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The multilingual workplace realities of Polish truckers: A case study in the Netherlands

Abstract: Although international truckers are essential to the European supply chain, we know little about how they deal with their frequent multilingual workplace interactions. This paper examines the effects of participants' Individual Multilingual Repertoires (Pitzl, Marie-Luise. 2016. World Englishes and creative idioms in English as a lingua franca. *World Englishes* 35(2). 293–309. https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12196) on their behavior and attitude toward multilingual interactions. Five Polish truckers and six Dutch logistics professionals were observed and interviewed. An ethnographic case study approach allowed us to consider interactions from multiple perspectives. Findings from the study reveal that some, but not all, Polish truckers struggle to interact in the most common lingua francas in the Netherlands: English and German. We show that some of the Dutch logistics professionals have a low opinion of foreign drivers' linguistic abilities, which impairs the potential to find shared multilingual resources, and ultimately to improve communication skills. Results of the study contribute to an understanding of the dynamics of multilingual interactions in the workplace. Practical suggestions for logistics professionals and future research are identified.

Keywords: multilingual workplace interaction, international trucking, sociolinguistic profile, Individual Multilingual Repertoire, ethnography, case study

1 Introduction

Multilingual workplaces are increasingly the norm. Numerous scholars have described different aspects of lingua franca communication in business

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environments (e.g., Angouri and Miglbauer 2014; Gerritsen and Nickerson 2009; Gunnarsson 2014). In the quest to understand the mechanisms of multilingual interactions in the workplace, most scholars turn towards the management level or blue-collar immigrant workers. Insights gathered from production facilities are typically overlooked. The European road haulage sector is one of those overlooked workplaces, despite it being highly multilingual insofar as truckers drive across linguistic zones, interact with a diverse array of colleagues and customers, and adopt creative communication strategies to overcome multilingual difficulties (Dijkstra 2017). Over five million people are employed in the logistics sector (EU 2017), who work together with even more people working in other sorts of companies. Notably, the truckers often come from Eastern Europe, and speak Slavic languages. While Slavic languages are, to one extent or another, mutually intelligible, the ability of speakers to understand or be understood by speakers of other language families is highly limited. Polish companies have taken over 27% of the European logistics market, which brings them close to the 28% of market leader Germany (CBS 2018). However, similar to what is attested by many citizens of other Eastern European nations, sociohistorical factors, such as the absence of English in education and limited contact with Westerners until the end of the Cold War in 1991, might put these truckers at a linguistic disadvantage.

Logistics service providers must ensure that they meet the growing demand for logistics services. A substantial European shortage of truck drivers means that these companies may not have the luxury of placing high demands on the linguistic skills of their drivers. These drivers usually get the job done, yet little is known of how these multilingual interactions work. So far, Juhász (2013) and Lønsmann and Kraft (2018) are among the few who have explored the multilingual reality of the logistics sector. Understanding how truckers with varying levels of proficiency in languages other than their native language manage their international work, and where these differences originate from would contribute significantly to our knowledge about multilingual communication in organizations, and would provide opportunities to improve the effectiveness of these interactions. The specific question we address is: How do Polish truckers manage everyday multilingual workplace communication with Dutch logistics professionals? To this end, we conducted ethnographic case studies in two warehouses in the Netherlands; both Dutch logistics professionals and Polish truckers were observed and interviewed.

This paper is structured as follows: after this introductory section comes a section on the use of lingua franca, the role of language barriers and stereotypes in a multilingual context and their relevance for the present study. In Section 3 we provide sociolinguistic profiles for Poland and the Netherlands to illustrate the context of the relevant linguistic issues. In Section 4, we discuss the case study

methodology, followed by a description of the findings about communication strategies and contrasting expectations in the workplace in Section 5, and the conclusion in Section 6.

2 Multilingual workplace interactions

The field of applied linguistics defines a 'contact zone' as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 1991: 34). European warehouses are contact zones in which brief exchanges in physical goods and in communication happen. During each exchange there is hierarchical asymmetry between the staff members in the warehouse and the truckers. For instance, staff members are the ones to decide when the physical exchange occurs. When the staff decides that another task has higher priority, they can make truckers wait, and there is little that the drivers can do about that, other than call their forwarder. The truckers have far fewer options to influence the behavior of the warehouse staff.

The interactions within contact zones might come under even more pressure when the interlocutors' proficiencies diverge, since "[i]n the workplace power is exercised precisely in those areas where language is most intense" (McAll 2003: 249). When a trucker arrives at a warehouse where the local staff speaks in another language, it may be challenging to communicate about the task at hand. Section 2.1 considers how the use of a lingua franca might ease multilingual communication, and Section 2.2 considers the role that language barriers and stereotypes might play in lingua franca interaction.

2.1 Lingua franca as the common ground

In Western Europe speakers in a multilingual situation frequently switch to English to find common ground with their interlocutor through a lingua franca. Correspondingly, in the last 30 years research into English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has been a very active field of study. The first studies "envisaged the possibility of identifying and maybe codifying ELF varieties" (Jenkins 2015: 77), for instance to describe Dutch speakers' version of English. However, scholars eventually agreed that "ELF, with its fluidity and 'online' negotiation of meaning among interlocutors with varied multilingual repertoires, should not be considered as consisting of bounded varieties, but as [an] English that transcends boundaries, and that is therefore beyond description" (Jenkins 2015: 55). From the initial focus in ELF research the emphasis on English as a lingua franca has shifted

towards the multilingual context of lingua franca interactions. Several ELF scholars recognize the importance of multilingualism in lingua franca practices and research (e.g., Jenkins 2015; Mortensen 2013, 2017; Pitzl 2018; Seidlhofer 2009); yet English remains the fundamental language. For instance, Jenkins (2015: 77) emphasizes that in lingua franca situations, English is "now conceived as one among many other languages, one resource among many, available but not necessarily used". After all, a situation in which people switch from their mother tongue to a lingua franca is by definition a multilingual situation.

