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Communication Needs in Science?

Access to Communication Optimisation in an International Research Project in the Area of Public Health

Abstract

Barrier-free communication in an international research project – can this be achieved, and if so, by using which methods? The present article presents a project in the area of public health operating in six different countries. Coming from different countries and disciplines and speaking different mother tongues, the project members constituted a heterogeneous group working together on a daily basis. After identifying some barriers to efficient communication in this setting, the article will discuss the access to communication optimisation. The article ends with suggested methods for communication optimisation in this setting.

1 Introduction

Science is becoming more and more global, with researchers from different nationalities and disciplines collaborating in research projects with joint grants. Communication technology helps to overcome geographical barriers and gives the impression that research collaboration can be extended without any problems. Collaboration is also becoming more flexible – “imagine it is Monday and nobody comes to the office” (Bonnet 2015). All collaborators are working flexibly from different places, connected by web-based tools. The tendency in collaborative research is going towards an even more open approach, sharing data and information with open access (Bartling/Friesike 2014). Open access publishing, open access data, open communication – this sounds like barrier-free research and communication but appearances are deceitful. Web-based communication using English as a lingua franca (ELF) creates new barriers often underestimated in academia. By analysing the communication in an international research project as a case study, different barriers to communication have been identified and methods to overcome these will be explained in the present article. How does a linguist have the opportunity to intervene in the project communication actively and are linguistic methods sufficient for this task? This article is considered to be a methods paper, describing an approach for carrying out research in applied linguistics in a research project in the area of public health funded by the Seventh Framework

Program of the European Union (EU-FP7). Comprising three main parts, this article first describes a research project as case study including its communication and collaboration patterns. Further, different barriers to efficient communication in this project are discussed before suggested methods for communication optimisation are finally presented.

2 The AMASA Project

‘Accessing Medicines in Africa and South Asia’ (AMASA) was an EU-FP 7 research project, led by the University of Edinburgh. Researchers in Belgium, India, South Africa, Switzerland, Great Britain and Uganda examined the access to seven different medicines in Africa and South Asia. The research included examining the production, distribution, supply and consumption of medicines in seven different areas of health: HIV/AIDS, Malaria, Reproductive Health, Tuberculosis Control, Mental Health, Pain Management and Diabetes. To conduct this research, project members from several different backgrounds worked together on a daily basis, which resulted in a heterogeneous setting:

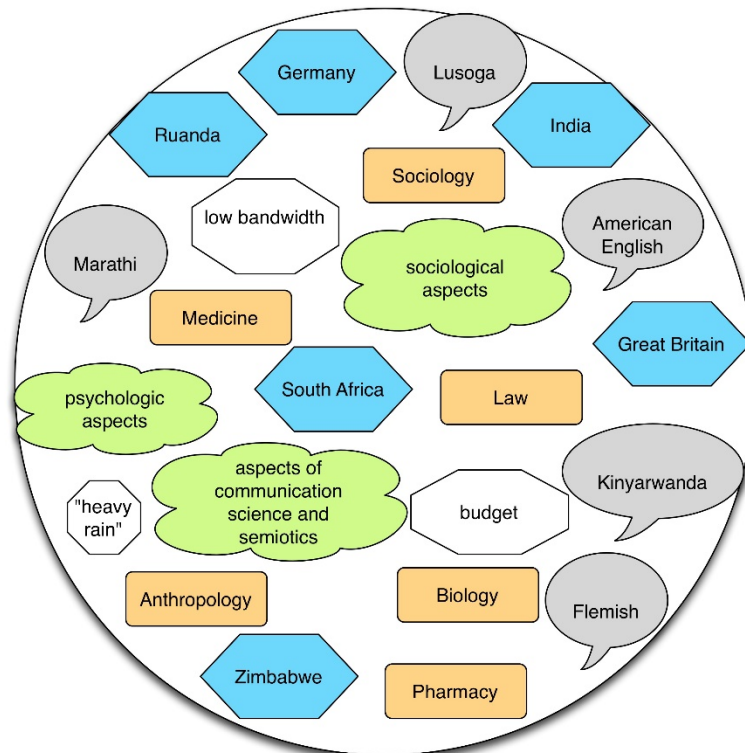


Fig. 1: Heterogeneity of the project communication at AMASA

Figure 1 shows examples of the different professional (orange) and national (blue) backgrounds involved. Some project members did not work in their country of birth. For

example, one project member came initially from Ruanda, where he also completed his studies, and now worked for the AMASA project in Belgium. Other project members came from the USA and worked for AMASA in Switzerland and Great Britain. Therewith, the current job location does not give any indication of nationality and mother tongue.

