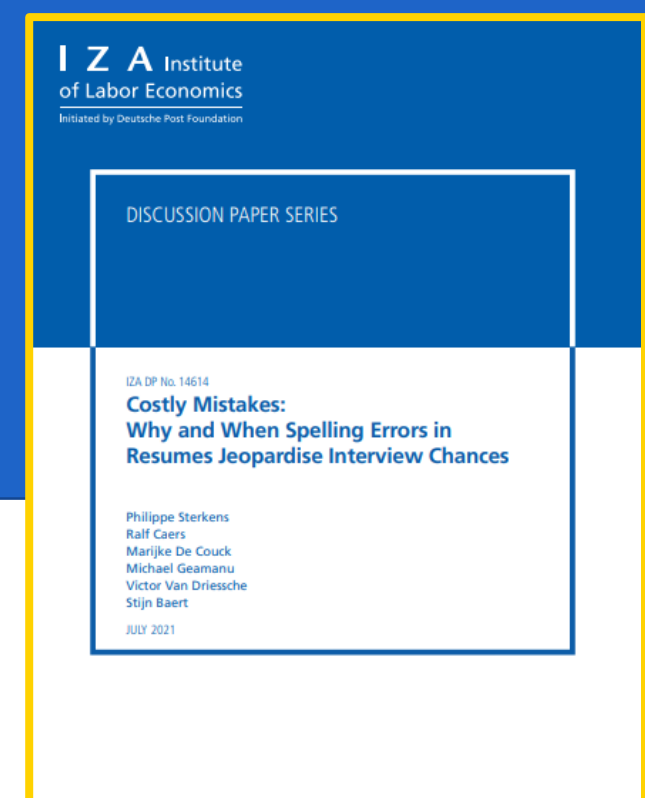


# COSTLY MISTAKES: WHY AND WHEN SPELLING ERRORS IN RESUMES JEOPARDISE INTERVIEW CHANCES

By Philippe Sterkens, Ralf Caers, Marijke De Couck,  
Michael Geamanu, Victor Van Driessche, and Stijn Baert



# A. MOTIVATION



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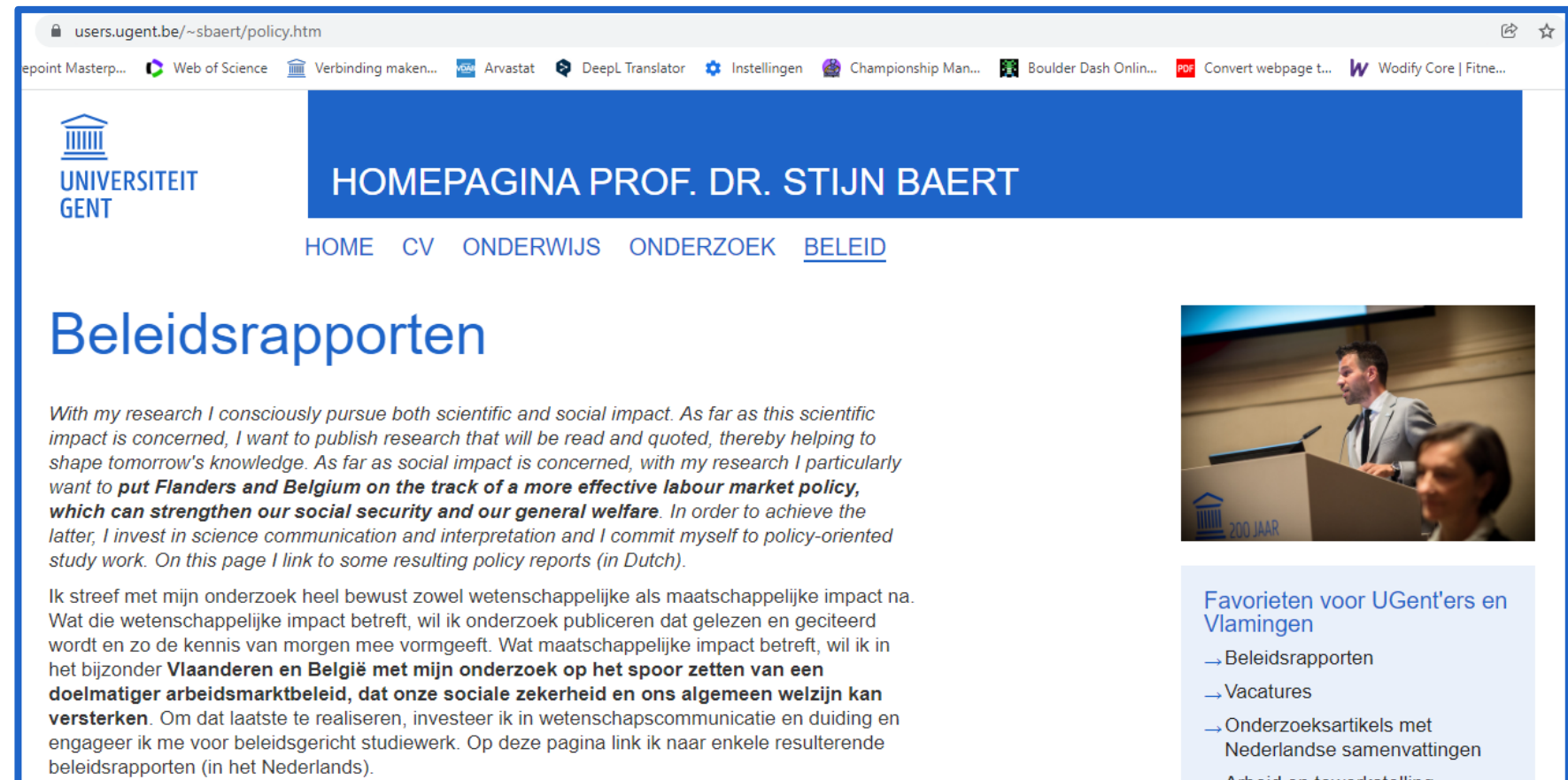
# A. MOTIVATION

