Organising multilingually:

Setting an agenda for studying *language at work*

Abstract

This essay brings together IB and Sociolinguistic research on the use of language in multilingual organisations and organising. We problematise core categories and underlying assumptions that have been widely adopted in this field of research and to argue for a holistic and context sensitive approach. Special attention is paid to the notion of national language and the multinational organization. Scholars have started to argue for new ways of researching language in organisations and to call for more processually oriented categories and meanings such as organising and languaging. Current core categories such as monolingual/multilingual, small/large and national/multinational often remain static, structural and binary and hence are not in sync with the fluidity and change of human activity nor with the promise of the broader linguistic and discursive turns in social sciences. We argue for multidisciplinary enquiry in this field of research. We propose theoretical and methodological advances and close the paper with a future agenda for studying the dynamics of language in multilingual settings.

Key words

Multilingual organisation, language use, categories, linguistic turn, discursive turn, international business, sociolinguistics, theoretical and methodological advances

1 Introduction

In international business (IB) research, work on language in multinational organisations has been burgeoning (Brannen et al., 2014). Language has moved from being treated as an operative and peripheral issue to becoming a strategic concern for a growing number of IB researchers (Luo and Shenkar, 2006). Recent research has shown how language diversity in multinational corporations (MNC) affects core management processes such as effectiveness of communication (Harzing and Pudelko, 2014), knowledge transfer between subsidiary units (Peltokorpi and Vaara, 2014; Reiche et al., 2015) and overall sense of belongingness and cohesion among geographically dispersed employees (Neeley, 2017). IB research often takes a structuralist, design-based view of the organisation and illustrates well the complex co-existence of multiple languages at work. This body of work has provided us with rich empirical studies and is traditionally concerned with the use of different (primarily national) languages, seen as distinct systems used in a professional setting. Typically though IB work does not discuss the fluidity of practices and processes that are related to situated and contextual choices employees make when deciding to use one language over the other at work.

IB, however, is not the only discipline that has concerned itself with language use in multlilingual organizations. Sociolinguistics and applied linguistics have also addressed multilingualism at work which has attracted considerable attention (Angouri, 2014; Gunnarsson, 2014; Roberts, 2007). Recent work in applied linguistics argues for a dynamic understanding of language use and a shift of focus from the language, as the object of enquiry, to the language user, their repertoire, the linguistic resources available to them and their corresponding linguistic practices (Auer and Wei, 2007). Moving away from structuralism, current work focuses on the resources the speaker mobilises in different contexts and the complexity of practices (see, for instance work by Canagarajah, 2013; Otsuji and Pennycook, 2011; Wei, 2011). At the same time, sociolinguists turned to multilingualism in the workplace and the young but established field of workplace discourse is a case in point (Holmes and Stubbe, 2003). They criticised the prescriptive understanding of language as the static and fixed national variety static, a view that dominates in IB research, and argued that prioritising a national variety over any other variety is a political, not a linguistic choice[1]. Sociolinguists addressed the relationship between language and power in language use and showed the dominance and subordination between (national) languages and other varieties[2].

Despite sharing complementary interests, theoretical and methodological traditions in applied and sociolinguistic research have distinct trajectories, which often keep scholars and studies apart. The same, if not deeper, disconnect is noted between IB, applied and sociolinguistics, notwithstanding the common preoccupations with language use in multilingual organisations. These disciplines have

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[1] The term variety is used to avoid the, typically misleading, distinction between 'language' and 'dialect' and the connotations of status and appropriateness that come with the former. Despite the various criteria commonly used by non-linguists to distinguish between the two (see Section 3.1), more often than not these criteria are political and not linguistic. Official/national languages often correspond to the linguistic variety of the most powerful groups in a given national context and hence the symbolic power associated with them. In line with this position we favour the term variety as a neutral one here.

[2] We mainly focus here on socio- and applied linguistics in relation to IB research. There is a wealth of studies on bi/multilingualism in cognitive linguistics which has addressed the relationship between language and perception, emotion and thought and which have been discussed in psychology and organisational psychology. This goes beyond the interest of this paper but see work by Costa et al. (2014) and Keysar et al. (2012).

developed in parallel with limited dialogue between them and without engaging with each other. We consider the dearth of conversation a limited and limiting position, which deprives the fields in general and our research in particular from opportunities of cross-fertilisation and development.

Thus, the purpose of our essay is to connect these parallel worlds, which we believe offers opportunities for dialogue not only between but also within disciplinary areas. We aim to scrutinize the main analytical categories as well as their underlying assumptions and limitations that have dominated research on language in multilingual organisations. The purpose of our critique is not to put down earlier research, which has provided a wealth of insights, but to provide a direction for future research and identify some priority areas for scholars sharing an interest in language use in the multilingual workplace. Influenced by the postpositivist, postmodern thinking in social sciences, the linguistic and discursive turns bring to the fore the dynamics of processes, fluidity and change in organisational life. Consequently, scholars across disciplines are arguing for new ways of researching language use. We wish to probe and advance the full potential of the linguistic and discursive turns, which we believe will change the theoretical and methodological choices that have been prevalent in our disciplines.