2.1 Project Communication

In this heterogeneous setting, the internal project communication was influenced by several factors, such as the different nationalities and mother tongues (figure 1 shows examples highlighted in grey) or the disciplines and related languages for specific purposes (LSPs – figure 1 shows examples in orange). As figure 2 below presents, the discipline of studies does not give enough indication of the LSPs used:

Dear NAME,

I was looking at the new folder structure and I have a few questions concerning the activity monitoring:

- Don't we sort this by tracer meds? I assume that's the final PI decision?
- What's about the oxytocin instrument? I didn't find the finalised instruments for all partner sites (IN and SA are missing).
- Are all updates of the MoH surveys on track?

The DMS is back to work, the problem was based on the inproxy server of the NAME network. I hope this won't appear in future again – cross your fingers!

All best from Basel,

Kristina

Fig. 2: Example of an email

Figure 2 presents an email sent to a member of the AMASA project. Written by a project member with a background in applied linguistics, it contains elements of different LSPs, for instance project management (*activity monitoring* and *PI decision*), medicine (*tracer meds*) or information technology (*inproxy server*). Additionally, some project-specific terms are used, such as *oxytocin instrument* (research instrument for examining the access to Oxytocin), *IN* and *SA* (India and South Africa) or *MoH surveys* (surveys conducted with members of the Ministry of Health). As figure 2 shows, the idiolect of the project members includes different LSPs, not only the ones related to the professional background. The email displayed in figure 2 was sent to a project member from Ruanda working in Belgium. Having a professional background in medicine, he did not have any problems understanding the content of this email. These additional LSPs, which are part of each project partner's idiolect, were acquired within the collaboration in a heterogeneous setting by situated learning (Lave/Wenger 1991). Additionally to the different mother tongues and LSPs, various other factors influenced

the project communication in the AMASA project. Following the pragmalinguistic context model (Roelcke 1999/2010: 18ff), sociological factors (e.g. level of education – between master level and professor, professional experience – between none and over 30 years, age – between 20 and over 60 etc.), psychological factors (e.g. intellectual capacities, linguistic skills, motivation to communicate – mandatory communication with the leading house or based on individual initiative, level of liability – for instance decision related to finances or brainstorming with the team, etc.) as well as factors related to semiotics and communication studies (e.g. number of communicating persons – dialogue with one colleague or workshop with thirty participants, communication medium – for instance email or videoconference, spatial and temporal relation between text production and reception of the text, etc.) have significant influences on the communication (Roelcke 1999/2010: 18ff). Due to the immense geographical distances, face-to-face meetings with all project members were not feasible. Some project members met each other at annual workshops, but unfortunately not all project members had the opportunity to meet each other in person during the course of the project. Therefore, the internal project communication at AMASA was mainly web-based, involving different communication media.

For the internal web-based communication, different media were used. For instance, emails were used for the daily one-to-one communication as well as for addressing all project members by using the mailing list of the project. Telephone conversations were replaced by regular Skype calls, attended by two to twenty project members. Instead of local workshops, videoconferences lasting several hours were organised, including coffee breaks for social exchange. In the AMASA project, the document management system Alfresco was employed – initially used for storage and sharing of documents and other data, it became the collaboration platform of the project by including different communication features, for instance a wiki used as project specific glossary, a discussion forum, a calendar and a blog.

2.2 Project Language(s)

Without ever discussing it, English was used as a lingua franca (ELF) in AMASA and considered as the common language for this project. Barbara Seidlhofer defines ELF as “a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language” (Seidlhofer 2004: 211). The project language was not mentioned in the technical annex, nor was it documented in other project documents. While requesting support from English native speakers for the external communication (for instance policy briefs), no proofreading or other form of support from native speakers was used for internal communication. All project members were expected to be fluent in spoken and written English in order to collaborate with the project partners. Whereby general language is not enough in this context, quoting Kalverkämper (1990), “alles Sprechen auf der Welt ist fachlich und zwar auf einer gestuften Fachlichkeitsskala zwischen den Polen (extrem) merkmalsreich und (extrem) merkmalarms” (Kalverkämper 1990: 112) –

this means, all communication can be defined as “specialised”. Kalverkämper differentiates between highly featured and less featured communication. He outlines his assumption by using examples – unfortunately, an operationalisation of his scalarity assumption is missing, as criticised by Hennig (2010: 302). Therewith, there is no complete list of mandatory features for specialised communication. Transferring the examples given by Kalverkämper to the internal project communication in AMASA, a discussion about research methods can be defined as highly featured, whereas a chat about the nice weather in London would be less featured – but the whole project communication can be defined as “specialised”, as LSPs cannot be switched off during breaks.¹ Summarising, internal project communication in AMASA can be defined as a completely specialised communication, consisting of high and less featured parts and embedded in English as a lingua franca. There was no training, all project members were expected to communicate efficiently in this setting from the outset.

