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Linguistic diversity in business contexts: a functional linguistic perspective



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Abstract

This paper investigates the diversity issue in business contexts in Switzerland from a linguistic perspective and reports the results of field activities in two multinational enterprises. Using a qualitative-empirical approach, the paper analyses two interviews with Heads of Communication in charge of the development and implementation of communication strategies for a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce. Particular attention is paid to the role of English as the corporate language, and to attitudes towards language. A methodological agenda will be proposed which is intended as a contribution to the field of Linguistic Diversity Management.

Dieser Beitrag untersucht den Problembereich der sprachlich-kulturellen Diversität in multinationalen Unternehmen der Schweiz aus einer pragmatischen Perspektive. Ausgehend von Interviews mit Entscheidungsträgern aus den Kommunikationsabteilungen zweier multinationaler Firmen geht der Beitrag der Frage nach, wie und in welchen Zusammenhängen die kulturelle und sprachliche Diversität der Belegschaft in die Kommunikationspraxis solcher Entscheidungsträger einfließt und die Sprachpolitik des Unternehmens bestimmt. Die Ergebnisse der Analyse werden von methodologischen Fragestellungen gerahmt, die aus der pragmatischen Betrachtungsweise hervorgehen.

1. Introduction

In order to meet globalisation demands, Multinational Enterprises (MNEs) have developed a practice of recruiting ‘international’ staff. This, in turn, has led to a significant increase in cultural and linguistic diversity at all levels of the workforce, including technically trained and highly qualified personnel. This global trend is felt more acutely in Switzerland than in other neighbouring states because of the internal linguistic diversity and the high density of MNEs in the country. Many companies have introduced English as the corporate language in official business interaction. While management staff, who are mostly trained in English for business purposes, highlight the functional dimension of language use, they are often unaware of the broader cultural and interpersonal implications the use of language has on the interaction with their peers. Without a strongly reflected language policy as a back-up, a ‘patchwork constellation’ of languages and language use within MNEs easily leads to dissatisfaction, unrecognised intercultural tensions, and difficulties in implementing management decisions on all levels of the company.

In this paper, we would like to approach the topic by reviewing the diversity issue in business contexts in Switzerland from a linguistic perspective and report the results of field activities with two multinational enterprises that are considered leaders in traditional Swiss business industries (pharmaceutical and automation industry). We will analyse two interviews with Heads of Communication occupying leading roles in the development and implementation of communication strategies for a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce. In doing so, we will highlight the role of language in cueing perceptions and attitudes towards diversity in the corporate world. In particular, we will discuss how language attitudes determine a readiness-to-act in issues concerning linguistic and cultural human rights. As the result of this analysis, a methodological agenda will be proposed.

2. Multilingualism, economy and Switzerland as a special case

While economic migration has been a constant factor of industrialised societies for decades, recent globalisation, growing internationalisation and the significant increase in cross-border trade has created an enormous potential for professionals who seek their fulfilment and fortune in a place other than their place of origin. In the European Union, national and business infrastructures in different member or associated states today resemble one another to an extent that relocation has become not only an option but a welcome and attractive opportunity for such professionals. This trend is encouraged by multinational enterprises which aggressively expand and venture into new strategic locations, often offering relocation packages to their current staff and employees. These recent trends in society are commented upon by national and supranational policy research institutions across the continents. At the European level, cross-border migration and communication has been firmly recognised as a priority policy concern since the Lisbon strategy (2000) and, subsequently, since the establishment of the policy on the portfolio for multilingualism (2006).¹

The ten-year plan of the Lisbon strategy was aimed at the transformation of Europe into a knowledge-based society of global impact. Since the establishment of multilingualism as a policy area in the European Union, the political activities have been strongly guided by economic concerns of multiple language proficiency. In this context, the potentially 'lost' business of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with insufficient language skills has been foregrounded in research, and a need for the development of coherent business language strategies in private enterprises has been expressed by policy institutions on numerous occasions.² These statements seek to encourage individual language learning and foreign language skills in order to remove linguistic barriers between citizens and to enhance mobility of the European workforce. At the same time, they criticise the frequent strategy of companies to meet their immediate language demands by recruiting native speakers from the language areas they need to cover. In other words, the European Union promotes a multilingualism strategy for the economy that is geared towards improving the language skills of the existing or local workforce rather than towards diversifying local teams.³

1 The portfolio for multilingualism was based on the Framework Strategy for Multilingualism (COM(2005)596 final), and the Action Plan 2004–2006 (COM(2003) 449 final).

2 Cf. ELISE – *European Language & International Strategy Development in SMEs* (2001); ELUCIDATE Survey, *Business Communication Across Borders. A Study of Language use and practice in European companies*. Hagen, S. (ed), (London: CILT, 1999); ELAN, *Effects on the European Union Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise* (London: CILT, 2006); REFLECT – *Review of foreign language and cultural training needs. Comparative Overview of Survey Results* (2002); cf. also recently the new *Framework Strategy for Multilingualism* (COM(2008) 566 final) or Davignon, Viscount Etienne et al., *Languages mean Business. Companies work better with Languages. Recommendations from the Business Forum for Multilingualism* (Brussels: European Communities, 2008).

3 This attitude is reflected in speeches made by Commissioner Leonard Orban, such as 'European Commissioner for Multilingualism: Why languages and business mix', American Chamber of Commerce, Bucharest, 19 April 2007 (Speech/07/240). In his speech, Leonard Orban implies that there are potential challenges involved in the creation of teams from multiple linguistic backgrounds; a challenge that has been recognised in research as a major challenge for the economy, but which does not seem to have been addressed by companies themselves.

Where can we locate Switzerland in this debate? Switzerland tends to constitute a 'special case' in the European landscape in many respects, also in the domains of economic migration and integration. For example, Switzerland takes great pride in its democratic culture which is built on the participation of the base in political decisions. This democratic pride is seen in all areas of public concern, including questions of labour law. While fundamentally 'base-democratic', Switzerland is also known for its rigorous naturalisation procedures for foreign nationals. This practice seems to contradict Swiss economic policy which is strongly oriented towards attracting foreigners for all industry sectors. Such a liberal and pragmatic approach in Switzerland towards hiring staff from Europe, and indeed from all over the world, further seems to contradict the widespread political Euro-scepticism in the country and, as a consequence, the critical attitude of the locals towards a potential membership of Switzerland in the European Union. As a non-member, Switzerland has chosen to regulate its economic exchange with Europe on the basis of time-consuming and bureaucratic diplomatic efforts. The product of these efforts, the so-called bilateral treaties, have received widespread attention in the public media over the past decade, and particularly in the context of two national referenda held in 2002 and 2006, which subsequently gave rise to heated public debates on the issue.

The fact that labour market movements in Switzerland are subject to bilateral treaties with Europe which have to be voted upon directly by the Swiss people contributes to a socio-political climate of public sensitivity towards issues of economic migration and integration. The issue of economic migration is frequently used in the political rhetoric of players from the public domain, and is connected to a fear of displacement and cultural fragmentation caused by foreigners. As a result, the topic of economic trade with Europe, which is closely linked to discourses of integration and migration, forms an essential part of political thinking in the Swiss public domain, and strongly permeates organisational cultures in Switzerland. Such is the case, for example, with the issue of migration, which has been present in political debates for many years and, at different points in time, peaked in political actions against an uncontrolled influx of foreigners.⁴

Traditionally, the political exploitation of migration in this discriminatory sense has been directed at socially weak, lowly-qualified workers at risk of unemployment (e.g. the 'black sheep campaign' of the Swiss People's Party in 2008).⁵ National communication efforts have tried to counter these attempts at discrimination by drawing attention to the traditional cultural and linguistic diversity of Switzerland and the need for intercultural dialogue.⁶ More recently, the public focus on socially weak migrants has shifted in favour of so-called highly qualified foreign workers, as a result of the

4 In 1987, the 'Nationale Aktion gegen die Überfremdung' failed to collect 50,000 signatures for a national referendum 'gegen die Ueberfremdung'/'against an uncontrolled influx of foreigners', proposing a rigorous immigration policy for foreign nationals. In October 2008, a referendum against the extension of the free movement to Romania and Bulgaria has been successfully called for by various right-wing political organisations.