In what follows, we first discuss the linguistic and discursive turns in organisation studies. We then turn to the role and language of the main categories that have been used to study multilingual organisations in IB, applied and sociolinguistics and problematize these categories when applied to the contemporary multilingual workplace. We offer a holistic and context sensitive approach to the study of linguistic ecosystems (Angouri, 2017) and make the case for a multilayered and multidisciplinary approach to better understand multilingualism in the workplace. In doing so, we aim to take the linguistic and discursive turns forward.

2 The linguistic and discursive turn in organisation studies

Researchers in organization studies often use the label ‘linguistic turn’ as a ‘catch all term’ with multiple meanings[3]. For us, this vivid debate indicates above all that there is a longstanding interest in and preoccupation with language among organisation scholars.

The article by Alvessson and Kärreman (2000) marks the linguistic turn in the realm of organisation studies. They were among the first to refer explicitly to ‘linguistic turns’ (in plural) in organisation studies and the broader social sciences Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, pp.141-142) discuss the linguistic turns in three areas: (i) the very nature of language itself which is a philosophical discussion of postmodernism, poststructuralism and social constructionism, (ii) diverse uses of language as practice in empirical social contexts, and (iii) production of research texts as part of the research process. In essence, these turns are about social reality and its relationship to language. The fundamental problem that Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, p.13) tackle is that “language cannot mirror social reality” (see also Phillips and Oswick, 2012) but constructs social reality. They criticise the language-as-mirror practice that has dominated social sciences on the grounds that social phenomena are far too complex to be reduced in this way and call for language-conscious organisation research. Alvesson and Kärreman (2000, p.140) state that “[t]here is a reflexive deficit regarding language in highly significant parts of social science”. These authors advocate the creative and functional

[3] We would like to thank Mats Alvesson, Joep Cornelissen, Dan Kärreman, Nelson Phillips and Eero Vaara for generously sharing their views on the term ‘linguistic turn’ and its relationship with the ‘discursive turn’ in organisation studies.

capacities of language in terms of how language shapes organisational reality rather than simply mirrors it, which is line with the social constructionist turn in social sciences (see also Mautner, 2015a; Phillips and Oswick, 2012). Since the contribution by Alvesson and Kärreman, a variety of sub-fields in management and organisation studies such as institutional scholarship (Cornelissen et al., 2015) and strategy research (Vaara, 2010) have taken the same stance.

The labels 'linguistic and discursive turns' are used in endless ways and often with overlapping meanings. The term 'discourse' is abstract that has been defined differently by different scholars in a range of disciplines (Johnstone, 2008). In sociolinguistics, it is common to distinguish between micro and macro discourses; the former referring to language used in the 'here and now' of specific contexts, localities and settings and the latter in relation to ideologies, stances and positions visible to those who are members of a community (Angouri and Marra, 2011). This applies to all professional communities including academia, where the different fields construct their professional identity in and through discourses. These discourses are mobilised through specific lexical choices, which in their turn index professional affiliation and positioning.

For Phillips and Oswick (2012), the broader linguistic turn in social sciences legitimises and explains the growing popularity of various linguistic methods such as organisational discourse analysis. Phillips and Oswick argue that some organisation scholars have been carried away by language as an object of study and forgotten the organisational context in which language use is embedded. In doing this, they risk "missing the primary lesson of the linguistic turn" which, based on Deetz (2003, p.423), is to look "through discourse to see the specific ways [in which] the world is produced".

In institutional scholarship, Cornelissen et al. (2015, p.10) explicitly do not use the term 'linguistic turn' at all when describing "communicative institutionalism" – "a theoretical approach that puts communication at the heart of theories of institutions, institutional maintenance, and change." They define communication broadly to include "social interaction that builds on speech, gestures, texts, discourses, and other means" (p.11). They contrast two approaches with each other: communication as a conduit vs performative approaches to language and institutions which is largely a critique of the former. They consider language as a force that directly shapes the cognitive outcomes of other actors in the institutional setting and view communication as constitutive of institutions. Cornelissen et al. further specify that institutions are constructed in and through an interactive, locally situated process of communication in which actors exchange views and build up mutual understanding through co-production. This performative, constitutive capacity of language comes very close to the arguments provided by the advocates of the linguistic turn.

Vaara (2010) also makes a call for taking the linguistic turn seriously in strategy research. For him, "[t]his means that we must focus attention on the ways in which a discursive approach can expand our understanding of strategy and strategising" (Vaara, 2010, p.43). Vaara raises a useful question on whether the full potential of the linguistic turn is still to be realised (Vaara, 2010, p.30). His answer lies in advocating a multifaceted interdiscursive approach.

To sum up, although the linguistic turn took place in organisation studies already several decades ago (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Phillips and Oswick, 2012), it has not signified a dialogue across disciplinary boundaries or a growing number of multidisciplinary research. As Mautner (2015b, p.12) succinctly puts it, "wherever the linguistic turn has turned to, it certainly wasn't linguistics". This is the gap that we aim to fill.