## A.1. FIT IN MY RESEARCH AGENDA

Common thread running through almost all of my research:

EXPLAINING WHY SOME INDIVIDUALS ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN HET LABOUR MARKET THAN OTHERS

Related to societal ambitions:



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HOMEPAGINA PROF. DR. STIJN BAERT

HOME CV ONDERWIJS ONDERZOEK BELEID

### Beleidsrapporten

*With my research I consciously pursue both scientific and social impact. As far as this scientific impact is concerned, I want to publish research that will be read and quoted, thereby helping to shape tomorrow's knowledge. As far as social impact is concerned, with my research I particularly want to **put Flanders and Belgium on the track of a more effective labour market policy, which can strengthen our social security and our general welfare**. In order to achieve the latter, I invest in science communication and interpretation and I commit myself to policy-oriented study work. On this page I link to some resulting policy reports (in Dutch).*

Ik streef met mijn onderzoek heel bewust zowel wetenschappelijke als maatschappelijke impact na. Wat die wetenschappelijke impact betreft, wil ik onderzoek publiceren dat gelezen en geciteerd wordt en zo de kennis van morgen mee vormgeeft. Wat maatschappelijke impact betreft, wil ik in het bijzonder **Vlaanderen en België met mijn onderzoek op het spoor zetten van een doelmatiger arbeidsmarktbeleid, dat onze sociale zekerheid en ons algemeen welzijn kan versterken**. Om dat laatste te realiseren, investeer ik in wetenschapscommunicatie en duiding en engageer ik me voor beleidsgericht studiewerk. Op deze pagina link ik naar enkele resulterende beleidsrapporten (in het Nederlands).

