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Reconsidering Translation and Language in an International Business Context : Beyond an Instrumental Approach

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RECONSIDERING TRANSLATION AND LANGUAGE IN AN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CONTEXT: BEYOND AN INSTRUMENTAL APPROACH

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One of the most striking features of business in the 90s is the increasing internationalization and as a consequence an increase in international contacts within and among organizations. While a decade ago, the international contacts were restricted to sending a selected group of expatriate managers to foreign units, today, the international contacts become increasingly part of daily work. Managers travel for short periods of time, follow training programs in other countries, have world-wide meetings through video-conferencing, and are members of transnational groups linked by e-mail. They come on an almost daily basis in contact with managers from different cultural backgrounds speaking different native languages.

However, this internationalization does not occur without any problems in language use and translation activities (Hermans, Simoens & Jansen, 1994). These problems raise the need for a coordinated management policy concerning translation and language use and learning. Given the overwhelming attention for culture (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg & Martin, 1991; Schein, 1993) and language (Putnam & Fairst, in press; Reed & Hughes, 1992) as theoretical approaches within the management process, it is surprising that the role of languages and translating is rather systematically ignored in a multi-cultural business context. The question of languages is generally seen as an issue of foreign language teaching which is the responsibility of the education community and individual employees but not of management. This lack of management attention is rather remarkable since, by definition, international management involves different cultures, different meanings, and different languages. It is our aim to address the question of how to deal with a mix of native languages in international business settings. Our starting point is the use of the concepts of language and culture within management and organization theory. We want to reconsider *translation and language learning* from these two concepts and embed them in the management process. The aim is to develop a language policy in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual setting.

Translation and Language Problems in Management

There are several international business contexts in which translation and language learning pose challenging questions for management. Many times, these questions are overlooked by managers, since "there are more pressing issues than just the translation of a text or the language learning needs of a new employee". However, the following three examples show that translation and language are much less innocent than thought at first sight. They bring us to some critical questions with important implications for the management process. A first, well-known illustration refers to the context of marketing. Everyone is familiar with the Pepsi Cola advertising slogan: "Come alive with Pepsi". When the campaign was introduced in Germany, the company was forced to revise the ad because it discovered that the German translation of "come alive" became "Come out of the Grave". And in Asia, the same phrase was translated to "Bring your ancestors back from the dead"[1] (Ricks, 1993). Although such mistakes seem to happen to the best international organizations like Apple, Coca-Cola, Philip Morris, Yves St. Laurent, Kellogg and Procter and Gamble, the implications of these blunders have not yet been analysed in terms of a management of language, as provoked by the following questions: What went "wrong" in the organizing process that guides the interaction between the main parties involved like marketers, translators, international managers and clients? In what way have these parties underestimated the cultural dimension of a simple marketing slogan? How can organizations ensure that the intended meaning of an advertising slogan will not be "lost" in the translation? Can the translation process be organized in such a way that failures like these are less likely to occur? Specialists in translation studies will remark that these questions refer to more fundamental questions of "what "losses" in translation mean" and "how marketing and translation strategies should be connected?".

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[1] This example is often referred to in management and marketing literature. However, the sources do not mention the German translated and the specific Asian language which illustrates the dominant attention towards the source text instead of the target cultures.

A second example refers to expatriates and to the importance of language skills for managers completing an international assignment. In her study on cross-cultural adjustment problems of expatriates, Janssens (1992) found that managers mentioned language as one of the most important problem in adjusting to daily life and work. These managers explicitly stated that "local language is a pre-requisite for success in personal life and business". And that "the local people of the foreign country misunderstood and misinterpreted what they said which caused major problems" Organizations and managers are confronted with the following questions: What do expatriates mean with *mis*understandings and *mis*interpretation? To what extent is it necessary that organizations require their expatriates to speak the local language? Are these language skills seen as practical tools or as a form of cultural exchange? In what way is talking one's native language a criterion to become a so-called dual citizen expatriate? And how does the local language spoken by managers abroad relate to the general policy of the company?

A third illustration refers to the context of mergers and acquisitions of companies coming from different cultural regions. One of the realities of mergers and acquisitions is the organizational integration of the two companies (Buono & Bowditch, 1989). This integration is often characterized by uncertainty, distrust, us-versus-them tensions, power struggles, turnover and absenteeism, and declines in job performance. Furthermore, this trust process can be heavily distorted by differences in culture and language. For example, in Belgium, it occurs that when a Flemish and Walloon company merge, English is choosen to be the business language instead of Flemish, French or both of them. The following questions arise: To what extent is the use of a particular language important? What are the implications when a company chooses one language to be dominant, or when they allow different languages and encourage their employees to speak several languages? What if one of the cultural groups is more skilled in the dominant language, how does that reflect on the power of the two groups, and what impact does this linguistic inequality have on their relations?

