



14th GEM&L International Conference on Management and Language

EM Strasbourg Business School

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Call for Papers

Global working and language: Towards an understanding of global-local interplay

Global forms of work have become common in MNEs (Reiche, Lee and Allen, 2019) in an ever-growing heterogeneity of local environments (Jaussaud and Mayrhofer, 2014). By global working, we mean situations in which employees from diverse cultural backgrounds, often in geographically distant and different national contexts, are collaborating (Hinds, Liu and Lyon, 2011). This includes all forms of expatriation, corporate and self-initiated expatriation, short-term assignments, flexpatriation and international business travel (Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Riedl and Kollinger, 2004) as well as work in global virtual teams and domestic work with involvement in international responsibilities and/or interactions with colleagues from different countries. This last aspect concerning virtual work has become all the more crucial as we face the unique challenges experienced during the health crisis (Doh, 2020).

We have chosen to use the expression “global working” to highlight the fluidity and situatedness of these specific work experiences, close to “international working” introduced by Mayrhofer, Reichel and Sparrow (2011) and by McNulty and Brewster (2019). Angouri and Piekari (2018) also call for a more fluid approach to organizations and global work which conceptualizes organizations as more than their physical and legal structures. In this perspective management and organizational scholars have shown that discourse shapes organizations (Cooren, Vaara, Langley and Tsoukas, 2014; see also Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen and Clark, 2011, in the special issue of *Organization Studies* on *Communicating, Organizing and Organization*). The importance of situatedness in context raises the question of global and

local interplay in each global working situation: i.e. how global and local dynamics co-construct the reality of global working experiences within the language ecosystem (Angouri and Piekkari, 2018) of each local environment.

Language lies at the heart of global working at three different levels identified by Reiche and colleagues (2019): actors, processes and structures. Firstly, actors may be more or less invited to participate in global working arrangements and to voice their opinions in these instances depending on their level of mastery of the corporate language of the MNE. Employees may be empowered (Tietze, 2008) or, on the contrary, marginalized if they do not master the language of the organization (Neeley, 2017). In this regard, individuals having developed multicultural identities may bring precious contributions to global working (Lee, Masuda, Fu and Reiche, 2018). Research also suggests that expatriates proficient in the language of their host country develop more and deeper relationships with locals and adjust better than others (Zhang and Peltokorpi, 2015). Whatever the context, language competence may not suffice to erase the effects of differing native communication styles or to prevent the doubts and frustration these may cause (Louhiala-Salminen, 2005; Tréguer-Felten, 2018), a feeling shared by increasing numbers of diverse types of global workers in MNCs and especially by those labelled migrant workers.

Secondly, in terms of processes, it has been suggested that language skills influence knowledge sharing and that an overemphasis on international networks reduces employees' embeddedness in local networks which is critical to MNCs' development (Peltokorpi and Vaara, 2014). Other areas have also been explored, such as: how corporate international policies or international marketing campaigns are deployed locally or how language skills enable boundary spanning activities (Barner-Ramussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov and Mäkelä, 2014) and influence teamwork (Tenzer and Pudelko, 2017).

Finally, it is important to unravel the role of language in different structures of global work and to understand, for instance, if an expatriate moving physically to another country will resort more to speaking a local language in a specific host country than someone involved in global working arrangements in his or her own country. Global-local dynamics in specific contexts and different situations of global working may trigger different ways of negotiating language use. As a result of the current pandemic, global workers may have to rethink their virtual working practices. Indeed, the dramatic increase in situations where virtual work is imposed makes it difficult to maintain network ties, especially weak ties (Levin and Kurtzberg, 2020;

Milliken, Kneeland and Flynn, 2020). In this regard, the fact that a majority of employees work remotely may affect global workers' access to important information passed through informal networks and weak ties. Global working language practices may also be destabilized for former business travellers who are asked to work from home and to communicate with colleagues around the world in different time zones. From a local perspective, the global health crisis may place new demands on host country nationals working with international staff (Faeth and Kitter, 2020; Fee, 2020) with the lack of opportunities for informal interaction between the different parties impeding relationship building.

Understanding these dynamics requires a fluid approach to language use, seen as social practice (Karhunen, Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen and Piekkari, 2018). From this perspective, languages are not static elements, to be analysed merely through the prism of proficiency in a national language. Janssens and Steyaert's multilingual franca (2014) concept illustrates this approach by throwing light on the local practices resulting from the imposition of English in MNEs.

To examine the implications of local language use more in depth it would be valuable to investigate how business concepts and work processes are understood and enacted by local employees in their own contexts. For instance, subsidiaries located in cross-border regions provide opportunities to observe how employees draw on all their language resources and combine them to make themselves understood (Langinier and Ehrhart, 2020).

Analysing language as a social practice raises a number of methodological issues and calls for self-reported data surveys, observations, critical ethnographic studies, as well as interaction analysis (Angouri and Piekkari, 2018).

We thus welcome papers which investigate the interplay between new forms of global work and language use in MNC and non-MNC contexts (i.e. SMEs, NGOs, etc.) (Angouri and Piekkari, 2018). These papers could address but are not limited to:

- The link between language and the boundary spanning role of global workers
- The role of "born globals": how people with multicultural identities experience global working and what their relation is to language in these instances
- The way migrants transport language in MNCs, how their language skills might be recognized in some instances

- The way language is used by global marketing specialists, how international marketing campaigns are deployed internationally, and what the role of language is in this process
- The impact of differing communication styles on global-local dynamics and processes
- Methodological issues associated with the analysis of language in global working situations, what kind of data collection this requires, what approach could fully account for the complexities of global-local dynamics and their link to language in global working situations
- Multilevel analysis highlighting how the macro environmental context and the corporate context influence global workers' multilingual practices
- Translating the research findings on global working and language into the management education sphere
- The evolution of language practices as global and local working patterns become increasingly virtual
- The impact of working from home on multilingual working situations

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The paper 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.

Since we have maintained the same conference theme, **every paper accepted for GEM&L 2020 will automatically be accepted for GEM&L 2021.**

Authors have four options:

1. Present their 2020 paper unchanged.
2. Modify their 2020 short paper according to the reviewers' suggestions before re-submitting it.
3. Elaborate on their 2020 paper by submitting a full paper between 7,500 and 9,000 words (inclusive of tables, references, and figure captions).

4. Submit a new short paper for the GEM&L 2021 conference.

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- Length of short paper: between 3000 and 4000 words, excluding references.
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Formatting guidelines:

- 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.
- Text: Times New Roman, size 12.

Format for references:

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: 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), 270-278.

Proposals in French or in English in Word format to be uploaded on the GEM&L website, www.geml.eu by 15 January 2021

Re-submissions and new submissions will be subjected to a double-blind competitive review process on the basis of originality, rigor and relevance. No author information or other identifying information should appear anywhere in the submission.

Doctoral session

Please note that the conference will host a doctoral session, which will offer PhD students the opportunity to discuss their doctoral thesis project with the most prominent senior scholars in this field of research and to receive feedback from them.

All authors will be informed of the outcome of the review process no later than **15 March 2021**.

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

Awards

- Awards will be presented for the best conference paper and the best reviewer.
- Nigel Holden Prize: **We have the pleasure to announce that a Nigel Holden Prize will be awarded** for the best doctoral thesis project submitted in 2021. In addition to

the criteria mentioned above (originality, rigor and relevance), the Nigel Holden prize will take into consideration the use of sources in other languages than English.

Schedule

Short paper: 15 January 2021

Notice of acceptance: 15 March 2021

GEM&L Conference: 10-12 May 2021

For any information concerning the conference, please contact: scientifique@geml.eu

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