Favorieten voor UGent'ers en Vlamingen

- Beleidsrapporten
- Vacatures
- Onderzoeksartikels met Nederlandse samenvattingen
- Arbeid en tewerkstelling

# A. MOTIVATION

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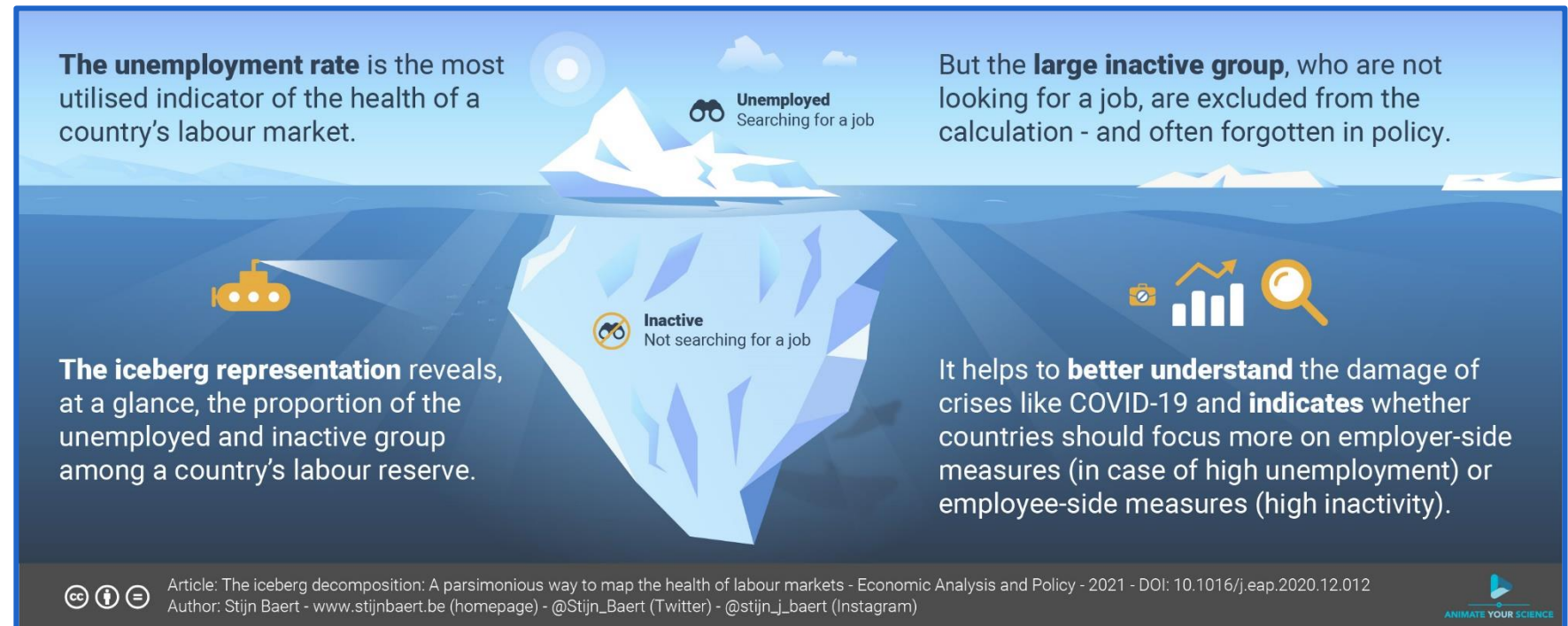
Common thread running through almost all of my research:

EXPLAINING WHY SOME INDIVIDUALS ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN THE LABOUR MARKET THAN OTHERS



REDUCING EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS

Related to societal ambitions:



# A. MOTIVATION

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Common thread running through almost all of my research:

Related to societal ambitions:

EXPLAINING WHY SOME INDIVIDUALS ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN HET LABOUR MARKET THAN OTHERS



REDUCING EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS



INCREASING EMPLOYMENT RATE



IMPROVING WELFARE AND WELL-BEING THROUGH BETTER EDUCATION, HEALTHCARE AND PENSIONS



# A. MOTIVATION

## A.1. FIT IN MY RESEARCH AGENDA

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EXPLAINING WHY SOME INDIVIDUALS ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL IN THE LABOUR MARKET THAN OTHERS

### RESEARCH LINE 1: DETERMINANTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND INACTIVITY

- Measuring and comparing labour markets' health
- Scarring effects of unemployment and underemployment
- Success factors in transition from school to work



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### RESEARCH LINE 2: LABOUR MARKET DISCRIMINATION

- Measuring hiring discrimination
- Explaining hiring discrimination
- Testing interventions to solve hiring discrimination

With Louis Lippens, Axana Dalle and Abel Ghekiere

### RESEARCH LINE 3: WORK AND HEALTH

- Career after burnout
- Job choice and well-being

With Eline Moens, Philippe Sterkens, Kristen du Bois and Claudia Rومان

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STERKENS ET AL. (2021): WHY AND WHEN SPELLING ERRORS IN RESUMES JEOPARDISE INTERVIEW CHANCES?