Engaging translators and learning foreign languages are often seen as marginal problems in comparison to the financial and strategic problems. However, the above examples suggest that these problems can strike at the heart of the management process. The need emerges to understand the role of language in the management process and to have a systematic translation and language learning policy. Our aim is to address the development of such a policy. We will first position translation and language learning within the management process by discussing the cultural and linguistic ground of the management process. Within these theoretical approaches, we consider two perspectives on language: language as representation versus language as action - and two perspectives on culture: culture as a variable versus culture as a metaphor. Based on these contrasting perspectives, we will discuss the implications for a translation language learning policy in a multi-cultural and muli-lingual setting. Throughout the presentation of our ideas that originate from management theory, we will refer to insights from translation studies. By doing so, we want to argue for a multi-disciplinary based language policy in which the domains of management and translation studies are aligned.

The Cultural and Linguistic Ground of the Management Process

In order to position translation and language learning within a business context, we approach the management process from a double scope, e.g. culture and language. Both concepts became increasingly central in management theory in the eighties and early nineties. Culture was introduced in managerial life as a useful concept for understanding individual behavior and the ways in which organizations integrate themselves (Schein, 1985) and therefore as a tool to manage in an effective way. More recently, the management literature knows an important movement towards recognizing the importance of language (Pondy, 1993), discourse (Mills & Tancred, 1993) and rhetoric (Huff, 1983; Simons, 1989). However, it seems as if the cultural school tends to ignore the role of language in a multi-cultural context, while the language scholars have not really incorporated the cultural studies. A similar gap can be found between the research traditions in the disciplines of linguistics and cultural studies. While linguists involved in business research used to deal with foreign language acquisition and translation services without considering its cultural context, cultural studies often seem to deal with canonized culture excluding its social organizational embeddedness.

In developing a translation and language learning policy, we want to bridge the two approaches of culture and language. We see organizations as multi-cultural and multi-lingual phenomena. Organizations build up cultural experiences ("a culture program"), steered by management policies and organizing principles ("a management program") embedded in the variety of language games ("a language program") and mediated by translations and language learning. As a consequence, translation and language learning emerge within the triangle management-language-culture as shown in Figure 1. We will now discuss how culture and language became prominent within management theory.

Insert Figure 1

The Cultural Essence of Management

In the eighties, culture was introduced in management as a new strategic concept able to improve organizational effectiveness. Culture refers to a system of knowledge, ideology, values, laws, and day-to-day ritual that distinguish one group from another (Morgan, 1986). It was considered to be an integrating mechanism, a social or normative glue that holds the organization together (Schein, 1985). Employees obtain a shared understanding of the organizational mission, develop consensus on goals and means to attain the mission, communicate with and understand each other, and know what kind of behavior gets rewarded or punished. In sum, ambiguity is resolved by a dominant culture of shared values and a common language. Several authors argued that an organization with a strong culture creates a sense of identity and organizational commitment (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982), it enhances social system stability, and guides and shapes behavior (Louis, 1983).

Although there is a controversy to what extent organizational culture is manageable, culture remains a powerful concept in management. In considering managing a cultural activity, we direct our attention to the symbolic significance of even the most rational aspects of organizational life (Morgan, 1986). Managing becomes a "management of meaning" by which sense making is the crucial element. Because of this cultural "boom", culture was no longer an issue for organizational change agents only. Managers are seen as cultural managers (Schein, 1993), who value the cultural essence of the management process.

While the concept of culture became criticized (Calas & Smircich, 1987) and the interest has died, it can catch its second breath with the upcoming importance of intercultural management. With the internationalization, managing becomes a multi-cultural activity. Organizations consist of a multi-cultural workforce with different basic assumptions, values, beliefs and languages. The challenge is great given research showing the influence of national cultures on the development of beliefs and values within organizations (Adler & Jelinek, 1986; Smircich, 1983), and on different management styles and organizational structures (Hofstede, 1992). The question becomes: How to create meaning when the fundamental cultural assumptions of employees from different cultural traditions clash with each other? Given the close link between culture and language, managers will need to deal with translation and language in this sense-making process, and its implications for a translation and language policy in a multi-cultural setting.

The Linguistic Turn in Management and Organization Theory

The cultural revolution in management during the eighties is followed by an increase in attention for language in the nineties. Although, language is by far not as popular in managerial and academic settings as the cultural "trick" has been. Here, the management domain has followed evolutions from the social and cultural sciences mostly in the context of postmodernism. This extradisciplinary attention has led to a fundamental shift in approaching language in business contexts and the so-called "linguistic turn" in the organizational domain (Reed & Hughes, 1992). Winograd and Flores (1987) describe this turn as the shift from language as descriptive and representational to language as action and performative. Until then, language had been used in management theory in the context of communication, and in cultural, symbolic and semiotic analysis.

