

WORKING CONVERSATIONS?: LANGUAGE IN THE WORKPLACE

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Background

Using the Guide

Pages 2- 7 explain the background to the videos which this guide is designed to support. If you already know the background to the project and the practice of Forum Theatre, you may want to go straight to the sections on planning and running sessions.

Introduction

This guide is designed to accompany a series of six short videos made for the IR Multiling project.

The Multiling project

Industrial relations in multilingual environments at work (IR-MultiLing) was funded for two years by the EU Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs. The project was aimed at researching multilingualism at work and its impact on industrial relations in six European countries: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and UK. The project has been supported by National Advisory Groups of social partners and other experts.

The European Union has 23 official languages and over 60 indigenous regional or minority languages. In London, alone, 230 different languages are spoken by its inhabitants.

The growing presence of multilingualism or plurilingualism (using different languages for different purposes) is supported anecdotally, but while the numbers of different languages spoken within a city or a country are sometimes known, and are growing, there is virtually no information about workplaces other than a small literature on the trend for multinational companies to adopt a universal language (usually English) to use in external, and often internal, communication.

The human right to use minority languages in public life is supported by the EC. It is also policy to argue that 'a mobile workforce is key to the competitiveness of the EU economy' and to advocate 'all EU citizens learn and speak more languages' while still having 'access to EU legislation, procedures and information in their own language'. Yet the preferences of many of Europe's elites to communicate between themselves using English as a 'universal language' can both lead to the down-grading of national, regional or migrant origin languages, and to career penalties where there are difficulties in accessing English language skills.

IR-MultiLing has researched areas of understanding/misunderstanding and intended/unintended outcomes arising from language policy choices and whether the costs and benefits of linguistic diversity map differently for employers and managers than for employees.

Desk research and case studies in France, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Spain and the UK, have developed a typology of multilingual work environments contrasting multinational and national/local organisations with different management and non-management linguistic experiences. It has analysed whether workers lacking full linguistic access at work are treated differently in terms of their access to trade union participation and support. The project has developed recommendations for decision-makers. Reports on the project are at the [IR Multiling website](#).

Why videos?

The project was committed to producing a DVD for training for use across Europe, primarily to use with trade unionists but also other parties with an interest in the issues.

Theoretical background

Why orthodox pedagogy won't work¹

Early on in the project, we recognised that a prescriptive, didactic video would not work.

On the one hand, the context in the countries which the materials are to be used are highly diverse. Linguistic diversity is often but not always a reflection of migration. In Catalonia, Catalan and Spanish are both 'official' languages. In France about 400 different languages are spoken (including 75 regional languages). In Italy most migrant workers speak Italian fluently but in other countries migrant workers frequently don't speak the dominant workplace language fluently. Obviously there are issues with specific languages too. Disrespect can be shown in any language. In languages which use formal and informal (T-V) second person form, this may be clearer than in languages which don't.² The numbers, backgrounds and workplace roles of migrants in different countries (And regions within countries) differ: from Hungary with small numbers of migrants, mainly in professional and managerial roles) to London with many migrants often in low paid and precarious occupations. Industrial Relations structures and processes are also widely varied between countries and sectors with formal collective bargaining arrangements and the NHS in the UK, for example, but in other countries and sectors low union density, generally, or specifically for migrant workers. The legal and policy context differs widely. While French is the official language, workers have the right to receive their employment contract in their 'home' language.

On the other hand, participants in workplace education have important commonalities. Whether they are trade unionists, (unorganised) migrant workers or managers, they are adults, with knowledge and experience which needs to be drawn on, not ignored or devalued. As Plutarch said, nearly 2000 years ago, learners are not empty vessels. Their minds do *'not require filling like a bottle, but rather, like wood, it only requires kindling to create in it an impulse to think independently and an ardent desire for the truth.'* Some of the participants will have had bad experiences of formal education or be suspicious of propaganda or indoctrination. Autonomy or control is important to them. Furthermore, for many participants in workplace education, learning is not for learning's sake. It is learning in order to change their situation. The goals and methods of change cannot be realistically, or ethically imposed on them.

As the quotation from Plutarch highlights, the idea that education is about 'drawing out' not 'filling up', is nothing new. Although the terminology of 'experiential learning' is twentieth century, the idea that people learn from reflection on experience goes back as far as Aristotle (In Greece) and Chanakya (in India) more than 2000 years ago and Al Farabi in the tenth century in the Middle East. However, the dominant model of much formal education is generally one of instruction, with the teacher as the expert or the 'sage on the stage' rather than the 'guide on the side'. Particularly for people whose experience

¹ Readers of this guide who want references to the information or ideas, should either view the reports on the [IR Multiling website](#) or contact the author: ppre@onetel.com

² In this project every major country language except English: (vous/tu;(French) sie/du (German); tú/usted (Spanish); tu/vostè (Catalan; te/ ön (Hungarian); tu/lei (Italian)

of education has been negative or partial or disrupted (Including by migration), the challenge is to undo that experience.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The pedagogy adopted for the training proposed here, is derived from the work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921 -1997). Freire's ideas were originally developed in the context of trying to develop adult literacy in Brazil, followed by exile, in South and North America and Europe, during the military junta.

