

Literature analysis of the language challenges and the responses thereto of European multinational companies

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Language diversity is an inherent part of international business transactions, despite the dominance of English. The challenge for management, HRM, and employees in multinational companies is to find the right strategy. Multinational organizations can be categorized using the EPRG (ethnocentric, polycentric, regiocentric, geocentric) model, according to how they define their relationship with subsidiaries, and how they operate in foreign markets. Using this model, conclusions can also be drawn from their applied language strategy.

Keywords: language diversity, language barrier, EPRG-model, economics of languages, language strategy

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1. Introduction

Language diversity is a challenge for most employees of multinational companies. Because of globalization, people with different cultural backgrounds work together which can be advantageous, but at the same time, it can hold risks. In a multilingual company, the long-term success main factors are cultural diversity awareness, team cohesion building and maintaining, trust, and good management (Nielsen, 2020). Effective communication depends very much on language usage. The English language became an essential “must” in companies working in international markets (Ehrenreich, 2010). Previously, the language factor was identified as a minor problem and as “the forgotten factor in multinational management” (Piekkari & Welch & Welch, 1997, p. 591.); now it has become a strategic issue (Maclean, 2006). Language is a tool for sharing ideas and information, networking and therefore it makes an important part in the operation of multinational companies. Strategic considerations of MNC need

to be aligned not only with human resource management practices but also with language policies to ensure both internal and external communicative actions run smoothly (Van den Born & Peltokorpi, 2010).

Based on Maclean's (2006) suggestion that there is a link between the international strategy of companies and language use, I aim to present a literature review of language strategies that work or fail in international practice, to give a description of the EPRG model and with the help of case studies, and to illustrate the different dimensions of the model demonstrating the importance of language diversity. As Neeley et al (2012) pointed out, the introduction of a common language facilitates globalization in a company's life. Using a lingua franca also triggers processes that were expected but have had a greater impact on performance and efficiency than anticipated.

This article deals with international management and international business communication related to international human resource management to contribute to the literature and highlight the consequences of language diversity that may affect international business processes. Following the conclusions of Van den Born & Peltokorpi (2010) and Maclean (2006), I apply the EPRG approach and examine European case studies.

2. Research Methods

This article analyses the cases and results in the literature and collects the outcomes from the case studies to present the management challenges related to languages, to analyse the language policy strategies and draw conclusions. The EPRG framework is used to identify companies' attitudes towards language diversity and their classification in terms of international orientation.

The data derived from the University of Debrecen UDiscover, Science Direct, and Wiley Online Library was supplemented by the ConnectedPapers visual graph builder application, which helped to improve the efficiency of keyword searches by identifying the relationships between journal articles. First, I used the keywords 'language' and 'multinational company' and got more than 10 000 results. Then, I applied the keywords 'language proficiency' which helped to specify my search. For the selection of case studies, only European languages and companies were taken into account to keep country- and culture-specific factors approximately homogeneous. The considered timeframe was from 1997 to 2020. Finally, I selected 10 case studies that contained enough information to draw conclusions using the EPRG model.

The first part of the paper discusses the literature on language strategies. The second part contains a comprehensive overview of the EPRG model, followed by an analysis of the strategies presented in the first part in the Conclusions section.

3. The strategies applied by multinational companies

Companies which work in an international environment face several factors when they decide about languages, including e.g. employees and their knowledge, domestic and international experience, foreign markets in which the company operates, how it enters the foreign market, the size of the company, and its resources (Welch & Welch, 2018), but also by the company's partners, suppliers, and customers (Fredriksson & Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006; Neeley & Hinds & Cramton, 2012; Neeley, 2013; Sanden 2020).

The organization could use the language of the home country or the language of the host country, but they could also choose a third, intermediary language (Luo & Shenkar, 2017; Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). By using the language of the home country, communication between the different entities can take place directly, without an interpreter or translator. Using the language of the host country can be costly for the company. English is usually used as the intermediary language, as it is currently the most widely spoken foreign language in the world. In Europe, German is often used as the lingua franca in German-speaking companies (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017; Fredriksson et al 2006). Whichever option a company chooses, all present challenges for leadership, human resource management, and employees.