The awareness of the idea that language shapes organizational reality has led to two tendencies in the theoretical and empirical domain of management and organizational knowledge creation. First, the scope of interest became much broader and new business contexts and concepts were explored. The generative force of language is examined in well known contexts such as communication (Putnam, 1990), motivation (Carter & Jackson, 1993), leadership (Pondy, 1993), and organizational change (Pondy, 1983), but also in more unconventional area's like emotionality (Fineman, 1993), gender (Wilson, 1992) and sexuality (Mills & Tancred, 1992). Second, this interest became fundamental in character as language is seen as central in the epistemology of management science and innovative ways of relating language to organizational phenomena are explored. Several new points of attention become part of the managerial scenery such as language games, metaphors, conversations, dialogues and rhetorics, and the question about the interrelationship between power and language becomes central in the linguistic analysis of an organization (Burrell, 1988). It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss both tendencies more thoroughly (for a review, see Putnam & Fairst, in press).

However, the new "complexity" of language in management is seldom considered in the context of internationalization and the mix of different native languages. This complexity increases as we see organizations of today as multi-lingual firms where people speak not only different native but also different professional, hierarchical, and internal languages. The complexity can become revolutionary in character as it points out that the traditional link between nations and (national) languages are blurred and that geographical and political homogeneity is no longer reflected by homogeneous language use (Lambert, 1994b).

Two Perspectives on Language/Culture in the Management Process

The increased attention for language and culture in management has led to a rich range of approaches to language (Putnam & Fairst, in press) and culture (Martin, 1992). Out of these different approaches, we will focus on two contrasting perspectives in order to discuss the embeddedness of translation and language learning in the management process. These two perspectives with respect to language are: language as representation and language as action (Putnam, 1994). Parallel to these visions are two contrasting perspectives on culture: culture as a variable and culture as a metaphor (Smircich, 1983). Within these cultural perspectives, we notice a different role of language with respect to creating sense. Both perspectives lead to very different options for developing a translation and language policy as we will discuss in the following section. The first perspective stresses the perspective of the communication producers' instead of the receivers' perspective which makes communication inevitably normative. Within management, this perspective is momentarily dominant. The second perspective stresses that both producer and receiver construe meaning in an interactive way. Here, one engages in a more descriptive way of language analysis of the management process.

Language as Representation/Culture as Variable

The interest of management for language came largely through the growing awareness of the importance of communication for organizational effectiveness. In examining the role of language in management, scholars referred to the communicative aspect of language. Language is seen as a means of communication by which information is passed from one person to another person. It is a vehicle or a method to understand organizational constructs (Putnam & Fairst, in press).

Communication strives to reduce misunderstandings and ambiguity, and to reaffirm and support the mission and the structure of the organization so they appear as "natural facts."

A similar perspective can be found on culture when scholars take culture as a variable (Smircich, 1983). By taking culture as a variable, organizations are seen as instruments and adaptive mechanisms which produce culture. Organizations have a culture with language, symbols, myths, and stories being cultural artefacts (Schein, 1993). Culture is seen as a way to control and to guide behavior. According to this rather mechanistic view, culture can be manipulated in an instrumental way. It was this kind of mechanistic attitude that underlies many perspectives advocating the management of culture in the eighties (Morgan, 1986). For example, Schein (1985) argues that organizations differ in the degree to which the cultural messages are consistent and clear. Leaders are then advised to manage what they communicate. They can communicate explicitly and implicitly the assumptions and values they hold through what they pay attention to and reward, through modeling, through the manner in which they deal with critical incidents, through the criteria they use for recruitment, selection, and promotion. As a consequence, employees will internalize the uniform corporate values by conforming to the norms and expectations of the organizations, and a sense of common identity and shared meaning will exist.

In taking culture as a variable, language is seen as a cultural artefact. This implies that language is an indicator of the strength of the culture. Members of an organization with a strong culture will gradually develop common conceptual categories and a language geared to mutual understanding and acceptance (Schein, 1985). They establish a common language that permits interpretation of what is going on, and learn each other's semantic space, in order to determine what they mean by "a good product" or "high quality" produced at "low cost" to get into the "market" as rapidly as possible (Schein, 1985). The development and change of such a shared language will be highly dependent on the influence strategies and power games of management.

