challenges that are mentioned by participants and how these are solved. In some cases, participant groups are compared. Some comparisons are made between Dutch participants and non-Dutch or native speaker participants. In other instances, native speakers are compared with Dutch and non-Dutch participants, in which case these two groups are jointly indicated as 'non-native' participants. The examples given can be found in the results section of the study. Some examples that are used have not been mentioned there, and can be found in the corpus (see Appendix 7), which contains all examples.

5.1 ELF Use

The ELF use amongst participants was a substantial part of the interviews. The data reveals that there is a particular sense of expectation towards the use of ELF amongst non-native speakers (Example 1-4). In example 2, Dutch participant 6 explains why the level is

deemed important: they are working at a level where English use should not be a problem. Participant 1 agrees with this statement: "everybody is like expected to be able to speak quite good English. Because everybody's dealing with other offices around the world, either by phone or email" (Example 4). Other participants often mention that correct communication is an important part of their work. Non-native speakers express that they expect themselves to acquire native speaker proficiency. These standards are quite high, because as non-Dutch participant 3 mentions, "you will never be a native speaker". This intention could be a result of non-native speakers aspiring to a native level (Jenkins, 2011, p. 926). Non-native speakers show diverse opinions on making mistakes when speaking ELF. As some compare it to their own imperfect English and are impartial, others find themselves annoyed when other people make mistakes, like non-Dutch participant 5: "in the moment, you get frustrated" (Examples 10-12). This can be a result of non-native speakers seeing American and British English as the norm (Jenkins, 2011, p. 926). As they have not expressed awareness to the fact that they are speaking a different variety of English, they compare themselves to that norm and expect others to be at the same level. This can explain why some Dutch and non-Dutch participants are frustrated when mistakes are made and when the communication is not going as effectively as they would hope. As mentioned before, non-native speakers see conformity to Standard English and 'correctness' in the use of the language as the most important parts of the communication (Keto, 2019, p. 54).

There is a contrast with native speakers, as they are indifferent towards others speaking 'incorrect' English and express appreciation towards the fact that they try: "I more have an appreciation towards the fact that they're attempting to speak English for me" (Example 14). Native speakers understand the difficulty of learning a foreign language perfectly, and are therefore more forgiving of mistakes made by non-native speakers (Keto, 2019, p. 55). The statements from the native speakers are aligned with Keto's claims that this group holds a prescriptive ideology towards the standard of English (2019, pp. 53-54), as they have expressed their understanding that it is difficult to learn a foreign language perfectly ("It is not their native language, so you just have to understand that" (Example 9)) and their appreciation towards non-native speakers for trying (Example 14). These aspects indicate that they do not view non-native speakers as ELF speakers, but rather as learners of Standard English who are taking part in native speakers' language. Especially since this distinction has not been made throughout the interviews, it can be suggested that participants are not aware of their ELF use. This assumption, along with the norm that non-native speakers are holding

for themselves, can explain the difference in expectations between the non-native and native participants in this category.

While the level of English overall, especially in the Netherlands and Amsterdam as a whole, is thought to be high ("I would say here in Amsterdam, the level of people is very good. Both Dutch and non-Dutch, English is fantastic" (Examples 15, 16)), many non-native speakers are extremely critical of their own level. Dutch and non-Dutch participants are seeking to improve their English by taking courses (Examples 17, 18) in order to be taken seriously: "more professional, but yeah, I want to improve my vocabulary, I want to use different kind of words" (Example 18). None of the participants took a course when they started in the Global team, and only Dutch participant 7 was assessed on some level: "we just had uh, a job interview, we did it in Dutch and halfway, the interview was switched to English" (Example 20). This is related to expectations of the company, as expressed by Dutch participant 8 (Example 21). He mentions that one is expected to speak English well when they apply for a position within this team. However, some non-Dutch participants had trouble with their confidence level at the time they started working in the Global team: "I was maybe a little bit more shy, you know, in meetings at the beginning because I did not have the level of confidence I have now" (Example 22, 23). As they were 'new speakers' of the language according to the description of Darquennes and Soler (2018, p. 2), the confidence level impacted their use of ELF. Both participant 4 and 5 mention having engaged less in conversations and overthought what they were saying. These are indicators of their low confidence level in ELF (Park & Lee, 2005, pp. 205-206). However, both participants mention that this improved over time, as they grew accustomed to speaking it daily. Even though the confidence levels as well as the critical view of non-native speakers upon their use of ELF can cause difficulties, the participants mention few instances in which misunderstanding was insurmountable.

