

## **10<sup>th</sup> GEM&L International Conference on Management & Language**

**Paris, 17-18 March 2016**

**ESCP-EUROPE**

**79, avenue de la République  
75011 Paris France**

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

### **Crossing Language Boundaries in Organisations**

Boundary-crossing has become an integral part of doing business in the world as companies are compelled to engage in network-building and knowledge-sharing at home and abroad to meet their strategic objectives. However, the resulting *language* boundaries have not been effectively dealt with by organisations due in large part to the treatment of language as a non-business issue (Welch and Welch, 2008; Harzing and Feely, 2008; Bargiela-Chiappini et al., 2003). Until recently, scholarship in this area also lagged behind as linguists, organisational theorists, and sociologists have tended to work in separate “silos”, missing opportunities to contribute to an understanding of how companies can communicate worldwide across multiple and diverse boundaries.

In the past two decades, however, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of language as a bridging act which affects social capital, subsidiary clustering and inter-unit communication, and HR policies (Welch and Welch, 2008). The literature on boundary-spanning has been enriched by studies on the role of bilinguals and multilinguals as brokers between linguistically-diverse parties, capable of gaining the cooperation of potential foreign partners and customers (Brannen and Thomas, 2010; Beeler and Zhao, 2013). Proficiency in the local language, for example, allows for a greater access to crucial information at the local level whereas corporate language proficiency of host country nationals plays a key role in reverse knowledge transfer (Peltokorpi, 2015).

Whether we consider translation in its classical sense, “the process of moving communication in any form (verbal or written) from one language to another” (Piekkari et al., 2013), or extend the notion of translation to incorporate the conversion of knowledge from one group to another (Holden, 2002), the translation process is at the heart of collective understanding (Piekkari et al. 2013). Refuting the conventional view of translators as simple transmitters of texts and instruments of communication, Yoo and Jeong (2015) have found that translators promote knowledge transfer while acting as facilitators of cross-cultural encounters. Tietze (2015) has described translation as a “creative” activity, in which the message of the source is reinterpreted into a new reality. Each of these approaches reminds us that translation is a social process best achieved through the interaction of the parties involved. This helps to explain why technical solutions such as translation software cannot always provide satisfactory results (Buckley et al., 2005).

Research on translation as a form of boundary-spanning offers new insights into the dynamics of top-down and bottom-up communication in organisations, providing a more refined view of how management processes unfold (Van Grinsven, 2015). For example, in their work on the translation of corporate policies and values into meaning for the workforce, Broadfoot et al. (2015) examine how agency can also be understood as a process of translation when individuals and social collectives cross discursive boundaries.

In spite of evidence that the use of a mandated common language leads to a range of problems from power imbalances to language clustering and in-group behavior (Vaara et al., 2005) many organisations continue to rely on lingua franca policies. Recently, scholars have shown that no one corporate policy is appropriate for all companies, and that contextualization may provide a more realistic approach to the debate. Steyaert et al. (2011), for example, have identified six different language environments or “linguascapes” using factors such as language proficiency and diversity of the organisational members. Janssens et al. (2004) have shown that organisations’ perspectives on translation can be mechanical, cultural, or political, and that these perspectives go hand in hand with the organisations’ international outlook, language management policies, and ability to make the most of their diverse workforce.

Recent studies on MNEs have highlighted the importance of context in determining the potential range of solutions and the fact that social networks play an important role in dealing with translation needs under time pressure. Piekkari et al. (2013) develop a theoretical framework of the translation process and propose the concept of “language absorptive capacity, which (...) refers to the collective ability of the organization to understand and absorb communication in a different language”.

Building on this, Welch & Welch (2015) have developed the concept of "Language Operative Capacity" which, when properly managed on the organisational level, enables the MNE to function effectively as a multilingual entity and thereby potentially gaining competitive advantage.

In this call for papers, we are interested in further exploring the ability of organisations to cross language boundaries, capitalizing on advances in research on language as a core organisational issue. We welcome empirical and conceptual papers which aim at breaking new ground, and in particular, papers which examine the way language impacts such vital activities as translation, boundary-spanning, knowledge transfer, knowledge management, and intra-unit communication. Authors are encouraged to explore approaches to language issues within organisations, and to closely scrutinize daily business practices and activities. The areas of enquiry which may be explored include, but are not limited to, the themes listed below:

### **Language boundary-crossing and knowledge transfer**

What is the role of translation in knowledge transfer?