Language as Action/Culture as Metaphor

While the first perspective is grounded in a correspondence between language and the world, this second one exists as a consensual domain - as interlinked patterns of activity (Winograd & Flores, 1987, p. 76). This perspective sees language as a form of human social action, and argues that language creates organizational reality (e.g. Morgan, 1986; Bittner, 1965; Evered, 1983; Hummel, 1977; Silverman & Jones, 1976). Language becomes a process of communication that evolves from and contributes to the context, relationship, and social situation (Putnam & Fairst, in press). The language used by the members of any organizational group does more than characterizing that group, more than communicating information and more than enabling the members to make sense. The language they use defines their reality. It reveals how its members view their organizational world and how their world is constructed (Evered, 1983). So, an organization is created daily by the linguistic enactments of its members in the course of their everyday communication between each other.

The view that language plays a critical role in the construction of the organizational world, has been stimulated by the increasing interests of management scholars for language philosophy and postmodernism. From a postmodern perspective, there is a fundamental undecidability of language meaning. The rationality, wisdom or objectivity of managers is dependent on their colleagues' perception and reception of communication for it are their colleagues who interpret and reinterpret the sayings. “Rationality” is a product of social collaboration and complex negotiation processes (Gergen, 1992). For example, in an organizational change project introducing the team-concept, the meaning of “teams” was found to be different for the different stakeholders involved (Bouwen, 1993). In this perspective, studies of organizations focus on the plurality of language games, engage in deconstructions of organizational texts such as mission statements, and are sensitive to the norms of those who play these language games.

Parallel with this language view, a second perspective on culture argues that culture can not just be viewed as a simple variable that societies or organizations possess. In contrast, culture is a dynamic, ongoing proactive process of reality construction (Morgan, 1986). Here, culture is a metaphor, and organizations need to be considered as particular forms of human expression in which cultures are systems of shared cognitions, beliefs, and meaning. Language, symbols and rituals are not taken as cultural artefacts but instead as generative processes that shape meanings. Organizations have no culture but *are* cultural. Organizations rest in shared systems of meaning and hence in the shared interpretative schemes that create and recreate that meaning (Morgan, 1986). In contrast to the first perspective on culture, managers can never control culture to a full extent. They can only influence culture by being aware of the symbolic consequences of their actions and be aware of the interpretation of their communication by their colleagues and employees.

In this view that managers construct and reconstruct organizational culture, language is treated as a means of defining and negotiating subculture boundaries (Gregory, 1983). Language facilitates and serves as a barrier in negotiating understanding, rather than representing meaning (Putnam & Fairst, in press).

These two contrasting perspectives on language and culture represent only a selection out of a broader range of approaches to language in organization analysis (Putnam, 1994). A more elaborate description that clarifies how these major approaches are linked to insights from other disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, conversational analysis, cognitive psychology, semiotics, and critical language analysis has been reviewed by Putnam (1990). In a similar vein, the multi-disciplinary origins for the different uses of culture in organizations has been reviewed by Smircich (1983). Furthermore, other distinctions than those stressed in management literature may be relevant to develop models which ground a translation and language learning policy. A distinction that has become prevalent in translation studies as well as in other disciplines such as linguistics, systems theory, and philosophy, is the normative versus descriptive view. Normative views deal with goals to be achieved and with ideals rather than pragmatical matters. Descriptive views deal with contextualized communicational phenomena and with all aspects and partners of communication. In business communication, the descriptive view will stress that economic target groups care more about the impact of messages than the companies' goals and intentions. Language policy then becomes a matter of open partnership instead of unilateral control. These two remarks show that an interdisciplinary approach to translation and language learning is both inevitable and necessary. At the same time, we notice that most disciplines continue their isolated efforts, and it is striking that the tendencies we distinguished within the management domain remain unrelated from those in linguistics, pragmatics and translation studies. But in these studies, the link with social organization is often not developed. As the "linguistic turn" takes a specific form in each of these disciplines, its development might gain from a more intensive "dialogue" among the different disciplines.

We will now return to the two contrasting perspectives on language and culture and examine their implications for the role of translation and language in the management process and the development of a language policy.

Translation in Management: Necessary Evil or Cultural Exchange?

Many failures of management like a failed introduction of a new product, an unsuccessful marketing campaign, or a missed contract go back to undervaluing the role of translation. Other so-called translation blunders can be added to the Pepsi-Cola illustration in section one. When Nike's slogan - 'Just do it' - was shown in a television advertisement, in which several persons repeated this slogan in their native language, one man, a Samburu tribesman, was *really* saying 'I don't want these, give me big shoes'. The promotion staff of Nike did not really know what these natives were saying, and Nike could start thinking of a new advertisement (Ricks, 1993). Blunders can become so notorious, as in the case where firms promote their products using the wrong language. For instance, Time magazine ran a Spanish-language advertisement in its Brazilian edition (Ricks, 1993). Although these incidents and mistakes are not without any humour, and even entertaining to outsiders, firms do not like to admit their cultural "insensitivity." Furthermore, such mistakes imply a high financial cost, a blot on their corporate image, and are not always easy to "repair" or to align with their original intentions. As an outsider, one can laugh how these mistakes could ever happen, but as they happen, it is more appropriate to take a closer look and to understand why these mistakes occur from an organizational perspective. In translation studies, these blunders have been interesting material for scholars investigating the roles of the language game (Toury, 1980).