3 The role and language of categories in research on multilingualism

Organising data and findings in clear-cut categories has and still is seen as evidence of systematic research in many disciplines and social sciences do not form an exception. Categories such as age, gender or profession as well as national language are commonly used to guide research designs and focus researchers' attention and priorities. In line with the paradigm of social constructionism, categories are meanings systems and constructions of a particular representation of the (multilingual) reality at a particular point in time. In this regard, they are always situated, negotiated and emergent.

Categorisation has been seen as "a fundamental and universal process because it satisfies a basic human need for cognitive parsimony" in the development of new knowledge (Abrams and Hogg, 1988). Christensen and Carlile (2009, p.241) emphasise categorisation as an important step in building descriptive theory. Categorisation is based upon attributes of phenomena that have been observed, and identified as common between the members of a category. Researchers commonly classify their findings into categories, frameworks or typologies to simplify the world before exploring relationships and associations between categories. These simplifications and the influence of positivism has led to the use of a number of binaries which we discuss in detail below. Understanding these binaries is critical for advancing theoretical frameworks and methodologies that have served the study of multilingual organisations for years.

In their extensive review article Loewenstein et al. (2012, p.58) argue that "vocabularies generate meaningful categories". They posit that a vocabulary approach to language has the potential to bring collectives together and to provide "a common ground for currently disconnected sets of researchers to integrate their work" (p.77). In their context, vocabularies refer to "systems of words, and the meaning of these words, used by *collectives* at different levels of analysis – groups, organisations, communities of practice, and institutional fields – in communication, thought, and action

(Loewenstein et al., 2012, p.45, italics in the original). For Loewenstein et al. vocabularies are central for organising and without them it would be impossible to conduct any meaningful communication.

In the next section, we will scrutinize two core categories that have served our fields in the study of language in different workplace settings, the *national language* and the *organisation*. While these categories have produced useful insights into the multilingual workplace they do not reflect the theoretical and methodological advances associated with the linguistic turn, which underscores fluidity and change. Furthermore, it is important to note that life is not always fluid and dynamic in the eye of the beholder and the use of those terms as ‘catch all’ metaphors is actually misleading. For lay people, visible stabilities remain and many of our categories such as national languages are still very real in their daily lives at work. In mundane discourses there is often very little fluidity in whether one uses French or Spanish, and how much English one needs to have to be able to participate in decision-making processes in a given workplace setting. At the same time, the symbolic power associated with one variety in one context is not necessarily transferable to another. Hence while pre-determined categories have limited analytical value for the researcher, this does not mean that there is not any stability in power structures and ideologies associated with significant groups in any context (Caldas-Coulthard & Iedema, 2008; Angouri, 2017). Categories are, and have been, analytical tools, artificially constructed by the researcher to capture the way research participants actively talk themselves into being and do language in interaction (Angouri, 2016). These categories are never a neutral labelling system – they are always political, reflecting the wider socio-political *status quo* and the dominant representations of multiple realities as well as the dominant theoretical and conceptual tools in social sciences.

3.1 The one national language as the main category

IB research has tended to prioritise national varieties of languages such as French, English, German and Finnish over dialects in multilingual organisations (Brannen et al., 2014). At the same time, linguistics has studied language from different angles depending on the field and topic area, but often not in an organisational context. Organisation scholars in turn have engaged with discourse analytic studies (Phillips and Oswick, 2012) and addressed the fluid and hybrid nature of language use (Janssens and Steyaert, 2014). However, their focus has typically been limited to the monolingual space of English (Tietze and Dick, 2013) and not addressed the use of different languages in the organization (Piekkari and Westney, 2017). Global expansion of company activities, recruitment of an increasingly diverse workforce and access to new markets explain why language has acquired prominence in current research.

The association of language with one national language is directly related to the history of *nation state* and the ideology of *homogeneity* (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011). The "one language, one people" motto is common in symbolic representations of 'nations' and in political discourses on the broader sociopolitical environment where strong ideologies about language reside. In scholarly writings about language this means that one variety – typically 'the' national language – has been the basic unit of analysis and languages have been treated as separate and discrete *units.* The speaker is often a monolingual native speaker surrounded by a speech community that shares the very same language variety. In this way of thinking, multilingualism stands for the sum of various national languages.

This rather neat, tidy and static way of attempting to capture multilingualism at work is familiar to any researcher in this area and has followed the development of thinking in IB as well as some areas of linguistics. IB research has explored which national language (ie., that of the country of origin, the host country or a third country) organisational members use to interact within the MNC.

Recently, more critically oriented IB research has challenged the notion of the national language as the dominant category and challenged the ideals of language "purity". Boussebaa et al. (2014) draw on post-colonial analysis and associate Englishisation with power relations at call centres in India. They pose the question of how pure the English language skills of Indian employees are in relation to the accent and pronunciation of the powerful elite groups in the organisation. The choice of a particular national variety such as British English over Indian English is always a political priority, not merely a linguistic choice.