# A. MOTIVATION

## A.2. WHAT WE KNOW ALREADY: THEORY

- Signalling theory (Spence, 1973): recruiters use cv characteristics to predict unobserved productivity drivers.
- Applied to the impact of language problems in cv's on hiring chances.
  - Language problems might signal **lower interpersonal skills** (Martin-Lacroux, 2017).
  - Language problems might signal **lower levels of conscientiousness** (Martin-Lacroux, 2017; Morgan & Thompson, 2013).
    - Conscientiousness is positively associated with job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991), hiring chances (Baert & Decuyper, 2006) and earnings (Mueller & Plug, 2006).
  - Language problems might signal **lower mental abilities** (Figueredo & Varnhagen, 2005; Martin-Lacroux, 2017).
    - Mental abilities are the single best predictor of job performance (Hunter, 2017; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).



# A. MOTIVATION

## A.3. WHAT WE KNOW ALREADY: EMPIRICS

Study	Country	Method	Occupation(s)	Main results (on spelling errors)
Charney & Rayman (1989)	United States	Survey experiment with 18 recruiters	Mechanical engineers	Resumes with errors (average eight to ten) received lower ratings on desire to interview.
Charney, Rayman & Ferreira-Buckley (1992)	United States	Survey experiments with 89 recruiters	Marketeer	Resumes with errors (average five to nine) received lower ratings on desire to interview.
van Toorenburg, Oostrom & Pollet (2015)	Netherlands	Survey experiment with 73 recruiters	HR specialist	Resumes with errors (five) received lower hireability ratings.
Martin-Lacroux (2017)	France	Verbal protocol analysis of 20 recruiters	Banking account manager	Resumes with spelling errors (ten) are described differently from resumes without errors and resumes with typographical errors (ten). Spelling errors are attributed to soft skills, abilities and culture.
Martin-Lacroux & Lacroux (2017)	France	Survey experiment with 536 recruiters	Banking account manager	Resumes with spelling errors (five or ten) had the highest rejection rates. Only recruiters with considerable spelling abilities penalised error-laden resumes.
Shore, Tashchian & Forrester (2021)	United States	Survey experiment with 164 respondents	Sales manager	Resumes with spelling errors (eight) received lower interview probabilities, hiring probabilities, salary offers and were perceived more negatively.