We will argue that these translation blunders are not so much the result of incompetent translators but of the way translation activities are embedded in the management system. The question then becomes how translation as a particular kind of communication can both be valued by and give value to the management process. Therefore, we have to consider how the translation act is integrated in the broader management process, and how translators are involved in the organizing process. We will discuss the embeddedness of translation in the management process based on the two perspectives on language and culture in management: translation as "a neutral act", and translation as "a management act". These two visions differ with respect to the meaning of translation, the role and influence of translators, and the expected value of translation for management.

Translation as a Neutral Act

When managers take language as a vehicle of communication, they are likely to consider the existence of different languages as a problem they need to deal with. Translation is a way to solve this problem and to make communication possible. It is supposed to be a neutral act and management asks "correct" translations. Translation is supposed to offer no additional value, it can only make mistakes.

This meaning of translation is reflected in the role and influence of translators and the expectations managers have. From the managers' point of view, translators play the role of clarifying and facilitating communication. They come in as transmitters or sometimes facilitators of the conversation between them and the other parties. Translators can literally be found in a side-office or a cornerroom where they in silence translate notes and brochures that will be distributed to another audience, speaking coincidentally another language. Conversations with business translators show that they experience managers many times as being impatient, expecting translations "to be finished by yesterday", and asking their translators to be permanently stand by (Hermans, Simoens & Jansen, 1994). Interestingly, this position of translation within companies is reflected in spatial terms. The peripheral position of the offices used for translation activities is often a clear illustration of the semiotic structure of social values and the operational function allotted to translation.

Fundamentally, translators are located in no man's land. Translation becomes absorbed in managerial systems and daily pressures, and is not given a second thought. The act of translating is passed over. It is supposed to be a neutral act without any additional value. Translators just lend their voice, and help the awkward speaker who is not able to speak the language of his/her interlocutor. Translation in a business context emerges as a necessary evil which needs to be done but should not stop daily routine and rhythm.

It is well known that specialists in translation question this view as if translation could ever be a neutral act. They have shown how naive the idea is that translation would not loose anything from the original message, nor that it would not offer any additional value. The discussion on the equivalence concept has shown that the goals of translational communication can never be defined in unidirectional terms, and as mere execution (Toury, 1980). It becomes crucial to embed such insights in the context of social organization and to draw the consequences for the way management approaches business translation (Lambert, 1994a). Translation, which is located within the social organization, then becomes a management act.

Translation as a Management Act

In this second vision, translation is not seen as problematic for management but as an act that offers additional value to the management process. This reflects the view in translation studies that translation can never be only a copy of a given text but that it always offers value. As the meaning and value of translation is considered within the management process of sense making, the question becomes: What does "translating" mean, what does it mean for whom, and what is its impact on language use within the management process? Given the view that management is a process of sense making between different parties, translation becomes an extremely complex act, mediated by multiple parties. Furthermore, managers and others can discover that translation is an important job. It brings them to the critical question what translation really implies and how to translate from one language to another. This question has been central in discussions between linguists and translators. While many linguists may stress the theoretical impossibility of translation, translators are faced with the practicalities to deal with specific translation problems. According to an important group of scholars in translation studies (Toury, 1980; Holz-Mänttäri, 1984; Snell-Hornby, 1989), the issue of possibility/impossibility of equivalence is outdated, as they are aware of the complexity of the norms involved in the translation process due to the various traditions, goals and partners involved. For them, the idea of impossible translations refers to the point of view of those who adopt the point of view of the committer, and not of the user, the market or the observer. The difficulties that face translators, however, may not be a reason for management to downvalue their role nor for translators to make up excuses. In contrast, the "complexity" of their job requires an intensive dialogue with the involved parties. There are a number of parties involved with translation in an organizational context. Among them are the translators and copywriters whose jobs are directly linked to translating and writing texts. But also employees in other functions like marketing, engineering and strategy, are involved parties. What is needed is a dialogue in which the different parties voice what it is that they can expect and offer to each other, and how they can cooperate in realizing a constructive translation strategy. The quality of the dialogue will depend on the more or less common ground and expectations between the partners. Through this dialogue, translation will become a performative act, which shapes a "new" organizational reality. The translator becomes a "writer" of organizational text. There is no substantial difference between producing in one language and translating into other languages. They both are performative acts.