Many participants indicate that their native languages influence their English. For some, it is the speed they speak at or their accent: "at the beginning I was like, I'm going to try to work on my accent, and have a better, an English accent" (Examples 35, 36). As Backus et al. (2013, p. 193) stated, these are features that often characterize one's ELF use. Most Dutch participants indicate searching for words, and are pleased by the option to switch to Dutch: "if it's really something difficult you can just use Dutch" (Example 27). According to all participants, Dutch is used frequently on the work floor: "when it's not work related they speak in Dutch. Because probably it's easier for them" (Example 29). This language switching indicates a lack of language policy and corporate language, which can make it harder for all

interlocutors to be included in the conversation and can lead to negative emotions amongst those who do not speak the other language used (Ahmad and Widén, 2018, pp. 358-359; Kulkarni, 2015, pp. 139-140). This does not seem to be the case in the Global team, as most non-Dutch and native speaker participants indicate understanding that there is a lot of Dutch use: "I mean if they want to speak Dutch between each other and I don't understand, I mean, it's perfectly fine for me, it's normal, they're in their country, they need to speak their language as well" (Examples 29-31). The non-Dutch group also mentions that Dutch employees could find a good balance, and speak English whenever there is either work-related information, or in any instance a non-Dutch speaker is present: "usually if you have someone who is an English speaker at the table, or non-Dutch speaker at the table, they would switch to English" (Examples 32, 33). The use of Dutch hence does not seem to have an influence on knowledge-sharing and is not seen negatively within the team. Even though there is no language policy and official corporate language, this does not seem to affect the communication.

5.2 Communication Difficulties

       In terms of communication difficulties, two main categories are addressed in the interviews: conflicts and miscommunication. Whereas miscommunication receives a lot of attention, all participants indicate that they have never experienced a conflict that was due to language or misunderstanding. They mention that irritation can sometimes take place when there is a misunderstanding: "it gives you irritation because I'm like, I want to finish this as soon as possible, but if I'm having trouble understanding you" (Example 37). The answers to the question of how they would resolve a potential conflict are purely hypothetical. It is therefore not an accurate representation of the participants' experiences. However, it reveals a difference between Dutch and non-Dutch participants. Dutch participants prefer to handle irritations directly: "If there's a problem, we don't sit on it […] for two, three weeks" (Example 40). Participant 2, a native speaker, explains taking an indirect approach: "I would probably let the conversation end and then afterwards I would go up to my colleague and I would just be like, would you mind filling me in on what you guys just spoke about? And then that would maybe give him the hint that, next time speak English" (Example 39). Most participants mention not addressing irritations at all, which coincides with the 'neglect' orientation Thomas (1976, as quoted in Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, pp. 123-124) formulated. This could be an attempt at saving face, both for the irritated speaker himself who wants to be liked, as well as saving the face of the other person by not offending or

embarrassing them (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 67). Dutch participants expressing being forthright about their irritations could mean that their perception of politeness differs from those of international employees, thus they employ different strategies for avoiding or minimizing FTA's. As Dutch people prefer directness, which is seen as honesty (White and Boucke, as quoted in Mellaard, 2008, p. 51), they might have attempted to avoid FTA's by expressing their thoughts immediately, thus gaining respect from the other person and thereby positively influencing their positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 67). This difference in minimizing FTA's can affect the relationship between employees, and will be discussed more in section 5.3. Since there was no data that showed conflict and all answers concerning conflict resolution were purely hypothetical, this cannot be discussed as it is not an accurate representation of what occurs within the Global team.

Additionally, most participants indicate that miscommunication happens largely through phone conversations and that non-native speakers struggle with strong accents such as British and Indian: "I have issues with uh, sometimes with people who are from Wales, when I call them on the phone, people from Cardiff, the accent is difficult sometimes. And with also Indian people, I'm struggling big time" (Examples 41, 42). Jenkins (2000, as quoted in Jenkins, 2009b, p. 12) mentions that accents can influence intelligibility because of vowel length, consonant sounds and omissions, and stress production. Native speaker accents are found especially hard to understand (Jenkins, 2009b, p. 12) by non-native speakers. As accents such as Welsh and Indian show different vowel production and stress placement, this influences the communication between the Amsterdam office and the Welsh/Indian offices.

However, this is solved by participants using some of the competencies mentioned by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, pp. 85-87), which were simplifying, repetition and clarification, the use of discourse markers and the use of active listening. The results reveal that discourse markers are not mentioned by any participants. The reason for this could be that the communication was not directly observed and the participants did not think about the exact words they were using while speaking. However, active listening is mentioned by non-native speakers often. They explain that they frequently ask the other person to clarify or repeat what they had said when misunderstanding occurred. Additionally, they repair misunderstandings by repeating a few words, then having the other fill in the rest, or taking the meaning from the context of the conversation: "I try to catch as much words as possible, to make a link between the words and to understand what the person is saying" (Examples 43, 44). When non-native speakers are the ones misunderstood, they express often asking the other person whether they have understood correctly, or asked hearers to repeat what the

speaker said (Examples 48, 49). These indicators of active listening allow the participants to solve miscommunications quickly and minimize interference with their work. This falls quite closely together with repetition and clarification, which indicates the structuring and highlighting of information. Participants claim to rephrase or repeat important parts of the conversation. Simplifying can also be seen within non-native speakers and is encouraged: "it's not a work of art, you have to keep it simple. Short and simple" (Example 51). Non-native speakers often mention using simple words and not saying anything out of context to facilitate the communication process (Example 50). The employment of these strategies by non-native speakers assures that there is no room for misunderstanding in the external communication. This means that even though there might be challenges such as accents, fast speaking or unintelligibility, understanding is typically achieved.