# A. MOTIVATION

## A.4. WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW

Limitation: only focus on white-collar jobs

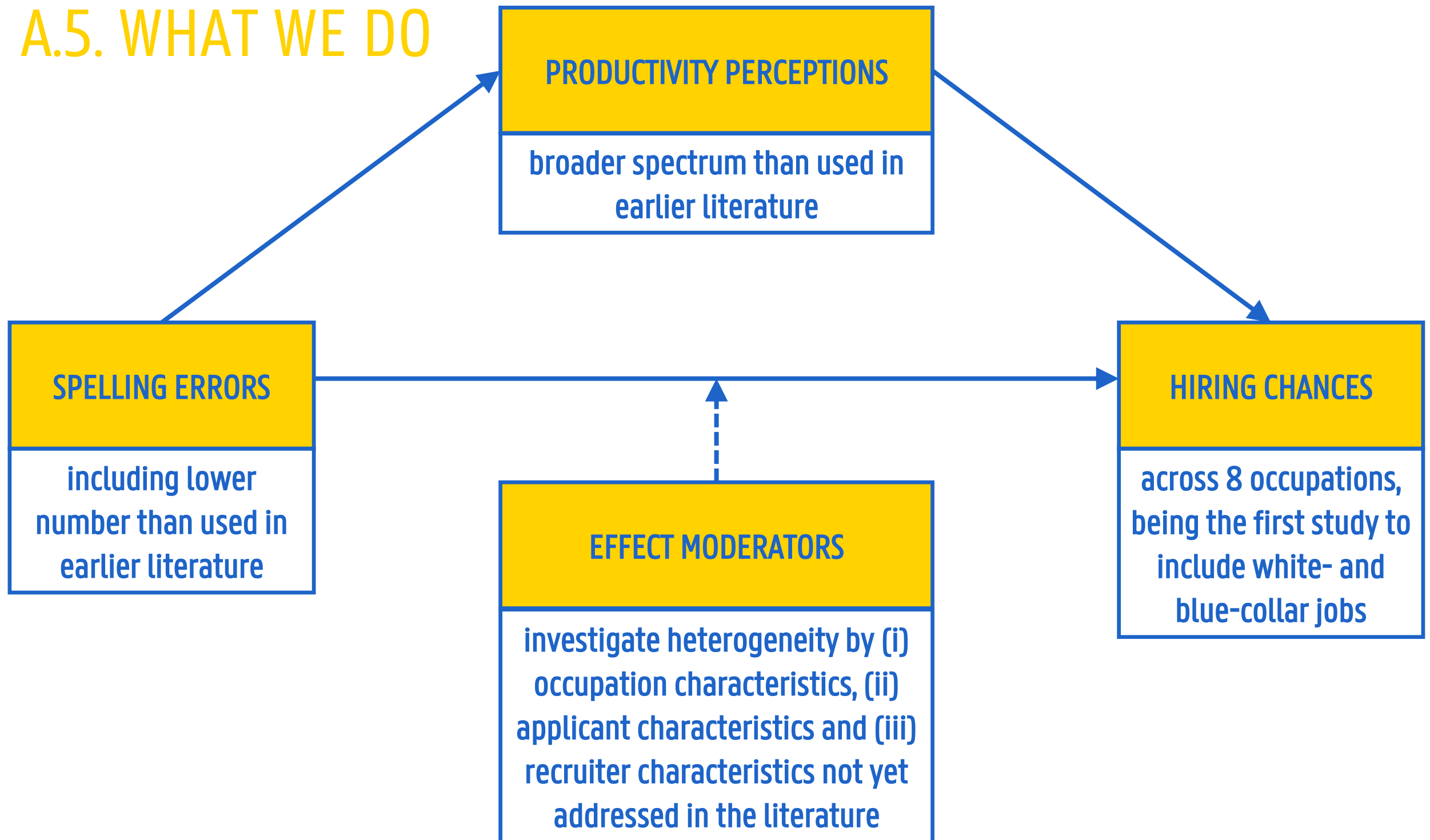
Limitation: randomised number of errors is high

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# A. MOTIVATION

## A.5. WHAT WE DO



# B. THE EXPERIMENT



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## B. THE EXPERIMENT

### 445 GENUINE RECRUITERS EVALUATE PROFILES ...

Vignette dimensions	Vignette levels
Number of spelling errors	{0; 2; 5}
Sex	{Male; Female}
Age of graduation (years)	{Foreseen age of graduation; Foreseen age of graduation + 1; Foreseen age of graduation + 2}
Student work	{None mentioned; Student work in the weekends; Student work during the holidays}
Hobbies	{None mentioned; Team sports; Volunteering}
Achievement in tertiary education	{None mentioned; Graduated cum laude; International experience}
Perception of mother tongue	{Mother tongue; Mother tongue, excellent}



# B. THE EXPERIMENT

## ... IN 8 OCCUPATIONS ...

Job	Req. level of education	Sector	Req. written communication skills
Recreation worker	Low	Services	Low
Production worker	Low	Manufacturing	Low
Secretary	Low	Services	High
Assistant graphic designer	Low	Manufacturing	High
Specialist electronics	High	Manufacturing	Low
Air traffic controller	High	Services	Low
Human resources manager	High	Services	High
Audiovisual specialist	High	Manufacturing	High