Central to Freire's thinking was that people's ability to think and speak for themselves is typically submerged or 'silenced' by the dominant culture. That doesn't mean that people are literally silent but that what they say is what they think they are allowed or expected to say. He talked about education as being for liberation, emancipation or transformation. Freire talked about education as birth or rebirth. One image of transformation (Originally from Heraclitus) is that of a spring, well, rain water or melting ice which becomes a stream, then a river, before reaching a delta or estuary and ultimately joining the sea. Transformation means 'unveiling' and then changing reality rather than adapting to it.

Freire's approach stresses that learning is:

- A collective activity: learners pooling their insight from experience through a dialogue between equals
- A series of journeys: people start and finish at different points and there is not a single beginning or end
- About emotions and reason

The aims of learning are to achieve:

- Transformation through action
- Liberation or emancipation from oppression
- Critical consciousness

Process

The process of emancipatory or popular education has four stages. Although they are not explicitly referenced in the theatre method used in the videos, they help explain how they work. A group of people – a 'culture circle' rather than a class - discusses:

1. *'Generative themes'*: they may be negative or positive aspirations. Generally, these might be broad ideas like 'power' or 'racism'. In the context of this project, they were topics such as 'Respect and Dignity', 'Fairness', Health and Safety.
2. *Social 'Codes' or "rituals"* are concrete examples of the themes. Freire encouraged the use of drawings, newspaper cuttings, photographs etc. to make images the themes
3. *Decoding*: the circle discusses what the codes mean to them, learning from each other
4. *Reflection & Action (Praxis)*: a process of revising ideas about the scope for action and the causes of the problems identified, hopefully becoming subjects or agents rather than 'objects'.

The role of the teacher

Freire described the traditional role of the teacher as being an authoritarian one, a vertical relationship in which he pupils are passive. Following Sartre, he described that as digestive pedagogy: like a nutritionist telling others what they should eat. He also described it as 'banking': the teacher making

deposits in the accounts of the pupils. Freire said the relationship had to be a horizontal one – between equals. He echoed Socrates who talked about the teacher as a midwife. From Plutarch's metaphor above, the teacher is 'lighting the match' to light up or energise the participants.

The role of the teacher is to:

- Pose questions
- Question answers not answer questions
- Learn with the group

Freire said the role of teachers was not to win people over or fill them with slogans although he also quoted Mao Zedong approvingly: 'We must teach to the masses clearly what we have received from them confusedly'. He said education is a synthesis between the educators' maximally systematised knowing and the learners minimally systemised knowing.

Theatre of the Oppressed

Augusto Boal (1931-2009) was a theatre director who worked with Freire in Brazil and in exile. He became dissatisfied with the kind of political theatre which he had started with, in the style, for example of Bertolt Brecht. He called it coercive. He was also critical of what he called evangelical theatre or the theatre of advice. He explained why he changed his view:

In the 1960s...we made use of our art to tell Truth, to bring Solutions, we ...taught peasants how to fight for their lands, we who lived in the big cities...the blacks how to combat racial prejudice...we who were very white; women...virtually all of us were men. Nevertheless, the intention was very good...He was challenged by a peasant: "when you true artists speak of the blood that must be spilled, this blood is ours not yours"

A shift from actors speaking to an audience to the audience being actors happened when a woman in an audience went on stage after actors failed to resolve the situation on stage and took their place as an actor: *a spectator*. This element of a spectator playing herself is one of the ways in which Theatre of the Oppressed differs from 'role plays' but equally important was the idea that there is not just one way or a right way to behave.

One of the reasons why Theatre of the Oppressed suggested itself as a form which might be particularly suitable for the Multiling project was that it was developed in a context where Quechua and Aymara-speaking people in Peru were described as 'illiterate' because they were unable to express themselves in a Spanish, the official language. It has also been extensively used by trade unions including by one of the unions which the Multiling UK team was working with.

Theatre of the Oppressed has a number of different forms:

- *Rainbow of Desire*: this is Boal's method for addressing internalised oppression. Coming from the very overt repression of the Brazilian junta, in Europe he was struck by the fact that the cops were (all) in the head. Although he saw the therapeutic value of theatre, he was critical of drama therapy and psychodrama which he saw as simply expelling the poison in the mind rather creating a new kind of critical consciousness.
- *Legislative Theatre*: Boal was an elected politician in Rio de Janeiro and he used theatre to get his constituents to draw up proposals for new laws and policies.
- *Invisible Theatre*: invisible theatre is a kind of street theatre in which the spectators do not know that they are watching theatre. He used it for example, on the Paris Metro to explore sexual harassment.

- *Forum theatre*: this is described below.

The Theatre of the Oppressed method

- *Participants are all “spect-actors”*: simultaneously spectators and actors, though there may be actors as performers/catalysts.
- *Participation* is through doing things not (just) saying things
- *Exercises* are an essential part of the action – they are not simply icebreakers. The aim is to get people not to be self-conscious about expressing themselves physically, emotionally and ideologically, through the memories of experiences and the senses: sounds (not necessarily words), touch (When appropriate) and above all, visually.
- *‘Catharsis’*: in the sense of enhancing understanding and using emotion
- *Images* (Both physical and spoken) of an issue or situation participants choose or recognise in which there is a conflict

