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**Can Language be Managed in International Business?**

PhD Series 23-2014



**Copenhagen  
Business School**  
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

# Can Language be Managed in International Business?

Insights into Language Choice from a Case Study of  
Danish and Austrian Multinational Corporations (MNCs)

**Nina Bellak**

LIMAC PhD School  
Department of International Business Communication

PhD Series 23-2014

# **CAN LANGUAGE BE MANAGED IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS?**

**Insights into Language Choice from a Case Study of**

**Danish and Austrian Multinational Corporations (MNCs)**

**Nina Bellak**

**PhD thesis**

**Supervisor: Associate Prof. Maribel Blasco**

**LIMAC PhD School**

**Department of International Business Communication**

**COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL**

Nina Bellak  
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*To my family and dear friends*

*Meiner Familie und treuen Freundinnen*



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## Preface

When reading the title of the present PhD thesis, one may wonder about the motivation for selecting Danish and Austrian companies. One of the reasons is personal; it all started when I came to Denmark in 2009 to start this PhD project centering around language in international business (IB). I was introduced to a new culture and society quite open towards the English language and also its use. I had not experienced anything like that before, neither in my home country Austria nor Belgium where I had lived for a year. When arriving in Denmark, my second language was French, not English, which meant I did not feel comfortable using English. However, I usually chose English (as a *lingua franca*) when approaching Danes and I was impressed by their vocabulary, oral communication skills and especially by their code-switching abilities, which I could not keep up with. They might have addressed me in Danish, realized I was a foreigner who did not speak Danish, and would immediately switch to English without any major problems.

In Denmark the public exposure to the English language is pronounced as on national television, radio and other media. Apart from children's programs being dubbed, everything is broadcast in the original language version supplemented with Danish subtitles, which facilitates foreign language learning. According to an EU survey entitled *Europeans and Their Languages* (Special Eurobarometer 243), Denmark is also the country with the highest population rate (46 %) self-evaluating its English skills as "very good" (European Commission 2006: 14). Almost half (44 %) of those speaking it as a foreign language (86 %) also use it "often" (European Commission 2006: 17). These facts are indicators for an overall Anglophile Danish society which is perceived controversially, thus the subject of lively debate (e.g. Phillipson 2001, Preisler 2003, Lund 2003). My personal impression gained was that this 'focus' on the English language and a 'general' self-confident attitude towards English use had an impact on the perceptions and values of languages other than English within Danish society.

Being immersed in Danish culture and Copenhagen Business School (CBS), I also gained insights into tertiary education. Most Danish business schools have recently been confronted with a

decreasing number of students studying languages, in particular languages other than English, as part of their business education (Jakobsen 2003, Due 2011). In the context of CBS, languages other than English are usually referred to as 'small' languages, i.e. French, German and Spanish. (Italian and Russian used to be part of this language group until they were closed down.). In secondary education, the focus has traditionally been on English, German and French, but today also includes the languages Spanish, Italian, Russian and Japanese (Jakobsen 2003). However, a similar trend as at the university level, that is a declining interest in language learning in general is noticeable (Mondahl 2011).

In Austria, public exposure to the English language is less pronounced because all television programs are dubbed and voice-over is mostly used for radio programs, which hinders this natural, facilitated learning of English or any other foreign language. Regarding curricula, English is the main language taught in primary and secondary education. At the secondary level French, Italian, Spanish and Russian play a role in addition to English (Archan & Holzer 2006). From my tertiary education involving Johannes Kepler University (JKU) and Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), I know that international business (IB) degrees include two compulsory foreign languages, at least at the undergraduate level (see also Stegu 2009). By contrast, business administration would only include English as a foreign language. Also, at these universities I had not experienced that languages such as Spanish, French or Russian would be referred to as 'small' languages. In other words, learning foreign languages in addition to English is part of an international business education at JKU and WU, whereas at CBS the IB student 'can get by' with English only.

In a sociolinguistic sense, I was fascinated by the diversified perceptions of languages – English vs. languages other than English – and their roles or prioritization in society and university education as well as their constructed meanings in international business. This aroused my interest in comparing these two countries in my project. Thus, I approached a large Austrian corporation where I had personal contacts to see if it was interested in participating in this research. Similar pre-existing contacts in Denmark's business community seemed promising for gaining access to a Danish corporation. Since both global operators were willing to participate, I decided to position the thesis in international business with a focus on multinational corporations (MNCs) for pragmatic and practical reasons.

Overall, I believed that comparing two countries or including two different HQ locations, having both different and similar characteristics, would provide a fruitful basis for a collective case study. My research interests and possibilities of access aside, there were several calls identified in the *business* and *language* literatures that could back my decision up (see *Chapters 2* and *3*).



## Summary

International businesses like multinational corporations (MNCs) operate across national, cultural and linguistic borders both internally and externally, and thus are under pressure to make language choices. Despite the increasing tendency towards ‘English only’, little is known about whether language can be managed. In addressing this research gap, the present thesis explores language choice in four MNCs. A deeper understanding of language choice in its social context enables us to learn more about the manageability of language in such international business contexts.

The theoretical framework draws on primarily sociolinguistic theories, combined with concepts from applied linguistics, language policy and planning/management, linguistic anthropology, translation studies, social psychology, and international business and management. The analyses in this qualitative case study are based on different empirical data, though with a focus on interview data, collected from two Danish and two Austrian headquarters and selected subsidiaries.

The findings suggest that language choice is a social, contextually-bound and multilingual phenomenon. More specifically, the MNCs operate as multilingual speech communities where headquarters and subsidiaries choose their own language and English as a lingua franca only if necessary. The notions of corporate language and language policy are partly negatively connotated and point towards non-management. Furthermore, participants’ language choices are informed by (1) their language proficiency (first language and possible foreign languages), (2) their roles, role relationships within the employment domain, and politeness strategies, all shaped by relative status and power, (3) their attitudes to language and motivations, and (4) social forces external to the MNC community. At a more abstract level, social context is defined by (1) social-linguistic, (2) social-relational, (3) social-psychological and (4) social-regulatory contextual dimensions that inform or impose the choices of HQ languages, local/customer languages and English (as a lingua franca). The language choices can involve code-switching/-mixing, passive multilingualism, translation and interpretation, language learning and acquisition, human resource management

(selective recruitment and staff relocation). Most of the choices are in fact made at both the individual and corporate levels, which are hard to separate from one another. The corporate level is fragmented into individual executives who make language choices in their own right which are far from harmonized. An additional level is external forces (e.g. authorities, laws) that impose the use of multiple languages on the MNCs. Finally, language choices vary across the MNCs' organizational units, internal and external communications and communicative situations. It can be concluded that language choice is a social, complex, context-dependent and multilingual phenomenon which makes it hard to control or regulate.

In conclusion, my research indicates that language management in international business contexts undertaken by MNCs can hardly be centralized or monolingual. Under the influence of external forces, it is even beyond their control. This suggests that language management needs to be localized, multilingual and sensitive to social context. Ultimately, one could question whether language needs to be managed at all or should be better left to individual choice. This knowledge can contribute to both research and business practice.

## Resumé

Internationale virksomheder (fx multinationale selskaber) opererer på tværs af nationale, kulturelle og sproglige grænser, både internt og eksternt, og er dermed under pres for at foretage sprogvalg. På trods af den stigende tendens til det der i forskningsverdenen betegnes som *English only* ("kun på engelsk"), ved vi meget lidt om sprog faktisk er noget der *kan* administreres. For at adressere dette problem, undersøges i denne afhandling sprogvalg i fire multinationale selskaber. Hvis vi får en dybere forståelse af sprogvalg i dets sociale kontekst, vil vi også forstå mere om hvordan sprog kan håndteres i internationale forretningsmæssige sammenhænge.

Den teoretiske ramme trækker primært på sociolingvistiske teorier, kombineret med begreber fra anvendt lingvistik, sprogpolitik og sprogplanlægning, lingvistisk antropologi, oversættelsesteori, socialpsykologi og "International Business og Management". Analyserne i dette kvalitative casestudie er baseret på forskelligt empiriske materiale, men med fokus på interviewdata der er indsamlet fra to danske og to østrigske hovedkvarterer og udvalgte datterselskaber.

Resultaterne tyder på at sprogvalg er et socialt, kontekstbundet og multilingvalt fænomen. Mere konkret kan man sige at de multinationale selskaber fungerer som flersprogede sprogsamfund hvor både hovedkontoret og de lokale selskaber vælger deres eget sprog og kun engelsk som lingua franca når dette er nødvendigt. Begreberne "virksomhedssprog" og "sprogpolitik" bliver dels modtaget negativt, og peger i retning af mangel på ledelse. Desuden bliver deltagernes sproglige valg præget af (1) deres sprogkundskaber (modersmål og eventuelle fremmedsprog), (2) deres roller, rollerrelationer inden for beskæftigelsesområdet, og høflighedsstrategier, som alle er formet af brugernes relative status og indflydelse, (3) deres holdninger til sprog og motivation, og (4) sociale kræfter uden for de multinationale selskaber. På et mere abstrakt niveau, definere den sociale kontekst af (1) social-lingvistiske, (2) sociale-relationelle, (3) sociale-psykologiske og (4) social-regulerende kontekstuelle dimensioner, der påvirker eller pålægger sprogvalget i hovedkvarteret, lokale/kundernes sprog og engelsk (som lingua franca). De sproglige valg kan indebære "kodeskift/-veksling", passiv multilingvisme, oversættelse og tolkning, sprogundervisning og sprogtilegnelse, forvaltning af menneskelige ressourcer (selektiv rekruttering

og flytning af personale). De fleste valg bliver i virkeligheden truffet både på det individuelle og på koncernniveau, og de er svære at adskille fra hinanden. Koncernniveauet er opsplittet i individuelle ledere som selvstændigt foretager sprogvvalg, der overhovedet ikke er blevet harmoniseret. Et ekstra niveau udgøres af ydre kræfter (fx myndigheder, love) der pålægger multinationale selskaber brugen af flere sprog. Endelig varierer de sproglige valg på tværs af de multinationale selskabers organisatoriske enheder, deres interne og eksterne kommunikation og kommunikationssituationer. Vi kan konkludere at sprogvvalg er et socialt, komplekst, kontekstafhængigt og flersproget fænomen, som er svært at kontrollere eller regulere.

Sammenfattende viser min forskning at sprogplanlægning i internationale forretningsmæssige sammenhænge i multinationale selskaber næppe kan være centraliseret eller monolingval. Når de er påvirket af ydre kræfter, bliver sprogplanlægning uden for deres kontrol. Dette tyder på at sprogplanlægning skal være lokaliseret, multilingval og modtagelig for den sociale kontekst. Til syvende og sidst kan man spørge om det overhovedet er nødvendigt at foretage sprogplanlægning eller om det ville være bedre at overlade sprogvvalg til den enkelte. Denne viden kan bidrage til både forskning og praksis i erhvervslivet.



## Contents

Acknowledgements.....	I
Preface .....	II
Summary.....	III
Resumé .....	IV
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Problem Definition: Language Choice in International Business – Can Language be Managed? .....	1
1.2 Research Question (RQ) .....	3
1.3 Overall Aim and Contributions.....	3
1.4 Structure of the Thesis .....	4
<b>2 Positioning the Study in the Existing Literature .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1 Overview of a Cross-disciplinary Field .....	5
2.1.1 Language (choice) within business research – language as a ‘barrier’ .....	5
2.1.2 Language (choice) within language research – language as a ‘resource’ .....	7
2.2 Empirical Findings of Prior Research on Language Choice in International Business.....	10
2.2.1 Language choice in MNCs.....	10
2.2.2 Language choice for external communication purposes: the ‘forgotten’ dimension in MNC contexts .....	17
2.2.3 Positioning the study at the cross-road of two non-Anglophone nations .....	20
2.2.3.1 Language choice in Danish businesses.....	21
2.2.3.2 Language choice in Austrian businesses .....	23
2.2.4 (Empirical) knowledge gaps summarized.....	25
2.3 Theoretical Discussions in a Cross-disciplinary Field.....	27

2.3.1	Language choice made at different levels: language policy/strategy, planning/management, practice – useful distinctions or conceptual confusion? .....	27
2.3.2	Language choice in MNCs: a sociolinguistic approach.....	37
2.3.2.1	MNCs as multilingual speech communities and language functions .....	40
2.3.2.1.1	HQ language, local and customer languages .....	41
2.3.2.1.2	Lingua francas and corporate languages .....	42
2.3.2.2	Language choice classifications (from a seller's perspective) .....	45
2.3.2.3	Different types of language choices.....	46
2.3.2.3.1	Passive multilingualism .....	46
2.3.2.3.2	Code-switching/-mixing .....	47
2.3.2.3.3	Language choices involving translation and interpretation .....	47
2.3.2.3.4	Language choices for educational purposes (language training and acquisition, language buddies).....	51
2.3.2.3.5	Language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment, staff relocation) .....	52
2.3.3	Language choice embedded in social context: a working framework.....	53
2.3.3.1	Language proficiency and norms of a speech community.....	54
2.3.3.2	Domains of language use: participants, their roles and relationships, setting, topic within the employment domain.....	56
2.3.3.3	Politeness strategies (and social relationships) .....	58
2.3.3.4	Attitudes to language (vs. beliefs and ideology) .....	60
2.3.3.5	Personal motivation (integrative vs. instrumental/extrinsic vs. intrinsic).....	64
2.3.3.6	Internal and external forces .....	66
2.3.4	(Theoretical) knowledge gaps summarized.....	68
2.4	Summary .....	69
<b>3</b>	<b>Research Design and Methods .....</b>	<b>71</b>
3.1	A Qualitative Research Approach .....	71
3.2	Philosophical Underpinning .....	72
3.3	A Qualitative Case Study.....	77
3.3.1	A collective case study of four MNCs headquartered in Denmark and Austria .....	79
3.3.1.1	Selecting multinational corporations (MNCs) .....	80
3.3.1.2	Selecting Danish and Austrian MNCs.....	81

3.3.1.3	Selecting two case companies per country .....	84
3.3.1.4	Initial problems encountered .....	86
3.4	Data Collection .....	87
3.4.1	Empirical materials: research interviews (RIs), corporate documents and websites ...	87
3.4.2	Collecting interview data: a first overview .....	88
3.4.2.1	Interview respondents across three levels of employment .....	90
3.4.2.1.1	Further problems encountered .....	91
3.4.2.2	Entering the field and conducting research interviews (RIs) .....	91
3.4.2.3	The interview protocol (see Appendix) .....	94
3.4.3	Treating alternative data sources: corporate documents and websites .....	96
3.5	Data Analysis .....	97
3.5.1	Data preparation: transcribing research interviews .....	98
3.5.2	Coding phase I: exploring and reducing data digitally (using NVivo) .....	99
3.5.2.1	Developing a coding tree following an abductive logic .....	100
3.5.3	Pattern coding phase I: revisiting coded data manually to further reduce data and look for relationships .....	103
3.5.4	Pattern coding phase II: understanding and interpreting relationships using within-case displays .....	104
3.5.5	Crafting case study reports in an iterative fashion: ‘telling the story...’ .....	107
3.5.5.1	Drawing and verifying conclusions .....	108
3.5.5.1.1	Treating alternative data sources (data triangulation) .....	109
3.5.6	Finalizing reports and synthesizing findings across cases .....	110
3.6	Summary .....	112
<b>4</b>	<b>Language Choice in a Multinational Corporation (MNC): A Case Study (I) of DK_1 ....</b>	<b>113</b>
4.1	About DK_1: Facts and Figures .....	113
4.2	Language Choices on DK_1’s Website .....	113
4.3	DK_1 as a Multilingual Speech Community: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms .....	115

4.3.1	A language guide (on English usage) or language policy?.....	117
4.4	Language Choice at DK_1 Informed by Social Context.....	119
4.4.1	Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices .....	119
4.4.1.1	Proficiency informs the choice of English .....	120
4.4.1.2	Proficiency informs the choice of the HQ language.....	122
4.4.1.3	Proficiency informs the choice of local languages (and transition to English) .....	123
4.4.1.4	Proficiency informs the choice of (translation into) local languages (double standard) .....	124
4.4.1.5	Proficiency informs the choices of English and local/customer languages (involving interpretation) .....	125
4.4.1.6	Proficiency informs code-switching/-mixing.....	125
4.4.1.7	Proficiency informs passive multilingualism.....	127
4.4.1.8	Proficiency informs the choice of the language of instruction for corporate training....	128
4.4.1.9	Proficiency informs the choice of English for educational purposes (language training).....	129
4.4.2	Social-relational dimension: participants' role relationships and politeness strategies inform language choices.....	129
4.4.2.1	Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice of (translation into) customer languages .....	130
4.4.2.2	Buyer-seller relationship and politeness inform the choice of (interpretation into) customer languages .....	135
4.4.3	Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages inform language choices .....	136
4.4.3.1	Ethnocentric attitude informs (imposes) the choice of Danish (internal forces).....	136
4.4.3.2	Positive attitude to the HQ language informs the choice of Danish (via help of expatriate) .....	138
4.4.3.3	Geocentric attitude informs the choice of English for educational purposes (language training and acquisition).....	139
4.4.3.4	Varying attitudes inform language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation).....	141
4.4.4	Social-psychological dimension: participants' motivations inform language choices (including language acquisition) .....	143

4.4.4.1	Integrative, instrumental/extrinsic and intrinsic motivations inform the choice (and acquisition) of HQ, local and customer languages .....	143
4.4.4.2	Intrinsic motivation informs the choice of local languages .....	144
4.4.5	Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages .....	144
4.4.5.1	National (home-/host-country) laws enforce the choice of (translation into) customer languages .....	145
4.4.5.2	National (host-country) authorities enforce the choice of (translation into) local languages .....	146
4.4.5.3	National (host-country) education systems (acquisition planning) influence selective recruitment.....	146
4.5	Conclusions Drawn from Case Study I: Language Choice at DK_1 Embedded in Social Context .....	146
<b>5</b>	<b>Language Choice in a Multinational Corporation (MNC): A Case Study (II) of DK_2...</b>	<b>153</b>
5.1	About DK_2: Facts and Figures .....	153
5.2	Language Choices on DK_2's Website.....	153
5.3	DK_2 as a Multilingual Speech Community: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms .....	155
5.3.1	A language policy statement and its understandings.....	158
5.4	Language Choice at DK_2 Informed by Social Context.....	163
5.4.1	Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices .....	163
5.4.1.1	Proficiency informs the choice of English .....	163
5.4.1.2	Proficiency informs the choice of local/customer languages.....	166
5.4.1.3	Proficiency informs the choice of the HQ language (involving translation).....	167
5.4.1.4	Proficiency informs the choices of English and local languages (involving translation).....	167
5.4.1.5	Proficiency informs the choices of English and local languages (involving interpretation)..	168
5.4.1.6	Proficiency informs code-mixing.....	169
5.4.1.7	Proficiency informs passive multilingualism.....	169
5.4.2	Social-relational dimension: participants' role relationships and politeness strategies inform language choices .....	171

5.4.2.1	Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice of (translation into) customer languages (translation quality imposed by external forces) .....	171
5.4.2.2	Buyer-seller relationship and polycentric attitude inform the choice of customer language for educational purposes (language training) .....	174
5.4.3	Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages inform language choices .....	175
5.4.3.1	Ethnocentric attitude informs (imposes) the choice of Danish (including language acquisition) (internal forces) .....	175
5.4.3.2	CEOs' ethnocentric and geocentric attitudes inform(ed) the choices of Danish and English (internal forces) .....	177
5.4.3.3	Geocentric attitude informs the choice of English (divergence) combined with ethnocentrism .....	179
5.4.3.4	Geocentric attitude informs the choice of English for educational purposes (language training and acquisition) .....	180
5.4.3.5	Varying attitudes inform language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation) (double standard) .....	181
5.4.4	Social-psychological dimension: participants' intrinsic motivation informs the choice of local languages .....	183
5.4.5	Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages .....	184
5.4.5.1	International scientific community enforces the choice of English within Research & Development .....	184
5.4.5.2	Supranational institutions and legal regulations enforce language choices .....	185
5.4.5.3	National (host-country) authorities and customers enforce the choice of local/customer languages (involving translation) .....	186
5.4.5.4	National (host-country) education systems (acquisition planning) influence selective recruitment .....	187
5.5	Conclusions Drawn from Case Study II: Language Choice at DK_2 Embedded in Social Context .....	188
<b>6</b>	<b>Language Choice in a Multinational Corporation (MNC): A Case Study (III) of AT_1...</b>	<b>195</b>
6.1	About AT_1: Facts and Figures .....	195
6.2	Language Choices on AT_1's Website .....	195
6.3	AT_1 as a Multilingual Speech Community: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms .....	197

6.4	Language Choice at AT_1 Informed by Social Context .....	201
6.4.1	Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices .....	201
6.4.1.1	Language proficiency informs the choice of English .....	202
6.4.1.2	Language proficiency informs the choices of English and local languages (involving translation) .....	204
6.4.1.3	Language proficiency informs the choices of local languages and English (involving interpretation) .....	205
6.4.1.4	Language proficiency informs code-switching/-mixing.....	207
6.4.1.5	Language proficiency informs passive multilingualism .....	208
6.4.2	Social-relational dimension: participant roles, role relationships, politeness strategies and power relations inform language choices.....	209
6.4.2.1	Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice of customer languages for HRM purposes (selective recruitment).....	209
6.4.2.2	Politeness strategies and participant role (relative power) inform the choice of the HQ language (double standard) .....	210
6.4.2.3	Politeness strategies and social relationships inform the choice of the local language for educational purposes (language acquisition) .....	210
6.4.3	Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages inform language choices .....	212
6.4.3.1	Ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of German and interferes with standardization (double standard) .....	212
6.4.3.2	Ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of German for educational purposes (internal forces) .....	213
6.4.3.3	Local ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of the local language (involving interpretation/translation).....	214
6.4.3.4	Varying attitudes inform language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation).....	215
6.4.4	Social-psychological dimension: participants' motivations inform language choices (including language acquisition) .....	218
6.4.4.1	Integrative and instrumental/extrinsic motivations inform language choices (including acquisition).....	219
6.4.4.2	Instrumental/extrinsic and intrinsic motivations inform the choice of a local language.....	219

6.4.5	Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages.....	220
6.4.5.1	International stock market enforces the choice of English within Investor Relations (IR) .....	221
6.4.5.2	National (host-country) work regulations enforce the choice of (translation into) local languages .....	222
6.5	Conclusions Drawn from Case Study III: Language Choice at AT_1 Embedded in Social Context.....	223
7	<b>Language Choice in a Multinational Corporation (MNC): A Case Study (IV) of AT_2...</b>	229
7.1	About AT_2: Facts and Figures .....	229
7.2	Language Choices on AT_2's Website.....	229
7.3	AT_2 as a Multilingual Speech Community: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms.....	231
7.4	Language Choice at AT_2 Informed by Social Context .....	233
7.4.1	Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices .....	233
7.4.1.1	Proficiency informs language choices for foreign market expansion .....	233
7.4.1.2	Proficiency informs the choice of English .....	234
7.4.1.3	Proficiency informs language choices (involving interpretation) .....	237
7.4.1.4	Proficiency informs language choices (involving translation).....	239
7.4.1.5	Proficiency (and channel) inform(s) code-switching (English, German).....	240
7.4.2	Social-relational dimension: participants' role relationships and politeness strategies inform language choices.....	241
7.4.2.1	Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice of (translation into) customer languages .....	242
7.4.2.2	Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice (and acquisition) of the customer language.....	243
7.4.3	Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages inform language choices .....	244
7.4.3.1	Varying attitudes inform language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation).....	244
7.4.3.2	Geocentric attitude informs (imposes) the choice of English (internal forces).....	250



7.4.3.3	Negative attitude to English and participant role inform the choice of the local language (involving interpretation) .....	251
7.4.4	Social-psychological dimension: participants' instrumental/extrinsic motivation informs the acquisition and passive use of local languages .....	252
7.4.5	Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages .....	253
7.4.5.1	(Supra)national funding enforces language choices (involving translation).....	254
7.4.5.2	National (home/host-country) authorities enforce the choices of HQ/local languages.....	255
7.4.5.3	National (host-country) regulations enforce the choice of local languages (involving further training).....	256
7.4.5.4	Local suppliers enforce the choice of the local language (involving translation).....	257
7.4.5.5	National (host-country) education systems (acquisition planning) influence selective recruitment.....	258
7.5	Conclusions Drawn from Case Study IV: Language Choice at AT_2 Embedded in Social Context .....	258
<b>8</b>	<b>Synthesis and Discussion of Findings Across Cases.....</b>	<b>265</b>
8.1	Language Choice in four MNCs with Particularities and Commonalities .....	265
8.2	Four MNCs as Multilingual Speech Communities: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms .....	269
8.2.1	Corporate languages and their understandings.....	270
8.2.2	Language policy, language guide and their understandings .....	272
8.3	Language Choice in four MNCs Informed by Social Context.....	274
8.3.1	Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices .....	274
8.3.2	Social-relational dimension: participant roles, role relationships, politeness strategies inform language choices .....	278
8.3.3	Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages and motivations inform language choices .....	282
8.3.4	Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages .....	288
8.4	Summary.....	293

<b>9</b>	<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>299</b>
9.1	Empirical Contribution .....	299
9.2	Theoretical Contribution .....	303
9.3	Application and Managerial Relevance of Findings.....	306
9.4	Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Future Research .....	310
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>313</b>
	<b>Appendix (Interview Protocol) .....</b>	<b>343</b>

## Figures and Tables

Figure 2-1: MNCs as multilingual speech communities .....	45
Figure 3-1: Understanding of cases in this study (based on Stake 2000).....	80
Table 3-2: Selecting two case companies per country .....	84
Table 3-3: Characteristics of the four case companies .....	85
Figure 3-4: Interview data collected from Danish and Austrian HQs and subsidiaries (in Australia, Austria, Germany) .....	90
Table 3-5: Distribution of interview respondents across three levels of employment.....	91
Figure 3-6: A (hierarchical) coding tree .....	103
Table 3-7: Relationships between social context and language choice .....	106

## Abbreviations

<b>AT:</b> Austria	<b>IR:</b> Investor relations
<b>AU:</b> Australia	<b>L1:</b> First/native language
<b>CEO:</b> Chief Executive Officer	<b>L2, L3, etc.:</b> Second, third language
<b>CFO:</b> Chief Financial Officer	<b>LPP:</b> Language policy and planning
<b>CL(s):</b> Corporate language(s)	<b>M&amp;As:</b> Mergers and acquisitions
<b>DE:</b> Germany	<b>MNC(s):</b> Multinational corporation(s)
<b>DK:</b> Denmark	<b>NNS(s):</b> Nonnative speaker(s)
<b>DKK:</b> Danish kroner	<b>NS(s):</b> Native speaker(s)
<b>ELF:</b> English as a lingua franca	<b>R&amp;D:</b> Research and development
<b>EMA:</b> European Medicines Agency	<b>RI(s):</b> Research interview(s)
<b>ENL:</b> English as a native language	<b>RQ:</b> Research question
<b>EU:</b> European Union	<b>S:</b> Subsidiary
<b>EUR:</b> Euros (€)	<b>SMEs:</b> Small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>FL(s):</b> Foreign language(s)	<b>TM(S):</b> Translation memory (system)
<b>HQ(s):</b> Headquarters	<b>TS:</b> Translation Studies
<b>(I)HR(M):</b> (International) human resource (management)	<b>UK:</b> United Kingdom
<b>HSE:</b> Health, safety and environment	<b>UN:</b> United Nations
<b>IB:</b> International business	<b>U.S.:</b> United States (of America)

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Problem Definition: Language Choice in International Business – Can Language be Managed?

In an era of globalization, modern societies increasingly communicate across national, cultural and linguistic borders facilitated by sophisticated communication technologies. While such a development among others fosters international trade, growth and expansion, it also poses communication challenges; international firms of today navigate in a multicultural and multilingual business environment that is more heterogeneous than ever before (Li 2007, Coupland 2010a, 2010b, Garrett 2010, Coulmas 2005a). This also means global businesses have pressure for language choice. Yet, our knowledge about language choice in international business (IB) is scarce and controversial.

In more general terms, language in IB is an area that is only gradually gaining importance. In international business and management studies, for instance, language has been described as “the forgotten factor” (Marschan et al. 1997: 591) or “the orphan of international business research” (Feely & Harzing 2002: 1). There are several reasons that language tends to be a ‘hidden dimension’ in both academia and business practice. One reason is the fact that language is often considered a component of culture (Welch et al. 2005). Cultural studies are much more pronounced in and integrated into IB research than language sciences. A certain overreliance on intercultural differences may have led to ignoring the central function of language in international business encounters (Harzing & Feely 2008). Another reason, often closely related to the discussion on culture is the common assumption that *one* language – English – is sufficient for global business communication (Loos 2007). Over the past decades English has gained an undeniable significance as the *lingua franca* in international trade as well as many other areas (e.g. Phillipson 2008).

This trend towards monolingualism is also reflected in international organizations’ approach to language policy and management. Multinational corporations (MNCs) increasingly choose English as their corporate language (e.g. Airbus, Nokia, Renault) in an effort to facilitate

communication with partners, customers worldwide and improve business performance. Such a single-language policy may even be regarded as a ‘must-have’ for global operators regardless of where they are headquartered, since as long as the strategy is carefully implemented, it is in theory applicable to any context – be it a U.S. business with operations abroad, a European company focusing on domestic customers or an Asian firm with a primarily Asian workforce. This is based on the assumption that “global business speaks English” (Neeley 2012: 117). In this vein, linguistic diversity and languages other than English have negative connotations: “Unrestricted multilingualism is inefficient and gets in the way of accomplishing business goals” (Neeley 2012: 119).

In stark contrast to ‘English only’<sup>5</sup>, also referred to as ‘language standardization’, as often advocated by Anglophone businesses and scholars, it has been argued that “this idea of a common language [English] has long been oversold in international business[;] several trends indicate that multi-lingual situations are an everyday phenomenon in international organizations” (Janssens et al. 2004: 414, see also Maclean 2006). In other words, multinationals cross linguistic boundaries on a daily basis, both internally and externally, thus operate in a variety of languages (Piekkari & Zander 2005, Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011). In this vein, other authors criticize the notion of monolingual corporate policies being ideal for MNCs’ both internal and external communications owing to the multilingual context in which they navigate (Dhir & Gòkè-Paríolá 2002, see also Loos 2007). Put bluntly, “given the demographic, social and business trends predicted for the future[,] it is difficult to see how any company can contemplate going multinational without going multilingual at the same time” (Feely & Harzing 2003: 50).

The current debate within extant *business* and *language* literatures could be described as a bipolar continuum; on the one end of the continuum we find ‘English only’, i.e. the idea of English being the universal and ideal language choice in order to manage and ‘overcome’ multilingualism. On the other end of the continuum, the notion of multilingualism is not merely an everyday phenomenon in business practice that is hard to manage; on the contrary, it is considered a necessity for fulfilling different communication purposes and for striving business success. Thus,

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<sup>5</sup> The notion stems from an American language activist movement of the mid 1970s that had the ambition to make English the only official language in the U.S. Today, it is frequently used across various literatures to express the idea of using or implementing English as a universal *lingua franca* in various contexts.

multilingual language policies and management activities are suggested. This continuum or dichotomy also raises the broader question whether language can (and should) be managed at all (Spolsky 2009). What the field lacks is empirical evidence of ‘what is going on’ in international business practice. In other words, a deeper understanding of language choice in IB contexts is necessary to reevaluate the manageability of language in a multilingual business world. In addressing this research gap, I have formulated the following research question.

## 1.2 Research Question (RQ)

*Can language be managed in international business contexts? Language choice in four multinational corporations (MNCs)*

First, this exploratory research question aims to get a holistic understanding of the research phenomenon language choice in MNC contexts and its deeper social structures; the notion of language choice (in a sociolinguistic sense) captures which language is chosen by whom, for which purpose, where, in which communicative situation, and most interestingly for which reason. This means I am interested in the social context in which language choice is embedded. Second, in-depth insights into language choice in MNCs will enable to answer whether language *can* be managed in such international business contexts.

## 1.3 Overall Aim and Contributions

Exploring language choice in its context in particular MNCs aims to learn about whether language can be managed in such IB contexts. More specifically, a multilevel analysis of language choice and social context will scrutinize both employer/corporate and employee/individual levels and how they interact with one another. In so doing, the thesis intends to assess whether language can be centrally managed and if so how, or to what extent, or whether we may need to abandon

the notion of language management in international business contexts at all. In closing this knowledge gap, this study can contribute (empirically and theoretically) to both *business* and *language* research communities in an interdisciplinary way. Furthermore, the findings can be primarily applied by MNCs including their language managers or policy makers but might also be insightful to IB practitioners in general. Ultimately, my research hopefully raises language awareness and helps improve international business communication.

#### 1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of the present PhD thesis will be structured as follows; **Chapter 2** presents the current state of the art and positions the study both empirically and theoretically within the broader fields of international business and language studies. Empirical and theoretical knowledge gaps are highlighted in order to contextualize and problematize the research question. In **Chapter 3** a detailed account of the qualitative research approach and case study methodology is provided. The case study findings based on two Danish and two Austrian MNCs are presented in **Chapters 4-7**. **Chapter 8** synthesizes the results across cases and discusses them in the light of prior research. The final **Chapter (9)** summarizes the conclusions that can be drawn, i.e. the study's empirical, theoretical and practical contributions as well as its limitations and avenues for future research. This is followed by the list of references and the *Appendix (Interview Protocol)*.



## 2 POSITIONING THE STUDY IN THE EXISTING LITERATURE

### 2.1 Overview of a Cross-disciplinary Field

The purpose of this chapter is to present the state of the art and thereby position the study in the existing literature, that is, within business and language research. More specifically, I will look into language choice investigated in international business and management research, organization studies and business communication (with an overall focus on multinational corporations), to which I will refer to as *business studies*. Also, I will review literature that focuses on language choice in corporate settings studied from a (socio)linguistic perspective, which I will subsume under the umbrella of *language studies*. Sociolinguistic theory attempts among others to explain how a language choice is made in its (social) context and thus useful for answering the study's research question (RQ), which centers on language choice in MNC contexts and languages' manageability (see *Chapter 1, Section 1.2*). Within these two major fields, empirical research gaps will be highlighted. Furthermore, I will provide first insights into the rationale behind selecting Danish and Austrian businesses for this study, review seminal pieces focusing on Denmark and Austria, and position my research within these national contexts. This will be followed by a more detailed account of the theoretical debates and conceptual challenges as to language choice both within and across *business* and *language* disciplines; these debates will be taken as a point of departure and shape the overall sociolinguistic theoretical framework underpinning this research. Overall, both empirical and theoretical knowledge gaps, being the essence of this chapter, aim to contextualize the RQ and put the motivation for this study into perspective.