# B. THE EXPERIMENT

## ... ON HIREABILITY AND SIGNALS ...

Evaluative dimension	Statement
<b>A. HIRING DECISION</b>	
Interview probability	I think that I will invite this applicant for a job interview.
Hiring probability	There is a high chance that I will effectively hire this applicant.
<b>B. PERCEIVED INTERPERSONAL SKILLS</b>	
Perceived quality of communication	I think that this applicant will communicate well with me
Perceived quality of communication during a job interview	I think that this applicant will communicate well with me during a job interview.
Perceived ability to get along with others encountered on the job	I think that the applicant will get along with all sorts of people she/he will encounter in this job.
Perceived pleasure in interaction	I think that, at work, I will enjoy interacting with this person.
<b>C. PERCEIVED CONSCIENTIOUSNESS</b>	
Perceived as hard-working	I think that this person is hard-working.
Perceived as organised	I think that this person will work in an organised manner.
Perceived as thorough	I think that person will work thoroughly.
Perceived as systematic	I think that this person will work systematically.
Perceived as being responsible	I think that this person is responsible.
<b>D. PERCEIVED MENTAL ABILITIES</b>	
Perceived problem-solving ability	I think that this person has strong problem-solving abilities.
Perceived capacity to learn quickly	I think that this person has the capacities to quickly learn new skills.
Perceived intelligence	I think that this person is intelligent.
Perceived knowledgeability	I think that this person is knowledgeable.



## B. THE EXPERIMENT

### ... AND FILL OUT A POST-EXPERIMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

- Thereby we can investigate the following moderators of the spelling error effect:
  - demographics such as participant gender, age, mother tongue, nationality and education level;
  - participants' professional experience;
  - sensitivity to language care scale.
- In addition, robustness analyses using the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale can be conducted.



# C. RESULTS



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# C. RESULTS

SPELLING ERRORS

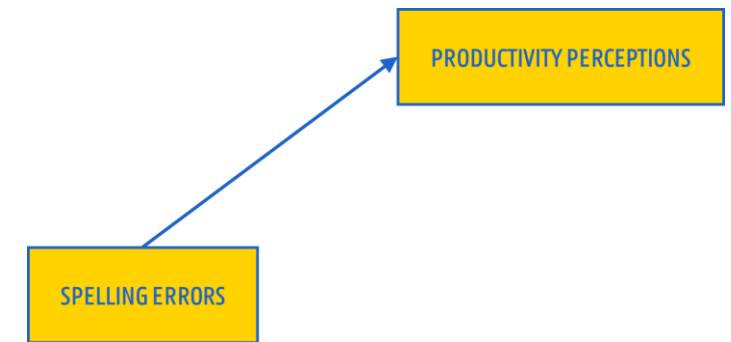
HIRING CHANCES

## C.1. SPELLING ERROR PENALTY

- Graduate resumes containing **two spelling errors** receive an **7.3 percent points lower interview probability** compared to an error-free resume.
  - Comparable to the value recruiters attach to applicants' volunteering experience.
- Graduate resumes containing **five spelling errors** receive an **18.5 percent points lower interview probability** compared to an error-free resume.
  - Substantially greater than that of any other experimental manipulation (e.g. degree class and student work).

# C. RESULTS

## C.2. SPELLING ERROR SIGNALS



- Signal of lower interpersonal skills:
  - Causal evidence for perception of **poorer communication during a job interview and later in the workplace.**
  - When job candidates make five mistakes, recruiters also think that others will be **less likely to cooperate with these candidates and that they will enjoy that cooperation less.**
- Signal of lower levels of conscientiousness:
  - Causal evidence for perception of **less (i) hard-working, (ii) well-organised, (iii) thorough, (iv) systematic, and (v) responsible.**
- Signal of lower mental abilities:
  - Causal evidence for perception of **(i) having lower problem-solving ability, (ii) less trainable, (iii) less intelligent, and (iv) less knowledgeable.**