The forum process

1. A forum theatre event starts off like a conventional play. It could be as short as 3-4 minutes as in the Multiling videos. In the usual forum theatre form there is one actor who has ‘the’ issue or problem. S/he is called the protagonist. There is usually a person they are directly in conflict with: the antagonist. However, it is possible to have more than one protagonist and the antagonist might not be present.
2. The spectators are asked by the Joker (See below) if they agree with the outcome or resolution of the problem? And would they like to change it?
3. The spectators are asked who wants to replace the protagonist and when? Normally, this is done by clapping hands or clicking fingers. If there are a lot of people present, it is helpful to go through the whole scene and to choose the moments when the most people want to intervene.
4. A Spectator takes protagonist’s place
5. More spectators make replacements
6. Discussion of models of action for the future (Some practitioners might leave this stage out)
7. Either, the event organisers will introduce another prepared scene or the participants will be invited to stage their own scenes
8. Stages 1-6 are repeated

The role of the joker

Boal called the facilitator a joker. S/he:

- Facilitates the process
- Does not to decide or propose solutions
- Ask questions (see below)
- Gives guidance on who can be replaced: ‘the protagonist’
- Guides who comes in to replace the protagonist: there can be difficulties if a spectator not experiencing the same oppression wants to replace an oppressed protagonist. However, adversaries playing each other can be very revealing and people can recognise an oppression from another similar or parallel oppression or situation. It can be a good way of someone with specialist knowledge sharing it e.g. the law works.

Questions for the joker to ask...

- *Is it familiar? Does it seem real? Do you recognise this?*
- *Could it happen differently?*
- *What would you do if you were x?*
- *Does this solution work? Is this effective or ineffective?*
- *How many solutions are there? S/he makes it clear there is no single solution to this or absolute right and wrong.*
- *At what point would you change it?*
- *Who else wants to have a go?*

Designing scenes

When the joker invites participants to design their own scenes s/he should encourage them to think about:

- A cast of characters
- Setting: where the action takes place
- Key issues
- Any images or verbatim phrases to be included
- Any props which help make the scene clearer

The videos

The scenarios were devised by actors from *Implicated Theatre* based on their experience and on material from the IR Multiling project.

Implicated Theatre is a company of mainly migrant workers to the UK. It has been working since 2011, as a series of workshops as part of the Serpentine Galleries' Edgware Road Project. Beginning as a collaboration with the Migrants Resource Centre, the theatre group works with migrant's rights organisations across the city including the Anti-raids network, LAWAS and, since 2014, UNITE the union's Hotel Workers branch and Justice for Domestic Workers. Theatre director Frances Rifkin facilitates the work with Amal Khalaf of Serpentine Galleries.

Nye Williams filmed and edited the videos.

John Eversley oversaw the production on behalf of Multiling and Utopia Arts administered the budget.

The videos are all at: [IR Multiling YouTube](#)

Planning a session

Who is it for?

It may be a mixed group or very specific:

- Migrant workers
- Trade union representatives
- Employers: managers and supervisors, Human Resources
- Educationalists
- Educationists
- Workers from trade unions or migrant workers' organisations
- Students

Each group will have specific needs which may reflect their fluency in the main language of the session, their work and industrial relations experiences and their reasons for taking part.

Who is running it?

Ideally, the session will have the services of experienced Forum Theatre facilitators. If you don't know of one, contact John Eversley ppre@onetel.com who will try to identify one. If a forum theatre facilitator is not available, then adult educators, particularly with a background in critical literacy (Freire's concept) will understand the principles and have used related practices.

If the facilitator can rehearse some of the scenes with even one or two other people beforehand, that makes it easier to stage them 'live'. The collaborators don't need to be actors. The [Transcripts](#) (in six languages) will help people 'learn their lines' which they don't have to do word for word.

How long is the session?

It is difficult to use the materials in less than three hours. A lot can be achieved in day session. The scenarios which are in the videos were developed over two days by a theatre company of migrant workers but they have worked together over five years.

[Session Plans](#) are suggested below.

Setting up a session

- Choose the right space...
 - Size: allows for a seated circle of people with chairs that can be easily moved
 - Room for performance space
 - Acoustics so that people do need microphones to be heard
 - Lighting so that video can be watched
 - Disability access
- Makes sure you have projection and sound equipment with a computer with a USB/Flash Drive or DVD drive. Although the videos are online, broadband can be too slow to work well.
- Anticipate some props: a basic table, papers, a brush, a laptop not in use, for example.

Running a session

Using the videos

Explain background to [The Multiling project](#) highlighting that:

- The videos were made by migrant workers in London
- The scenarios were developed from their experience and findings of research
- In addition to six scenarios, there are many [Additional scenarios](#) from the research

Explain that you are going to:

- Show (One or more) of [The scenarios](#) (background) and videos in six languages [IR Multiling YouTube](#)
- If you are not sure which one(s) will be most relevant, then you could show all of them but that will often be unnecessary and inappropriate
- Do some exercises with them to get them used to performing
- Take the scene from the video and restage it
- Repeat the scene with the participants joining in. Stress that you won't let them just talk about what they would do, they need to join in for the method to work
- Make new scenes with them

[The scenarios](#)

[English](#)

1. Actimel

[Actimel - English](#)



Health and Safety is an issue that migrant workers, trade unions and employers have all raised as a problem when there are language barriers. Sometimes the issues involve plant and machinery or invisible hazards which are more difficult to stage.

2. **Darling:** a new employee discovers that the supervisor will not use her proper name. She feels disrespected.