2.3 Internal Collaboration

While the project communication was rather heterogenic as shown above, the internal collaboration followed defined structures as displayed in figure 3 below:

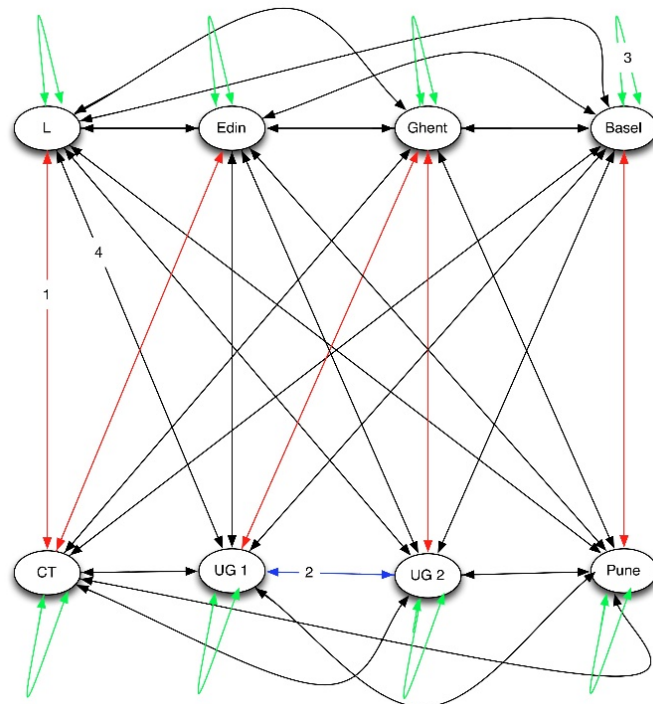


Fig. 3: Ways of communication at AMASA

¹ Additionally, project members with local languages were needed in order to conduct the field research in Africa and India, such as semi-structured interviews with patients who were not fluent in English. Especially important documents such as informed consent forms were translated into local languages.

AMASA consists of eight teams in six countries, organised in tandems and twelve working groups. As figure 3 above shows, one or two Northern partners constitute a tandem together with one or two Southern partners – these connections are highlighted in red: London (L) and Edinburgh (Edin) with Cape Town (CT), Ghent with both teams in Uganda (UG1 und UG2), Basel with Pune. As there were two teams in Uganda, these teams had a stronger collaboration – highlighted in blue in figure 3. Highlighted in green, figure 3 visualises the internal staff meetings every team undertook locally. The frequency of these local meetings depended on the team and their principal investigator, i.e. the local supervisor – one team had weekly minuted local team meetings, other teams did not even meet once a month and did not take minutes. Others included the AMASA topics in their regular unit meetings and therefore did not schedule local meetings explicitly for AMASA. More frequent were the meetings of the twelve internal working groups, consisting of at least one member per partner institute. In the fortnightly meetings of the project management working group, all current topics of the project related to research and administration were discussed, led by the project PIs. All the project management meetings were minuted, and these minutes were shared with all project members as they provided a detailed overview of the current status of the project's progress. These project management meetings were open to the whole team and continued after the official end of the project, in order to enable project members to maintain contact and to develop new ideas for further collaboration. By collaborating in working groups, related to the different research topics but also for knowledge management and communication, the project members worked together on a daily basis during the project (displayed with black arrows in figure 3). This approach to working in groups runs like a continuous thread through the whole project: It started with working groups, followed by so called gap groups² and finally, the project members worked collaboratively on writing publications, organised in writing groups with members from different partner institutes.

3 Barriers to Efficient Communication in AMASA

Due to the heterogeneity outlined above, barrier-free communication was not feasible in AMASA but the project members nevertheless aimed for an efficient and therewith successful communication. How can efficient communication be defined here and which barriers to efficient communication appeared at AMASA?