#### 2.1.1 Language (choice) within business research – language as a ‘barrier’

The cross-disciplinary field of language choice is characterized by various understandings of language and language choice in corporations. First, within the *business* community, the notion of languages (multilingualism) often has negative connotations. Although occasionally referred to as a facilitator, language(s) tend(s) to be associated with a *barrier* to e.g. communication in general, market entry, subsidiary control or local operations and overall coordination (Brannen 2004, Luo

& Shenkar 2006, Harzing & Feely 2008, Harzing et al. 2011). Language may also be conceptualized as a source of power which potentially has a negative impact on organizational structure and group dynamics or interpersonal relationships (e.g. Marschan et al. 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b, Vaara et al. 2005, Brannen 2004). Multilingualism, in particular, is often linked to expenses (e.g. high transaction costs) or business loss, and perceived as an obstacle to achieving business goals, knowledge sharing and efficiency (e.g. Luo & Shenkar 2006, Luring & Selmer 2012, Neeley 2012, 2013, Neeley et al. 2012). This also shapes the community's overall understanding of or approach to language choice which often centers around overcoming language diversity. Thus, a commonly studied but also controversial phenomenon is the choice of a lingua franca – often English – in an attempt to facilitate communication. It may be perceived as a profitable choice to ease 'the language barrier' (Feely & Harzing 2003) or solution to the problem of multilingualism, and is commonly referred to as 'standardization' (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, 1999b, see also Vandermeeren 1998). As Piekkari & Tietze (2011) most recently summarize:

The term 'language standardization' (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch, 1999, p. 379) refers to efforts by top management to instill a common corporate language and harmonize internal and external communications through general rules and policies. It is driven by the assumption that 'one language fits all' communication needs.

Advocates of this concept share the strong belief that language and language diversity can be managed, i.e. by a centralized single-language policy suggesting lingua franca use within and outside the MNC network. In broader terms, "language design is the product of deliberate language choice" on the part of corporate management (Luo & Shenkar 2006: 321).

This standardizing approach to language has been subject to criticism since it is perceived as being too simplistic. In more detail, Piekkari & Tietze (2011) argue that "language use is very much context-dependent and therefore difficult, if not impossible to dictate by general policies" and thus try to "set the agenda for language-sensitive research in international business and management" (p. 267). This has led to an intra-disciplinary "debate on standardization versus contextualization" (ibid.). In this vein, advocates of 'language contextualization' have taken up a more 'language-sensitive' stance which is open to languages other than English. They object to

‘English only’ and question its effectiveness or applicability to contexts of various natures (e.g. global, national, local, cultural, functional/occupational, situational) (e.g. Fredriksson et al. 2006, Steyaert et al. 2011, Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011). In other words, the debate within the *business* community centers on the question whether English can fulfill all communication purposes, whether language can be regulated or managed in such a centralized, standardizing, top-down manner (e.g. Piekkari & Tietze 2011, Janssens et al. 2004, see also Dhir & Gòkè-Pariolá 2002). This discussion and research problem is basically the foundation for my RQ; in order to contribute to this discussion and solve some of the intra-disciplinary issues raised, the thesis focuses on the notion of language choice in context seen from a sociolinguistic perspective. I posit that such an approach can shed light on the circumstances under which English and languages other than English might be chosen and the rationales behind. More specifically, sociolinguistic theory helps identify the social context that defines agents’ language choices and thus helps us better understand how language choices are made in everyday workplace situations. These contextual insights will hopefully enable us to revisit the usefulness of centralized policies (i.e. promulgated by headquarters) in general and single-language approaches in particular, and consequently theorize in a more informed fashion about the manageability of languages in MNCs (see RQ). This in-depth knowledge is helpful to (theoretically and practically) embrace language choice in its integrity, refine language policy and management for business purposes from a new – sociolinguistic – angle, to ultimately improve international business communication.

### **2.1.2 Language (choice) within language research – language as a ‘resource’**

We also find various insights about the role of language and language choice in organizations within the *language* sciences. More specifically, within sociolinguistics, the notion of language(s) in societal or organizational contexts differs from the one predominant in *business* research. Language or multilingualism is usually associated with being a *resource* (rather than a *barrier*), also in workplace settings (Li 2007, Roberts 2007, Meyer & Apfelbaum 2010). A number of *language* scholars have investigated the relationship between linguistic resources or language choice and business performance, also referred to as the ‘economics of language’ (Grin 1996, Grin 2007, Coulmas 1992, Dhir 2005, García & Otheguy 1994). For instance, choosing a customer’s or

business partner's first language (L1) has been found to represent a competitive edge that can positively affect profitability and success (Vandermeeren 1998, Grin et al. 2009, Mettewie & Van Mensel 2009, Mettewie et al. 2006, Vandermeeren 1999). Consequently, it is often argued that the English language chosen as a lingua franca (standardization) cannot fulfill all communicative purposes in international business per se (Davignon 2008, Adiyaman 2011), and can in fact lead to the loss of business opportunities (Vandermeeren 1998). Similar insights can be gained from European projects like FLAIR (Hagen 1993), Elucidate (Hagen 1999), ELISE (Hagen 2001) or ELAN<sup>6</sup> (Hagen 2006). The ELAN report, for instance, highlights that some of the companies sampled lose trade opportunities due to insufficient language resources.<sup>7</sup> Also, the PIMLICO<sup>8</sup> report illustrates the positive effects of a company's (multilingual) language management strategy on export performance and turnover (Hagen 2011). More recently, the DYLAN project explores the dynamics of multilingualism among others in businesses and stresses that actors' multilingual practices are not necessarily solutions or answers to problems but rather assets for corporations (Berthoud et al. 2013). This means language can be a resource or can offer a competitive edge and is not necessarily the source of a problem. In a similar vein, Spolsky (2009) wonders how it is possible that global businesses are that slow in developing multilingual policies given that international business is not a new development but has existed for centuries. Most interestingly, the author raises some questions that are quite similar to the one elaborated in the previous section. The author writes an entire book about language management where he finally argues that

language management requires a detailed understanding of multilingualism and social structure, as well as of multidimensional social and demographic space. [...] Because so much of language management produces questionable results, apparently supporting monolingual hegemony and discouraging pluralism and multilingualism, is this not an area (like religious belief) better left to individual free choice? [...] We are left then with two basic questions; can language be managed? And if it can, should it be managed? (Spolsky 2009: 260f)

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<sup>6</sup> Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise

<sup>7</sup> Although often cited, the study has also been subject to some criticism such as not being representative of various countries (Grin 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Promoting, Implementing, Mapping Language and Intercultural Communication Strategies

In this sense, Spolsky's (2009) views very much align with the 'language-sensitive' *business* scholars' claims, as detailed above. Together, they support and justify the study's RQ.

A gap specific to *language* research, more precisely to the area of language policy and planning (LPP) or language policy and management is the scarce investigation of corporate contexts. LPP has traditionally dealt with national contexts such as planning/managing language for entire, usually multilingual, nations (i.e. macro contexts). Micro contexts such as businesses have yet seldom been studied possibly because they are not recognized as "an 'authentic' research genre" within the research tradition of LPP (focusing on the national level) (Baldauf 2006: 159). Baldauf (2006) also mentions the greater difficulties in gaining access to corporate than to public or governmental research sites. Similarly, Roberts (2007) notices that the field of language policy and planning is dominated by studies conducted in educational, community or family rather than workplace settings, and also mentions the enhanced difficulty of getting access to business environments.

My overall impression of the *language* field is also that if businesses are investigated, it is mostly small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (e.g. Hagen 2006, 2011, Incelli 2008, Vandermeeren 1998, Grin et al. 2009, Mettewie & Van Mensel 2009). Furthermore, many of these studies adopt a quantitative methodology, which means they provide more general answers to which languages are chosen (and maybe their effect on business performance), rather than insights into situational or contextual language choice. In this sense, the field of *language* studies could benefit from qualitative insights into the relatively new micro dimension of business in general and MNC contexts in particular. This also helps to see whether it is feasible to transfer theoretical concepts such as policy or planning/management, initially generated in nation-state contexts, to corporate environments or whether they may have to be refined in one way or another.

Overall, the *business* and *language* communities have different understandings of language, languages (multilingualism) and language choice, creating this kind of barrier-resource dichotomy. Yet, I believe they fruitfully complement each other, which is why I will try to reconcile the literatures in the framework of this research. In this vein, the present thesis attempts to contribute to both *business* and *language* research but in different ways. The field of *business* studies can benefit theoretically in that an in-depth study taking on a sociolinguistic approach can shed light on the

phenomenon language choice in international business in a new – context-sensitive – way. Sociolinguistic theory can help decipher how language choice operates in social context. This helps reassess the usefulness of centralized and English-only policies and the degree to which languages can – if at all possible – be managed. The *language* community on the other hand can benefit empirically and methodologically from my study in that it provides new insights into one of the still under-researched micro-level areas, i.e. businesses, and into MNC rather than SME contexts. Also, I adopt a qualitative case study design to complement the mostly quantitative *language* studies and deepen our understanding of contextual language choice. In conclusion, my study engages in both *business* and *language* discussions by studying language choice in selected MNCs and thereby addressing the question of whether language can be managed. In the following, I will discuss seminal pieces of research in both fields and focus on their empirical findings.

## **2.2 Empirical Findings of Prior Research on Language Choice in International Business**

In an era of globalization, the choice of English is a common phenomenon; one can observe a hegemony of the English language – also referred to as ‘Englishization’ – in many different areas of modern society (e.g. academia, education, supranational institutions, tourism, arts, film and music industry) due to historical (i.e. colonial), political, cultural, social, economic and demographic or military forces with Anglo-Saxon roots (Phillipson 1992, 2003, 2008, Crystal 1997, Maurais 2003, Tietze 2004, Dor 2004, Graddol 2006, Spolsky 2009, Neeley 2012). The area of international business practice and research is no exception, as I shall discuss below.

### **2.2.1 Language choice in MNCs**

Many *business* studies focus on the choice of English as a corporate language in various contexts. In the following, I will discuss seminal pieces of research with a focus on the choice of English in such contexts. The extensive body of literature is twofold; first, a number of international business and management studies shed light on the choice of a company or corporate language in global

operators, often studied from a (theoretically) human resource or management perspective (Marschan et al. 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, 1999b, Piekkari et al. 2005, Vaara et al. 2005); second, there is the (international) business communication stream – with a focus on English chosen as a (business) lingua franca (B)ELF) – where partly applied linguistics, (inter)cultural and discursive frames are adopted (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002, Charles 2007, van den Born & Peltokorpi 2010, Fredriksson et al. 2006, Tange & Luring 2009, Palmer-Silveira et al. 2006, Vollstedt 2002, Haegeman 2002, Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005, Planken 2005, Nickerson 2005, Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007). Although business communication is the overarching term or label of the second stream, and one might think of various languages, there is an almost exclusive interest in English, which also explains the comparatively scarce scholarly attention languages other than English suffer from. Thus, it remains to include languages other than English into current research to unravel the circumstances under which these are chosen and for what reason in order to get a holistic picture of international business communication. In other words, an open-ended approach to language choice is needed.

As briefly mentioned in the thesis' introduction, English is commonly chosen as a corporate language by companies located in Anglophone countries (e.g. Crick 1999, Clarke 2000). SanAntonio (1987) ethnographically studies language choice and related problems from an ethnic identity perspective in a Japanese subsidiary of an American company that chooses English as the company language and prescribes the use of English in all local units. However, in order to compete with the Japanese business network and to attract highly-skilled personnel, the subsidiary hires people without English competences. The American expatriate managers try to enforce the English-only policy by e.g. forbidding the translation of documents into Japanese. The policy becomes a power and control mechanism which negatively affects intergroup relations. Only English-skilled Japanese staff has access to scarce information and better career opportunities (ibid.). This study illustrates that a centralized policy suggesting English only may be difficult to implement at the subsidiary level, especially in environments where the local language and ethnic identity are strongly linked, and English is not widely spoken.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, this article is published in a *language* journal but regularly cited in the *business* community.

Another seminal article in the *business* literature is Marschan et al.'s (1997) case study of a Finland-based MNC (Kone Elevators). Adopting a human resource management (HRM) perspective, they focus on the implications of the choice of English as a corporate language for local units and internal communication. The analysis (based on interview data from 25 local units) suggests that the use of English only facilitates communication on the upper management level but not necessarily on middle management and operating levels because of lacking English skills among staff members. The authors thus discuss the dialectical nature of language as a facilitator versus a barrier. Varying or lacking language proficiency can also become a source of power. Language-skilled personnel can control and impede communication by filtering or distorting information. The authors suggest the integration of language into business strategy, the development of language policies and the appointment of a language officer in order to reduce communication problems and improve internal communication. In a follow-up study, Charles & Marschan-Piekkari (2002) specifically discuss lingua franca communication problems among the subsidiaries of Kone Elevators. The single case study based on interview data reveals language problems due to decreasing English skills lower down the hierarchy. This leads to the centralization of power on the one hand and the exclusion of those with low or lacking English skills on the other hand. However, the units offer comprehensive training in a variety of languages with different learning objectives based on local needs (*ibid.*). This study exemplifies that approaches to language training can differ across locations (organizational units) and from the centralized decision promoting a single corporate language.

Fredriksson et al. (2006) conduct an interview-based (36 interviews) case study of a German MNC (Siemens AG), including units in Finland and Germany, and investigate the role or rather perception of English as a common corporate language. Although Siemens operates in almost 200 countries, the language of the home country (i.e. German) still has a dominant role. There is no common agreement on whether English or German, or both are the official corporate languages. Also, different languages (including languages other than English) are used in different contexts and required for e.g. top management positions. Based on their findings, the authors question the concept of a *common* corporate language in that English is neither commonly chosen nor perceived as the common language (*ibid.*). Their study shows that languages may be perceived differently across locations (organizational units) and staff members (levels of employment). This



means language choices made at the corporate level (such as choosing a corporate language) are subject to individual interpretations and perceptions, which opens up the discussion on language beliefs, ideology and attitudes which I address in further detail later in this chapter.

Overall, these studies have provided insights into the choice of English at the corporate level in various business contexts and the implications of such a top-down decision for local units and employees. Various discrepancies between an English-only policy and business practice indicate that languages other than English seem to play a role but we do not know exactly which one. I adopt a more bottom-up, open-ended approach along the lines of Steyaert et al. (2011) who suggest that English (as a corporate language for internal communication purposes) “is not the endpoint of a language policy but forms one of the possible anchor points around which to deal with multilingual complexity” (p. 271). In this sense, the present study aims to complement the body focusing on English and the effects of adopting a corporate language by including languages other than English and exploring the broader concept of language choice, which I will further discuss below.

One could argue that the choice of English as a corporate language also represents a form of language policy and/or language management decision. That is to say, both *language* and *business* scholars have studied language choice (at both employer/corporate and employee/individual levels) under the umbrella of language policy/management mostly understood as solutions to language and communication problems. (The individual concepts and their similarities and differences in meaning will be explained in detail in Section 2.3.) Within the *language* community, Kingsley (2010) addresses language choice at different levels, i.e. policy/management and practice levels, and the influence of beliefs in the multilingual workplace. Adopting language policy and management theories (Spolsky 2004, Shohamy 2006, Jernudd & Neustupný 1987), interview data with managers in ten Luxembourg banks shed light on top-down language policy, while questionnaires and focus-group discussions at the employee level from three case banks capture language practices and language beliefs. The comprehensive analysis shows that even in banks, where English has been explicitly managed, i.e. chosen and implemented as a working language, alternative ‘mechanisms’ or choices for different purposes are subsequently pursued (i.e. different language courses, recruitment of language-skilled candidates). This creates a pluralistic top-down implicit policy which also fosters multilingual use practices among employees. Staff both highly

values and uses English, alongside languages other than English based on their linguistic repertoires, the medium, i.e. written versus oral interaction and transactional as opposed to relational purposes (bottom-up dimension). The interplay of top-down management (employer) and bottom-up pressures (employees) on de facto practices highlights the complexity of language policy in international business (ibid.). This study is insightful insofar as it takes on the challenge of capturing and understanding the relationships between explicit and implicit policy dimensions, management, practices, i.e. choices at different levels, and participants' beliefs. In other words, these findings show the dimensional complexity of language choice in the workplace, and the specific nature of this context. The question whether we need all these distinctions that seem to overlap to some extent will be addressed in the theory section.

Similarly, Nekvapil & Nekula's (2006) *language* study investigates language choice from a language management perspective in the Czech subsidiary of the Germany-based Siemens VDO Automotive corporation<sup>10</sup> that has chosen English as its corporate language. The authors draw upon interview data (collected from local and international managers) and participant observation, apply language management theory (Jernudd & Neustupný 1987) and distinguish between 'organized' and 'simple' language management. Various languages are chosen by the subsidiary's management for educational (language classes) and practicing purposes (simulated use of languages). Some language choices also involve or require translating or interpreting tasks mostly carried out by nonprofessionals (who at times lack the technical expertise and terminology needed). Apart from these forms of organized language management, employees choose languages for educational purposes too and initiate language training for themselves or develop other strategies for coping with language problems such as avoiding (face-to-face) communication in a given language, or language correction and repetition of important information in interactional discourse, all conceptualized as simple language management (Nekvapil & Nekula 2006). Although the authors claim to find this clear-cut distinction between initial simple language management feeding into organized language management, I argue that the line is blurred in that language choices still seem to be context-dependent, i.e. made by different actors in different situations embedded in or specific to geographical contexts (location) such as a subsidiary. On a conceptual note, if language management starts at the individual level, then this whole

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<sup>10</sup> Siemens VDO Automotive is one of the 14 business groups forming Siemens AG.

policy/management-practice dichotomy becomes somewhat redundant since it is no longer clearly distinguishable from the practice level.

Within the *business* community, Harzing et al. (2011) follow up on a conceptual paper on language management (Feely & Harzing 2003), and empirically investigate the language barrier to internal communication and offer a number of language barrier solutions – involving language choices at different levels. Their analysis is based on interview data (44) – presented in a quantifiable manner – collected primarily at the management level from seven German headquarters, one Japanese HQ and selected subsidiaries. They distinguish between (1) structural solutions (adoption of English as a corporate language, machine translation, reliance on external translators and interpreters, language training, selective recruitment), i.e. choices made at the corporate level, (2) informal changes in communication patterns (adapting medium and style of interaction, code-switching from English into Japanese/German), i.e. choices made at the individual level, and (3) bridge individuals (bilingual employees, ex-/in-patriates, locally hired home-country nationals, parallel information networks, i.e. staff contacts coworkers sharing their first language (L1) rather than those in charge) (ibid.). Overall, the study is insightful in that it shows that language choices are made at different levels resulting in a mix of choices of various kinds. Conceptually speaking, it would be interesting to know why the term language management used in the earlier paper (Feely & Harzing 2003) has been replaced by language barrier solutions, although the empirical data are actually contrasted to and discussed in the light of the earlier paper.

Another *business* study (Steyaert et al. 2011) but with many references to applied linguistics and sociolinguistics moves away from the idea of language policies or management, but instead focuses on discursive practices in two Swiss headquarters located in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. The discourse analysis of 32 semi-structured interviews discloses six discursive practices, i.e. individuals' justifications of language use or choice (similar to language ideologies within linguistic anthropology): (1) choice of the HQ language (i.e. French) (adaptation to the location), (2) choice of the addressee's or interlocutor's language (adaptation to the counterpart), (3) negotiation of situational language choice as in meetings (use of the majority's L1), (4) choice of a 'third' language (often English), (5) simultaneous use of L1s in written communication and (6) code-mixing/-switching. The findings also illustrate that the larger a group of speakers is, the

more powerful it becomes, which breeds language hierarchies and intergroup conflicts. Conceptually, the study “look[s] beyond language policies by moving to the process of languascaping, the ongoing negotiation among accounts of how to ‘choose’ between languages” in relation to local, national and global spaces and time (Steyaert et al. 2011: 277). Put simply, this study shows that different language choices are juggled around with and negotiated on an everyday basis. The fact that the findings are presented under the umbrella of negotiation stresses that language choice is not a simple or clear-cut enterprise because it involves different people, different locations and situations with different linguistic landscapes. Studies like this are the exception within the field which suggests further research into these alternative perspectives.

These four studies shed light on alternative choices going beyond the choice of a lingua franca or corporate language. Choices are made at different levels – which some studies try to encapsulate more or less successfully – and for e.g. educational (language training) and HRM (selective recruitment) purposes or may include translation/interpretation activities. The studies unanimously indicate that language choice is not a straightforward but rather complex phenomenon of a social and contextual nature. That is, an MNC’s agents make language decisions dependent on context. Yet, we have only marginal knowledge about how context influences language choice. A motivated account of the context in which language choices are embedded, more precisely of the contextual dimensions informing language choices in communicative situations, is necessary to refine these different forms of policy/management or possibly abandon them.

Furthermore, the works presented in the previous sections unanimously leave out the dimension of external communication or at least do not explicitly discuss whether language considerations are made for internal or external communication purposes. Yet, it is essential not to ‘forget’ external encounters for various reasons which motivate their inclusion into the present research. The dimension of external communication and its importance will be elaborated in the following.

### 2.2.2 Language choice for external communication purposes: the ‘forgotten’ dimension in MNC contexts

A possible reason for focusing on internal rather than external matters could be the size of an MNC network, its multilingual character and the linked complexity of internal communication in itself. Another reason could be the belief that internal and external dimensions of language choice are identical and e.g. English can be chosen for communicating with staff just as well as with customers or external partners (Neeley 2012). A third factor could be the general assumption that external communication issues are taken care of locally by the subsidiaries and thus not worthwhile including.

As already touched upon, the choice of English as a lingua franca or some corporate language is one attempt to harmonize internal communication. However, it can hardly be applied to external encounters such as establishing international and intercultural business relationships (Schumacher 2003, Swift 2008). More specifically, “it does nothing to ease the language barrier with external bodies such as customers, suppliers, international agencies and governments” (Feely & Harzing 2003: 46). Thus, under certain circumstances MNCs may need to use the languages of ‘the others’, i.e. their interactants, contracting parties or target groups such as customers. Customers and independent buyers, for instance, are in the favorable position of choosing between many competitors. It is likely that a buyer wants to purchase a product or good using her/his first language (L1) and likely chooses the seller who ‘speaks’ this language (Lavric 2008, Domke-Damonte 2001, Ammon 2010, Håkansson & Wootz 1979). This creates an asymmetrical ‘buyer-seller relationship’ (Feely & Harzing 2003) which may explain why sellers tend to speak their buyer’s languages. In sociolinguistic terms, choosing a counterpart’s language is referred to as ‘linguistic adaptation’ (Vandermeeren 1998) or ‘language accommodation’ (Giles & Powesland 1975, cited in Holmes 2008, see also Callahan 2006).<sup>11</sup> Although repeatedly studied in SME contexts by *language* scholars, as also mentioned earlier in this chapter, linguistic diversity in general and the role of these various buyer or customer languages in particular are hardly ever

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<sup>11</sup> Rooted in the linguistics community, several studies of mostly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have identified a positive correlation between sellers’ linguistic adaptation to their business partners, customers or clients, and profitability (Vandermeeren 1998, Grin et al. 2009, Mettwie & Van Mensel 2009, Mettwie et al. 2006, Vandermeeren 1999). Scholars have also tried to quantify the loss of business opportunities as a result of lacking English and foreign language skills (Incelli 2008, Hagen 2006).

investigated in MNCs and *business* studies. This might also be related to the overall scarce research interest in languages other than English and focus on ‘standardization’ in an English-dominated field of research.

However, recent *business* research highlights the importance of customer languages and the role of subsidiaries in external communication in local markets. Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio (2011) investigate language use in 61 Finnish subsidiaries of foreign multinationals which have mostly implemented English as their corporate language. They rely on quantitative survey data from management staff, supplemented by informal interviewing. Subsidiaries have an important mediating role between HQ and local environments. In order to successfully operate in the host-country markets, local external interaction is dominated by languages other than English, i.e. the languages of the customers. This also means that subsidiaries need to administer loads of translation tasks in order to make business-to-customer interaction work. In conclusion, the authors highly question the usefulness of choosing English centrally but suggest localized decisions including local languages instead. In this vein, they argue that the significance or prioritizing of languages depends on the organizational context; while the parent company may focus on the HQ or corporate language rather than local languages, the opposite may be the case for subsidiaries, which seems to render language hierarchy in MNCs “a two-way street” (ibid. p. 294). This *business* study engages in the disciplinary debate on ‘standardization versus contextualization’, and demonstrates that leaving decisions about external communication to subsidiaries only shifts and decentralizes the question of language choice from the HQ to local levels but does not answer it *per se*. English chosen at HQ does not fit the local needs. National market circumstances require the choice of customers’ first language. This choice requires some form of translation. The insights gained on translation issues add a whole new layer to the research phenomenon of language choice in the MNC. More specifically, we know very little about the transition between interunit and host-country communication and the language shift, i.e. from English or the HQ language to local/customer languages, inherent in this process. This opens up questions about translation administration and the quality or degree of professionalism, i.e. who carries out the translation (and interpreting) tasks and are there any problems involved (see also Nekvapil & Nekula 2006)? Therefore, it has been argued that the dimension of translation (to bridge internal and external communications) needs to be further investigated and

included into the picture of language decisions (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011, Piekkari & Tietze 2011).

Loos' (2007) *language* research captures language choice in the form of language policy in a private organization including external communication, too. It is a case study of a Dutch holiday center (headquartered in Amsterdam) that chooses German as the official language for communicating internally with the German site and externally with the local customers in Germany. The analysis is based on an interview with the Dutch Head of the HR Department, corporate documents and 50 (audio-recorded) conversations between Dutch and German employees and guests (customers). The findings reveal that language choices made at the subsidiary level in interaction with customers depend on various factors; there may be Dutch customers who (1) do not speak German, (2) expect that they can speak Dutch in a Dutch holiday center (headquartered in the Netherlands) or (3) assume they need to speak German since they are on German territory (linguistic adaptation to the location). These different language abilities and assumptions or beliefs and attitudes account for German, Dutch or mixed language use. The author critically argues that the German-language policy does not fit the local context and the customers' needs, who are mostly Dutch and not German (ibid.). This study is interesting in that it shows, similar to Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio (2011), that a centralized choice is not necessarily applicable to local, external communication needs, which also means that the internal and external dimensions might need to be treated separately.

These two studies presented above indicate that the external communication dimension is not to be underestimated or forgotten in MNC contexts. They argue the case for including external business endeavors when studying language choice in international business in order to reach a more diversified picture of the research phenomena. Furthermore, they exemplify that choosing one language or single-language policies might not be enough in a globalized business world. They can hardly fulfill all the different communication needs. MNCs in their function as both employers and sellers have different relationships with their staff and their customers which may result in different languages choices. This also means that if we want to get an idea of language (choice) in MNCs in its integrity, one ought to study both internal and external communication dimensions, which this study embraces.

### 2.2.3 Positioning the study at the cross-road of two non-Anglophone nations

The thesis engages in the vivid debate, outlined above, on standardization versus contextual language choices and multilingual language policy frames (contextualization) and explores non-Anglophone MNC contexts contrasting English-speaking and U.S. perspectives (e.g. Neeley 2012). Several calls for comparative research can be found in the *business* literature. Fredriksson et al. (2006) state that “Anglo-Saxon companies are likely to suffer from certain ‘blindness’ to the language problem due to the current dominance of English as the *lingua franca*” (p. 411) and suggest that “[f]uture research should therefore compare firms from different language backgrounds in order to assess the possible effects of home-country language and ‘language blindness’” (p. 420). A potential ‘blindness’ of Anglophone businesses has also been stressed by other scholars (e.g. Thomas 2008, Graddol 2006, Crick 1999, Clarke 2000, Hagen 2005). Similarly, Welch et al. (2001) would welcome an in-depth exploration of “language issues in firms from different countries” (p. 206). In other words, “there is a need to extend the analysis into a wider range of company languages, not just those using English, and of parent-country languages” (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b: 437). The controversial discussion in the extant literature in general and these calls in particular have motivated me to study MNCs headquartered in non-English-speaking countries (with different parent-country (HQ) and corporate languages) and their responses to the question of language choice.

In search of comparable research contexts, I came across an interesting report entitled *Languages mean Business – Companies work better with languages* published by the European Commission (Davignon 2008). The report claims that linguistic diversity represents a competitive advantage for businesses and “a lingua franca can never be enough to satisfy every communication need” (Davignon 2008: 3), along the lines of most *language* studies. In order to support this claim, the author not only refers to the often cited large-scale ELAN study (Hagen 2006), but also to research that has been conducted at the national levels. In this context, two countries, namely Denmark and Austria, are used as a positive and a negative case example respectively, as the following quotations show:

The Confederation of Danish Industries carried out a survey among their member companies in 2007 which showed that other languages than English are used by more than a third of all companies and that 4 companies out of 10 have experienced more or



less serious communication problems with trade partners in other countries as a result of linguistic deficits. (Davignon 2008: 11)

This quotation lets one assume that Danish companies seem to be open towards the choice of languages other than English, and that their business partners lack the language skills needed for doing business globally. The Austrian market, on the other hand, is described in a more negative way:

The Austrian Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft published a report in 2006 projecting future problems in Austria, which is one of the few countries where the language skills among the general population have actually gone down according to the Eurobarometer. In addition to English, the companies will need Italian and the languages of the trading partners in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular Czech, Slovak and Hungarian. (Davignon 2008: 10)

On the basis of the quotation above, one could speculate that the Austrian companies are linguistically not equipped for international trade as the general population speaks fewer foreign languages. Since the EU report (Davignon 2008) does not contain any references, we do not know exactly to which Danish survey and Austrian report it is referred. This has aroused my interest in looking into these two national research communities in more detail. In the following, seminal studies concerned with language choice and related problems from Danish and Austrian perspectives will be reviewed. It will turn out the picture drawn at the national levels is slightly different from Davignon's (2008) postulates.

### **2.2.3.1 Language choice in Danish businesses**

In a Danish context we find a large-scale survey based on 267 Danish businesses, all members of the Confederation of Danish Industry (Dansk Industri). It sheds light on foreign language (FL) needs from the firms' perspective, attitudes towards foreign language use and language choices in interaction with foreign trading partners. 60 % of the businesses in the sample conduct business in English whereas 8.7 % of the SMEs and 4.9 % of the larger companies use the trade partners' first languages. Language barriers in international business are encountered with China, France,

Germany and Russia. From a Danish perspective though, the implications and problems such as the loss of business opportunities are mostly attributed to the poor English skills of the foreign counterparts. In other words, Danish companies largely do not believe they need to choose any languages other than English (Verstraete-Hansen 2008, see also Verstraete-Hansen 2009).

Similar insights can be gained from Millar & Jensen's (2009) (mixed-method) study on language choice and management in five Danish multinationals, with an interest in the role of English in business and society. The findings reveal a prevalence of English as a lingua franca and corporate language in the Danish business world, also for external communication purposes. The authors conclude that "it is the customer that is seen as having the problem, not the company" (ibid. p. 99), if s/he does not speak English. In other words, perceptions of English predominant in Danish businesses and society color "perceived needs in relation to other foreign languages" (ibid. p. 102).

Further qualitative research focuses on the choice of English as a corporate language within Danish MNCs. Lønsmann's (2011) ethnographic study of a Danish pharmaceutical company sheds light on perceptions of English and Danish (language ideologies) within the company. It turns out that both English and Danish are chosen whereas Danish is considered important since the company is located in Denmark ("one-nation-one-language ideology", p. 225). This also means that international staff members are expected to learn Danish to facilitate social integration. In this vein, Tange & Luring (2009) qualitatively investigate the effects of English chosen as a corporate language on social interaction, knowledge sharing and organizational culture in 14 international Danish organizations. They identify a discrepancy between the Danes' open-minded or positive attitude towards the adoption of a corporate language and their actual language practices; Danish is often used for informal communication, so-called language clustering, which largely prevents international staff from socializing with Danes. These two studies are interesting insofar as they not only highlight the role of English but also the relevance of Danish internally, specifically in the home-country environment (headquarters). More specifically, they stress the social implications of international staff members, i.e. their social integration or exclusion within a setting. By contrast, another Danish study shows that HQ-subsidary interaction may also include local languages (e.g. French) if English lingua franca communication is not an option because local staff do not speak fluent English (Andersen & Rasmussen 2004).

Based on these insights, one could get the impression that Danish companies tend to be ‘English-friendly’ when it comes to international business encounters and do not overtly consider languages other than English, unless they ‘have to’, which is more or less the opposite of what is postulated in the EU report (Davignon 2008). Also, within this body of Danish studies, language policy and management is often associated with or even limited to the adoption of English as a corporate language and its implications (see also Sørensen 2005). As a consequence, a scarcity of research into alternative language choices (including languages other than English or Danish, language training, translation/interpretation, etc.) is noticeable. This is a gap the present thesis wishes to address by studying language choice in its broader, multifaceted sense in Danish MNC contexts.

#### **2.2.3.2 Language choice in Austrian businesses**

In the Austrian context, we find a number of studies, mostly quantitative ones, that account for language choices with regard to both internal and external communications. For example, Archan & Dornmayr’s (2006) study is a country-wide survey based on 2,017 businesses of varying sizes. It focuses on FL needs, language skills of newly recruited staff and language training offered by companies. The main business lingua franca relied on is English (except for interactions with Hungary) and 10 % of the sample have adopted English as a corporate language. Between 17 % and 31 % of the businesses interacting with Latin America, Spain, Italy and France rely on the buyers’ L1s. German may be used in Eastern European and former Yugoslavian markets (*ibid.*).<sup>12</sup> Linguistic adaptation to Romance-language speaking partners is also found in a case study of three Austrian middle-sized exporters (Bäck 2004). The choice of German in Eastern European collaboration is similarly highlighted in a regional quantitative study of Lower-Austrian SMEs bordering the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Schweiger 2008).

Another survey gives an overview of the role of foreign languages in 40 Austrian MNCs. The majority of the companies investigated – with an average number of approx. 6,500 staff – have German as a corporate language (52 %). The rest (48 %) have either one (English), two (German

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<sup>12</sup> See also Ammon (2001) on the role of German as a lingua franca in Europe and Busch (2010) on language change and policy in former Yugoslavia.

and English, English and Italian) or three (German, English and Italian or French) corporate languages. 60 % of the firms believe in the ‘very important’ role of foreign languages, in particular those companies with English as a corporate language or multiple corporate languages. In addition to adopting corporate languages, a high number of the firms either support externally organized language classes (79.5 %) or in-house courses (74.4 %), in addition to stays abroad for language training purposes, selective recruitment and participation in international conferences. Professional translators and interpreters are relied on for promotional material, contracts and technical texts, occasionally also for negotiations. Besides English, also Slavic languages, Hungarian, Chinese, Romance languages, etc. are reported to having gained importance since the mid-1990s. In an era of globalization and Eastern European market expansion (fostered by the EU enlargement in 2004), the choice of English is perceived as not being enough (Weber 2008).

Overall, it seems that Austrian businesses choose a mix of languages, including the use of English, of customers’ or business partners’ languages and ‘their own’ language (i.e. German). They tend to adopt different corporate languages – which makes them interesting to study (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b) – engage in a number of alternatives to English and may regard foreign languages as important for global business operations. These impressions shed a different light on the ‘Austrian business situation’ than Davignon (2008) does, in particular in contrast to the Danish contexts.

Moreover, with regard to research on Austrian firms and methodologies applied, Lavric (e.g. 2008) has repeatedly stressed the lack of qualitative in-depth insights into language choice in business in comparison to the larger body of quantitative studies (e.g. Kubista-Nugent 1996, Rheindt 1997, Seeböck 1999, Daublebsky 2000). This is also reflected in my review. A valuable qualitative contribution is based on SMEs (Bäck 2004). Thus, the research community focusing on Austrian businesses can benefit from the present project in that it is of an exploratory and qualitative nature and includes MNC (instead of SME) contexts.

