

## **The Englishnization of Business: challenges and strategies**

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### **Abstract**

In the global business environment, the companies compete and cooperate in a common marketplace, frequently adopting a common language of communication. The use of English as a business lingua franca (BELF) in multinational and multicultural enterprises is thus no longer a novelty. Some corporations take it even further, proceeding to Englishnization, by purposefully implementing the use of English as the only language in all domains of communication and business operations. The decision of switching interactions to a specific language of choice might facilitate the communication, but it also presents new challenges to the users, due to the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This descriptive qualitative study takes a closer look at four reports of implementation of English as a common business language: a business organization in central Europe, two corporate mergers in Scandinavia, and the case of an online retail company in Japan, in order to identify the main difficulties encountered during the process. Based on these case-studies, the paper also summarizes a series of tools and strategies recommended to mitigate and overcome the obstacles.

**Keywords:** corporate language; Business English Lingua Franca; Englishnization, language strategy.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Quoting the British sociologist Anthony Giddens, globalization is “the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens, 1990, p. 64). The world of today is no longer one confined to national borders, and neither is business. The movement and operation of people, goods and services in foreign markets is increasing day by day, bringing along new challenges. Language question is one of them, for now there is a need to understand and be understood by clients, partners and coworkers from different linguistic backgrounds.

It is important to differentiate between two terms: globalization and internationalization. Globalization is characterized by growing worldwide interconnections, rapid change, growing numbers and diversity of participants and greater managerial complexity (Parker, 2005). It is a process of increased interaction and integration among the people, businesses, and governments, driven by international economic interests and propelled by modern communication and information technologies. Internationalization, on the other hand, is considered to be a response to

globalization. Globalization is an activity, a challenge that presents itself to the business owners across the world, but internationalization is a mindset, a notion that an increasingly global market calls for new approaches and new interactions. The corporate language in this context becomes a tool for internationalization. It becomes a code language for business purposes, to facilitate the interaction between clients and the business, between suppliers and buyers, between different subsidiaries and parts of the same company. More often than not, the choice falls for English.

As pointed out by Svartvik, Leech and Crystal (2016, p.1), just five languages – Chinese, English, Spanish, Russian and Hindi – are spoken by more than half of the world's population. Even though English is not the one with the highest number of native speakers, there is a clear and worldwide recognition of its special status: it is a highly functional form of international communication. While the majority of other languages work as the most effective communicative channel within a given country or territory, English excels as soon as there is a need to establish contact and communicate across countries or cultures. Three major changes in the second half of the XVIII and all through the XIX century (after 1750 and until about 1900) contributed for it to happen (Stevens, P., 1992, p.29): first, the populations of the overseas English-speaking settlements significantly increased in size and became states with colonial governments. Second, the colonies began their pursuits for independence, taking pride in the varieties of English and enforcing the linguistic differences. And third, as these new states stabilized and flourished, there were more and more non-native speakers that had to learn English in order to interact with the governing class, make commercial exchanges, find employment, etc. The widespread use of English can of course be seen as a result of lucky coincidences. Were, for example, the Dutch or the Portuguese the ones to establish and maintain the most successful and strategic trading routes or to apply different politics to their colonies, probably the linguistic dominance in today's world would be a different one. More recently, the economic power of United States of America since the post-WWII period and the spread of Internet also have contributed to increment English as a global language. History has proven that commerce, development and a common language go hand in hand – something that applies to the modern business world as well.

In response to the demands of operating in multiple foreign language environments, many multinational corporations (MNC) have adopted English with the intention of facilitating the process of in-house as well as customer communications. Among such multinational corporations are General Electric (origins in USA), L'Oreal (France), Nokia and Kone Corporation (Finland), Siemens (Germany), Electrolux and Nordea (Sweden) and many others (Latukha, Doleeva, Järnlström, Jokinen, & Piekkari, 2016). The third biggest Japanese carmaker Honda has announced that by 2020 its interregional working language will be English (Greimel, 2015; Borzykowski, 2017) and surely many more will follow the suit. A common corporate language can bring clear benefits even for companies that already come from an originally English-speaking country: it saves time and money, makes life easier for recruiters, narrows the choices of applicants and provides advantage in negotiations (Cavaliere, Glasscock, & Sen, 2014). The primary concern of this paper is to identify the consequences that arise when English is adopted as BELF or when a complete Englishization is proposed, to provide an overview of the recommendations to solve the problems and to highlight the importance of adequate strategies and managerial decisions.