At the same time, in sociolinguistics the complex relationship between 'language' and 'dialect' has a long tradition (Romaine, 2000; Britain, 2016). It is common for lay users to consider 'language' as having more speakers than a dialect or being the 'correct' form. These criteria however reflect powerful language ideologies and not linguistic 'facts'. The widely known quote 'language is a dialect with an army' foregrounds that the relationship between language and dialect is directly related to political and economic issues (instead of linguistic ones). This said, the national varieties for many years dominated research in bi/multi-lingualism (Auer and Wei, 2007.). Dialects are more rarely considered although their significance for the speakers and the connotations they carry are being exploited for the marketing/advertising of products and services (Kalmane, 2010.). For instance, certain northern dialect on English in the UK are perceived by speakers of English as 'friendly' and 'sociable' which has been picked by and exploited by advertisers who include representations of these dialects in commercial spots or similar (Kelly-Holmes, 2005).

Another contrast between IB research, applied and sociolinguistics becomes visible when comparing the notion of language competence. In IB scholarship it is common to conceptualise language as a measurable skill and capability that the individual (rather than the organisation) possesses to perform the job (i.e. the degree of fluency that individuals demonstrate in a particular national language, see e.g. Klitmøller, 2013). Turning to sociolinguistics and applied linguistics (e.g. Canagarajah, 2000; Jaffe, 1999) such an understanding language as a 'technical' skill vs. part of an individual's repertoire and sense of self has already been addressed. Recent work (e.g. Piller, 2016) has further problematised the treatment of language as a commodity that individuals possess on the grounds that it is based on a narrow and static view of language. Linguists argue that there is a need to conceive competence in a dynamic, situated way that goes beyond static lists of can/cannot do. It is widely argued that the very notion of 'efficient' communication in the globalised economy has had a commodifying effect on the understanding of language. 'Language' or 'foreign' language in this context acquires value in relation to the activities of an organisation (Heller, 2010, for a review) and the symbolic power associated with the language users in any given context. Language varieties are socially and locally valued and hence a situated and context sensitive approach is necessary for unpacking the dynamics of language use in any workplace setting. We return to this point in the last section of our paper.

3.2 The multilingual organisation as the main category

IB research has predominantly drawn on a static understanding of the organisation as its core category. IB scholars have tended to explore particular kinds of organizations, their subunits and boundaries as the level of analysis to determine language use. Consequently, much of the existing research has looked at internal rather than external communications. Commonly used categories in this body of research include multilingual MNCs and domestic firms; large MNCs and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); manufacturing and service firms; white-collar and blue-collar workplaces as well as private for profit and public organisations. Sociolinguistics has also used these categories to shed light on workplace discourse (e.g., Sarangi and Roberts, 1999; Llamas and Watt, 2010; Angouri and Marra, 2011).

The multilingual MNC vs the 'monolingual' domestic firm: Much of the existing research in IB has focused on the multilingual MNC. This term typically refers to a firm that operates in two or more countries as well as in two or more languages (Piekkari and Westney, 2017, p.195). In other words, such a firm is defined in terms of two criteria: multinationality and multilingualism. This definition points to the presence of the firm's units such as sales, R&D and production in several locations and multiple language environments. However, the mere presence of the firm in various foreign markets, tells little about the extent to which multiple languages have penetrated (Feely and Harzing, 2003) the organization in terms of work processes, activities and the social interactions they entail. Luo and Shenkar (2006, p. 321) define this type of an organization slightly differently by labelling it a 'multilingual community' where several languages are employed concurrently and recursively between units (see, also Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen and Piekkari, 2006). Yet, the focus remains on the unit level rather than on the level of employees or individuals.

The research trajectory on the multilingual MNC builds on the assumption that the higher the firm's degree of internationalization, the more visible, tangible and pressing language diversity becomes. Yet, it is important to recognise that depending on how we 'count' language/s, not all multilingual corporations are multinational and vice versa, not all multinationals are multilingual (Piekkari and Westney, 2017). Furthermore, purely domestic firms need not to be monolingual. Located in countries with two (e.g., Canada and Finland) or more official languages (e.g., Switzerland) or in countries with multiple linguistic communities, such as Indonesia or India, domestic firms are multilingual but not necessarily multinational in their operations (Piekkari and Westney, 2017) and evidently as societies are multilingual workplaces are too. Research undertaken in linguistics on multilingualism in Catalan firms in Spain (Strubell and Marí, 2013), on promotion of corporate bilingualism in Wales (Barakos, 2014), and in organisation studies on power relations in companies located in the French-speaking part of Switzerland (Gaibrois, 2015) provide valuable insights into the role and use of language. These studies go beyond the focus on national languages by taking the bi/multilingual domestic setting as their starting point. Further to this, in the context of intense mobility where people move out of choice (better prospects) or necessity (fleeing from conflict), the concept of a 'domestic' workforce is very limited.