At the same time, the inclusion of languages other than English inevitably increases the number of variables and thus the complexity of theorization. With this in mind, Pitzl (2016: 298) proposes the 'Individual Multilingual Repertoire' (IMR), which consists of "all the linguistic resources a person has at their disposal". These repertoires develop during a lifetime, and are affected by numerous factors such as education, experiences, and personal interests. In a contact zone the IMRs of the interlocutors will overlap to some extent, resulting in a 'multilingual resource pool' (MRP) that is shared by the involved individuals (Pitzl 2016: 298). Pitzl argues that "[t]he bigger the multilingual resource pool (MRP) that speakers share, the greater will be the likelihood for code-switching into particular (local) languages, the greater will be the likelihood for more extensive code-mixing and multilingual practices" (Pitzl 2016: 298). In other words, the probability that IMRs can be effectively used in creative and unexpected ways increases when interlocutors have more resources in common.

In this era of globalization, European logistics professionals often have several languages in their respective IMRs and collective MRP. It is likely that drivers will share a repertoire with local logistics professionals in the form of a lingua franca such as English or German; however, an IMR does not necessarily contain these languages. The specific languages in an IMR will differ from one individual to another. Moreover, the proficiency of the languages in an IMR will range on a broad spectrum, from linguistic knowledge which is limited to logistics jargon to near-native proficiency in one or more languages. Repertoires are formed in various ways; for instance, through formal education, or from experiences with interlocutors who are considered foreign by the speaker. In this contribution we consider a language to be 'foreign' when it is not the native language of the speaker. Although experience in interaction with foreigners does not necessarily lead to high proficiency in the foreign language(s), it can increase the availability of distinctive utterances that can be used in particular work situations that occur in different linguistic settings. Still, even limited proficiency in one or more languages may be useful in workplace interactions in the logistics sector. This brings to mind the sociolinguistic stance which is elegantly formulated by Blommaert: "People use all there is to use in making sense; they use explicit linguistic

resources as well as implicit, sociocultural ones", (2010: 178). Therefore, allowing professionals to utilize their entire IMR will increase their ability to successfully interact with a wide range of interlocutors.

2.2 Language barriers

Tenzer and her colleagues (2014: 509) define language barriers as "obstacles to effective communication, which arise if interlocutors speak different mother tongues and lack a shared language in which they all have native proficiency". Lingua franca use and extensive IMRs may at times facilitate interaction, yet interactions are composed of much more than just words. Speakers need to be aware that the words they are using might have different meanings in different contexts. Linguistic subtleties, either verbal or non-verbal, enable people to pass along information, if only they know how to present the message. Communication and media scholars Couldry and Hepp (2017: 30) remark that:

> We learn not only the basic communicative signs, but also patterns of *how* to communicate: the way to 'question', to 'answer', to 'discuss', etc., is based on certain social patterns – 'rules' based in institutional facts – which we learn during our socialization. Such patterns can have a high level of complexity, including 'schemes' showing how to articulate a 'speech' in a correct way or how a multi-layered 'dispute' should take place. But regardless of how complex these patterns are, they are built on the basis of forms of communication that remain in place independently of the concrete *contents* of communication (2017: 30; original italics).

For instance, "thank you" could be interpreted as sarcastic rather than as an expression of gratitude, based on the tone and facial expressions of the speaker. Paul Grice (1975) argues that competent speakers know how messages should be presented to their interlocutor, and how to interpret and act upon response messages. Langlotz (2009) argues that meaningful lingua franca interactions may be troublesome, because a speaker's perception of a context, as well as the repertoire to communicate about that context are likely to differ from the perception and repertoire of their foreign interlocutor. Similarly, Mortensen (2017: 275) points out that "[s]haring semiotic resources does not merely concern physical access to the same signs, whether verbal or not, but also access to a shared understanding of the typical meaning of these signs". Thus, in a context where people face linguistic obstacles, people need to overcome a range of language barriers to negotiate shared meanings.

Furthermore, culture and context play a major role in multilingual communication, even when an interaction might seem trivial. "All communication involves participants, settings, purposes, linguistic and other communicative

medium choices, none of which are culturally neutral" (Baker 2015: 12). People interpret situations according to their own cultural norms, and they refer to the scripts or schemata that they consider appropriate to handle such interactions (Baker 2015; Piller 2017). The individual differences in interpretation, which are influenced by a person's culture, add another level of complexity to multilingual interactions.

In a situation where people are pressed for time it might seem efficient to take the individual's linguistic and cultural complexity out of the equation. In this case, Hofstede's well-known dimensional concept of culture quantifies cultural orientations based on a person's nationality comes to mind (Hofstede 2011). Then again, some scholars assert that it is counterproductive to enter interactions based on a static and homogenous image of an interlocutor's way of interaction (e.g., Blommaert 2010; Holliday 2011; Pennycook 2010; Piller 2017). These images, commonly known as stereotypes, "are beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups" (Hilton and von Hippel 1996: 240). Although stereotypes help impose order on the social world, at the same time, they may hinder flexible thinking (Pickering 2001: 3). When it comes to intercultural communication competences, business communication scholars Kassis-Henderson and her colleagues (2018: 306) argue that even though it is easier to comprehend a different culture when it is depicted as a homogenous and static phenomenon, this oversimplification of cultural traits "often results in stereotyping, which tends to magnify the very factors that challenge communication". They plead for an approach which allows for the recognition of individual differences, or the "various layers" in one's language repertoire (Kassis-Henderson et al. 2018: 306). Similarly, Mills (2017: 28) argues that even though we might perceive the beliefs and values of a certain group as homogenous "we are doing so at a stereotypical, ideological level. These ideological beliefs are not necessarily ones that all of the members of that culture will draw on in their own linguistic repertoire". When the assessment of an interlocutor relies too heavily on the generics of stereotypes rather than the 'individualized view' of an interlocutor, this tends to lead to over-adjusting, which negatively affects a conversation (Dragojevic et al. 2015). In over-adjusting a speaker ignores the actual competencies of an interlocutor, and uses strategies like unnecessary repetitions, slow speech and exaggerated intonation. A fixed image of a foreign interlocutor's linguistic abilities thus impedes meaningful and effective conversation.