## II. USING ENGLISH AS BUSINESS LINGUA FRANCA

English is spreading faster than any language in world history, and to a large extent this is due to English being increasingly recognized as the de facto language of business (Neeley, 2012). International business community is characterized by a multinational workforce continually moving and communicating across borders, leading to numerous situations in which English is used by first, second and foreign language speakers of English simultaneously, sometimes in co-existence with one or more other languages (Nickerson, 2005). Three key motives push the companies to adopt English. The first is pressure from competitors in the global arena. As suppliers, customers, partners, and rivals increasingly use English as the language of business, firms feel pressure to do the same. The second is the outsourcing of different tasks to different countries. Linguistic diversity can become an obstacle if the success depends on departments in different countries working in harmony with each other. The common goal can be pursued more efficiently if they speak the same tongue. Finally, a third reason that drives multinationals to mandate English as a business language is mergers and acquisitions of companies worldwide (Neeley, Hinds, & Cramton, 2012).

The term English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) refers to the use of English as a common language among speakers of different first languages, who come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Seidlhofer (2001, p.138) defends that it is not merely a copy of English as a Native Language (ENL) that is being distributed worldwide. She highlights the nature of ELF as evolving out of spread, not distribution, and advocates that the role and importance of ELF users should be recognized. Particularly relevant is her statement that ELF speakers are not primarily concerned with emulating the way native speakers use their mother tongue within their own communities, nor with socio-psychological and ideological meta-level discussions. Instead, the central concerns for this domain are efficiency, relevance and economy in language learning and language use (Seidlhofer, 2001).

Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta (2005, p. 403) mention Business English Lingua Franca (BELF) as neutral and shared communication code used by international speakers with the common purpose of communicating successfully in a global business environment. BELF is neutral in the sense that none of the speakers can claim it as her/his mother tongue; it is shared in the sense that it is used for conducting business within the global business discourse community, whose members are BELF users and communicators in their own right – not “non-native speakers” or “learners” (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta, 2005). Yet some authors (Rogerson-Revell, 2007) point out that both terms ELF and BELF exclude a substantial amount of communication, when English is used as a common language between ELF and English as a mother tongue (EMT) speakers. Broader terms such as ‘English as an International Language’ (EIL), along with ‘Global English’ and ‘International English’, are thus used. For the purpose of this paper, no distinction between BELF and EIL will be made, for the challenges that present themselves to the users can be identified in both communities.

According to Modiano (2009, p.212), a lingua franca is a language which has considerable utility in multicultural settings, among people with differing linguistic profiles. This author gives the example of what he calls the ‘Euro-English’: with Euro-English, it is believed that idiosyncratic features found in the English of mainland Europeans – their accents, local lexical coinages, and various lexico-grammatical features – can be the basis for a second language variety. In many respects, the Euro-

English model is related to EIL. In both Euro-English and EIL there is the understanding that English is taught and learned because it is useful in multicultural settings. English is no longer a ‘foreign language’, acquired because one aspires to interact with its native speakers, the ones who belong to the “Inner Circle” that Kachru (1982) described in early 1980s. Instead, it has now become an important mainland European language in its own right, one which facilitates communication between non-native speakers.

Further than BELF goes Englishnization – in this context, an approach used by some companies that implement the English language as the only means of communication. Sato (2015, p. 22) describes it as one of today’s typical corporate language policies that requires all employees to speak or use English for their work, wherever they are and regardless of what they do. Paterson (2015, p.195) portrays Englishnization as “stringent linguistic demands” made to the employees, who are expected to be able to use English in all meetings, documents and communications. Nixon (2015) distinguishes between the incentive approach and the mandated approach, where the use of English is either encouraged by offering a monetary or other type of incentive, or, to the contrary, sets strict requirements and penalizes the ones who do not comply.