In conclusion, it is argued that a comparison of Danish and Austrian multinationals having different national language backgrounds, i.e. Danish and German, can hopefully yield novel insights into the area of language choice in international business by potentially offering

sophisticated or diversified answers to the question of language choice and alternatives to the choice of English and single-language policies.

#### **2.2.4 (Empirical) knowledge gaps summarized**

The previous sections of this chapter have given an overview of seminal empirical studies shaping a cross-disciplinary field of inquiry and identified several research gaps. First, a number of studies rooted in the wider *business* community examine the notion of English as a lingua franca or corporate language and are interested in the implications of such a choice for internal communication. This means an extensive body of literature has provided valuable insights into the role of English and related problems in various organizational contexts (Marschan et al. 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, 1999b, Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002, Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005, Piekkari et al. 2005, Vaara et al. 2005, Fredriksson et al. 2006, Tange & Luring 2009). These studies or rather the problems and discrepancies identified let one wonder whether English can be enough and what functions languages other than English assume in MNC contexts. In addition, they question the usefulness of centralized choices and the degree to which languages can be managed at all.

Second, both *business* and *language* literatures have shed light on alternative choices (including both employer/corporate and employee/individual levels) for e.g. internal/external communication purposes, educational or HRM purposes (adoption of several corporate languages, language training and acquisition, reliance on or recruitment of language-skilled individuals, translation/interpretation services, code-switching/-mixing, etc.). The cross-disciplinary field lacks in-depth knowledge about the context in which these various choices are embedded to learn about the manageability of language.

Third, with regard to an MNC's communication, it has been noticed that there is often a strong focus on internal communication. While interunit communication is possibly dominated by English, the external dimension, i.e. host-country interaction with customers, requires the choice of customer languages. Thus, subsidiaries assume the role of mediators between HQ and local markets. In this context, some authors stress that single-language policies do not fit local settings

and their encounters with customers. Overall, language choices for external communication purposes need to be empirically investigated, if we strive for a more holistic picture of language choice in MNCs and languages' manageability. By integrating both internal and external communication dimensions in the present study, I hope to contribute new insights to the field.

Fourth, with regard to methodology, several *business* scholars suggest a comparison of non-Anglophone research sites (Fredriksson et al. 2006, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b, Welch et al. 2001). This may help gain new perspectives on language choices, alternatives to the choice of English and counterbalance Anglophone perspectives (e.g. Neeley 2012). Danish and Austrian businesses are mentioned in an EU report representing 'good' and 'bad' examples of language-oriented business activities. A closer look into other sources including Danish and Austrian firms has drawn a controversial picture, which renders these national contexts scientifically interesting to compare. Prior studies have shown that the Danish MNCs investigated prioritize English and Danish whereas the Austrian companies tend to rely on German, English and other languages. A cross-national comparative study aims to provide multifaceted insights into language choice in international business, possibly contrasting English-only perspectives. (Further reasons for the adoption of a cross-border design including these headquarters locations will be discussed in *Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1.2.*) Another methodological observation concerns prior research's focus on either one or more headquarters or the subsidiary level only. Some studies include both levels, supposedly for (unit) triangulation purposes, but do not explicitly differentiate between language choices made at the various organizational levels (HQ, divisions, subsidiaries) in the discussion of their findings. Since many of the extant findings do yield differences across the locations (settings) resulting in discrepancies of various kinds, the distinction seems crucial and will be considered in the present study, in order to advance the area of language choice in the context of MNCs.

In conclusion, we have gained an overview of how the notions of language and language choice have so far been empirically investigated in different organizational contexts. The theoretical discussions within the field are dealt with in the next sections of this chapter.

## 2.3 Theoretical Discussions in a Cross-disciplinary Field

In the following three sections, I will discuss the research phenomenon language choice theoretically and elaborate on the theoretical frameworks that underlie this research. First, the review of a number of studies and their empirical findings, as presented in the previous sections, has highlighted that language choice in international business is not a clear-cut phenomenon. Authors within and across *business* and *language* communities seemingly have difficulties conceptualizing language matters in organizational contexts, which has stirred some conceptual confusion, which I will attempt to elucidate by adopting the overarching concept of *language choice*. Second, I will conceptualize language choice in IB, and MNCs particularly, from a sociolinguistic perspective. This includes a detailed description of an MNC's idiosyncrasies from a sociolinguistic angle and the various language choices that are made within the MNC network. The third and last part of this chapter focuses on a number of primarily sociolinguistic theories, combined with concepts from linguistic anthropology, applied linguistics and social psychology, that provide possible factors that influence language choices made in their social context. The chapter finishes off with a summary of the theoretical knowledge gaps.

### 2.3.1 Language choice made at different levels: language policy/strategy, planning/management, practice – useful distinctions or conceptual confusion?

If one reviews the phenomenon language choice in an interdisciplinary fashion, one discovers that multiple conceptualizations of language choice can be found in both *language* and *business* communities, as also reflected in the previous sections of this chapter. In fact, we are dealing with a myriad of concepts and terms that have both similar and different meanings within and across disciplines, e.g. (explicit, implicit) language policy, (simple, organized) language management (solutions), language barrier solutions, (discursive) practices and language use can be found (e.g. Kingsley 2010, Nekvapil & Nekula 2006, Spolsky 2009, Feely & Harzing 2003, Harzing et al. 2011, Steyaert et al. 2011). In addition, the definitions not only partly overlap but may also suffer from vagueness or implicitness.

One theoretical problem within the extant literature is that authors have tried to conceptualize language choice at different levels, i.e. at the employer/corporate and the employee/individual levels, which creates a distinction between the policy/management and practice dimensions. Yet, this distinction does not seem totally clear-cut. Prior research, as reviewed earlier, has shown that the dimensions do overlap in that policies or management may have an implicit character and thus resemble practices rather than top-down policies or management activities. Also, policy may not be approved by all staff members and thus be disregarded, etc. In this sense, the conceptual distinction (between policy/management and practice) may not be useful in a business context after all. This has led me to adopt a more open, inductive approach to the subject matter and start out with the overall concept of *language choice*. This will allow me to see at which level a choice is made, by whom, in which communicative situation and for which reason. In this way it will be possible to see whether policy/management can de facto be distinguished from practices, that is whether language can be managed at all within an international business context (see RQ – Chapter 1, Section 1.2).

Terms and concepts like *policy* or *management* have their roots within sociolinguistics, as only briefly touched upon in the introduction of this chapter. More specifically, the concepts originally embrace language choice at an institutional level, where authoritative bodies such as governments choose one or more languages and promote or declare them as e.g. ‘national’, ‘minority’ or ‘regional’ languages, in an attempt to regulate or change language use among participants (practices) within a (multilingual) speech community such as a (multilingual) nation (Fishman 1987, Ising 1987, Berthoud & Lüdi 2011, Coupland 2010b, De Swaan 2010, Ricento 2013). These overt or deliberate interventions on language use have been studied in the research tradition of language planning and language change (e.g. Haugen 1987, Cooper 1989, Jernudd & Das Gupta 1971, Rubin & Jernudd 1971), and language policy (e.g. Spolsky 2012a, Ricento 2006, Shohamy 2006, Phillipson 1992, Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1995), all contributing to varying degrees to a field which is today mostly known as language policy and planning (LPP) (Ricento 2006, 2013, Baldauf 2006, Jernudd & Nekvapil 2012) or language planning and policy, depending on where the focus lies (Deumert 2009, Spolsky & Lambert 2006),<sup>13</sup> and increasingly

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<sup>13</sup> Language policy and planning (LPP) has emerged as an integrated field in an era of decolonization and nation building in the 1960s, when newly independent African and Asian countries needed to choose or rather agree on a



also language policy and management (Spolsky 2009). The broader field is characterized by various concepts. Spolsky (2012b, 2009, 2004) summarizes that over time authors have defined and used similar concepts (e.g. language *policy*, language *plan*, language *planning*, language *intervention*, (organized versus simple) language *management*, language *engineering*, language *treatment*) in different ways or interchangeably. One could add language *regimes* (Coulmas 2005a) or the *regulation* of linguistic behavior (Seargeant 2009) to the list. There are also scholars who have used and still prefer the general term language *choice*, also for discussing it at a broader societal scale, instead of policy, planning or management (Hunt 1966, Romaine 2000). The broader field is a branch of sociolinguistics, possibly studied under the umbrella of (societal) multilingualism and language contact (Wodak et al. 2011), applied sociolinguistics (Mesthrie 2011, Coulmas 1997, Fishman 1971), applied sociology of language (Fishman 1972b) or understanding and intervening (Wardhaugh 2006).

Since they are somewhat similar and interrelated concepts, it is difficult to draw a precise definitional line between *policy* and *planning*. While the definition was originally based on Kaplan & Baldauf's (1997) work, which drew on ideas from Rubin & Jernudd (1971), Baldauf (2006: 19f) revises previous definitions as follows:

Traditionally, language planning has been seen as the deliberate, future-oriented systematic-change of language code, use and/or speaking, most visibly undertaken by government, in some community of speakers. Language planning is directed by, or leads to, the promulgation of a language policy(s) – by government or some other authoritative body or person. Language policies are bodies of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve some planned language change (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997: 3). Language policy may be realised in very formal (overt) language planning documents and pronouncements (e.g. constitutions, legislation, policy statements, educational directives) which can be either symbolic or substantive in form, in informal statements of intent (i.e. in the discourse of language, politics and society), or may be left unstated (covert). While the distinction between language policy (the plan) and language planning (plan

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common 'national' language (Ricento 2013, Deumert 2009, for a historical overview see Dhir & Gökè-Pariolá 2002, Jernudd & Nekvapil 2012). This was considered necessary in order to "improve efficiency, develop nationalistic attitudes, and promote economic development" in times of modernization (Ricento 2013: 525). On the one hand, it seems LPP has become an integrated field of study due to the interrelationship of the concepts policy and planning, which I will define later in this section. On the other hand, originated as two separate disciplines both language policy and language planning still have their own journals (e.g. *Language Policy*, *Current Issues in Language Planning*) with different agendas, that is, policy and planning are not necessarily studied in consolidation. There does not seem to be a consensus on what the field is called. What seems to be commonly agreed upon is that the broader field of LPP lacks an overarching theory due to the complexity of matters involving language in society (Ricento 2006).

implementation) is an important one for users, the two terms have frequently been used interchangeably in the literature.

Although this definition is comprehensive, some elements are nevertheless confusing such as the nature of language policy which can be explicit or implicit. The ‘overt’ (explicit) policy is the actual plan in the form of a written language planning document/policy statement with a set of rules governing change of language use. However, a language policy can also exist without a written document, as a ‘covert’ (implicit) reality characterized by some kind of ‘unwritten laws’ and practices. This means that the term language *policy* has both a very concrete and a more abstract, tacit meaning, which makes it difficult to define it precisely and actually distinguish it from both *planning* activities and language *practices*.

Similarly, Berthoud & Lüdi (2011) define explicit language policy from a national perspective as the promotion of languages supported by written (legal) documents (e.g. European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages). They also acknowledge that language policy can be indirect or covert. The authors argue that “[t]he notion of language policy incorporates ‘language planning’” – which they associate with Haugen’s (e.g. 1987) seminal work on language planning (divided into status and corpus planning<sup>14</sup>) – and describe as “any type of intervention which addresses sociolinguistic problems” and “the enactment of (explicit) linguistic policy by way of a ‘road map’”. Planning implies not only decisions at the political level but also all choices relative to the domains and modes of intervention” (ibid. p. 479).

By contrast, Spolsky (2004) offers a much broader conceptualization of language policy which encompasses:

language practices, language beliefs and ideology,<sup>15</sup> and the explicit policies and plans resulting from language-management or planning<sup>16</sup> activities that attempt to modify the practices and ideologies of a community. (p. 39)

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<sup>14</sup> Status planning is generally associated with the allocation of functions to languages (e.g. national status), whereas corpus planning is concerned with the standardization of a language’s internal structure (Haugen 1987, see also Deumert 2009 for an overview).

<sup>15</sup> Spolsky seems to use the concepts beliefs and ideology/ideologies interchangeably (see also Spolsky 2009: 4).

<sup>16</sup> Note, *planning* has increasingly been replaced by *management* usually for language choice in contexts other than national ones (Spolsky 2009, Nekvapil 2006, Baldauf 2006), to which I will return later.

These ideas highlight the policy-practice level and suggest that explicit policies and plans being the result of language management attempt to change language practices and beliefs or ideologies within a speech community. (I will discuss beliefs and ideologies in the context of attitudes as a possible factor influencing language choice later in this chapter.) Worthwhile mentioning is also that Spolsky (2009) distances himself from this neat demarcation between *policy* as the *plan* and *planning* encompassing only the *implementation* process – as Baldauf (2006) does – by stressing the ambiguity of the word *policy* and arguing that a language management decision *is* a *policy*. In other words, “[l]anguage management refers to the formulation and proclamation of an explicit plan or policy, usually but not necessarily written in a formal document, about language use” (Spolsky 2004: 11). This explains why *policy* and *planning/management* often get confused and are sometimes used interchangeably.

More recently, Spolsky (2009) takes on a different approach or shifts focus by arguing that:

Language policy is all about choices. If you are bilingual or plurilingual, you have to choose which language to use. [...] The goal of a theory of language policy is to account for the choices made by individual speakers on the basis of rule-governed patterns recognized by the speech community (or communities) of which they are members. Some of these choices are the result of *management*, reflecting conscious and explicit efforts by language managers to control the choices. (p. 1)

Looking at the first two sentences of the quotation makes me wonder how one differentiates between policy and practice levels if policy starts at the individual level. Furthermore, the “goal of a theory of language policy” does not seem any different from basic sociolinguistic theory which accounts for the choices language speakers as members of a speech community make, which I will discuss later in more detail. Similarly, Lavric & Bäck (2009: 39) talk about an “individual language policy” which represents the strategy behind one’s language practices. In this sense, the distinction between the policy and practice levels gets blurred again.

Lauridsen (2008: 103) does not distinguish between policy and planning or management and introduces contexts other than national ones to which a language policy can be applied:

The concept of language policy is multi-faceted and includes education and training as well as the skills and competences needed in a professional – or non-professional – context when people interact in speech or writing across linguistic and cultural borders.

Furthermore, the concept covers the choice of language or languages used for human interaction in particular settings. Finally, language policy matters may be considered at different levels, first of all at the level of international organisations or supra-national bodies like the UN or the EU, [...] at national level, [...] or at the level of individual organisations or companies, [...].

Apart from the national level, language policy may conventionally be associated with, language policy can also concern supranational institutions as well as organizations and corporations. It has to be noted that the business area as one of the micro contexts is still an under-researched area in comparison to macro-level research (e.g. national language policies). Thus, we know relatively little about the meaning of e.g. policy and management or similar concepts in corporations. In other words, macro settings seemingly differ from micro contexts in that the latter usually do not encompass language laws, official regulations or legislations. That is, policies, strategies or management – however one defines them – in a business environment are less formalized concepts *per se* than in macro contexts (cf. language policies of multilingual nations). This lets us question the usefulness or interdisciplinary applicability of these terms and concepts to micro-level environments; prior research, as discussed previously, also indicates that the policy level is likely to interfere with, thus hard(er) to distinguish from, the practice level. In this vein, Baldauf (2006) raises a number of crucial theoretical questions as to the similarities and differences between the macro and micro levels:

Furthermore, the notion of agency often lies with government officials, who are the prime actors in language planning activity (Baldauf & Kaplan, 2003). But, studies arising from this tradition raise the question of whether language policy and planning activity, almost by definition, is restricted to such large-scale (macro) governmental activity or can the frameworks that have been developed be applied differentially, but in an equally valid manner, to micro situations? Or, to put it another way, does language planning operate on a continuum from the macro to the micro? Is the resultant micro work still language policy and planning, or does it (should it) then fall into some other sub-field of applied linguistics or of some other discipline; e.g. sociolinguistics, education, critical discourse studies (CDA) or business studies? (p. 148)

Baldauf (2006) stresses the varying idiosyncrasies of macro and micro contexts and thereby problematizes the applicability of policy and planning concepts to micro environments such as businesses. He suggests their theoretical refining or even considers repositioning them within

sociolinguistics or business studies. These theoretical shortcomings the author highlights justify my research question, also theoretically (see *Chapter 1, Section 1.2*).

In line with Baldauf's (2006) above speculation, the conceptual diversity or ambiguity does continue once language policy and related concepts are applied to a business context. First, a language *policy* in corporate contexts may no longer be referred to as language policy (Loos 2007, Dhir & Gòkè-Paríolá 2002, Bergenholtz et al. 2003, Lauridsen 2008, Simonsen 2009, Duchêne & Heller 2012) but also as (corporate/company-specific/formal) language *strategy* (e.g. Janssens et al. 2004, Feely & Harzing 2003, Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011, Lavric & Bäck 2009, Møller & Jensen 1997). Regardless of the different 'labels', policy/strategy can mean multiple things.

Within the *business* community, Vaara et al. (2005) associate a *corporate language policy* with the choice of English as a corporate language (in the case of two merging banks) for internal communication purposes. Also within *language* research, a *corporate language strategy/policy* may be limited to internal communication and be subsumed under language *awareness*; "a language aware company would formalise a corporate language strategy, i.e. a policy for a single language to be used internally within the group for international meetings" (Feely & Winslow 2005: 15). By contrast, Vandermeeren (1998) associates a *corporate foreign language policy* with the improvement of staff members' language skills through measurements taken by the corporate management, e.g. internal or external language training. Lauridsen (2008) discusses the lack of a commonly adopted definition of a *corporate language policy* due to the complexity or cross-disciplinary relevance of the topic. The author provides a more comprehensive definition of a language policy which is integrated into a corporate communication policy (covering internal and external communication). It attempts to regulate language choices (in different settings), linguistic and intercultural resources, recruitment and education policies or professional translation/interpretation services with regard to internal and external communication.

Apart from replacing *policy* by *strategy* if it concerns corporate research sites, *planning* may be replaced by *management*. That is, if languages are planned for contexts other than the national (macro) ones, e.g. organizations and private sector companies (or religious, public or educational

institutions, home and family), it is more common to talk about *micro language planning* or *language management* (Baldauf 2006, Spolsky 2009).<sup>17</sup>

[M]icro language planning refers to cases where businesses [...] hold agency and create what can be recognised as a language policy and plan to utilise and develop their language resources; one that is not directly the result of some larger macro policy, but is a response to their own needs, their own ‘language problems’, their own requirement for language management. (Baldauf 2006: 155)

Baldauf (2006) links micro language planning or management to a language policy and plan which is a response to language problems, which adds a new dimension or subtlety to the phenomena. This notion also presupposes that companies have problems which they need to solve.

Similarly, Nekvapil & Nekula (2006) associate language *management* with problem solving. They draw on sociolinguistic Language Management Theory (LMT) (e.g. Jernudd & Neustupný 1987), apply it to and refine it within a business, in fact MNC environment. Their framework suggests that language management starts at the individual level in the form of intralingual language correction in conversations and discourse or ad-hoc solutions to contextual language problems, both as results of or reactions to the identification of a language problem at stake. In the long run the observations of language problems at the individual level (*simple* language management) ideally feed back and are integrated into language management at a more general, central level (*organized* language management) (see also Section 2.2.1).

Spolsky (2009) develops a model in which he defines language *management* in the workplace as “employers managing the language of their employees” and “management decisions are intended to modify practices and beliefs in the workplace, solving what appear to the participants to be communication problems” (p. 53). Inspired by Nekvapil & Nekula (2006), he argues, too, that language management starts at the individual level in the form of informal problem solving initiated by individual employees themselves. (Note, Spolsky’s (2009) theoretical propositions

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<sup>17</sup> Note, the term *language management* is, to my knowledge, more commonly used than *micro language planning* in both *language* and *business* literatures (e.g. Baldauf 2006, Spolsky 2009, Millar & Jensen 2009, Incelli 2008, Berthoud & Lüdi 2011, Feely & Harzing 2003, Harzing & Feely 2008, Tange & Lauring 2009).

differ from his earlier model of language policy (2004) in that explicit language policies are omitted).

I argue that conceptualizing language management as the answer to language or communication problems as Baldauf (2006), Nekvapil & Nekula (2006) and Spolsky (2009) do – see also Feely & Harzing (2003) below – is problematic. Not all forms of language management (e.g. language training/acquisition) may result from perceived language problems but may have other reasons or motivations (if one considers, for instance, motivation theories in L2 acquisition). It may simply be regarded as a language choice (for specific purposes).

Then there are *language* scholars who try to distinguish between or blend *policy/strategy* and *management* for business purposes in different ways which does not make the enterprise any easier. In the ELAN-report, for instance, a language policy concerns external communication and is referred to as “the planned adoption of a range of techniques to facilitate effective communication with clients and suppliers abroad” and listed as one of the *language management techniques* (Hagen 2006). The follow-up study, the PIMLICO project, takes the ELAN report’s definition of language policy but labels it *language management strategy* (LMS) and adds that an LMS “usually comprises a package of pre-emptive measures which facilitate a company’s entry or expansion in a new cross-border market where there are linguistic and/or cultural barriers” (Hagen 2011: 4). In this vein, Lüdi et al. (2010) provide a definition of *language strategies*, in fact used interchangeably with (*measures of*) *language management*, and emphasize the implicit nature of the phenomena:

In fact language strategies – we prefer the term (*measures of*) *language management* and understand by that *all forms of the company’s or its agents’ intervention on the employees’ linguistic repertoires, their representations of language and multilingualism [i.e. semiotic appearance] and their language behaviour in internal and external communication* – are not likely to be communicated explicitly in official documents (e.g. on the firm’s website). In most cases these sets of interventions – which are far from monolithical – must be deduced from traces in the data. (Lüdi et al. 2010: 213f)

The authors add the key terms *intervention(s)* and *language behavior* of agents to the conceptual list. They also stress that language strategies or language management measures are not necessarily

documented in explicit documents or statements but need to be investigated in their implicit nature. This aligns with the implicit nature of policy, as discussed earlier (e.g. Baldauf 2006).

The *business* scholars Feely & Harzing (2003) conceptualize *language management* as solutions or options undertaken by the employer at the corporate level which aim at overcoming the *language barrier* (as between headquarters and their national subsidiaries) (see also Harzing & Feely 2008). MNCs can then formulate a *language strategy* based on the range of “options for managing language problems” (Feely & Harzing 2003: 42). Among those are e.g. the use of a *lingua franca*, functional multilingualism, translation and interpretation services. The impact or intervention on employees’ language use is not included. As also mentioned in the literature review, later on Harzing et al. (2011) omit the term *management* but adhere to *language barrier solutions*. (As mentioned above, not all matters are probably about a language problem or barrier and a fitting solution; in a multilingual setting like the MNC, linguistic borders need indeed to be crossed but they are not necessarily associated with a barrier. The question might just be which language to choose in which context.) Among *language* scholars, one also finds the notion of ““solutions” for overcoming potential problems” (Lüdi et al. 2010: 212), such as the use of a *lingua franca*, receptive multilingualism, or translation and interpretation, but they are categorized as *ideologies and practices of communication* (ibid., cf. Nekvapil and Nekula 2006). These solutions may also be grouped as *foreign language use* in businesses: asymmetrical use (buyer’s or seller’s language), symmetrical use (e.g. *lingua franca*, polyglot dialogue) and translation/interpretation (Vandermeeren 1998).

This extensive overview illustrates the complexity of the subject matter. Given its cross-disciplinary nature, one would expect inconsistencies across research disciplines. Though the terminological and conceptual variety or multiplicity also exists within the communities, i.e. *language* and *business* research, which renders the clarification of ideas even harder. The terms and concepts have different meanings for different authors, their definitions overlap with one another, and no terminological consensus has yet been found in the research communities. More specifically, regardless of the research tradition they come from, both *language* and *business* scholars seem to struggle with distinguishing between policy (statements), strategy, planning, management, solutions, interventions and partly also practices and ideologies. To reach some conceptual clarity, I will use the inclusive term and concept *language choice* which does not imply per se any form of



agency, hierarchal dimension or intervention in the form of policy or management but covers both the policy and practice levels. To provide an example; translation and interpretation services are often grouped as (*organized*) language management (e.g. Nekvapil & Nekula 2006, Hagen 2006, Feely & Harzing 2003) or some formalized solution to language problems (e.g. Harzing et al. 2011). But what if a subsidiary once chooses Chinese as the target language of a business letter and sends it to a local translation agency, or if the individual employee translates/interprets for her/his boss on an occasional basis? They are all translation/interpretation activities but they are not necessarily formalized in any way. Another problem concerns the dual purpose of most language management definitions; i.e. management intends to solve language or communication problems (e.g. by translating information) and to change language users' practices (individual choices). One might ask in which way the reliance on external translation agencies, even if this might be a formalized solution, de facto influences or intervenes with employees' skills and choices or practices. The fact that some documents are translated into different languages (as a result of language choices) may not interfere with staff's language choices at all. So, it might be more useful to pay special attention to the context and specify who chooses which language in which setting for which purpose in order to advance the field in micro contexts such as business environments, and to reassess the role or usefulness of policies and management, i.e. the manageability of languages, in workplaces (i.e. MNCs) and thereby possibly help improve international business communication (see also RQ). Besides, critical voices asking whether language can and should be managed can be heard in both *language* (Rubin & Jernudd 1971, Deumert 2009, Spolsky 2009) and *business* research communities (Piekkari & Tietze 2011). In order to study language choice in context, more precisely, how language choices are made in MNCs, this research adopts a sociolinguistic framework, which will be discussed below.

### **2.3.2 Language choice in MNCs: a sociolinguistic approach**

My decision to adopt a sociolinguistic approach to this study has been inspired by some *business* scholars. For instance, Brannen et al. (2012) argue that the *business* community needs "interdisciplinary insights gained from a plethora of fields such as [...] linguistics, [...] in order to generate genuinely innovative frames of reference for understanding the role of language in

international business". Similarly, Harzing & Feely (2008) invite sociolinguists to contribute to explaining how language (and language barriers) impact on international business and management. Most of the *business* studies investigating language choice and related matters rely on frameworks rooted in communication, culture, management and organization, postcolonialism, (social) psychology, strategy, to mention a few, occasionally (socio)linguistics (e.g. Harzing & Feely 2008, Selmer 2006, Brannen 2004). By adopting a sociolinguistic perspective in the present study, it is hoped to shed light on language choice in MNCs in a new way, generating insights of use to the broader *business* studies community and advancing the field of international business in an unconventional way, i.e. by stressing the social dimension and nature of language choice. More specifically, we may get a more sophisticated picture, that is a context-specific, in-depth understanding of how the firm's participants or agents choose languages in a social context. In other words, once we know more about the contextual dimensions that influence language choice, we will hopefully learn whether language can be managed by the employer. In this sense, sociolinguistic principles are believed to answer the study's RQ (see *Chapter 1, Section 1.2*).

Broadly speaking, the field of sociolinguistics is concerned with the study of language in society (Romaine 2000, Holmes 2008). It has also been described as the study of speakers' choices (Coulmas 2005b), the study of language in its social context (Spolsky 2011) or the science of language and society (Ammon et al. 1987, see also Peng 1982).<sup>18</sup>

When talking about *language*, sociolinguists usually distinguish between a language (e.g. English, Chinese, Spanish) and its varieties of national, regional, social/ethnic, specialized, etc. nature within a single language (e.g. British English, Boston English), together making up a *code* (Fishman 1968, 1972b). A code can be described as "a culturally defined, rule-governed system of shared arbitrary symbols that is used to transmit meaning" (Cooley 1983: 242). Cooley's (1983) broad definition includes both oral and written language (i.e. media) as well as paralinguistics (e.g.

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<sup>18</sup> Looking at the history of sociolinguistics, important names that have substantially shaped and contributed to the field with their areas of expertise are Charles Ferguson (sociolinguistics), Joshua Fishman (the sociology of language), William Labov (language variation and change), Basil Bernstein (codes and social class), Dell Hymes (the ethnography of communication/speaking) and John Gumperz (interactional sociolinguistics) (see Wodak et al. 2011 for an overview), but also Einar Haugen (language planning) and Uriel Weinreich (language contact) (see Spolsky 2011). Spolsky (2011) explains that the field is sometimes called sociolinguistics (Fishman 1971) and sometimes the sociology of language (Fishman 1968, 1972b), terms which might be used interchangeably, as Fishman seems to do himself (cf. Fishman 1971, 1972b). At times they are demarcated in that the sociology of language is associated with a stronger focus on sociological aspects (Grimshaw 1987).

pitch), nonverbal cues (e.g. body language) and discourse encompassing among others the choice of language – which is this study’s main interest. A code also comprises language style (e.g. level of formality in language usage) and language register often related to occupational areas (e.g. legal, technical, medical fields or vocabularies) (Scotton 1983, Holmes 2008, Romaine 2000). When talking about *society*, the concept may be associated “with dyadic encounters, small group interaction, large group functioning, the articulation of social classes and sectors, contacts and contrasts between entire nations, etc.” (Fishman 1968: 5).

Based on the above, sociolinguistics can be described as “the study of the characteristics of language varieties, the characteristics of their functions, and the characteristics of their speakers as these three constantly interact, change, and change one another within a speech community” (Fishman 1971: 4). It also “seeks to discover the societal rules or norms that explain and constrain language behavior and the behavior toward language in speech communities” (Fishman 1971: 3). This also implies that even at a societal level languages are not necessarily overtly planned/managed, and that explicit language policies may not always exist. Yet, language users are acquainted with the community’s behavior norms, including language choice. Put simply, sociolinguistics aims to explain why individuals speak in different ways in different social contexts, identify the social functions of language and discover how language is used to convey social meaning (Holmes 2008). The overall goal of sociolinguistics is “to move towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the way language is used in a community, and of the choices people make when they use language” (ibid. p. 13). This makes it eminently suited to studying language choice in a social context such as the workplace in general and an MNC network in particular. In other words, sociolinguistic theory helps get a preliminary understanding of language choice in MNCs (see RQ – *Chapter 1, Section 1.2*). Generally speaking, sociolinguists try to answer the question ‘who communicates in what language (or variety) to whom, where, about what, and for what reason?’ within a speech community (Fishman 1965, 1972b, Holmes 2008). That is to say, participants (language users) – sometimes divided into senders/addressers and receivers/addressees/recipients of information – choose a language (or languages), including a medium (written, read or spoken/oral) and a channel (e.g. email, letter, telephone) in a

communicative situation or event (Hymes 1968, Fishman 1971, 1972b),<sup>19</sup> within a setting of interaction (location), in order to communicate about a subject matter (topic), with a certain function and purpose (Hymes 1968, 1972, 1974, 1987, Holmes 2008).<sup>20</sup> Applying a sociolinguistic framework to the present study enables to describe and distinguish between different participants (e.g. employer, employee, customer, etc.), languages with different functions (e.g. lingua franca), communicative events/situations (e.g. conference, meeting), the setting of the workplace including different physical locations (e.g. MNC's home country) and different purposes (e.g. internal versus external communication), all forming a multilingual speech community, i.e. the MNC, which I will further detail below.

### 2.3.2.1 MNCs as multilingual speech communities and language functions

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the multinational corporation (MNC) can be conceptualized as a multilingual speech community. A speech community, as also mentioned earlier, can be defined as a group of people that “share at least a single speech variety” (Fishman 1972b: 22), that communicate regularly and frequently, and share a set of rules and conventions (norms) about language usage (Gumperz 2009). (I will elaborate on community norms later in this chapter.) It

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<sup>19</sup> I do not exclusively nor entirely rely on Hymes' (1968) model of the ethnography of speaking, rather take the elements relevant for this study, and combine them with other key terms commonly used within sociolinguistics (see e.g. Fishman 1972b on the use of medium or media).

<sup>20</sup> The terms *function* and *purpose* are hard to distinguish, often used interchangeably, and can also have different meanings within sociolinguistics; for instance, the function of speech (i.e. utterances) may be of e.g. expressive/affective, directive or referential/informative nature (Hymes 1968, Holmes 2008). The purpose or function of a communicative event or situation (e.g. meeting, job interview) is the reason(s) for the interaction such as organizing a business meeting, applying for a job, attracting customers, etc. In this sense, purpose/function may also overlap with or is closely related to the notion of topic (Holmes 2008). By contrast, the function of an entire language or variety within a linguistic system can also ‘stand for’ the language of one nation, of law/court, education or trade, etc. In this sense, languages serve national, international, official, educational or commercial functions; adding to the confusion, these types of functions are often also associated with languages' statuses or roles, the latter being less formalized. Terms like function, status or role are used in various ways and difficult to distinguish; note, Esperanto serves the function of an auxiliary language, English has the status of a world language, or German has the role of a lingua franca in Eastern Europe (Ammon 1987). Assigning national or other official status to a language may also involve some form of national language policy and planning in a speech community, also known as status planning. I will primarily adhere to the term function capturing at best the sometimes implicit or not well-defined role of languages within the MNC and employment domain. The literature, for instance, has shown that the meaning or interpretation of a corporate language is ambiguous in that it does not seem to be perceived or associated with an official status (as the status of a national language). Thus, the notion of function seems more appropriate for describing the nature of e.g. a lingua franca or corporate language in an MNC context. Furthermore, in this study the purpose of a language choice grasps what the language (with a certain function) is chosen for; e.g. English in its function as a corporate language is chosen for internal communication purposes.

has traditionally been associated with a nation or region where the social rules or conventions imply the use of the national or regional language within the community (Gumperz 2009, Gumperz 1968). But the concept may be applied to any other unit or entity of language users such as a workplace, company or other organizational context (Spolsky 2009). As opposed to a language community (e.g. English, German speakers), a speech community is not necessarily monolingual but may be diglossic (bilingual), hetero- or polyglossic (multilingual), or characterized by a number of language varieties (Fishman 1972b, Romaine 2000, Ricento 2013). Similarly, in the field of international business and management, the MNC is often described as a ‘multilingual’ organization (Luo & Shenkar 2006, Fredriksson et al. 2006, Steyaert et al. 2011, see also Thomas 2008). This is because the MNC network consists of geographically dispersed organizations including a parent company or headquarters (HQ) and the national subsidiaries (e.g. Ghoshal & Bartlett 1990), which are all embedded in different linguistic environments (Thomas 2008).<sup>21</sup>

#### 2.3.2.1.1 HQ language, local and customer languages

These geographic and linguistic idiosyncrasies of an MNC also provide languages with different functions. The headquarters is located in a home country and dominated by its national language, which I will label ‘HQ language’ (cf. Thomas 2008, Fredriksson et al. 2006, Luo & Shenkar 2006, Harzing & Pudelko 2013). The subsidiaries’ locations are usually referred to as ‘host countries’ (e.g. Ghoshal & Bartlett 1990). The languages primarily chosen at subsidiaries assume the

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<sup>21</sup> In the field of international business, MNCs’ *environments* usually represent industries. A *global* environment or industry, for instance, requires a high degree of global integration (i.e. centralized, globally scaled operations) and little local responsiveness (i.e. decentralized, national operations aligned with local needs). A *multinational/multidomestic* environment promotes a strong focus on local responsiveness and a weak on global integration. The *international* environment in which both dimensions (integration and responsiveness) are weak fosters dissemination of parent-company (HQ) knowledge. There is also the *transnational* environment requiring an integrated strategy; the transnational approach tries to simultaneously unite global efficiency, flexibility in responding to domestic differences and needs as well as worldwide learning or knowledge exploitation (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1998, Ghoshal & Nohria 1993, Harzing 2000a, Harzing 2000b). The different environments may foster different structures (i.e. organizational designs) and corporate strategies impacting on interunit communication and language choices in one way or another (Luo & Shenkar 2006). Research has shown that it could also go the opposite way, that communication flows and language affect an MNC’s organizational structure. That is, a ‘shadow’ structure based on language develops which is different from the firm’s formal one. This means units are officially grouped together geographically (e.g. Southern Europe including Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain) but on a more informal basis they are clustered according to languages or language groups with varying language distance from the headquarters (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b).

functions of ‘local languages’ (cf. Luo & Shenkar 2006, Thomas 2008, Harzing & Pudelko 2013). Outside of or external to the MNC one finds independent buyers, clients, customers, business partners and agents or joint ventures in home-country and host-country markets that all ‘speak’ different languages whose function will be referred to as ‘customer languages’. (In this study’s case, HQ, local and customer languages are primarily languages other than English except for Anglophone units or subsidiaries and buyers/customers, of course.)