Another issue in multilingual interaction is that even when people master the necessary linguistic resources they might lack the register which is considered appropriate, as pointed out by Couldry and Hepp (2017). Norms and social practices which are informed by cultural background, but also by differences in role-specific viewpoints. When people get to know alternative viewpoints this might

adjust their take on matters; however, initially, they will draw from the norms and social practices that they are already used to. Piller (2017) argues that communication issues may arise regardless of linguistic issues within a multilingual context. She notes that "in interactions there are often simply different interests at stake and interactants may not actually want to understand each other" (Piller 2017: 84). Guido's (2016) research provides an example of a misunderstanding between a Nigerian immigrant and an Italian volunteering tourist, that arises from the individual viewpoints (tourist vs. immigrant) during the interaction. The tourist's choice to maintain her viewpoint derails the interaction, even though both speakers are proficient enough to speak in English. The diversity of multilingual business environments also provides plenty of examples of this sort. Studies show that employees might choose a range of strategies to handle unclear or inconvenient information. For instance, Marschan and her colleagues found that international employees sometimes will ignore information which is written in English as a lingua franca, like in their case of the Spanish employee who receives English information from the Finnish headquarters (1997: 593). There are plenty of other examples of this kind of misunderstandings in the literature on business communication (e.g. Angouri 2013; Peltokorpi 2007; Wilczewski et al. 2018).

In the context of this study the truckers and the logistic staff at the companies share the goal to transfer goods. In the process of reaching this goal these people's practices are likely informed by their IMRs, as well as past experiences and stereotypes in situations where they have to communicate with interlocutors who were foreign to them, and to decide how to conduct themselves. Section 3 explores historical events, language education, and language use in the workplace for Poland and the Netherlands to provide context about the linguistic backgrounds of the Polish international truckers and their Dutch clients.

3 Sociolinguistic profile

Inspired by the examples of Edwards (2016) and Hilgendorf (2007) who follow Kachru's (1990) theoretical model for analysing the non-native use of English in foreign contexts, this section presents a qualitative sociolinguistic profile of both Poland and the Netherlands. Like the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) paradigm, the World Englishes (WE) paradigm, which these scholars draw on, explores the role of English among non-native speakers. Where WE focuses on postcolonial context, ELF scholars are usually interested in what Kachru refers to as the expanding circle countries, as are we in this article. In this case, the profile covers English, which is considered "the most important language next to the mother tongue" (Berns et al. 2007: 2), and other languages such as German, Russian and

French when appropriate. The purpose is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic background that members from both groups bring to the table when they meet in a contact situation.

3.1 Polish truck drivers

Within the context of the European road haulage sector there are large differences in the language proficiencies of Polish international truck drivers. An important factor is the dominant position of the Polish language in Poland. Polish has gained this position throughout Poland's turbulent history in which independence was gained and lost several times. This historic turmoil has left its traces in the linguistic differences between the cohorts in the Polish population. Under the Soviet regime, Russian was taught obligatorily as a second language; education in other languages was quite rare (Gonerko-Frej 2014; Reichelt 2005). Simultaneously, the Iron Curtain severely limited contact with people from Western Europe. So the cohort of drivers who grew up under the Soviet regime most likely lacks formal education in any Western European languages. Since Poland regained independence, the most common foreign languages in Polish education are English, German, and Russian, with Polish as the main language of instruction (Otwinowska 2015). English is an elective language, which is chosen by nearly 90% of Polish students (Kasztalska 2014). Then again, Gonerko-Frej (2014: 165) stresses that current methods cause linguistic insecurity, as students are expected to speak in a native-like manner, which is very hard to achieve. Moreover, Otwinowska (2015) asserts that English education is often more directed at passing exams rather than to prepare students for interactions. Therefore, the younger cohort might also not be optimally prepared for interactions in ELF situations either.

In practice, drivers frequently transit from national to international roads with limited proficiencies in Western European languages (e.g. English or German). Several studies show that this practice is adopted in a range of sectors, the expectation to learn the relevant skills 'on the job' is not exclusive to the logistics sector (e.g. Canagarajah 2013; Piller and Lising 2014; Wilczewski et al. 2018). In this case, since there is a significant difference in wages between national and international driving, young truckers are likely to expand their driving beyond the Polish borders. Of course, truckers may acquire an additional language at any stage of their career, regardless of the languages that they acquire in formal education. In fact, the number of multilingual interactions, and the visibility of foreign languages in Poland has increased since the fall of the Iron Curtain, so languages other than Polish can be experienced more often. As a result, truckers might be more aware of the advantages of expanding their IMR with multiple

languages. Hence, in line with several studies which illustrate various biographical junctures at which people may decide to acquire an additional language (Pujolar and Puigdevall 2014; Walsh and O'Rourke 2014), a driver's decision to embark on an international career may trigger the need to acquire additional language skills.

3.2 Dutch warehouse workers

The Dutch have held the opportunities of multilingualism in high regard, particularly for the purpose of trade. Ammon and McConnel (2002) argue that the Netherlands owe their economic success to cross-border transactions that require the German, French and English language. The prominence of English dramatically increased after WWII, as 'the language of the liberators, the money providers and progress' (Ridder 1995: 44). Since then the consumption of the English language and culture has immensely increased in the Netherlands. The preference for the English language in Dutch society is also reflected in education. Although German and French are still present in secondary schools, English is the only compulsory foreign language in Dutch education (Edwards 2016). The prominence of English in education supposedly yields a high proficiency in English among the Dutch, whereas competence in German and French usually remains comparatively modest (Nortier 2011). Correspondingly, most Dutch people consider English as imperative for their international business, which comes at the expense of German and French proficiency (Edwards 2016).

