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**The hardest word**

**Language Matters**

I am in a queue. It's early but already busy. As I am putting my coffee order in, the barista wants to know my name. I say it. He is clearly struggling to hear it – maybe it's the mask.

After repeating it a few times, he is now struggling to spell it. I deliberately misspell my name for him: a-n-d-r-e-a in the hope that this more familiar spelling will help. Just as well he doesn't need my last name too. That's even harder to spell. I can feel people shifting uncomfortably in the queue behind me. Awkward.

The barista is trying his best to be polite. He smiles an apologetic smile. Awkwardly. I smile back.

Not all interactions are successful. Even short and relatively trivial interactions can have an impact. Sometimes you want to start the conversation again and forget everything that was said. Sometimes you never want to see the person again.

One of the most difficult conversational "saves" is required when communication has broken down and an

argument has taken place. Being good at this kind of "save" can be crucial for businesses because unhappy customers can spread negative press and thus impact the company's reputation. It's also important for individuals, who might want to save a friendship.

So how do we turn around an unsuccessful interaction?

There are different ways of recovering from a bad situation (humour is one!) and, as always, language matters. The reason it matters is not just because what is said matters, but also because how it is said

can make all the difference. In the English-speaking world, one obvious saving tactic is to apologise. This works only if the apology is deemed authentic.

A classic linguistic way to undermine apologies is to follow them with but X. This use of but X cancels the intention of the apology, or at the very least weakens it, by implying that the apology was not needed in the first place.

Furthermore, the apology is not the only thing that matters in overcoming an argument: how the apology is received is equally important. It really does take two people to save an unsuccessful

interaction. An apology followed by the listener's own apology, no matter how small (oh no, it was me, I misunderstood, sorry about that) works towards (re-) establishing solidarity and common ground.

This pairing – adjacency pairs, in technical terms – of a particular speech act (here, the act of apologising) with an expected appropriate response (the act of reciprocating an apology) is helpful in resolving disagreements, not so much through the content of the apology itself, but by the fact that both parties are willing to apologise in the first place.

This is when language matters again, because apologies need to be expressed in such a way that they might be identified as genuine apologies.

Having said that, an apology responded to with another apology is not the only adjacency pairing which is likely to lead to conflict resolution. Another strategy is the acceptance of the apology but framing it in positive terms, for instance by commending the speaker's intent to apologise. An acceptance which acknowledges and saves the face of the addressee without signalling further denigration can help alleviate the conflict.

In contrast, anything that implies "Yes, you did really need to apologise for that" will usually not work.

Communication really is a two-way street. Words are used to get things done and their impact is most definitely felt. As for me, I am sticking with my local barista now that he has learnt my name. He makes good coffee.

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**Rwanda deal is a cruel pretence**

Views from around the world. These opinions are not necessarily shared by Stuff newspapers.

Priti Patel's ambition to send asylum seekers as far away from the UK mainland as she can has a history. Two years ago, the home secretary looked at shipping Channel migrants to processing centres from North Africa to the South Atlantic. Those ideas eventually bit the dust.

Last week she announced that, in return for £120m of development aid, Rwanda will accept the transfer of UK asylum seekers.

The significance of the announcement was as much in its cynical timing as in its cold-hearted substance. Boris Johnson is being hammered again by the unpopularity of his Downing Street pandemic lawbreaking and fines. For the prime

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minister, a headline-grabbing crackdown initiative on immigration provides a media distraction.

There is no disputing that the inhumane people-smuggling operations in the Channel need to be gripped and controlled more effectively. But the answer is not for the UK military to seize the migrants, load them in planes, send them to Africa on a one-way flight and forget about them.

The answer, as always, must be a pragmatic and just approach. It should be to work with France and other European neighbours more thoroughly to process claims better and more fairly, and to make deals for the return of those who do not qualify.