Mehrsprachigkeit und Multikulturalität im Studium

MuMiS-projekt.de

Student worksheets

Communication Strategies

Provided by MuMiS project – Multilingualism and multiculturalism in university studies

Subproject A: English as a lingua franca at university

Developed at the University of Hamburg sponsored by VolkswagenStiftung

For more information about the research project, see our website: http://www.mumis-projekt.de/

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Exercise 1 Overcoming misunderstandings

15 min

In the following dialogue, student Felipe does not get a very satisfactory answer from the institute's secretary Ms. Huber due to an unresolved misunderstanding. Work in pairs: Read the extract and answer the following questions.

FELIPE	Good morning.
MS HUBER	Good morning...hang on, let me just put this away...Now, what can I do for you?
FELIPE	I have just arrived here for my studies erm only first semester and in the orientation week they said that we can ask you if we have any questions. And well, back home in Bolivia I am in the national league in martial arts, you know Kyudo, the Japanese martial arts? And I am very motivated about doing martial arts also here in Germany. Do you know any places where I can keep practicing Kyudo here?
MS HUBER	Hm, this is right, a hobby is very good when you study, you also need to relax sometimes. But ... hm, I am sorry, but I don't know much about arts here at university. But Professor Albrecht is very good at painting and knows a lot about arts so you could go there and ask him.
FELIPE	Hm... well, ok.
MS HUBER	Bye, good luck!

a. **What is the cause of the misunderstanding?**

b. **How could Felipe and Ms Huber have overcome this misunderstanding and come to a solution, e.g. that she is referring him to the university's sports club?**

c. **Re-write the end of the dialogue in which the misunderstanding is resolved and Felipe's question is answered! (Info: Kyudo is a Japanese art of archery.)**

Exercise 2 How to formulate strategies

5 min

The strategies shown below are typical examples for actively solving linguistic challenges. On the right you can see examples for each strategy. Match each strategy with its corresponding example.

Paraphrase:
Reformulation

What's the word again for this? You know when...

All-purpose-word:
Using a word that can be used for a wide range of other words

What do you mean with "the exam was a breeze"?

Code-Switching:
Switching the language

We want to go to the Bäckerei now to try some of this famous Apfelstrudel – do you want to join us?

Asking for help:
Turning to the interlocutor for assistance

It melts. It becomes water.

Asking for clarification:
Requesting explanation of an utterance

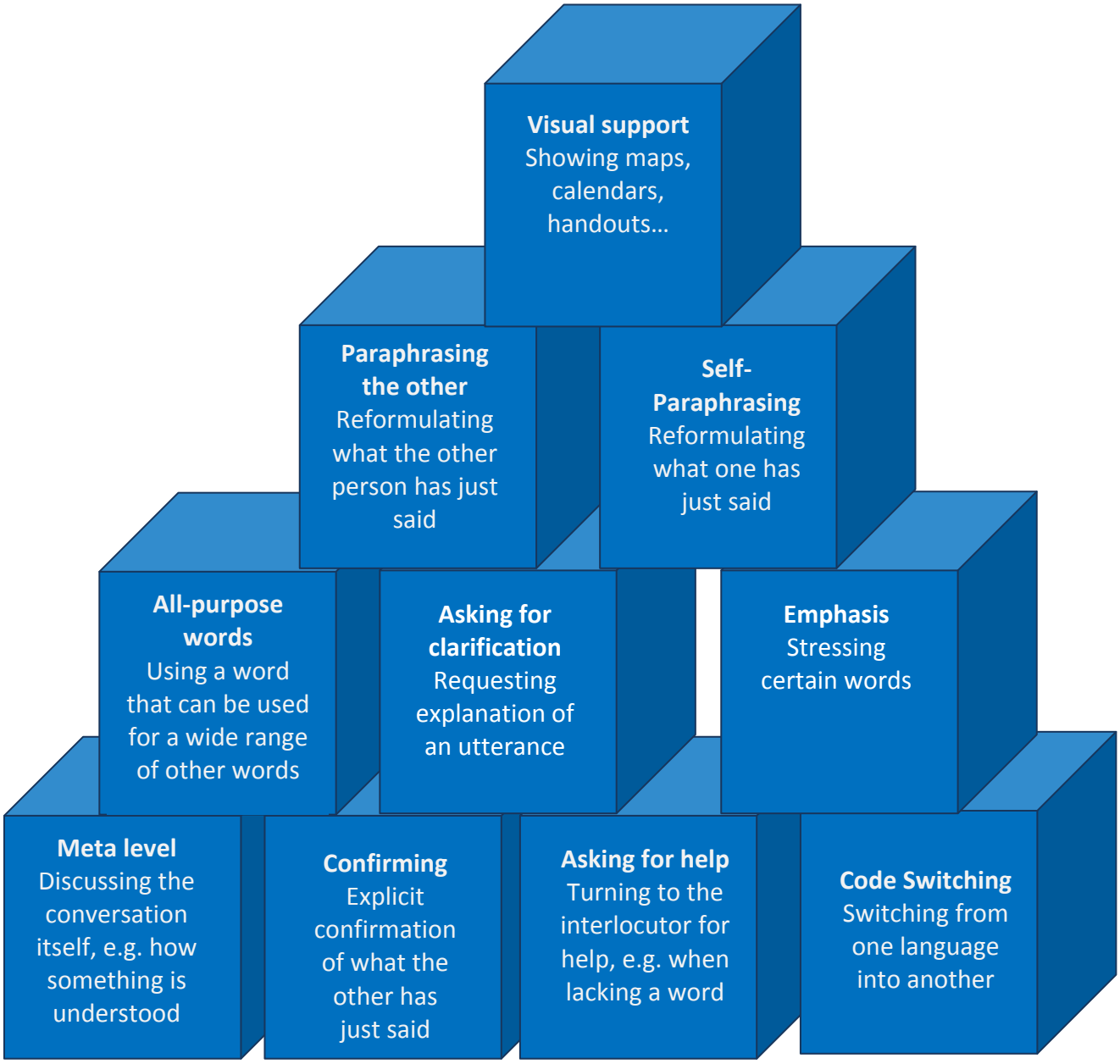
Could you turn on this thingy for me, please?