When considering the drawbacks of the use of EIL in terms of culture, some authors argue that it can encourage a certain ethnocentricity, especially if the business has English-speaking origin. The imposition of dominant language can also mean the disregard of the local customs and asserting that the right way to do things is the “American way” (Cavaliere, Glasscock, & Sen, 2014). The English-speaking world has been stereotyped as low-context; characterized by step-by-step, linear, compartmentalized, and logic-based thinking (Hall, 1976). Unfortunately for the EML speakers, much of the world tends to be high-context, but Englishnization may further entrench the idea that it is not necessary to learn about or accommodate the difference inherent in other cultures. Reinforcing the primacy of the English words may lock them into the low-context comfort zone (Cavaliere, Glasscock, & Sen, 2014). It can induce self-satisfaction and a dangerous condescension toward the less developed countries. Such approach can promote backlashes, for some people fear the homogenization of cultures and the loss of local identities. Neeley (2012) proposes an alternative point of view, suggesting that the capacity to communicate in several languages is a tool to spread knowledge about one’s own culture and ultimately, about the company one belongs to. The speakers creating the lingua franca do have a cultural background and bring into business interaction their own culture bound views (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). The notion of this original context and its importance for the communication process can be useful when analyzing the factors that influence the use of BELF and can help to explain the success or shortcomings of the language strategies applied.

### **III. LEARNING FROM THE EXAMPLES**

In 2010, Rakuten - Japan’s largest online marketplace - implemented the English as the company’s official language of business practically overnight, and is the most well-known case of Englishnization. The CEO of Rakuten (Mikitani, 2016) argues that Japan is working inside a linguistic bubble – with the businesses oriented toward the domestic market and paying little attention to global trends. He defends the choice of his strategy by pointing out that switching to English has the capacity to make Japanese

firms more competitive, while opening employee's' eyes to the outside world. Another benefit of using English in business: the language has few power markers. Its use can therefore help to break down the hierarchical, bureaucratic barriers that are entrenched in Japanese society and reflected in Japanese conversation, which could boost efficiency. Yet there are several downsides as well. The implementation of the “English only mandate” is perceived as a shock and the employees become rather scared and unwilling to cooperate. Besides that, the sudden and total change creates a new kind of professional differentiation among Japanese employees that does not exist when they function in their native language. It can create situations where an employee with excellent professional skills but poor language competence gets marginalized, while a less competent worker with good English proficiency is being promoted (Nixon, 2015, p. 23).

For growing number of Europeans, English now functions as a ‘second language’ in an increasing number of domains. English is a lingua franca of unprecedented importance also in this part of the world. It is now a universal language used globally in myriad ways, by people with differing abilities, accents, grammars, and lexical registers (Modiano, 2009). Nevertheless, a short study conducted in a particular European organization - Groupe Consultatif Actuariel Europeen (GCAE), now Actuarial Association of Europe, revealed that the implementation of a common official business language is not always perceived in a pacific manner (Rogerson-Revell, P., 2007). This study explores the use of EIB in business meetings, which are essential to this type of organization, and highlights some of the difficulties and frustrations encountered by non-native English speakers. The findings indicate three main groups of concerns: a) cultural: differences in working styles and the need to give participants an adequate amount of time to respond in meetings, as well as to the tendency to defer to more senior associates, b) organizational: relative isolation of smaller associations or subsidiaries, particularly if predominantly populated by non-native speakers of the organizational lingua franca; c) language barrier: particularly in regards to oral communication, since the requirement to have a wide range of linguistic competence can cause problems.

Louhiala Salminen et.al also present a 2001 study of two cross-border corporate mergers in Scandinavia. The merging companies investigated are from Finland and Sweden, having Finnish and Swedish as their respective native languages but using English as a lingua franca. Overall, the descriptions of problematic situations in “foreign language use” are consistent with those identified in GCAE – in most cases problems appear in oral communication, telephone conversations, as well as the difficulty in meetings. Even though the biggest number of employees are non-native English speakers and thus do not have the additional pressure of having to deal with EMT speakers, the discomfort of not being able to effectively express opinions or convey nuances, or acting assertively in negotiations, is still upsetting. The perception of underlying cultural differences is also reported, with reference to distinct communication styles used by the employees of each nationality (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005).