5 See, for example, the commentary in the *New York Times* by Sciolino, Elaine, 'Immigration, Black Sheep and Swiss Rage' (8 October 2007).

6 See, for example, the speech of Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey 'Dialog-Welten: Europäisches Jahr des interkulturellen Dialogs' (Zürcher Lehrhaus, 21 February 2008). The topic of migration and cultural diversity, moreover, is currently being pushed with a separate Action Plan (since January 2008).

free movement between Switzerland and the EU. This shift in the social profile of migrants is generally welcomed by economic organisations and left-wing governmental parties,⁷ while right-wing Europe and migration sceptics fear a loss of cultural identity.⁸

While similar debates on diversity, economic migration and social integration undoubtedly take place in many European states with migration flows, the case of Switzerland is somewhat different in that the actual diversity in Swiss society, as well as in the Swiss economy, is far more pronounced than in the surrounding states. Thus, these debates express a discourse not only firmly rooted in the Swiss public consciousness, but, more importantly, a discourse rooted in real and recognisable trends that are visible across all sectors and areas of everyday life. In fact, Switzerland ranks second after Luxembourg in terms of multinational density (more than three times that of the United States or Germany), deriving 34 per cent of its total GDP from multinational activities (Swiss or foreign). The high density of multinational enterprises, among other factors, gave rise to the recently published study by the Swiss-American Chamber of Commerce and the Boston Consulting Group.⁹ The aim of the study was to formulate recommendations on how to keep the Swiss economy attractive for future foreign business activities. Two recommendations are worth mentioning in the present discussion as they highlight the strong interconnectedness between politics and economy. Firstly, the study recommends that immigration conditions ought to be significantly improved to remove administrative and other barriers for so-called 'talented' workers from the EU and other states; secondly, Switzerland ought to make efforts to 'ensure sufficient availability of local skilled and specialized labor.'¹⁰ A recent OECD policy brief confirms these recommendations, finding that in Switzerland, despite its apparent multicultural workforce, labour-market outcomes among foreign nationals are less favourable than those among the native-born population. Negative scores are significantly higher in Switzerland than in other OECD countries with strong immigration flows regarding migrant workers from non-European countries.¹¹

7 See, for example, Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey 'Die Weiterführung und Ausweitung der Personenfreizügigkeit ist in aller Interesse'/'The continuation and extension of the free movement is in everybody's interest (Parteitag der SP im Kanton Solothurn, 2 September 2008).

8 Cf. <http://www.eu-kritik.ch/>

9 Naville, Martin, Adrian Walti, and Pia Tischhauser, 'Multinational Companies on the Move: How Switzerland Will Win the Battle!' (Swiss-American Chamber of Commerce and The Boston Consulting Group: Zurich, 2007).

10 Naville et al., 'Multinational Companies on the Move', p. 52.

11 OECD, *Economic survey of Switzerland*, Policy Brief (November 2007), p. 10.

3. The socio-political role of language in Swiss economic research

In his recent analysis of societal restructuring in the face of globalisation, the emergence of English as the global Lingua Franca and the development of the knowledge economy, Glyn Williams argues that language and culture play a crucial role in the negotiation of meaning within working communities of practices.¹² Despite the widespread call for greater attention to language as a relevant factor of business performance, enterprises are often reluctant towards including language within their diversity management portfolio. Popular opinion tends to promote the idea of heterogeneous teams being more creative and innovative by themselves, ignoring the double-edgedness of linguistic diversity and the need for systematic linguistic management to prevent communicative shortfalls.¹³

While public funding seems to be made readily available for research on the impact of (linguistic) diversity at the workplace, there is very little recognition at management levels of the need to implement those results as yet. In other words, research still finds itself in the situation of having to raise awareness to the fundamental importance of an appropriate sensitivity to languages at the workplace.¹⁴ Therefore, planning further research in this area inevitably raises the question why it is taking so long for companies to take the issue on board.

Some answers to that question can be found when we look at the nature of studies on the issue and at who commissions and carries out research on language diversity in the first place. Most studies dealing with language at the workplace reveal a socio-political rather than a management concern and they accentuate, in particular, the issues of migration, integration and social opportunities for individuals. Let us illustrate this with a few examples. In 2006, the Federal Statistics Office (FSO) published a study on the topic,¹⁵ concluding that there existed 'class differences' among migrants

12 Williams, Glyn, *The Knowledge Economy, Language and Culture* (Multilingual Matters: Clevedon, 2010); cf. also Studer, Patrick, Felicia Kreiselmaier, and Mi-Cha Flubacher, 'Language planning of the European Union: a micro-level perspective', *European Journal of Language Policy* 2.2 (2010), pp. 251–270.

13 Cf., for example, Basler Zeitung, 'Heterogene Teams sind innovativer', 'Heterogenous teams are more innovative', September 12, 2008. This article stands as a perfect example of the discrepancy between needs recognised by research and the reluctance of the private industry to acknowledge its results.

14 In fact, a need for greater language awareness in companies has been repeatedly expressed over the past decade (cf. for example, Marschan, Rebecca, Denise Welch, and Lawrence Welch, 'Language: the forgotten factor in multinational management', *European Management Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (1997), pp. 591–598). That communication practices of members in multinational/multicultural teams may differ profoundly and hence create fissures in team constellations has long been noted generally in intercultural management studies, cf. Trompenaars, Fons and Charles Hampden Turner, *Riding the waves of culture* (New York, 1998). However, the specifically linguistic impact on team communication has been constantly ignored up to now, as is shown by Chen, Stephen, Ronald Geluykens, and Chong Ju Choi, 'The importance of language in global teams: a linguistic perspective', *Management International Review*, 6, vol. 46 (2006), pp. 679–695. These studies rely, to some extent, on findings from studies on US companies in the 1980s which identified linguistic issues especially in cross-border business activities: Inman, Marianne, *Corporate Language Strategies for Global Markets. Executive Summary*. (Anchorage: Alaska Pacific University, 1989), pp. 2–16; Inman, Marianne, 'Language and Cross-Cultural Training in American Multinational Corporations', *The Modern Language Journal*, 69:3 (1985), pp. 247–255; Inman, Marianne, 'How Foreign Language Study Can Enhance Career Possibilities', ERIC (1987), pp. 1–6; Simon, Paul, *The Tongue-Tied American: Confronting the Foreign Language Crisis*. (New York: 1980).

15 Haug, Werner, *Migranten und ihre Nachkommen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt: Ein Überblick*, (Neuchâtel: Bundesamt für Statistik, 2006).

which resulted in different civil and social statuses of the migrant populations. While in this study knowledge of (Swiss) German (in the German-speaking part) was clearly identified as a key factor for career advancement of individual migrants, the ‘added value’ of linguistic diversity for enterprises and institutions in general was left largely unexplained.¹⁶

Other studies follow a similar line of thought as they measure the economic ‘value’ of individual languages and multilingualism in general, thus drawing attention to the language competencies required for migrants (as well as locals) to advance in their careers.¹⁷ Indirectly, these studies not only seek to raise awareness of companies on the value of linguistic diversity at the workplace and the potential business loss that may arise as a result of language inattention but also stress the role of the state as a regulator and protector of linguistic diversity as a fundamental right of society. Yet other studies draw attention to the negative impact inattention to cultural and linguistic sensitivity has on individual staff performance.¹⁸

Especially large multinational companies have, in recent years, been opening themselves to (linguistic) diversity issues by allowing researchers to conduct qualitative and quantitative fieldwork analyses at their worksites. There are currently several ongoing programmes in Switzerland involved in research activities that deal with linguistic diversity and economy.¹⁹ While companies that participate in these projects essentially provide access to the field for researchers, they do not *commit* themselves to incorporating research results into their communication structures. Thus, the design of these projects seems oriented to filling gaps in research rather than providing appropriate management strategies for specific enterprises.