The non-native speaker group also reveals that they tend to switch mediums when at risk of miscommunication: they ask to receive an e-mail with all crucial information (Example 46). This allows them to obtain all the necessary information they need while refraining from using the above-mentioned communication strategies in case of a misunderstanding. It ensures that no misinterpretation can take place, which is of vital importance in the insurance business. This was not seen in the native speaker group.

For native speakers, this process of resolution has proven to be slightly different. They are mostly focused on how they can send a message understandably than to decipher what has been said by the other person, and are therefore accommodating to the non-native speaker. This includes restriction of vocabulary, speaking slower and clearer, avoiding contractions and increasing repetition (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 86). The participants mention that their slang can sometimes cause misunderstandings: "you know you have your slang of different countries, so it's not really the English language I think uh, sometimes the slang gets misinterpreted" (Example 45). Both native speakers indicate making a conscious effort to use less slang. If this is misunderstood, the solution is to rephrase or use a more common saying. This indicates the restriction of vocabulary, which increases intelligibility for non-native speakers. Participant 2 also mentions that when speaking to a native speaker, his language changes considerably and he gets to use his native language more, proving that although native speakers hardly have restrictions speaking English, ELF calls for a different language system to be engaged (Jenkins, 2011, p. 929). In this instance native speakers are, in fact, participants in ELF instead of native speakers of Standard English. This means that the use of English is changed when speaking to a non-native speaker and adjusted to their level in order to reach mutual understanding (Backus et al., 2013, p. 194). The native speaker participants

also indicate that they spoke slower and clearer, and tried to target key facts in the conversation in order to bring the message across: "bring it down to like a business chat, so mention things that they'll be aware of, […] because they work in Atradius they'll know of the terms" (Example 47). By highlighting the important parts of the message and adjusting to the non-native speaker level, native speakers ensure that the message is received correctly. Avoidance of contractions was not mentioned by the participants and is therefore not discussed.

In some respects, the approaches to solving miscommunication are similar between native and non-native speakers. Both groups utilize active listening, repetition and simplifying, however, where non-native speakers either switch mediums or take meaning from context, native speakers restrict their vocabulary and highlight key parts of the conversation. This difference in solving miscommunication is in line with Spencer-Oatey and Franklin's (2009, p. 86) and Backus et al.'s (2013, p. 194) theory that native speakers employ different strategies. This is a result of non-native speakers being concerned with both sending and receiving of the message, while native speakers often only deal with sending the message intelligibly. This implies that all interlocutors adjust their language to be participants of ELF, but the language proficiency determines what actions are used to reach mutual understanding.

5.3 Cultural Differences

As there are multiple nationalities working together in the Global team, it can be expected that there are some cultural differences. One participant indicates that for internationals, there is a possibility of experiencing culture shock (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, p. 152) when first coming to Atradius Amsterdam: "coming from a [nationality] environment, into this very Dutch environment, even though it's international, the way we are open to each other and very direct, […] it's a really Amsterdam company" (Example 53). The participant thus states that this shock was due to a substantial difference in culture, as the Amsterdam office is very direct. The person who experienced this expresses that he was used to a more hierarchical layout within an organization. According to Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) culture shock can cause a sense of loss with respect to status or friends, feelings of helplessness, irritation about practices in the new environment, and feelings of isolation (p. 152). However, the participant does not comment on this. While he states to have been "very shocked for how direct they were" (Example 58), there is no mention of psychological effects. This may be because of personal reasons such as having his family in the Netherlands. However, the participant indicates having grown accustomed to the

directness fairly quickly. Other non-Dutch and native speaker participants express that they acclimated to the Dutch directness as well: "at the moment the directness, I feel a little bit taken aback, but then after a while I just remind myself, of like, that's maybe how they have their dialogue" (Examples 59, 60). As informality is seen as the norm within Dutch organizations (Mellaard, 2018, p. 49), it is likely that this is something non-Dutch people have no choice but to acclimate to.

This difference in politeness could, again, be a result of the different perceptions of positive and negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 67). It can be suggested that Dutch people are considered direct because they have different standards for this phenomenon. The politeness between Dutch employees and newly arrived internationals thereby differs, as Dutch participants consider honesty and forthrightness to be more effective and therefore respectable, positively influencing their positive face when this is applied (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 67). Honesty is considered an indication of effectiveness, as Dutch participant 8 expresses: "it's the way it is, it's the truth, nobody says anything about it and it will just keep going on, this should change" (Example 63). However, what is considered 'polite' for a Dutch person, can threaten an international's negative face, as they can feel offended. Non-Dutch participant 4 mentions that "it can be seen as very rude and very aggressive" (Example 60) when someone is not accustomed to the directness. Participant 3 also indicates that there is only "a thin line between Dutch humor and Dutch offensiveness" (Example 58) and jokes could thus easily be perceived as offensive for internationals. Since the face is mutually vulnerable, both interlocutors will attempt to minimize FTA's, but this likely takes different forms for Dutch people than it does for internationals. This implies that if there are cultural problems in international teams, especially in a Dutch environment, they could be difficult to solve as people of different cultures have different referential frameworks towards politeness and face. In the case of the Global team, the participants indicate that there are no issues regarding this phenomenon, as they are just accepting it for what it is.