In general, people are expected to have a sufficient level of English before they start their job; based on English acquired in education, the high visibility of English in Dutch society, as well as knowledge acquired during previous working experiences. Thus, often the level of their linguistic knowledge remains unquestioned upon entry into a new job. That said, in Edwards' (2016: 74) study, most blue-collar workers feel that neither their work nor the English during their vocational training, which is supposed to prepare people for their linguistic career needs, contributed significantly to their English proficiency level. Moreover, Nickerson (1998) argues that additional language training is rather rare for most workers. Even though it is likely that numerous Dutch blue collar workers work with international partners it can be questionable whether all Dutch professionals are indeed as multilingual as they might be portrayed.

3.3 Summary

The socio-historical background of the Netherlands and Poland differs. Historically speaking, the Dutch have been sovereign since the end of WWII; whereas Poland regained its independence 44 years later. Such differences yield impacts on contacts with foreigners as well as upon the languages taught and spoken in both nations. Despite the major role of the English language in both nations, only the Netherlands obliges students to acquire English. Comparatively, in Poland, students are allowed to choose other foreign languages. So at least some of the future Polish truckers might not have studied English in school. Nonetheless, both nations include foreign languages, such as English and German in their education, and English is increasingly present in both societies, so it is likely that English will be increasingly available in multilingual interactions.

Clearly, the diverging sociolinguistic profiles can lead to contrasts in the languages that Polish and Dutch logistics professionals have available to them. These differences and the strategies to overcome them have been examined in an exploratory case study, which is described in Section 4.

4 Case study

By moving goods across Europe international truck drivers make sure that goods and services remain available which keeps our society functioning. Several studies explore factors that affect a trucker's performance; for instance, scheduling (e.g. Goel 2010); driver safety (e.g. Rodríguez et al. 2006); physical health (e.g. Van der Beek 2011), psychological health (Kemp et al. 2013; Karimi Moonagi et al. 2015), and sleep issues (e.g. Feyer 2001). Despite the multilingual character of Europe, the factor of language has been mostly overlooked. Thus, case studies form a suitable method to learn about the languages that are relevant to logistics professionals. Moreover, a qualitative approach provides the opportunity to explore people's attitudes towards diverging languages in the multilingual workplace. The following sections consider the participants, and the chosen methodology in this study.

4.1 Participants and research sites

The fieldwork for the case study was conducted at two Dutch warehouses during one regular working week. In 2017 the first author, who is a Dutch and Polish bilingual, observed the participants at the Logistics Department of a production

plant, or at an external warehouse that cooperates with the production plant. Both companies were located in the Dutch province of Fryslân. Although these warehouses work with some dedicated Dutch drivers, the majority of the drivers are randomly appointed by the transport planners. In other words, there were no dedicated Polish drivers with whom the Dutch workers had established working relationships, but based on statistics (CBS 2018) and local expertise we were confident that a large number of Polish drivers would be passing through during the fieldwork. Our sample consisted of five Polish truck drivers (all men; age range 28–53) who drive internationally. These were all the Polish drivers who passed through these offices during this particular week, which was less than we had initially expected. At company A, nearly all Dutch employees (four men; age range 27–60) participated in the study. One employee was excluded, as he did not consent to being recorded. At company B two Dutch employees (both men; age 53 and 58) worked in the warehouse and took part in this study.

4.2 Methodology

This study took an ethnographic mixed method approach. The participants were observed during work-related interactions. The communication between the Polish drivers and the Dutch employees was observed from their moment of entry in the office, and on two occasions during their communication at the warehouse as well. Fieldwork notes were kept of all these observations. To ensure that the participants were unequivocally aware of the aim and nature of the study, they all received an explanation in their native language. The Dutch employees were informed about the data collection beforehand, and asked for their cooperation prior to the effectuation. All drivers were informed about the research after recording their initial contact at the counter, to minimize the influence on the initial interaction. We opted for this strategy as "[h]uman beings are inextricably part of their environment: they may behave differently (not typically or 'normally') in a controlled 'laboratory' setting" (Gillham 2000: 5). Thus, the researcher postponed the announcement of her research to the Polish drivers until the initial contact phase with the Dutch employees was completed. All participants were assured that whether they would participate or not, their business relationship would not in any way be affected. Furthermore, they were informed that they could have all or some of their data deleted from the record if they changed their minds about something they said or about their participation in general.

   After giving consent to participate in the study, participants were invited to a semi-structured interview; participants were allowed to digress to allow for rich data. These interviews were recorded after participants provided signed consent,

and all participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. All interviews were conducted in Dutch or Polish (depending on the interviewee's native language) by the first author. The interview questions, both Dutch and Polish, were inspired by Juhasz's (2013) study of Hungarian truck drivers. Likewise, participants were asked to self-assess their language skills, to express how they perceive their interactions with their foreign interlocutors, and their attitudes toward those interlocutors. The fact that the participants were at work posed time-constraints for the interviews. Interview duration varied from 10 to 35 min and often was accompanied by conversations in a less formal setting. Nonetheless, the combination of both methods allowed the data to represent natural workplace interactions, and to disturb people's work as little as possible, as recommended by Holmes and Stubbe (2015).

The combination of methods has several advantages. First, multiple sources of data grant triangulation. For instance, a comparison between the observed interaction and the statements in the interview enables a critical look at participant's self-assessment. Second, the plurality of methods allows for multiple angles in which observations and expressed opinions may be interpreted, which facilitates a broader understanding of the context in which truckers operate. These advantages helped us to generate theories about how international truckers make sense of their world, corresponding with Bryman's (2001) explanation of the qualitative approach.