3.1 Efficient Communication

Successful communication relies on several factors. Roelcke mentions the communicative expense and the communicative result itself, as well as the communicative capacity (together with the communicative willingness) of the communicating persons (Roelcke 2005: 42). Successful communication exists, if the complexity of the text

² The project specific development and meaning of this term is outlined in Pelikan/Roelcke (2015).

relating to the expense and the result fits exactly to the capacity of the producer or the recipient relating to their communicative capacity and willingness (Roelcke 2005: 45). According to Roelcke, efficient communication means either efficient transfer expenditure or efficient transfer result in due consideration of the transfer capacity of the recipient (Roelcke 2005: 47). As figure 4 below shows, efficient communication relies on expense and result.

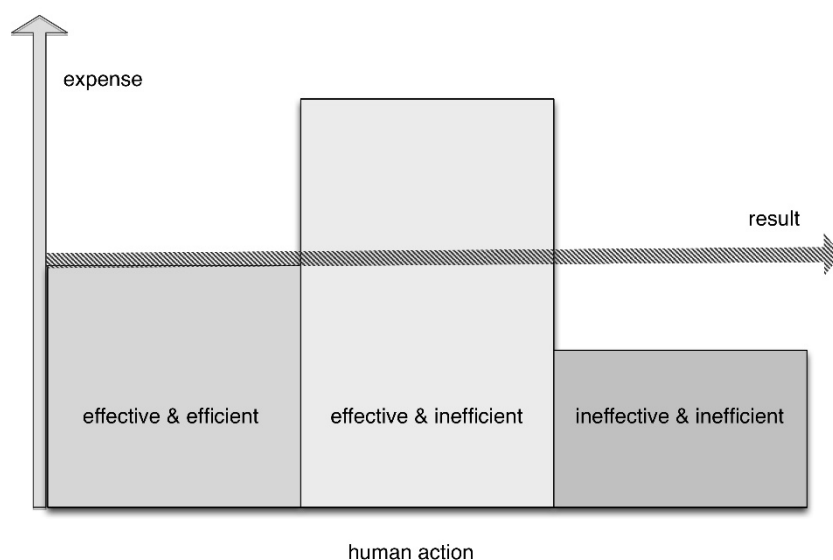


Fig. 4: Effectiveness and efficiency of human action (Roelcke 2002a: 31)

An action is effective if the expected result is achieved (Roelcke 2002b: 19).³ If it is not achieved, then the action is ineffective. Effective communication also takes place when a defined result is achieved with a minimum of expense or “if a particular expense is combined with a maximum of result; we can call the first case *efficiency of expense*, the second *efficiency of result*. However, if a particular result is obtained without a minimum of expense, or, if a particular expense is not combined with a maximum of result, the human action in question may be effective but is inefficient anyway” (Roelcke 2002a: 30-31).

In the AMASA project, a defined communicative result was striven for with a lowest possible expense. “I’m on the project for about 5 percent and I have 10–12 projects going on” (2PR1)⁴ – due to the work load of the majority of the project members, language economy (Roelcke 2002b: 24ff) is an important aim to achieve. The information needs to be transferred in a way that facilitates efficient communication with the lowest communicative effort possible.

³ Roelcke’s approach to communicative efficiency is reviewed in detail by Heidrich (2013).

⁴ ID of a project member.

3.2 Identified Barriers

In the process of writing the proposal of the AMASA project, different difficulties affecting the daily collaboration were expected. These difficulties were related to administration and the planned research process. As outlined above, the project members worked collaboratively in teams consisting of Northern and Southern partners. In such North–South research partnerships, capacity building for sustainable development is a mandatory part of the project proceeding (NCCR North-South s.a.). Capacity building was a part of the project proposal and therewith included in the project proceeding from the outset. While the difficulties expected and therefore included in the project’s capacity building focus on administration and research methods (including skills for data analysis tools), communication was not listed there. The difficulties in efficient communication identified later led to different barriers, which can be categorized into three groups (Pelikan 2015):

(1) Linguistic barriers

Due to different mother tongues and LSPs, difficulties in understanding arose – ELF does not guarantee comprehensive communication in this setting (Pelikan 2014).

(2) Geographical barriers

Due to the immense geographical distances, face-to-face communication was limited and the communication mainly relied on web-based communication tools.

(3) Barriers concerning information technology

The communication media employed were not always used efficiently and sometimes the wrong media were used for different purposes.

3.3 Access to Communication Optimisation

Prior to identifying appropriate methods for communication optimisation, there needs to be access to the communication in question itself and to the project members involved. Communication is a sensitive topic. How can a linguist get the chance to intervene in a research project in the area of public health and optimise the communication significantly?