Let' s give an example in the business context. Translation of a new mission statement for an international company cannot be done after the statement is completely thought of and written in the dominant language of the company. In doing so, one adopts a technical approach, meaning that translations have to be dealt with after all other aspects have been arranged. In contrast, translation will need to be considered from the beginning on. Here, feedback and two-way communication can happen by which management and translators investigate the meaning of the mission statement for the target culture. Together they will gain insight into the idiosyncratic values of the original mission statement and examine how the differences in meaning between the two cultures can be aligned into a "common" mission statement. So, the mission will be rewritten taking into account the cultural specificity and embeddedness of certain values. Translation is not anymore a technical aid but becomes a cultural production. It is a cultural phenomenon, in which translation (as well as learning new languages) figures as a culturally rooted discourse discovering by the language system a new culture.

This vision on translation as cultural production is already an accepted view in translation studies (Toury, 1980; Holz-Mänttäri, 1984; Lambert, 1994a; Snell-Hornby, 1989). However, it stills needs to be integrated in the production of social organization, necessarily embarking in an interdisciplinary vein. Therefore, translation and the role and status of translators within a business company need to be reconsidered. Translation within a business context may lead to several at first sight contradictory consequences. While an appreciation of translation and the recognition of the value of different languages is a remedy for language and cultural dominance, it can, at the same time, instigate cultural isolationism and ethnocentricity. However, this kind of dichotomous thinking needs to be transcended (Steyaert & Janssens, 1994). Translation can be seen as a way to prevent cultural dominance as well as acknowledging different cultural identities. Translation functions as a "third" language between the original text and the translated one. It is an active zone, where the differences between multiple meaning systems can be explored. Translation is not only a way for making communication possible, it gives an opportunity to learn about the cultural embeddedness of a language, and is thus a goal on itself. The grey zone where the translator traverses from one language to another and backwards, is not empty but more like a cultural exploration. Translators bridge and explore actively the space between two or more speakers, languages, texts, and cultures. As a consequence, translators cannot be used as stand-by specialists who can quickly transfer the mission statement from one language into several other ones. In contrast, they can be seen as key informants of a specific culture which implies that they are best native speakers. Or they should look for key informants in the local subsidiaries. They are mediators being able to understand and bridge multiple cultural perspectives.

Organizational Language Learning policy: A Matter of Second Language Learning or More?

In the introduction, we illustrated the importance and difficulties of language learning in international business contexts. Business firms are increasingly confronted with situations in which they have to cope creatively with cultural differences and to develop skills in intercultural communication. Many other examples can be added to the statement "that going abroad implies learning a new language" or to the situation where a merged firm has to "choose" a communication language. What to think of a Flemish high tech firm near the French boarder finding it more easy to hire French civil engineers than to integrate engineers from other parts of Flanders who speak another dialect and always leave after a couple of months? How to judge the communication strategy given to expatriates of learning a couple of "currency coins" like information on local sport vedettes, as a way of showing that they "belong" to the new culture community (Brein & David, 1971)? How long will it take before the expatriate owns up and will it become clear that s/he has not really a profound understanding of her/his new cultural situation? These interesting but at the same time problematic examples seem a challenge for cultural and linguistic specialists to understand and criticize.

As business firms are struggling with aligning the multiple languages spoken in their organization, related experiences and insights can be helpful in developing a language learning policy. The findings of research on expatriates' adjustment (e.g. Black, 1988; Janssens, 1992) can be very useful as the general context for intercultural collaboration. Furthermore, the problems that business firms now face, have been noticed in other contexts such as developing aid (Peace Corps, World Vision), immigration (Berry, Kim & Boski, 1988), intercultural marriages, education (see Erasmus-project), art (initiatives such as The Cultural Capital of Europe, Europalia) and sports (IOC, FIFA). International politico-economic contexts such as the European Union, GATT, and NAFTA are inspiring examples for the type of language policies that business firms are to develop. The EU, for instance, invests a lot of money and effort in respecting the heterogeneity of languages and cultures. Not always without problems, as Reeves (1989) concluded recently when stating that languages form a barrier no EC directive can eliminate (see also Lambert, 1994a). So, a lot can be learned from experiences and literature from outside the management domain.

We will develop two views on how language learning is closely interwoven into the management process of an international business firm. One view sees language learning as a technical skill, the second one as a travelling experience. These views differ with respect to the role of learning a second language, the importance attached to the use of multiple languages and the sustainability of such a situation through managerial initiatives. Although similar visions have been developed in discussions within translation studies, they still need to be developed in an international business context.