Andersen and Rasmussen (2004) analysed Danish companies and their French subsidiaries, where none of the three strategies mentioned above could be implemented. The Danish parent company had few French speakers, and the French subsidiaries had neither Danish nor adequate English language skills. It is the responsibility of managers to develop an effective language strategy, but their responsibility goes beyond selecting one or more languages and communicating them appropriately. When using a common corporate language, communication asymmetries and conflicts can arise and a multicultural approach is needed to resolve them, but the same risk can exist in multilingual environments (Yanaprasart, 2016).

In the case of Siemens AG, employees in the German and Finnish units were asked about the common corporate language, and the survey revealed that although English is the official working language, it is far from easy in everyday life. Language use was influenced by geographical location, management level, and of course the origin of the respondent. The parent company and subsidiaries worldwide preferred to use German, while in Finland, English and German were used simultaneously, typically by senior management. It was not uncommon for company employees to use a mixture of languages in their daily communication (Fredriksson et al., 2006).

Feely and Harzing (2003) divided the language barriers into three sets of issues. The first is the number of languages used within the company and by the

company's stakeholders. The second issue is which functions require multilingual communication and at which levels. The third question is the depth and sophistication of the language skills required. Within a company, the language skills required from employees may vary according to the nature of the job.

3.1. The employees of the multinational company and the question of language

There may be resistance from employees if the former official language of the company is changed. In the case of takeovers or mergers, the symbolic importance of language choice may also be enhanced (Vaara & Tienari & Piekkari & Säntti, 2005; Maclean, 2006).

In the case of Austrian companies, when the official corporate language was changed to English, employees were reluctant to accept the new procedure (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017), similarly to the case of mergers in the Finnish-Swedish banking sector (Vaara et al., 2005). In some cases, employees fear that their lack of language skills may lead to loss of status over time (Neeley, 2013). Moreover, language skills become an expectation rather than an advantage for higher, managerial positions (Fredriksson et al., 2006). The primary aim is to accelerate corporate communication, to avoid translation costs, and to be able to adapt to global trends. In contrast, Japanese workers have found that a task that would have taken half an hour in their mother tongue could take up to four hours in English. At the same time, there was constant anxiety about their language skills in their daily work (Neeley et al., 2012). Workers may have experienced this new expectation as a marginalization of their mother tongue or as a burden for those whose language skills or abilities were not adapted to it (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004). Interviews with employees in Greek multinational companies revealed that the economic crisis had led to an appreciation of the importance of language skills among employees. They believed that this skill would help them to keep their current position or to obtain a higher one, but in the case of a dismissal, it would increase their chances in the labour market (Machili, 2015).

Differences can be observed in the language skills of different generations. Older workers do not necessarily have a high level of English, unlike the younger generation for whom it is no longer a problem (Fredriksson et al., 2006). The tensions between them could set back work processes. Companies often attempt to bridge this situation by offering different language courses. The Volkswagen Group has a recognized training plan which shows that developing the language skills of employees is a multi-year process that requires resources not only from the company but also from the employee (Feely & Harzing, 2003). In the case of the Finnish company Kone, participation in language courses was linked to a minimum level of knowledge, thus motivating employees to self-train and

reinforcing their belief that their investment would be rewarded with further training in the company (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch & Welch, 1999).

Knowledge of language also includes semantic and semiotic knowledge, which are part of the culture and help to encode the underlying meaning of words. Knowledge of language is not only the grammatical knowledge of a language, but also metacommunication, i.e. the gestures and accompanying facial expressions, as well as other elements, such as the accepted rate and volume that accompany speech. Without knowledge of these, a worker in a multicultural environment is exposed to serious emotional influences that can make him or her feel uncomfortable, excluded, or frustrated (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). All of this can lead to an increase in the employee's dissatisfaction with both his/her position and the company, which leads to a deterioration in performance (Charles, 2007).

Some companies do not have well-developed language strategies (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004). Language difficulties are often seen as a matter for the individual, but in multinational companies, it has become more of a management challenge. Factors that hinder communication fluency have become critical for efficiency (Charles, 2007). Developing and improving language management is a costly and time-consuming process. According to Feely and Harzing (2003), the problem is not one of cost, but of recognizing the importance of language barriers.