5 Language choice in Dutch warehouses

The analysis of our interview data shows that interlocutors agree upon Western languages as a lingua franca; however, the interviews have revealed some contrasting expectations between the different participants. The analysis of the IMRs and the corresponding language choices in the warehouse are discussed in Section 5.1; next, the focus shifts towards the differences in perception on multilingual interactions in Section 5.2.

5.1 Individual Multilingual Repertoire

All participants report abilities with at least one additional language in their Individual Multilingual Repertoire (IMR) next to their mother tongue. Accordingly, the drivers and the warehouse workers prefer to opt for a common language to interact with each other. Table 1 displays the languages that participants mentioned as part of their IMR, regardless of the degree of proficiency. Four of our

Table 1: Frequency of the languages mentioned as part of the IMR of 11 participants.

	Participant	Age	Dutch	English	French	Frisian	German	Italian	Polish	Spanish	Russian
Dutch group	Edwin	60	×	×			×				
	Peter	27	×	×			×				
	John	45	×	×		×	×				
	Walt	59	×			×					
	Harry	48	×	×		×	×				
	Vincent	53	×	×	×	×	×				×
Polish group	Damain	47		×	×		×	×	×	×	
	Jan	53		×					×	×	
	Aron	53					×		×		
	Milan	46					×		×		
	Michael	28		×			×		×		

participants mention their knowledge of Frisian, which is an autochthonous minority language in the North of the Netherlands. As a result of the varying proficiencies in these contact situations the language choice tends to alternate between English and German, depending on speakers' abilities and preferences.

Despite the prevailing idea that English is the most crucial lingua franca in large parts of the world, including the Netherlands, results from the case study suggest that in the European logistics sector this might not always be the case. In this case study a higher number of Dutch and Polish speakers report knowledge of German rather than of English. Given that Germany is the neighboring country of Poland on the western border, drivers encounter the language quite frequently. Aron an experienced international driver with a reasonable proficiency in German, shares his experience in that he mostly encounters the German language in multilingual interactions:

[associated audio_001_mp3 with example (1)]

(1) ARO: *[najwięcej to spotykam] Angielski (1.3) no i dużo Niemieckiego bo my tutaj jeździmy Holandia Belgia naj- najwięcej się jeździ nie (.) no (.) no a Angielski to w Holandii praktycznie jest (.) na bieżąco (.)*
     BIA: *no (.)*
     ARO: *a w Niemcach to już tak trochę mniej (.)*
     BIA: *no w Niemcach to (.) lubią po Niemiecku rozmawiać tak*
     ARO: *dokładnie*
     ARO: [mostly I encounter] English (1.3) well and a lot of German because we drive here mo- mostly in the Netherlands and Belgium right (.) English in Holland is practically (.) on a regular basis (.)
     BIA: right (.)
     ARO: and in Germany it is already a bit less (.)
     BIA: yeah in Germany they (.) like to speak German yes
     ARO: indeed

Three drivers indicate that they prefer to communicate in English, the remaining two prefer German; although their individual proficiencies vary. Then again, acquiring a lingua franca, such as English, might not solve all issues as drivers might still encounter less proficient customers (Van der Worp et al. 2017). Marek, a driver who is proficient in English, portrays several incidents in which his linguistic knowledge fell short in communicating with his client because of a lack of German proficiency. Other drivers said that they do not encounter any difficulties caused by the multilingual aspect in the interactions (discussed in Section 5.2.3).

Two Dutch staff members (age 60 and 45) also claim that even though they are able to use both English and German, they were more proficient in German than in English. This is more surprising given the supposed omnipresence of English in Dutch society, and the position that it has in education. For instance, Edwin, a blue-collar worker asserts that he uses English, German and Dutch to do his job, after which he mentions that it is easier for him to speak in German than in English. The observations show that during a conversation with an English-speaking driver, Edwin frequently code-switches to German, as do some of his colleagues. Moreover, on some occasions Edwin was observed to code-switch to Dutch while he speaks with a foreign driver; yet, it does not seem to affect the interaction with the driver as their interaction just carries on. In contrast, the youngest Dutch staff member argues that he can hardly speak German since most of his education focused on English. For him the use of German drastically increased since he started this job. He remarks that communication is tricky if a truck driver only speaks German.

An unexpected result is that few participants mention Russian. Interestingly, only a Dutch participant reports basic knowledge in Russian. It is likely that all of the Polish drivers had Russian classes back in school, yet none of them claim any proficiency in this language. Milan mentions that sometimes he interacts with Russian speakers, but then immediately dismisses his Russian skills claiming that he is 'really bad at languages', and that he remembers hardly any of the Russian classes. It is unclear whether the Polish and Dutch participants appreciate their Russian language skills in a different way, whether they try to ignore the Russian presence in Polish history, or perhaps the Polish drivers do not believe Russian to be relevant in the context of the interviews.

5.2 Differences in perception

5.2.1 Contextual constraints in multilingual interaction

No participant explicitly expects to interact in their native tongue with a foreign interlocutor. Nonetheless, the drivers' multilingual repertoires do not seem to impress all of their Western European clients. Some clients seem to expect that drivers should acquire languages during their time on the road; they do not seem to believe that drivers put in much effort. In this way, the problem of interaction is clearly placed with the driver, and not with the client; similar attitudes are found among participants in other studies (e.g., Lønsmann and Kraft 2018). For instance, in (2), during a group interaction the Dutch manager, Vincent, asserts his disbelief about the lack of vocabulary of some of the foreign drivers, to which other

participants point out that despite lacking vocabulary drivers still seem to get their job done.