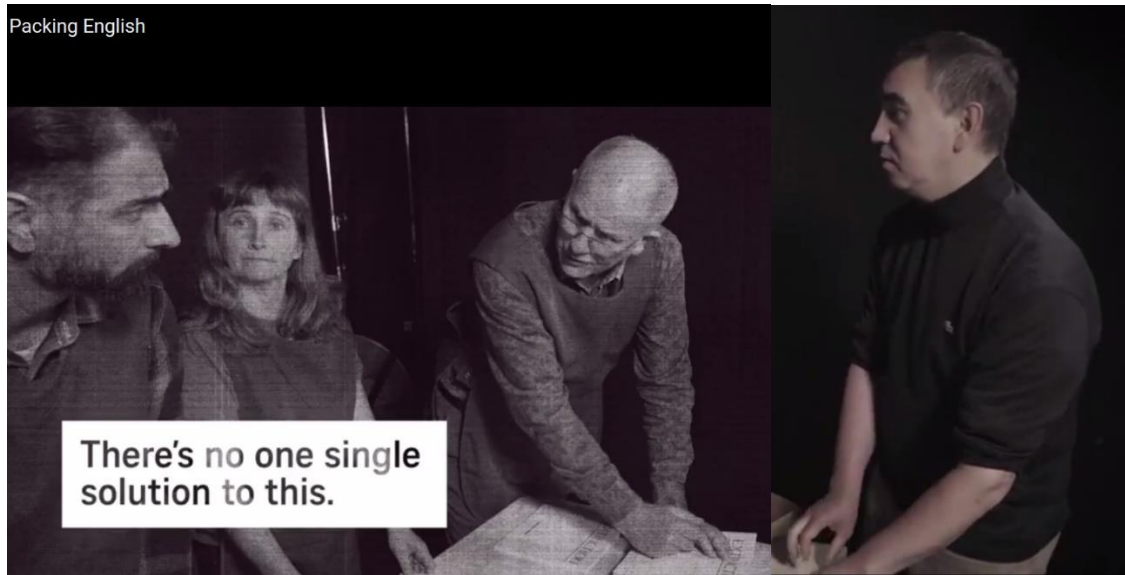
[Darling - English](#)



English does not have formal and informal forms of address (The T/V forms) as many other languages do, so lack of respect may be evident through terms like 'darling', 'mate', 'boy' or 'girl'.

3. **Packing:** there is tension between a new migrant worker and an established local worker about how fast to work. The trade union representative does not want divisions between workers.

[Packing - English](#)



'New Boy' thinks he has to be better or faster than other workers because his position, as a migrant worker, is more marginal but that causes friction with other workers.

4. **Toothbrush:** a misunderstanding between a hotel guest and a housekeeper means she may lose her job

[Toothbrush - English](#)



Users of the Toothbrush/Two brush scenario may need to look for situations in other languages when similar sounding words get confused.

5. **Join the union:** Why? Why not? A group of workers discuss reasons for joining or not joining a union

[Join the Union-English](#)



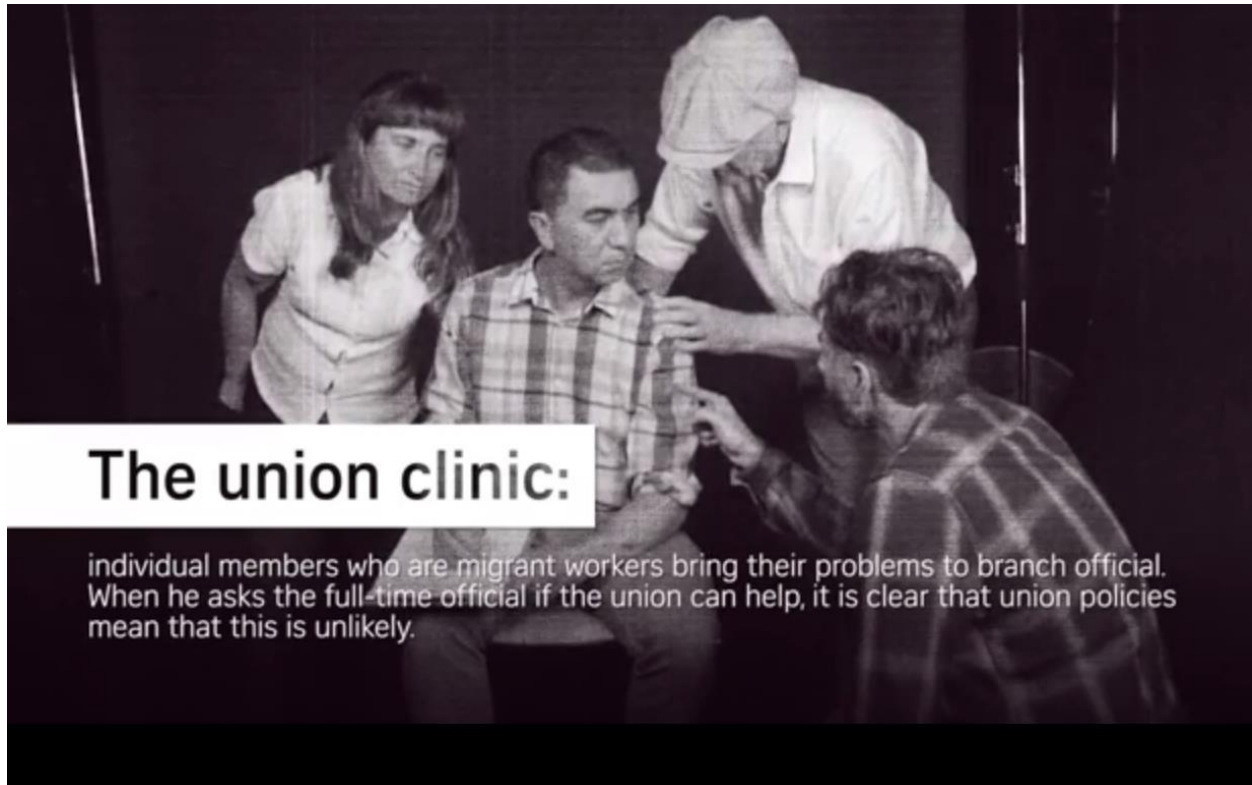
Why was the worker dismissed? Was it a language-related issue? Perhaps for speaking in her home language? Not understanding instructions in the main workplace language? Not being able to explain problems?