A study conducted by Aichhorn and Puck (2017) showed that employees are aware of the challenges posed by linguistic diversity. They identified two strategies to handle this. The first is adaptation through language choice, which reduces the anxiety experienced in a foreign language environment. Respondents reported that they often mixed languages, i.e. English was mixed with local languages. This finding is in line with those of research by Fredriksson et al. (2006). Managers reported that at the beginning or end of the conversation, a few words are exchanged in the workers' mother tongue, which reinforces trust and respect between them and helps to build relationships, but the language of work and negotiation remains English. In some cases, this may also be a demand from local workers, that the individual coming to the company makes an effort to learn some of the local language (Steyaert & Ostendorp & Gaibrois, 2011). Machili's (2015) survey found that more than 92 percent of informal conversations were in the local language, while English was used for formal events and video conferences. Therefore, it is not surprising that expatriates' local language skills facilitate their integration into a new environment. According to research by Selmer and Lauring (2015), workers posted to a host country with a relatively difficult local language had a greater advantage in learning that language than expatriates working in a country with a relatively easier language. However, Nekvapil and Nekula's (2006) research in the Czech Republic found that Czech language training for expatriate workers was not successful.

Aichhorn and Puck (2017) identified three main reasons why native speakers switch to English even between themselves. The first of these is that workers are used to communicating in English professionally and find it difficult to find the terms in their mother tongue. They more often felt more confident in business professional situations in a foreign language than in their mother tongue (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). The second reason has been identified as the egalitarian role of a common corporate language. They argued that by using English, no one was disadvantaged and no one was excluded from the conversation by chance. However, if the last person in a conversation who does not speak the company's mother tongue leaves the conversation, the others automatically switch languages (Ehrenreich, 2010). Equality is further reinforced by the fact that the common corporate language is usually not used as a mother tongue but as a second or third language so that the parties are in a nearly equal position (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012). The third reason is cultural differences. According to respondents, if the dialogue is in one of their mother tongues, they tend to assume the same cultural background as their own. This misconception can be overcome by English. The adaptation mode identified by Aichhorn and Puck (2017) is the simplification of one's language means that interlocutors try to adapt the conversation to their partner's language skills. This can be achieved through simplifying grammatical structures or pronunciation, but also by not using metaphors and idioms (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). This helps to reduce tension among employees and increases the understandability and intelligibility of the conversation. However, adaptation involves both sides. Both the speaker and the listener need to adjust their expectations of the other (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Ehrenreich (2010) found a different phenomenon in his study and this was later confirmed by Harzing and Pudelko (2013). According to the interviewees studied, native speakers and higher-level speakers of English often used their language advantage as a tool of power, which made it difficult to work together. This situation does not only affect English, but essentially any language used by companies (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). This phenomenon is also observed in the case of merging firms (Vaara et al., 2005). The manager's task is to create a language environment that is understandable to all.

Aichhorn and Puck (2017) identified as a second strategy of high importance the case where the use of language was based on mutual agreement between the parties. In this case, employees paid more attention to how they expressed themselves and presented what they said in a more detailed way.

Country-specific factors also have a strong influence on language use and can lead to situations that differ from those described above. Steyaert, Ostendorp, and Gaibrois (2011) studied a Swiss company where at least three languages were used continuously at the same time. The strategies revealed are in line with the findings

above, but new systems are observed. One example is improvisation, where no common language is clearly defined, but a mixture of languages is constantly used and while English is spoken one moment, German is spoken the next. The same phenomenon was observed in written communication.

In international negotiations and business meetings, it is not uncommon to meet both native speakers and people who use the language as a second language. There may be differences in how participants feel in a meeting, depending on its size. In smaller meetings, respondents felt more comfortable than in larger ones. Respondents pointed out that they sometimes found it difficult to find the right word at the right time in a foreign language, whereas this would not be a problem in their mother tongue (Rogerson-Revell, 2007). Many have questioned their professional competence (Vaara et al., 2005). This conflict creates tension between native and non-native speakers, ultimately leading to a breakdown in trust between the parties (Neeley et al., 2012). Aichhorn and Puck's (2017) study revealed that not only can a lack of language competence lead to misunderstandings, but also to the reinforcement of negative stereotypes.