#### 2.3.2.1.2 Lingua francas and corporate languages

Apart from HQ and local/customer languages, it is necessary to elaborate on alternative functions such as a lingua franca which is discussed in both *language* and *business* communities (e.g. Vandermeeren 1998, Feely & Harzing 2003). Rooted in applied linguistics, the widely known and broadly used notion of a lingua franca – originally a pidgin for commercial purposes<sup>22</sup> – describes “all instances of using a language different from the speakers’ mother tongues for specific purposes” (Knapp & Meierkord 2002a: 9). In other words, “when we find a language which is commonly used by people whose native languages are different, we describe it as a lingua franca [...] used to communicate across linguistic barriers” (Samarin 1968: 661). In international business this lingua franca is very often the English language (Coulmas 1992, Thomas 2008, Fredriksson et al. 2006, Ammon 1991, St John 1996), possibly representing the only ‘shared’ language among interactants (Feely & Harzing 2003, Nekvapil & Nekula 2006).<sup>23</sup>

Usually ‘English as a lingua franca (ELF)’ (e.g. Seidlhofer 2001) ‘belongs’ to nonnative speakers (NNSs) of English.<sup>24</sup> The concept applied to business or cross-border mergers may also be referred to as ‘Business English Lingua Franca (BELF)’ and BELF users as “communicators in their own right – not ‘non-native speakers’ or ‘learners’” (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005: 404). These

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<sup>22</sup> Samarin (1968) offers a detailed overview of the existing kinds of lingua francas and their different purposes; they may serve as trade, contact, international languages, etc.

<sup>23</sup> Apart from lingua franca, English or its function could also be associated with the terms ‘global’ or ‘world’ language and ‘Englishes’ (accounting for the multiplicity of English varieties) (Graddol 2006, Phillipson 2001, Crystal 1997).

<sup>24</sup> ELF is not only an applied language management concept but a whole research discipline in itself with its own journal (Knapp & Meierkord 2002, Seidlhofer 2002, Mauranen 2005, Mauranen & Ranta 2009, House 2003, House 2007). In addition, it is often the research focus in the (international) business communication literature and related areas (Vollstedt 2002, Haegeman 2002, Louhiala-Salminen & Charles 2006, Nickerson 2005, Planken 2005, Bargiela-Chiappini et al. 2007, Palmer-Silveira et al. 2006).

classifications do not seem theoretically useful for the present study. Regardless of whom English ‘belongs’ to, business communication in English is very likely to be heterogeneous, occurring across different groups of speakers. This means we can hardly study isolated (B)ELF communication since also English native speakers (NSs) might have to communicate with NNSs of English within and across the multilingual MNC borders. For the purpose of this research, ELF simply describes the phenomenon where a shared language is used or needed; this comprises not only NNSs or English learners but also NSs in business contexts with different levels of English skills. The varying fluency of speakers presumably impacts on communication, in that it facilitates or impedes mutual understanding (Phillipson 2008, Steyaert et al. 2011). One exception applies; if it concerns NSs only, I will adhere to the label ‘English as a native language (ENL)’ (Seidlhofer 2004).<sup>25</sup>

Apart from a lingua franca, a language can also assume the function of a corporate language. As the literature review has already illustrated, English (or any other lingua franca) may be chosen as the ‘(shared) company language’ (Marschan et al. 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b) or ‘(common) corporate language’ (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, Thomas 2008, Feely & Harzing 2003, Harzing et al. 2011), which could be defined as follows:

A common corporate language (CCL) is the language of global operations. This is the language in which official information is transferred between subsidiaries and their parent organisations. Due to the spread of English as a global language of communication, CCLs are frequently English. (Thomas 2008: 309)

The choice of a common corporate language also aims to “harmonize internal and external communications through general rules and policies” (Piekkari-Tietze 2011: 267), also referred to as ‘(language) standardization’ (Piekkari-Tietze 2011, Marschan et al. 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et

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<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that ELF is often considered a ‘neutral’, culture-free language detached from Anglophone culture and ELF users’ own (i.e. L1) cultural norms and understandings (Crystal 1997, Krumm 2003). Louhiala-Salminen et al. (2005) conduct research in two Swedish-Finnish mergers and identify different, culture-bound discursive practices regarding the level of politeness, directness and the amount of chitchat in their ELF interactions. In the present study, it is therefore assumed that in practice users do have different cultural backgrounds that affect ELF communication in one way or another (Henderson 2005, Meierkord 2002, Phillipson 2008), but I do not investigate this in a systematic manner.

al. 1999a, 1999b).<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, a corporate language intends to facilitate corporate interunit knowledge transfer, formal reporting and corporate documentation or to harmonize information systems (Vollstedt 2002, Feely & Harzing 2003, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman 2007).

The notion of a common corporate language has also been challenged by prior research (Fredriksson et al. 2006, Millar & Jensen 2009). Staff members may not perceive it as common, i.e. do not commonly share or approve this idea of having one *common* language. Similarly, Sørensen's (2005) survey results among 70 corporations based in Denmark show that having English as an (official) corporate language "is no indicator of the scope nor the extent of its English usage" (p. 67). Also conceptually, he critically notices that "there is no collective perception of the concept, its scope, and how various aspects of CL [corporate language] interact" (p. 68). I will follow Sørensen's (2005) terminology and use the term 'corporate language' which is not limited to the English language but can be applied to any language. Besides, there might be more than a single language, possibly two or even three languages assuming the function of corporate languages within an MNC (Weber 2008, Fredriksson et al. 2006). Based on the above, it seems the different functions and choices are conceptually both similar and different; whether English being assigned the function of a corporate language is a form of policy and way of formally standardizing or harmonizing language choice (for internal and/or external purposes), or whether a corporate language merely describes the function it assumes within an MNC and the way it is used, is unclear and needs to be confronted with empirical evidence.

Overall, MNCs as multilingual speech communities are characterized by multiple languages assuming different functions, internal and external communication dimensions, as illustrated below (see *Figure 2-1*). The nature of language choices in different communicative situations will be detailed in the following sections.

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<sup>26</sup> Note, in the LPP community the term is used in its broader understanding of regulating or standardizing language usage and structure by means of corpus planning (e.g. Ricento 2013), which is not necessarily limited to the English language if one considers multilingual speech communities.



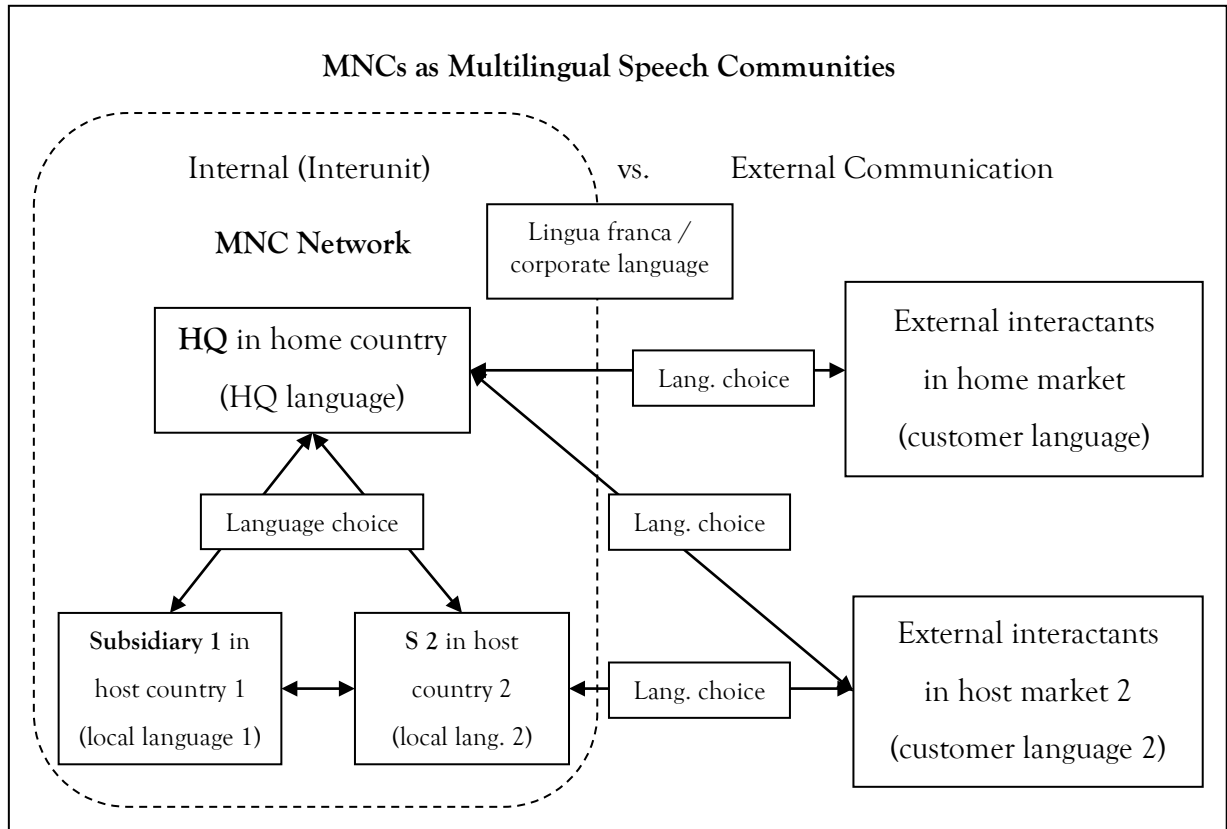


Figure 2-1: MNCs as multilingual speech communities

### 2.3.2.2 Language choice classifications (from a seller's perspective)

Aligned to the above, Vandermeeren (1998) classifies language choice in seller-buyer interaction which is relevant to this study and can also be applied to MNCs. If a company chooses the first languages (L1s) of its customers – or customer languages as I call them – the language choice can be classified as ‘linguistic adaptation’ resulting in an asymmetrical communication. This kind of language choice has also been described as ‘language accommodation’ (Giles & Powesland 1975, cited in Holmes 2008, see also Callahan 2006).<sup>27</sup> If the business chooses its ‘own’ language (HQ

<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Giles & Powesland’s (1975, cited in Holmes 2008) speech accommodation theory (SAT) encompasses different speech strategies from the sender’s perspective, namely speech divergence or convergence. Divergence describes the phenomenon where a speaker wants to mark social distance, i.e. distance herself/himself (from the interlocutor) by deliberately choosing a language other than the addressee masters. This language behavior can be driven by e.g. political motives, negative attitudes towards the other person or group of speakers, etc. In a workplace environment, this could mean that a corporation intentionally chooses English or any other language although it is well known that (the) counterpart(s) or addressees do not speak this particular language. By contrast, speech

or local language) in this communicative situation (seller-buyer interaction), Vandermeeren (1998) talks about ‘non-adaptation’ (on the sender’s part), which is also of an asymmetrical nature. Alternatively, participants choose none of these languages but a ‘third’ language, i.e. a lingua franca, which is seen as a symmetrical form of interaction and referred to as ‘standardization’ (Vandermeeren 1998). I will use these terms also for classifying choices with an internal communication purpose, including various levels; e.g. the headquarters may choose local languages to accommodate its subsidiaries (vertical communication), or horizontal communication across subsidiaries can be characterized by the choice of English (standardization), or international staff members being nonnative speakers of the HQ language might linguistically adapt to L1 users of the HQ language.

### **2.3.2.3 Different types of language choices**

#### **2.3.2.3.1 Passive multilingualism**

Another form of (symmetrical) language choice is the notion of ‘passive multilingualism’ (‘passive Mehrsprachigkeit’) (Arntz 1997) or ‘receptive multilingualism’ (ten Thije & Zeevaert 2007), which is also referred to as ‘polyglot dialogue’ (Vandermeeren 1998, Ammon 2003). This means that the MNC chooses language X and e.g. the business partner chooses language Y and they are able to understand each other. This is possible because they have a passive or receptive understanding of the language chosen by the counterpart. In other words, the participants’ languages are mutually intelligible (as the Scandinavian languages) (Haugen 1966). This phenomenon can be applied to both oral encounters and written communication. The notion of choosing two or more languages

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convergence describes the phenomenon where the sender chooses the recipients’ language or variety (or by adapting to their pronunciation, vocabulary). The underlying reason is that the sender wishes to please her/his conversation partner, to signal social closeness or sociability and solidarity. Convergence is very similar to Scotton’s (1983: 123) “deference maxim” as part of her theory of markedness; this means that a speaker addresses someone in a marked language in a conventionalized setting because s/he desires something from the addressee (e.g. asking for a favor). Scotton (1983) even links this phenomenon to Giles & Powesland’s (1975) accommodation theory that explains the same type of negotiation but argues that the deference maxim is a component of an integrated model related to a natural theory of markedness. These theoretical concepts describe or classify language choices into two categories in the light of a sender-receiver relationship, i.e. one’s own or the counterpart’s language. Accommodation could also be driven by matters of politeness, as will be discussed later, or might as well be the unmarked, i.e. ‘normal’ or appropriate, choice with respect to interactants’ social distance and role relationships, which I will also discuss later.

simultaneously exists in the *business* literature too but does not have an explicit label (Steyaert et al. 2011).<sup>28</sup>

#### **2.3.2.3.2 Code-switching/-mixing**

Other phenomena or choices involving more than one language are code-switching and code-mixing which are forms of language contact, and to some extent very similar concepts. Code-switching appears when language X is chosen in the first place and at some point communication switches to and continues in language Y (and eventually switches back to language X). Switching may include more than two languages (Bechert & Wildgen 1991, Auer 1998). By contrast, participants mix codes if they choose language X and only occasionally borrow single words or expressions from (an)other language(s) (Y, Z) (Appel & Muysken 1990), also referred to as ‘borrowing’ (Scotton 1990). This concept can be applied to both oral and written media. The phenomenon of code-switching has also been identified in *business* research (Harzing et al. 2011, cf. Steyaert et al. 2011 on ‘improvisation’, see also Section 2.1.2) or intercultural studies (Poncini 2003).

#### **2.3.2.3.3 Language choices involving translation and interpretation**

Certain language choices may require language assistance of different kinds such as external language resources, i.e. professional translators for written and interpreters for oral encounters (Feely & Harzing 2003, Hagen 2006, Nekula & Nekvapil 2006). Apart from being conceptualized as language choice for the purpose of this study, translation and interpretation activities also represent an entire field of research, or rather an interdiscipline, which borrows from several disciplines, named Translation Studies (TS) (e.g. Snell-Hornby et al. 1994, Snell-Hornby et al. 1999, Kade 1968, Toury 1980, Snell-Hornby 1988). This is seldom mentioned or explored in the

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<sup>28</sup> Note, in the *business* literature a multilingual or linguistically diverse team often refers to a group of people with different native languages communicating in English. The participants’ first languages are neither actively nor receptively used but may impact on the participants’ English usage (van den Born & Peltokorpi 2010, Henderson 2005). The ‘business conception’ differs slightly from the sociolinguistic and applied linguistic understanding and could therefore lead to conceptual confusion.

broader field of language (choice) in business with a few exceptions (e.g. Janssens et al. 2004, Steyaert & Janssens 1997). Janssens et al. (2004: 416) stress that “[t]he role of translators[/interpreters] and their position in the communicative network of international companies seems often to be neglected”. Also, Piekkari & Tietze (2011: 268) refer to Janssens et al.’s (2004) work, and argue that “[w]e need to introduce the vocabulary and ideas from translation studies in order to develop stronger concepts and frameworks for future research”. I will present some of the key terms and concepts within TS.

In theoretical terms, the process of translating/interpreting can be described as the transformation of a *source* text into a *target* text. Within TS a text is understood in its broader sense and applied to both written (translation) and oral (interpretation) media. Reiß & Vermeer’s (1991) Skopos theory conceptualizes translating/interpreting as an intercultural activity that is guided by the purpose (skopos) of a target text in a specific, culture-bound target setting (target culture) rather than by equivalence between source and target texts. This means purpose is prioritized over equivalence and allows or endorses ‘translational flexibility’ such as cultural adaptation (localization) in a target text product. Put simply, a purpose-oriented approach is not about transferring *words* but about creating *meaning*, which also implies that any source text can be translated in different ways in order to achieve various purposes (Pym 2010). In this vein, text types, genres and registers can influence translation processes or strategies (e.g. the degree of localization needed). For instance, an argumentative text type (e.g. promotional genres such as advertisements or sales pitches) tends to require more translational creativity and localization or cultural adaptation to the target culture than an instructional text type (e.g. user manual within a technical register) in order to be recognized as a fully functional target text by the addressees (Trosborg 1997, Reiß & Vermeer 1991, Lambert 1994).

In the present work professional translation is to be understood as a target text produced by a native speaker of the target language (her/his A language), linguistically and culturally trained, translating *from* a first (B) or second (C) working language (i.e. source language) *into* her/his L1 (A), i.e. the target language (B/C → A language), conventionally not into both directions (Gouadec 2007, Reiß & Vermeer 1991, Holz-Mänttari 1984). This means a translation agency providing high-standard products would only rely on e.g. Spanish native speakers (NSs) with a degree in TS for the translations into Spanish. This is common practice in the well-known

Austrian agencies, for instance. Some international large translation companies not only require NSs of the target language, but also that the translators are specialized in the field in question, i.e. a specific register (e.g. technical, commercial, financial, legal, biomedical/pharmaceutical and advertising/marketing translation) and live in the country where the translation will be used (Gouadec 2007). In the case of professional interpretation (oral interaction), the person is usually able to interpret in both directions, that is, from two or three foreign working languages (B, C, D) into the L1 (A language) and from the latter into the first working language (B) – as in liaison interpreting which is for instance needed in interview situations (B  $\leftrightarrow$  A) (e.g. Pöchhacker 2004). Variations in standards, quality requirements and best-practice examples are likely to be found across agencies and in particular across countries or markets differing in supply and demand. In Denmark, for instance, translators may work both *from* and *into* their foreign working languages.

The field of Translation Studies suffers from the fact that translation or interpretation is often considered an easy task or “just a matter of ‘languages’” (Gouadec 2007: XVII). Professional practitioners and theorists alike would probably agree that there is more to it than that; in the course of their training they ideally acquire different skills, techniques and methods, theoretical and cross-cultural knowledge, anchored in TS, necessary to convey the linguistic subtleties. Furthermore, they get acquainted with specific registers (i.e. terminologies of technical, legal, commercial natures) or the cultures in which the source and target languages are embedded (Snell-Hornby 1988, Lambert 1994, Kadric et al. 2010, Steyaert & Janssens 1997, Gouadec 2007). This is also why translators may get described or conceptualized as experts in cross-cultural communication who do more than translating between two languages, which is embraced in the concept of ‘translatorial action’ (Holz-Mänttari 1984). Based on the above, I will distinguish between *professional* language experts (translators/interpreters) and *nonprofessionals* such as bi-/multilingual staff members, language assistants or linguists.

### *Terminology management*

Multinational corporations may engage in terminology management, a sub-area of Translation Studies, that deals with e.g. the storing or retrieval of translations and term bases (e.g. Wright &

Budin 2001). For instance, if translation is frequently relied on in a large company, it may work with a translation memory (TM) system (TMS), a computer-based aid for translators storing previous translations and facilitating their re-use (Macklovitch & Russell 2000, Somers 2003). More specifically, it is a “particular type of translation support tool that maintains a database of source and target-language sentence pairs, and automatically retrieves the translation of those sentences in a new text which occur in the database” (Macklovitch & Russell 2000: 137).

Another tool assisting human translation, as suggested by Thomas (2008), is a corporate dictionary of English terms which aims at harmonizing a company’s specific terminology. That is, the same term (of general or specific nature) is company-wide used to describe the same phenomenon. In the language planning literature, such a harmonization strategy falls in the area of corpus planning (Cooper 1989). This concept can be extended to several languages (e.g. customer languages), creating a multilingual term base. Ideally, only language terminologists are in charge of the establishment of such an IT system and its updating (e.g. Wright & Budin 2001). Companies that pursue some form of terminology management intend to ensure consistency among their translations.

#### *Language department*

In the context of translation and interpretation in corporate contexts, an MNC may decide to establish an in-house language department (Feely & Winslow 2005, Hagen 2006). This refers to “[t]he maintenance by the company of a team of language professionals who provide translation and interpreting services” (Feely & Winslow 2005: 16). In practice though, for economic reasons, companies mostly rely on external agencies or individual freelancers on an occasional basis rather than employing language experts (Gouadec 2007).

In conclusion, this excursus into the field of Translation Studies attempts to deepen our understanding of the role of translating and interpreting in international business and to introduce its vocabulary and ideas to the *business* community, as suggested by Piekkari & Tietze (2011).

#### 2.3.2.3.4 Language choices for educational purposes (language training and acquisition, language buddies)

##### *Language training and acquisition*<sup>29</sup>

Language(s) may also be chosen for educational purposes. Participants can either improve existing language skills or acquire new foreign languages (FLs) in the workplace (Feely & Harzing 2003, Nekvapil & Nekula 2006, Hagen 2006, Vandermeeren 1998, Marschan et al. 1997, Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002, Archan & Dornmayr 2006). An alternative form of training is that employees spend some time in a country where the language in question is spoken in order to improve FL skills (Archan & Dornmayr 2006, Schöpper-Grabe 2008, Weber 2008). In the *business* literature, language training is often discussed in specific cases of expatriate employees. Furthermore, we have learned that which languages are chosen for training is not ‘universal’ but may differ across organizational units, and that they are not formally chosen (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002). *Language* research has shown that language training/acquisition may also be initiated by the individual employee for various reasons (Nekvapil & Nekula 2006). These are all indicators that language training/acquisition may not be a choice that is made by the corporate management, offered in a centralized manner or dictated by some policy. Once again, it seems that context might be influential in choosing languages for educational purposes. It would be interesting to know what motivates different approaches to training/acquisition (both from employers’ and employees’ perspectives).

##### *Language buddies*

Language(s) may also be chosen for another educational purpose. Within *language* research, ‘language buddies’ are defined as employees that semi-informally assist coworkers with less language proficiency (Hagen 2006) or in a more formalized way possibly across departments (Feely & Winslow 2005). The degree to which language buddies are formally assigned to staff seems to remain unspecified in the literature (Harzing et al. 2011, Hagen 2006).

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<sup>29</sup> I distinguish between training, i.e. the improvement of existing language competences, and acquisition, i.e. the learning of a foreign language.

#### 2.3.2.3.5 Language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment, staff relocation)

##### *Selective recruitment*

Language(s) may also be chosen for HRM purposes, namely recruitment. Different languages may be chosen as relevant for different positions. In other words, it may be decided that for certain tasks or responsibilities specific language competences are required and job applicants' linguistic repertoires need to account for that. For instance, native speakers of a particular language or candidates with various foreign language skills may be hired, which is referred to as selective recruitment (Hagen 2006, Feely & Winslow 2005, Feely & Harzing 2003, see also Reeves & Wright 1996). In other words, languages or language proficiency can become a hiring criterion for a job at hand. In this sense, the recruiting executive or employer chooses one or more languages for a given position or job profile.

##### *In-/expatriation of staff (language nodes)*

Another language choice with an HRM purpose is the strategic positioning of personnel within the MNC network via staff transfers; language-skilled staff members may be inpatriated or expatriated with the purpose of facilitating (interunit) communication (Feely & Harzing 2003, Thomas 2008, Hagen 2006, Feely & Winslow 2005). Inpatriates are staff coming from local units to the headquarters, whereas expatriates are personnel leaving the home country and being assigned to subsidiaries in host countries. Employees being neither home- nor host-country nationals will be referred to as third-country nationals or international staff that can be located at both HQ and subsidiaries (Harzing 2000b, Tayeb 2000). Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999a) discover that an expatriate might be fluent in the HQ language and thus be in charge of the communication with HQ during the assignment. Prior to or during the stay abroad s/he may also acquire the local language if it is deemed necessary for the local position. After repatriation – redeployment at HQ – these local language skills may prove useful for post-assignment HQ-subsidiary communication. They become “language nodes” (ibid. p. 377), which also puts them in an influential and powerful position, going beyond their initial responsibilities. Based on their case-study insights, Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999) conclude that language plays an important role in the area of IHRM which is not always recognized by corporate management. Consequently, the



authors argue that language should have a more strategic position in the MNC by incorporating language proficiency into HR policies, more specifically staff recruitment, selection, training or transfers, etc. (These bi- or multilingual employees are also described as “bridge individuals” (Harzing et al. 2011: 281), “key personnel” or “critical gatekeepers” filtering information where language skills actually represent a source of power (Piekkari et al. 2005: 340f).)

When comparing conceptual with empirical insights, the question arises whether in-, ex- or repatriates are deliberately positioned as ‘language nodes’ due to their language skills or whether they simply become these mediators during their assignments out of contextual or circumstantial necessity. The *business* literature suggests that they become language nodes and concludes that they could be positioned more strategically (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, Feely & Harzing 2003). Also, Hagen’s (2006) *language* research shows that corporations do in-/expatriate staff but the underlying rationale does not seem to be related to language matters. In other words, the empirical insights reflect more the linguistic implications or ‘side-effects’ of in-/expatriation rather than a strategic positioning of language-skilled staff. We need further empirical findings to better align them with conceptual ideas. In sum, HRM is an area that may include language choices with various purposes which need to be looked into in a more contextual fashion.

The language choices of various kinds made for different purposes, as described above, are of a rather descriptive and applied or practice-oriented nature; that is to say, they give an overview of the language choices that are possibly made in an MNC but they do not tell us anything about the underlying rationales for a given choice. In the following, I will therefore elaborate on a number of frameworks that attempt to grasp the interaction between language choice and social context.

### **2.3.3 Language choice embedded in social context: a working framework**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, sociolinguistic theory helps build a working framework that captures how language choice operates in social context. I will exemplify how I apply the frames to the MNC context.

### 2.3.3.1 Language proficiency and norms of a speech community

In the present study, participants' language proficiency describes language users' native or first language (L1) and possibly nonnative or foreign language (FL) skills (i.e. L2, L3, L4, etc.) forming or adding up to the linguistic repertoire of a speech community (Gumperz 1968, 2009, see Llurda 2000 on *proficiency*, *competence* and *ability*). For my purpose, the notion of proficiency merely describes the reported, perceived and socially constructed skills, variation or perceived limitations but does not encompass any form of objective evaluation or formal assessment. The way language proficiency operates in the speech community can be captured by Scotton's (1983) work. She develops a theory of markedness and code choice that accounts for community members' "variation in linguistic code choice", i.e. why people use different codes in interaction.

The model relies on the premise that participants in conversation interpret all code choices in terms of a natural theory of markedness. That is, as part of their communicative competence (Hymes 1972), speakers recognize choices as either unmarked or marked in reference to the norms of their speech community. Community norms designate specific linguistic choices as the unmarked realization of a specific set of rights and obligations holding between a speaker and addressee. It is this association between code choices and rights-and-obligations sets which enables us to calculate a conversational implicature from a code choice. (Scotton 1983: 115)

In order to understand the essence of the theory, I need to further elaborate on the key terms 'communicative competence' and 'norms', as already touched upon earlier. What Hymes (1972, 1987) describes as 'communicative' or 'sociolinguistic competence' is the knowledge language speakers have about how to interact and use language appropriately in context. This also includes being familiar with and able to follow the rules or behavior norms of a community. Rules or norms regarding language and social behavior are recurring key terms when defining and describing the field of sociolinguistics (Cooley 1983, Fishman 1971, see also Ammon et al. 1987, Spolsky 2009). For instance, Gloy (1987) sees 'language norms' as a subcategory of 'social norms' and defines them as "expectations and/or explicit manifestations of modal circumstances which (ought to) regulate the formation, functions, usage and evaluation of linguistic units of varying

complexity” [my translation].<sup>30</sup> Communicative competence and conventional rules or norms are mostly acquired unconsciously or implicitly by community members as they grow up and are socialized within the speech community (Spolsky 2004, Fishman 1972b). Fishman (1972b) argues that norms and behaviors of a speech community are shaped by participants’ roles and relationships. Role relationships “are implicitly recognized and accepted sets of mutual rights and obligations between members of the same sociocultural system” (p. 37). This includes choosing the appropriate code in a given social context or specific situation (Fishman 1972a, Spolsky 2004). In this sense, it could be argued that the buyer-seller relationship, as mentioned earlier and referred to in the *business* literature, implies the commonly recognized customers’ right to information in their L1 and the seller’s obligation to comply with that e.g. by translating product information into customer languages. Role relationships will be further discussed below. Only if these kinds of social conventions, norms or “practices” are articulated or “spelled out” by an authoritative body, we can talk about language management (Spolsky 2004: 10). This suggests, as mentioned earlier, that members of a community do not necessarily need to be told which language to choose (under which circumstances) by top-down policies or management. In other words, language choices may be the result of social implicatures rather than policy and management. If we link this theoretical discussion to our literature review, one might wonder if businesses actually manage languages or if we observe more of a natural theory of markedness, as Scotton (1983) suggests, applied to a multilingual speech community; more specifically, her model suggests that language users negotiate and interpret code choices in interaction as ‘unmarked’ (or ‘marked’) with respect to the norms within a speech community. These norms define unmarked language choices by the specific rights and obligations that speaker and addressee hold. That is, a speaker knows when to employ which language/code, e.g. language X with addressee (1) in a specific situation and language Y when talking to addressee (2) in another context. Applied to the workplace domain, HQ staff may choose the HQ language in the home country while subsidiaries choose the local languages in host-country settings. Both choices may represent unmarked languages since they might be interpreted as the ‘natural’ thing to do, as appropriate choices or the recognized norm and conventions within the MNC. A violation of the norms or deviance

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<sup>30</sup> “Erwartungen und/oder explizite Setzungen modaler Sachverhalte, die ihrem Inhalt zufolge die Bildung, Verwendungsabsicht, Anwendung und Evaluation sprachlicher Einheiten der verschiedensten Komplexitätsgrade regulieren (sollen)” (Gloy 1987: 121).

from the conventionalized unmarked choice is manifested in the use of a ‘marked’ language (e.g. language X instead of Y). Participants of multilingual speech communities normally speak one (e.g. the dominant language of a speech community), two or more languages and may master them to varying degrees (i.e. L1, L2, L3, etc.). In this sense, language users’ linguistic abilities limit communication or code choice to some *shared* competences which may interfere with the social order or norms and conventions (Scotton 1983, see also Ammon et al. 1987, Holmes 2008). Scotton (1983: 125) labels this the “virtuosity maxim”, which means that a marked (i.e. unconventional) language choice is the result of varying or lacking language fluency in the unmarked (i.e. conventional) language. Put simply, in incidences where varying language proficiency ‘gets in the way’, it may supersede social norms and dimensions (Scotton 1983, see also Hunt 1966). Applied to this study, one might imagine a business environment whose norms suggest the use of Danish (i.e. unmarked language) because the company is located in Denmark, for instance. If the interacting participants do not have Danish in their linguistic repertoires, they may choose a language other than Danish diverging from the norm (i.e. marked choice). In the business literature (Vaara et al. 2005, Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005), this kind of contextual language choice determined by the linguistic repertoires and language skills of the participants involved in a communicative situation is associated with a ‘pragmatic’ view on language choice. Choosing an alternative to Danish is pragmatic in the sense that it is the only possible option to ensure some form of communication.

### **2.3.3.2 Domains of language use: participants, their roles and relationships, setting, topic within the employment domain**

Fishman (1972a, see also Mioni 1987) divides multilingual speech communities into *domains* of language use to conceptualize language behavior; among those is the employment domain characterized by three social(-relational) factors (influencing language choice): participants (e.g. employer/seller, employees, buyers/customers), the setting (workplace with a physical location) and specific topics typical of the domain (e.g. professional or business matters). What distinguishes participants from individuals is that they assume certain roles. The typical roles or labels for participants in the employment domain are employers, employees, managers, workers,

customers, clients, etc. In an MNC context, one needs to add (regional) headquarters and subsidiaries. Participants can assume more than one role within the domain; consider the MNC network; HQ may choose a language in its role as a *seller* for external communication purposes or as an *employer* for communicating internally with national subsidiaries. The different participant roles may result in different language choices. Thus, participants also have different role relationships, e.g. HQ-subsidiary, subsidiary-subsidiary, employer-employee (internal) or buyer-seller (external) relationships. Participant roles and relationships might have an impact on language choice. The setting or location has physical characteristics (e.g. size, design of factories, office space), social meaning and interpretation. In the case of an MNC, we are faced with several types of settings or locations (corporate, regional, divisional headquarters environments, foreign subsidiaries in host countries) with varying executive power, autonomy and responsibilities. In this sense, domains reconcile people and physical realities (places). As such, the setting or location may affect language choices. The third characteristic of a domain is topics that are conceived appropriate to talk about or discuss in the domain. Certain topics may be linked to specific languages and therefore influence choices. The changing of topics, e.g. from business to social matters, in interaction may explain switching between languages (code-switching) (Spolsky 2009).

It has to be noted that the employment domain exists next to other domains such as family, friendship, religion and education which are embedded in or together form the multilingual speech community. The underlying idea of Fishman's concept of domains is that one specific language (variety) is associated with a given domain which renders a speech community or whole society bi-or multilingual. For instance, participants choose language X at home (family domain) but language Y at work (employment domain). This concept is too narrow for our purposes because I conceptualize the MNC not only as an employment domain as a part of the larger global society but also as a multilingual speech community in itself, given its participants all speak different languages by definition. As Holmes (2008: 23) argues, domains of language use help "draw a very simple model summarising the norms of language use for the community". Nonetheless, the social dimensions of the employment domain (participants and their inherent relationships, setting and topic) are indeed useful for the present study.

### 2.3.3.3 Politeness strategies (and social relationships)

In a business context (employment domain) a language may also be chosen for reasons of politeness. That is, participants may intend to establish a polite image with the counterpart and therefore use the latter's first or preferred language (accommodation). The concept might be applied to interpersonal interaction or communication with e.g. customers in general. Selecting the counterpart's language is perceived as a politeness act whereas using one's own language or a lingua franca might be regarded as less polite or even rude (Bäck 2004). In Holmes' (2008: 281) general terms,

politeness involves taking account of the feelings of others. A polite person makes others feel comfortable. Being linguistically polite involves speaking to people appropriately in the light of their relationship to [the speaker]. Inappropriate linguistic choices may be considered rude. [...] Making decisions about what is or is not considered polite in any community therefore involves assessing social relationships along the dimensions of social distance or solidarity, and relative power or status.