There is a wealth of literature on communication optimisation and project communication itself (e.g. Strohner/Brose Hg. 2002; Delisle/Olson 2004; Schubert 2009; Freitag et al. 2011; Janich/Zakharova 2011; Zajac 2013; Alnajjar 2014). So knowledge on these topics has been acquired and documented, but

Knowledge is like fine wine. The researcher brews it, the scientific paper bottles it, the peer review tastes it, the journal sticks a label on it, and archive systems store it carefully in a cellar. Splendid! Just one small problem: wine is only useful when someone drinks it. Wine in a bottle does not quench thirst.
(Bennet/Jessani 2011: 1)

So how could the knowledge on optimisation of project communication and on project communication itself coming from linguistic research be applied in a project like

AMASA? There was neither a work package concerned with communication, nor was there communication optimisation mentioned within the milestones and deliverables. Although the majority of the project members did not have previous experience with communication in such a heterogeneous setting, communication was not part of the project's capacity building. While in many companies and their projects, internal communication as well as training in intercultural communication and collaboration is common practice and also represented in the literature, in academia it is not, as the literature review on this topic has shown (Pelikan/Roelcke 2015). Project leaders, who take care of internal communication, cannot be taken for granted; their focus is mainly on the dissemination and external communication only (Zürn/Pelikan 2014). With all these perspectives, different factors negatively influence the access to communication optimisation in academia and hence, linguistic research on this topic.. One issue is the lack of awareness concerning communication difficulties. "There is a view that communication is a less important skill than planning and project management activities. This is not so. If you communicate badly, your project will fail" (Nokes/Kelly 2007: 246). Researchers in science often do not see the need for communication optimisation as they do not have any experience with it and with linguistic research on this topic at all. Some do not realise the gap between effective and efficient communication and fail to see that these two concepts are not the same. Additionally, the ambiguity of the term 'communication' itself, used synonymously with dissemination for instance by the European Commission (European Commission 2012), also shifts the focus towards external communication, thus neglecting internal communication. This approach coming from the European Commission is an unfavourable sign, because the project principal investigators (PIs) implement in their project proposals and further projects what is requested and finally evaluated by the donors. If the donors neither request nor check or finally evaluate something, why should it be taken into account by the project PIs? In some countries and related projects, also the lack of appreciation of the humanities in the area of science is not beneficial. For instance Yoweri Museveni, the current president of Uganda, claimed that art courses are useless (Wandera 2014) as they are "to blame for joblessness" (Tumushabe 2013) and he "urged humanities graduates to seek slots in the army, police and prisons services" (Wandera 2014).

However, referring to Schubert, communication optimisation means conscious intervention (Schubert 2009: 110) – so there is a need for active intervention.

How is it feasibly to intervene in this setting for working on communication optimisation? A method for accessing the communication itself is necessary as the first step towards optimisation.

4 Methods

Based on the barriers to overcome outlined above, there was a significant need for communication optimisation in AMASA; but which parts could be optimised during the course of the project and by using which methods?

4.1 Establishing Access to Project Communication

A successful intervention requires access to the centre of the communication and an appropriate position in the project. As the author of the present article did not only lead the knowledge management, but also the data management at AMASA, there was a chance for intervention. While (especially internal) communication and its optimisation is often treated as an orphan in academia, dealing with data management is considered as crucial. There is no empirical research without data. Data management has been discussed and developed during the last years and the discussion continues, for example on publishing research data (Mewborn 2014). For international universities, it is mostly common practice to develop and provide guidance on research data management, for instance as exemplified by the University of Edinburgh as the AMASA leading house (University of Edinburgh 2013). Hence, data management has to be implemented in a research project and in the guidelines for project websites. The European Commission requests a link to the project's intranet as compulsory element (EC best practices, Cordis 2011). So there must be 'something internal', a platform for sharing 'something'. The internal communication is the focal connection between cooperation, coordination and collaboration (Ballod 2014: 61) and essential for sharing information and creating knowledge. The difference between data (raw material), information (structured data) and knowledge (processed information) shows, that these terms cannot be used synonymously. For instance, a server cannot store knowledge, but only data from which we then have to extract information for creating knowledge. Equally, it is important to differentiate between data management, information management and knowledge management. For AMASA, the technical annex includes a work package on knowledge management – by using knowledge management as an umbrella term for data management and information management, and including the communication tasks as well. Knowledge management was understood as managing all data, information and knowledge necessary for the daily collaboration. While "in many cases, knowledge management or knowledge sharing, is hosted within communication" (Le Borgne 2012) at AMASA it was the other way round. In his blog, Ewen Le Borgne focuses on communication and knowledge management in business – not in academia. As mentioned above, the need for a well-established communication concept, including the internal communication (then maybe supported by knowledge management) is not yet recognised in academia. So within AMASA, knowledge management and data management opened the door for implementing internal communication or its optimisation, respectively. As a consequence, several steps need to be taken in advance in order to carry out linguistic research in a project such as AMASA and to work on communication optimisation.