What seems to become evident from this discussion is that the benefit of private companies in implementing linguistic diversity research is not sufficiently addressed. Surely, companies may wish for employees to be successful at work for mutual benefit, but they do not feel responsible for employees’ *abilities* required for success. And although companies surely acknowledge that failure to be successful, for language or other reasons, may be an unpleasant and frustrating experience to the individual, they are aware that an employment contract is the result of a voluntary joining of forces

¹⁶ Haug, *Migranten und ihre Nachkommen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt*, p. 17.

¹⁷ Grin, François, ‘Economic approaches to language and language planning: an introduction’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, Issue 121, pp. 1–16; Grin, François, ‘The economics of language: survey, assessment, and prospects’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, Issue 121 (1996), pp. 17–44; Grin, François, and Claudio Sfreddo, ‘Language-based earnings. Differentials on the Swiss labour market: Is Italian a liability?’, *International Journal of Manpower*, Vol. 19, Issue 7 (1998), pp. 520–533. Grin, François, *Language Policy Evaluation and Europe. The European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

¹⁸ Schweizerisches Forum für Migrations- und Bevölkerungsstudien (Neuchâtel, 2004) commissioned by Travail Suisse, supported by the Swiss Foreigner Commission (Schweizerische Ausländerkommission). Similar studies can be found at European level (see footnote 3).

¹⁹ E.g. DYLAN (Dynamiques des langues et gestion de la diversité), a five-year integrated multinational EU project coordinated by the University of Lausanne; National Research Programme 56 (Language Diversity and Linguistic Competence in Switzerland), supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation. It is divided into five thematic areas, of which one deals with ‘language and economy’; LINEE – Languages in a Network of European Excellence, a scientific network funded under the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission. Recently, as a consequence of the present paper, a two-year project, ‘Language diversity in working processes,’ has been approved by the Swiss National Science Foundation and is currently being carried out at Zurich University of Applied Sciences.

between employer and employee and that the employer is not expected to hire staff that may not be able to carry out their tasks successfully. In other words, what seems to be lacking in current research activities is the factor of strategic motivation of private companies in sourcing human capital. Companies are primarily interested in hiring staff for profit and in allocating human capital in ways beneficial to their needs. If this means finding candidates with French, German or English language skills, companies will do so. It does not matter to them where potential candidates come from or how they have acquired the skills they need as long as they are willing to relocate to their company worksite and accept the employment conditions.

It seems therefore relevant to recognise that research on linguistic diversity at the workplace is only perceived as an issue at management levels if communication fails or breaks down, and especially if it does so over a prolonged period of time. While communication failure may occur across all business sectors every now and again, the majority of companies have adopted very pragmatic and reasonable solutions to deal with the language demands of everyday interaction. Despite the fact that today's linguistic and cultural diversity can be an unrecognised source of difficulties, which may have a significant, potentially negative impact on business performance, organisations are normally able to function day-to-day in complex linguistic constellations without being aware of the potentially 'added value' language strategies may have.

Thus, current research activities, although they undoubtedly must be taken seriously, tend to approach the issue of linguistic diversity from a socio-political angle and not from the perspective of a profit-driven enterprise.²⁰ Consequently, the vast body of research on the topic traditionally focuses on migrant groups at risk of discrimination or unemployment, such as may be the case with lowly-qualified, low-income workers, while attributing the causes of these unwanted 'side effects' to a lack of attention to the micro-social environment of individual migrants.²¹ This socio-political focus on the distributional effect of diversity contrasts with companies' primary interest in profitable allocation strategies of human capital. Hence, it is not surprising that companies have been slower in paying attention to the issue, even if one can reasonably argue that distributional effects of short-term allocation strategies may be as detrimental to company performance as to a national economy. What needs to be done for companies to become interested in the subject matter is to approach linguistic diversity from a management perspective (HR, communication, task management) rather than from an individual, cultural, societal or political angle.

20 Cf. also the 'remedial' discourse in the context of language and participation, Rodriguez, Cristina, *Language and Participation*, *California Law Review* 94 (2006): 687–768.

21 Cf. for example, Haug, *Migranten und ihre Nachkommen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt*, p.10.

4. Linguistic diversity in action: a case study

In the context of the above considerations, we contacted 35 multinational enterprises with their global or regional headquarters in Switzerland. The companies contacted were industry leaders or otherwise strongly present in their field, and they had a long record of conducting international business in Switzerland. The following industries were selected: food, banking and insurances, watches, pharmaceutical industries, and the travel industry. We subsequently conducted interviews with Heads of Communication and of Human Resources from various enterprises in order to find out which attitudes were prevalent among managing staff whose task it was to align communicative needs of employees with management conceptions of corporate communications.

The response rate to our initial enquiry was surprisingly high, which clearly showed that most companies took our proposal seriously. When asked whether they would like to participate in a larger project on linguistic diversity in their particular environment, however, the negative responses clearly dominated. In a few instances, management simply did not find the topic sufficiently relevant or interesting for their immediate business needs; in other cases, a combination of factors led to a negative response, such as 1) the complete absence of multilingual teams or the presence of only few multilingual constellations at the workplace; 2) involvement in too many HR/communication projects; 3) internal restructuring and lack of time to invest into the issue. Even those companies with which interviews could be arranged considered linguistic diversity a marginal item on the company's agenda. HR/Communication managers typically acknowledged the advancement of English as a Lingua Franca at their workplace, which was put down to a changing business environment. Companies and staff likewise were asked to adapt to these changes by providing and availing of English language opportunities. If a problem was identified by management, it was referred to a lack of business-related English language competence.

In the following, we would like to analyse some typical response patterns in interviews with two senior communications managers from two multinational companies in Switzerland. Both companies are internationally active and derive their main business through cross-border trade. The first company (Company 1) is a pharmaceutical multinational; the second company is specialised in the technology sector (Company 2). In both cases, we arranged interviews with the respective heads of internal communication. Both communication managers agreed to have their interviews recorded for research purposes. In the follow-up on the interviews, the first company showed moderate interest in prioritising the issue, while the second company appeared more favourable towards taking action. We would now like to discuss selected passages from these two interviews against the background of the managers' readiness to do something about the issue of linguistic diversity, assuming that the response patterns we encountered reflect communicative behaviour towards languages which is typical of multinational enterprises in Switzerland.

4.1 Corporate culture and linguistic diversity in multinational teams: Company 1

Company 1 is a large multinational enterprise with employees spread across subsidiaries around the globe; its headquarters are located in Switzerland. We talked to the Head of Communication who was responsible for internal communication and parts of the external representation of the company.

In the interview, the Head of Communication (henceforth: HoC) expressed a strong concern for the individuality of language use; at the same time, he suggested that language within the company should be treated under merely functional aspects. When asked if he agreed with the EU statement that language was the direct expression of culture and identity, he answered:

(1)

HoC I guess I'd have to say I agree with that. Language is innate, language is an expression of individuality, NOT JUST of culture. [...] Its something that needs to be respected. But when that crosses the roads of globalisation, then you have to compromise.²²

The focus on 'innateness' and 'individuality' as opposed to 'culture' reflects the strong value the HoC attributes to particular individual talents who bring about excellent corporate solutions to problems. However, although the HoC admits that linguistic diversity is important as 'an expression of individuality', he argues that the practicalities of globalisation demand a streamlining of languages to a limited and manageable number in which English quickly emerges as the 'lead' language. This creates a paradoxical situation where an ethical ideal to ensure freedom of expression is superseded by the corporate need to ensure a common understanding – internally and worldwide. Our interview partner reflected this by stressing that they fostered 'a healthy environment, healthy culture that people can feel free to express how they need to express themselves', while admitting that using Lingua Franca English forced employees to simplify their language in order to minimise misunderstandings. Yet, the HoC maintained that under these circumstances equal opportunities of expression were guaranteed for all employees since everybody had to adjust and monitor their language use in business interaction. This pressure to simplify has consequences, as shown in Excerpt 2.