Exercise 3 Identifying Communication Strategies

30 min

When a conversation is not running smoothly, so called *communication strategies* like the ones below may be a helpful tool for achieving mutual understanding.

a. **Read the following dialogue (next page) and identify as many strategies as possible. One has already been done for you. Note that there may be more than one example for each strategy in the text and that those strategies may not always be clear cut but overlapping.**



Yīng – a Chinese student – is currently writing her Master's thesis with Professor Meyer. So far she is doing well, but a sudden case of illness in her family is causing her a lot of distress.

YĪNG	Good morning, Mrs. Meyer!
PROF. MEYER	Good morning, Yīng! How are you and how are you getting on with your thesis?
YĪNG	Thank you, thesis is great so far but I want talk to you because I have a problem…
PROF. MEYER	Oh yeah?
YĪNG	My mother she is very sick in China and I must go there.
PROF. MEYER	Oh! I am very sorry to hear that!
YĪNG	Hm. But my thesis finish in March.
PROF. MEYER	Sorry? → *Asking for clarification/repetition*
YĪNG	My thesis finishes in MARCH.
PROF. MEYER	I am not quite sure if I understand.
YĪNG	I don't have time.
PROF. MEYER	Ah you mean that you won't have time to finish your thesis in time? When do you have to hand it in again?
YĪNG	Yes, I don't have enough time to finish. The deadline is March, 10th already and I will fly to China on Monday and should be come back on 23rd of February.
PROF. MEYER	I fully understand, hm. So let me think, what can we do? [*checks his calendar*] Monday will be the 25th of February… How much work have you got left now? I mean which chapter are you working on at the moment? Is it still a lot that you have to do?
YĪNG	It's just one chapter left and the introduction and conclusion and then need proof read and formatting. But I have finish chapters 1, 2, 3 and now almost the analysis is done. But it still is not enough time, because in China I cannot concentrate on my work really.
PROF. MEYER	Sure. So what you are saying is that you are almost done but you will need another couple of days time because of your flight home.
YĪNG	Yes, I would like to postpone the deadline to the END of March but I am not sure if I can do this.
PROF. MEYER	With your case – I mean your mum is very sick – this should be possible I sink. However, we better check with the… with the… er… how is this place called again in English… sorry, the *Prüfungsamt*… you know the place in Lindenallee 40? It's on the tip of my tongue!
YĪNG	You mean the examination office?
PROF. MEYER	Yes, the examination office, of course! I sink the lady responsible for this is called Konstanze Basselmann. She should be able to help.
YĪNG	OK, then I better go there now. But do you know if I need like a thingy from you … a sort of letter or paper or something?
PROF. MEYER	You mean like an official statement that I as your supervisor agree with you handing it in later and so on? I don't know, actually. But let me just write one just in case, wait a second [*types and signs his agreement*] – here you are!
YĪNG	Thanks so much!
PROF. MEYER	You are welcome! And if you have any more questions regarding your thesis just get back to me, okay?
YĪNG	Okay, thanks a lot. I will do that. Bye.
PROF. MEYER	Bye.