The (political) context of trade unions in different countries affects people's attitudes: are they seen as a part of the state, possibly spying on workers or are they seen as revolutionary subversives?

Do some people think trade unions are a redundant form of collective action because it can be done through social media etc.?

6. **The union clinic:** individual members who are migrant workers bring their problems to branch official. When he asks the full-time official if the union can help, it is clear that union policies mean that this is unlikely

[Union Clinic - English](#)



This form of union organisation may not be familiar or relevant in all countries. Some unions or union federations run drop in 'surgeries' or 'clinics' for members, migrant workers, in particular. For some unions this kind of advice bureau model is seen as enhancing the potential for collective action. Others see it as undermining it. Some clinics will have bilingual staff or volunteers. Others won't.

The issues that the actors are raising are more universal:

- Being overworked
- Wanting language classes (A right or established practice in some countries and sectors but not in others)
- Not understanding their contract of employment (Again a right to translation guaranteed in some countries but not others)
- Unions have finite resources and they have rules or policies to decide what they can or cannot do

Videos subtitled in other languages

[Italian](#)

Actimel	Actimel-Italian
Darling	Darling-Italian
Packing	Packing-Italian
Toothbrush	Toothbrush-Italian
Join the Union	Join the Union-Italian
Union Clinic	Union Clinic-Italian

[Spanish](#)

Actimel	Actimel-Spanish
Darling	Darling-Spanish
Packing	Packing-Spanish
Toothbrush	Toothbrush- Spanish
Join the Union	Join the Union-Spanish
Union Clinic	Union Clinic-Spanish

[Hungarian](#)

Actimel	Actimel-Hungarian
Darling	Darling-Hungarian
Packing	Packing-Hungarian
Toothbrush	Toothbrush-Hungarian
Join the Union	Join the Union-Hungarian
Union Clinic	Union Clinic-Hungarian

French

Actimel	Actimel-French
Darling	Darling-French
Packing	Packing-French
Toothbrush	Toothbrush-French
Join the Union	Join the Union- French
Union Clinic	Union Clinic-French

German

Actimel	Actimel-German
Darling	Darling-German
Packing	Packing-German
Toothbrush	Toothbrush-German
Join the Union	Join the Union-German
Union Clinic	Union Clinic- German

Session Plans

3 hours...

1. Begin with a presentation on the theoretical background to Forum Theatre. A version of a such a presentation in English is here: [Forum Theatre](#)
2. Exercises:
 - a. [Crossing the Circle](#)
 - b. [Occupy the Space](#)
 - c. [1-2-3](#) (adding multilingual, noises and gestures)

Show three of the films, ending with the [Union Clinic - English](#)

- 3.
4. Three actors performed the bit of the union clinic scene where a character says she can bring a priest as an interpreter.
5. Audience do replacements

Show the other three films ending with [Join the Union-English](#). Two actors act out 'unions are part of the state'

6. Replacements
7. Audience (Depending on size of the group, together or in smaller groups) discuss principles and ideas for future activities

4 hours

As above, but you could add in a session with a specialist on e.g.

- Collective Bargaining Agreements
- Negotiation methods and tactics
- Legal Rights and Duties

5 – 7 hours (Include a long break!)

As above but invite participants to devise their own scenarios and/or use one of the [Additional scenarios](#)

Exercises

General rules:

- Create some ground rules before starting: Sharing, listening, quiet when asked, agree to try the games, ask questions, space for discussion, free exchange of opinions and ideas, the right to stand back.
- If someone wants to not take part, drop out or pull back: support them and ask them, for example, to help you watch and feed back on what they see. They usually join in eventually.
- Don't over explain. Demonstrate what you want people to do. Call "*freeze*" or another short word to stop the action. "*Stop*" can be used instead of "*Freeze*". It's good to have a simple one syllable instruction.
- Ask for silence during the games: sharing afterwards is fine. Silence focuses the action of the game. Insist on this! Nicely!
- *Phrases for Joker to use in italics.*

Crossing the Circle. (CS)

Notes for Joker.

This can be done at different levels.