The large MNC vs the 'local' SME: Large multinationals have dominated the agenda of language research in IB (Brannen et al., 2014; Piekkari et al., 2014). The complexity and diversity of their activities and workforce make them prime sites for research. The linguistic profile of MNCs is typically contrasted with the 'smaller' firm which has been deemed to be *monolingual* and *local*. The underlying assumption is that size is a suitable measure of language diversity.

However, this does not apply to SMEs that operate in a multilingual reality. Recent research in the UK (e.g. ARCTIC project, 2013) has shown that SMEs use a number of strategies to meet their diverse language needs. This includes the more traditional working with translators and interpreters to recruiting speakers with high levels of competence in the target language to forming formal and informal networks to promote business activities. Similar findings were also produced in the case study of five Finnish SMEs by Pohjanen-Bernardi and Talja (2011). The small size of SMEs does not render them uninteresting in terms of language requirements or language resources – these may simply reside outside the boundaries of the firm.

The manufacturing vs the service firm: The majority of studies in IB has examined manufacturing rather than service firms, or firms with hybrid offerings involving elements of both products and services. The dominance of manufacturing firms as a research context may explain why linkages between units of the MNC are often portrayed in terms of "flows" of resources such as parts, components, and finished goods as well as funds, skills, and knowledge (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). This "flow" metaphor reduced the connections across MNC subsidiaries to a set of nodes and pipelines that passed resources rather than more subtle social interaction and exchange which would have been more conducive to an exploration of language (Piekkari and Westney, 2017) and language use.

Overall, however, the language environment of the industry has not been explicitly considered, potentially because the level of analysis has been the organisation and the focus has been on internal rather than external communications with customers, suppliers or other stakeholders. Yet, the industry sector such as services, engineering or textile may provide a useful macro-context for explaining and understanding language use in multilingual organisations. The industry has explanatory power shedding light on differences in the level of education between firms across sectors, the resources the firm allocates to language and translation activities, and the way the customer interface is organised (Holmqvist and Grönroos 2012; Sanden, 2015).

The executive suite vs white-collar and blue-collar workplaces: IB research has primarily been conducted on language diversity of managers and from a management's perspective. Hours spent in the executive suite talking to and interviewing managers often provide research findings with legitimacy (Macdonald and Hellgren, 2004; Westney and Van Maanen, 2011). To date, IB scholars have hardly been interested in studying language issues in entry-level or low paid jobs whether among white-collars or blue-collars. In a study of a Danish-owned maquiladora in Mexico Bjerregaard and Klitmoeller (2016) briefly mention the English classes of white-collar workers when exemplifying conflicts over global practice sharing in this MNC, but this is an exception.

It seems that the underlying assumption of this sub-category is that language diversity and competence in strategically important languages increase as one moves higher up in the organisational hierarchy. If mentioned, blue-collars are treated as a homogenous group of monolinguals who speak only the local host country language and are thus of limited interest to the study of language use in multilingual organisations (Kirilova and Angouri, 2017).

On the other hand, sociolinguistic research on blue-collar workplaces has shed light on the nuances of language competence and issues around power and access– mainly in relation to the main languages of an organisation or a society. Kirilova (2013) studied the complex relationship between the role of local language (Danish in her case) and lingua francae among blue-collar workers to explain how they cross boundaries and attempt to fit in. These questions have also preoccupied researchers studying white-collar settings. This stream of work has uncovered the multidimensional relationship between local and global languages, language use and power in the ecosystem of the multinational workplace (Mahili, 2014). As with the other divides, we believe that it is beneficial to study phenomena of language use and border crossing across the different strata of organisations and in relation to the broader socioeconomic environment (Kirilova and Angouri, 2017) instead of isolating parts of an organization.

The private for-profit vs the public organisation: To date, private for-profit organisations have dominated the field of language diversity and multilingualism at the workplace. There is a common illusion that these organisations are 'truly' multilingual and thus more relevant and exciting as research sites. Private organisations also face a different kind of pressure to perform and increase efficiency of their operations. In their context, language diversity is often experienced as a problem that carries costs and needs to be solved (Brannen et al., 2014).

Yet, other types of organisations such as hospitals, NGOs and universities provide highly suitable and exciting but unexplored research setting for examining multilingualism at work. Boussebaa and Brown (2016) studied the power and identity implications of the increasing Englishization in a French university. Similarly, Slíwa and Johansson (2014) studied 19 business schools in the UK that represent linguistically diverse organisations in an Anglophone environment. They argue that an important enabling factor for the international expansion of the British business schools has been the status of English as the contemporary lingua franca of academia (see, also Tietze, 2008).

More generally, public organisations often explicitly profile themselves as forerunners in diversity management and claim to be exemplary in their practices, hence constituting an appropriate setting for relevant research. The EU is a prime example of high translation demands due to the extensive number of official languages and working languages in the community (Unger, Krzyzanowski, and Wodak, 2014; Koskinen, 2008).