b. Now have a closer look at the language and the formulations used: which phrases and expressions are typical for the following strategies?

Self paraphrase:	**Paraphrasing the other:**

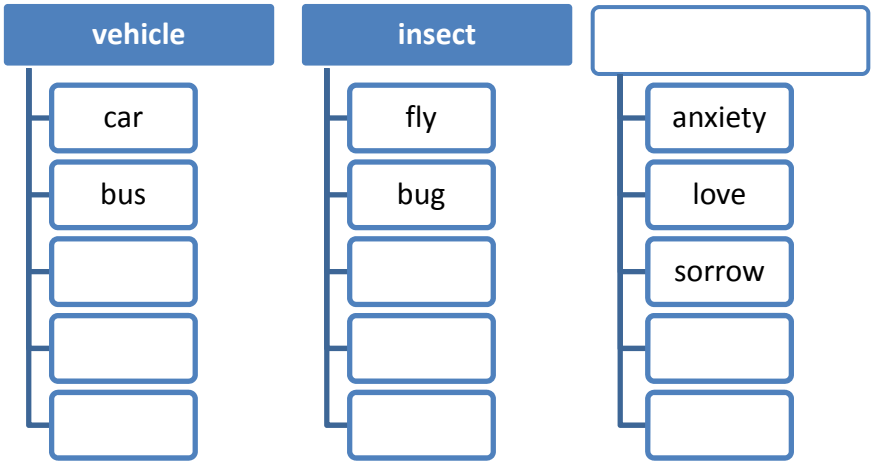
Asking for clarification/repetition:	**Asking for help:**
- *Sorry?*	

Exercise 4 How to paraphrase

In the following exercises you will get to know a couple of techniques on how you can paraphrase.

5 Min

a. **In the example above, the mother cannot remember the specific name of a monkey she has recently seen in a zoo. This does not stop her, however, from telling her story. Expecting that her conversational partner can picture the animal, she draws on *superordinate* words such as "animal" and "monkey" and describes some of its distinguishing features. In fact, using *superordinate or subordinate* terms is an effective strategy when you cannot come up with a word. Now it's your turn: Find the missing *subordinate* and *superordinate* words.**



10 min

b. Raúl is talking to his granny about his life at university but she is not familiar with all the university terminology. Help him explain the following terms by *describing* them each in a single sentence:

student assistant	**overhead projector**	**campus**
term paper	**credit points**	**deadline**
plagiarism	**Bachelor's thesis**	**ERASMUS programme**

A student assistant is somebody who is working as a support for a professor.
An overhead projector is ... _____

5 min

c. *Synonyms* are words that share (almost) the same meaning. Thus, they are a great alternative to words that just don't want to come to your mind. Find appropriate substitutes for the words that are underlined.

Ginger is an intelligent cat.

He suggested that we should...

I spoke to her briefly this morning.

It is important that you cite your sources correctly.

The lift is out of order.

5 min

d. Lydia is telling her friends about her last weekend but she has difficulties finding the right words. Instead, she can only come up with *opposites*. Find the words she actually meant to say. One has already been done for you.

What's it called? We didn't want to **let** the room with the nice view but... I mean, the owner **lets** the room and tourists...

You mean tourists **rent** it.

I don't mean to **break** but...

You mean ...

You know, it was not a **rough** surface but...

Luckily the beach was not **private** but...