The case of the Danish-French companies (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004) is an example of debatable strategies where language is seen as a barrier rather than a resource. While communication with consumers was clearly in French, the working language remained unclear between English and French, which hindered the speed of communication and decision-making and created awkward situations on both sides. Within the same company, the use of one or two key linguists was observed who were not employed as interpreters, but in this case as engineers who had sufficient knowledge of French to assist in company communication. It is not difficult to see that such a strategy entails high risks. The loss of a key person also jeopardizes the continuity of communication and can disrupt work processes in the short term. It should also be stressed that the primary task of the employee is not translation and mediation. For them, these are just additional tasks that make it difficult to carry out their original duties and are professionally adverse, often placing too much burden on them (Vaara et al., 2005; Nekvapil & Nekula, 2006; Machili, 2015). A key linguist, by his or her qualifications, or rather lack of them, can make translation mistakes that can lead to losses in the company's operations. A critical point is the precise job definition and the recruitment of employees who can fulfil both language requirements and other tasks (Feely & Harzing, 2003). An obvious solution is to consider candidates with the required language skills from the outset, but Andersen and Rasmussen (2004) argue that the main task of the subsidiary is to serve the local language needs at the local level.

According to Luo and Shenkar (2017), parent and subsidiaries have fundamental language differences due to different purposes, different environments, and different tasks. For the headquarters, language choice should serve to facilitate

globalization and information flow. The languages used by the subsidiaries should help to achieve the company's objectives, support the international strategy and fulfil local tasks.

The need for a common corporate language may come from within the organization as a conscious strategy or as a consequence of an acquisition or merger (Vaara et al., 2005; Bouchien de Groot, 2012; Neeley et al., 2012), but it may also be the result of external pressure. Important partners, suppliers, customers, or competitors can also be a strong motivator for a company (Fredriksson et al., 2006; Neeley et al., 2012; Neeley, 2013), but government regulations can also play a role (Saulière, 2014). There are examples in the international literature against the introduction of a single corporate language. Statoil/Equinor in Norway introduced English as the sole corporate language in 2010, to which Norwegian partners reacted negatively. The case eventually ended with the intervention of the Norwegian state, which strengthened the position of the Norwegian language in the country. As a result, financial reports of multinational companies, for example, have to be prepared in Norwegian and English, with few exceptions (Sanden, 2020).

4. Review of the EPRG model

The EPRG model is used to describe the international management strategies that companies entering the international market can adopt in their operations. The original model was developed by Perlmutter (1969), who at that time distinguished between three directions (EPG). In the full model (EPRG), E stands for ethnocentric, P for polycentric, R for regiocentric, and G for geocentric. The region-centric dimension was introduced in the model in 1973 by Wind, Douglas, and Perlmutter. The EPRG scheme is also used in international marketing (Reketye & Tóth & Malota, 2015). Maclean (2006) used the EPG scheme developed by Perlmutter to identify the reasons behind language choice.

The ethnocentric company operates according to its own cultural and corporate values and experiences from the domestic market and applies them unchanged in the host country (Reketye & Tóth & Malota, 2015; Gaál & Szabó & Kovács, 2005). An ethnocentric strategy is characterized by the fact that employees from the home country (expatriates) occupy management positions so that their language is typically used by subordinates in the host country (Muratbekova-Touron, 2008; Van den Born & Peltokorpi, 2010). This is typical of countries where acceptance of greater power distance and homogeneity of values are part of the culture (Luo & Shenkar, 2017). In their study, Harzing and Pudelko (2013) found that Asian multinationals have a stronger ethnocentricity with respect to language than the European, Scandinavian, Australian, and American companies studied.

Companies from countries with small languages create a special situation. If the language is difficult to learn or not sufficiently internationally spoken, top management may order the introduction of a new corporate language (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999). Companies from Nordic countries are adapting to the English language trend that dominates the business world (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013). Different cultural characteristics may be behind these two contradictory decisions.

The polycentric company already recognizes cultural differences and tries to take them into account. With the increased geographical expansion and the growth of tasks and activities, ethnocentric orientation is losing its effectiveness (Muratbekova-Touron, 2008). Subsidiaries can now be managed by local employees. In region-centric companies, activities are divided into regions and adapted to the characteristics of these regions. It assumes that the countries in the region are similar and treat them as one market (Rekettye – Tóth – Malota, 2016). A geocentric company, on the other hand, has a global perspective: both the parent company and the subsidiary operate according to a global orientation (Gaál et al., 2005). According to Rekettye – Tóth – Malota (2015) ethnocentric and geocentric orientations have common characteristics, but the difference lies in the approach. While ethnocentric orientation does not accept changes, then geocentric orientation can adapt.