(2)

Int When you say 'command of English' you refer to functional knowledge to get the job done, basically. But say other aspects of the language like being able to really communicate what one thinks about something, perhaps in creative tasks. Do you think it might be a hindrance, if somebody is not a native speaker? Is that an issue there, the language command?

HoC I don't think it's a terrible hindrance. I think that's more in the predisposition of the PERSON than it is on the outside. Because I think when we come into a culture like this [i.e. Switzerland], which is very international and where English is only the business language, it's NOT the DOMINANT language, what happens is that English SIMPLIFIES to a certain

²² In transcripts from our interviews, words in capital letters indicate emphasized intonation; '[...]' indicates left out passages. Square brackets filled with words indicate complementary information.

- degree. So, you don't use vernacular as much. I certainly don't.
- Int Uhuh. So you adapt?
- HoC I've adapted tremendously to this environment. When you hold global teleconferences...
You know, I have had one with Japan this morning, where we ended up to keep it very simple, very straightforward, and not use any strange words.

One difficulty touched upon here is that in international business interactions each participant has to determine what actually is or might be a 'strange word' in order to avoid it, and s/he has to plan on alternative strategies to get across the point without distorting the meaning of what is to be communicated. According to the HoC, this need to simplify one's language in order to establish common ground was recognised and practised by all employees alike; and, as he observed, it does not limit one's ability to express oneself intelligently. Rather, in the words of the HoC, 'it's JUST the LANGUAGE itself, that you use', meaning that (the simplified English) language is handled as a tool, purely functionally. This emphasis on the utilitarian function of language rests on assumptions about the nature of language somewhat opposed to the concerns voiced by the HoC earlier where he stressed the impact of language on culture and identity and the importance to express oneself freely.

Moreover, as the HoC admits, North Americans and British native speakers, when communicating with each other, usually switch to vernacular rather quickly after establishing common ground through their native language, but refrain from doing so in corporate communication when native speakers and non-native speakers have to understand one another. Lingua Franca English, as applied in corporate communication, is, in effect, a medium of interaction distinct not only from everyday varieties of English, but also from business varieties used between mother tongue speakers. Thus, it seems that the use of Lingua Franca English can rule out the use of 'normal' interactional elements such as humour, irony, informal talk and the like.

When asked about language planning or linguistic regulations, the HoC responded that there were no regulations except that English was the official corporate language. Foreign employees were offered courses in the Swiss national languages on a voluntary basis, but were required to communicate in English at a high level.

But even if English was the official language of written interaction, German and French were used occasionally in e-mails between native speakers of those languages, especially in informal contexts. In formal contexts, on the other hand, he argued that 'If it's for business, and it's clearly for business I think people NATURALLY today write in English.'

Whereas the operative status of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) seemed an unquestionable given, more attention was paid to another aspect of company-internal communication: in order to enhance the spread and exchange of ideas that can add business value, employees were encouraged to establish informal contacts across different teams and units. Thus, in that perspective, language planning within the company included the strategic provision of interaction opportunities. Architectural spaces taking account of different cultural influences were seen to contribute to this openness and accessibility. Even staff exchange with subsidiaries worldwide was

regulated by well established procedures and routines taking care of possible cultural and geographical differences (e.g. by staff rotation schemes which bring staff from all over the world to the headquarters in Switzerland). The foremost corporate interests guiding these measures, according to the respondent, were smoothing the business operations in diverse geographical sites, maximizing market assets by adapting to local conditions, fostering talents from emerging markets, and recruiting the best in order to bring talent into the organisation. Moreover, the respondent emphasised the positive effects of multinational staff in the company as they bridged the gap between management levels and the staff's 'real world', generated innovativeness and facilitated acceptance of management decisions at the subsidiary level:

(3)

HoC I think it [multinational team collaboration] works fairly well, most of the time, and it usually introduces some REALITY into the equation. Because we tend to of course live, as any good corporate level office, in a bit of a tower that we've created for ourselves. And we need to bring in the REAL environment into OUR environment. [...] And innovativeness, I'd say, a little bit here and there, where ideas that they use locally that we might not have thought of get implemented at a global scale. And the other important thing is, when you bring somebody from a local market to a global environment, oftentimes, not always, but oftentimes, that they help to explain back to their network the challenges that we face. [...] But that's more of a cultural and a language thing.

The HoC alludes to an image of the company's top management presiding in an ivory tower which is disconnected from the linguistically and culturally diverse work reality on the ground. Therefore, international staff rotation schemes were put in place so as to facilitate greater linguistic and cultural exchange. The image also reflects the distance towards the society and cultures at the local sites of the company, and even towards the Swiss headquarters's surroundings. Instead of stressing the embeddedness of the company in Swiss culture and society, the HoC emphasises the company's own corporate culture and society-like network throughout the world which includes every employee, irrelevant of origin and mother tongue. In the same line of thought the respondent describes that the needs of staff regarding diversity and inclusion cannot be assessed globally, but have to be addressed individually:

(4)

HoC You can't measure that, it's just sensitizing, and training, and educating, and creating a healthy environment, where people can challenge each other, for example, and open up, and discuss this, in a RESPECTFUL manner. But that's all part of that: creating an inclusive environment, not just a diverse environment. You can mandate diversity, but you can't mandate inclusion. Inclusion is an internal force, that's even more important and it's the bigger barrier, and that's inclusive thinking on every dimension. And there is even hidden... — You don't KNOW the diversity of an individual when you look at them necessarily, because maybe their gender doesn't say it, or their skin colour doesn't say it, or the language they speak, but it's some other... ((snapping sound)).

In this passage, all employees as individuals together are portrayed as producing a vast range of diversity which should be taken account of in terms of management practices. What can be operationalised strategically are parameters of inclusion that

address the practicalities of management in global teams, such as simplifying language, coordinating time differences and timelines of the projects, leveraging the differences and turning them into a business asset. Thus, corporate culture, almost as an antidote to diversity, incorporates and includes everyone in the company, and English as a corporate Lingua Franca is the practical means to implement this inclusion.

What becomes evident through this interview is the double-edgedness of diversity (linguistic and otherwise): as a factor in promoting corporate goals, such as being innovative, attracting international talents, closing communication gaps with subsidiaries and different levels of corporate structure, and at the same time as endangering the necessary operative homogeneity of the company. In particular at the management level this discrepancy entails a permanent struggle between regulating and acknowledging diversity in order to make the most of it for corporate goals. One outcome of this struggle is the deliberate focus on English as a cross-cultural facilitator of communication; however, this also leads, due to the size of the enterprise and the corporate culture and identity, to a neglect of local and regional socio-cultural embedding of the company.

4.2 Linguistic diversity as a challenge: Company 2

In the case of Company 2, which responded favourably to the project idea, the communication manager agreed to arrange an interview but made it clear at the outset that it was unlikely the company would commit itself to a binding project in any way. Against this initial warning, the company's positive response came as a surprise. However, once we had analysed the interview in greater detail, we identified a number of cues that seemed to have led to their eventual turn in favour of the project proposal.