- It re-structures the classroom (if not done already) into a circle of chairs.
- People look across the room at each other.
- It is ideally done standing and walking.
- This might be a process for development. Decide on whether to ask group to sit or stand depending on confidence, willingness.
- Ok to use first or second languages, as useful and appropriate.
- *No talking: OK to smile, laugh.*
- Take it as far as seems OK depending on newness etc.

Practical instructions: Crossing the Circle

- J says *everyone please put chairs in a large circle of one row.*
- Now everyone, look at someone across the circle, smile, wave, contact. Someone not next to you. *Hi!, Freeze/OK!/stop!/great!!/thanks!*
- Demonstrate looking at, acknowledging, smiling at someone: waving, making a signal.
- *Now, as a group, look at the person you've chosen and change places across the circle, greeting them as you pass.*
- J Demonstrate as necessary. Keep it going so there are overlapping crossings and as much greeting as wanted, not isolated moves. *Freeze.*
- *Choose other partners, greet and cross. A new person each time.*
- Depending on confidence, repeat freely and add words, sentences.
- This can be adapted into word and sentence-use, as J decides or group suggests.

Occupy the Space! (OtS)

Notes for Joker:

- Firmly encourage people to look down at the spaces between them and fill uneven gaps.
- This focuses people on the task not self-consciousness.
- It can become quite giggly and fun. Play with the speed.

(OtS) Practical Instructions Occupy the Space.

- Joker: Demonstrates walking round the space by asking a couple of people to walk with her and then getting others to join.
- *No talking! Laughing fine but no talking!*
- *Just look at the space between you! Keep it equal no big gaps. Faster!! Slower!!*
- *"Freeze!!"*
- *Ok! Walk again. Practice a bit.*

(OtS) Then, try all or some of the following. Call "freeze!" between each change.

- *Walk and smile at each person, greet, wave, make contact. Freeze!*
- *Walk and frown or play at being cross: just facial expressions. Freeze!*
- *Divide the group on the floor and ask half to stay cross, half to smile. Freeze!*
- *Add a sound: laugh, exclaim, they can choose. Freeze!*
- *Reverse the division and do this again. Freeze!*
- *Ask them to walk, smile and greet each other, exchange names in culturally various ways: handshakes, using native languages, second language etc. Freeze.*
- *Walk again. Freeze.*
- *Ask a person next to you three questions for e.g. favourite food, favourite film, favourite person. To be decided by J in context of group.*

(OtS) Walk with a word: agree a list of words on flip chart: emotions, thoughts etc.

- *Choose a word for yourself. Keep it secret.*
- *Walk the space, look at others etc. Freeze.*
- *J asks group to walk in silence with the word in your mind.*
- *Walk the feeling of the word.*
- *Walk and speak the word to yourself.*
- *Walk and speak the word to each other, share with others.*
- *Adapt to sentences, use in new ways.*

123

Notes for Joker:

- Demonstrate the instructions without initial explanation.
- Useful for working together. It generates language about this theme.
- Useful for beginning to perform: everyone shows what they've made to the group at the end, unless they refuse.
- With repetition, this changes.

Practical Instructions 123

- Joker asks people to form pairs: A and B.
- *Face and look at each other.*
- Joker and someone else demonstrate counting Person A says 1, Person, B says 2, person A says 3, Person B says 1 and so on....
- Joker says: *now you try.*
- The pairs count 1 2 3 over and over trying to get it smooth. *Giggling fine. No talking at all!*
- J demonstrates replacing 1 by a sound and gesture (s/g) which replaces the number, e.g. a hand wave and a sound.
- A starts...
- S/g is used by both partners, shared, learnt from the partner.
- For example, the s/g made by A for number 1, is used by both partners.
- B replaces 2 and A uses it as 2. Then only 3 remains.
- A or B replace 3. They share 3 sounds/gestures.
- Practice them and then perform to the group.
- In a multilingual group, you can start counting in different languages....

Additional scenarios

Themes

Click on a theme to go to examples

1. [Status of languages](#)
2. [Health and Safety](#)
3. [Not knowing your rights or knowing them but unable to articulate them](#)
4. [Formal and informal rules on language spoken at work](#)
5. [Language as a barrier to good relationships with customers or users](#)
6. [Disrespect and Indignity, exploitation because of language or migrant status?](#)
7. [Language as a barrier to good relationships with colleagues, supervisors and managers](#)
8. [Management attitudes to learning dominant language](#)
9. [Language, culture and political issues in trade union organisation](#)
10. [Language policy and practice not working properly](#)

Creating your own scenarios

Please do! If you tell us about them, we will add them to the collection: ppre@onetel.com

Elements of a scenario

When you are creating a scenario, think about...

- A cast of characters
- Setting: where the action takes place
- Key issues
- Any verbatim phrases to be included

Themes, Issues, settings and Dialogue...