4.1. The EPRG framework and languages

Organizations with an ethnocentric orientation often put foreign language skills on the back burner and give preference to the language of their own country of origin. In contrast, polycentric organizations have a differentiated language strategy that better reflects the position of their subsidiaries. In adopting a geocentric approach, they take global aspects into account, and therefore the importance of a common business language increases (Van den Born & Peltokorpi, 2010). Geocentric MNCs emphasize communication based on an intermediary language in foreign subsidiaries. However, foreign affiliates need to monitor communication problems in case of a common language and in such cases, they should use the local language. Thus, the intermediary language and several other languages can coexist (Van den Born & Peltokorpi, 2010).

According to Maclean (2006), there is a link between the strategy adopted or observed by the company and attitudes towards language. Perlmutter (1969) adopts three of these groupings in his analysis. These were communication processes, complexity, and identification. Applying the EPRG model, he argues that the importance of the language issue comes to the fore in the evolution to a geocentric approach, as companies simplify the issue in ethno- and polycentric approaches. The complexity of the geocentric company's organizational structure

and operations, however, already requires differentiation of language use. An ethnocentric company uses the language of the home country; a polycentric one uses the language of the host country. A geocentric company is not closely tied to the language of any country, but rather chooses a common language, which in many cases is English (Maclean, 2006). The internationalizing company learns the role and importance of languages through experience (Welch & Welch, 2018). The adoption of English is an important stage in the shift from an ethnocentric orientation. These approaches can also be seen in the case of language training within companies. For ethnocentric MNCs, language training is more important than for polycentric companies, but it is only available to a limited group of workers and usually in the language of the sending country. For the geocentric company, training is important and widely provided, and employees may require training in several languages as an important part of international career development (Van den Born & Peltokorpi, 2010). The relationship between the model and languages is summarized in Table 1 based on the literature.

5. Conclusions

In the case studies analysed, the researchers typically used questionnaires and different types of interviews, but also analysis of internal communication and documentation, observation, and shadowing. In some cases, companies were either not named for reasons of confidentiality (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004; Charles, 2007) or pseudonyms were used (Muratbekova-Touron, 2008; Steyaert et al., 2011). A summary of the research is presented in Table 2.

The Danish-French case study (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004) highlights the importance of choosing the right strategy. In the case of this company, none of the Danish, French, and English languages seemed to be able to fulfil the expected function. On the Danish side, there was a tendency towards geocentricity, but the French side showed more ethnocentric behaviour. Due to unclear language issues, it is not possible to clearly conclude to which dimension the EPRG model may belong.

Among the case studies, an interesting case is the merger of Swedish and Finnish banks (Vaara et al., 2005), which, despite not being a parent-subsidiary merger, still shows ethnocentric features in the corporate language policies. The language of the new company that emerged became Swedish, even though it was a 'merger of equals' (Vaara et al., 2005, p. 607.). This ethnocentricity is further reinforced by the fact that Swedish language courses were provided to employees. Later, seeing the problems, the common corporate language became English, which can be interpreted as a shift toward a poly- and geocentric orientation, and

Table 1.: Dimensions of EPRG and languages

	ethnocentrism	polycentrism	regiocentrism	geocentrism
<i>Decision making</i>	Decisions are made in the parent company in the language of the parent company.	Some of the decisions may also be taken by the subsidiaries. Local languages will come to the fore.	Regionally specific languages are used in decision-making.	English plays a strong role alongside the local languages.
<i>Leadership positions</i>	Employees from the home country hold senior positions in the subsidiary.	Senior positions can now be filled by locals. Language skills are becoming more valuable in career development.	Regional managers who speak several languages will come to the fore.	The origin of the employee does not matter. Language barriers can be overcome by knowing English.
<i>Information and knowledge sharing</i>	Information and knowledge flow only in the language of the home country.	In the language of the host country, but also the language of the sending country.	The languages occur in the regions, but there is one language that stands out as a connecting language, which could be English, German, French.	The information flow is in English.
<i>Training courses</i>	Teaching the mother tongue is the main aim of the courses.	Teaching the mother tongue is the main aim of the courses.	Other regionally important languages besides the mother tongue.	Workers are open to learning languages to help them in their international careers.
<i>Tension and stress</i>	Workers may experience the language policy of the company in the sending country as repression of their mother tongue.	Stress and anxiety may occur due to insufficient language skills.	Stress and anxiety may occur due to insufficient language skills.	Workers can come from anywhere in the world, so they already have a global mindset to help them.