Firstly, it became clear during the interview that the company fostered a culture of patronage and interpersonal relationships which is otherwise typically seen in SMEs. During the interview, the company's founding story was highlighted as central to its success, which was rooted in the local (regional) economy (i.e. Switzerland) and the immediate environment (France and Germany). The manager – herself a local from the region – acknowledged that all but one members of the director's board were either local or from the neighbouring regions of Switzerland, while more than twenty-three nationalities were represented in the company's headquarters in total. Thus, the issue of being local, of integration into the 'mother company', as well as the adaptation to the broader cultural and linguistic environment, figured prominently in the formulation of the respondent's attitude towards linguistic diversity. While the respondent praised the diverse backgrounds of their employees as one of the company's assets, she identified limitations to that generosity when team interaction, which typically takes place in the national languages of Switzerland, or in the corporate language English, was controlled by people who did not show any willingness to adapt to the majority culture. This concept of adaptation to the host culture, which essentially reflects the broader integration policy of Switzerland (i.e. 'fördern and fordern', promote and demand), was illustrated with a case example of an English speaking employee who, in the seven years he had been in the company, had not acquired any local languages and therefore was not able to follow any meeting that took place in German.

As a result, all meetings with that person had to be conducted in English, even if all other team members were native German speakers. In excerpt (5), our respondent clearly expresses her personal disapproval of this behaviour, which is considered as uncooperative:²³

(5)

- HoC But obviously there are people who do not want that [to integrate] at all. We also have one person, an Englishman, who has been in Switzerland for seven years who can't speak any German and that is difficult.
- Int But does he function in the company?
- HoC Yes, partly, yes.
- Int But in meetings, does everybody speak English when he is present?
- HoC Yes.
- Int Because of him?
- HoC Yes, because of him, ONLY because of him.
- Int So there are seven Swiss and he and one speaks English?
- HoC Yes, we really DO speak English with him but I get terribly upset about this but that's the way it is. Off-the-record, I find this a COMPLETE disgrace. (3s)
- Int Yes, that IS extraordinary.
- HoC And recently he has started work in communication and I find that terribly difficult.
- Int But this is only possible because it [English] is the corporate language. I assume if he were Italian this wouldn't be possible ...
- HoC If he were Italian it would be easier because as Italian he would be speaking English as a foreign language too. You have to see, all others [other teams] who have foreign languages [i.e. non-national languages] as second languages work much better than those [teams] in which some have English as a native language. That is much more difficult.
- Int Why is that?
- HoC Because English speakers who speak English as their mother tongue can express themselves in a much more differentiated way which obviously strains the language capacities of those who can't do that.
- Int And do you notice this?
- HoC I can notice this, I can notice this, yes.
- Int So there is some kind of predominance of the native speaker [of English]?
- HoC Yes, in a way I mean it is already predominant if the native speaker is the only one for who you change your language in your own country. But it really does make a difference if I speak English with someone who doesn't have it as their native tongue to someone who has it as their mother tongue. I have a natural respect for that, I keep thinking is this the right expression or did I get that wrong ...
- Int ... that is natural.
- Int1 You feel inhibited then, yes.
- Int And there is nothing you can do about this? That is dictated from above?
- HoC Oh yes, yes, we are working on it [laughing].
- Int An exception to the rule, a majority decision?
- HoC No, no, I keep talking to him in German.
- Int So he can understand it in that case?
- HoC No, he can't, he really can't.

23 The interview was originally conducted in Swiss German and translated into English by the authors.

- Int1 And his children, they probably go to the international school?
 HoC That's right, he lives in France works here and the children go to the international school.
 Int And are there other cases like him or is he really a special case?
 HoC He really is a special case.
 Int A persistent special case.
 HoC The most persistent special case that I know of [laughing].

The respondent's strong disapproval of employees who were unwilling to accommodate linguistically was preceded by a discussion of the company's corporate language (English) and the general English language competencies of the non-native speaking employees. In this discussion, as well as in the excerpt above, the respondent expressed her concern with employees being disadvantaged due to the lack of language skills and the difficulty connected to the proper linguistic formulation of one's ideas. She conveyed that knowing the right (combination of) languages, ultimately, meant being able to establish contact with key people more easily, which in turn opened career and promotion paths. In the case example of Company 2, the language needed for career advancement was identified to be English (the corporate language) but, just as importantly, German (the native language of the largest population in the company). In this context, language was recognised as a key to establishing contacts within the company, and in particular as the ability to conduct what the respondent called *small-talk*, i.e. the ability to use language to establish interpersonal relationships.

(6)

- Int How are for instance friendships formed [...] Isn't it often the case that language groups are formed, that Spaniards talk with one another, that the French talk with one another simply because they can UNDERSTAND each other? We can't blame them for this. Have you got any experiences with this or how do you imagine this scenario, what do you think about this?
 HoC It would be wrong to say, no, this does not exist, certainly.
 Int So are you saying that if you can establish contact via a foreign language that this can be a barrier in some cases?
 HoC This is certainly so, yes.
 Int And could you imagine that for this reason business potential may be lost?
 HoC Most certainly [...] you can easily do small-talk with someone you share the same language with rather than with someone you don't, and small-talk is after all the gateway to many other things ...
 Int ... such as promotion ...
 HoC ... this may well be for example we don't have anyone on the board in management that is English speaking.
 Int They are all Swiss or German?
 HoC Yes, well no, there is one person from Chile but he speaks German very well.

Apart from an open recognition of language as a source of problems and a key to success, the respondent's frequent references to the company's soft values such as 'organic' growth, employee satisfaction, which was attributed to the special spirit and the family structure of the company, contributed to seeing company interaction in terms of discursive processes rather than cause-effect-relationships and short-term communicative goals. The factor of interpersonal relationships was also highlighted

as an important part in the company's cross-border trade strategy where relationships were built up over the course of years before associated companies were eventually incorporated by the mother company. Consequently, potential linguistic barriers across countries were seen to disappear gradually as mutual trust developed between the partners over time. On that basis, cross-border interaction was not perceived as posing any particular difficulties to successful trade cooperation. While cross-border trade was not seen as problematic, the internal communication of company values in a multinational and multilingual environment was clearly identified as a challenge management was facing at the time. This was illustrated with the difficulty of translating soft value factors into other languages, which often resulted in ideological debates of the decision-makers on the meaning of specific terms. Such debates even occurred in teams with supposedly similar language backgrounds, i.e. German and Swiss-German, which was illustrated with a discussion on the concept of loyalty which took place between native German and native Swiss-German speakers:

(7)

- HoC [...] That's why there are people who are convinced that you can write a text in English directly but I don't believe this. I think you need to know first what you actually want to say in your mother tongue and then translate it into English. In these cases we have ideology debates. For example we once had the topic 'loyalty' and the time alone it took until we had defined what we actually meant by 'loyalty'. Our German colleagues had a completely different understanding of loyalty to ours. It was an intense discussion about what loyalty IS, this really touched on the fundamental values of every one of us and there we differed diametrically.
- Int And did you notice cultural differences there?
- HoC Yes, clearly, that was highly interesting. I think the Japanese still don't understand what we mean by it. They once tried to translate something and I only saw three pages of what they meant by this term. I obviously didn't understand what they meant but they had tremendous difficulties with the concept.
- Int And are these concepts understood as corporate values?
- HoC Yes, exactly.

In conclusion, a combination of factors contributed to the company's interest in the issue of linguistic diversity: (1) a general openness towards the question; (2) the recognition of language as a facilitator and a barrier to successful interaction and business; (3) existing challenges regarding company-internal language use; (4) a local socio-cultural awareness and an appreciation of the company's cultural and linguistic roots.