The lack of cultural-related problems could be due to the formation of a discursive interculture (Koole & Ten Thije, 2001, p. 583), as some participants mention that common ground has allowed them to form a new kind of culture within the team: "there's another type of culture in there, in our department. So it's not only the Dutch, well of course we're with a lot of people who are Dutch, […] but we work all with each other, so another kind of culture developed in our department" (Example 56, 57). Dutch participant 6 states, "I think because we work in the global department, I think like fifty people from all over the world, so you also develop with each other some kind of culture". Many Dutch participants state that the

international employees now sometimes participated in the straightforwardness, and that they seem indifferent towards it from their Dutch colleagues. Non-Dutch participant 4 agrees: "actually I'm quite direct as well now, so I took a bit from Dutch persons". This could either imply that non-Dutch and native speaker participants adapted to the Dutch culture, or that there were adaptations from the Dutch participants as well, which resulted in the formation of a discursive interculture (Koole & Ten Thije, 2001, p. 583). If this is a reality for the Global team, cultural differences will be less noticeable, and adaptations will have occurred from all cultures to form a new one.

However, in the external communication this difference is especially visible, as one participant states that "you see some international people who are just making a quick chat first, with the client, whereas the Dutch people most of the time just go straight to business" (Example 64). While the other telephone speaker can perceive this as an FTA, Dutch people likely perceive these to be less strict, and are seemingly more indifferent about saving their positive face (the need to be liked) or saving the other's negative face (the need to not be imposed upon by others) (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 67). This can cause difficulties in the communication as the other speaker could experience this as an FTA while the Dutch person does not recognize this as one.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to assess to what extent efficient and successful communication was reached with the use of ELF within the Global team. This was researched by interviewing two native English speaker, three non-Dutch non-native speaker, and five Dutch participants. Together, these ten participants make up over half of the Global team in its entirety, which provides a clear depiction of how communication occurs on a daily basis. In this section, the main research question and two sub-questions are answered:

> *To what extent is successful and efficient communication reached when English is*
> *used as a Lingua Franca within the Global team of Atradius Amsterdam?*
> 1. *What kinds of challenges in the communication can be identified?*
> 2. *What processes are used to solve these challenges?*

The first sub-question identifies the challenges in ELF communication. Even though participants themselves indicated having no problems with communication, the results revealed that non-native speakers' expectations can be too high. They aspire to be at a native

speaker level and expect the same of others. This can cause irritations or impatience when mistakes are made, even though most participants indicate being indifferent, since they are not native-like either. For newcomers in Amsterdam, confidence levels can greatly impact communication as they are afraid to make mistakes and thus participate less in conversation. Furthermore, the lack of a clear language policy causes an abundance of Dutch use amongst Dutch speakers in the team. Non-Dutch and native speaker participants, however, have indicated that they are indifferent towards Dutch use in case the content of the conversation is not important for them. Any miscommunications would happen mostly in external communication and concerned problems such as accents or other native language influences over one's English use. Native speakers had the most trouble with being understood when using their Standard English instead of ELF as a separate system. Another major finding was that the criteria for FTA's did not seem to match up between Dutch and native speaker or non-Dutch participants (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 67). As the Dutch indicated being very direct, their conditions for positive and negative face appeared to be different from those of other cultures, and this can thus cause difficulties should an issue arise.

The second research question provides an answer to how these challenges are solved. Firstly, confidence issues and the need to improve can be fixed by taking a company provided language course. Even though non-native speaker participants set the bar high for themselves, it is an option to take this course and obtain more language skills. This is also implied to improve with experience and daily exposure. Another finding indicated that the language switching of Dutch employees is solved by making a conscious effort to speak English whenever something of importance is discussed, or a non-Dutch speaker is present. Participants thus indicated that during daily communication, this hardly ever was a problem. As for misunderstandings, non-native speakers tend to use the communication strategies mentioned by Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009, pp. 85-87). Active listening, repetition and clarification and simplifying were used often to fix any misunderstanding. If there was any uncertainty, they would switch to another medium to verify correct understanding. Native speakers focused on restricting their language, structuring and highlighting their information, simplifying and speaking slower and clearer to be intelligible by non-native speakers. Overall, this would solve most misunderstandings. Furthermore, cultural differences played a bigger role than participants indicated. A culture shock was shown to be fixed by the formation of a discursive interculture (Koole & Ten Thije, 2001, p. 583), which allowed participants to feel part of a new culture, instead of being an outsider of an unknown culture. In case of conflicts, non-Dutch and native speaker participants were shown to be indirect and neglect the situation,

whereas Dutch participants were upfront and preferred to solve the issue straight away. This could again be due to the mismatch of face and FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 67). Overall, conflicts were said to hardly ever occur within the team or in the external communication.