This also ties in with the sociolinguistic norms or rules as discussed above in the context of a speech community or employment domain; speakers or participants assume different roles, such as seller, employer, boss, employee or customer, etc. which also says something about their inherent relationships, social distance or closeness and relative power or status per se; these interact with politeness in different ways. In other words, whether a language choice is considered (in)appropriate or (im)polite in a given context is influenced by the roles and social relationships of the interactants.

More specifically, the basic assumption of Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is that every adult member of a society has 'face' which describes their public self-image they wish to claim for themselves. There are two types of face; (1) *negative* face refers to "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (ibid. p. 61), while (2) *positive* face describes the self-image or 'personality' any member claims and wants to be appreciated in interaction. Face can be maintained (polite behavior) but also threatened or even lost (impolite behavior). There are (negative and positive) politeness strategies to maintain some other person's face in different ways. A negative politeness strategy is characterized by respectful, specific and focused behavior (on part of the speaker) which does not impede the addressee's freedom of action or attention (negative

face). In a buyer-seller relationship, negative politeness could be the reason for choosing a business partner's first or preferred language (accommodation) instead of a lingua franca (standardization). A positive politeness strategy is addressed to and satisfies the addressee's positive face. It usually occurs between socially close interactants that approve their personalities and share knowledge.

By contrast, face may also be threatened (face-threatening act) or lost which describes the concept of being embarrassed or humiliated. In this context, the relative power of the speaker over the addressee, the social distance between the interactants and the degree of imposition involved when performing face-threatening acts are important factors. If we link this to language choice at workplaces and their organizational hierarchies, it could be argued that executives have more power than their employees and thus more freedom of action including choosing languages with different implications for others. They may choose or rather 'impose' a language on their staff and thereby possibly perform a face-threatening act to varying degrees; if inferiors are not so fluent in this language or do not master it at all, they might feel uncomfortable or embarrassed.<sup>31</sup> Partly similar to the concept of domain, politeness theory, too, takes into consideration participant relationships, some form of (a)symmetry of power or status and social distance/proximity (Brown & Levinson 1987). As Scotton (1983) summarizes Brown & Levinson's (1987) work, politeness strategies attempt to preserve interactants' face and their social relationships.

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<sup>31</sup> Yule (1996: 65) describes a positive politeness strategy as "solidarity strategy" which marks closeness between speaker and addressee through e.g. the use of a shared dialect or inclusive pronouns and terms, and the exchange of personal information. This is similar to Holmes' (2008) solidarity/social distance scale which is concerned with participant relationships. The better participants know each other the higher the solidarity index and the more socially intimate they are. This kind of relationship may foster an informal speech style, positive politeness strategies, vernacular languages or vernacular forms within a code, the L (low) variety of a language or a particular code. This may also be an expression of shared values and attitudes, of a shared identity with the same ethnical background. Thus, the language shared by an ethnic group is also described as "the language of solidarity" (Holmes 2008: 440). Applied to this study, this could mean that expatriates might want to show solidarity and mark social closeness by using the local language (of the setting/host-country) instead of a lingua franca. By contrast, if the participants are socially distant the solidarity level is also low. Conversations between strangers are most likely dominated by a formal speech style, negative politeness strategies, the H (high) variety of a language or lingua francas and official languages (Holmes 2008). This could explain why HQ-subsidiary communication is in English, and business-to-customer interaction or buyer-seller relationships are dominated by customer languages (Feely & Harzing 2003).

#### 2.3.3.4 Attitudes to language (vs. beliefs and ideology)

From a language policy perspective, language beliefs or ideology, i.e. “the beliefs about language and language use” (Spolsky 2004: 5), represent a crucial and influential element with regard to language choice within a speech community, as explained below:

The members of a speech community share also a general set of beliefs about appropriate language practices, sometimes forming a consensual ideology, assigning values and prestige to various aspects of the language varieties used in it. These beliefs both derive from and influence practices. They can be a basis for language management, or a management policy can be intended to confirm or modify them. Language ideology or beliefs designate a speech community’s consensus on what value to apply to each of the language variables or named language varieties that make up its repertoire. (Spolsky 2004: 14, Spolsky 2005: 2153f)

Language ideology or beliefs assume a significant role in Spolsky’s (2004) language policy model since they have the potential to account for language choices at both the practice and policy/management levels. It is unclear whether beliefs and ideologies are used interchangeably. Regardless, both concepts seem to center on assigning values (and prestige) to languages. The author argues that in most nations there are a number of ideologies coexisting but usually there is one dominant one. This also implies that values are not assigned equally to languages but variance can be observed in most speech communities or domains. Overall, Spolsky’s (2004) elaboration on beliefs and ideology is not very comprehensive which is why I need to look into disciplines other than LPP, i.e. linguistic anthropology and the broader framework of sociolinguistics.

Language ideology or linguistic ideology as an entire field of inquiry is a branch of linguistic anthropology. Language ideology can be defined as “the way in which we think about language” (Seargeant 2009: 346/348), more specifically as “entrenched beliefs about the nature, function, and symbolic value of language” (ibid. p. 346). This also helps understand why Spolsky at times uses beliefs and ideology interchangeably. Another, well-cited, definition is Silverstein’s (1979: 193, cited in Seargeant 2009) proposition, that describes linguistic ideologies as “any sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure or use”. This means that language users are aware of language, its structure and use, and



able to express that. More specifically, ideology seems to be understood as the articulated explanation for language use.

Other authors acknowledge the implicit nature of language ideology. For instance, Kroskrity (2004: 498) defines language ideologies as “beliefs, or feelings, about languages as used in their social worlds”. He understands beliefs as “local understandings” of an explicit or tacit nature, and feelings as a “relatively automatic aesthetic response” (p. 512). In this sense, these thoughts about or conceptions of language may be explicitly articulated or implicit in communication, and can be seen as more or less successful “attempts to rationalize language usage; such rationalizations are typically multiple, context-bound, and necessarily constructed from the sociocultural experience of the speaker” (p. 496). I would argue that if they are multiple and subjective, this also means that they are not necessarily consensual within a speech community. That is to say, Spolsky’s (2004) and Kroskrity’s (2004) views on ideology are oppositional.

Woolard (1998) gives an overview of four major strands of language ideology research where ideology may be seen as: (1) “ideational or conceptual, referring to mental phenomena; ideology has to do with consciousness, subjective representations, beliefs, ideas” (p. 5), (2) “derived from, rooted in, reflective of, or responsive to the experience or interests of a particular social position, even though ideology so often (in some views, always) represents itself as universally true” (p. 6), (3) “ideas, discourse, or signifying practices in the service of the struggle to acquire or maintain power” of a social, political or economic nature, and “the tool, property, or practice of dominant social groups” (that attempt to disguise, legitimize or distort the unequal distribution of power), and (4) subject to “distortion, illusion, error, mystification, or rationalization” which “can derive from the defense of interest and power” or “limitations on human perception and cognition” (p. 7). The author also argues that there is a clear divide between the first two approaches which are more neutral and descriptive – often also covered under the label of worldviews or beliefs – whereas the third and fourth notions are certainly critical and more negative (Woolard 1998).

In sociolinguistics, language beliefs or ideologies, in particular the elements of assigning values and prestige to languages or subjective representations are often conceptualized as language attitudes grounded in Labov’s (1966, cited in Mesthrie 2009) seminal work. He defines them as hearers’ immediate evaluative response to or reaction toward different accents, providing varieties

with different prestige (Labov 1966, cited in Mesthrie 2009, Holmes 2008, see also Deumert 2009, Ricento 2013 on attitudes in LPP research and Baldauf 2006 on prestige planning). Attitudes are also related to or are kinds of beliefs but have a slightly different meaning since they embrace subjective opinions, evaluations, judgments or assessments. Deprez & Persoons (1987) discuss the notion of attitude, a concept rooted in social psychology, in a sociolinguistic light. They draw on Allport's (1954, cited in Deprez & Persoons 1987) and Fishbein & Ajzen's (1975, cited in Deprez & Persoons 1987) work describing attitude as 'the readiness to behavior' and the positive or favorable and negative or unfavorable response to or evaluation of an object, which can be a person, an event or a language, etc. The construct of attitude has cognitive, evaluative and conative components. The cognitive element grasps all the knowledge one has about the (attitude) object, which is based on beliefs. Beliefs are "a person's subjective probability judgments concerning some discriminable aspect of his [or her] world" (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975: 131, cited in Deprez & Persoons 1987: 125). That is to say, the person assumes a relationship between the attitude object and some other object, feature or attribute. So, the cognitive component includes "all characteristics, attributes objects that are associated with the object in question" (ibid.). Fishbein & Ajzen (1975, cited in Deprez & Persoons 1987) distinguish between descriptive beliefs (inherent to direct observation or experience of the object), inferential beliefs (which are new beliefs originating from extant beliefs) and informational beliefs (which represent what authorities say about the object). Not all beliefs correspond to the true, objective representations of the object (which then turn into stereotypes). This has consequences for the evaluative component of attitude, being the key component, namely the linking of emotional values to beliefs. In order to elaborate on the evaluative component of attitude, the authors refer to Sherif's (e.g. 1968, cited in Deprez & Persoons 1987) 'Social Judgement Theory' comprising the idea of ascribing positive ('latitude of acceptance') and/or negative values ('latitude of rejection') to a belief and thus to the object. The third element of attitude is the conative component which is in fact determined by both the cognitive and evaluative components. Here, beliefs and emotional values are transformed into behavioral intentions that are situation-specific. "In the conative component compromises between diverging beliefs and emotional values are looked for, on the basis of which specific behaviour is prepared" which results in "instructions for behaviour in concrete situations" (p. 127). The general assumption is that individuals behave or act according to their context-bound intentions. What I see as the essence of this sociolinguistic discussion of the notion of attitude (in

its sociopsychological understanding) is that it further defines language beliefs by adding an evaluative element; that is, language users not only have certain beliefs about languages and their use but more of an opinion; they may subjectively evaluate or ‘judge’ languages by assigning different emotional values (of a positive and negative nature) to them, which creates two main categories, i.e. positive and negative attitudes. Both have the potential of influencing and shaping behavior (conative element) which is in this study’s case language choice behavior of agents within the MNC.

Within the *business* community, attitudes are found to be associated with home-country attitudes or headquarters’ orientation towards their subsidiaries which express varying significance of an MNC’s different languages (and their functions). Generally speaking, it could be distinguished between three (HQ) attitudes: (1) ethnocentric (home-country oriented), (2) polycentric (host-country oriented) and (3) geocentric (world-oriented) attitudes. For instance, executives of an ethnocentric corporation would argue that e.g. home standards as to persons and performance are better than local ones (Perlmutter 1969). Van den Born & Peltokorpi (2010) take Perlmutter’s (1969) classification further and discuss it from a language policy and HRM perspective, meaning ethnocentric companies prioritize the HQ language, polycentric ones also value local languages and geocentric firms emphasize the use of a lingua franca (see also Maclean 2006, Thomas 2008). In the context of prioritizing or valuing languages, other *business* scholars talk about language hierarchies; languages may be given certain priorities in HQ-subsidiary relationships which might be reversed from a local perspective as in subsidiary-customer interaction (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b, Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011). The different languages with their varying functions (e.g. HQ language, local or customer languages, lingua franca or corporate language) are in contact and likely to ‘compete’ with each other as a result of participants’ varying perspectives, values or attitudes, and locations. This may also explain that language is often associated with (a source of) power in organizational contexts (Janssens et al. 2004, Piekkari & Zander 2005, Vaara et al. 2005). Hierarchies are also discussed in the *language* sciences; Romaine (2000), for instance, critically argues that languages always compete with each other, reflecting social hierarchies, and sometimes they are even in conflict. Similarly, Nelde (1987, 1997) claims that contacts between different languages inevitably lead to conflicts between the speakers of those languages (see also e.g. Ricento 2010, 2013, Maurais & Morris 2003, Maurais 2003). In other words, attitudes to

languages within an MNC or which value to apply to them may not be a straightforward decision on the part of the headquarters or corporate management but rather multiple attitudes may be found, depending on the social context, i.e. agents (participants) involved and the setting (location). Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that terms like the ‘headquarters’ or ‘subsidiaries’ (or their attitudes) are personifications; that is, we are de facto dealing with MNCs’ agents, i.e. executives, who are individuals with subjective and thus possibly diverging opinions or attitudes to languages. This renders the notion of attitudes (as much as the notion of language choice) a social phenomenon.

Taking on Perlmutter’s (1969) terminology and the insights on the e.g. geocentric attitude, reconciling it with the sociolinguistic aspects on attitude, and applying it to this study, this could translate into staff members agreeing that the choice of English (as a lingua franca or corporate language) within the MNC is the best, most efficient or sense-making choice for e.g. harmonizing interunit communication. That is, they commonly attribute a positive value to the English language and thus share a positive attitude to English and its choice for internal communication purposes. In this sense, an attitude to language can influence language choice at both the corporate and individual levels in general, while a geocentric attitude may inform the choice of English.

#### **2.3.3.5 Personal motivation (integrative vs. instrumental/extrinsic vs. intrinsic)**

As mentioned earlier, participants may choose languages for educational purposes. More specifically, members of a speech community in general or participants of the employment domain in particular may wish to learn a foreign language (FL), i.e. a second (L2) or third (L3), etc., language, in order to be able to employ it within the employment domain. The reasons that employees learn new languages and/or use them at their workplace may be personally motivated.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Although in the literature motivational aspects are primarily discussed in the context of L2 acquisition rather than its application, they are indeed closely linked and not mutually exclusive; often people are motivated to learn a language with the objective of eventually applying it. In this sense, I conceptualize personal motivation as a factor possibly driving both language acquisition and its employment.

Lambert et al. (1968) develop a social-psychological theory of language learning that accounts for the influence of attitudes and motivation in second language learning. More specifically, the authors distinguish between two main attitudinal orientations: firstly, an orientation may be of an *integrative* nature, meaning the person wishes to learn more about the group speaking the language and to eventually become a member of this language community, i.e. an in-group member. (The integrative orientation is very similar to Herman's (1968) notion of acculturation and social adjustment. That is to say, choosing a language, namely the language of another group or language community may be intended to mark social identification and affiliation with that group. In other words, a newcomer to a community may use the language of the host society in order to socially and culturally adjust and eventually be socially integrated and accepted as an in-group member. In a business environment, this may apply to relocation of staff (in-/expatriation management) who shift to and wish to integrate into linguistically and culturally different workplaces (e.g. home and host countries). For this purpose, depending on their linguistic repertoires and extant skills, they may also (need to) acquire the language of the host society. Herman (1968: 510) argues that "the readiness of a person to learn and use a second language may depend in part on the measure of his [or her] willingness to identify with the group with which the language is associated – or, at any rate, on his [or her] desire to reduce the social distance between himself [or herself] and that group".)<sup>33</sup> Lambert et al.'s (1968) second orientation is about language learning for *instrumental* reasons, which means the language is studied for utilitarian purposes such as enhancing one's career opportunities. But both orientations/motivations in fact imply that the language learner eventually *employs* the language either to be socially integrated (in a foreign language environment as in job rotation) or to utilize languages at work for professional purposes.

This theory from the 1960s ties in with newer perspectives on motivation for foreign language acquisition. More specifically, Noels (2001) takes the *integrative-instrumental* dichotomy further by discussing research that has shown that the two orientations are not mutually exclusive and that other orientations have been identified since then (for an overview see Noels 2001: 44). She bases her argument on Deci & Ryan's (1985, cited in Noels 2001) self-determination theory which suggests the distinction between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* orientations, and *amotivation*. (I will omit the

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<sup>33</sup> From a politeness perspective, the choice of the in-group language, i.e. the local language of the host country as in the case of staff allocation, would correspond to the 'language of solidarity' (positive politeness strategy) (see Section 2.3.3.3).

latter since it is not relevant for my research purposes and focus on the former two instead.) An *extrinsic* orientation, which is similar to Lambert et al.'s (1968) *instrumental* orientation, describes instrumental and goal-oriented rationales behind L2 acquisition, that may be partly externally influenced (e.g. through curricula). For instance, a language may be learned because it is believed to enhance career opportunities or in order not to lose a job (ibid.). Applied to this study, one could argue that workforce may have a general interest in learning new languages which they intend to fulfill in the workplace environment, possibly linked to their job or occupational functions, i.e. usefulness and applicability in certain communicative scenarios such as interaction with customers of these language groups (instrumental/extrinsic orientation). By contrast, an *intrinsic* orientation describes the inherent pleasure, interest in the activity and satisfaction associated with it, all underlying reasons for acquiring a second or foreign language. Linked to my study, staff members may enjoy choosing foreign languages (assuming e.g. local or customer functions) within the workplace domain.

In sum, language acquisition and application of the linguistic knowledge acquired seem to be closely related. In other words, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are not limited to language acquisition but may also apply to language use; that is, personal (intrinsic/extrinsic) motivation may be the rationale behind the choice of various languages in MNCs and for business communication purposes.

#### **2.3.3.6 Internal and external forces**

Spolsky's (2009) language management model, although criticized for its lacking contribution to the field of LPP (Jernudd 2010, Sloboda 2010), offers some valuable insights useful for my research. His propositions take a number of different dimensions with regard to language choice into account. More specifically, he adopts Fishman's domain approach – as introduced before (see Section 2.3.3.2) – and distinguishes between internal and external factors that may influence a language choice.

The author describes the model, which embraces practices, beliefs/ideologies and management, as follows:

The model entails a number of defined speech communities, social levels, and domains, ranging from the family through various social structures and institutions up to and including nation-states and supranational groupings, each of which has pressure for language choice provided by internal and external language practices, language belief systems and ideologies, and language management efforts. (Spolsky 2009: 7)

The dimension of internal and external influences, as mentioned in the quotation above, gets further elaborated on; every domain has its own policy, “with some features managed internally and others under the influence of forces external to the domain” (Spolsky 2009: 3). This means that internal forces or policies – in his view based on practices, beliefs and management – within the domain may account for language choices. However, there are external forces outside the domain impacting on individuals partly because they are members of different domains. The different memberships may lead to language choices that are not convergent with the norms of the respective domain; in other words, practices and beliefs may cross domains and may overlap so that for instance the family language gets chosen at the workplace because the employer and employee are also parent and child. Also, there are different levels of management; language management efforts ‘from above’ may intend to impose practices and beliefs on a ‘lower’ domain, e.g. if a school language policy attempts to control practices in the family domain, i.e. at home. Thus, Spolsky (2009: 7) argues that a “multilevel analysis helps explain some of the problems of centralized language management, which has to overcome practices, beliefs, and management at the lower levels” (p. 7). Although I do not distinguish between policy/management and practice levels, as Spolsky does, the idea of some sort of forces within and outside a speech community or domain and how these interact is indeed useful.

Since I have applied the working concept of the multilingual speech community to the MNC and distinguished between internal and external communication with regard to the community (MNC network), I will use the same internal-external dichotomy with regard to forces; this means we could imagine internal dynamics or forces that impact on language choice within the MNC network e.g. between HQ and subsidiaries or individual employees. Forces external to the MNC community could be national policy and planning (e.g. language-in-education (or acquisition) policy/planning) or supranational management efforts or policies and regulations (see also Lauridsen 2008). These may have an impact on language choice made within the MNC community. Moreover, the difference in levels of management, that Spolsky (2009) problematizes

here, comprises the potentially limited effectiveness of centralized management; this problem of effectiveness may also apply within the MNC such as discrepancies between the headquarters' decisions and local choices at the subsidiary level, as the literature review has also shown.

#### **2.3.4 (Theoretical) knowledge gaps summarized**

The previous sections have intended to give an overview of the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The cross-disciplinary nature of the subject matter has had theoretical implications. There is a myriad of conflicting, similar and different concepts of language choice making it almost impossible to work across but also within disciplines, and consequently hard to compare works of different authors or even the same author(s). For instance, the ideas of language policy and management within sociolinguistics (cf. Baldauf 2006, Spolsky 2004, 2009, Nekvapil & Nekula 2006), within international business and management (Feely & Harzing 2003, Harzing et al. 2011) or across the two are far from united. However, I have tried to work in an interdisciplinary fashion and highlighted the similarities/differences and the conceptual confusion the broader field suffers from. In order to reach some clarity or rather theoretical simplicity to begin with, I have adopted the concept of language choice (instead of policy/management, practice, use, etc., cf. Baldauf 2006, Spolsky 2004, 2009, Berthoud & Lüdi 2011, Lauridsen 2008, Lüdi et al. 2010, Nekvapil & Nekula 2006, Hagen 2006, 2011 Feely & Winslow 2005) and thereby abandoned the idea of policy/management and practice levels per se.

Furthermore, I have combined insights from primarily sociolinguistics (e.g. Fishman 1968, 1971, 1972a, 1972b, Hymes 1968, 1972, 1974, Scotton 1983, Brown & Levinson 1987, Deprez & Persoons 1987, Vandermeeren 1998, Holmes 2008, Spolsky 2009), and related fields such as applied linguistics (lingua franca communication, language acquisition) (e.g. Knapp & Meierkord 2002, Seidlhofer 2001, 2004, Lambert et al. 1968, Noels 2001 – partly drawing on social psychology), and Translation Studies (e.g. Reiß & Vermeer 1991, Holz-Mänttari 1984, Snell-Hornby et al. 1999, see also Steyaert & Janssens 1997, Janssens et al. 2004), as well as international business and management studies (e.g. Feely & Harzing 2003, Harzing & Feely 2008, Harzing et al. 2011, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, Steyaert et al. 2011), including corporate communication (Dhir & Gökè-Pariolá 2002, Fredriksson et al. 2006).



A synergy of several fields with a primary focus on sociolinguistics has allowed me to conceptualize the MNC as a multilingual speech community and employment domain. Then, I have tried to conceptualize language choice in an open-ended and simplistic fashion, resulting in several language choices (for various purposes). Sociolinguistic frames attempt to better understand language choice embedded in its social context. In other words, I have developed a theoretical and analytical framework that attempts to give a preliminary idea of language choice in MNCs and the influence of social context on choices. Also, these frameworks will guide the analysis in an open-ended and exploratory fashion.

## 2.4 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the current state of the art and positioned this research in the existing literature, at the intersection of *business* and *language* research, with a focus on Danish and Austrian multinationals. Empirical, theoretical and partly methodological gaps have been illuminated. This has helped to further contextualize, problematize and justify the research question, and to put the study's contribution into perspective. In sum, the present thesis addresses contextual language choice in an exploratory and multidimensional way in multinational corporations (MNCs) from a primarily sociolinguistic perspective with the overall aim of shedding light on the manageability of language in such international business contexts (see also *Chapter 1, Sections 1.1-1.3*).



### 3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This chapter aims to exemplify the various methodological choices made in the course of this study; first, it will shed light on the study's overall research approach – being of a *qualitative* nature – and the case study research design chosen. The latter encompasses the selection of case companies and the way (i.e. method) and by what means (i.e. data sources) these cases were studied. Second, the chapter will provide a detailed account of the data analysis adopting an interpretive perspective.

#### 3.1 A Qualitative Research Approach

Following my overall research aim (see *Chapter 1, Section 1.3*), this work is a purely qualitative piece of research in order to gain in-depth insights into language choice in international business. Denzin & Ryan (2007: 580) provide a comprehensive description of what a qualitative inquiry implies:

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret these things in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, and observational, historical, interactional and visual texts—which describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives.

By employing a broad spectrum of intertwined interpretive activities and practices (*methods*), qualitative researchers aim to grasp as many “subtle variations in ongoing human experience” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b: 19) and thereby “get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand” (ibid. p. 3f). Furthermore, “[t]hey seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience

is created and given meaning” (ibid. p. 8).<sup>34</sup> Given the nature of the study’s objective, that is language choice as a social phenomenon in MNC contexts (see *Chapter 1, Section 1.2*), a *qualitative* inquiry or design was considered most appropriate (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, 2011, Lincoln & Guba 1985, Lamnek 2005, Marschan-Piekkari & Welch 2004).

### 3.2 Philosophical Underpinning

The way research is conducted very much depends on one’s approach to philosophy of science, which is about the ways researchers perceive the world or reality (*ontology*), they believe the latter can be captured and studied in order to reach acceptable scientific knowledge and position themselves in relation to the known (*epistemology*), and the different ways of generating that knowledge (*methodology*). Qualitative researchers are philosophers (with different worldviews) in that they are guided by ontological, epistemological and methodological principles forming the paradigm in which they navigate (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b). Paradigms can be defined as “sets of basic beliefs” (Guba & Lincoln 1994: 108). Denzin & Lincoln (2000b) argue that the underlying philosophy renders all qualitative research *interpretive* in nature. The qualitative research tradition has over time been shaped by four general or major interpretive paradigms (positivist & postpositivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical, and feminist-poststructural) (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b). Similarly, Saunders et al. (2012) distinguish between four philosophies of science: positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism. At a more general level, it could be argued that paradigmatic controversies often center around positivist and nonpositivist worldviews. If we take a look at several handbooks of qualitative research the overall contemporary trend seems to favor or imply nonpositivist philosophies (e.g. social constructivism), as can be illustrated by generalizing statements as the following: “Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b: 8). Miller & Glassner (2004) critically argue that “[r]esearch cannot provide the mirror reflection of the social world that

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<sup>34</sup> These characteristics stand in sharp contrast to quantitative research, where the focus is on studying the objective physical reality, controlling causes and effects or the causal relationships between variables, measuring and quantifying phenomena, testing hypotheses, generalizing findings to a population and formulating general laws that are able to predict future outcomes (Flick 2009: 13, see also Denzin & Lincoln 2000b).

positivists strive for, but it may provide access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds” (p. 126). In other words, qualitative research is “grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly ‘interpretivist’ in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted” (Mason 2002: 3). Similarly, I will follow a nonpositivist or interpretivist, more precisely the constructivist-interpretive path (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b).

The (social) constructivist paradigm fundamentally shaped by Berger & Luckmann (1966) is widely adopted in qualitative (social science) research (Guba & Lincoln 1994, Lincoln & Guba 2000, Schwandt 2000, Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009). Schwandt (2007: 38) defines constructivism in its “ordinary sense”, as follows:

[C]onstructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience. Furthermore, there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction. We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but, rather, against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth.

In this vein, it is worthwhile mentioning the role of language within the social constructivist paradigm (for an extensive overview see Irwin 2011). Schwandt (2000) explains that the philosophy of social constructionism<sup>35</sup> endorses “an expressivist-constructivist theory of language, in which, broadly conceived, language is understood as a range of activities in which we express and realize a certain way of being in the world”. This means humans “are self-interpreting beings” and “language constitutes this being” (p. 198). In sociolinguistic terms, “[l]anguage constructs social reality” (Holmes 2008: 436).

From an ontological point of view, this means that within the social constructivist paradigm reality is constructed by mankind and thus ‘relativist’. These multiple realities can be described as constructions that are mentally, socially, experientially and individually informed. Such an

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<sup>35</sup> Constructionism, as Schwandt (2000) uses the term, may be used instead of constructivism. Often used interchangeably, Crotty (1998), though, distinguishes between the individual that makes sense of the world (constructivism) and society as a collective group or culture that generates meaning and shapes individuals in their way of thinking (constructionism).

ontology makes its clear delineation from epistemology disappear; the latter understands knowledge generation as a 'transactional' and 'subjectivist' process. That is to say research products are conjointly and interactively created by the inquirer and their study objects or better described as their subjects (Guba & Lincoln 1994). This process of co-constructing meaning and knowledge (through e.g. interviews) makes it "impossible and undesirable for researchers to be distant and objective" (Hatch 2002: 15). As opposed to quantitative researchers who try to detach themselves from the research activity and thereby reach objectivity, qualitative scholars rather immerse into the field and deliberately choose to be present and involved in their research (Patton 2002). Thus, researchers' impressions, reflections, observations, feelings, etc. become part of the research process. In qualitative research the subjectivity of both the inquirer and the study participants are acknowledged. Consequently, most qualitative researchers do not claim to be objective or value-free, rather reflexive, which means that they critically reflect on their selves, their relationships with respondents and how these might impact on the research activity (Flick 2009, Lincoln & Guba 2000). They may also strive to be sensitive, which stands for the "ability to respond to the subtle nuances of, and cues to, meanings in data" (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 35). In this sense, the qualitative researcher is often associated with the image of an (interpretive) 'bricoleur' who by drawing on multiple sources and analytical steps attempts to make sense of the data and build social worlds (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, 2011).

These ontological and epistemological considerations have methodological implications, namely that the inquirer-participant interaction is necessary to decipher and interpret the different constructions through a hermeneutical and dialectical (contrastive) approach, eventually leading to a consensus construction (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Hatch (2002) tries to translate Guba & Lincoln's (1994) ideas as follows:

Researchers spend extended periods of time interviewing participants and observing them in their natural settings in an effort to reconstruct the constructions participants use to make sense of their worlds. Hermeneutic principles are used to guide researchers' interpretive coconstruction of participant perspectives. (Hatch 2002: 15)

As already mentioned, the social constructivist paradigm belongs to the interpretive traditions or paradigms where the researcher's aim is to achieve *understanding* (*Verstehen*) through (subjective)

*interpretation*. Put simply, analysts interpret their data in search of meaning or to make sense of them. Hermeneutics has been described as “the theory of interpretation” (Smith et al. 2009: 21). Hermeneutic principles, as mentioned in the quotation above, thus describe the analytical process of sense-making, which is not a linear process, as it is often the case in quantitative positivist paradigms, but a circular one (Flick 2009). It is circular in that “[t]he analyst works back and forth between the data or story (the evidence) and his or her own perspective and understandings to make sense of the evidence” (Patton 2002: 477f). Also, the activity is characterized by going back and forth between smaller and larger data entities, between ‘the part’ as well as ‘the whole’ in order to reach authentic conclusions. This is the reason this analytical method is usually referred to as the hermeneutic circle (e.g. Schwandt 2007, Patton 2002, Smith et al. 2009). Strictly speaking, the analyst “is engaged in a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith et al. 2009: 3). This means the analyst’s sense making is only a second-order or second-degree construction while the participants’ accounts are of a first-order nature (Smith et al. 2009, Schütz 1962, cited in Flick 2009). Hermeneutics as a methodology has its origin in interpreting texts (e.g. biblical and religious texts). Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) argue that “[f]rom hermeneutics, qualitative researchers can learn to analyze their interviews as texts and look beyond the here and now in the interview situation” (p. 51). The authors, by referring to Schwandt’s (2000) work, state that the meaning of interviews (as texts) or other documents emerges from a cultural, historical, political and literary context as well as background information and other surrounding meanings, perceptions or values (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

Overall, an analytical approach that involves subjective judgment and (contrastive) interpretation of the reflexive inquirer leads to subjective rather than objective or absolute findings (Hatch 2002, Flick 2009, Denzin & Lincoln 2000b). The latter are often represented in the form of case studies or extensive narratives

that describe the interpretations constructed as part of the research process. Accounts include enough contextual detail and sufficient representation of the voices of the participants that readers can place themselves in the shoes of the participants at some level and judge the quality of the findings based on criteria other than those used in positivist and postpositivist paradigms. (Hatch 2002: 15f)

In other words, evaluation criteria such as validity and reliability become trustworthiness and authenticity in qualitative (naturalistic) inquiry (Guba & Lincoln 1994, see also Lincoln & Guba 2000). It is important to remember that qualitative research attempts to draw a “*holistic picture*” of phenomena and settings, and to “understand the fundamental nature of a particular set of activities and people *in a specific context*” (Patton 2002: 480).

As mentioned in the very first section (3.1) of this chapter, qualitative research focuses on *understanding* subject matters in greater detail (rather than *explaining* them). By contrast, quantitative research typically has explanatory purposes, i.e. testing hypotheses or cause-effect relationships in order to arrive at generalizable laws and theories that are ideally able to predict future events. The demarcation line between descriptive and exploratory versus causal and explanatory approaches is not totally clear-cut. In other words, explaining is not limited to quantitative research, but has a different meaning in qualitative studies. Schwandt (2007: 105) argues:

In commonsense usage, to explain something is to make it intelligible or understandable. However, usually, when we ask for an explanation, we are asking for an account of *why* something happened. Qualitative inquiry is often concerned not simply with what human actions mean but why they occur.

In search of the ‘why’ and explanations, the qualitative researcher is dependent on their subjects (respondents) who provide their individual explanations for human actions and decision making.

To the extent that you are describing the causal linkages suggested by and believed in by those you’ve interviewed, you haven’t crossed the line from description into causal interpretation. And, indeed, much qualitative inquiry stops with the presentation of case data and cross-case descriptive comparisons aimed at enhancing understanding rather than explaining “why”. (Patton 2002: 478)

This means I am interested in reported, subjective ‘explanations’ for human decision making and experience, i.e. the underlying rationale(s) why a particular language is chosen in a given context. This is a distinct epistemological differentiation between my qualitative approach to ‘explanation’ and the one in the quantitative tradition where explanation is commonly understood as deciphering cause and effect relationships. In this study, explanations can be described as personal



accounts or rationales that are multifaceted and context-dependent, hence valuable as they help deepen our “understanding of human experience” (Stake 1995: 38).

In conclusion, a qualitative research approach positioned in the constructivist-interpretive or social constructivist paradigm which draws on relativist ontologies, subjective epistemologies and naturalistic methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln 2000b) appeared appropriate for the purpose of this study, namely gaining a deep understanding, ‘inside’ knowledge (Dyer & Wilkins 1991) on the manifestation of language choice in international business contexts (i.e. MNCs) including participants’ underlying rationales.

### 3.3 A Qualitative Case Study

As briefly mentioned, case studies are often the research product created or strategy of inquiry applied within the qualitative, interpretive tradition in general and the social constructivist paradigm in particular (Stake 2000).<sup>36</sup> In alignment with my philosophy of science, a case study design seemed useful. Broadly speaking, within the qualitative tradition, the case study is understood as a strategy of inquiry that “relies on interviewing, observation, and document analysis” (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a: 371). From a sociological perspective, Orum et al. (1991: 2) define a case study “as an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon. The study is conducted in great detail and often relies on the use of several data sources”. From an organizational perspective, Hartley (1994: 212) argues that “[a] case study allows for a processual, contextual and generally longitudinal analysis of the various actions and meanings which take place and which are constructed within organizations”. Within the field of business and management research it has been defined as “a research strategy that examines, through the use of a variety of data sources, a phenomenon in its naturalistic context, with the purpose of ‘confronting’ theory with the empirical world” (Piekkari et al. 2009: 569). The relationship between evidence and theory in qualitative research in general and in case study research in particular is viewed controversially across disciplines and paradigms, depending on philosophical groundings (see Piekkari & Welch 2011a for an overview of the case study approach

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<sup>36</sup> Stake (2000) does not limit the case study to a qualitative methodology per se, though focuses on the latter.

in its historical context, Flyvbjerg 2006). More specifically, positivist and postpositivist qualitative (case) researchers may apply an objective epistemology (searching for generalities), use inductive (nonlinear), i.e. grounded in evidence, logic to reach explanations in the form of testable hypotheses or propositions (Eisenhardt 1989, Glaser & Strauss 1967, Strauss & Corbin 1998, Charmaz 2000). In this sense, qualitative (case) research has theory-generating or -refining rather than deductive theory-testing purposes (as in quantitative research). By contrast, the well-cited case study methodologist Yin (2009), coming from an experimental psychology tradition, does not limit case study research to inductive exploration but includes deductive logic and explanatory aims (why-questions) leading to cause-effect relationships (Yin 2009, see also Welch et al. 2011, Mahoney & Goertz 2006). By contrast, constructivists often distance themselves from the ‘inductive theory-building’ scope of case studies, may not discuss induction or deduction, nor distinguish between theory and evidence since they are inseparable and can only be understood in conjunction. In this sense, they theorize from case studies through ‘interpretive sensemaking’ (Welch et al. 2011). This means the aim of case studies is “particularization”, i.e. *understanding* and *learning* about the particularity of a case or cases and human experience, rather than generalization (to a given population or the theory that is proposed) (Stake 1995: 39, see also Coffey & Atkinson 1996). In other words, there is a “difference between case studies seeking to identify cause and effect relationships and those seeking understanding of human experience” (Stake 1995: 38). Such relationships detached from context cannot grasp the complexity of a case; rich description is necessary to understand participants’ personal experiences, actions and their worldviews. Furthermore, the author talks about “naturalistic generalizations” which “are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves” (p. 85). Similarly, Dyer & Wilkins (1991: 613), stress that a ‘classic’ case study “create[s] an exemplar, that is, a story against which researchers can compare their experiences and gain rich theoretical insights”. In other words, rich descriptions “act as clear examples of new relationships, new orientations, or new phenomena that current theory and theoretical perspectives have not captured” (ibid. p. 617). As Flyvbjerg (2006) puts it, any discipline needs good exemplars to be effective.