Status of languages

1. *'No [Migrant worker] chooses [Country with dominant language not widely spoken outside country] because they want to of the language'*

[Reduced incentive to learn language]

Health and Safety

2. Workers demand a Technical Manual in [a national language] as well as English or English as well as national language.
3. Health and Safety information is not provided in migrants' languages
4. *One time this man in the office he speak with us but he have dialect and we understand nothing. He bring new chemical, we don't understand training, what it is for... He said: "It's not dangerous, it's the same like Actimel". But I don't understand how to use it, what is written here...I know it was a lie but I didn't understand. But now. Look my allergy... Now I have an allergy from chemical. He said:" You need to work with this. It is good for you. It's okay for you".*
5. *One day I had a bad headache. I didn't know how to explain that I had a headache and needs medicine.*
6. *I had an accident cleaning the bathroom. It was very slippery. I slipped I had problem with my shoulder for a few days and couldn't explain about accident. [Did it go in the accident book?] No.*
7. *I cut my finger and couldn't ask for plaster. Had to go in the office and had to finish work.*
8. *There was a new chemical. We didn't understand. The problem is that they didn't have the bottle they have to refill but didn't know how to say it. They placed machine there but we didn't know how to refill it. How to work with this machine, how to be careful with this chemical. Training was done from the agency but in English and we didn't understand.*
9. A cleaning product used to clean skin and clothes which was not always available but even when it was, it causes skin allergies for some workers (Which they had difficulty explaining to a doctor because of their limited English).
10. *Worker was told to do which he thought was unsafe. I told them ... but the manager said I had to [do it] and I slipped. Some people were telling me not to do it but if I didn't I would get reprimanded.*

Not knowing your rights or knowing hem but unable to articulate them

11. Contract information is not provided in migrants' language
12. Workers at workplace are told that some of them are going to be made redundant. Some of them don't understand the word redundant but they are too embarrassed to say.
13. A Yoruba speaking African nurse refuses to bandage a patient, she says it is the job of less senior nurse. She goes before a disciplinary and speaks English but isn't able to articulate her view that if your Job Description doesn't include bandaging, then you shouldn't be expected to do it and her strong respect for authority works both ways -down and up. [Migrant workers more vulnerable to disciplinary procedures]

14. *English is necessary for communication, documentation e.g. contract. The documents we received e.g. TUPE³: transfer from one institution to another. Not really understanding what they say. Just given to us for us to sign.*
15. Being asked to do jobs outside their job description which 'local' workers were not asked to do: *My first disciplinary procedure was for something I wasn't even responsible for but it needed to be done*

Formal and informal rules on language spoken at work

16. A Filipino worker in a call centre is not allowed to talk to a customer in their own language
17. Filipino nurses are not allowed to talk to each other in their own languages
18. A company advertises for a 'Polish and English-speaking cleaner' – so they could communicate with other workers. Union members complain.
19. A French speaking worker in a café run by a contractor for a bank greets customers in French and says '*Eh Voila!*' when he serves them. He says they love it. His supervisor says he must stop, saying: '*It's my restaurant, I can do what I like*'.
20. A policy is introduced that staff can use their own language in breaks as long as neither other staff or customers are around
21. Staff working for a cleaning company are told they cannot speak to each other in their home language on their walkie talkies. If they want to use their home language they have to do it face-to-face. Later they are told they can use their home language for up to three minutes on their walkie talkies.
22. *In the morning meetings, two groups they speak Romanian and Bulgarian. Manager says 'English please' because they not understand what they are saying.*
23. Filipino nurses said that they spoke informally with other Filipinos in their first language, despite the English- only policy. Doing so, they suggested, made communication easier, and made them feel less isolated and more 'at home'. The ease, convenience and comfort speaking in their first language encouraged them to speak Tagalog in coffee and lunch breaks, despite the management instruction that all communications, formal and informal, should be in English.

Language as a barrier to good relationships with customers or users

24. A customer in a café complains that the worker who makes omlettes does not greet him. '*Not saying Hello is not polite*'. The worker is Bangladeshi and has been promoted from being a kitchen porter. His English is not very good.
25. The customers ignore the worker who does not speak much English and go to a colleague with better English.
26. Russian speaking patient needs help going to toilet, nurse doesn't understand. Nurse worried s/he will be accused of negligent for not meeting a patient's needs. Russian speaking co-worker worried they will be disciplined for leaving their job to assist.
27. *The ward is understaffed; nobody supports staff who patients insult or complain about staff* [Migrant or Foreign Language speakers more vulnerable]
28. Hotel worker: *Many times you knock on door and guest want something... a drink, something them to bring something and not understanding. It was very difficult to work without language. If language problems, the managers not happy because guests complaining. Sometimes they kick*

³In the UK, when business ownership is transferred and workers have a new employer but are entitled to protection of their working conditions

you out. It happened to me when I was working for the agency. They say I don't understand English and they send me to other place

29. *If the guest needs something... a toothbrush, or whatever guest needs, I don't know. If I say 'call the supervisor' it is not polite. I don't understand if there is a problem. [Even] If guest wants to say 'thank you' I don't understand if they say thank you or if I have done something wrong and I need to correct. Can't do better.*
30. *I cleaned the room. It was room with children inside. Guest asked 'where are the toys?' but she didn't understand. I said 'call office'. She had rubbish bag which she threw away. If I had understood, I would have shown them that I hadn't thrown away the toys. I couldn't prove that that I hadn't thrown away toy bag. It was a big problem. They didn't take money [but] they called me at home. I felt very [Not translated]. The Bulgarian supervisor called me. He say 'How can you do that?' but I never did that but could not prove that.*
31. *Sometimes there's a note from the guest about extra tea or coffee and we don't understand what guest wants.... 'Milk' I understood and I give straightaway! Nothing else.*
32. *I cannot speak with the guest, even when I knock on the door and [cannot] say 'Can I clean the room or not?'. Or ask if they would like a late service. The basic things to communicate with the guest.*
33. *Filipino nurses said they sometimes felt uncomfortable answering the phone, in case they were unable to understand the caller.*

Disrespect and Indignity, exploitation because of language or migrant status?

