

Don't hold back! A workshop about linguistic assertiveness

With this workshop we want to engage the audience in a hands-on experience of the techniques that can be used to increase linguistic assertiveness.

Research has found that speakers of minority languages tend to switch to the dominant language in certain contexts and situations, for instance when there is a speaker of the dominant language around, when they approach a stranger, are at work or enter a shop.

The reason why people switch to the dominant or majority language so quickly in certain situations is called submissiveness. Submissiveness is a spontaneous, self-induced suppression of a certain behaviour in favour of another one by virtue of habit, or for fear of punishment. Linguistic submissiveness happens when somebody stops speaking her or his minority language and switches to the other one, even when no-one has asked for this.

There are many forms of linguistic submissiveness. If someone is a speaker of Welsh and when entering a local shop in a Welsh-speaking area where they know that the staff speak Welsh yet they start to speak English, then that person is being linguistically submissive. If two speakers of Irish are having a conversation and then a stranger approaches them and they switch to English before being told anything, then they are being linguistically submissive. All these situations create anxiety in a speaker and they often contribute to inducing a sense of failure and helplessness. However, linguistic submissiveness is nothing but a learned behaviour that can be changed with appropriate training.

Linguistic assertiveness is the ability to express oneself in a language while feeling self-assured in situations where one would have normally switched to a dominant language. LISTEN is an Erasmus+ funded project that works across four different minority languages, with different sociolinguistic backgrounds, to devise proven techniques that speakers can learn and apply in real-worlds situations to change their behaviour. During the workshop, we will introduce the general problem and with the help of testimonials we will engage with the workshop participants in a reflection about their linguistic habits. Then, by means of quick tests and role-playing, the audience will have a chance to test directly the range of recommended techniques that are recommended by the LISTEN project.