Source: Own composition

the perceived subordination was removed and English created equality between the parties.

The French company studied by Muratbekova-Touron (2008) showed strong ethnocentricity. According to her survey, while workers of French origin accounted for 12 percent of all employees, they held 45 percent of managerial positions. This was coupled with the fact that the accepted company language was French. A change was brought about by Anglo-Saxon corporate takeovers, which shifted the organizations towards a geocentric approach.

In the Finnish-German case study by Fredriksson et al. (2006), it is repeatedly observed that the work environment is multilingual, yet workers communicate with each other in German. Respondents were also not exactly sure whether only German, only English, or both German and English are the official working language. In light of these findings, it can be concluded that the company is situated between a polycentric strategy and a region-centric strategy. The case of a Dutch company examined by Bouchien de Groot (2012) however had communicated the official work language as being English, but employees kept using German and Dutch in different communication channels. The German respondents tend to insist on their mother tongue more than Dutch respondents.

The manifestation of a geocentric language strategy at the individual level can be seen in the case study of Aichhorn and Puck (2017), where the workers themselves had an international approach and successfully managed the complexities that arose.

The situation of in- and expatriates raises an interesting question. The presence of expatriates in the subsidiary's operations reinforces ethnocentricity, but the presence of inpatriates in multinationals (Tungli & Peiperl, 2009) reinforces poly- or geocentricity.

The Swiss companies studied by Steyaert et al., (2011) are a special case, as the country is quadrilingual, so multilingualism is a natural phenomenon for the company. For both companies, several languages were used in parallel, with English as the connecting language. However, in the responses of the interviewees of the first company, code Maximal, it can be observed that German and French were preferred, depending on the part of Switzerland from which the company originated. This caused some conflict between local and foreign workers. In the company code-named Globalos, English was the main language of communication, but workers still insisted on local languages. Both cases studied bear the characteristics of a polycentric strategy, but the attitude of the workers is ethnocentric.

In the German companies surveyed by Ehrenreich (2010), the languages of the employees included German, French, English, Chinese, and Spanish, but English was the language of mediation. Everyday life, documents, and presentations were all multilingual and English was not an official company language, suggesting

that the companies studied adopted a geocentric approach to language issues. The company's HR department provided English training for employees. Managers recognised that languages are valuable strategic resources. The geocentricity is reinforced by the fact that in the German headquarters, important management roles are filled by employees of the nationality of the country serving the customers.

In the case of the French-based company studied by Neeley (2013), English was adopted as the common corporate language under external pressure. The managers interviewed no longer defined themselves as a French company, but as an international company, and for this reason, they clarified their language and communication expectations for their employees.

The companies studied by Charles (2007) also showed the characteristics of a geocentric orientation.

6. Summary

According to Welch and Welch (2018), "the world of international business is a world of multilingualism" (p. 619). Although linguistic diversity can cause disruptions in the short term, research has shown its positive long-term benefits (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). There is a divided opinion as to whether a multinational company should make a clear decision on the corporate language or deliberately create an ambiguous situation so that internal processes can develop their own rules (Fredriksson et al., 2006; Bouchien de Groot, 2012). Without clearly defined guidelines, however, employee dissatisfaction and ultimately inefficiency are at risk. A monolingual strategy can cause the same amount of confusion as a multilingual one (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012).

The flow of information and knowledge must cross linguistic boundaries to appear where and when it is needed. If this is recognized by management in time, it becomes clear that the language issue is not a neutral issue (Vaara et al., 2005) but a strategic one (Maclean, 2006). Although Charles (2007) argues that there is a need for a common corporate language, he does not fail to note that internal language policies should be designed to best serve individual and organizational performance. The reason why it is difficult to make rational and logical decisions on language issues is that these decisions also affect emotions (Neeley et al., 2012). In inappropriate language environments, employees often feel unprofessional or inferior because of their language skills, even if they speak the language but cannot express themselves well enough (Vaara et al, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007, Neeley et al., 2012; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). There are positive examples in the international literature of employees themselves having the right attitudes and competencies to manage diversity (Nielsen, 2020).