Language Learning as a Technical Skill

Within the perspective of language as representation, learning foreign languages will be approached in a functionalist way[2]. It is seen as a technical skill that employees should have or acquire, and for which firms are prepared to pay a lot of money. Newly hired or promoted employees for an international assignment are given crash courses in order to learn communicative abilities as soon as possible. This instrumental approach is also reflected in the way business firms deal with different languages, leading to pragmatical but not always well-considered strategies. For example, the use of English as the dominant business language shows a highly instrumental approach in which speaking another language is just a tool to communicate "easily". It is supposed to be a neutral skill without influence on the management process. A lot of Western firms with investments in Eastern-Europe are using such a strategy. For example, since their official business language is English, a Belgian firm with acquisitions in Hungary gives local managers the "opportunity" to learn English for reasons of easiness. However, they overlook with the same pragmatical ease what is lost when one would look at this strategy from the second perspective. And what about the resistance one can expect from the local Hungarians when the new owners neglect their native language and what this means to them? Interviews with Hungarian consultants of that firm showed that the Hungarian employees felt uncomfortable speaking English but also threatened in their own cultural identity. In our view, learning Hungarian should be a necessary step for the expatriates there, otherwise one is very close to a new colonial occupation.

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2 'Functionalist' is supposed to be seen as mechanical and efficiency-driven, and refers to the 'functionalist' paradigm, as distinguished by Burrell & Morgan (1979) in their paradigmatical presentation of organizational theories. 'Functional' is differently used in Translation Studies (Toury, 1980).

According to scholars in translation studies, the selection of the lingua franca as well as the use of translation or particular translation models will never exclude the possibility of power games and post-colonial relations (Greenblatt, 1991; Hyun & Lambert, 1994; Lambert, 1994a; Poltermann, 1995). They argue that only a better awareness of the cultural implications of international communication with the aid of translation and language will allow for the development of a language strategy within the management context.

Language Learning as Cultural Production

Within the perspective of language as performative, the discussion of language learning becomes much more complex and is doubly defined: How to cope with a multi-lingual situation taking into account the pluriformity of language games and the rhetorical construction of reality?

The first question raises the issue whether a firm should choose for the use of one dominant language or should respect the multiplicity of several local languages. Different theoretical scenarios are possible, based on a strategy typology of different types of international firms: multinational, global, international and transnational firms (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989). Given the duality of integration and local responsiveness, a global firm takes the integration option, the multinational the local responsiveness alternative, and the transnational firm tries to balance both. We would expect that a global firm will impose the language of headquarters as the generalized language, neglecting the rich possibilities of the local languages of their subsidiaries. In a multinational firm, the local languages will be dominant with little attention to the headquarter's language. The transnational firm will try to value the culture and identity from both the parent and the local countries. It is especially this strategy where a business firm chooses for a continuous and flexible "va-et-vient" between different languages that we would like to examine. Here, one does not rush into adaptation or acculturation but the differences are kept and fostered. The estrangement is not given up directly. One goes working in a foreign country or one acquires a plant in another country in the same way as one is used to travel. “Multi-language travel” refers to the idea that a language policy of a business firm can be based on the metaphor of “travelling”. One tries to understand and feel the other culture but one lives, sometimes discovers, at the same time one's own culture. There is a dynamic mutual exchange: one learns a new language/culture by comparing to one's native, and by exploring a second language/culture, a person or an organization becomes conscious of their own specificity. Although we have not studied the relationship between strategy type and language strategy, it is our hypothesis that many firms use a language learning policy of a global firm although their strategic policy is different.

Second, a language learning policy embedded in a performative vision on language, will give attention to how language shapes organizational reality and how organizational language games, metaphors, conversations, and rhetorical strategies are intermingled with a multi-lingual situation. For instance, organizational language games refer to the specific way in which a business firm creates its own organizational identity. Different firms develop different languages games (like one of control, trust or competence), and also within one firm, several language games can be competing in the construction of the organizational reality. A language game is related to one's professional, cultural, national background as well as to the sector and market niche of the firm. Especially in international business firms, national and organizational languages become interrelated in a complex way. As Wertsch (1991, p.106) notes, however, “it is often difficult to distinguish the various social languages and speech genres in a national language. Even though different social languages and speech genres serve different functions, they look “more or less alike” in that they appear within a national language.” As language is socially stratified (Bakhtin, 1981), the situation of two or more languages will increase this complexity. For instance, using a second language requires an ability to understand the level of how the language is used. Although Dutch and Flemish people speak the same language, a different use can be seen: Flemish use a language (game) of politeness and distance, while Dutch use a language of closeness and informality. Flemish use a lot "You" instead of "you", which is almost never used by a Dutch person. Remark how language shapes a different reality and that such a difference in reality can not be realized in English. The organizational dialogue is not only a communicative exercise but focuses on the interplay between different languages games, and how they act differently in various languages.