These cultural and linguistic challenges relate to Halls concepts of high- and low-context culture, and as such, do not have to be seen as unexpected. Both Japan and the Scandinavian countries are perceived to be high-context cultures, which make greater distinctions between insiders and outsiders than low-context cultures do. It can explain the animosity employees of Rakuten feel towards the imposed policy of a compulsory, low-context foreign language use and also towards the staff members of

international background (Neeley, 2012). Yet Halls model does not allow to elaborate further on the complexities of interactions that occur within two high-context cultures or in an even more complex multicultural environment, as the Finnish or GCAE cases. In the Swedish-Finnish mergers, although the communication culture is perceived as different by representatives of each nationality, authors report no actual evidence of real conflict or misunderstandings. It seems to indicate that there are shared values in existence, suggesting that the cultural and geographical proximity, as well as experiences obtained through work enable a more intense commitment (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). Thus it is necessary to look beyond the extent of a national culture and explore the engagement itself. The existing research focuses mostly on practical difficulties while implementing English as a corporate language and the implications on human resource management rather than exploring other possibilities. Despite the consensual belief that language is important to conducting international business, role of language as a key asset in multinational management is sometimes underrated and the deeper implications on communication are not always explored.

Culture and language are difficult to separate in international business. Language is the vehicle for culture; cultural values are reflected in the language spoken. Cultural facility increases familiarity between negotiating partners, which thereby increases trust; language may simply be a business tool or may additionally serve to increase trust. But – crucially - language is a tool, while culture is not: parties cannot transact in a culture; they must transact in a language, and this is what conveys language the special power (Selmier & Oh, 2012).

Nevertheless, there must be a clear perception of the different implications that the language standardization has on a business. Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, and Welch (1999) have observed language in the MNC from three perspectives: as a barrier, as a facilitator, or as a source of power.

A barrier. Neeley, Hinds and Cramton (2012) surveyed five MNCs in Germany, France, Japan, and the U.S., noting that side-effects of using English as a lingua franca include a decline in employee collaboration, productivity, and performance. The use of English could lead to organizational inefficiencies, such as diminished confidence among non-native speakers, or negative behavioral responses, such as increased hostility and distrust toward native speakers. General problems are pointed out by several authors (Welch, D., Welch, L., & Piekkari, R., 2005; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Mikitani, 2016): the work is more time consuming for meetings now take longer, the implementation takes time because the documents, proceedings, and other material must be translated, communication flow is more vulnerable to distortion, employees must adapt at a fast pace thus inducing stress, frustration rises. Social exclusion through language can also affect the individual's sense of belongingness (corporate identity), thus affecting attempts to develop corporate cohesion across diverse operations (Welch, D., Welch, L., & Piekkari, R., 2005). Neeley (2011) on her turn reports loss of productivity, lack of time to study, and conflicted views among managers impede staff success. Language issues become barriers, slowing down the speed of decision making and increasing related costs.

Additional problems reported by Rogerson-Revell (2007) range from comprehension difficulties, i.e. processing fast or quiet speech, through difficulties in both comprehension and production, due to vocabulary limitations, to difficulties in managing interactions appropriately. Part of the responsibilities are cast upon the native English speakers – more effort is expected from them to adapt the way of expressing themselves, due to the strong native accents and use of idioms or advanced terms.

Aichorn and Puck (2017) corroborate: communication with native English speakers can be significantly more difficult to comprehend, in particular if they fail to adapt their language accordingly. This creates a high threat to communication, for it can accentuate feelings of anxiety and discomfort among non-natives. The use of a very sophisticated language can create an additional barrier and impede communication.