While there are a number of challenges that arise in the daily working lives of the participants, these appear to be solved quite effectively within the team. Correct understanding is essential in the insurance field and it is therefore crucial that no misunderstanding is left throughout the communication process. The participants use communication strategies (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009, pp. 85-87), which are used differently by native and non-native speaker participants. This difference appears to be a result of language proficiency. The varying level of English within the Global team, however, does not seem to lead to insurmountable misunderstandings, as the participants indicated that mutual understanding is almost always reached. Additionally, a major finding was the mismatch of face and FTA's, which could result in difficulty to solve conflict, should it ever occur. This implies that in primarily Dutch environments, directness could lead to issues within multicultural teams. However, if cultures intertwine and a discursive interculture is formed, this difference could be minimized. In the Global team, participants indicate that all challenges in communication are solved, and misunderstanding is hardly ever severe enough to result in conflict. Participants are able to adapt to the other speaker's level, can fix miscommunication, and transfer any message, despite challenges in ELF and cultural differences. This implies that the team reaches efficient and successful communication.

Since only one team within Atradius was researched and only 10 participants were interviewed, the generalizability of this study is limited. It cannot be guaranteed that in other teams of the company, or other organizations entirely, the same results would emerge. Additionally, there is a possibility of a researcher bias, as Dutch culture is discussed and the researcher is Dutch. This could also have resulted in dishonest answers during the interviews, especially from native speaker and non-Dutch participants, with respect to Dutch culture and Dutch directness.

In future research, a bigger selection of employees should be interviewed, as well as other organizations. It would be interesting to include observations to investigate objectively how communication happens in real time. Besides this, a survey would be able to reach more participants and could therefore guarantee a higher generalizability. Future research could also include a deeper look into the formation of discursive interculture (Koole & Ten Thije,

2001, p. 583) in MNCs based in the Netherlands. All of this can provide more insight into how communication is realized in international organizations.

During this study, an abundance of interesting data was found and discussed. The aim of the study was not to provide Atradius Amsterdam with an advice on their language policy, but rather to describe what occurred in the team regarding communication at this time. For MNCs based in the Netherlands, this study provides an overview of possible challenges in communication for multicultural teams. Organizations such as Atradius Amsterdam should therefore raise awareness amongst employees to cultural differences and ELF use, as most participants in this study did not recognize their use of this variation. This will lower expectations for non-native speakers and allow them to be less hesitant in using ELF 'incorrectly'. Additionally, all newcomers to the team should be assessed on their level of English and potentially be instructed to follow a language course, to minimize proficiency differences. The implementing of a language policy could reduce the chances of language based exclusion and improve personal relationships within the team. This could further improve the effectiveness of communication in- and externally.

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Appendices

1. Topic list

- Use of ELF
  - (Grammatical) mistakes in self
  - (Grammatical) mistakes in others
  - Influence of native language in ELF
- Cultural differences
  - Politeness/directness (Dutch vs. others?)
- Confidence
  - Daring to participate in discussions
  - Language assessment/training received?
  - Experience with English
- Problems with communication
  - Miscommunications (internal/external)
  - Conflicts (internal/external)
- Competencies:
  - Linguistic accommodation (simplifying)
  - Structuring and highlighting of information (repetition/clarification)
  - Discourse markers (first or next)
  - Active listening (asking for clarification, checking for correct understanding or repairing misunderstandings)
- Native speakers:
  - Avoiding contractions (I'll / shouldn't've)
  - Increasing redundancy or repetition
  - Speaking more slowly and clearly
  - Restricting vocabulary, no slang/idioms
- Language policy
  - To Dutch participants: Dutch use within the team
  - Rules of when to use English
  - Switching languages in external communication when possible

2. Interview Questions

Primary interview questions and follow up questions:

1. How long have you been working at Atradius Amsterdam?
   a. Have you worked in an environment where you had to speak English previously?
2. Have you received an assessment or training for your level of English when you came to work here?
3. Do you feel like you're proficient enough to say whatever you need to say? For example, in meetings and discussions?
4. How do you make sure someone with less proficiency than you will understand what you're saying?
5. Do you ever feel like someone (in the team or in external communication) is misunderstanding you?
   a. How do you react?
   b. What steps do you take (to be understood/to fix the miscommunication)?
6. What do you do when you are the one misunderstanding someone else (in the team or in external communication)?
   a. Can you give an example?
7. Do you feel this has ever led to irritations or conflicts?
   a. Can you give an example?
   b. What did/would you do when it did/if it does?
8. Who do you contact if you feel there is miscommunication and this obstructs your work?
   a. What would happen when you tell someone about your issues with this?
9. To what extent do you feel your native language influences your English? (E.g. do you translate in your head?)
   a. Do you feel others' native languages influence their English?
10. Do you ever get annoyed at someone else's use of English? Why/why not?
    a. Do you care if they're using correct English? Why/why not?
11. Is there anything you would like to add?