Another example concerns the role of rhetorics in management. Rhetorics is one of the main innovative approaches to organization studies, highly linked to the emergence of postmodern perspectives. As our era makes a shift "from ratio to o-ratio," there is, besides the linguistic turn, also a rhetorical (re)turn (Simons, 1989). There already has been experimentations in social psychology (Billig, 1987; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and human sciences in general (Simons, 1989). Within the management domain, the focus is on the rhetorical strategies and the use of metaphors by managers (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990). Questions which raise from such a rhetorical perspective are : How are managers arguing while giving guidance to their collaborators or while negotiating with business clients? What is the difference between rhetorical strategies in one's native and in a second language?

Conclusion

We have raised the question of how to manage and create meaning in an international business context. This question may be more difficult to answer and to realize in practice given the interconnectedness of management, culture and language, and as a consequence, the complexity of the sense making process in a multi-cultural and multi-linguistic setting. We see translation and language learning as two activities mediating this management process. Organisations are therefore confronted with the task to develop a translation and language learning policy. We have discussed two different perspectives that may guide organisations in designing their policy and advise organizations to call for the input of all different parties involved.

So far, we have not made any explicit preference for one of the two models. Although we have presented them in a highly contrasted way, we would like to read them more as a tendency from an instrumental approach of language use towards a socio-cultural situated perspective on translation and language learning. Although, we recognize the technical dimension of translation and language learning, its one-sidedness has been documented throughout the discussion of the model of translation and language learning as "a management act". Therefore, we want to argue in favor of a policy which goes beyond an instrumental approach and is able to integrate both perspectives, e.g. to combine the technical aspects with the socio-cultural context.

We have mainly given conceptual arguments in favor of an interdisciplinary and multiperspectivistic grounded policy for translation and language learning in the management process without really incorporating empirical understandings. However, research concerning translation and language learning in an international business context is just starting. As a way of concluding this paper, we want to review different questions which were directly and indirectly raised throughout this text and suggest them as possible research questions. Some of them reflect basic questions in management and translation studies, others reflect new approaches to the study of translation and language learning. The general issue of what translation can ask from and offer to management and vice versa, generates the following research questions:

- What is the position of translation and translators in multi-language firms? At what moment in the management process do they become involved? Does management inform the translators about the purpose of the translation act? Is there a feedback process available through which translators and managers interact with each other?
- To what extent does the proficiency of the translator involve specific organizational knowledge? Can translation be an out-sourcing activity or does translation require the use of internal employees?

- What are possible scenarios for conceiving a kind of translation management? Do these scenarios differ with respect to the strategy of the international firm? For example, will international organizations with a global integration strategy use different scenarios than organizations with a local responsiveness strategy?
- What other economic and managerial factors will influence the role and position of translators? Is it the stage of internationalization, the kind of technology, or the type of products and customers?
- What are the effects of these different scenarios on the relations between different language-groups within the organization? On organizational image? On organizational effectiveness?
- What is the impact of the language policy adopted by companies on the socio-political relationships between governments and citizens? To what extent is the language policy linked with power relations?

Other types of research questions refer to the relationship between multiple language competence and management:

- How important are foreign language skills for managers? Does foreign language competence improve managers' performance and chances for promotion? How do organizations obtain foreign language skills: through recruiting or training?
- What are the implications of the dominance of a specific national language in a multi-cultural organization or group? Does this increase social categorization, ethnic identity and the use of stereotypes? What are the possible consequences? Is there more conflict between different national groups? How do these different groups deal with power?
- Is multiple-language competence a way to create trust and facilitate understanding in a multi-language organization? Or are other ways possible?

- Do different national languages construct organizational reality in a different way? How are various languages and language strategies/policies related to the construction of diversity of organizational language games? Is the marketing game different when one speaks his/her native language or another language? How is organizational reality constructed when individuals with different native languages interact?

Although the mistakes, problems and difficulties in translation and intercultural communication confirm the importance we attach to translation and language learning, some important ethical and political questions concerning the accountability and urgency of these issues, remain to be addressed. Who are the major stakeholders in translation and language problems? How crucial is the language "programming" of an organization for each of these stakeholders? Is dealing with language and culture not luxurious in times of recession? But then, do translation and language learning not address basic cultural questions for international organizations of the future?

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Figure 1:

Translation and Language Learning as Mediating Activities in a Multi-Cultural and Multi-Lingual Management Setting