[associated audio_002_mp3 with example (2)]

(2)   VIN: *ik kan me ook niet voorstellen om maar ergens drie weken of vier weken door Europa heen te rijden (0.4) en met geen mens een woord te kunnen wisselen of om een stuk eten te vragen of een brood te kopen (.)*

       BIA: *hm-hm*

       VIN: *zonder daarbij een een (.) het het woord of de beg-/ (.) ik zou elke dag een woord willen leren (.)*

       BIA: *° ja°*

       VIN: *van dat land willen al is het maar één woord (.)*

       BIA: *ja*

       VIN: *dan heb je na een aantal jaren heb je toch een eh (.) een repertoire maar (.)*

       BIA: *ja*

       VIN: *°het het [het zit er bij heel veel niet in°] (.)*

       SP2:   *[en toch redden ze het]*

       SP3:   *° ja°*

       VIN: I cannot imagine driving somewhere for three weeks or four weeks through Europe (0.4) and not being able to exchange a word with any person or to ask for a piece of food or to buy a bread (.)

       BIA: hm-hm

       VIN: without a a (.) the the word or the und-/ (.) I would want to learn a word each day (.)

       BIA: ° yes°

       VIN: of that country even if it is just one word (.)

       BIA: yes

       VIN: then after a few years you will have a eh (.) a repertoire but (.)

       BIA: yes

       VIN: °it it [it does not occur to lots of them°] (.)

       SP2:   [and yet they make it]

       Sp3:   ° yes°

Some of the Dutch participants expect drivers who frequent the Netherlands to acquire Dutch. However, our results suggest that the interactions of the Dutch warehouse workers with the foreign drivers rarely extend beyond the essential content, which is insufficient for language-learning efforts. Only a few Dutch

participants mention occasions on which they talk with drivers about things that are not work-related, and then only when the driver is considered a proficient speaker. Correspondingly, in our study the drivers argue that they do not interact frequently with clients along their way. This scarcity of interactions is reflected in the interview with driver Jan:

[associated audio_003_mp3 with example (3)]

(3)   JAN: *to znaczy generalnie to wie pani (1.0) eh mam (0.9) eh (.) kartkę (0.5)*
      BIA: *hm-hm*
      JAN: *i napisane (.) powiedzmy na załadunek (0.6) wszystkie dane (.)*
      BIA: *tak*
      JAN: *konieczne [no i] (0.4)*
      BIA: *[no]*
      JAN: *dużo nie musze (0.6) eh (.) dialogów (.) używać*
      JAN: In general then you know miss (1.0) eh I have (0.9) eh (.) a card (0.5)
      BIA: hm-hm
      JAN: and written down (.) let's say for a shipment (0.6) all the data (.)
      BIA: yes
      JAN: necessary [well and] (0.4)
      BIA: [well]
      JAN: I do not have to do much (0.6) eh (.) / use (.) dialogues

Similar attitudes are attested in other sectors as well. Piller and Lising (2014) find that contextual constraints in language learning might not always be clear to host communities. For instance, an Australian participant in Piller and Lising's (2014: 50) study asserts that the Filipino workers are not pro-active enough in acquiring the English language: "They're not going to learn if they don't make themselves learn. No one's going to teach them; they've got to teach themselves". This illustrates how some Australian autochthones in the study do not realize that Filipino migrant workers lack time to learn English or to mingle with the local population due to their long working days.

5.2.2 Learn an additional language

Some of the drivers participating in the study actively try to acquire languages. For instance, Aron argues that he has started to learn languages because he believes this is the right thing to do: "*I come from the assumption that (1.4) eh, when I drive to someone, then I need to adjust to him, instead of him to me*". In contrast, Damian, also a rather proficient German speaker, expresses that he felt pressured into

learning Western languages. In example 4 he explains how he picked up languages on the job, even while he was reluctant to put in the effort at first.

In line with Grice's (1975) notion about competent speakers (Section 2.2), preliminary results show that a mere knowledge of vocabulary does not suffice for a driver to be considered a proficient interlocutor by their Dutch clients. Despite several drivers reporting basic knowledge in multiple languages, including French, Italian, and in one case even in Dutch, some of their Western European clients assume they lack proficiency. While a repertoire that merely consists of multilingual jargon might be enough to carry out a standard dispatch, it might not resemble implicit Western standards for professional multilingual interactions. Furthermore, expectations for professional interaction may differ between countries; so linguistic expectations in Germany seem quite different from those in the Netherlands. A clear example can be found in that on the one hand Vincent complains about the lack of Dutch knowledge in the Polish drivers he meets, whereas he is willing to interact with these drivers in either English or German. On the other hand, the drivers, such as Damian below, report that most of their German clients demand that German is used as the lingua franca:

[associated audio_004_mp3 with example (4)]

(4) BIA: *a czy mówisz w innym języku niż w Polskim (3.2)*
     DAM: *no troszkę Niemiecki troszkę Angielski (0.8) słabiej*
           Francuski Włoski Hiszpański (0.4)
     BIA: *oj to nie źle ładnie eh (.) a (0.4) jak się nauczyłeś (0.4)*
     DAM: *ja haha (xxx) (1.1) no byłem zmusz/ ja byłem zmuszony się nauczyć*
           na rozładunkach Niemiecki to już raczej (0.7) uczyłem się (xxx) pleć
           i nie z książek
     BIA: *(.) uhhum*
     DAM: *Angielski no ff (1.0) tez tak przez (.) posłuchanie i też nie*
           (xxx) książki (1.0)
           A francuski hiszpański I włoski to od uch (1.1) to już przez
           usłuchanie (.) gdzieś na załadunku czy jak się dowiadywał
           (0.8)
     BIA: do you speak in another language than Polish (3.2)
     DAM: well a bit in German a bit in English (0.8) poorer French
           Italian Spanish (0.4)
     BIA: oh that that is not bad eh (.) a (0.4) how did you learn (0.4)
     DAM: I haha (xxx) (1.1) well I was forced to learn at dispatches
           German the most (0.7) I learned (xxx) [grammatical] gender
           and not from books

BIA: (.) uhhum
DAM: English well ff (1.0) also by (.) listening to it and also not
         (xxx) books (1.0)
         French Spanish and Italian from the ears (1.1) that was all
         from listening (.)
         somewhere on a dispatch one got to know it (0.8)