Overall, I applied the case study in a (social) constructivist, naturalistic manner, following e.g. Stake (2000), Schwandt (2000), Lincoln & Guba (1985, 2000), Dyer & Wilkins (1991), Piekari

& Welch (2011b). These characteristics matched the study's open-ended research question and also theoretical research interests (see *Chapters 1 and 2*). This means I do not object to the idea of theory refinement given the research question challenges extant concepts (within language policy and management research); yet it has to be done in close connection with empirical evidence, i.e. rich contextual description, in its naturalistic context, rather than context-free propositions.

### **3.3.1 A collective case study of four MNCs headquartered in Denmark and Austria**

Stake (2000) describes the case as a specific, unique system with behavior patterns occurring within certain boundaries. The case could be an individual person, a population of individuals or an incident the researcher is interested in. More precisely:

The case is expected to be something that functions, that operates; the study is the observation of operations. There is something to be described and interpreted. The conceptions of most naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological [...] case studies need accurate description and subjective, yet disciplined, interpretation; a respect and curiosity for culturally different perceptions of phenomena; and empathic representation of local settings – all blending (perhaps clumped) within a constructivist epistemology. (Stake 2000: 444)

The case study is not only a strategy of inquiry but also the product of the latter, that is a case study (report). In an instrumental case study, as chosen for this project, the researcher is not interested in the particular case per se (i.e. the MNC) but uses it to provide in-depth insights into 'something else', as a research phenomenon (i.e. language choice). However, a detailed account of a case's complexities, contexts and ordinary activities is given (Stake 2000). Often, the *context* a case study is derived from is crucial and richly described, as mentioned above. A 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of the context helps us understand the phenomena of interest, better capture their relationships and deeper social structures (Dyer & Wilkins 1991, Stake 1995). If the instrumental case study is applied to several cases, it is referred to as a collective case study (Stake 2000, cf. Yin 2009 on multiple case study design). I conducted a collective case study of four MNCs headquartered in Denmark and Austria to learn about the research phenomenon language choice within Danish and Austrian contexts respectively as well as across Denmark and Austria, as

illustrated by *Figure 3-1* below. In this sense, I was striving for both particularization (thick descriptions) and comparison in the form of cross-case accounts.

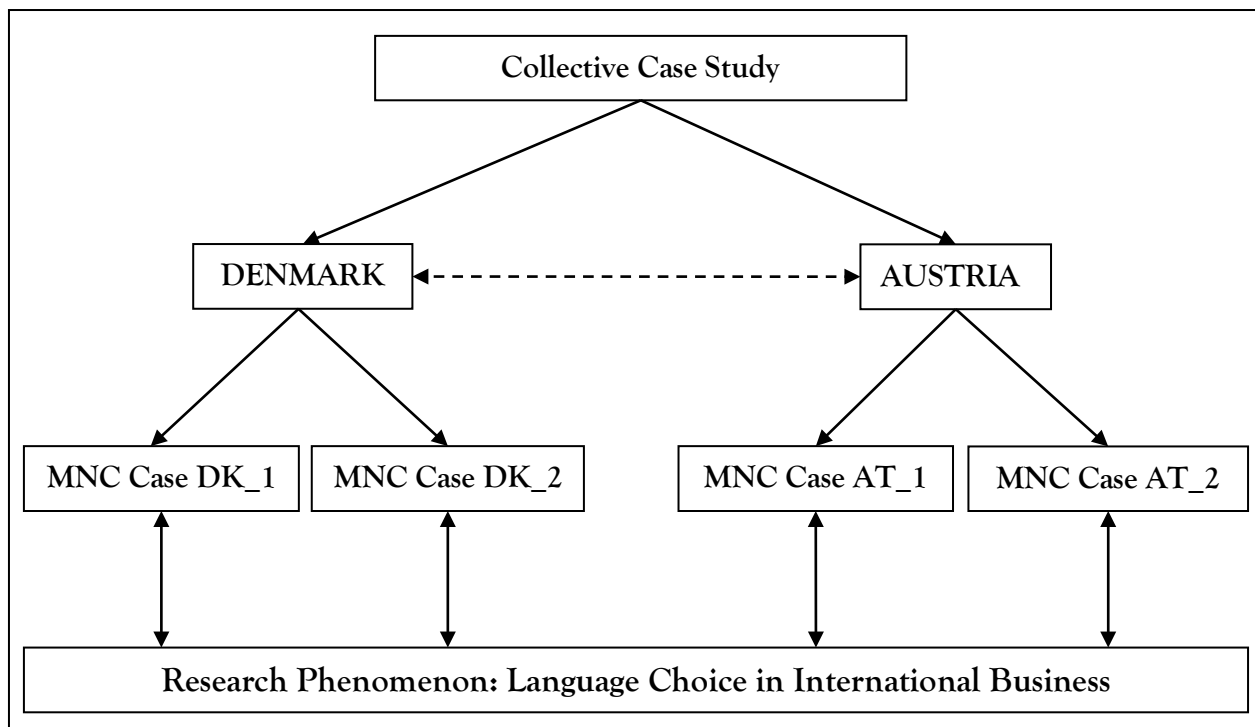


Figure 3-1: Understanding of cases in this study (based on Stake 2000)

### 3.3.1.1 Selecting multinational corporations (MNCs)

Generally speaking, the MNC represents the *case* in the present study, as it is believed to offer an appropriate framework to learn about and deepen our understanding of language choice in international business contexts. As discussed earlier, a multinational typically operates across countries and linguistic environments. This linguistically heterogeneous nature renders it a theoretically useful case (Eisenhardt 1989) for the study of language matters (Fredriksson et al. 2006, Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman 2007, Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002, Steyaert & Janssens 1997, see also Janssens et al. 2004). In other words, “there are few attempts to apply the insights of language diversity to the context of multinational corporations” (Welch et al. 2005: 14).

There were several reasons why I chose MNCs over small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Firstly, the degree of language diversity was expected to be higher in MNCs than in SMEs owing to their larger sizes, international activities and representation abroad. Secondly, the language choice diversity was also believed to be greater in MNCs than SMEs. Thirdly, MNCs as opposed to SMEs offered the possibility to study language choice from an internal communication perspective, across organizational units including HQ-subsidary relationships, which were suggested to be further investigated (e.g. SanAntonio 1987, Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002, Sørensen 2005, Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011). Fourthly, an apparent emphasis on SMEs within the *language sciences* (Hagen 1993, 1999, 2001, 2006, Vandermeeren 1998, Incelli 2008, Lavric & Bäck 2009) prompted me to opt for an MNC environment in order to provide an alternative (micro) business context. With regard to prior studies focusing on MNCs, my research contributes a new cross-border design involving Denmark and Austria, which I will detail below.

### 3.3.1.2 Selecting Danish and Austrian MNCs

A cross-border design has been proposed in avenues for future research found in the corporate communication literature. Fredriksson et al. (2006) state that “Anglo-Saxon companies are likely to suffer from certain ‘blindness’ to the language problem due to the current dominance of English as the *lingua franca*” (p. 411) and suggest that “[f]uture research should therefore compare firms from different language backgrounds in order to assess the possible effects of home-country [HQ] language and ‘language blindness’” (p. 420). A certain blindness of the Anglophone business community has also been identified in other studies (e.g. Thomas 2008, Graddol 2006, Crick 1999, Clarke 2000, Hagen 2005). Similarly, Welch et al. (2001) suggest an in-depth exploration of “language issues in firms from different countries” (p. 206).

Denmark and Austria were considered a suitable pair to address this call for investigating non-Anglo-Saxon firms and comparing different (home) countries, in accordance with Ghauri’s (2004) methodological recommendation of having both contrasting and similar characteristics in case study research. Differences concern the home country (HQ) languages Danish and German. A fairly limited number of Danish speakers (approx. 5 million) renders Danish a ‘small’ language (Lund 2003, Millar & Jensen 2009). This forces Denmark-based companies to rely on a foreign

language (FL) as soon as they engage in international relations and intend to leave the domestic or Nordic markets. This is also the reason that in larger speech communities with ‘major’ languages (e.g. German, French) English has been introduced into corporate communication later than in smaller speech communities (e.g. Danish, Swedish, Dutch). German- or French-speaking companies, for instance, do not necessarily have to rely on a lingua franca. They may either find external business partners fluent in their languages or hire local staff skilled in the HQ language (Vollstedt 2002, see also Ammon 2010). Similarly, Truchot (2003) observes that Scandinavian companies were among the first to realize the impediment of the use of their national languages in the process of expansion within Europe. These demographic and geographical situations are often used to explain a presumably high level of English and FL skills in northern Europe, in comparison to the rest, in particular the south of Europe (e.g. Harzing & Pudelko 2013). Another characteristic of the HQ language Danish is its proximity to the neighboring languages Norwegian, Swedish and Icelandic; these are all closely related languages and thus mutually intelligible (e.g. Haugen 1966, Romaine 2000). This means speakers can interact by using their first languages respectively and ideally understand each other. Although not a real language, ‘Scandinavian’ (*skandinaviska*) is a term frequently used to describe this polyglot way of communicating (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005, see also Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b, Welch et al. 2001). Scandinavian is often preferred to English in Nordic communicative contexts (Henderson 2005). Scandinavian languages, in particular Swedish, may also be described as regional lingua francas fostering or facilitating market expansion within the Nordic region (Welch et al. 2001, Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005, Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011). Also, they are usually part of national foreign language teaching curricula.

The second HQ language German, on the other hand, is spoken as an L1 by approx. 95-98 million people in mostly European countries (e.g. Austria, Belgium, southern Denmark, eastern France, Germany, northern Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Switzerland) and as a foreign language (FL) by 16.7 million people worldwide, with the highest number of German learners in Russia, followed by Poland, France, Ukraine and Hungary (Ammon 2003, 2010). This may enable the use of German in trade affairs across national borders as with Eastern Europe (Archan & Dornmayr 2006, Schweiger 2008). Note, however, that German seems to be in the process of being replaced by Russian and English among the younger generation (Ammon 2001). These

different characteristics surrounding the attribute home country (HQ location) or HQ language rendered them interesting to compare. (I was then striving for similarity across countries regarding other attributes like industry and company size, which I will detail later.)

Overall, Denmark and Austria have not been used in earlier cross-national case study designs. Within *language* research, there have admittedly been several cross-border, mostly quantitative, investigations with a focus on SMEs (Hest & Oud-de Glas 1991, Hagen 1993, 1999, 2001, 2006). By contrast, to my knowledge only one cross-national study (*Talking sense*) has included MNCs, headquartered in Germany, France and the UK (Feely & Winslow 2005). There seems to be a tendency to focus on larger countries or economies. In order to compensate for this imbalance, I decided to select MNCs instead of SMEs, and contrast two smaller nations.

If a cross-national dimension is applied to MNC contexts, it often concerns home and host countries (HQ vs. subsidiaries), or host countries only. Examples of qualitative studies are a German HQ with German and Finnish subsidiaries (Fredriksson et al. 2006); a German-owned Czech subsidiary (Nekvapil & Nekula 2006); one or more Finnish headquarters and their subsidiaries (Marschan 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, 1999b, Charles 2007, Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002); an American-owned subsidiary in Japan (SanAntonio 1987). As far as contrasting home countries is concerned, attention is mostly drawn to mergers and acquisitions (M&As), as the studies of Finnish-Swedish mergers (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005, Piekkari et al. 2005). There is only one qualitative study including different headquarters (seven German HQs and one Japanese) but the authors describe it as a “large-scale” rather than an ‘in-depth’ qualitative analysis, and it does not compare home-country effects (Harzing et al. 2011). Another point is that often a larger country and economy (e.g. Germany) is compared to a smaller one (e.g. Finland), or geographically and culturally very distant countries (US/Germany/Finland vs. Japan) are contrasted with one another (see e.g. Trompenaars & Woolliams 2003, Hall 1976 on cultural theories).

In conclusion, Denmark and Austria (as two HQ locations) were considered an alternative to the earlier studies, and could respond to the call for studying non-Anglophone countries and comparing different home-country (HQ) languages. To my knowledge no qualitative, contrastive

case study of this type has been conducted in an MNC context. I will now turn to the selection of the specific companies.

### 3.3.1.3 Selecting two case companies per country

In case study research, the sample size is usually far too small to pursue a random sampling strategy (aiming at representativeness and generalizability); since these were not my goals, cases were selected in a *purposeful* (rather than random) manner. In a purposeful and balanced design, which takes into account both balance and variety in case characteristics, the cases selected ought to give the opportunity to learn about the phenomenon in varied contexts. Usually, case researchers work with typologies or attributes in order to select their cases (Stake 2000, see also Ghauri 2004, Welch et al. 2011). In organizational or MNC contexts one might think of e.g. industry, company size, (HQ and subsidiary) locations, etc.

Considering my research goal and the purpose of finding a balance between particularization (thick description) and comparison, I chose a small number of cases for this collective study, that is two cases per country. To observe how language choice operates and functions across different contexts, I focused on the attributes HQ location (home country), industry and company size. Accordingly, one larger manufacturer and one smaller MNC operating in an alternative industry were purposefully selected for each country, as indicated by *Table 3-2* below (Stake 2000, Yin 2009).

Size	Denmark (HQ)	Austria (HQ)	
<b>Larger</b>	1 Manufacturer	1 Manufacturer	2 larger manufacturers
<b>Smaller</b>	1 MNC from alternative industry	1 MNC from alternative industry	2 smaller MNCs from alternative industries
	2 Danish MNCs	2 Austrian MNCs	4 MNC cases in total

Table 3-2: Selecting two case companies per country



The following table (3-3) summarizes in more detail the characteristics of relevance for choosing the study's MNCs (HQ location, industry, company size measured by number of staff and subsidiaries, and turnover per anno or business year). For reasons of confidentiality the company names have been disguised, the numbers are only approximate values and the industries are not discussed in detail. In summary, I was striving for both balance and variety in the case study design which is by no means representative of MNCs as a whole, of national contexts or any basis for statistical generalization. It is important to remember that "[e]ven for collective case studies, selection by sampling of attributes should not be the highest priority. Balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance" (Stake 2000: 447).

<b>4 Cases</b>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Size (no. of staff)</i>	<i>Size (no. of subsidiaries)</i>	<i>Turnover (in billions of EUR)</i>
DK_1	Manufacturing	18,000	80	≈ 3 (in 2012)
DK_2	Pharmaceutical	6,000	57	≈ 2 (in 2013)
AT_1	Manufacturing	46,400	500	≈ 11.5 (in 2012/13)
AT_2	Construction	7,400	26	≈ 1.5 (in 2012/13)

Table 3-3: Characteristics of the four case companies

Apart from HQ location, industry, size and turnover as selection criteria, each company had specific characteristics that rendered it theoretically interesting and relevant, and justified its selection. Based on desk-research and initial contacts with DK\_1 and DK\_2, it became apparent that they both had chosen English as their corporate language and formulated a language policy draft<sup>37</sup> and a language guide. Also, the key contact person of DK\_1 was a senior translator who provided first insights into language choice and related translation processes that seemed relevant. These characteristics rendered both DK\_1 and DK\_2 viable Danish case companies since diversified language choices could be identified and promising further insights were hoped for. The selection of AT\_1 was theoretically based on two factors; first, it is so large that a high degree

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<sup>37</sup> Language policy statements were not a selection criterion because I was interested in language choices made in context and the manageability of languages in MNCs. Policies were no exclusion criterion either because they were believed to deepen our understanding of language choice in its integrity.

of linguistic heterogeneity informing various language choices was assumed. Also, the pilot interview conducted with an executive revealed AT\_1' structure and organization into divisions and variation in language choice. HQ seemed to have two main corporate languages whereas one division (an Austrian-Swedish merger) had chosen English as a corporate or divisional language. This also tied in well with Marschan-Piekkari et al.'s (1999b) call for case companies with more than a single corporate language. Second, the corporate website's appearance came across as totally bilingual and very professional from a Translation Studies' perspective. These were the main criteria for including AT\_1 in the study. The fourth company case (AT\_2) was theoretically chosen due to its strong focus on German on the one hand and its primary business activities in Eastern Europe on the other hand, whose national educational systems and foreign language learning (macro language policy and planning) seem to differ from Central and Western Europe (Ammon 2001). In this sense, I assumed to find innovative approaches to language choice and thus included AT\_2 into the study.

Overall, one could say that there was no such thing as a specific attribute that was a universal selection criterion. This is because I was interested in learning about diversified and multifaceted choices. In other words, the case companies were all both similar and different to some extent, balance and variety being of importance (Stake 2000, Ghauri 2004). In selecting the different cases, I also attempted to strike a balance between the research foci of the study and pragmatic considerations (Ghauri 2004, Patton 2002, Stake 2000), such as temporal and financial resources, geographical distance and possibilities of access.

#### **3.3.1.4 Initial problems encountered**

Generally speaking, it was difficult to find and gain access to case companies in both countries. The companies were approached via email and asked if they were willing to participate in the study. The response rate was rather low. Initially I had a more ethnographic approach to data collection in mind, i.e. immersing in the field by spending two or three days at HQ, doing participant observation (e.g. in meetings), identifying and interviewing participants (e.g. executives, employees, international staff) I consider scientifically relevant or interesting. This was believed to be a fruitful approach to getting an idea of the company in its context, i.e. its

structure, employees, working atmosphere, languages used, etc. The first MNC (DK\_2) I had contacted turned this idea down owing to “lacking resources”. Instead the key person, having a rough idea of what the project was about, suggested I could come and conduct a few interviews with people he considered interesting, including himself. On the basis of this response, some adaptations to the planned fieldwork and selection strategy were necessary; when contacting further case companies I kept the description and title of the project short and catchy (1-2 sentences), suggested a limited number of participants needed (5-10) who I could conduct individual interviews with (30 minutes each). (I will discuss the research interviews in the following sections.) These modifications to data collection methods were fruitful, and were a pragmatic balance between research goals and companies’ willingness to participate. Overall, the possibilities of access depended very much on the openness of an individual contact person with an interest in research projects (DK\_1) and cooperativeness of people either my former supervisor (DK\_2) or I myself (AT\_1, AT\_2) knew personally. This was crucial for awakening the companies’ interest, building confidence and obtaining further access.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

#### **3.4.1 Empirical materials: research interviews (RIs), corporate documents and websites**

Generally speaking, once a case is chosen there are further decisions to make as to which places, persons or events to study or observe (Stake 2000). Apart from selecting company cases, I had to decide how to study them, i.e. which type of evidence to collect when, where and from whom, also referred to as searching for “cases within the case” (Stake 2000: 447) or “casing” (Ragin 1992: 217). Research interviews (RIs) (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, King 1994, Miller & Glassner 2004) represented the primary data source as they were considered most suitable for investigating human behavior, interpretation and understanding, i.e. participants’ perceptions, experiences, beliefs, problems and most importantly rationales and motivations behind language choices. In more philosophical terms, an open-ended interview (as text) can be regarded as “a window into human experience” (Ryan & Bernard 2000: 769) or “the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another” (Silverman 2000: 822f). Furthermore, through nonpositivistic, i.e. interactive, interviews “intersubjective depth” and “deep mutual understanding” can be achieved,

eventually generating “knowledge of social worlds” (Miller & Glassner 2004: 126f). Despite their importance, RIs were not the only empirical material. In the interpretive tradition alternative sources to interview data usually play an important role (Piekkari et al. 2009). Following this convention, both corporate documents and websites were included in the study. The inclusion of different types of sources also aimed to triangulate data and to study the company cases in their entirety (Patton 2002). In other words, the use of a variety of data sources (triangulation) helps ensure an in-depth understanding of the research matter under investigation, and thereby attempts to strengthen a study (Patton 2002, Denzin & Lincoln 1994, Flick 2009). “Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake 2000: 443, 1998: 97). However, ontologically speaking, it is important to remember that since there is no ‘objective truth’, triangulation is not a device or tool of, but an alternative to validation (Flick 2009). This means we are actually interested in the multiple realities (ontology), i.e. different perceptions of a single phenomenon which may be dialectical or controversial but that does not render them less valid, especially because the ‘particular’ cases are often the most interesting and insightful ones (Ragin 1992).

### **3.4.2 Collecting interview data: a first overview**

In total, I collected 34 semi-structured qualitative research interviews from two Danish and two Austrian MNCs (see *Figure 3-4* below) at two points in time (December 2009-January 2010 and June-September 2010). It was decided to collect interview data at both headquarters and subsidiaries. This ensured “unit triangulation” (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 2004: 254), a common strategy in IB case study research. This is because the type of knowledge, information richness and degree of detail may differ across levels. For instance, the more decentralized translation and language training are administered, the less information can be gathered at the HQ level. So in order to get a holistic picture of all aspects of language choice in international business contexts, I needed to consider local units, too.

Choosing local units (see *Figure 3-4* below) was once again done in a purposeful manner, involving a snowball or chain sampling strategy leading to “information-rich cases” (Patton 2002: 242). This

means that first or key informants were encouraged to suggest potentially interesting locations or respondents based on the study's research foci. Austria, for instance, represented not only the home country (for AT\_1 and AT\_2) but also the host country of subsidiaries in all four cases; the key person of DK\_1 suggested Austria and Germany as local options with potential interview candidates. Similarly, in the case of DK\_2, one influential HQ executive had a good connection to the Austrian unit, had lived in Austria and was willing to pave the way. For both Austrian HQs, the subsidiaries selected were also located in Austria because they were very specialized in a field and operated globally and independently from the headquarters. They could therefore provide interesting insights, although the HQ and local languages were both German. It is worth mentioning that the Austrian company cases offered a great variety of language choices and were quite open about their 'problems'. Thus there was less need to investigate in more depth at other local levels since data saturation was achieved more quickly. Obviously, there was also a personal and pragmatic dimension involved; it was easier for me – being Austrian – to obtain access to Austrian and German units. Australia as a subsidiary of DK\_1, the only Anglophone environment, was included as a local unit because access could easily be gained – I spent a research semester in Australia – and HQ staff facilitated access to local interviewees (snowball principle). The following figure (3.4) summarizes the distribution of research interviews (RIs) conducted in Denmark and Austria, across two organizational units, i.e. HQs and subsidiaries in Australia, Austria and Germany.

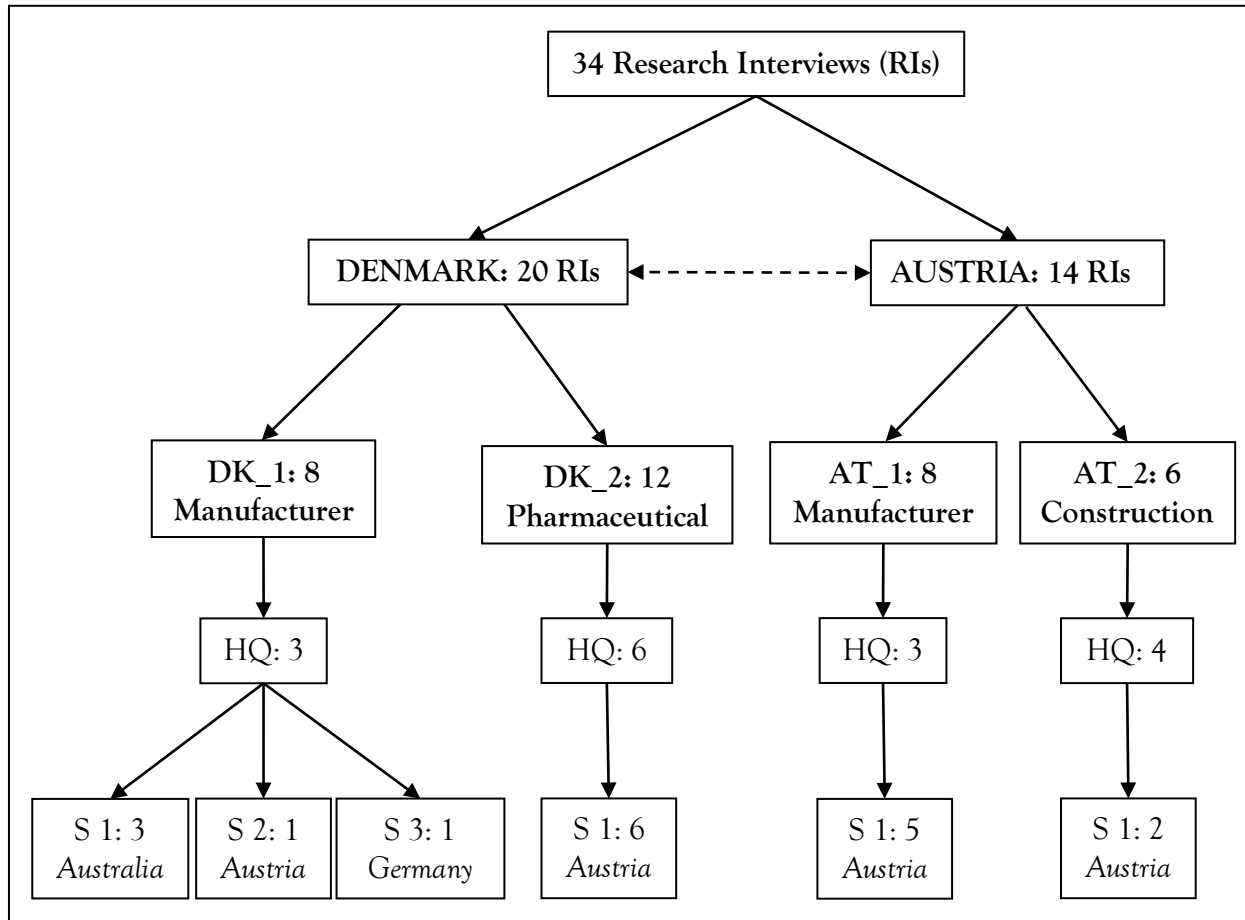


Figure 3-4: Interview data collected from Danish and Austrian HQs and subsidiaries (in Australia, Austria, Germany)

### 3.4.2.1 Interview respondents across three levels of employment

A purposeful snowball sampling strategy was also applied to selecting interview respondents. These were employees (e.g. language consultant, assistant/administrative staff, translator, copywriter, lawyer), middle managers (project leader, HR, product, account or marketing managers with varying supervisory functions, heads of smaller departments) and top managers with different responsibilities (managing directors, (regional) directors or executives and heads of larger departments or whole divisions). (Former) in-/expatriates or repatriates and third-country nationals represented an interesting group regardless of location and responsibilities because of their linguistic repertoires, perspectives on different environments and diverse experiences. They

were also ‘door-openers’ to accessing additional sites (local units and staff). The following table (3-5) shows the distribution of research interviewees across these three levels of employment.

3 Levels	DK_1	DK_2	AT_1	AT_2
Employees	4	3	3	0
Middle Managers	2	5	3	3
Top Managers	2	4	2	3
<b>In total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>

Table 3-5: Distribution of interview respondents across three levels of employment

#### 3.4.2.1.1 Further problems encountered

A constructivist-interpretive research design including a purposeful sampling strategy is more flexible than others, and allows unique cases and insights to emerge (Denzin & Lincoln 2000a, Stake 2000, Ragin 1992, Patton 2002). This flexible approach also had its drawbacks such as limitations of access which explain the uneven distribution of participants per case study. More specifically, at the Austrian subsidiary of DK\_2, the local contact person was particularly helpful and provided unlimited access by introducing me to almost all her colleagues, which doubled the number of participants in one day. At AT\_2 it was the opposite; the key person at HQ considered six informants in total sufficient and basically denied further access (to the employee level). This means access is often dependent on influential staff and can therefore also differ across organizational units and employment levels. Yet, this did not seriously compromise data collection since data saturation (including diversified insights into language choices and ‘particular’ cases) could still be achieved within AT\_2.

#### 3.4.2.2 Entering the field and conducting research interviews (RIs)

The final participants and interviewees were all contacted via email, briefed on the project, and practicalities were sorted out, such as date, time and location of the interview. The RIs were conducted face-to-face in the respondent’s usual environment (e.g. office, meeting room) with a

few exceptions. In six cases I could not visit the site and phone interviews were opted for. Except for one focus group interview (with three participants and suggested by one of them), I only conducted individual (one-to-one) interviews, considered most appropriate to gain as many diversified and personalized insights as possible.<sup>38</sup> All interviews were digitally audio-recorded (with the respondents' permission) and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes on average (min. 12 and max. 85 minutes).<sup>39</sup>

The interview language was either German or English, depending on the interactants' preferences and language proficiency. I was not fluent enough to conduct an interview in Danish, so English was chosen instead. The same was applied to all the other cases where the first language of the interviewee (i.e. Croatian, Dutch, Estonian or Swedish) could not be used. It was decided not to rely on an interpreter since the interviewees in question had agreed on doing the interview in English. Conducting a lingua franca interview in inter- or cross-cultural settings might lead to reduced data richness due to difficulties expressing ourselves in a foreign language (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari & Reis 2004, Welch & Piekkari 2006). I was aware of these potential problems and thus sensitive to possible misunderstandings.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion: I had an interview guide with an outline of the research phenomena of interest operationalized through several questions, which will be discussed in detail in the following section (3.4.2.3, see also *Appendix*). I tried to keep the questions rather short with a simple syntax and colloquial terms. Since interviewing is also a form of oral speech production, a simple language makes it easier for the respondent to follow. Semi-structured interviewing also allowed the inclusion of probing questions (i.e. asking for further

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<sup>38</sup> Focus group interviews are more suitable for exploring new phenomena, where the researcher presents a topic and only facilitates rather than leads the conversation, opening up for a broader, unstructured discussion (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Since I had a semi-structured research agenda with specific research interests and related questions, focus group interviews were disregarded in the first place. But the key person (from DK\_1) and respondent suggested the focus group interview as an opportunity for him and his two colleagues to get an idea of my project and consequently reflect together on other possible interview candidates (snowball principle). The interview was not as rich in data as the individual ones because not everyone answered all questions. Besides, the turn taking between informants and group dynamics may have influenced responses and viewpoints.

<sup>39</sup> The shortest interview was technically embedded in another interview. This was when a repatriate unexpectedly interrupted an interview. In this case, the actual respondent asked his colleague next door to join the interview and to share his experience as a former expatriate with us when it came to the topic of expatriation and the use of local languages. After 12 minutes the repatriate left again and the interview was continued with the actual respondent. Although it was not an entire interview but input on only one area (i.e. expatriation), it was counted as an interview representing a new, 'particular' case due to its special insights (Ragin 1992).



description, explanation or examples) and interpreting questions (i.e. repeating and paraphrasing information for clarification purposes), if needed. In addition, structuring questions were used in a meta-communicative way to introduce new topics and summarize previously discussed ones (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

The questions were open-ended, i.e. the informants needed to express and formulate replies themselves and thereby recreate their subjective understandings of the themes of interest. Such an approach let the interviewee and me (interviewer) build up an interactive setting which led in various directions, depending on the respondent's position (management vs. employee level), language proficiency, language choices, worldview, values and beliefs, working area, experience, interest in the topic, and also willingness to provide information and their time available. I tried to adhere to the interview script but if informants' answers opened up new directions, follow-up and specifying questions were added. Consequently, the order of the questions asked was not identical. This means the research interviews were embedded in their interpersonal and situational contexts, providing me with a diversified and multifaceted data set. Such a flexible and exploratory data collection method allowed the integration of additional themes with the emergence of new data, as suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994) or Ghauri (2004). In other words, qualitative research and semi-structured interviews are not neat and clear-cut but allow the researcher to explore more deeply by asking additional questions regarding a specific theme, omit certain questions in another context, change the order of the questions, etc., all depending on the flow of interaction and discussion, which is unique to every interview (King 1994, Saunders et al. 2012).

Further characteristics of the research interviews were that they contained narrative, factual and conceptual elements (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). The RIs were largely narrative, because they had 'story-telling' and retrospective components when expressing experiences. Talking about a particular topic or concept might evoke associations concerning an event in the past, illustrating a point of view or justifying an argument. The interviews also provided factual information, e.g. facts about the company's history, organizational structure, numbers and figures, which could partly be cross-checked and confirmed by studying the websites and by multiplying informants (i.e. triangulation, data saturation). To some extent the RIs were also conceptual, as they enabled me

to explore the subjective meanings and conceptual understandings of central terms such as ‘language policy’ or ‘corporate language’ (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

#### 3.4.2.3 The interview protocol (see Appendix)

A first interview protocol draft was drawn up at a very early stage of the project. This was tested through a pilot interview with the Head of Corporate Human Resources of the case company AT\_1 in April 2009. It was a very informal interview with the purpose of obtaining an overview of the company’s profile and ‘reactions’ to the themes discussed. It was more of a test run than actual data collection. Therefore, it was not recorded but notes were taken. The key ideas of this interview were taken to create a first German version of the protocol which I subsequently translated into English because these were the two (expected and actual) interview languages.<sup>40</sup>

The final research interview guide – see *Appendix (Interview Protocol)* – was designed on the basis of the research question generated from existing knowledge gaps, and shaped by my theoretical underpinning and working framework (see *Chapters 1 and 2*). The interview questions asked operationalized the research phenomena of interest, i.e. language choice and the manageability of language in MNC contexts. The interview protocol was divided into five parts. Part I was characterized by questions about the respondent’s position and responsibilities, educational background, as well as L1 and foreign language skills (*Questions 1-3*). The next question (*#3a*) was about whether or not they could use these languages professionally – relating to individual language choices. It was followed by two broad questions concerning the role of foreign languages in the company and in staffs’ personal work lives (*Questions 4a, 4b*) – addressing language choices at both the corporate and individual levels. These opening questions were helpful to set the interview scene, gain the respondent’s trust and establish rapport (Fontana & Frey 1994).

Part II (*Questions 5-9*) aimed to get an overview of the MNC (as a multilingual speech community) by asking about the languages chosen at the company in general or specifically for interunit

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<sup>40</sup> Since I have a background in Translation Studies, neither a second opinion nor back-translation was considered necessary (although I translated *into* a foreign language). The concept of back-translation is often relied on if the researcher is not proficient in the target language. In order to avoid translation inconsistencies, the target text is back-translated into the source language and then compared to the original language version (Janssens et al. 2004).

communication, the organizational structure and subsidiaries' autonomy, and languages chosen for external communication (foreign market expansion). These questions gave me a first overall impression of language choice (for internal and external communication purposes), the multilingual MNC community and possibly also speech community norms. This kind of data was also important to get an idea of the MNC's organizational structure or design.