34. *A supervisor calls Maria-Dolores, 'Maria'*
35. *A supervisor calls all the staff 'Darling'. He says all these foreign names are too difficult to learn.*
36. *'Don't say me 'Love', my name is Laura'.*
37. *Polish welders are taken on by an agency. They find they are paid less than the permanent workforce, don't have holiday entitlement or pensions. Local unions think local people should have been recruited or trained but decide to recruit them anyway to achieve parity of pay and conditions.*
38. *I had a problem with a manager. She gave more rooms to us and less rooms to others and the finish time she put the same. Not fair. I cannot explain that I am not happy.*
39. *A problem about nationality. If supervisor is Polish, then they have given [Polish] girls rooms that don't need cleaning they take rooms from Bulgarian girls and Bulgarian girls end up with less rooms [and therefore less money].*
40. *[On zero hours' contracts so...] They have a rota for the week. Get cancellations. I get given a day off which I don't want. I need money. But I can't explain on the phone. I need to go in and explain [Where there is a Bulgarian supervisor].*
41. *A bonus scheme which it was felt that Polish workers were penalised for being more productive: they threatened me with being dismissed because I copied what local people did. But I was told they should be doing things the way I do them!*

Language as a barrier to good relationships with colleagues, supervisors and managers

42. *Train catering crew: two French speaking staff in English speaking country complain about Polish staff speaking to each other in Polish.*
43. *A Polish speaking supervisor has her father and mother working for her. An English speaking supervisor thinks she is/should be in charge of all of them.*
44. *A new manager at a workplace comes in and meets a worker who does not understand what she says but responds to her greeting by kissing her hand. The director says *His English is not the best. But he is a very good worker and the residents like him**

45. A group of (Filipino?) (health) workers having a coffee/lunch break speaking in their own language. Other workers express negative feelings towards the group, mixture of suspicion, hostility, prejudice etc.
46. *If I speak English with foreman. If she doesn't speak with me slowly, I lose my time because I have to go to office, not on the phone. We have this list to make this room. If I can't read everything, maybe I make mistake.*
47. *I cleaned room. The sink was blocked but didn't know how to explain [on phone] so had to go down to supervisor to show her. It takes times because she has problems to explain.*
48. *There's a note on the door of the office. We see the note on the door. Some information but we don't understand it.*
49. *The canteen always ask us to explain in English what I want. [Much laughter]. Romanian person asks. [Discrimination?] No.*
50. The nurses were aware that there was a price to pay for speaking to each other in their home language. In the view of one Filipino nurse, *other staff saw such behaviour as snobbish and gave the impression that Filipino nurses were better than the rest.* Indeed, according to one manager, *such practices can 'alienate the group from other staff' whilst another said that she found 'it really offensive' and that patients would also not understand and this may cause anxiety and suspicion*

Management attitudes to learning dominant language

51. *'Your job is to clean not talk'... 'Don't shout'*
52. *'I've never been criticized for keeping quiet'*
53. One nurse manager said: *I feel strongly that if you take a job abroad, you have to take responsibility to learn the language.* Another manager said, *"we have 1000s of staff whose first language is not English, where does it stop, are we going to run English classes for everyone?"*

Language, culture and political issues in trade union organisation

54. Workers who have been told they are going to be redundant meet to discuss what to do. Most are not union members. Some of them think they should just go on strike. Some of them think they should or have to join a union to go on strike. They discuss what unions are for? Are they political or campaigning organisations; expert advisers e.g. On law or tactics; welfare organisations e.g. subsidized holiday hotels.
55. A union official joins a meeting of workers. He uses words some of the workers do not understand e.g. *redundancy, flaw, collective bargaining* but they are too embarrassed to ask.
56. *About 20 people join[ed union], maybe more: Bulgarians, Romanians etc. in housekeeping department. There are 25-30 in the department altogether. [Why not others?] One lady she think 'they only need my money'. Ridiculous, because it is only a small amount. New girls, they don't speak English. One from Italia, one from Romania. They work for this new company. They don't speak almost nothing. They work for longer than us. They work like a horse. No one speak for nothing. We cannot explain them.*
57. Union full-time official: *some of workers have very good English. But the person who speaks best English isn't necessarily the best representative: they can be young and ambitious and can be quite hostile for the needs of employees...]. They may be brought in by employers. If they are elected shop steward then they may run their own agenda e.g. training, promotion, their own difficulties. I have to watch it very carefully. ...*

58. Union Official: *Some general meetings are like the Eurovision Song Contest with seven languages. I am not sure if I am getting the message across and I can't tell jokes. It all has to be black and white. We have to divide the meeting into 2-3 groups and you lose the collective experience. It can also be expensive, running up a fairly big interpreters' bill. If employers supply an interpreter, then you are not sure what happens. For example, an employer repeats something that they should not have known*

[Language policy and practice not working properly](#)

59. *the language training budget has been cut and the training is inappropriate about 'Shakespeare'*

[Transcripts](#)

Transcripts of the dialogue in English, French, Spanish, Italian, German and Hungarian are available on the Multiling website

[Video Transcripts in six languages](#)