Taken together, the two main categories reviewed above –national language and the multilingual MNC have generated some important insights into language use in particular kinds of organisations. Like all categories, they carry important meaning systems and assist researchers in simplifying the complexity of the social world. While these established categories have served this field of research well to date, they can also be considered limiting due to their binary and static nature. For example, the ‘multilingual’ MNC is often explicitly or implicitly compared and contrasted with the ‘monolingual’ and ‘domestic’ SME. Furthermore, the dominant categories do not reflect the linguistic turn in the broader social sciences, which underscores fluidity and change and calls for a new, more processually oriented, holistic and context sensitive way to look into language than previously acknowledged in IB research.

4 Setting a future joint research agenda for studying *language at work*

In this paper, we invite scholars in IB, applied and sociolinguistics to move beyond binaries and static oppositions and engage further in multidisciplinary enquiry. Table 1 summarizes our previous discussion on the dominant categories in current research trajectories and provides an overview of the arguments we make in this section. We believe that thinking of languages and organisations as static binaries and separate entities does not fully capture the dynamic equilibrium of speakers' language resources and the way they are mobilised for work related purposes (see also Janssens and Steyaert, 2014). A recent special issue on multilingualism in the worplace (Angouri, 2014, see also Meyer and Apfelbaum 2010) drew on cases from different workplace settings and geographical contexts and argued for the need to approach language at work holistically. Such a shift in conceptualisation has theoretical and methodological implications both for the notion of language and the organisation and how we study them.

Insert Table 1 about here

Let us start from the theoretical implications for better understanding language use. We advocate a view of languages in flux, or languaging (Swain, 1985) which prioritises fluid and hybrid language practices (language-in-use) rather than national languages or varieties. After the turn of the century a number of studies made a compelling case for capturing the complexity of individual register and language choice. In this context a range of new terms have appeared in the writings of applied and sociolinguistics. As useful illustration, Canagarajah (2009; 2013) refers to *translingual* practices (Canagarajah, 2013) to capture the work speakers do in actively mobilising linguistic resources in order to achieve the goals of interaction. And the widely used *superdiversity* (Vertovec, 2007), typically evokes the pace of mobility and language contact as well as the need for engaging with complexity beyond the level of a metaphor which is becoming a shorthand for describing the dynamics of language choice and language use in any multilingual workplace setting. These are, evidently, simplifications of very interesting and timely debates (see e.g., Coupland, 2016; Creese and Blackledge, 2018) but the key issue here is that they all point to the notion of increased global mobility and languages in flux.

Similarly, the traditional conception of the organisation with clear boundaries is also at stake. The linguistic turn in organisation studies also underscores the necessity to move away from a static understanding of the organisation as an entity that is made up of its material and legal structure and that is fixed in time and space, to one that is fluid and continuously evolving (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000). To use Weick's (1979) terminology, we need to replace the noun 'organisation' with the verb 'organising'. In sociolinguistics, research on workplace discourse has already embraced such an understanding of the organisation that is fluid and dynamic. This field of research has shown how organisations talk themselves into being in and through discourse, and how participants' realities are situated, negotiated and emergent (Berger and Luckmann, 1991).

In terms of organizing multilingually, IB researchers have treated language both as a design variable to be considered as a factor in shaping the architecture of the MNC as well as a variable in itself to be designed (Piekkari and Westney, 2017, pp.212-213). Large and geographically dispersed MNCs increasingly adopt multi-dimensional structures (Strikwerda and Stoelhorst, 2009) that have the flexibility to draw on language resources when grouping subsidiary units into regional structures.

These language-based clusters can leverage the language capabilities of qualified managers and be re-arranged relatively easily. A prime example of the latter approach is the accumulated research on English language mandates in MNCs (e.g., Fredriksson et al., 2006; Luo and Shenkar, 2006; Neeley and Dumas, 2016). Top management deliberately selects, structures and designs a language that meets the strategic purposes of the organization.

For our purposes, the metaphor of an ecosystem is a useful meso-level construct as it is not limited to the boundaries of the firm and reflects better the actual multilingual reality of many empirical settings (Angouri, 2014). The organisation is here understood as a heterogeneous network of interorganizational relationships rather than a homogenous setting. For example, SMEs, which are embedded in linguistic ecosystems, balance their in-house language resources by sourcing them externally. They tend to rely on external translation service providers to deal with heavy translation demand and build strong and continuous relationships with the same service provider. In doing so, they generate language capital which feeds back into the daily practice at work (Piekkari et al., 2014, p.40). Although the firm does not own this resource the service provider becomes closely tied to the firm in a way that resembles quasi-ownership. In this way, an SME can turn into a very important node in the ecosystem when the magnifying glass is placed on its activities rather than its boundaries.