15 min

e. **Now work in groups of 3-5 students. Rephrase the following sentences in turn so that you arrive at 3-5 possible alternative formulations for each sentence. For your paraphrase you may want to use one of the above mentioned techniques. You can also change the word order or the register from formal to informal language and vice versa as long as the meaning of the sentence stays the same.**

Please refrain from smoking in the corridor.
An apple a day keeps the doctor away.
According to new research, song birds have regional accents just like human beings.
Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.
White House rejects Republicans' tax proposal

Exercise 5 Sharing the floor (→ Audio 1)

15 min

Work in groups:

a. **Have you ever experienced a conversation like this? How did you feel?**
b. **What do you think, how does the student and how does the lecturer feel in this situation?**
c. **What could both, student and lecturer, do to have a more balanced conversation in which they are equally involved?**

b.	Student's perspective	Lecturer's perspective
c.	**The student could…**	**The lecturer could…**

Exercise 6 Using open questions in interviews

10 min

Work in pairs: Try to find out as much as possible from your partner about how office hours are organized in his or her home country and whether s/he has noticed any differences to how it works in Germany. Use open questions, starting with

How… / When… / Why… / What… / Who…

Pay close attention to the answers you get depending on the type of question you ask.

Exercise 7 Steering a talk with different types of questions

10 min

a. **Imagine you are seeing your lecturer for advice but s/he is very monosyllabic in his/her feedback. Come up with three <u>open</u> questions which could help you to learn as much as possible about your lecturer's opinion.**

1.

2.

3.

b. **Now think of a discussion with your lecturer in which s/he just does not come to the point but keeps waffling about anything but your own topic. Come up with three <u>closed</u> questions that would narrow down your lecturer's response to short either/or-, yes/no- or factual answers.**

1.

2.

3.

Exercise 8 Using open and closed questions strategically

15 min

Journalists and advisors have in common that both have to pose effective questions in order to get the information they need from their conversational partners –the former to get to the bottom of a topic and in the case of the counselor to give appropriate advice. The following excerpt is taken from a series of interviews journalist Katie Couric has conducted with former U.S. Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin prior to the elections.[1] Read the passage and answer the following questions:

a. **Look at the questions Couric poses (marked in bold). Identify the open and closed type of questions. Which effect do the different questions have on Palin's way to answer them?**
b. **In this example, both interviewer and interviewee are native speakers of English. Still, in lines 5-6 Palin struggles to find a word. How do the speakers solve this problem?**

1	COURIC	You've cited Alaska's proximity to Russia as part of your foreign-policy
2		experience. **What did you mean by that?**
3	PALIN	That Alaska has a very narrow maritime border between a foreign country,
4		Russia, and on our other side, the land — boundary that we have with —
5		Canada. It, it's funny that a comment like that was — kind of made to cari — I
6		don't know. You know. Reporters —
7	COURIC	Mocked?
8	PALIN	Yeah, mocked, I guess that's the word, yeah.
9	COURIC	**Explain to me why that enhances your foreign policy credentials.**
10	PALIN	Well, it certainly does because our— our next door neighbors are foreign
11		countries. They're in the state that I am the executive of. And there in Russia—
12	COURIC	**Have you ever been involved with any negotiations, for example, with the**
13		**Russians?**
14	PALIN	We have trade missions back and forth. We— we do— it's very important when
15		you consider even national security issues with Russia as Putin rears his head
16		and comes into the air space of the United States of America, where— where
17		do they go? It's Alaska. It's just right over the border. It is— from Alaska that we
18		send those out to make sure that an eye is being kept on this very powerful
19		nation, Russia, because they are right there. They are right next to— to our
20		state.

[1] The excerpt is taken from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarah_Palin_interviews_with_Katie_Couric [01.02.2012]

Exercise 9 Thingy words

10 min

The following excerpt is taken from an authentic counselling session conducted in Germany. In this particular example, the professor tries to explain to the student what the introduction to the master thesis is all about. As you can see, he sometimes struggles to find the right word and uses a placeholder ("thing") instead. We call these placeholders all-purpose words.

	0
Prof	The idea of the introduction is that you tell the people what you have done

	1
Prof	and what your intention is. That's the main **thing** what you have to do in

	2
Prof	the introduction. And then you put the **things** that you describe specifically

	3
Prof	for your study into the next chapter. So you're coming from the

Prof	introduction as a global overview to the specific **things** of your study.

a. **Would you have understood what the professor wanted to say?**

b. **What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of using such a general word?**

c. **From your point of view, is it appropriate to talk like this?**

d. **Can you help the professor out: Which other – more precise – words or phrases could he have used instead of *thing*?**

e. **Which other English all-purpose words do you know?**

f. **What is a typical all-purpose-word in your mother tongue?**

Exercise 10 Using fillers and gambits

Read the following dialogue. Then answer the questions below.

