



11th GEM&L International Workshop on Management & Language

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COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Revisiting Multilingualism at Work:

New Perspectives in Language-Sensitive Research in International Business

Scholarly interest in the role of language in international business (IB) and organisational life has grown considerably in the past three decades in response to the many challenges faced by companies in managing their multilingual workforces. Benefitting from an increasing coverage in special issues [*International Studies of Management and Organization*, 2005, 3(1); *Journal of World Business*, 2011, 46(3); *Journal of International Business Studies*, 2014, 45(5)] and tracks in IB and OS conferences, research on language-related issues has established itself as a field in its own right, distinct from intercultural studies, both as a theoretical concept and a social phenomenon affecting every aspect of international business. GEM&L has contributed to this trend for the past ten years with international workshops focusing on themes such as the link between language and social identity, the management of diversity, the impact of language on company performance and the crossing of language boundaries.

Not surprisingly, given the multifaceted nature of this field, scholars from a range of disciplines – from (socio)linguistics, social psychology, and anthropology to management and organisational studies – are engaged in language-related IB research. Among the themes that have emerged from this literature, issues stemming from the social power of language occupy a prominent place (Fairclough, 1989; Vaara et

al., 2005; Hinds, Neeley and Cramton, 2014). Power dynamics have been linked to the use of a *lingua franca*, for example, which has been shown to have a “democratizing effect” on performance in some cases (Steyaert, Ostendorp and Gaibrois, 2011; Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari and Säntti, 2005) and dysfunctional effects in many others, particularly when speakers of the dominant language benefit from “unearned status” (Neeley and Dumas, 2016) that gives them undue control over the communication flow (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch, 1999; Feely and Harzing, 2003; Harzing and Pudelko, 2013; Neeley, 2013; Tietze, Cohen and Musson, 2003). Interestingly, researchers have found that the principle of “unearned status” also applies to the academic publishing world where non-native researchers must overcome more obstacles than native speakers to get their work published (Tietze and Dick, 2013; Tietze, 2004, Tietze forthcoming, 2017; Harzing and Feely, 2008; Harzing and Pudelko, 2013).

Some of the most innovative studies in language-sensitive IB literature address the problem of the “unequal playing field” (Schneider and Barsoux, 1997). One such topic is linguistic performance within global work settings as a hybrid process (Janssens and Steyaert, 2014). The development of concepts such as “in-between-spaces” (Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki and Welch, 2014), codemeshing (Canagarajah, 2011) and “translanguaging” (García, 2009) illustrate this trend. Studies by Langinier, Ehrhart and Barner-Rasmussen (2016), Langinier and Ehrhart (2015), Beeler and Lecomte (2015) and Steyaert, Ostendorp and Gaibrois (2011) describe hybrid practices in specific national or regional contexts while Gaibrois (2016) as well as Cohen and Kassis-Henderson (2015) address the role of mixed language use for individuals and organisations.

Exploration of the power of language users to negotiate their own language strategies (Lauring, 2008; Logemann and Piekkari, 2015) provides a promising new way of looking at language-in-use in IB. Piekkari et al. (2013) for example have put forward the idea of “language absorptive capacity” (the collective ability of the organisation to understand and absorb communication in a different language). Welch and Welch (2015) have developed the concept of language operative capacity (LOC) defined as “language-in-place, language-in-time and language-in-context”. A context orientation is also evident in negotiated discursive practices or “linguascapes” (Steyaert, Ostendorp and Gaibrois, 2011). Finally, multilingual individuals actively participate in negotiated practices as they act as “boundary spanners” (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014), “language nodes” (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch, 1999) or “bridge individuals” (Harzing, Köster and Magner, 2011), often independently from the position they hold in the organisation.

Opportunities to explore micro issues within the organisation extend beyond issues of power and policy, of course, including topics as diverse as the relation between language skills, social identity and emotions (Klitmøller et al., 2015), linguistic ostracism (Dotan Elliaz et al., 2009), trust (Zander et al., 2013), expatriation and career prospects (Selmer and Lauring, 2015; Zhang and Peltokorpi, 2015; Piekkari, 2008). Many macro issues in international business are affected by language as shown by research on the impact of cultural and linguistic distance on cross border acquisitions (Lopez Duarte and Vidal Suarez, 2013; Cuypers et al., 2015), where “language friction” can influence cross-border alliances (Joshi and Lahiri, 2014). The role of language in knowledge transfer has also attracted the attention of language and IB scholars (Peltokorpi, 2015; Schomaker and Zaheer, 2014; Reiche, 2015).

Also, linguists and IB scholars have looked into other ways of understanding language and languages in the business world at the individual and organisational levels. IB scholars have investigated the idea of “company speak” (Logemann and Piekkari, 2015), special languages and sociolects (Tietze, Holden and Barner-Rasmussen, 2016). Linguists have explored variationism in sociolinguistics and terminology (de Vecchi, 2014), research fields which address the connection between lexical units and “company speak” through terminology, socioterminology, pragmateterminology, and specialized lexicography. They have a strong link to languages for special purposes (LSP) and translation studies, which inform the practices used by translators in international and local business contexts. From the semiotic point of view, non-verbal sign systems are being explored in studies on multimodality in business communication and terminology (de Vecchi, 2013; Tenzer and Pudelko, 2016).

This (non-exhaustive) overview of language-sensitive IB research points to the progress that has been made during the past decades but also to gaps in current research and management practices. Considering that Alvesson and Kärremann’s (2000) ground-breaking article on the linguistic turn in social sciences has not led to effective multidisciplinary research, Angouri and Piekkari (forthcoming) call for more multidisciplinary language-sensitive research which brings together traditional research streams of management sciences with other relevant disciplines of social sciences. In addition, Angouri and Piekkari (*ibidem*) argue for a break from conceptual binaries, which artificially juxtapose categories such as MNCs and SMEs, private and public sector, mono vs multilingual. We therefore invite scholars to reflect upon ways to move the field forward.

As companies and their workforces are increasingly confronted with a multilingual reality, there are numerous opportunities for scholars to extend the boundaries of language-sensitive IB research. Areas in

which the role of language has not been sufficiently explored are the process orientation in organisational studies (Cooren et al., 2014), dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981), expansive learning (Engeström, 1987), collective activity as a discursive practice (Lorino, 2014) and activity theory (Vygotsky, 1986). Semiotic analyses of IB issues such as the one conducted by Brannen (2004) in her case study of recontextualization at Disneyland France may also help to advance the field. Methodologically, furthering our understanding of language in IB contexts implies new forms of participant observation of the reality that can only be captured by immersion in the situation.

We are interested in conceptual, methodological and empirical contributions that explore new research avenues, address under-investigated topics and work with novel approaches. Interdisciplinary papers or papers from other disciplines which offer promising fresh perspectives on the study of language diversity in organizations are especially welcome. All contributions are expected to be oriented towards the future and not limit themselves to overviews of the field. This includes the possibility to be a little more audacious in style (e.g., in the form of provocative theses) than is normally the case in conference papers. The themes which may be addressed include, but are not limited to those listed below:

- Conceptually:
What conceptual “blind spots” persist in language-sensitive research in International Business and Management? How could they be addressed?

How does research on terminology and multimodality contribute to the IB field?
- Methodologically:
What are the methodological challenges of researching the role of language in IB? How could they be addressed?

What novel methodological approaches could be adopted?

What are the methodological implications of interdisciplinary research?
- Empirically:
What areas remain unexplored on the empirical research map? Why would it be important to study them?

What is the impact of language use on small and medium enterprises, new ventures, and NGOs?

How does language diversity affect small and medium enterprises, new ventures, and NGOs?

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