In an ecosystem, monolingual spaces are an exception rather than the rule in both large and small businesses. Employees at the modern workplace – whether corporate, public or NGO – often operate at the interface of national, professional and language boundaries when carrying out their daily routines. In this regard, *multilingualism at work is not something that happens when one is out of a monolingual sphere*, but rather a mundane practice for most white- and blue-collar employees. The concept of an ecosystem emphasises a holistic and dynamic approach to organising multilingually and allows researchers to connect macro language ideologies, power structures and local interactional dynamics. Thus, thinking at the level of the ecosystem – the business practices and activities that form the employees' daily routine – provides a more accurate, albeit messier understanding of the modern workplace and its complexity. Such an approach defines organising as a verb through *practice* rather than as a noun (Weick, 1979) which we hope would offer more profound insights into language use at work.

In addition to theoretical implications, there are significant methodological implications and we argue for a holistic and context sensitive approach to the study of language in multilingual organisations and organising. Figure 1 provides an analytical framework that draws on a representation of three orders of context (see Goffman 1959; Giddens, 1984; Jenkins, 2000 but also Latour, 2005): the individual order, the interactional order, and the institutional order. The interactants operate at the interface of these three orders which "overlap completely; each is implicated in each of the others; none makes sense without the others" (Jenkins, 2000, p.10). The three orders also correspond to the commonly used distinction between macro/meso/micro levels of analysis. The micro typically referrers to the 'here and now' of the moment and the macro to the wider sociopolitical environment and social processes within which we all operate. While micro/meso/macro are often represented as separate, with the macro being 'out there', they are intertwined. Instead of conceptualising them as yet another binary opposition, the three orders form a web of relationships and structures, within which the *agency* of the individual user is located. Simply put, the first order has to do with individuals and their own reality, the second is negotiated between people, while the third refers to norms and structures already in place.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 suggests that a better understanding of language use in the modern workplace should encompass all three orders, thus providing a more dynamic and holistic analysis. This analytical model connects the *here and now* of interaction and links the choices individuals make with the language resources available in the institutional order. Instead of *either* looking into macro discourse and personal accounts on language, or only take a micro interactional approach, this comprehensive model looks into the micro choices individuals make interactionally and the ways in which this is situated in the broader context of the team, department, organisation, or industry, for example. This approach, which explicitly spans multiple levels of analysis, may help avoid the problem of 'forcing' data into a particular analytical category or extrapolating a 'local' phenomenon or practice to the whole organisation, thus assuming it exists as an analytical category (e.g. particular language use is only characteristic of a specific team, department or unit rather than the entire firm; the metaphor of a 'language pocket'; Piekkari et al., 2014). Taken together, Figure 1 proposes an iterative and multilayered approach to better understand multilingualism in the workplace and the process of negotiating membership into different communities and linguistic repertoires (see Angouri et al., 2016 on transitions into a profession and within a workplace).

In terms of specific methods and data sources, self-reported data, surveys and observations as well as critical ethnographic studies, interaction analysis and experimental work can shed light on multilingual practices at work. There is a body of ethnographically informed studies which have shown the multiple choices individuals make locally depending on whom they interact with, what their interactional agenda is, and the linguistic resources available to them (Angouri, 2014). While ethnographic research uncovers language practices in real time, there is also a need for longitudinal research which connects the choices made in a local setting with wider structures existent in the interactants environment and the wider sociopolitical context. Alongside methods and data sets that have been prioritised in our fields such as personal interviews, surveys and analysis of interactional data, a mixed methods approach is also suitable for answering the kind of questions we address here. They allow us to study language use from different angles and traditions.

5 Conclusion

We have argued that there is a need to problematise and reposition a number of established orthodoxies in order to capture the dynamics of the multilingual reality of the modern workplace. Our concluding section scrutinizes the analytical value of categories and makes a call for seriously engaging with multidisciplinarity.

5.1 Repositioning the analytical value of categories in a situated way

The dominance of the multilingual organization as a main analytical category has largely excluded informal, partial and temporal organisations and organising from the analysis in both IB research and workplace discourse studies. Furthermore, language use by non-organisational members and other key actors is rarely captured when the organisation remains the core category. As such, categories have no inherent analytical power; they are constructions that the researcher has used to explain phenomena. However, these categories correspond to structures that are visible to lay people and take on different meanings in different contexts. Organisations operate in a broader linguistic ecosystem that interacts with and straddles a nexus of national, cultural, professional, and geographical boundaries, to name but a few. If we accept that organising multiligually is what is happening, the challenge is to also understand how individuals use these or other categories in *doing* organising instead of forcing data into predetermined categories.

We argue that a focus on language practices provides an alternative way to conceptualise and unpack management practices; organising multilingually suggests a nuanced understanding of the complex linguistic landscape of any workplace. We all operate within a set of power structures and legal frames which are visible when at work or any other societal context. At the same time, the social world and professional context are negotiated, resisted or perpetuated through discourses and individual agency is paramount. Accordingly, *zooming in* the practices of employees around specific processes and *zooming out* on the wider context within which this takes places, can afford the theoretical and methodological tools for bringing together theory and practice. Stability and change co-exist and are related to the linguistic choices people make; this includes any language variety available and the style of interaction that is considered appropriate.