Table 2.: Summary of research methods and languages

Authors	MNC	Method	Sample	Language	EPRG
Andersen & Rasmussen (2004)	Danish companies and their French subsidiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> questionnaire, with more open questions telephone interviews 	no data	French, English	ethnocentric and polycentric
Vaara et al. (2005)	Finnish-Swedish bank merger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> case studies questionnaire in-depth interviewing analysis of news in the Finnish media 	53 respondents	Swedish, English	ethnocentric
Fredriksson et al. (2006)	Siemens AG In Finland and in Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal, semi-structured interview 	36 respondents	German, English, Finnish	polycentric and regio-centric
Charles (2007)	four, Finnish multinational company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> questionnaire interviewing internal communication analysis (e-mails, presentations) 	no data	English	geocentric
Muratbekova-Touron (2008)	French multinational company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> case study observation interviewing 	25 respondents	French	ethnocentric
Ehrenreich (2010)	German, family-owned multinational company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interviewing observation shadowing 	24 respondents	German, English	geocentric
Steyaert et al. (2011)	two Swiss companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> semi-structured interview discourse analysis 	32 respondents	German, French, English	ethnocentric and polycentric
Bouchien de Groot (2012)	Dutch multinational company with German units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> questionnaire 	811 respondents	Dutch German English	geocentric
Neeley (2013)	French high-tech company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in-depth interviewing semi-structured interview 	41 respondents	English	geocentric
Aichhorn & Puck (2017)	two multinational companies with Austrian interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> case studies semi-structured interview 	22 respondents	English	geocentric

Source: Own composition

It is not possible to draw sharp lines in the language issues of the EPRG model either, as a company does not go from being a domestic organization to an international one overnight. The analysis presented in the Conclusions chapter also shows that different strategic formations can be observed in the way companies operate. It is also clear that both external and internal motivations shape this phenomenon. Additionally, it should also be pointed out that the attitude of employees also contributes to the geocentricity of a company. Language training should not only focus strictly on language teaching but also on the acquisition of an attitude that enables the choice of a language strategy appropriate to the situation (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). This approach is advocated by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010, 2012), who argue that the possession of business communication and related competencies is more important than strict grammatical formalities. Most international interaction is not between native speakers of English, but between people who speak it as a language of learning, so they can be forgiven for not using it at a native level. In the case of BELF (English as Business Lingua Franca) communication, business competence and knowledge of business communication and the rules of the genre are therefore clearly more important than grammar and idiomatic expressions. Consequently, fluency in the mother tongue is not a relevant condition for success in international business work. This idea could change both language teaching and business education, and could also have an impact on the internationalization of higher education in different nations. According to Böcskei & Bács & Kovács & Tarnóczy & Fenyves (2018), Hungarian higher education is open to creating an international environment, but language courses were not rated as excellent by students.

Tungli and Peiperl (2009) researched human resource management issues related to expatriates. In their study, they briefly mentioned the increasing number of expatriates and the fact that they require the same pre-departure training, but at the same time, also different language training.

Several of the case studies included research on the Finnish language. This is because the difficulty and prevalence of the Finnish language can be compared to the Hungarian language. Finnish firms have little or no ability to use their own language in their internationalization process (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999), so the strategies used may serve as a good example for Hungarian firms.

The big question for the future is how the use of artificial intelligence and machine translation will influence language use in multinational environments. The work of HR is now greatly aided by technological innovations. According to the HR managers in Heikkilä and Smale's (2011) research, language standardization in e-HRM systems, specifically the use of English, has not caused significant problems in their work. The language standardization and the use of IT systems made it easier and faster for them to prepare reports and search for applicants. However, there was a disadvantage in terms of translations. Nonetheless, in line

with the findings of Fredriksson et al. (2006), managers were concerned about older workers who not only had electronic interfaces but also did not speak English correctly (Heikkilä & Smale, 2011).

For them, the use of artificial intelligence in translations is the solution. Various opposing views surround the quality and efficiency of machine translation, but not its speed. Today, the translation of written texts is becoming more accurate, but it has not yet managed to revolutionize or replace the living, spoken language. For the time being, the work of interpreters is only supplemented and supported by various programs, but they cannot replace the creativity and cultural knowledge required in a living language and different situations (Horváth, 2021).

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