Other questions:

1. Non-Dutch: Do you ever switch languages when you're on the phone or e-mailing with someone who speaks the same mother tongue as you?
   a. Why/why not?
2. How does it go in the breaks, does everyone hang out together, is English still used as much?
3. You often hear Dutch people are very direct. How do you experience that here in the office? (Are you aware that you are too?)
4. Do you notice cultural differences within the team?
5. How do you feel about the level of English of coworkers, does conversation always flow easily?

3. Information Letter

Information for participants

Communication in the Global Team

Universiteit Utrecht

1. Introduction

You have indicated your willingness to participate in a scientific study conducted by a researcher of the master's programme Intercultural Communication at Utrecht University. This document contains all information that you need in deciding whether you want to take part in the study. You are kindly asked to read this document attentively.

At any point, you are free to decide to opt out of this study.

2. What is the background and the aim of this research?

The areas of cultural diversity and communication is being studied intensively at the ICC Master's. The aim of this experiment is to see how different cultures interact in an organized setting using English.

3. How is the research conducted?

Participants will be asked to partake in an interview that will be between 20 and 40 minutes long. There is a possibility of follow-up interviews later on in the research.

4. What is expected of you?
The interviews will take no longer than 40 minutes. Other than your honesty and transparency, nothing else is expected.

5. What are the possible advantages and disadvantages of taking part in this research?
Participating in this study will provide Atradius Amsterdam with the full research report if so desired. The results could enhance communication in the team.

6. Voluntary participation
Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to take part in the research, you do not need to do anything, nor sign any document. You do not have to explain why you decide not to participate in the research. If you do decide to participate, you can always reconsider this decision and stop at any given moment – also <u>during</u> the experiment.

7. What happens with the data collected?

Data collected in this research will be stored and used in the research in complete anonymity. Your personal data are taken care of by the researcher only. In case you would like to update your details, you can contact the researcher at the following email address: kirstenvanenk@live.nl.

It is obliged to keep the research data – anonymized – for 10 years. By participating in this research, you are giving the researcher permission to do that. If you do not like to keep these anonymized details, you may not take part in this experiment.

8. Should you decide to take part in the research, is there a monetary compensation for your participation?

Unfortunately, there is no monetary compensation involved in this research project.

10. More information on this research?

Would you like to have more information on this research? Please feel free to contact Kirsten at kirstenvanenk@live.nl.

4. Informed Consent Form

Informed consent

Research:
Master's Intercultural Communication
Thesis Research
Utrecht University

Name researcher:
Kirsten van Enk

Purpose of the research:
The purpose of this research is to obtain knowledge as to how language impacts communication in an organised setting.

Your cooperation:
The data of the research will be obtained by the means of interviews. This data will be stored and used in the research in complete anonymity. The results of the study will not be distributed beyond the researcher, the supervisors, and the organisation. At any point during the research, you have the right to opt out without providing a reason. During the interviews, you will always have the choice not to answer a question, to take a break or to break off the interview.

By signing this document you agree to participate in this research. You can always choose to opt out of the research, even after signing. However, your participance is much appreciated!

I agree to partaking in this research,

Name: …………………………………………..

Date: …………………………………………..

Participant signature: Researcher signature:

…………………………………………….   …………………………………………….