The first step was to implement the document management system (DMS) Alfresco. Initially introduced at the technical centre of the project collaboration, it includes several communication features as, for instance, the wiki or the forum mentioned above.

Alfresco became ‘the place to be’ when working in the AMASA project, including all project documents as well as all relevant information. Project members required some time, as expected, to reorganise their working patterns according to Alfresco and to allow for behavioural changes (Lally et al. 2010). After this period, and particularly towards the end of the project, Alfresco was sometimes equated with AMASA. “It doesn’t let me into AMASA to read the agenda” (4RA3)⁵ – the project member did not ask for access to Alfresco, but for access to AMASA to read the agenda. Using data management under the umbrella of knowledge management as a backdoor for working on communication worked well except for the fact that this approach of focussing on technology first is not the recommended way in knowledge management anymore: TOM (Bullinger/Wörner/Prieto 1998) stands for *Technik, Organisation, Mensch* (‘technology, organisation, human’) and can be called an outdated model in knowledge management: technology first, then organisation and human. But for finding a way to communication optimisation, this old model was used as the project members saw the need for technical improvements and data management but not for work on communication. Alfresco was seen as the knowledge management platform, without differentiating between data, information and knowledge. Following this approach, it was easy on the one hand to reach acceptance for the implemented new ways of communication. However, on the other hand, it was difficult to come back to the initial approach, of focussing on human or organisation but not on technology. “IT is not KM”⁶ (Vashisth/Kumar/Chandra 2010: 20) summarizes the current approach in knowledge management – this had to be communicated within AMASA at a later stage. After the DMS had been accepted and used by the project members, the need for data management and knowledge management was seen by all project members. Only then, there was a way for communication optimisation.

4.2 Communication Optimisation

The communication optimisation in AMASA was based on the research questions shown in figure 5.

⁵ ID of a project member.

⁶ KM = knowledge management.