5. Towards a linguistic diversity management

The interviews illustrate how company structures, corporate image and linguistic awareness interplay at creating a workplace that offers specific communication structures and yet, at the same time, prevents others. Both interviews underline, though in different ways, that technical knowledge of a second language which is used as lingua franca is not enough to operate successfully in workplace communication. As can be seen from the argumentation in Company 1, the focus on the promotion of technical language skills in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) effectively deflects from the issue of multilingual team dynamics in business communication; it reduces language skills to particular individuals' knowledge that can be acquired in isolation. Deeper structures of language use, in particular communicative skills usually termed as 'soft skills', such as patterns of problem-solving and explaining are taken for granted. Even though language planning efforts occasionally form part of a corporate identity, often within diversity policies and Code of Conduct rationalisation, they fail to address the language use and the language behaviour of its workforce in interaction. The reluctance of companies in implementing language planning instruments that take account of critical components in team communication reflects common management practice in both monolingual and multilingual settings; its main focus is geared towards behaving 'rationally' and eliminating conflicting or contradictory messages.²⁴ For this reason, team communication at work has not been accorded the attention it deserves.²⁵ This is also seen in the fact that current management practices still do not take account of recent linguistic research in empirical discourse and text analysis. The lack of attention to linguistic factors results in a prescriptive linguistic management rationale that reinforces stereotypes and norms, yet fails to address particular communicative needs. Against this background, it seems clear that the diversity of formal and informal practices of communicating within an enterprise merits more empirical research.

While most MNEs have organisational units concerned with internal communication, the term 'communication' is commonly taken as an equivalent for the *exchange of information*, i.e. an institutional formalisation of information flows and knowledge management. Usually, this conception is based on a technical communication mo-

24 Quinn, Robert E., *Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes and Competing Demands of High Performance* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

25 Company internal communication and language use in German speaking teams has attracted attention in recent years, cf. Brünner, Gisela, *Wirtschaftskommunikation. Linguistische Analyse ihrer mündlichen Formen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000); Bendel, Sylvia, *Das Kommunikationsverhalten von Unternehmensangehörigen. Ergebnisse einer akteurzentrierten Feldstudie und ihre Konsequenzen für die Interne Kommunikation* (Luzern: Hochschule für Wirtschaft Luzern, 2006); Dannerer, Monika, 'Gute Kommunikation teuer? Zum Konzept der kommunikativen Effizienz in den Wirtschaftswissenschaften und der Linguistik', in *Organisationskommunikation: Grundlagen und Analysen der sprachlichen Inszenierung von Organisation*, ed. by F. Menz and A. P. Müller (München and Meiring: Rainer Hampp Verlag, 2008), pp. 47–69. In general, research interest in heterogeneous, linguistically diverse, teams is still underdeveloped and studies are scarce; cf. Adler, Nancy, *International dimensions of organizational behaviour* (Cincinnati: South Western, 2002); van den Bergh, Samuel and Ralph Lehmann, *Managing Multicultural Teams*. (Winterthur: Zurich University of Applied Sciences, 2004). It seems surprising that even actually available linguistic studies on intercultural teams and work communication are not considered by management-oriented studies in the field, e.g. Koole, Tom and Jan D. ten Thije, *The Construction of Intercultural Discourse* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994); Pauwels, Anne (ed.), 'Cross-cultural communication in the Professions', *Multilingua, Special Issue 13–1/2* (1994). A theoretical and methodological study linking the findings on monolingual team structures with the study of international teams is still missing.

del (sender, channel, receiver).²⁶ Again, this technical conception reveals a rationale that abstracts from concrete, *empirically relevant interaction and language behaviour* within enterprises, i.e. from ‘soft’ factors such as coordinating tasks and maintaining cooperativeness in a team.²⁷ While these factors are important in monolingual, national and relatively homogenous teams, they are even more important in diverse multinational teams: cooperating via a Lingua Franca requires the building of a trustworthy relationship and common ground within a team, since linguistic experiences and expectations towards the team task may differ greatly across nationalities and cultures. Also, expectations towards communicative patterns vary considerably, e. g. regarding silences and overlaps of talk in discussions, back channel signals which align processes of reception and production between hearer and speaker, the use of evaluative discourse markers like ‘I think’ and so on.²⁸

Focusing on language behaviour, therefore, means more than handling and organizing information efficiently. Ager (2001) suggests that ‘language behaviour means both how humans behave when they use language and also how they behave towards others using language, or even towards the communication system being used’.²⁹ In a yet stricter sense, ‘language behaviour’ may be understood as the sum of all kinds of linguistic and empractical activities, i.e. activities which are carried out by means of spoken or written language, and linguistic activities which are embedded in non-verbal activities. Hence ‘activities’ are yet unclassified units of (inter)action which may be analysed as meaningful in a larger context: as (*a series of*) *acts and actions* carried out to an end, a *purpose*, and based on *societal knowledge*.³⁰ The theory of linguistic action as developed within Functional Pragmatics ‘conceives of language

26 For a critique of the mechanistic model by Shannon/Weaver from a linguistic perspective, see e.g. Kleinberger Günther, Ulla, *Kommunikation in Betrieben. Wirtschaftslinguistische Aspekte der innerbetrieblichen Kommunikation* (Bern: Lang, 2003), pp. 87ff; Dannerer, ‘Zum Konzept der kommunikativen Effizienz in den Wirtschaftswissenschaften und der Linguistik’, p. 50f.

27 Studies on workplace communication proved that informal talk and seemingly not goal-oriented e-mail communication are crucial for corporate processes of coordination as well as for the flow of information, cf. Kleinberger Günther, Ulla, ‘Softcommunication – spontane innerbetriebliche Kommunikation ausserhalb vorgegebener Strukturen’, in *Organisationskommunikation: Grundlagen und Analysen der sprachlichen Inszenierung von Organisation*, ed. by F. Menz and A. P. Müller (München and Meiring: Rainer Hampp Verlag, 2008), pp. 225–243. A current research project conducted at ZHAW by Christiane Hohenstein and Sylvia Mnachen Spoerri specifically studies cooperative processes in multilingual teams, cf. Manchen Spoerri, Sylvia and Hohenstein, Christiane (2010–2012), ‘Sprachdiversität in Arbeitsprozessen – Language diversity in working processes’, Swiss National Science Foundation, project no 130170. Winterthur: ZHAW, Dept. L. [<http://www.projectdb.snf.ch/WebForms/Frameset.aspx>]

28 Particular linguistic constructions and patterns of interaction that may cause ruptures in multinational and plurilingual team constellations can be detected via methods of language contrast, cf. *Meaning through language contrast*, ed. by K. M. Jaszcolt and K. Turner (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2003). Language contrast based on Functional-Pragmatic theoretical reflection shows that evaluative formulae such as ‘I think’-constructions, while existing in all languages, serve different discourse functions in languages as diverse as German, Japanese and English, cf. Hohenstein, Christiane, ‘A comparative analysis of Japanese and German complement constructions with matrix verbs of thinking and believing: ‘to omou’ and ‘ich glaub(e)’’, in *Multilingual Communication*, ed. by J. House and J. Rehbein (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004), 303–341.

29 Ager, Dennis, *Motivation in language planning and policy* (Clevedon, etc.: Multilingual Matters, 2001), p. 2; see also Cooper, Robert L., *Language planning and social change* (Cambridge: University Press, 1989); Studer, Patrick, Felicia Kreiselmaier and Mi-Cha Flubacher, *Language policy-planning in a European context* (Bern: Universität Bern, 2008).