Younger drivers appear to remain in Poland for their first few years of driving (PWC 2017), where they learn how to carry out their job, and how to creatively handle issues that may occur on the road. While this is a good way to acquire the practical skills which are necessary for a truck driver, during this time they hardly use their repertoire of languages which they acquired during their education, and they receive hardly any socialization into the communication practices of foreign clientele. Yet this form of socialization is an essential part of the international career, given that "communication does not just 'happen', but that we communicate on the basis of objectivizations of language that we have learned in the process of our socialization" (Couldryand Hepp 2017: 30). When Polish truck drivers speak English, it may sound different from the variants to which the Dutch staff is used to hear; and the drivers might not use the register that the Dutch are accustomed to. Even when interlocutors are aware of these differences in speech, they might not have the means to clarify with their Dutch interlocutor. The driver may learn from experience, or from meta-linguistic conversations what sort of register works best in a Dutch warehouse, and thus how to meet the implicit standards of Dutch clients.

As participants in the multilingual scenarios in the road haulage sector arrive from diverging backgrounds, they are likely to have different perceptions about appropriate professional interactions. Even so, preliminary findings show that Eastern European drivers appear to be confident about their communication despite limited proficiency (Dijkstra 2017; Juhász 2013). This factor, combined with the high expectations which some people place on language learners as discussed in the Polish sociolinguistic profile, learning a Western lingua franca like English or German may not be so appealing for many Polish truckers. These truckers argue that in case of shortcomings in their language proficiency they can fall back on rephrasing, repeating, gesturing, drawing, and ultimately on mediation by their forwarder. In this case study truckers made ample use of these strategies; an example is provided in the interview with Michael:

[associated audio_005_mp3 with example (5)]

(5)   MIC: *w Danii był problem (.) duży (0.4) u Duńczyka (0.4) ja rozmawiałem*
                 trochę po Angielsku trochę tam (.) kali jeść kali pić Niemiecki (.)

BIA: *m-hm*

MIC: *a kolega rozmawiał znowuż po Włosku (0.4) a Duńczyk tylko po Duńsku ha ha ha °ha° ha h: h: no I się urodził problem I (.) tak no dobrze no to h: h: (.) eh zadzwoniliśmy do spedytora / znajdź kogoś kto tam po Duńsku [rozmawia] tak (.)*

BIA: *[ha ha]*

MIC: *znajdź kogoś kto po Duńsku rozmawia*

BIA: *no*

MIC: *i się okazało ze (.) rozmawiała (.) / hm:m (.) kto rozmawiał (.) a Ci co (0.7) eh:h świnie dla nich wieźliśmy*

BIA: *aha (0.5)*

MIC: *eh: rozmawiali po Duńsku bo tam sami załatwiają (.)*

BIA: *[m-hm]*

MIC: *[i dop]iero przez niego i z (.)*

BIA: *a[ha] (.)*

MIC: *[te]*

MIC: *słuchawka słuchawka słuchawka słuchawka tak (0.6)*

BIA: *h- ale udało się (0.7) oh to ciekawe*

MIC: *wtedy wtedy to był ciężki przypadek bo tak to to (0.8) nh:h zawsze była kartka papieru ręce nogi wszystko i długopis i (.) rozrysowywaliśmy tak tam trzeba załadować (.) °no to° (.) w ten sposób (0.8) ile sztuk °maja podawać i tyle° (0.6)*

MIC: in Denmark there was a problem (.) a big one (0.4) with a Dane (0.4) I spoke some English and a bit of (.) very basic German

BIA: m-hm

MIC: and my colleague spoke Italian (0.4) and the Dane [spoke] only in Danish ha ha ha °ha° ha h: h: well and a problem developed (.) yes well alright well then h: h: (.) eh we called the forwarder / find someone who can [speak] Danish right (.)

BIA: [ha ha]

              <at this stage both speakers chuckle; MIC throws over his coffee in the process>

MIC: find someone who speaks Danish

BIA: right

MIC: and then it turned out that (.) they talked (.) / hm:m (.) who talked (.) ah they who (0.7) eh:h we drove the pigs for them

BIA: aha (0.5)

MIC: eh: they spoke Danish because they are the ones who arrange the business there (.)

BIA: [m-hm]
MIC: [and then] through him and with (.)
BIA: a[ha] *(.)*
MIC: [the]
MIC: handset handset handset handset right *(0.6)*
        <MIC moves an imaginary phone from himself to an interlocutor; then he chuckles>
BIA: h- but you succeeded (0.7) oh that's interesting
MIC: then then it was a hard incident because that that / (0.8) nh:h always there was a piece of paper hands legs everything and a pen and (.) we drew how it needed to be loaded (.) °well than° (.) in what way (0.8) how many pieces °they need to hand over and that's it° (0.6)

5.2.3 Calling in assistance

Expectations for successful interaction diverge between drivers and their clients. Polish truck drivers consider their communication to be appropriate if they manage to exchange goods with the support of a third party. In the interviews they claim that despite challenges they have not experienced communication failure on their journeys abroad, as they could always fall back on their forwarder. This person helps them out in any kind of trouble, from a flat tire to a customer with whom they cannot communicate. In (6), Michael demonstrates that failure due to communication is unthinkable. After some laughter he starts to have an imaginary conversation with his boss, and arrives at the conclusion that if he is not able to carry out a conversation on his own, he should call for help:

> [associated audio_006_mp3 with example (6)]

(6)   MIC: *żaden szef nie pozwoli odjechać z pod rampy [pusty] (.) / mam pr-*
        mam problem z komunikacja / a jak / nie chcą mnie załadować (0.7)
        <śmiech>
            / no przecież nie ściągnę Cię na pusto tak (.)
       BIA: *no (0.6) a no tak ehm a (0.5) no wiec jak będzie wtedy za trudno to (.)*
        do spedytora dzwonisz
       MIC: *tak (.) do spedytora tak (.) jednak muszą być od czegoś tak (.)*
       MIC: no boss will allow to drive away from the ramp [empty] (.) / I have pr- (.) I have a problem with the communication /but how (0.7) they

> don't want to load me (0.7) <laughter> / well obviously I will not
> have you come back empty right (.)
>
> BIA: right (0.6) right (0.5) well (0.4) so if it gets to hard then (.) you
> call the forwarder
>
> MIC: yes (.) to the forwarder yes (.) they also need to do something
> right (.)