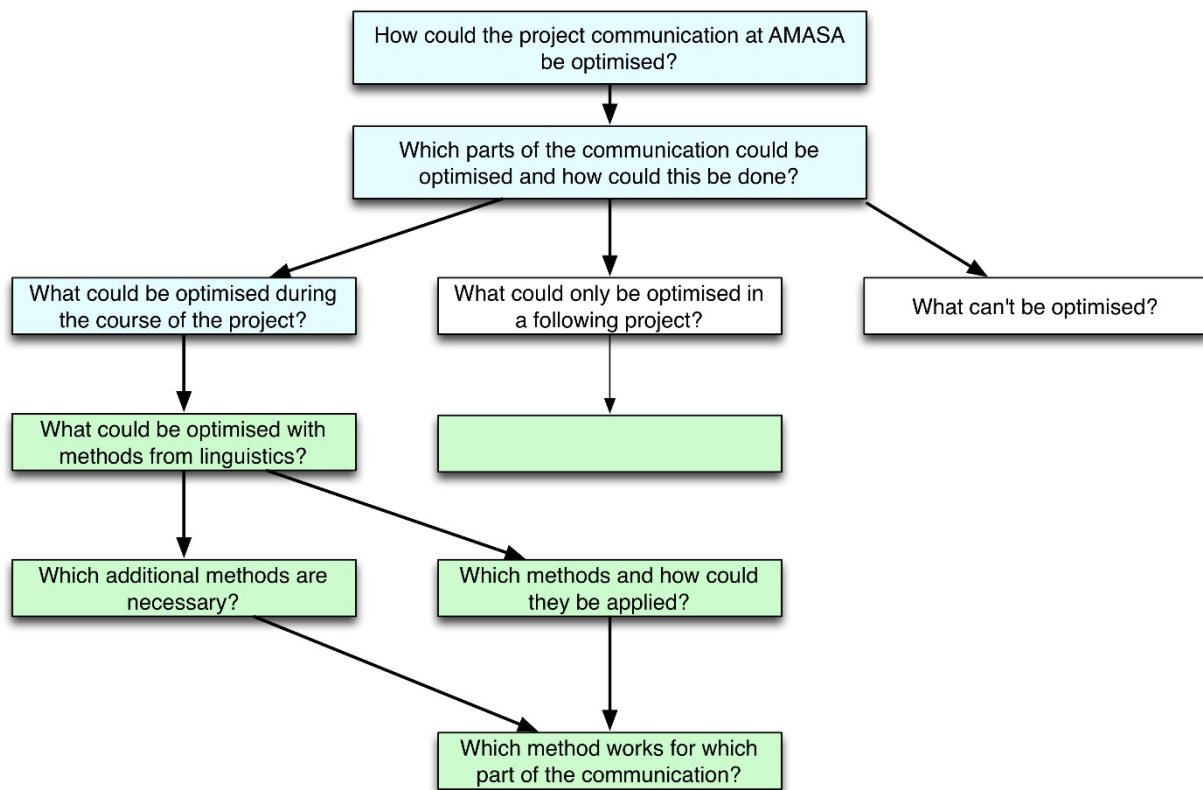


Fig. 5: Research questions

Figure 5 above presents the structure of the research questions for optimising the project communication in AMASA with “How could the project communication in AMASA be optimised?” as the umbrella question. Which parts of the communication could be optimised and how could this be done? And focussing on AMASA as a case study – what could be optimised during the course of the project (fig. 5 – left hand side in blue)? Antos and Knapp refer to applied linguistics as “a specific, problem-oriented way of ‘doing linguistics’ related to the real-life world. In other words: applied linguistics is conceived of here as linguistics for problem-solving” (Antos/Knapp 2008: xiii). So how could applied linguistics be used here to solve problems (fig. 5 – left hand side in green) and where are additional methods from other disciplines needed? In the middle in green, figure 5 presents the combination of methods of different disciplines for solving communication issues. Some of the identified barriers could not be solved during the AMASA project, but for further projects some changes could be made from the outset (fig. 5 middle in grey). Based on the idiosyncrasies of the further project, it needs to be defined which methods from applied linguistics or other disciplines could be used (empty box – figure 5 middle in green). Nonetheless, even with the combination of methods from different disciplines, some barriers could not be overcome, neither during nor after the project.

Referring to the concept of communication optimisation by Strohner and Brose (2002), based on the status quo (which barriers to efficient communication could be identified?) the target analysis was established and methods for reaching these targets were developed. In meetings of the knowledge management working group as well as in the fortnightly project management meetings, the different suggestions for communication optimisation were mentioned and afterwards the relevance was assessed. Further, different measures were verified concerning the problems they were supposed to solve, their feasibility and which partners and which media were expected to be involved. Only then, the verified measures were applied. Was the optimisation successful? Retests were used to assess the optimisation process. Following this approach, the mentioned barriers to efficient communication were identified based on data from the AMASA project and classified in relation to the research questions outlined above.

Within the process of communication optimisation, it turned out that methods from different disciplines are necessary for working on the research questions mentioned above.

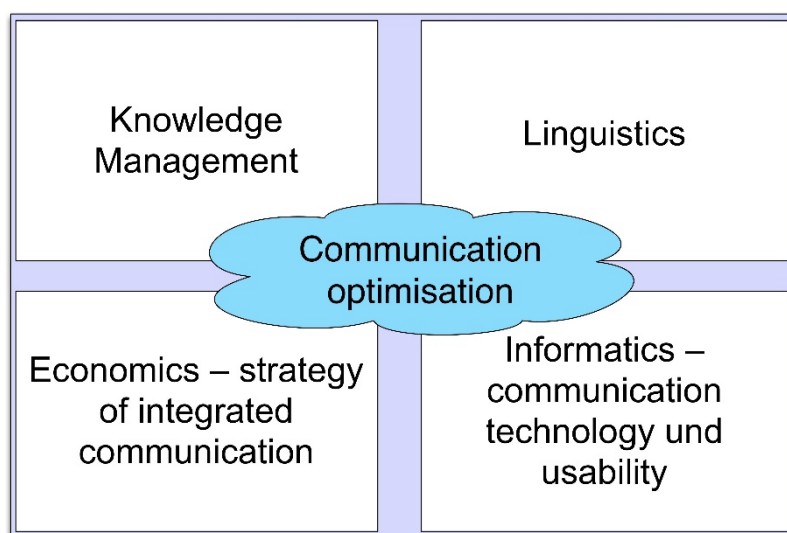


Fig. 6: Combination of methods

Figure 6 above presents some examples of disciplines, worth considering in terms of communication optimisation and used for the optimisation of the AMASA project communication:

Knowledge Management

Different models from knowledge management were adapted and applied to restructure some parts of the communication structure. For instance, the TOM model was adapted as follows: the process started with organisation (reorganisation of communication structure) and then followed by human being (realising the restructuring process)

and technology (providing the tools). Before analysing the comprehensibility of the emails by using methods from applied linguistics, the need for communicating this information via email has been assessed. By using a knowledge management framework, some information shared previously by email was moved to the discussion forum implemented in the document management system or shared on the internal part of the website. Some information was moved to the newly established newsletter for reducing the huge amount of emails significantly.