30 For a concise discussion see Rehbein, Jochen, ‘Das Konzept der Diskursanalyse’, in *Text- und Gesprächslinguistik*, ed. by K. Brinker, G. Antos, Wolfgang Heinemann, Sven F. Sager, 2vols./ vol. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 927–945.

as a complex of form-function-nexus anchored in reality as societal practice'.³¹ Based on insights in language psychology going back to Leont'ev and Vygotskij,³² Functional Pragmatics views language as something specific to and constitutive of the human species, i.e. as something that developed from a qualitative leap of communicative devices during the formation of human societies, thus allowing for a knowledge-based appropriation of reality.³³

In corporate enterprises language takes on the task of appropriating reality in accordance with corporate goals. This may be translated and controlled at the strategic level; at the same time language behaviour and linguistic action are subject to language-internal demands as much as to language-specific acts appropriating parts of reality. This leads to profound differences between languages with regard to standard speech actions, such as the ways questions and requests are addressed in a particular language (e. g. Standard German vs. Swiss-German vs. English vs. Japanese). Equally, it affects the ways vertical and horizontal communication takes place. Differences between languages are strong enough to cause differences in Lingua Franca English, depending on the first language of any speaker in a team. These differences are not linguistic faults in a grammatical sense; however, they become pragmatically relevant within a multinational, linguistically diverse team, and this can have repercussions on team interaction and success.

Communication in multilingual team interaction is particularly complicated in situations of open and unstructured interaction at complex task-level in which perceptions and attitudes of participants are formed and expressed.³⁴ These situations are common in teams who have to solve and analyse problems or define and implement corporate strategies. It can be expected that perceptions and attitudes of participants are expressed not only relative to their cultural and linguistic background but equally relative to their individual discursive resources they have acquired in the course of their lives. Thus, professional contributions to a team are determined by a complex interplay of the linguistic and individual discursive resources, the societal knowledge of a person, and her or his institutional role, the team task and the organisational structure that form the object of interaction (see figure 1 below); all of these factors need to be considered in an analytical approach.

31 Cf. Redder, Angelika, 'Functional Pragmatics', in *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication. Handbooks of Applied Linguistics Vol. 2.* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 133–178.

32 A. N. Leont'ev (1904–1979), Russian psychologist, has developed a theory of the interdependence of activity, consciousness and personality based on Marxist philosophy. He understands human consciousness as the 'highest form of reflection of reality that sociohistorical development creates', which irreducibly is produced by 'objectively existing agents', and thus analysable in terms of causal historical analysis, cf. *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality* (Transl. by Marie J. Hall) (Prentice-Hall, 1978). Leont'ev's work is also based on Vygotskij whose collected works he edited. L. S. Vygotsky (1896–1934), Russian psychologist, founder of a theory of development of the mind, stresses the importance of language and the dependence on social interaction in the development of the human mind. According to Vygotsky, instruction in a specific social environment determines the ways of thinking and acting from early childhood on and leads to 'cultural', i.e. particular linguistic and societal forms of thinking, speaking, and acting.

33 Cf. Hoffmann, Ludger, 'Der Mensch und seine Sprache – eine anthropologische Skizze', in *Diskurse und Texte*, ed. by A. Redder (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2007), pp. 21–36.

34 Creativity is a performance factor which is commonly cited as an asset of multilingual/-national teams, cf. Nunic, Aida, *Multinational Teams in European and American Companies.* (Allg. BWL, Wien: Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, 2007). However, other studies show that diverse teams either perform much better or much worse than homogeneous teams (cf. footnote 27), thus creativity is not an automatic outcome, but relies on the capability of coordinated interaction and quality of communication of the team members.

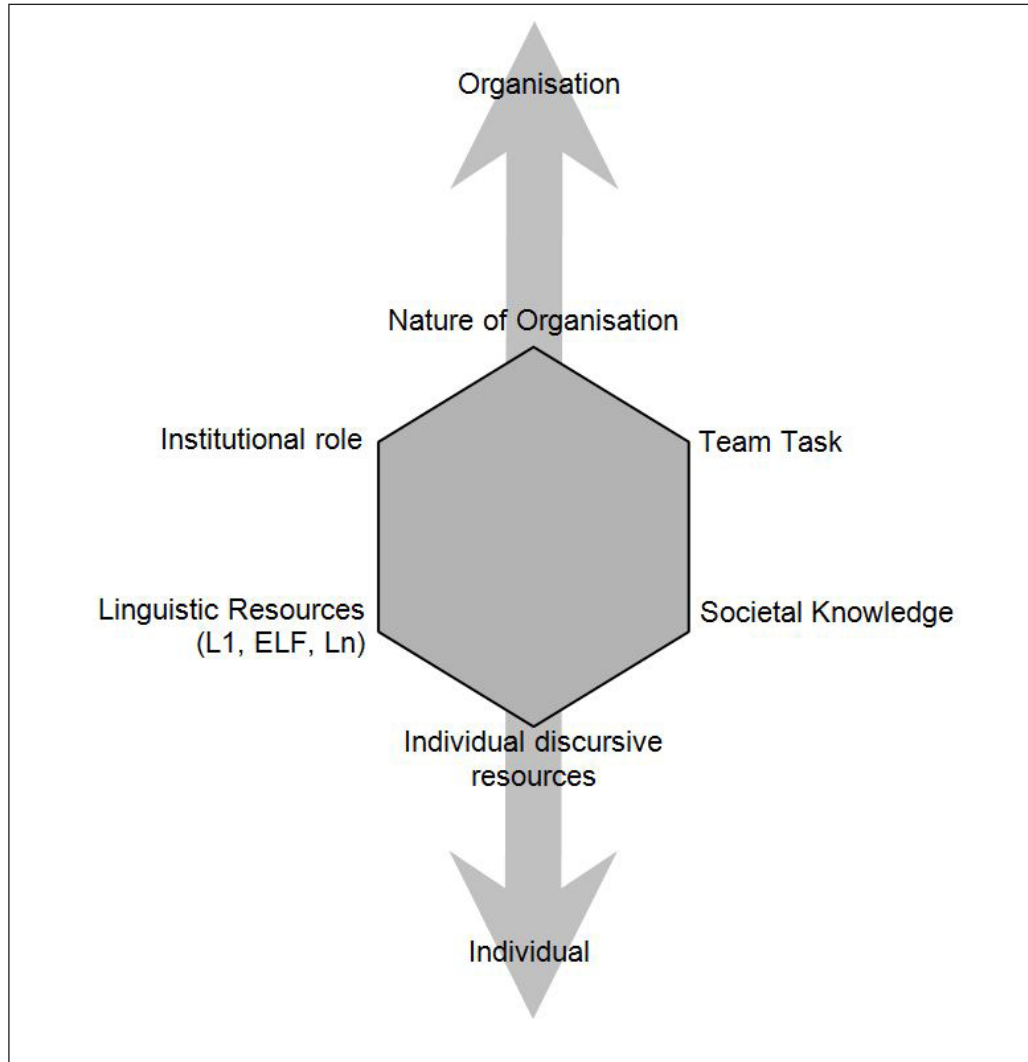


Figure 1: Interplay of factors in multinational teams

The conception, goal-setting and assigning of *team tasks* and also the assignment of *institutional roles* to team members and leaders depends largely on the *nature of the organisation* an MNE corresponds to, i.e. whether its structures are strictly hierarchical or participatory, how firmly and which corporate goals are set, how corporate compliance is achieved. These aspects may be studied by analysing official documents from the enterprise (vision, code of conduct etc.) and through semi-structured interviews with key players in the management. *Institutional roles*, in turn are linked to institutional knowledge about decision-making, routines and language use within the organisation/institution, and they depend on the *linguistic resources*, not only in an institutional agent's first language (L1), but equally in English as a Lingua Franca and possibly further secondary or tertiary languages (Ln). These linguistic resources partly feed the *individual's discursive resources* which include personal perceptions, attitudes and evaluations towards language, interaction and language behaviour. These, in turn, are closely related to *societal knowledge* which encompasses 'cultural' standards (e.g. maxims), and patterns of interacting (e.g. problem-solving, explai-

ning) acquired through education and socialisation. Solving a *team task*, again, relies on the combination of societal knowledge, individual discursive resources, linguistic resources and institutional roles brought into the team task by the team members. In that way, analytically, the macro-level of the organisation may be referred to the micro-level of individual employees and back to the management level via the team task. This interplay of factors necessitates a combination of several methods and theoretical frameworks. A theoretical reflection of how language management links top-down measures to bottom-up requirements is provided by Language Management Theory.³⁵ For further studies instances of noting language management practices in empirical interaction might be of interest. We propose to use a combination of text and discourse analytical approaches from Functional Pragmatics, Discursive Social Psychology, and Language Management Theory.