The first question (#10) of part III dealt with the existence of a language policy. (I only said "language policy or strategy" and did not include the term 'statement' since I was also interested in respondents' overall associations with and understandings of the term as a concept.) The next question (#11) addressed the existence of a corporate language. This was followed by questions on language choices involving translation and interpretation; I asked about the existence of a language department, if any documents needed to be translated, about the underlying reason for translating them, the degree of professionalism and about terminology management, and whether, how and why the firms relied on interpreters (*Questions 12-15a*). Then I was interested in language choices for educational purposes, i.e. whether language training or acquisition was offered to staff, in which format (when? where?) and whether courses were paid for by the company (*Questions 16-16b*). I also investigated language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment, staff relocation); this included the significance of language proficiency for certain positions (*Question 17, 17a*) and the role of and reason for in-/expatriation in the company (*Questions 18, 18a*).

In part IV of the interview protocol the focus was on perceived problems (linked to language proficiency) staff might have had experienced. It was attempted to learn about problems in internal and external interactions and possible explanations for the problems (*Questions 19-20a*). *Question 21* covered perceived differences in language proficiency. This part yielded at exploring possible challenges or negative perceptions associated with language choices.

The last phase of the interview (part V) returned to respondents' individual language choices in more detail; the *questions 22 and 22a* concerned language choices with foreign customers or colleagues and underlying rationales or motivations, followed by questions (#23-25) on the influence of media/channel and topic on language choices, code-switching/-mixing and passive multilingualism (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2*). The interview's last question (#26) covered

suggestions for improvements and changes the respondent could envisage. This was an implicit way of further exploring problems and challenges participants were facing.

In the course of the study, adaptations were made to the interview protocol, e.g. reformulating questions that turned out to be unclear or misleading, adding some new ones, leaving out others, paraphrasing difficult terms (e.g. 'way' instead of 'medium/channel') or avoiding words with negative connotations (e.g. 'challenges' instead of 'problems') and changing the syntax. Of course, some interview questions needed to be adapted to the organizational unit (HQ vs. subsidiary); (pro)nouns and the structure of the questions were changed accordingly when it came to interunit communication and relationships (see *Questions 6-8* of the *Appendix*).

### **3.4.3 Treating alternative data sources: corporate documents and websites**

Corporate documents and websites intended to complement the interview data. The company case DK\_1 had a written guide for English text production. This was given to me at HQ as part of the focus group interview. DK\_2 had a language policy statement; I collected a first written draft of it during an interview at HQ; the final version was emailed to me in August 2011.

The companies' websites provided first insights into language choices by exploring the different language versions of the corporate homepages, links to local websites, audio information for various target groups, written documents to download in different languages or (mono-/bilingual) job advertisements (specifying language skills required). In this sense, I gained an impression of the MNCs as multilingual speech communities defined by varying language choices across organizational units, choices involving translation or for HRM purposes (e.g. job advertisements). The corporate and local websites of all four MNCs were visited multiple times throughout the data collection phases and investigated more systematically in the different stages of analysis, which will be elaborated in the following.

Overall, at this stage I had already learned a lot about my cases and their phenomena. This makes it quite hard to sharply distinguish between data collection and analysis, the matter of the following section. Analysis or the process of learning and understanding started at the stage of entering the field, simply because I cognitively responded to data collection in trying to

understand what was happening, absorbing information or experiences and putting them into conceptual perspective in my head. This also shaped and guided data analysis.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

In general, data analysis is about reconstructing social phenomena in creating and representing personal accounts and artifacts of social life. More precisely, it deals with “classifying, categorizing, coding, [and] collating data” (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 108). Analysis is a cyclical process which is imaginative, sensitive, reflexive and flexible but at the same time scholarly, structured and systematic, and rigorous in nature (Coffey & Atkinson 1996, Strauss & Corbin 1998). Furthermore, data analysis is often closely related to the data collection process; this means analysis should not be seen as a separate or the final stage of research but informs or guides data collection, writing up, further collection and theoretical sampling, and is thus part of the research design (Coffey & Atkinson 1996, Strauss & Corbin 1998). In this sense, my data collection and analysis were intertwined activities. I immersed into the field and collected a first data set which provided me with a preliminary understanding of phenomena in their naturalistic settings and case boundaries. These insights gained, together with a preliminary analysis (digital coding phase I), informed the second round of data collection.

Aligned with the constructivist-interpretive paradigm, my overall approach to analysis was of an interpretive nature, i.e. making sense of data (in the form of readable texts) through subjective but reflexive interpretation, namely ascribing meaning to human experience and worldviews, etc. In this context, it is helpful to “distinguish between the *linguistic tradition*, which treats text as an object of analysis itself, and the *sociological tradition*, which treats text as a window into human experience” Ryan & Bernard (2000: 769). The focus was on *meaning* rather than *language* itself. In other words, *what* was said was more important than *how* it was said (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). I chose a sociological (over a linguistic) approach.

Furthermore, I followed an ‘abductive’ logic in analyzing the data. This means it was neither purely inductive (i.e. grounded in data) nor deductive (i.e. grounded in theory) but somewhere in between. Dubois & Gadde (2002) discuss an ‘abductive’ logic in the light of case study research

describing an initial analytical framework (based on existing conceptions) which develops over time through the discoveries in the field, through their analysis and interpretation, and the revisiting of theory or current literature. The authors argue that this is because “theory cannot be understood without empirical observation and vice versa” (ibid. p. 555). This non-linear analytical process is described as the ‘systematic combining’ of a framework, the empirical world, theory and the case (Dubois & Gadde 2002).

Overall, the analytical process was primarily based on Miles & Huberman (1994), hence characterized by the following analytical steps: data preparation, data reduction in four coding phases (of which phase I was carried out digitally), data display, drafting case reports, conclusion drawing and verification, leading to final results in the form of four case studies. These different phases of analysis formed a cyclical interplay which was continuous and highly iterative in nature. This means that data reduction led to new ideas informing data display. Conclusion drawing was characterized by travelling between display and the reduced data, leading to data verification, finalized reports and a synthesis of findings (across cases) including their broader implications. Although Miles & Huberman (1994) are advocates of a realist approach to qualitative analysis, they provide a very detailed and systematic guidance to data analysis which I found quite useful. I adapted their ideas to my purposes and the interpretive design. In this sense, I also compared it to Stake (1995) and integrated his views to the extent possible. He suggests similar steps: initial description, followed by categorical aggregation, and establishing patterns, leading to naturalistic generalizations, with the overall aim of learning from the cases and understanding ‘what is going on there’, moving from ‘the particular’ (case) to ‘the general’ (Stake 2000). The way constructivists learn and generalize from their case studies can also be described as ‘interpretive sensemaking’ (Welch et al. 2011), as mentioned earlier.

### **3.5.1 Data preparation: transcribing research interviews**

The very first step in the more systematic analysis phase was the transcription of (the first set of) interviews in Microsoft Word which was facilitated by a software (for transcribing audio files) and a foot pedal. Transcripts can be seen as the transformation of recordings, i.e. spoken language, into texts that are clear and readable to the analyst and which form the basic medium of analysis

(Miles & Huberman 1994, Flick 2009, Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).<sup>41</sup> As mentioned before, I had already learned a lot about my cases and their phenomena during data collection; these ‘first impressions’ were then intensified through transcribing the interviews, which was a time-consuming but exploratory and insightful activity. Furthermore, it was a very close interaction between me as an analyst and the data that launched the thinking about the data and already fostered asking questions about them. Of course, the even more systematic analytical process characterized by coding (i.e. naming, labeling, categorizing) and conceptualizing or abstracting was a subsequent step. However, transcribing is an essential step that helps to familiarize oneself with the data.

### 3.5.2 Coding phase I: exploring and reducing data digitally (using NVivo)

The step following transcription was an exploration and reduction of the raw data that helped structure and organize them. Data reduction can be achieved by *coding* which is defined as “attaching meaningful labels to data chunks” (Miles & Huberman 1994: 89). Coffey & Atkinson (1996: 32) stress that:

codes are organizing principles that are not set in stone. They are our own creations, in that we identify and select them ourselves. They are tools to think with. They can be expanded, changed, or scrapped altogether as our ideas develop through repeated interactions with the data. Starting to create categories is a way of beginning to read and think about the data in a systematic and organized way.

Following an abductive logic, my approach to coding was informed by extant literature (i.e. my theoretical or conceptual working framework – see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3*). However, the literature does not “provide ready-made concepts and models” but ideas “to develop perspective on our own data, drawing out comparisons, analogies, and metaphors. [...] A general value of eclectic reading is the development of “sensitizing concepts” (Blumer, 1954), or general analytic perspectives”

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<sup>41</sup> The activity of transcribing was limited to capturing ‘words’; this means that paralinguistic features (intonation, elongation) were not documented. However, if a respondent referred to secondary data, e.g. reading out loud from documents, this was indicated in order to distinguish it from the primary data. Paralinguistic elements can be relevant for conversational, narrative or discursive analyses focusing on *language* (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). As I focused on *meaning*, following the *sociological* (rather than linguistic) tradition, these features were less significant.

(Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 110). More specifically, I did a microanalysis which is a “detailed line-by-line analysis” that helps “generate initial categories (with their properties and dimensions)” (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 57). This line-by-line analysis can also be applied to single words, sentences, or paragraphs. In my case, the data chunks were whole paragraphs rather than single sentences in order to describe and analyze the evidence in its context. I adopted an open-coding strategy (Glaser & Strauss 1967), read the first three interviews on hard copy, highlighted themes of interest and made marginal notes including tentative labels. After this initial reading and preliminary coding, all the texts (of the first data set) were imported to NVivo, which is a software facilitating qualitative analysis of a huge amount of data (e.g. Bazeley 2007). The codes, called *nodes* in NVivo, represented common themes which were grounded in data, i.e. emerged inductively, but shaped by my conceptual understandings and theoretical framework (abductive logic), in accordance with my qualitative (constructivist-interpretive) design. In this sense, the codes (nodes) were my own creations.

#### 3.5.2.1 Developing a coding tree following an abductive logic

I continued my detailed line-by-line analysis digitally with the first set of interviews, then with the second data set and gradually developed a (hierarchical) coding tree in NVivo based on tree nodes, nodes and sub nodes (see *Figure 3-6* below). The nodes represent the themes that emerged from the data, also tied to the interview protocol, i.e. the questions asked to operationalize research phenomena of interest (see *Section 3.4.2.3, Appendix (Interview Protocol)* and *RQ – Chapter 1, Section 1.2*).

Coding phase I was characterized by a detailed *descriptive* analysis (Miles & Huberman 1994, Stake 1995). This means that *exploring* the data set dominated the first analytical steps. Coding in NVivo (and using its features such as memos) provided a diversified and detailed account of the data and facilitated the analytical process. It allowed me to store the same data chunk in multiple categories (nodes). The coding tree followed more or less the structure of the interview protocol. Therefore,



the first tree node stored background information on the respondents, for instance.<sup>42</sup> Some nodes do not have any sub nodes, but were part of the tree. For instance, none of the companies had a language department, yet I coded all the answers provided in the node. Furthermore, the complexity of the phenomenon language choice led to many similar nodes containing similar data. The HQ language was reported to be used in different contexts creating several codes 'at HQ' (representing the location) or 'interunit communication' (the communication purpose). Or, the tree node 'external communication' needed to be subdivided into 'foreign market expansion' which was in one Austrian case dominated by the 'HQ language' while for other external communication purposes 'customer languages', 'English' and 'HQ language' needed to be created. Data stored in 'customer languages' may contain information also stored under the tree node 'translation' and its sub-nodes. This means, initial coding was not only about data simplification (reduction) but also about "complication", that is, "coding usually is a mixture of data reduction and data complication. Coding generally is used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories *and* is used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation" (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 29f).

NVivo's features such as annotations and memos were useful for 'thinking about' the data during the digital coding process. Remarks were added in the form of NVivo annotations; this could be something striking about the data. Later on memos were used to write longer descriptions or summarizing statements, and to clarify meanings. Memos can be defined as a "researcher's record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions, and directions for further data collection" (Strauss & Corbin 1998: 110). Both annotations and memos were particularly useful for understanding and interpreting interviewees' perceptions and for reflecting on possible linkages between phenomena at an early stage of analysis. After this first digital coding phase, it was crucial not to lose track and 'drown in data' but regain an idea of 'the whole' empirical picture as the hermeneutic circle suggests, which led to pattern coding phase I.

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<sup>42</sup> The characteristics of each respondent (Respondent's profile), in alignment with the interview's introductory questions (#1, 2), only represented complementary knowledge, which was coded in order to be able to retrieve it more easily later in the analytical process, notably to integrate the information needed in the case reports (i.e. the respondents' positions, responsibilities or work areas). Their language proficiency (i.e. L1 and FLs) – see *Question 3* of *Appendix (Interview protocol)* – was not coded but registered in the *case book*, another function in NVivo, where different kinds of attributes (i.e. location of the employee and highest degree of education) were created to get a better description of the interviewees, their environment and background.

Tree nodes	Main nodes	Nodes	Sub-nodes
Respondent's profile	Position		
	Responsibilities		
	Educational background		
Organizational structure	Centralized (strong HQ control)		
	Autonomous subsidiaries		
Internal communication	At HQ (location)	HQ language	
	At subsidiaries	Local languages	
	Interunit communication	English	Problems
		HQ language	
		Local languages	
External Communication	Foreign market expansion	HQ language	
	Customer languages		
	English		
	HQ language		
Associations with language policy	Set of rules		
	English as a corporate language		
	Language training and acquisition		
	Emails/meetings in English		
	In-/expatriation management		
Corporate language	English (group language)		
	English (common language)		
	German		
Language department			
Translation	In-house	Nonprofessional	Machine translation
			Problems & advantages

		Professional	Terminology management (term base, translation memory systems)
	Outsourced/prof.		
	Text type, genre, register		
Interpretation	In-house/nonprof.	Problems	
	Professional		
	Communicative event		
Language training and acquisition	English		
	HQ language		
	Local language		
	Customer language		
	Paid by company		
	On site		
	During working hours		
HRM	Selective recruitment	Expertise more important than language	
	Staff relocation	Language nodes	
		Local language	
Code-switching/-mixing	Written medium		
	Oral medium	Positive associations	
		Trigger channel	
Passive multilingualism	Written medium		
	Oral medium		

Figure 3-6: A (hierarchical) coding tree

### 3.5.3 Pattern coding phase I: revisiting coded data manually to further reduce data and look for relationships

As a next step, I reread the entire data set coded to further reduce, complicate and eventually better understand the data. Though, rather than using NVivo again, it was performed manually in this second round. In the following steps, it was attempted to regain an overview by merging these small, diversified entities with partly overlapping information, resulting from coding phase I, into

bigger units again. This was done by rereading coded data on hard copy according to themes (nodes), first case study by case study, then according to themes across cases. Since the same data chunks existed in more than one category (node), I read the same information repeatedly, adding value to the process of understanding and learning about the phenomena. This also helped revisit and refine nodes, i.e. 'sensitize' the concepts (Coffey & Atkinson 1996). Existing and newly emerging nodes were written in the form of marginal remarks on the hard copies and key words representative for the themes were highlighted in the texts.

Through rereading and thereby reanalyzing an entire case study in this fashion, I was able to first regain a good overview of the four individual cases and second to see patterns, reoccurring themes across cases. In other words, this kind of systematic data revision also assisted the process of seeking linkages and relationships in the data set, also referred to as *pattern coding*; this is usually a step following initial descriptive coding because interconnections tend to be implicit and require analytical interpretation through repeated reading of data and revision of findings (Miles & Huberman 1994). For instance, from rereading and comparing respondents' rationalizations vis-à-vis the choice of the 'HQ language' 'at HQ' and of 'local languages' 'at subsidiaries' the notion of 'community norms' emerged. Furthermore, when going through the hard copies and reinterpreting data in their context, I identified rationales underlying language choice. So, I could for instance start to see a link between the theme 'English' and 'proficiency', or 'language acquisition' and 'customer language' and 'motivation', or between 'HRM' and 'attitudes to language', or between 'translation' and 'buyer-seller relationship' or 'external forces'. The next step was then data display.

#### **3.5.4 Pattern coding phase II: understanding and interpreting relationships using within-case displays**

Data display can be described as a visual representation of the data via concepts, models, key quotations or tables and matrices filled with summary statements (Ryan & Bernard 2000). Pattern coding (phase I), as just explained, was the basis for displaying relationships in the form of matrices. For each company one conceptual matrix was drawn on a whiteboard and summary statements were entered (Miles & Huberman 1994) (see *Table 3-7* below). The matrix focused on

the main themes of interest, i.e. the social dimensions and rationales informing language choice in the MNCs. More specifically, the most relevant nodes from the coding tree in the very left column and rows were placed side-by-side with five columns defining the **Social Context**. The summarizing statements entered formed the basis for the next step in the analysis (i.e. writing case reports – see *Sections 3.5.5 and 3.5.6*). Note, the matrix below does not display the entire data set but visualizes some insights across cases. It only aims to demonstrate how I proceeded in the analytical process. Therefore, the table is to be understood as a simplified illustration of the actual four matrices (i.e. one per company case).

The social context language choice was embedded in could be divided into the following categories: (1) Participants' language proficiency, (2) Participant roles, roles relationships & politeness, (3) Participants' attitudes, (4) Participants' motivations, and (5) External forces. They informed different language choices including translation and interpretation, choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment, staff relocation), choices for educational purposes, code-switching/-mixing, passive multilingualism etc. including various languages. The choices could be made at both the individual and corporate levels. This transition from the descriptive coding phase to this pattern coding was crucial in that it refracted the idea of levels or vertical (top-down) formalized language management such as translation and interpretation undertaken by the employer or corporate management. By 'looking behind' the themes of interest such as translation, that is uncovering the decision maker's underlying rationales for a choice involving translation in a given communicative situation, we could learn that translation could be initiated by a single employee or the corporate level (which also needed to be divided into HQ, regional and local management levels). This multilayered notion of social context and multidimensional language choices (across levels of employment and organizational units) uncovered the complex and multilingual nature of language choice in the cases. Ultimately, this helped answer the research question and learn about the limited manageability of language in MNC contexts. These categories were later aggregated and further abstracted into (1) social-linguistic, (2) social-relational, (3 & 4) social-psychological and (5) social-regulatory dimensions to reach a higher level of abstraction (Miles & Huberman 1994).

LANGUAGE CHOICE	SOCIAL CONTEXT				
	Participants' language proficiency	Participant roles, role relationships, politeness	Participants' attitudes	Participants' motivations	External forces
Choice of English	Participants have varying proficiency → English is chosen as lingua franca → pragmatic choice if a shared language is needed		Positive value assigned to English (geocentric attitude) informs the choice of English for HRM purposes (selective recruitment, expatriation), language training including operative level		International scientific community, international stock market, internat. funding of construction projects impose English
Choice of HQ language	Participants have varying proficiency → Danish/German is chosen in (regional) meetings → internationals (NNSs) accommodate NSs	Executives (participant role) are addressed in German owing to politeness (high status and power)	Ethnocentric attitude informs the choice (imposition) of Danish/German (can include acquisition) → internationals feel they need to use Danish/German (internal forces)		Home-country authorities (tax office) impose HQ language, including translation (English → German)
Choice of local languages	Translation into local languages for staff with limited English proficiency (HQ level)	Home-country executive is asked to learn the local language of the newly acquired site to show goodwill (politeness) → positively affects social relationships	Decision makers' polycentric attitude informs the choice of local languages for HRM purposes (expatriation)	Linguistic adaptation to colleagues (local language users) 'for fun'	Host-country authorities impose local languages, including translation and translation quality (English/HQ language → local languages)
Choice of customer languages	Some participants would also choose English with customers but they do not speak English → their L1 (customer lang) is chosen (involving interpretation)	Customers are addressed in their L1 due to buyer-seller relationship and politeness ('English is not enough') → involves (non)professional translation	Buyer-seller relationship and polycentric attitude let executive think about offering customer language training to staff	Employee acquires customer language for instrumental/ extrinsic motivation → identifies a utilitarian value	Customers communicate 'back' (product complaint) to subsidiary which has to respond
Code-switching/-mixing (different languages)	Email chains switch between English and Danish/German Switch to L1 for clarification purpose Participants borrow words from other language → positive impact on social relationships				
Passive multilingualism (different languages)	Differences in language fluency (L1 vs. L2) Mutual intelligibility of L1s				

Table 3-7: Relationships between social context and language choice

This process of rereading and cognitively absorbing data, paraphrasing them in my own words and entering the summarizing statements into the matrices helped capture the ‘holistic picture’ of the data. In this analytical phase I also tried to ‘put myself into the respondent’s shoes’ and to remember the interview situation, the overall impression gained and the respondent’s attitude to my project or how s/he expressed thoughts and articulated meanings. This attempted to reach more authentic interpretations of the data. After this visualization of the empirical data (i.e. within-case displays), I started writing them up in the form of four individual case reports (see *Chapters 4-7*).

### **3.5.5 Crafting case study reports in an iterative fashion: ‘telling the story...’**

What is commonly referred to as ‘writing up’ sounds easier and more mundane than it actually is. It is more like an art or craft of storytelling (e.g. Stake 1995) or scientific narration that requires representational, e.g. stylistic, argumentative, rhetorical, textual and literary, considerations that shape the resulting case study report. The case researcher needs to provide enough contextual description in order to convey the scientific message in a meaningful way. It is the analyst who makes these strategic analytical choices that inform the story s/he wants to tell. The mode of writing and representation are not arbitrarily chosen but scientifically informed or rigorous and yet subjective. This means that analysts decide what experiences of their participants to reveal and what information to omit depending on research foci and interests; there are different ‘units of narrative’ (e.g. individual social actor versus a social group or institution) that entail different ‘levels of generality’ (from specific, context-sensitive to more general statements about social actors, behaviors, experiences or acts and events). In other words, the focus of the narrative, be it an individual or act, functions as “the main carrier of the argument”, hence influences the analytic level of generality (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 112-115). Flick (2009) stresses that subjects transform everyday experience, events or activities embedded in a natural and social environment into knowledge, which needs then to be interpreted and understood by the researcher (through the ascription of meaning) and eventually translated into readable texts which in their sum construct the world. (This creates a triangular relationship between experience, interpretation and construction.) Scientific reports as representational accounts of participants’ multiple realities do

not speak for themselves, rather are subject to interpretation too; they need to be interpreted by their readers. This means both authors of social science texts and their readership are all involved in and contribute to the social construction of reality based on texts. “Reading and understanding texts become active processes of producing reality, which involve not only the author of (in our case social science) texts, but also those for whom they are written and who read them” (Flick 2009: 79). As Stake (1995: 126) formulates it: “The researcher should try to anticipate what vicarious experiences will do for the reader, should try to organize the manuscript so that naturalistic generalization is facilitated. By providing information easily assimilated with the readers’ existing knowledge, the writer helps readers construct the meanings of the case.” In sum, any qualitative data set has the potential of telling multiple tales constructed by the (case) researcher and their understanding of the social world.

In the present study, the crafting of the written case reports was done in a cyclical and iterative fashion. First, drafts were written based on the coding phases, in particular coding phase II, pattern coding and the matrix formation (data display), as explained above. The four reports drafted were initially rather chaotic and unstructured. Several revisions and editorial work were necessary during which the reports’ order and structure changed multiple times, information was cut out or revised and new data added. Both ‘individual’ and more ‘general’ units of narrative or statements can be found since I studied language choice at all levels. Representative quotations were carefully selected, and if necessary translated, indicated as “[my translation]”, and included in the reports since they served as exemplars of themes and concepts (Ryan & Bernard 2000, Miles & Huberman 1994), of ‘particular’ cases (Stake 2000) and of the respondents’ subjective understandings. Quotations also served the purpose of making the case stories or accounts more lively, partly personalized and authentic. In other words, this was an attempt to raise the findings’ quality as to credibility (trustworthiness and authenticity) (Guba & Lincoln 1994, Hatch 2002).

#### **3.5.5.1 Drawing and verifying conclusions**

The findings were cross-checked through revisiting coded and non-coded (‘raw’) data (interview transcripts) to make sure I had interpreted them as authentically as possible. Absorbing and reinterpreting coded and raw data with fresh eyes and comparing them with the interpreted,



displayed data in the reports helped finalize them. In this process, when making the final adaptations, I made sure to always indicate where the evidence came from. I had realized that data were sometimes presented as if they had been universal perceptions within a case study, which they were not, and so the source(s), i.e. who reported what, were made explicit. The phase of conclusion drawing and verification was also characterized by looking for negative evidence (Miles & Huberman 1994). However, not all of the authors' suggestions for verifying results could be included. Neither the entire reports nor individual quotations were cross-checked with respondents which would have increased the trustworthiness of the findings. Due to the size of the sample and data set, and time constraints, I was unable to pursue and administer this kind of verification process which represents a methodological limitation.

#### **3.5.5.1.1 Treating alternative data sources (data triangulation)**

In the phase of writing the reports, the alternative data sources were analyzed, not in NVivo but manually, in order to firstly triangulate sources and secondly to gain potentially new insights into language choice in MNCs.

The documents were analyzed in an exploratory fashion by looking for themes of interest, as generated in the coding phases. Again, through semi-inductive manual coding on hard copy and an interpretive analysis, I aimed to understand the contents of the documents. The latter were summarized and integrated into the case reports. DK\_1's language guide (see *Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1 of Case Study I*) revealed information about translation solutions and quality, terminology management (corporate term base) and language ambassadors (similar to the notion of language buddies). Relevant information was extracted and quoted in the case report for the purpose of displaying data and raising authenticity. DK\_2's language policy statement (see *Chapter 5, Section 5.3.1 of Case Study II*) provided insights into guidelines on language choice. It was vital to compare the draft and the final version of the language policy to check if any fundamental changes had been made. The final version did contain new themes such as ideas about the choice of English for HRM (selective recruitment) and educational purposes (English training). These themes were included and discussed in the findings (case reports).

The corporate websites were primarily investigated to see if they were mono-, bi- or multilingual, or had links to local websites in local languages and what type of information was available in which language(s). Specific content or the accuracy of translations was disregarded. I systematically browsed through the MNCs' websites to get an idea of what information and functions were accessible for which language users. This browsing activity resulted in switching between and cross-checking the various language versions. Although it was not possible to check all their local websites, I nevertheless attempted to scrutinize a dozen local websites per company case. This seemed an appropriate number to obtain an overall first impression of language choice manifested by the companies' online representations. The information gathered was stored in Microsoft Word, case by case, and included in the beginning of the case reports. The sections (on language choices on websites) were revised and restructured in the course of proofreading and finalizing the case reports. In so doing, I revisited all four company websites again, complemented the sections with additional details (e.g. on job advertisements) and updated the information.

Overall, the analysis of both corporate documents and internet data provided additional insights into language choices within the companies. This triangulation of data sources (interview data, corporate documents, websites) enriched the data set, led to data saturation and also helped verify the conclusions.

### **3.5.6 Finalizing reports and synthesizing findings across cases**

As suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994), one of the final steps was a cross-case analysis which started by rereading and also revising the individual case reports. This was performed by reanalyzing themes in their contexts across cases. The structures of the reports were, to the extent possible, harmonized. That is the reports' sections all relate to the broader themes of interest (i.e. the MNC context, language choices on websites, multilingual speech community including language functions and language choice norms, and the social context based on four dimensions that influence language choice) but the subheadings, often very lengthy, differ in order to guard the cases' idiosyncrasies, i.e. describe concepts and social meaning in their contexts in greater detail. However, the reports eventually all followed a certain structure with a focus on language choice in MNCs, anchored by the research question (see *Chapter 1, Section 1.2*).

As mentioned earlier, some methodologists and practitioners stress the important relationship between analysis and theory. More specifically, “[t]he processes of analysis do not end with the organization and categorization of the data; they go through to the elaboration of interpretive perspectives and concepts. It is not necessary to plunge into the complexities of grand theory. It is, however, necessary to have, use, and explore ideas” (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 162). As already mentioned previously, it is imperative for qualitative scholars in general and case researchers in particular to clearly state “how they can and do “generalize””, namely in a ‘particularized’ – to adopt Stake’s (2000) terminology – and localized manner. They start with describing local manifestations of social worlds and settings but attempt “to transcend the local and the particular” through generating or refining concepts, broader frames and ideas following an abductive logic. “Abductive inferences lead us from specific cases or findings toward generic levels that allow us to move conceptually across a wide range of social contexts” (Coffey & Atkinson 1996: 162).

Subsequently, it was attempted to identify differences and similarities across cases and case attributes like home countries (HQ or corporate languages), industries and company sizes. In so doing, I revisited all themes of interest (in particular the contextual dimensions), and described and analyzed them across cases. This analytical progression helped identify cross-case generalizations and their broader implications (see *Chapter 8*). More specifically, I discussed every empirical sub-finding (each contextual dimension informing language choices) with regard to prior research and its implication or contribution to the literature. Also, the very last step of the data analysis also aimed to arrive at theoretical implications through abstraction (Miles & Huberman 1994), or to move from the ‘particular’ to the ‘general’ (Stake 1995). In other words, the cross-case analysis resulting in a synthesis of the findings regarding language choice in MNCs enabled me to discuss the findings theoretically and refine current concepts. Although theory development was not the purpose of this case study, it could be argued that the four contextual dimensions present a framework that helps us better understand language choice in MNC contexts (see *Chapter 8, Section 8.3*).

### 3.6 Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the methodological choices made during the course of the study. More specifically, it has shed light on the study's overall research approach, its philosophical underpinning and the specific case study design adopted. The selection of the cases (i.e. MNCs), data sources and data collection (methods) have been thoroughly described. This has been followed by an explanation of the data analysis and the various steps involved, leading to final case studies (see *Chapters 4-7*).

## 4 LANGUAGE CHOICE IN A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION (MNC): A CASE STUDY (I) OF DK\_1

### 4.1 About DK\_1: Facts and Figures

The first company case (out of four) is a manufacturing company headquartered in Denmark. It is one of Denmark's largest manufacturers with about 80 (sales and production) companies in around 55 countries and almost 18,000 employees (4,000 in Denmark). The MNC is structured according to regions e.g. Central and Eastern Europe (CEREG), Asia Pacific with regional management teams and regional headquarters, e.g. Austria or Singapore. This organizational structure fosters horizontal communication and activities (regional meetings on performance of sales, logistics, productions, annual strategy meetings or training sessions). The subsidiaries, also referred to as sister companies, seem to have a certain degree of autonomy. Yet, there are markets of different sizes; Germany, for instance, is still the largest single market but there are also countries outside Europe such as China that have gained importance over the years. The MNC's net turnover was DKK 22,590 million/22.6 billion ( $\approx$  EUR 3 billion) in 2012.<sup>43</sup> (This case company (I) is the second largest MNC investigated in this collective case study. I gathered data from the headquarters and subsidiaries in Austria, Germany and Australia.)

### 4.2 Language Choices on DK\_1's Website

First insights into language choices can be gained from the company's online representation. DK\_1 has a corporate website ([www.DK\\_1.com](http://www.DK_1.com)), also labeled as *international*, *global* or *group* website, which is in English only and contains a lot of information on the company's profile (structure, history, facts, policies, etc.), products, which industries the latter are used in, customer service and training (courses, seminars on knowhow) offered to customers. There is an extensive list of their products supported by pictures and often brochures that can be downloaded as PDF files.

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<sup>43</sup> These data have partly been collected from the company's website. [retrieved February 19, 2014]

The firm is also represented in social media, such as blogs (e.g. Twitter) and social networks (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn). YouTube videos can be watched about e.g. the company's history 'told' by an English speaker's voice, supported by Danish subtitles and supplemented by a Danish executive speaking English as a foreign language. There are other videos where executives talk about different matters (e.g. global strategy) in English without any subtitles. Videos that can be watched on the French website, for instance, relate to the local context and are in French only. The diverse solutions suggest that language choice is context-bound which allows for variation at both the HQ and local levels (i.e. choice of English and Danish subtitles, choice of English or local language only). Also, language choice does not seem to be centralized but localized, which gives the subsidiaries certain autonomy in choosing languages.

In the right corner of the corporate page, there is a search function called 'country selector' which directs one to a list of 64 (out of 80) countries with subsidiaries listed according to continents. The list includes both the national and English names for the countries, and links to most of the local websites. The national websites look similar in design and information available, which contains both corporate and local or country-relevant contents. Subsidiaries do not speak English but choose national (host-country) languages to online represent DK\_1 in host-country markets. (We will gain more insights into the choice of customer languages later in this case study.)

Job advertisements can be written in different languages; HQ positions may be advertised in Danish or English. English proficiency and skills (e.g. writing) required may be specified. Host-country advertisements mostly remain in the local languages and may require or appreciate English competences. Language choices for HRM purposes such as the language of the advertisement and the language(s) required for a job vary across positions and locations (settings).

Overall, these first impressions on language choice gained from DK\_1's website reflect variation in language choice within and across organizational units. The corporate website alone leaves the impression of DK\_1 being very internationally oriented (geocentric attitude) since it is in English only. Taking national websites into account, including the Danish one, one could say the company presents itself as a multilingual speech community where various national (customer) languages are chosen. In the following, I will look into the notion of DK\_1 as a multilingual speech community, language functions and its language choice norms in more detail.

### 4.3 DK\_1 as a Multilingual Speech Community: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms

DK\_1 can be described as a multilingual speech community where different languages serve different functions which also lead to certain language choice norms within the MNC network. At DK\_1, Danish being the national language of the home country assumes the function of the HQ language which is mainly chosen within the HQ environment. Similarly, the national languages of the host countries assume the function of local languages and are mainly chosen at the subsidiaries. English serves the function of the company's *group* language (i.e. lingua franca) which is primarily chosen for internal communication across organizational units (settings). All languages become customer languages once they are chosen for external communication purposes such as engaging with buyers and customers in local markets.

In order to get a more detailed picture of DK\_1 as a multilingual speech community, it is crucial to look into these functions and their meanings in more depth and language norms within the community. Respondent #1a (Senior Translator\_HQ\_Danish)<sup>44</sup> describes the functions of DK\_1's languages as follows:

Also in the book<sup>45</sup> we define our group language or corporate language as English when we communicate among the companies [units]. And when [Respondent #1b] and her colleagues in the group management, when they communicate with the management of the other companies, well of course they do that in English. As you said [Respondent #1c], we are employed in Denmark, and when we are working with our Danish colleagues, of course we speak Danish and so they do in Germany or in Austria or in Hungary or whatever. If they are communicating with their local colleagues then they speak their local language.

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<sup>44</sup> Each interviewee is assigned a number (e.g. #2); this respondent was part of the only group interview together with respondents #1b and #1c. Further characteristics indicated are the person's job title or function (e.g. Senior Translator), location (HQ or subsidiary) and first language (e.g. Danish). In the following, the subsidiary will be abbreviated 'S' and its location indicated by the country code (i.e. 'AT' for Austria, 'AU' for Australia, 'DE' for Germany). For instance, respondent #7 (Account Manager\_S/AU\_English/Punjabi) has the occupation of an Account Manager, is located at the Australian subsidiary of DK\_1 and reports to have two first languages (i.e. English and Punjabi).