How is knowledge transfer accomplished through translation between headquarters and subsidiaries?

What social issues are involved in the transfer of knowledge?

What is the impact of agency and structure on knowledge transfer?

What role do host country nationals play in enhancing corporate communication?

What are the implicit and explicit forms of resistance to knowledge transfer?

To what extent should translation and, more broadly, knowledge transfer, be considered as acts of recontextualisation?

### **Language boundary-crossing and translation**

How can in-house translators contribute to the communication goals of companies? When can translation be outsourced?

What is the place of an in-house translator within the company?

To what extent do managers consider translation to be a managerial or organisational issue?

What power issues must the translator face?

How do translators and project managers collaborate in the field?

What are the challenges facing the translation departments of multinationals?

Management of translation costs

Human resource management and the management of translators and of in-house translation

To what extent can the transmission of the values and the strategy of the company be considered an act of translation?

How can in-house language training reduce language barriers within the organisation?

What are the promises and limits of translation technology?

### **Language boundary-crossing and the management of linguistic capital**

How can the multilingual company manage the linguistic capital of its employees in order to increase its "language operative capacity"?

What role do multilingual collaborators play in reducing the impact of language barriers?

What are the positive and negative effects of corporate terminologies in the multilingual organisation?

How is language diversity taken into account in communication between the head office and subsidiaries, and between subsidiaries?

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## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

### TEACHING WORKSHOPS ON LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

You are also invited to propose a half-hour workshop on best practices in your field. Proposals which support the conference theme of crossing language boundaries in organisations are especially welcome. The deadlines for submission are the same as those for paper submissions. All proposals will be reviewed by a panel of GEM&L board members.

#### Review board

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Ling Eleanor **Zhang**, King's College London, United Kingdom

### **Guidelines for authors**

The abstract should indicate the key theoretical, methodological and empirical questions addressed in the paper, the conceptual field(s) informing the paper, if applicable the data set used in the paper and the major theoretical and empirical contributions of the paper. All submissions must be original and should not have been previously accepted for publication.

First page with author's name, affiliation, e-mail and postal address.

Text of the proposal: in .doc(x), anonymous, justified, 2.5 cm margins throughout.

Title: Times New Roman, bold, size 16.

Other titles: Times New Roman, bold, size 12.

Extended abstract (around 1500 words, excluding references) with 4 - 5 keywords. Text: Times New Roman, size 12.

Format for references:

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.

- Steyaert, C., Ostendorp, A., & Gaibrois, C. (2011). Multilingual organizations as 'linguascapes': Negotiating the position of English through discursive practices, *Journal of World Business*, 46(3), pp. 270-278.

Proposals in French or in English in Word format to be uploaded on the GEM&L website, [www.geml.eu](http://www.geml.eu) by **30 November, 2015**

All submissions will be subjected to a double blind competitive review process on the basis of originality, rigor and relevance with members of the Scientific Committee serving as reviewers. No author information or other identifying information should appear anywhere in the submission.

All authors will be informed about the outcome of the review process no later than **15 January, 2016**

#### **Guidelines for the full paper**

Authors of selected proposals are requested to submit completed papers (around 7500 words) to [scientifique@geml.eu](mailto:scientifique@geml.eu) by **1 March, 2016**.

At least one author of each paper must register for the conference and present the paper.

GEM&L is the guest editor of a Special Issue on *Crossing Language Boundaries in Organisations* to be published by the *European Journal of International Management*. Authors who wish their conference paper to be considered for publication in the Special Issue (Vol. 11, No. 6, to be released in November 2017), are advised to follow the journal guidelines at:

<http://www.inderscience.com/info/inauthors/index.php#01>

**Note that only papers written in English or translated into English will be considered for publication.**

For any information concerning the conference, please contact: [scientifique@geml.eu](mailto:scientifique@geml.eu)

#### **Schedule:**

Extended abstract:	<b>30 November, 2015</b>
Notice of acceptance:	<b>15 January, 2016</b>
Final paper:	<b>1 March, 2016</b>

**For registration information go to: [www.geml.eu](http://www.geml.eu)**