## C. RESULTS

### C.3. ERROR EFFECT MEDIATORS

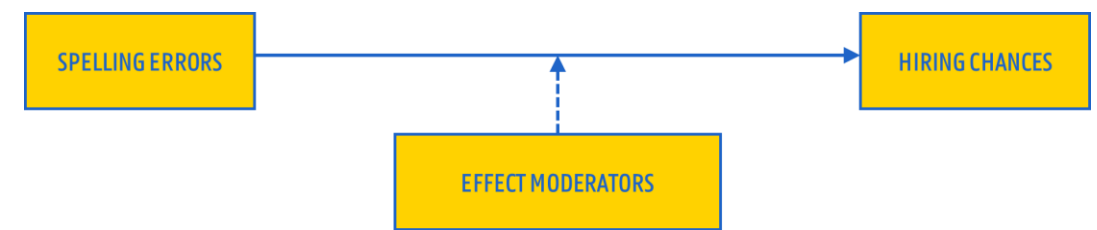


	Two spelling errors	Five spelling errors
Mediators	Percentage of spelling error's effect on interview probability explained by mediators [p-value]	Percentage of spelling error's effect on interview probability explained by mediators [p-value]
Perceived interpersonal skills (s)	9.0% [0.038]	11.6% [0.033]
Perceived conscientiousness (s)	12.1% [0.049]	11.9% [0.001]
Perceived mental abilities (s)	32.2% [0.000]	31.9% [0.000]



## C. RESULTS

### C.4. HETEROGENEOUS EFFECTS



- Evidence that **female applicants were penalised more severely** than males and that the mentioning of volunteering had a buffering effect, thus reducing the penalty inflicted.
- Additional moderation analyses with job and participant characteristics suggest that error-laden resumes are more disapproved of:
  - in **blue-collar jobs**;
  - in **positions with high requirements for written communication**;
  - and by **recruiters perceiving themselves as sensitive to language-care**.

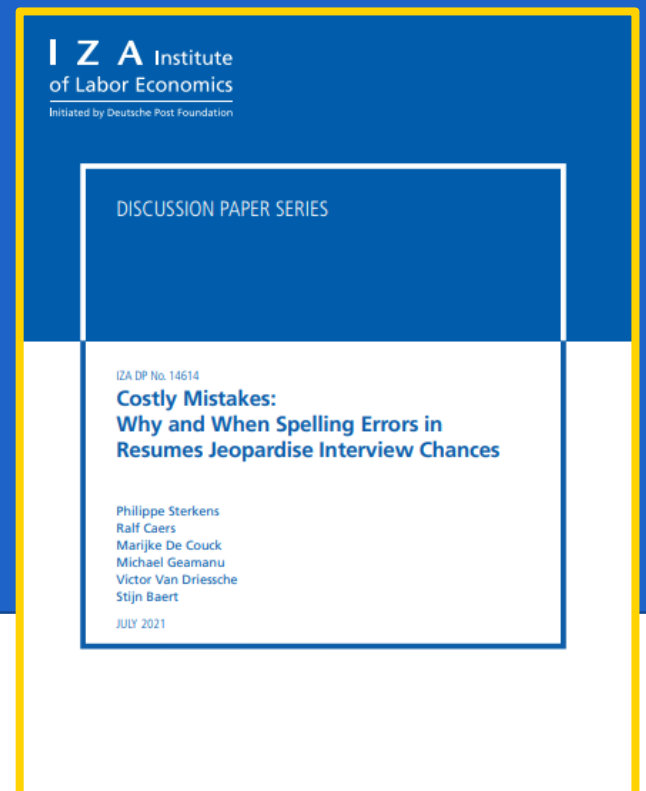
## Conclusion:

1. We drastically enhanced the ecological validity of scenario experiments on language care and hireability.
2. This magnitude of five errors' effect is unlike any of the other applicant-side manipulations we investigated (e.g., student work and hobbies).
3. Unfavourable perceptions of applicants' mental abilities explains the largest share (approximately 30%) of this effect.

Homepage: [www.stijnbaert.eu](http://www.stijnbaert.eu)

Twitter: @Stijn\_Baert

Instagram: @stijn\_j\_baert



## Ways to collaborate:

1. Joint-research in which vignette experiments are used to explain (!) decisions at the employer or employee side in the labour market.
2. Follow-up research on language/etiquette and hiring chances.
3. Joint-research related to other components of my research agenda (see slide 6).
4. Joint-supervision of a Master's thesis might be a starting point.

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