30 Min

Ricardo	What did you think of my presentation today?
Mehmet	Well, it was very interesting of course but to tell the truth I thought you know you should have paid more attention to the audience.
Anastasia	The thing is that it was like really exciting at the beginning with you showing the video clips of politicians who talk a lot without saying much, you know. That part has been hilarious actually and drew all our attention. But I mean to be quite honest I had some difficulties following your presentation after that. It was like rather monotonous, wasn't it?
Ricardo	Oh really…? But well…you are probably right I suppose. I mean I spent so much time looking for video clips of politicians that I actually had to rush to prepare the rest of the presentation.
Mehmet	Now you know it's not easy giving a presentation… Oh well, next time you could just invest more time, couldn't you?
Ricardo	Good heavens, even MORE time? Well, let's change the topic! It's time for lunch, don't you agree?

a. **You may have noticed that the speakers use a lot of words and phrases that do not carry much meaning but rather serve as fillers or gambits. Identify as many of these fillers and gambits as possible so that you arrive at the bare contents of the dialogue. Note that the first ones have already been done for you.**

b. **Although fillers and gambits do not transmit much content information, they nevertheless fulfill various conversational functions. What do you think: Why do speakers use them?**

The following list (next page) shows some of the functions, fillers and gambits might have.

c. **Nominate your three favourite phrases!**

d. **Now work in pairs or groups and share your opinions on the following topics while using the phrases listed below (next page).**

- **In Germany, there should be more university courses where French is the language of instruction.**
- **It would be wise to teach immigrants' languages such as Turkish and Polish in schools rather than English or French.**
- **English should become the second mother tongue of every world citizen.**

Function	Examples
Starter show that you have something to say and that you would like to take the turn	Well, … Now, … Well, I think myself … Well now I wonder… Now you know… Well that's one possibility of course but…
Uptaker react to what has just been said by showing surprise, dismay, amazement, doubt etc.	That's right Okay Oh Really Indeed You don't say Oh dear Oh lord Good heavens What a nuisance Super Great Terrific Not again
Cajoler make the conversation more palatable	You know (really)… To tell the truth… You see To be quite honest / Honestly Actually In fact Really I mean
Underscorer draw attention to or highlight an important point	Look, I'll tell you what Well, the thing is… What I'm (really) getting at is… The basic problem is this… (Well/Now) look Listen The point/thing is That's the problem This is what I am getting at
Asides thinking aloud, talking to yourself to show that you are still conversationally present	Let me see now What's it called What's his name Now when was that Let me think (Now) where was I What was I saying
Appealer invite the hearer to agree with you or to react to what you've just said	…, couldn't you? …, is that right? …, isn't it? Don't you agree? Does s/he? Do you?

Exercise 11 Social strategies

20 min

a. Compare the two sentences in each set. What differences do you notice? Which effect would these sentences have on you as the listener?

- Could I borrow one of your pens for a moment?
- Could I borrow one of your pens for a moment, *I left mine at home*.

- You better re-write this chapter.
- *Your thesis will certainly be more successful and you will receive better marks* if you re-write this chapter.

- If you decide to use American spellings in your paper then you should be consistent in your usage.
- *I don't want to sound too pedantic*, but if you decide to use American spellings in your paper then you should be consistent in your usage.

b. The examples above represent three different types of social strategies. Find out which strategy has been employed by matching each quote with its respective definition below.

"...I left mine at home."

"Your thesis will certainly be more successful and you will receive better marks…"

"I don't want to sound too pedantic…"

Sweetener: dispel concerns and fears, remove objections others might have

Disarmer: defend yourself against complaints or criticism others might have of you

Grounder: give a reason for your request

c. Now it's your turn: Make the following sentences smoother by adding a Grounder, Sweetener and/or Disarmer!

- Student to student mate: Could you lend me 50 Euros?
- Student to professor: I need an interim examination certificate.
- Professor to student: I need this book back tomorrow.
- Professor to student: Could you wait for five minutes, please?
- Student to professor: I actually need the signature right now.
- Professor to colleagues: Can we finish this discussion first before we talk about possible days for our next meeting?