**Case Study: “Language Barriers in Cross-Cultural Communication”**

Some senior American and Israeli managers were on a conference call. The topic of the call was transitioning from an on-premises product to a cloud-native product. In the middle of the discussion, one Israeli manager said that the R&D staff in Israel ‘don’t care’ about some of the changes. An American manager, although usually polite, couldn’t restrain himself when he heard that statement. “What’s that supposed to mean, they DON’T CARE??” he thundered.

This is a great example of a wrong expression giving the wrong impression. The Israeli manager’s intention got **lost in translation** since English is his second language. What he meant by ‘don’t care’ was that it wouldn’t make a big difference, didn’t matter, didn’t bother them – the correct English phrase would be ‘don’t mind.’ (The two terms seem so close to the Israeli ear and mind… practically identical… almost a synonym.)

Due to lack of knowledge or not understanding the nuances of a language, many Israelis often make usage mistakes. Another example is the English word ‘issue,’ which has been adopted in Hebrew as a cognate meaning topic or subject, whereas Americans tend to perceive the word with a negative connotation – like a problematic topic or subject. The distinction is liable to ruffle some feathers; if an Israeli innocently says, “I have an issue to bring up,” an American will already be on the defensive before another word is even spoken.

**It’s one challenge to become confident when speaking a foreign language, and quite another to become fluent in a foreign culture.**In effect, misunderstandings, and failure to communicate between co-workers from different cultures lead to ambiguity, mistrust, and disrupted productivity. Both sides appear to be speaking English, but each is using it in a context relative to their own culture. This can make for some heated arguments.