5. Coding Trees
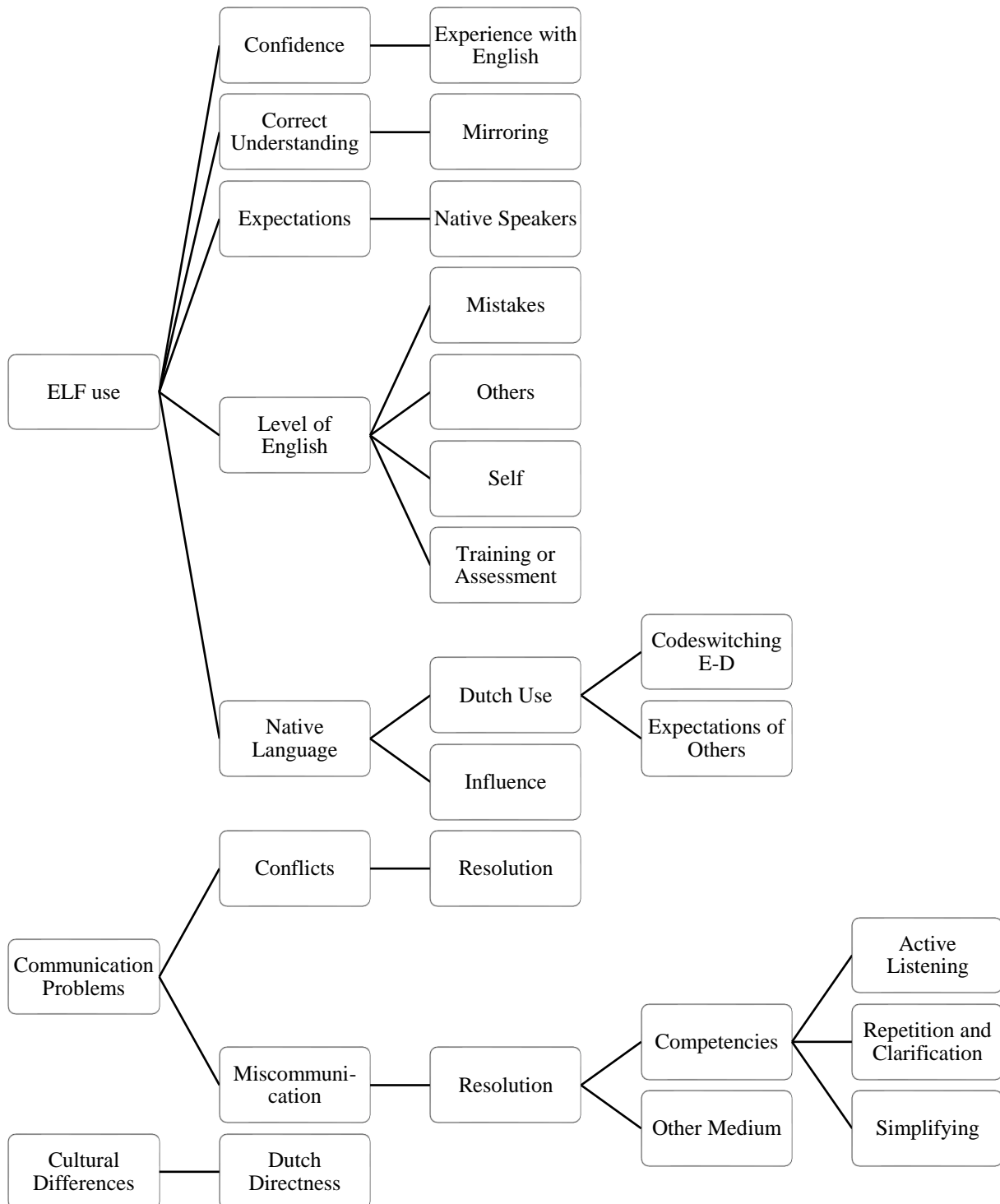
5.1 Coding Tree Dutch Participants

Figure 1: Coding Tree Dutch Participants

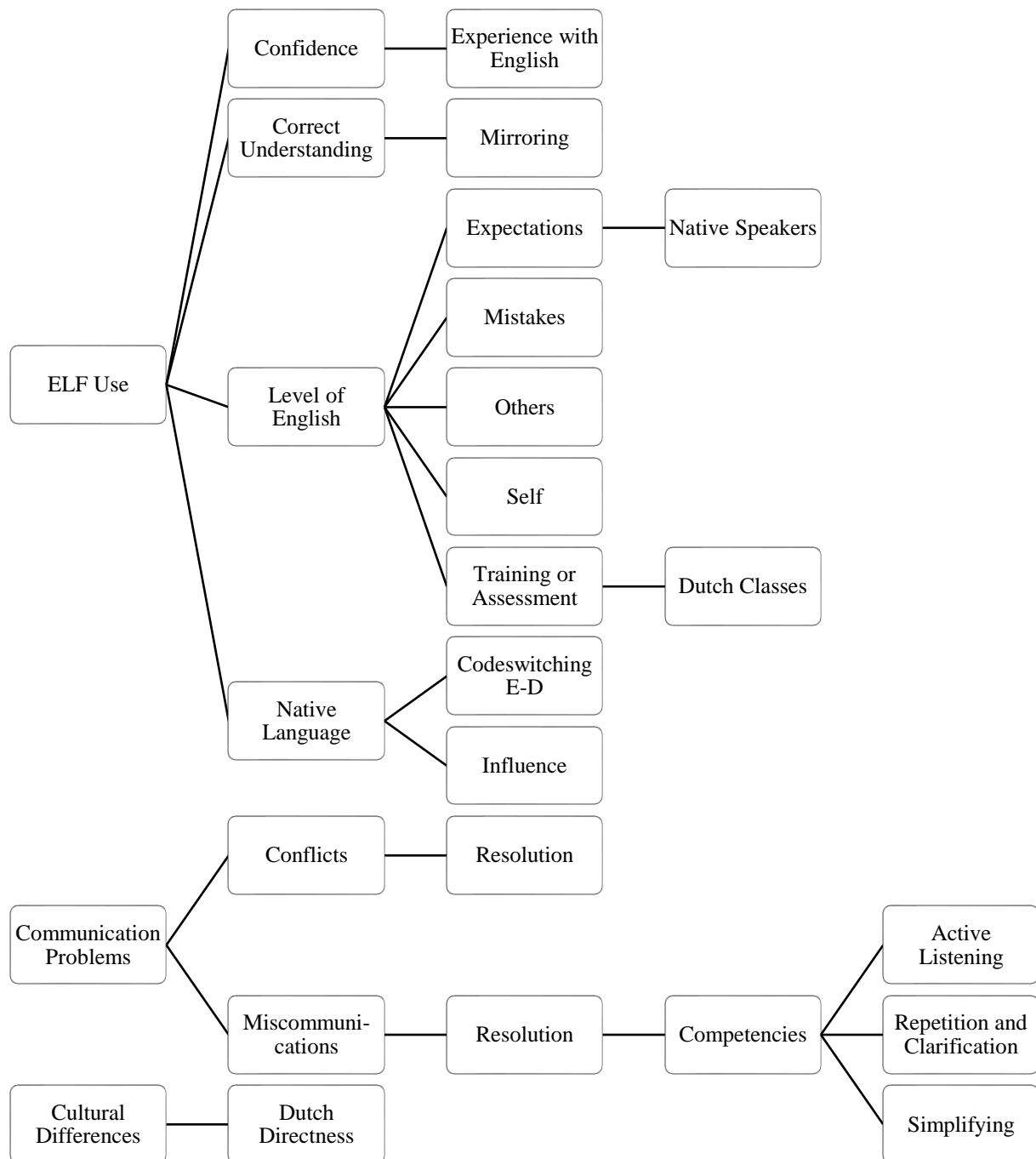## 5.2 Coding Tree Non-Dutch Participants

