

Critical perspectives on the management of multilingualism in IB

Special Issue call for papers from *critical perspectives on international business*

Submission Deadline: 31 March 2020

Guest Editors

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Introduction to the Special Issue

Scholarly interest in the role of language and, in particular, the rise of English as a global language in international business (IB), and organizational life more generally, has grown considerably in the past two decades. Most of the studies to date, however, have adopted a managerialist-functionalist perspective, focusing on corporate or individual solutions for overcoming language barriers. While this stream of research has significantly contributed to understanding the challenges of multilingualism in IB, research would now benefit from other perspectives. In other words, there is a need for research in IB going beyond questions of organizational efficiency and performance.

In particular, there is a need for more critical studies so as to examine how language policies and language practices in IB are mediated by power and politics. For instance, the increasingly widespread practice of mandating of a common language inside multinationals, far from being a neutral process, “should be viewed as exercise of power” (Vaara et al., 2005, p. 596). In this context, native speakers of the imposed language typically benefit from “unearned status gain” (Neeley and Dumas, 2016, p. 1) that gives them undue control over the communication flow (Feely and Harzing, 2003; Harzing and Pudelko, 2013; Neeley, 2013). The mandated language typically empowers some while disempowering others (Dotan Elliaz et al., 2009; Vaara et al., 2005) and acts as a source of individual influence within the firm (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999; Peltokorpi and Vaara, 2014). Similarly, some research

has shown how translation can be understood as an inherently political act (Ciuk et al., 2018; Logemann and Piekkari, 2015).

Moreover, studies of human agency creation in the context of linguistic inequalities, which might include open resistance against the use of a certain language as well as more subtle forms of non-compliance such as adaptation, would highlight power and politics in multilingual organizations as a source of dynamism and change, stressing possibilities of empowerment, emancipation and giving voice to marginalized groups. As an example, scholars have recently stressed the power effects of hybrid language use, as it can provide possibilities to express voice and participate (Gaibrois, 2018; Janssens and Steyaert, 2014), thus departing from the general tendency to emphasize national languages in language-sensitive IB (Tietze et al., 2016).

This emerging body of power-sensitive research has advanced understanding of language policies and practices in IB and one can expect it to be developed further, both empirically and conceptually. However, we believe it is time to conduct more critically oriented studies that can locate corporate language policies and practices in wider historical and socio-political contexts. One example is research on language policy informed by theories of imperialism and colonialism (Boussebaa et al., 2014; Boussebaa and Brown, 2017; Śliwa, 2008; Vaara et al., 2005). Another example is research pointing to the linkages between global English and neo-liberalism (e.g. Śliwa, 2010). Research on language policies and language use in IB also needs to take into account the hierarchy that exists between languages so as to bring into the analysis the fact that languages are generally “not equal in terms of socio-politico-economic value” (Hua 2014, p. 236) and thus potentially productive of intra-organizational inequalities. As Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of linguistic capital highlights, the value of an individual’s utterance depends on the value of that person’s first language on the market of languages.

Additionally, in order to understand the effects contemporary IB activity has on the individual, specific communities and society (Dörrenbächer and Michailova, 2019), we need more research on the ways in which language policies and practices in IB relate to privilege and inequality as well as to processes of participation and inclusion/exclusion (e.g. Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012). Research investigating how language intersects with other diversity dimensions such as migrant background, education or organizational function shows how language contributes to social and organizational differentiation (Johansson and Śliwa, 2016). Possible questions include the effects of using English as ‘lingua franca’ on low-qualified employees’ participation in organizational life (Gaibrois, 2015), or the consequences of the foreign-language environment on migrants’ and refugees’ organizational status.

On a conceptual and empirical level, most research on language policies and language use in IB tends to be conducted from a Western perspective. Frameworks and methodologies developed in the USA and Western Europe continue to be applied across different socio-cultural contexts, and the major debates are orchestrated by scholars affiliated with Western universities and by Westerners based elsewhere, as Michailova and Tienari (2014) have criticized with regards to IB in general. However, conceptualizations of multilingualism or methodologies stemming from outside the industrialized world (Roberts and Dörrenbächer, 2016) hold great potential for deepening understanding of language policies and language use in IB.

Finally, research in other organizational contexts than multinational corporations is required, because focusing on the multinational as a core category of IB research often remains static, structural and binary, and is not aligned with the fluidity and change of human activity, in which language practices play a crucial role (Angouri and Piekkari, 2018). Examples of other research contexts include universities (Boussebaa and Brown, 2017), offshore outsourcing companies (Boussebaa et al., 2014). Informal, partial and temporal organizations (Angouri and Piekkari, 2018) or non-profit based IB, as suggested in a call by Dörrenbächer and Michailova (2019), are another promising research context.

In this Special Issue, we therefore invite scholars from various disciplines and geographical locations to address multilingualism in IB from a critical perspective, focusing on how multilingualism in IB relates to privilege and inequality. Potential authors are encouraged to highlight the impact of the contemporary global and societal context on language policies and practices, and vice versa. Conceptual, methodological and empirical contributions addressing the following, by no means exhaustive, themes are particularly welcome:

- The impact of (neo)colonialism on language policies and language practices in IB
- The effects of language hierarchies on individuals' language capital in organizations
- Language and its intersection with other diversity dimensions, such as education, occupation, organizational status or gender
- The consequences of language policies for employees on the lower hierarchical levels and/or with limited proficiency in foreign-languages
- Migrants' and refugees' language-related challenges
- Agency creation in multilingual organizations and resistance against language-skill related privilege
- The political dimensions of translation
- Perspectives on language policies and language practices in IB from outside the industrialized world

Following the renewed aim of *critical perspectives on international business (cpoib)* to focus on the contemporary context of IB (Dörrenbächer and Michailova, 2019), submissions are expected to address how global and societal changes relate to language policies and practices

in IB. Potential contributors are encouraged to challenge the earlier focus on managerial perspectives by highlighting issues of privilege and inequality. They are also invited to suggest alternatives to focusing on efficiency and individual-level language skills by presenting innovative approaches to addressing multilingualism in organizations.

Submission Instructions

The deadline for submissions is 31 March 2020. For more information on *critical perspectives on international business*, including style guidelines, please visit the journal's website at: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/loi/cpoib/>.

All submissions will be subject to the regular blind peer review process of *critical perspectives on international business*. Submissions to the special issue are made using ScholarOne Manuscripts <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cpoib>.

More Information

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