One fruitful way of approaching the study of attitudes that reveal the discursive resources of individual social actors is provided by discursive psychological studies.³⁶ Unlike traditional attitude work, discursive psychology does not use a simple ‘factors-and-outcomes logic’, but applies a conversational and rhetorical perspective, emphasising (inter-) action and construction.³⁷ Thus, attitudes do not appear as static and fixed entities in the heads of people, but as the production of evaluations that takes place during interaction and which invites the expression of disagreement, criticism or a counter-position.³⁸ In this context, language, linguistic diversity or multilingualism can be understood as *concepts* in a theoretical sense, i.e. as constructed representations commonly expressed through terms that carry a strong socio-political and evaluative potential. Attitudinal behaviour between interactants, consequently, can be analysed in terms of the conceptual rhetoric that is motivated by the discursive use of individual concepts.³⁹

In order to reveal the attitudes connected to multilingual team interaction, a combined approach to the field will be necessary. Semi-structured, task-oriented interviews with team members and team leaders can be compared to semi-structured, policy-oriented interviews with decision-makers (e.g. in diversity management) within an enterprise. Interviews will be directed at revealing the attitudes towards linguistic diversity as a resource as well as a potential source of problems in MNEs and their respective

35 Cf. Nekvapil, Jiri, ‘On Language Management in Multinational Companies in the Czech Republic’, in *Language Planning and Policy. Language Planning in Local Contexts*, ed. by A. J. Liddicoat and R. B. Baldauf Jr. (Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters, 2008), pp. 268–287.

36 Cf. for example, Harré, Rom, and Grant Gillett, *The Discursive Mind* (London: Sage, 1994).

37 Rather than asking questions concerning the influence of factor X on outcome Y (e.g. What is the influence of communication breakdown on task failure), discursive psychology, in Potter’s terms, looks at attitude applying a conversational and rhetorical perspective, emphasising action and construction (e.g. what is a breakdown of communication? How does it take place?). Cf. Potter, Jonathan, ‘Discursive Psychology: Between Method and Paradigm’, *Discourse and Society* 14 (2003), pp. 783–794, (p. 786).

38 Puchta, Claudia and Jonathan Potter (2002), ‘Manufacturing individual opinions: market research focus groups and the discursive psychology of evaluation’, *British Journal of Social Psychology* 41 (2002), pp. 345–363 (p. 347); Billig, Michael; S. Condor; D. Edwards; M. Gane; D. Middleton; A. Radley, *Ideological Dilemmas. A Social Psychology of Everyday Thinking*. (London: Sage, 1988).

39 See Studer, Patrick ‘Conceptual contradiction and discourses on multilingualism’, in *Perceptions and Beyond: Linguistic Diversity in a Knowledge-Based Economy*, ed. by P. Studer and I. Werlen. (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2011, forthcoming); see also Skinner, Quentin (1989), ‘Language and political change’, in: *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. by T. Ball, J. Farr, and R. L. Hanson (Cambridge: University Press, 1989), pp. 6–23.

plurilingual work teams. Methods of ‘shadowing’ and the audio-/videotaping of core team tasks need to complement these data, so that empirically occurring interaction in task resolution can be compared with the perceptions and attitudes about multinational team operation and language behaviour of team members. A theoretical basis for linguistic interaction analysis on the basis of audio-/videotaped data is provided by Functional Pragmatics, where larger, institutional structures are analysed in relation to interactional patterns and particular linguistic structures (procedures) a language offers.⁴⁰

Based on the observation that in second/foreign language use (L2 use) and English as a Lingua Franca, both ideological and pragmatic transfers from one’s first language (L1) or proficient L2s are common even on a high level of proficiency,⁴¹ our hypothesis is that successful team processes in MNEs are brought about by a pragmatic competence centring on reflexive skills. Thus, we believe that individual, highly developed first, second and foreign language skills are not the only crucial precondition of successful management of intercultural team tasks. Rather, our focus is directed towards ‘language behaviour’, and more specifically, towards ‘linguistic action’ (pragmatics of linguistic interaction as in action patterns, procedures and speech acts; inferencing, schemata, rhetorical devices, and attitudes towards these). In other words, our goal is to find means by which pragmatic and reflexive competence in issues of linguistic diversity may be recognised and fostered on all levels of MNEs. This includes the development of measures by which multinational teams can be assessed and trained. Finally, we propose implementing a Linguistic Diversity Management (LDM) directed at language use and language policy that is oriented to plurilingual practices within MNEs.

40 See Rehbein, ‘Konzept der Diskursanalyse’, and Rehbein, Jochen, ‘Matrix constructions’, in *Connectivity in Grammar and Discourse*, ed. by J. Rehbein, C. Hohenstein and L. Pietsch (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2007) pp. 419–447; for patterns and linguistic procedures in Japanese and German academic discourses see Hohenstein, Christiane, *Erklärendes Handeln im Wissenschaftlichen Vortrag. Ein Vergleich des Deutschen mit dem Japanischen* (München: iudicium, 2006).

41 Thomas, Jenny, ‘Cross-cultural pragmatic failure’, in *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2) (1988), pp. 91–112; Rehbein, Jochen and Jutta Fienemann, ‘Introductions – Being polite in multilingual settings’, in *Multilingual Communication*, ed. by J. House and J. Rehbein (Amsterdam/New York: Benjamins, 2004), pp. 223–278 with specific regard to ELF cf. House, Juliane, ‘Pragmatic Competence in Lingua Franca English’, in: *Lingua Franca Communication*, ed. by K. Knapp and C. Meierkord (Frankfurt a. Main: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 245–267; and Seidlhofer, Barbara ‘Research Perspectives on Teaching English as a Lingua Franca’, in: *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 24, (2004).10, pp. 209–239; and the most recent discussion in Salvi, Rita and Hiromasa Tanaka(eds) ‘Intercultural Interactions in Business and Management’, *Linguistic Insights* 146 (Bern: Lang; 2011).

6. Conclusion

In this study, we reviewed in detail the issue of linguistic diversity in a Swiss multinational environment, focusing on interactionally-based perceptions in spontaneous speech (interviews) and the implications of linguistic and cultural diversity on the behaviour towards language. Against the background of a widespread disinterest of companies in the effect of multilingual communication at work, the study confirmed that the implementation of one-language solutions in business communication (usually English) fundamentally affects the structures of face-to-face exchanges between employees, from turn-taking mechanisms to the ways conclusions are reached and decisions are communicated. The study showed that a good or even excellent command of English can not be the single crucial prerequisite for members of multinational teams and for managers when expected to operate and negotiate successfully in international business.

The analysis of Company 1 revealed that there is discrepancy and contradiction in managerial decisions between concessions made to simplify linguistic interaction between employees and the call for free and creative linguistic contributions to solving complex problems. By comparison, Company 2 confirmed that in an L2 environment informal talk between employees in their mother tongues (Swiss-German, German, or French) not only facilitates a mutual understanding and cooperative behaviour between employees but is essential in communicating company values and in establishing cultural roots of an enterprise.

Finally, the study proposed a detailed qualitative approach emphasising the importance of the micro-interactive level in the construction of company values, language ideologies and, ultimately, the identification of individual members with their organisation. The micro-interactive level was shown to constitute a relevant parameter that must be taken into account in the establishment of a comprehensive Linguistic Diversity Management Strategy for companies.

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