A facilitator. Among the most obvious reasons is the improvement of information flow between units in the various foreign locations of an MNC, and easy access to company documents, such as manuals, technical reports, operating procedures, etc. (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999). Nixon (2015) points out other positive aspects: individuals can realize promotional opportunities and have increased job market security. A person who attains fluency in English is likely to gain more confidence and develop a feeling of security, both of which are important emotions to have amid a growing scarcity of well-paying jobs. When people become proficient in English, they also become more competent at the different kinds of work roles that require English communication. Mikitani (2016) argues that Englishization has helped to increase the efficiency and competitiveness of Rakutens operations more than ever, precisely because there is no longer need for translation, the general competence levels are now higher and a much needed global perspective is obtained.

A source of power. Another reported challenge is the pressure that the introduction of a selected common language places upon both regular employees and managers reaching for the top positions. Studies conducted in Finland (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999) and Russia (Latukha et al., 2016) demonstrate that a corporate language not only may play the role of a glass ceiling for the vertical mobility of employees but it also acts as a glass wall to horizontal career moves. Marschan-Piekkari (1999, p.381) mentions the implicit message: “if you are interested in career progression in this company, it is essential that you learn the common language”. Also at Rakuten the fear of losing ones’ job due to insufficient English skills was real: all employees had to learn English within two years or risk being demoted or fired (Neeley, 2012). Language can also be a considerable source of power for those individuals and groups who possess fluency in the key languages used within the multinational context. Such power may be delivered to individuals whose formal status would not normally allow them access to confidential and strategic company information or may provide them with opportunities to act as gatekeepers, thus deciding what information is transmitted to either headquarters or to subsidiary staff (Welch, D., Welch, L., & Piekkari, R., 2005).

Mikitani (2016, p. 2) defends another type of empowerment, stating that “the diverse and modern approach breathes new life into a moribund business culture”. By speaking a different language, a different behavior and a different thought process also becomes possible, and the English-only policy promotes change in staffs’ world view and eventually leads to a more global mindset. It can be questioned whether the ends justify the means, given the undeniable references to the aggressiveness of the mandated Englishization approach, but he points out that globalization has changed the familiar business landscape and an adaptation is urgent if a company wants to survive. The aging population and stagnating economic growth is a reality not only in Japan but in other developed countries as well, so a new mindset is crucial to invert the tendencies. Borzykowski (2016) observes that the language policies represent also part of a larger cultural shift for the companies, for businesses are organized globally and not regionally, and if they want to become more efficient, it can only be done by collaborating across geographies. The implementation of English is not a throwback to

colonialism or a play for cultural superiority, but rather a powerful enabler of communication.

#### **IV. FINDING SOLUTIONS**

Several authors (Neeley, 2012; Sato, K., 2015; Nixon, 2015; Sanden, 2016) acknowledge the great importance that a proper language management has on the business performance. Neeley et al. (2012) argue that managers must understand the communication challenges that people face when they have a low level of proficiency in a lingua franca mandated by a company. They also need to be proactive rather than reactive and anticipate and understand the impact of coping strategies that workers may use - such as avoiding meetings, excluding native lingua franca speakers, etc. It is necessary to create a safe communication environment and encourage empathy, thus a clear and full support is crucial from early on. Not only the CEO but also all the intermediate-level managers and supervisors should be behind the chosen policy so that employees, the ones being asked to convert their language, receive a strong unified message (Nixon, 2015). The assumptions must be tested, questions asked to obtain immediate feedback and generate mutual understanding. Sanden (2016) stresses that continuous feedback from the front line ensures strategic learning and reduces the risk of suboptimal outcomes.

What happens is that most companies do not know the state of their language resources. In order to effectively manage diverse language demands, language audits are a basic requirement for a sound language management strategy. Hiring people with competence in the corporate language is evident. However, it should be recognized that language skills must be utilized, as fluency and competence decline without consistent practice. Periodic language audits would provide an up-to-date picture of staff language skills, where they reside, and if appropriate steps have been taken to ensure that the level of required language competence is being developed (Welch, Welch, & Piekkari, 2005).