Economics

Previously in business communication and still in academia, there is a distinction between internal and external communication – often with the focus on external communication (Zürn/Pelikan 2014). Following the concept of integrated communication (Bruhn 1997/2013), internal and external communication should interact as one channel of communication, which is supposed to be the backbone of the project collaboration. Following this approach with the whole project allowed focusing on internal communication and collaboration and therewith helped to abandon the focus on external communication mainly used in academia.

Linguistics

The heterogeneous setting described above requires different approaches and methods from linguistics. Apart from sociolinguistics (e.g. Curry/Lillis 2010) also other methods for improving the comprehensibility of verbal and written communication are necessary. For instance, studies using key-logging (Göpferich 2006) with project members from all partner institutes were carried out in AMASA in order to improve the comprehensibility of different texts as well to prioritise responses to emails.

Informatics and Communication Technology

In the implementation of the DMS, it was necessary to consider the usability of some of the tools supported by tutorials and user manuals created especially for this project. Due to the geographical constraints, there was a lack of face-to-face contact and therefore social exchange. Long videoconferences with shared coffee breaks for social exchange as fixed agenda items were scheduled in order to mitigate the lack of contact in person. Information and communication technology plays an essential role for communication optimisation here as it provides the necessary communication tools.

From the various areas of linguistics, the focus needs to be on applied linguistics here. Seen as “linguistics for problem-solving” (Antos/Knapp 2008: xiii), applied linguistics is predestinated for being used for optimising communication. But with linguistic methods alone, it was not feasible to overcome all the barriers that arose in AMASA. Only with a combination of methods from different disciplines, it is possible for communication optimisation to work in such a heterogeneous setting.

All these methods focus on conscious communication optimisation by direct intervention as requested by Schubert (2009: 110). During the course of the project,

project-specific terminology arose, but was not created consciously (Pelikan/Roelcke 2015) – whether this can be considered as communication optimisation needs further research.

5 Summary and Prospects

Internal capacity building concerning project communication and knowledge management at the beginning of the project would have been very useful for the awareness of these topics as well as for the understanding that tools cannot solve communication problems without support from the appropriate concept. In general, to conduct research, first the research questions are formulated, afterwards the methods are established and eventually the last topic is considered, i.e., the tools – so why reverse this approach when communication is at issue? In addition to research papers and “a web page remembering the great days of the finished project” (Lytras/Sakkopoulos/Ordóñez de Pablos 2009: 247), well-established internal communication could be seen as a product as well as the basis for further collaboration. So for future projects, these topics need to be considered at the very beginning and included in the technical annex appropriately.

“Successful publication on the part of researchers is not ‘job finished’. It is ‘job started.’ [...] To drive research findings to wherever they need to be to provide real and maximum benefit to the policy, to practice, to people” (Bennet/Jessani 2010: xxii). Studies on communication optimisation and efficient communication in the field of applied linguistics do not only need to be published, they need to be applied. Innovation – Validation – Application, this maxim of the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute could also be applied to linguistic research on communication optimisation. Innovative methods should be validated on specific data and then applied in an appropriate setting. Finally, the work on communication optimisation at such an interesting international research project requires different skills, which researchers in applied linguistics need to acquire quickly. The different LSPs not only have to be analysed for their vertical structure – they also have to be understood in order to be able to take minutes. As there are not many jobs, especially for applied linguistics in the area of communication optimisation in academia, the linguists need to look for other possibilities – for example in the area of knowledge management or data management (if the necessary skills are not an obstacle). Once initial contact has been made, communication optimisation can and should begin!

Leading the knowledge management and communication working group involved liaising with members from all partner institutes in AMASA, with Kristina Pelikan deeply involved in the project. Therefore, the present author had the opportunity to conduct research during the course of the project, including participant observation, using her interim results and carrying out retests. Being a member of AMASA for the whole course of the project was essential for obtaining these data; this would not have been possible for an external person.

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