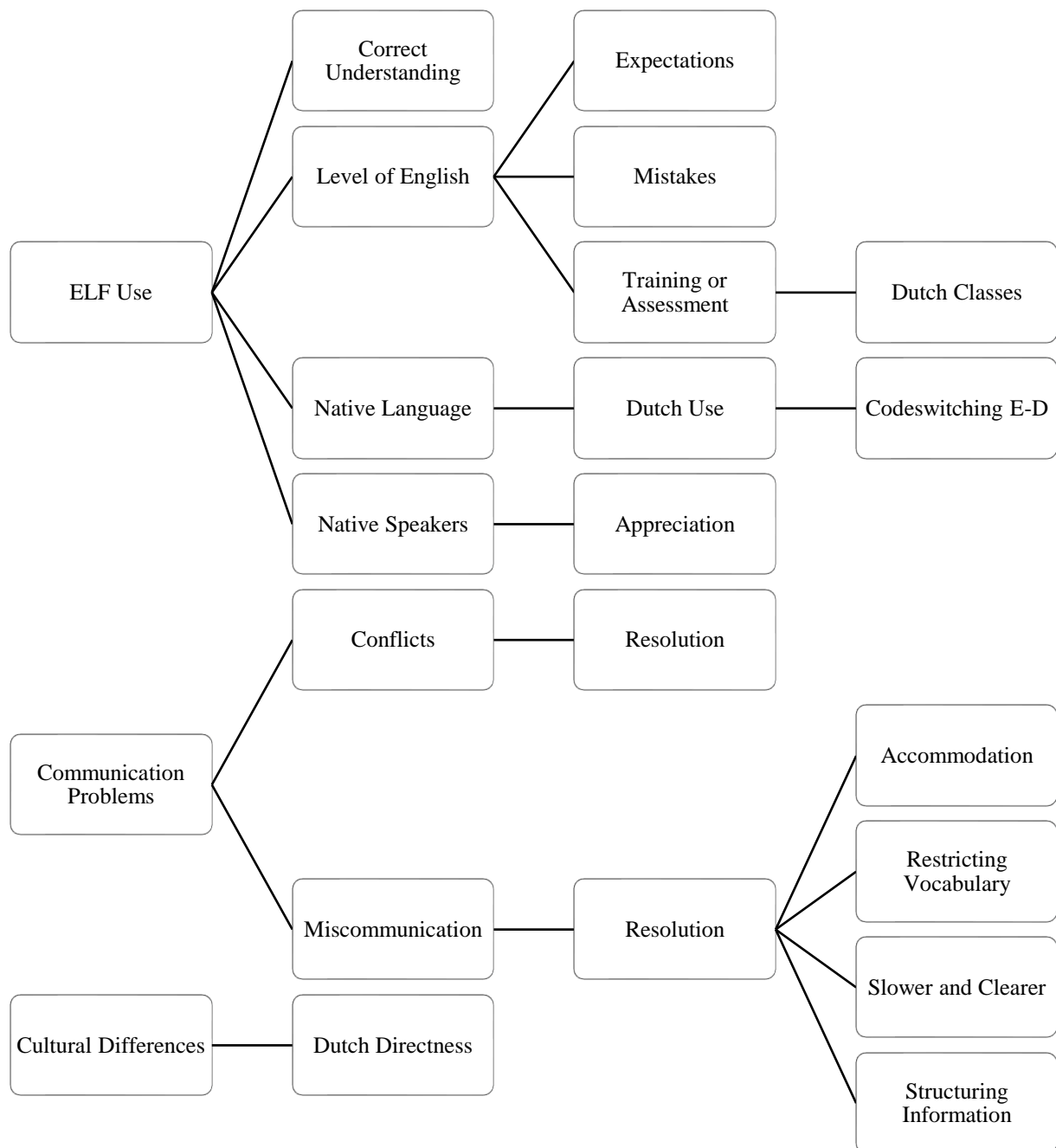*Figure 2: Coding Tree Non-Dutch Participants*

5.3 Coding Tree Native Speaker Participants

Figure 3: Coding Tree Native Speaker Participants