Tran and Burman (2016) recommend to benchmark English proficiency of the workforce, since employee testing can give an immediate view of the linguistic strengths and deficiencies, as well as to link English proficiency to business objectives and motivate learners by highlighting the advantages of knowing the common language for each job function. It is important to recognize that language training is a strategic investment like any other change in management. Having a pragmatic and flexible approach to language training has been reported as one of the key components to a successful implementation, as it is necessary to provide personalized and sector-specific preparation. The BELF perspective should be in the forefront, the different skill levels have to be taken into account, and the main concern should be on teaching a language for the job, the tasks and not for the sake of the language itself. Linguistic correctness should not overshadow the importance of establishing an effective and efficient communication (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Tran, Burman, 2016).

The role of modern human resource departments has shifted from simply managing the payroll to a focus on pursuit of organizations long-term objectives (Kapoor, 2011). An appropriate language strategy therefore is critical to MNCs' global human resource management and employees' language and cultural adaptability skills need to be seriously considered when recruiting, training, evaluating, and promoting them (Tiwari, 2013; Neeley & Kaplan, 2014). The employees should be encouraged to



be aware of their own and of their interactants' discourse practices, conventions, and cultural preferences. Even if fluency in the lingua franca is not an issue, a lack of cultural awareness can cause significant misconstructions and divergences, and lead to conflicting group norms, practices, and expectations. To prevent such rifts, cross-cultural training must be embedded in language training (Neeley & Kaplan, 2014). By learning to know and appreciate a range of communication cultures, including their own, the employees will also learn to appreciate the need to be flexible; given that flexibility is one of the most important skills needed in the rapidly changing business community of today (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005).

To further enhance communication, the same flexibility is required from the organization itself. The very organizational structure of the multinational has to change from vertical, hierarchical to a horizontal, flatter structure. By doing so, a greater sense of unity can be created because the number of levels between employees and management is reduced (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999) and the employees can be made co-responsible to assume roles and responsibilities for standardizing practices in their workplace (Angouri, 2013). According to Nixon (2015, p. 27), the managerial staff has to listen to what their employees are saying, so that a comprehensive language strategy can be tailored to address employee needs rather than follow the mandatory approach. Referring specifically to Englishnization, the author emphasizes that companies should also realize that the changing over to an English-only workplace is not a two or three-year process but a way longer journey. This observation can actually be applied for any language policy, as the different case studies mentioned in this paper provide evidence that consequences of a corporate language implementation are still felt and discussed years past.

Jannsens and Steyaert suggest three different categories of corporate language policies: monological lingua franca, monological multilingualism and multilingual franca (as cited in Sato, 2015, p.23). Monological lingua franca refers to the situation in which a common language and other accompanying practices are made mandatory for business communication to remove the barriers generated by the diverse languages and cultures of the business stakeholders. In contrast, monological multilingualism acknowledges the multiple languages, customs, and cultures existing in any given business entity and attempts to give equal status to each of them. A third approach, multilingual franca, foresees no imposed choice of language, assuming that those involved in the communication process negotiate contextually which linguistic resource to use for a successful interaction. According to Sato (2015), Englishnization fits into the first category, and as such inevitably contrasts with the first or mother tongue of the employees, creating, as the author calls it, the "local language paradox" (Sato, 2015, p.27). It means that in situations where employees are aware that they share both their local language and English, the imposed mandate to communicate in the later is only likely to create discomfort in the workplace. Sato also points out that monological, unrestricted multilingualism is impractical and, in most cases, too expensive for businesses, concluding that the third type of language policy, a multilingual franca, may constitute a convincing alternative for global companies.

In regards to language strategies, they can be analyzed not only at a macro (organizational) level but also at a micro-level, seeing how individuals cope with the different challenges that language barriers present. Aichorn and Puck (2017) discuss two major strategies: language accommodation through adjusting the communication style to that of a conversational partner, by simplifying the speech, vocabulary, etc., and negotiation of shared meaning in order to achieve mutual understanding and to avoid

miscommunication. If international business professionals at the managerial level are aware of these micro-level issues, it becomes possible to design more adequate human resource development measures that help employees adjust to new language environments (Aichorn & Puck, 2017, p. 400).