5.2 Engaging seriously with multidisciplinary

This leads us to the final point of our essay, namely the need for multidisciplinarity. Crossing disciplinary boundaries has been on the agenda for many years and a number of projects and collaborations form examples of good practice (e.g. Janssens and Steyaert, 2014; Slíwa and Johansson, 2014). Notions in linguistics such as linguistic human rights, issues of ownership of a language variety, and the ethics of language teaching (e.g. Pennycook, 1998) can enrich current debates in IB research. In reverse, the extensive understanding of the multinational organisation in IB scholarship can fruitfully advance current research on the multilingual workplace in the socio/linguistic field.

However, we often fall into the trap of paying merely lip service to multidisciplinary research rather than engaging with it seriously. Needless to say, going outside one's own comfort zone is never easy; it comes with many epistemological as well as practical challenges and 'costs' such as difficulties to fully appreciate research findings from another discipline and to understand the vocabulary and methods of 'the other'. Despite this, if we are to challenge established orthodoloxies and not reinvent the wheel again and again, we need to connect better research agendas, theoretical and methodological tools that we have been using. Also, by being less dogmatic about our own disciplinary conventions and more tolerant and accepting of other ways of studying language use in multilingual workplaces 'right', we start hearing and listening what colleagues have to say, linguistics and IB being our main foci here. Patience is currency here because building awareness and sharing research findings across disciplines takes time[4]. Only through an open exchange and dialogue can we make a start of a more nuanced enquiry which can provide richer insights into the fast changing workplace.

We hope that our initiative to engage in a conversation across disciplinary boundaries contributes to a fruitful dialogue and paves the way for many more studies to follow.

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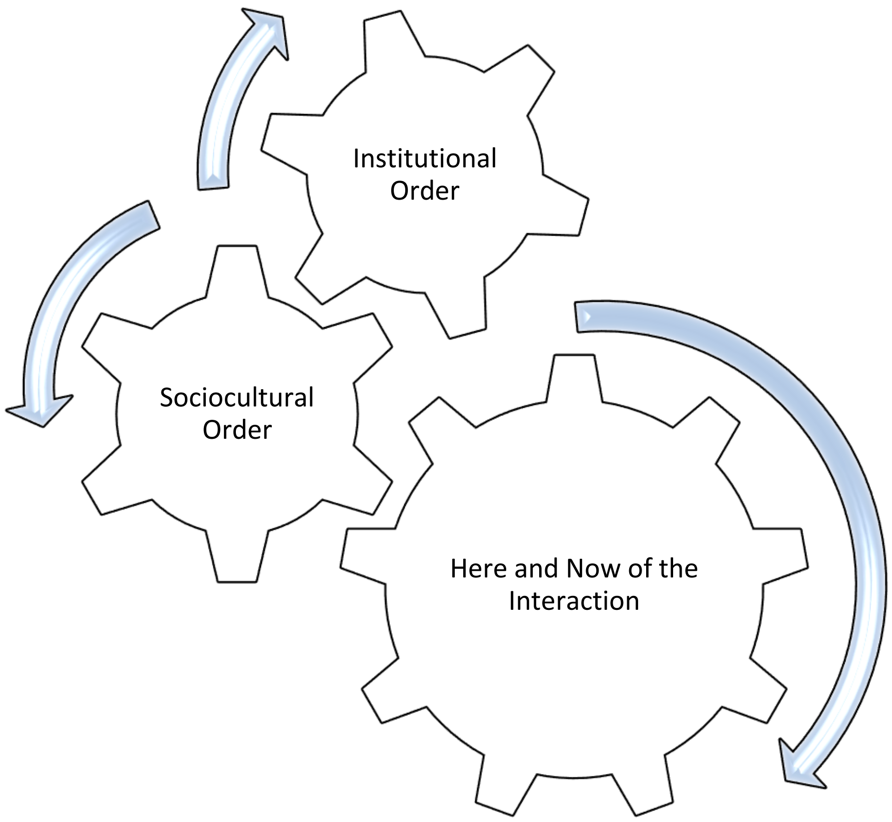
Figure 1 Unpacking multilingualism in the modern workplace



Current research trajectories		***Future research trajectories***
National language as the main category Focus on separate/distinct languages		*A complex linguistic landscape/Languaging* Focus on language practice
Multilingual organization as the main category and its binary sub-categories Focus on organizational boundaries		*Organizing multilingually* Focus on transcending boundaries
The multilingual MNC	The 'monolingual' domestic firm	Language as a design practice
The large MNC	The 'local' SME	Language[s] as a factor to be designed (e.g., common corporate language)
The manufacturing firm	The service firm	Ecosystem as a metaphor and a meso-level construct that connects macro and micro levels of analysis
The executive suite	The white-collar and blue-collar workplace	Multilingualism as a mundane practice, monolingual spaces an exception
The private for-profit organization	The public non-profit organization	'Doing' organizing Focus on activities and practice

Table 1. Summary of current and future research trajectories