Similarly, Piller and Lising's (2014) study of Filipino migrant workers in Australia illustrates that migrant workers tend to do more linguistically demanding tasks in groups, supplementing individual limitations in English proficiency. Moreover, Blommaert's (2010) study of an immigrant neighbourhood in Belgium also shows that the immigrants frequently 'pool' their resources when they need to accomplish demanding communication tasks. In other words, this type of strategy does not only occur in the logistics sector, but also in other multilingual contexts.

It is important to realize that the fact that a strategy works to accomplish a goal also means that it is accepted by all the stakeholders. In this case, an Australian participant Piller and Lising's (2014) study reproaches the collaborative strategy arguing that a lack of mingling with the locals restricts the Filipinos from learning English. Furthermore, the main focus in the learning process of the immigrant children in Blommaert's study lies with getting language 'right'; if the children fail to do so they will be assessed as 'not-so-smart' or 'struggling' learners, despite that the total of their linguistic and semiotic qualities might suggest otherwise (2010: 175). A similar attitude can be found in the European logistics sector. The perspective of Danish and Dutch clients on the communicative skills of Eastern European drivers appears to be in stark contrast with that of the truckers themselves, as the local warehouse workers assert that most Eastern European truckers "cannot communicate" (Dijkstra 2017: 25; Lønsmann and Kraft 2018: 145). These comments are in line with unfavourable Dutch stereotypes about people from the former Soviet nations (Boland 2014; Nijhoff 2017). The Dutch layperson often perceives Slavic nations, including Poland, rather negatively as 'the former Eastern bloc', or Eastern Europe; regardless of debates about whether a nation belongs to East or Central Europe (Hyde-Price 1996). Thus, the way that drivers are perceived by their Dutch clients may be influenced by a predominantly negative view. Coupled with the traditional perspective in which "[languages] tended to be theorized as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members" (Pratt 1991: 37), it is clear how people might assume an interlocutor's linguistic capabilities based on their background. A stereotypical image of poor linguistic abilities of the Eastern European trucker might corrode the effectiveness and efficiency within the supply chain. Yet this is exactly what seems to happen,

regardless of many similarities in the sociolinguistic profile of Poland and the Netherlands, such as the presence of English in both societies, or the availability of foreign languages in education.

6 Conclusion

In this contribution, we performed two explorative multi-method case studies dedicated to shedding light on how Polish truck drivers deal with the linguistic requirements of their international profession when they are in the Netherlands. The purpose of these case studies is to learn about the strategies that these professionals employ to keep the European supply chain running smoothly.

The outcomes of the case studies show that in the contact zone of a Dutch warehouse the IMRs of Polish international truck drivers and their Dutch interlocutors could be quite similar. The shared goal of a dispatch facilitates the negotiation of shared meanings in the process of their work. Furthermore, we have shown that English is a frequently used lingua franca in the context of these Dutch warehouses. Even more interesting is that, despite the societal focus on English in business communication, we also found that several participants consider German to be an essential lingua franca and claim to be more proficient in German than in English. While the sociolinguistic profile illustrates that English is now present in several layers of both Dutch and Polish society, the language has been omnipresent in Dutch society for several decades longer. As a result, English proficiency of the Polish truckers seems to be lower in some cases, as compared to that of the Dutch participants. It seems that for some of them that might be because they chose to learn to speak German instead of English. On its turn, this decision might create new issues for the Dutch logistics professionals, like for our young participant in the study, because of the focus on English in their education. Despite the societal expectations that English is the most essential language for business, there are large numbers among both the Dutch and the Polish participants who attest to some degree of proficiency in German as opposed to English. Although other languages are mentioned, participants do not consider them very relevant in the context of the interaction itself.

The findings of this exploratory study are limited to the context of these two warehouses. As over five million Europeans work in the logistics sector (European Commission 2017), there are ample opportunities for future research into the 'human aspect' of the immense European supply chain. It would be interesting to learn about motivations for (not) learning an additional language and about the linguistic practices of logistic professionals, through a qualitative approach, or on a larger quantitative scale. Consequently, we are going to continue investigating

this sector in a more longitudinal mixed-method study with more case studies of Dutch warehouses. Ultimately, studies in a variety of locations in Europe will enhance our understanding of multilingual workplace interactions, and provide building blocks to create a future infrastructure which remains meaningful for the people involved.

There is to our knowledge no standard language test for logistics professionals. Thus, more research is needed to determine when logistics professionals feel that the proficiency of their interlocutor is sufficient. This knowledge can then be used to develop dedicated teaching and training programs, but it can also inform about the existing differences in perception about when someone's linguistic knowledge is 'sufficient for the job', which can then perhaps lead to a higher tolerance in interacting with someone who is deemed 'not proficient'. Eventually, these repeated communication practices may affect interlocutors' assumptions and individual repertoires, which in turn can help to make communication more effective in the long run.

The linguistic and cultural diversity in the logistics sector is here to stay, and so are the occasional problems and frustrations. It is therefore important to better understand and to facilitate the creativity of these multilingual professionals in dealing with sometimes complex situations in the contact zone.

Appendix

Transcription conventions:

(.)	less than 0.3 s pause in speech
(1.3)	pause in speech in seconds
mo-	self-interruption
° yes°	spoken silently
[well]	overlap
<laughter>	comments by the researcher
Verbatim	line-by-line verbatim speech of the Polish or Dutch part of examples are provided in English, the English paraphrased translation follows immediately after the original

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