It is also fundamental to acknowledge that a number of languages co-exist in the same company not only because of the geographical diversity of the operational aspect, but also because of the multilingual profile of the workforce. As language is the way for inter-/intra-department and company communication, issues of management of linguistic diversity become relevant not only for corporate companies but also for the employees who are asked to manage increasingly complex linguistic environments, both in terms of work and also social talk (Angouri, 2013). The notion that a multilingual workplace does not turn monolingual because of the implementation of one working language in a top-down approach, further supports the idea that the language choice and use can be seen as a constant negotiation process between the participants and that an official language policy can leave room for certain flexibility when it comes to the level of inter-/intra-team communication.

Ultimately, one must look at the differences as a resource, rather than as a constraint. The Finnish-Swedish case demonstrates that, in the circumstance of a company merger, if both parties are fully aware of the significance of communication and its role in the construction of a new culture for the new, merged company, it is possible that a cross-border merger is, in fact, more successful than a domestic one. In all kinds of conditions, however, one must be aware that it will take time before employees can fully identify themselves with the new group, and feel that it is “us”, instead of “us” and “them” (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005, p. 418). What is crucial here is precisely the notion that a new organizational culture is being created, that the previous working methods are no longer suitable, and that the communication is a key to success. The whole process of communication requires specific skills, attitudes, and values and cannot be reduced to the obvious aspect of foreign language capability – most often proficiency in English – or a generalist knowledge of cultural differences (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012). It is required not only to speak but also to act differently, in order to achieve success.

## V. CONCLUSION

In the business environment, English is often perceived as neutral and shared communication code that can be used by international workforce with the common purpose of successfully interacting in a global business environment. Several studies, referred to in this paper, have been conducted to analyze the process and impacts of a common corporate language implementation in Japan, European Union area or Scandinavian countries. They also report on the obstacles that may arise, ranging from language comprehension and proficiency issues, to organizational inefficiencies, such as opposition or low compliance, diminished overall performance and self-confidence, and concerns on career progression. Yet it is important to remember that a common corporate language is a tool to bring people and businesses together, rather than drive them apart, therefore a doubled effort must be made by the upper managerial staff to acknowledge the challenges and to ensure a successful implementation. It can be achieved by means of proper language management, flexibility in the organizational structure, and by paying attention to both recruitment and training.

Even so, there are voices quite critical on the overall obsession with adopting English as lingua franca, asking whether the conventional wisdom that ELF promotes internal communication and makes information sharing and decision making more effective is even true (Kim, 2016). It might be questionable, and depend on the industry, country, and sector in cause. Many studies have emphasized the importance of and need for English usage in MNCs, yet research on the relationship between language strategy and performance remains underdeveloped. More data could allow to draw different conclusions and possibly prove that one measure does not fit all cases.

Japan currently follows a trend and over-reliance on foreign language testing to decide everything from university admission to professional advancement (Paterson, 2015). This tends to be more of a cosmetic measure than a solution for the real issue, for a high proficiency level alone does not make the workforce instantly better and more competitive in the global arena. As Greimel (2015) puts it, forcing Japanese engineers to speak English to one another is no recipe for success by itself, but being open to outsiders is. Managers need to keep in mind that what they are pursuing with an English-only policy is not the rule of English, but rather ease of transnational communication (Storozum, 2013).

Assuming Englishization to be the only language strategy available for MNCs is incorrect because existing studies suggest alternatives, such as bilingual and multilingual strategies (Sato, 2015; Kim, 2016). Therefore, a company must be sensitive to the diversity of needs within and choose the best possible solution, rather than simply follow the monological lingua franca approach.

Attempting to force an all-English policy in a truly global company is actually another paradox, due to the discomfort among employees that comes from awareness that an artificial form of communication is being imposed. It certainly does not take into consideration the underlying principle of globalization, mentioned in the introductory part of this paper - the internationalization. If one does perceive the language as a tool to reach mutual understanding across borders, then a mono-linguistic dominance does not correspond to the required mindset and does not enable the flexibility that suits multicultural and multinational workplace. It is consensual that a certain degree of fluency in the corporate language is imperative, yet the significance of obtaining the best possible contributions of motivated and committed employees to reach the ultimate corporate goals is even greater. Ultimately, it is the communication that must be improved, and not just the linguistic competence.

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