<sup>45</sup> The book is the language guide which will be discussed subsequently (see Section 4.3.1).

As the respondent (#1a) explains, English has been defined as the group or corporate language that assumes the function of an internal lingua franca. It is for instance chosen for interunit communication purposes (“when we communicate among the companies”) since the participants, i.e. different organizational units or their agents, all speak different languages. Other than that, participants affiliated with a setting (location) will choose the national language of the setting assuming the functions of the HQ language and local languages. The way the respondent (#1a) expresses his thoughts on language choices within the speech community (the repeated use of “of course”) also indicates that these choices seem somewhat logical or obvious to him.

Similarly, respondent #1b stresses the function of local languages within their national environments:

But we have employees from other countries who naturally may communicate internally in the language they have in, between the administrative people from Germany or Holland or Hungary and when they communicate just two or three persons, then they would communicate in their native language. (Respondent #1b\_Assistant to Group President/Management\_HQ\_Danish)

The choice of local (national) languages among local language speakers is considered a ‘natural’ phenomenon or language choice behavior.

These choices are not described as some top-down policy or language management, rather as common-sense, i.e. unmarked, choices. In other words, both respondents’ (#1a, #1b) rationalizations of language choices (“of course”, “naturally”) also tell us something about the behavior norms of DK\_1 as a multilingual speech community. That is, the communicative implicatures suggest that Danish (as the HQ language) and host-country languages (as local languages) all represent unmarked languages that are chosen among L1 users in their respective settings. English is the unmarked lingua franca (for interunit communication purposes) whose function is also described as ‘group language’, ‘official corporate language’, ‘company language’, ‘primary language’ or ‘our global language’.



#### 4.3.1 A language guide (on English usage) or language policy?

In relation to the function of English within the MNC network, we learn that the company has a “DK\_1 language guide”. The ‘language group’ is a team of four employees,<sup>46</sup> “who were given the task of working out a language guide for [DK\_1]’s corporate language English” (p. 76 of the language guide). Although stated as if it had been a top-down approach and a decision had been made at the top management level, the focus group interview indicates otherwise; it was more the language group and colleagues with an interest in languages from different departments who thought that DK\_1 should have a language guide. We could say the idea emerged at the department level and was subsequently proposed to the corporate management (bottom-up). The coordinator of this project was respondent #1a, a Danish in-house translator of English, affiliated with the Technical Marketing Department, who collaborated with three colleagues from Corporate Branding, Group Production and Corporate Communication, all having an interest in languages or even a degree in linguistics.

Overall, it is defined as their “common reference book in questions relating to English” (p. 1). More specifically, it is a text production manual; it advises staff on how to structure and write a coherent text in English, which standard variety to use (i.e. British English), how to spell corporate names correctly, which style, terms, expressions and phrases to prefer and which one(s) to avoid in different business scenarios. It tries to standardize and improve corporate language usage. Furthermore, it is explained how cultural differences can affect one’s text. In addition, it offers language assistance to employees; copywriters, translators and secretaries, the language group, in-house “language ambassadors” can be contacted and asked for help. A language ambassador is an employee that volunteers to promote the language guide locally and may act as a language consultant within the local company or even offer language assistance (e.g. proofreading). More specifically, it says: “A big corporation like [DK\_1] employs many different specialized people, such as copywriters, translators and secretaries. These colleagues write and translate internal and external texts every day and thus have great experience in the language field” (p. 77 of the language guide). This reflects that in-house translation is common practice characterized by both professional and nonprofessional solutions. Furthermore, the corporate

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<sup>46</sup> Three of those were the focus group interviewees (Respondents #1a, 1b, 1c).

glossary (which will be further detailed in the context of terminology management – see *Section 4.4.2.1*), and other (online) dictionaries that can be consulted are listed. This language guide exists as a PDF file and hardcopy booklet in Danish and English. The English version sometimes gets requested by local units since they use it as learning material for local English training.

Some informants associate this language guide with a sort of language policy, while others clearly delineate it from an explicit language policy, as follows:

Yeah, we do. I'm hesitating whether... I am thinking, is it a policy or just guidelines? I can't remember. [...] The document is trying to put forward some good habits, some good views on what is good language. It is not a set of rules, that in this situation you do this, and in this situation you do that and you can look it up in this book, you can't. Only a few pieces of good advice as to how you write or how you contact other people. But it's more a question of trying to spread the view that good language is important for a global organization as DK\_1. Because good language is also part of our image. So if we are not concerned about the language both when we send out some written material or when we communicate with people face-to-face then good language is also part of our image. And that's what we try to do in the language guide, try to point out to our colleagues all over the world how important it is to be aware that language is part of our common image. (Respondent #1a\_Senior Translator\_HQ\_Danish)

The respondent (#1a) explains that the language guide is not a language policy, which he sees as a set of rules regulating situational language choice, but rather some guidelines on English usage and where to find language assistance within the company. Although the guide is primarily about English text production, it seems to have another purpose, that is, raising awareness as to the importance of languages including external communication and their potential positive or negative impact on the corporate image. In this sense, the language guide tries to draw employees' attention to language and communication matters at a generic level.

The notion of a language policy encompasses further interpretations. For instance, respondent #3 (Regional Business Director\_S/AT\_Danish) argues that there is no language policy, neither does he mention the language guide: "Not a policy but the only thing is, we have a company language and that's English. It was actually Danish for a lot of years. We were expanding internationally but now it's English." He does not associate the choice of a company language with a language policy, rather describes the functions of languages that have changed over time related to international expansion. Others link the notion of a language policy to the level of English proficiency that is

required for attending corporate training sessions or to in-/expatriation policies. The understandings of a language policy are multiple which means there does not seem to be an explicit or well-defined policy within the corporate context of DK\_1 upon which respondents commonly agree.

One could say that these first insights indicate that DK\_1's languages serve various functions that are manifested in behavior norms within the community; L1s are chosen within the units and English as a shared (corporate) language across units. There is no explicit language policy (statement) defining these functions and norms or guiding language choice per se. Yet, there is a language guide that attempts to standardize English usage and suggests language assistance (in the form of translators, language ambassadors or dictionaries, etc.). These preliminary insights indicate that language choices are embedded in social context, yet do not grasp the rationales underlying language choices, which will be the focus of the remainder of this case study.

#### **4.4 Language Choice at DK\_1 Informed by Social Context**

The following sections will detail how social context influences language choices, more specifically, the contextual dimensions that inform language choices at DK\_1. These include English, the HQ language (Danish) and local/customer languages (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3*).

##### **4.4.1 Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices**

The first contextual dimension that informs language choices is of a social-linguistic nature. Generally speaking, language proficiency stands for participants' linguistic repertoires which include usually one first language (L1) and possibly foreign languages (FLs), i.e. L2, L3, L4, etc. More specifically, the notion of proficiency embodies both ends of the continuum; proficiency ranges from high to low (nonexistent) proficiency in languages. In this sense, varying language proficiency not only informs language choices but may also induce positive and negative associations with participants, thus language can represent both a resource and a barrier. Note,

participants are to be understood in a broader sense, i.e. can represent the individual language speaker but also larger entities such as departments or organizational units (HQ, subsidiaries) that have different L1s (i.e. HQ versus local languages) and make different language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.1*).

#### **4.4.1.1 Proficiency informs the choice of English**

Participants' language proficiency informs the choice of English. Participants, organizational units (headquarters, regional headquarters and national subsidiaries), more precisely their agents, all speak different first languages. English is chosen in many different communicative events when a shared language is needed as in interunit communication. These events include both written and oral media (e.g. email correspondence, presentations, meetings, corporate training, etc.). DK\_1's participants perceive the choice of English in various ways and often associate it with some challenges since English fluency varies. The focus group interviewees (Respondents #1a, #1b, #1c), for instance, acknowledge that the choice of English (in its function as a group language) influences their daily work insofar as it is a foreign language for the majority of staff and everyone is a better communicator in her/his native language (L1). Respondent #6 (Product Manager\_S/AU\_English) is slightly more critical by arguing that "there is a natural understanding that most people can, you know, work with English, there [are] some that can't, to be honest".

Proficiency not only informs language choice but sometimes also the choice of media and channels. Respondent #2 (Member of Regional Management\_S/DE\_German) once had a Czech employee (with Russian skills and marginal knowledge of English and German). They chose English as a lingua franca but stuck to a written medium since the Czech colleague preferred email correspondence, so that he could consult a dictionary. In this case, participants' language proficiency not only informs the choice of English but also limits it to a specific medium (written) and channel (email) of communication.

The choice of English as a shared or group language for interunit communication purposes also includes English native speakers (NSs) such as the Australian subsidiary, and can be associated with problems. Locally, Denmark is brought up and Danes' English skills are commented on in

two ways; on the one hand, they are described as being generally very proficient, on the other hand, “there’s always mistakes and then we call it ‘Danglish’” (Respondent #7\_Account Manager\_S/AU\_English/Punjabi). In another respondent’s (#6) words:

You do have some challenges with certain colleagues who struggle with their English. And then, you know, even on a day-to-day basis when you deal with the Danes, it tends to be, you know, you don’t always get your message across and I suppose that’s probably not just a language thing but also a cultural thing. You know, different cultures sometimes say things differently, you know. So, that’s interesting. (Respondent #6\_Product Manager\_S/AU\_English)

This respondent (#6) adds another dimension to the problem of English choice and proficiency, that is, perceived cultural differences; they may also affect mutual understanding and lead to misunderstandings.

English may also be chosen in external encounters. At a product launch in Taiwan organized by the regional HQ in Singapore including various participants with different proficiency, English has been chosen as the shared language. Though, some problems linked to this choice are mentioned. An English speaker (Respondent #7\_Account Manager\_S/AU\_English/Punjabi) noticed limited English skills and different ways of speaking among the Taiwanese and other Asian cultures. Some participants seemed more shy and reserved when talking. As a reaction to the nonnative speakers’ (NNSs’) behavior and perceived cultural differences, the respondent (#7) and his Australian colleagues adapted their English and spoke very slowly. Similar impressions are gained from interactions with Europe. Another English NS (Respondent #6\_Product Manager\_S/AU\_English) attempts to choose a ‘simple’ register and style (e.g. by excluding slang terms or Australian expressions) in written communication, in case the recipient’s English skills are poor. In these examples, the respondents choose English as a native language (ENL) but simplify it in oral and written media for communicating with NNSs while the latter accommodate the English NSs. Apart from these countries mentioned above, variation in English fluency is also brought up in the context of Eastern Europe, Germany, Austria, Southern Europe, South America. Apart from countries, job functions and functional areas are mentioned, too. Engineers, for instance, are a group of staff that is reported to struggle with the English terminology of the technical register. Within the financial and legal registers, a financial expert in the Ukraine is

named “who knows the law by heart but his English is a disaster [my translation]” (Respondent #2\_Member of Regional Management\_S/DE\_German).

Overall, English is commonly chosen in interactions uniting different participants with different first languages or varying language proficiency. English represents a pragmatic choice if a shared language is needed, but is also associated with some problems. These perceived problems relate to counterparts’ (NNSs’) limited or lacking English skills and diverse cultural backgrounds.

#### 4.4.1.2 Proficiency informs the choice of the HQ language

Participants’ proficiency also informs the choice of the HQ language Danish. Danish gets chosen in different communicative situations such as meetings if all participants speak Danish, as explained below:

Sometimes there are meetings where everything is presented in Danish. [...] There are hardly any foreigners in the corporate management, there are a few. I know that because I have lived there myself. [...] and not every Dane, even at the top management level, although they all speak fluent English, but if one starts speaking near-native or good English, some words are misunderstood. And you want to avoid that. So, Danish is chosen instead. I don’t mind because I understand almost everything except for a few dialect expressions [my translation]. (Respondent #2\_Member of the Regional Management\_S/DE\_German)

Danish is chosen at a meeting if all attendees master Danish either as an L1 or FL, as the respondent (#2) for instance. In this sense, the NNSs linguistically adapt to the NSs of Danish. Additionally, the respondent (#2) assumes that not all Danish executives feel totally comfortable speaking English which is why Danish is preferred to English. These internal meetings might also be set up across organizational units, among expatriated Danes in a regional (management) position and Danish-skilled international managers. If Danes represent the majority and non-Danes are outnumbered (e.g. 15:3), even this kind of “international meetings” are held in Danish. The respondent (#2) adds that he also senses a bit of national pride that favors the choice of Danish in these contexts. In sum, language proficiency of the participants involved in the

communicative situation, supported by the number of languages speakers (majority of L1 users), and possibly an ethnocentric attitude inform the choice of the HQ language Danish.

Regarding the choice of Danish, we also learn that proficiency informs the choice of Danish but limits it to easier subject matters (topics). This can be seen with an English NS with Danish proficiency (Respondent #4\_Copywriter & Business Development\_HQ) who chooses Danish only for socializing (purposes) because his Danish is not good enough to discuss more complex matters such as professional or business-related topics. (He chooses English for presenting his work in meetings.) In this sense, the choice of Danish is limited to simple conversation topics (e.g. small talk). That is to say language proficiency not only informs language choice but also the choice of possible topics in a foreign language.

#### **4.4.1.3 Proficiency informs the choice of local languages (and transition to English)**

The following quotation highlights that participants' proficiency can also inform the choice of local languages in the first place which may shift to English later in the internal communication process:

I think it all depends on which language is most convenient in the situation. If you are in a situation where those people speak the same local language, then, of course, they would use that local language instead of switching to a language which is foreign to all of them. Then they would prefer to speak in their own language. But that would also be in that situation. And when the situation develops and they have to carry it further up [from the local to the HQ level] then they would have to switch to English. (Respondent #1a\_Senior Translator\_HQ\_Danish)

Local participants involved in a given situation would choose the local language in the first place. (This also confirms behavior norms, the function of local languages and their unmarked nature – see Section 4.3.) This example refers to market research where the regional and local managements would explore potentially interesting adjacent markets and carry out studies or analyses in the local language. Once the information becomes relevant for and needs to be exchanged with other organizational units such as HQ, then the lingua franca English would be chosen (or maybe translated into) in order to ensure mutual understanding between participants.

#### 4.4.1.4 Proficiency informs the choice of (translation into) local languages (double standard)

If information that is distributed internally needs to reach staff members lower down the hierarchy, such as production workers, local languages are usually chosen over English. The rationale is that most production workers do not speak English and thus need to be addressed in their L1 (accommodation). In the case of written information the choice usually involves some form of translation from English into local languages.

The international staff magazine, for instance, is a text that is outsourced to an external translation agency and professionally translated into the major local languages English, German, French, Hungarian, Chinese and Portuguese and proofread in house by NSs of these languages. The target languages are selected according to market size and number of staff, i.e. language speakers, based on an ‘investment-return calculation’, i.e. economic considerations. This gives the local languages different priorities and creates a hierarchy among local languages, more accurately double standards in that only some host countries are privileged to get access to certain information in their local language while others do not (based on the number of language users). One could even argue that this is some form of divergence (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.2*) given that the receivers are known for their limited FL skills, ergo knowingly excluded from the information distributed via the staff magazine.

Some other internal documents are only relevant for a specific region and therefore produced regionally, i.e. localized, in a nonprofessional manner. In the region Central and Eastern Europe, information for sales staff (e.g. sales newsletter) exists in Russian, German and English. Usually a bilingual staff member who is “good at” (Respondent #3\_Regional Business Director\_S/AT\_Danish) Russian and English, for instance, writes and translates this text genre. A good command of the source and the target languages is considered sufficient to fulfill the translation task for this regional internal communication purpose.

It could be summarized that these text genres addressing local staff are translated (both centrally and regionally) into certain major local languages because most of the intended receivers do not master English but speak the local language only. In this sense, the participants’ language proficiency, once again, explains this kind of language choice (linguistic adaptation/accommodation).



#### **4.4.1.5 Proficiency informs the choices of English and local/customer languages (involving interpretation)**

English might be chosen for oral interaction among colleagues but combined with Russian based on the participants' poor or lacking English skills; this involves some form of nonprofessional interpretation, as respondent #4 (Copywriter & Business Development\_HQ\_English) explains:

Yes, I guess so because one of the colleagues couldn't explain himself [in English], then one of the guys would interpret for me [from Russian into English]. So it would be intercollegially, you might say, that is two Russians and me in a conversation, and one Russian says something that I don't understand, then they speak in Russian, and this colleague would translate it for me [into English]. But that's not a formalized thing.

This shows that if English cannot be chosen by all interactants, a bilingual person may mediate between the parties. It also highlights that these choices are not formalized in any way but rather made informally.

Similarly, in oral interaction with customers the choice of their language (L1) combined with nonprofessional interpretation is common in certain regional communicative events. At the subsidiary level, it is reported that 90 % of their customers (also businesses) in Eastern Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Serbia) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) do not speak English. If the Regional Business Director (Respondent #3\_S/AT\_Danish) meets with a customer (e.g. a mining company), a bilingual employee, usually the local sales manager, serves as a mediator between the two parties (e.g. English  $\leftrightarrow$  Russian or Serbian). (Interestingly, the counterparts' nonexistent English skills, i.e. their language proficiency, are the reported reason for this language choice and the customers' accommodation rather than the customers' role within the employment domain and linked asymmetrical buyer-seller relationship.)

#### **4.4.1.6 Proficiency informs code-switching/-mixing**

Code-switching or code-mixing commonly occurs as the result of participants' various language proficiency and may apply to both written and oral media. Internal email correspondence can be bi- or multilingual. Danes communicate with Australians via email and somewhere along the way

there are issues that happen to be discussed in Danish. This phenomenon also exists with the language pair English and German, where email chains start out in English, switch to German at some point, then back to English and end in German. The switching could be triggered by linguistic inadequacies or simply the change of participants who speak different languages or happen to share a language other than English.

Code-switching can also occur in face-to-face encounters; respondent #7 (Account Manager\_English/Punjabi) from the Australian unit faced a communicative scenario where two Danish colleagues discussed an issue in Danish to clarify what had been said in English. In another local setting (Austria), not all German speakers are comfortable speaking English in meetings; the respondent (#3) may raise a question in English, then participants switch to German and discuss the question, and the most confident and/or competent employee gives the answer in English in the end. Respondent #4 (Copywriter & Business Development\_HQ\_English) has experienced switching in another communication channel; HQ had a conference call with a Japanese sales company where the Japanese switched from English to their L1 to discuss an issue and then reported back in English. The respondent (#4) does not perceive this language choice as negative (e.g. lacking English fluency of the Asian colleagues) or rude (exclusive), rather thinks of it as “an expression of just getting things done a bit quicker”.

Similar to code-switching is code-mixing (also referred to as borrowing); in the area of technical documentation language mixing may occur in HQ-subsidiary interaction (Germany), where topics are discussed or presented in English. However, if a German speaker does not know the English word in a highly technical register, s/he simply borrows the German term, either because Danish participants know German or the German word is closer to the Danish than the English one anyway. This is specific to the language pair Danish and German, both Germanic and rather similar languages. The multilingual interaction sometimes entails amusement and a casual atmosphere, the Senior Translator (Respondent #1a\_HQ\_Danish) reports. Thus, from a Danish perspective, the variation in English fluency is not perceived negatively, rather the opposite. This means the phenomenon of code-mixing (triggered by varying language proficiency) may reduce social distance among participants. Similarly, respondent #4 (Copywriter & Business Development\_HQ\_English), who has basic German knowledge, has experienced code-mixing

with German interactants; they may borrow a German word or even write it down to make sure they understand each other. So visual expression adds to the clarification.

The phenomenon of code-switching/-mixing is informed or triggered by the fact that explaining complex matters is easier in the L1 than the L2. In this sense, these types of choices are needed for clarification purposes and for eventually ensuring mutual understanding. In addition, it has a perceived positive influence on efficiency or social relationships in reducing the social distance.

#### **4.4.1.7 Proficiency informs passive multilingualism**

At the subsidiary in Austria, the expatriated Regional Business Director (Respondent #3\_Danish) explains that different kinds of local meetings are usually conducted in English where it is chosen as a lingua franca among participants. However, he is occasionally involved in meetings where both German and English are chosen, based on the attendees' varying language proficiency, as he explains:

Yeah. I would say for me I think I understand 80, 90 % what's spoken in German. If it's 'Hochdeutsch', then there is no problem. The problem is more or less always when you have to speak it yourself. So listening, no problem, and then normally when I am having these kinda meetings with colleagues, they also understand more English than they speak English. So this is due to the agreement that if I speak in English they can understand it, and they can speak in German.

The respondent (#3) has difficulties speaking German, thus prefers English instead, while the counterparts have difficulties speaking English, hence choose German over English. These language choices are possible because the participants' receptive or passive understanding of German and English is greater than active foreign language proficiency and production. They (actively) use different languages (L1, L2), yet (passively) understand each other due to the mutual intelligibility of the languages chosen. These insights gained at the local level illustrate that language choices made in communicative events like meetings depend on the attendees and their respective proficiency, which might be English in most cases but could also be English and German.

#### 4.4.1.8 Proficiency informs the choice of the language of instruction for corporate training

We learn that the language chosen as a medium of instruction for teaching purposes in corporate training is informed by training participants' language proficiency. In many cases the language chosen for this training purpose is English as the common language among participants with different L1s. Training attendees need to self-evaluate their English skills before they can participate in an HQ training run in English. In this context, respondent #3 (Regional Business Director\_S/AT\_Danish) mentions that people may not always be totally honest about their English skills and probably exaggerate a little when they self-evaluate their proficiency before applying for a job or attending corporate trainings. He once witnessed a Russian participant use an electronic device translating words from English into Russian since he had difficulties following the instructions in English. For similar reasons, as noticed by an Australian local employee (Respondent #8\_Office Manager\_S/AU\_English/Greek), participants sometimes group and sit together according to their native languages (language communities) or families of languages in order to help each other out, discuss and clarify things in the first language. Due to this difference in language proficiency and variation in English proficiency, NSs of English are usually in a favorable position when it comes to solving group tasks in English. In this vein, another Australian associates similar challenges with the choice of English for corporate training:

I mean there are, let's say, there are some challenges with, you know... Some of the colleagues don't have a really good grasp of English, I mean there is a minimum level required from everybody to attend training sessions for example. So, if their English level is not up to a certain level they're generally not, able to attend a training session. (Respondent #6\_Product Manager \_S/AU\_English)

This also explains that English is not the only language chosen for corporate training. Respondent #2 (Member of Regional Management\_S/DE\_German) says that in some parts of the world (Italy, France, Spain, South America) corporate training is organized locally in the local languages because many staff members do not speak English. Hence, Spain, for instance, has been responsible for the organization of training sessions in South America and Portugal because of a shared or similar language.

#### **4.4.1.9 Proficiency informs the choice of English for educational purposes (language training)**

At the local level, we learn that participants' proficiency or rather their shortcomings in English sometimes inform the choice of English for educational purposes (training). The language classes are organized in different ways and localized, as explained below:

It's not a big problem here [at the Austrian subsidiary], I would say. Most people speak English. So there is not done anything special but if you go to Russia, for instance, where we have a huge organization and unfortunately we have some staff that are communicating especially with Danish specialists. There, they are, that's very organized that they are offering and even pushing some of the local staff to participating in these lessons. [...] I would say depending on the size of the company, normally it's done outside but actually in the case of Russia, I tend to remember that they, because of the size, it's so big, they actually have teachers coming to the company. (Respondent #3\_Regional Business Director\_S/AT\_Danish)

Internal communication seems to be impaired by participants' language proficiency, namely limited English skills which account for the choice of English for educational purposes (English training) at this particular setting (i.e. Russia). (This does not apply to the Austrian subsidiary.) Also, the administration is tailored to the local unit; they had teachers coming to the site due to its size and the high number of participants (while usually these classes take place outside the company).

Overall, language choices for educational purposes in the form of language training are informed by participants' language proficiency (or inadequacies) and perceived skills needed for interunit communication. In addition, language choices are not only localized but tailored to the social setting in question, and therefore may also differ across local units.

#### **4.4.2 Social-relational dimension: participants' role relationships and politeness strategies inform language choices**

Within the employment domain, participants assume various roles such as buyers or customers and sellers, which gives them inherent relationships expressing relative power or status and social closeness/distance. These also define which language choices are appropriate (polite). Role

relationships aligned with politeness principles inform language choices (involving translation/interpretation) (see also *Chapter 2, Sections 2.3.3.2 and 2.3.3.3*).

#### **4.4.2.1 Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice of (translation into) customer languages**

The participants' role relationship, i.e. buyer-seller relationship, and politeness strategies suggest the accommodation of buyers, that is, the choice of their first language (customer language) when interacting with or addressing customers, as respondent #2 (Member of the Regional Management\_S/DE\_German) details below:

General information on products or other information circulating internally is mostly in English but if you use it externally, in the market, and address the customer, then you have to do that in the local language. And there, we even distinguish between Austria, Switzerland and Germany. [...] Once I was responsible for the distribution of a product in Germany, Switzerland and Austria, and I made some linguistic changes and adapted it to Swiss German [...] and even such small details are appreciated. And this gives you a competitive edge that makes you stand out from your competitors in the market, if you establish customer relations and rapport. And you can only establish customer relations if you cater to the customer's specific needs, without overdoing it, of course, there is a fine line, but accepting the customer and responding to them. [...] English is fine, yes for [internal] communication but is not enough for engaging with the market. That is, I'm sorry, but that's a misbelief. That English is enough is a genuine misbelief [*my translation*].

These insights explain why promotional text genres like customer information (e.g. customer magazine, electronic newsletters, product presentations or information, brochures, leaflets, material for campaigns), often distributed via the Marketing Department, is usually translated into customer languages. A source text might be written in English at HQ, often based on collaboration between a text writer and a specialist coordinated by the Marketing Department:

We call it text writers, so it is people, some are even native speakers in English but have been living in Denmark for many years, so they speak the Danish language. And very often when we make promotional material or anything that is being used publicly we have text writers to write the text, meaning if I am a specialist and we have to write something about booster, then this text writer will sit together with me and I will explain what I would like to have in the article or brochure or whatever. And then he will ask some additional questions, goes back, makes a draft in English, and then I as a specialist will read through

and approve it or change what's technically wrong and then he will rewrite it and then probably a little more commercial guy will look at it and then it's ready to be published. (Respondent #3\_Regional Business Director\_S/AT\_Danish)

Since the text genre is promotional and it is used for external (public) communication purposes, the quality of the text product is important. This means the text product is a blend of specialist knowledge and language expertise. It often serves as the source text for translation into further customer languages, usually carried out locally. Since there is no language or translation department, the Technical Marketing Department often administers translation processes. (On that note, if translations are needed in other departments or units, e.g. Communications, Law or Group Management, they take care of that themselves).

At HQ, several criteria are mentioned that influence the decision in favor or against translation into customer languages: the size of the customer group, i.e. number of customer language speakers, defining investment and return, the market potential in general and the ability to administer and carry out the translation process. The decision-making process may be a dialogue between central marketing and regional or local marketing representatives. A newsletter, for instance, is translated into Spanish, Italian, French, German, Dutch, Hungarian and Russian. Other material could be available in as many as 35 languages.

Locally, we learn that translation may also be administered independently from HQ, and carried out both internally and externally, as respondent #3 (Regional Business Director\_S/AT\_Danish) explains:

Normally every country has some external company linked or associated to DK\_1 locally for that purpose but also very often the local staff is translating from English to local language. And it simply depends on economy. If the budget doesn't allow an external company to do it, then they would do it locally.

The translation agency is chosen by the subsidiary and relied on if financial resources allow it; otherwise local staff translates nonprofessionally. Whether it is done internally or externally is decided by the respondent's (#3) staff: "My marketing manager is doing that. To be honest, I don't know when he chooses the one or the other solution."

At the same time, the respondent (#3) remembers a case where the language chosen in the first place has been the customer language and translation into English has been outsourced:

I have some case where a German product specialist has made a German article that I would like to use in the region, then I have to first translate to English and then to get a proper translation down here [in Austria] I will hire an external company to translate it, to make sure that it's properly translated and then I will give the article to all the local sales companies and then they can translate it again to the local language and publish it in magazines and newspaper and so on. Sometimes I would say, especially when it's public promotion material, then we are very cautious about how to do it.

In this example, the source languages (for translation) are chosen and translations are administered in a bottom-up or horizontal rather than top-down fashion. That is important information is written in the customer language of a local market, then professionally translated into English, so it can be used horizontally at a regional level including other local markets. Translation quality is described as important since English is the intermediate language which serves as the source language for the other customer languages.

Apart from addressing end consumers in general, customer languages may also be chosen when first external business contacts are made or business relations initiated. Respondent #4 (Copywriter & Business Development\_HQ\_English) refers to an incident where a letter had to be sent to China and the question whether or not to send it in English was raised. It was decided to translate it into Chinese since this was considered the appropriate way to establish business relations with (Chinese) customers; this not only reflects the asymmetrical buyer-seller relationship but also the intention of the company to appear polite by choosing the appropriate language with regard to their role relationship.

It could be said that the decision of choosing and translating into customer languages in these cases is primarily based on the fact that the text genre is promotional and the target group or receiver is customers or potential buyers who need to be addressed appropriately, respecting and fitting the participants' role relationship which may also be described as a polite language choice. Buyers are in a superior position than DK\_1 in its role as a seller which creates an asymmetrical role relationship. Additionally, market size (number of speakers and potential customers), economic and administrative considerations play a role.



### *Terminology management – tools assisting translation*

In the context of choosing and translating into customer languages, it is worthwhile mentioning that the company works with a few tools that attempt to facilitate translation activities, in rendering them time-efficient and translations more consistent. A translation memory system (TMS) is, for instance, used for the technical documentation. These documents are translated into the customer languages by the subsidiaries and then uploaded to a corporate translation system. At HQ (Technical Marketing Department), the various language versions are downloaded, approved and put together. The collection may consist of 26 to 30 languages (depending on where the product will be sold). They are fed into a TMS which grows with every translation that is produced and gradually facilitates translation tasks since the TMS stores and memorizes translations, shows former matches based on which it suggests possible new translations.

In addition to the TMS, DK\_1 has established an electronic corporate dictionary. All translators, either in house or external, have access to the dictionary that stores both the company-specific, technical terms (incl. definitions, cross-references) and phrases, names, titles, abbreviations, units, and even information on grammar. The database totals 6,000 English entries and 2,000-3,000 terms in Danish and German. It has been initiated and is supervised by the Technical Marketing Department. Respondent #1a (Senior Translator\_HQ\_Danish) and some of his colleagues train and support colleagues who need to use the database. The dictionary is in principle not limited to these three languages; the local units are welcome to add any other language, as stated in the language guide (p. 78).

These insights illustrate that the translation process assisted by technology, more precisely terminology management tools (i.e. TMS, corporate dictionary), aims at a high degree of consistency and high-end quality of target texts. This tells us something about how the choice of customer languages is operationalized.

### *Problems associated with nonprofessional translation*

Not all translation activities are of a professional nature or assisted by the abovementioned tools. Consequences of low-quality translations are different translation errors. For instance, respondent

#2 (Member of Regional Management\_S/DE\_German) has come across literal translations of idiomatic expressions and sayings which do not make any sense in the target language. Or, a translation as part of a product description could be incomplete: „Dieses Material besteht aus blødem Eisen.“ In this specific example an internal person translated from Danish (source language) into German (target language) but did not know the German technical equivalent (‘Weicheisen’) and thus left it in Danish. Other translation errors are so-called false friends which are also related to the technical register; the Danish source term ‘vinkelkontaktleje’ has happened to be mistranslated into ‘Winkelkontaktlager’ (German) instead of the right term ‘Schräggugellager’, explains the German-speaking respondent (#2). Sometimes not only single words but whole sentences or paragraphs do not make sense in the target language; the Regional Business Director (Respondent #3\_S/AT\_Danish) shares his experience with in-house, nonprofessional translation practices:

I have seen cases where not only when you speak the language but also translation is really misunderstood and then I have a dialogue with the people in Denmark, and we talk about the case, then I can get the impression or idea or the intention behind the written message and then maybe we will translate in another way locally. [...] I have a very good example from a survey made from Germany, from the production and I am sure there has not been an English or native English-speaking person that has proofread this, it's a survey. Because I got it and there were three areas where I didn't understand 100 % what the intention was. [...] that was an English document translated by German speakers. So, I could imagine that he had the German word, then he found a dictionary, found the English word. But you know it's simply out of context to use this English word in the whole sentence. [...] And, of course, he had probably made his version in German and then later translated it into English.

In this case, local language speakers translated into English which included some mistranslations. As possible reasons the respondent (#3) mentions a word-by-word translation assisted by a dictionary that does not guarantee contextually adequate language usage in the target text.

Similarly, an incident reported on by the Australian subsidiary reflects nonprofessional translation activities from Danish into English which are problematic for the following reason:

His [the Segment Manager's] English is good but when he writes it, uhm, I've gotta, if I need to forward that on to a customer, I need to cut and paste and put words in and take words out and because the way he writes... it is not the way it should be written in the English language. He has translated it from Danish and written it. So, the words are the

other way. So, a person who, from provincial Victoria, from the country wouldn't understand a word he's saying because he is trying to work out why this word's here and it should be over here. (Respondent #8\_Office Manager\_S/AU\_English/Greek)

The problem at stake is that translation into an L2 or L2 text production in general does not always meet the quality standards required for customer communication. In order to compensate for this, the local Australian Office Manager simply revises the texts sent by the Danish manager and corrects the language mistakes before sending them to clients and customers. This shows that it is important to distinguish between the functions of English in different contexts; the choice of and/or translation into English as an L2, FL or group language may suffice for internal communication purposes ("His English is good"), and yet not good enough for external interaction with customers, where language, communication and translation quality standards are more elaborate.

In sum, the problems encountered illustrate the sophisticated nature of translation the company has to deal with. Also, some of the errors are the result of staff members translating from e.g. their L1 into a foreign language. In this sense, this also marks the limitations of nonprofessional or low-quality translation which may lead to misunderstandings that cannot always be remedied. In the worst case, translation products cannot convey the meaning of the source text and render communication with the target group ineffective.

#### **4.4.2.2 Buyer-seller relationship and politeness inform the choice of (interpretation into) customer languages**

The buyer-seller relationship and the linked appropriate (polite) language choice also apply to oral encounters requiring some form of interpretation. Choosing customer languages in oral interaction by means of nonprofessional interpretation is mentioned in the focus group interview; clients and guests visiting HQ would be accommodated, as respondent #1b (Assistant to Group President/Management\_HQ\_Danish) describes it:

There may be examples where we have customer groups coming here and that may be customers from all over the world. And in order to give them a fair presentation of our product line, for example, then sometimes we involve an interpreter.

Similar to the rationale behind translations, customers are seen as a target group entitled to information in their L1 following politeness principles (“fair”) and the linked role relationship. In this example, it is reported that a specialist may give a presentation in Danish or English and third-country nationals with the language skills in questions (e.g. Polish, Hungarian or Lithuanian) living in Denmark rather than professional interpreters would be sought to mediate between the language in which the talk is held and the customer language.

#### **4.4.3 Social-psychological dimension: participants’ attitudes to languages inform language choices**

Participants have different attitudes to languages in that they assign positive and negative values or attributes to languages. We learn about positive attitudes to Danish at HQ (ethnocentrism) and locally, as well as to English (geocentrism). These multiple attitudes vary across participants, i.e. do not form a consensual ideology, and may even stir controversies among executives (rival attitudes) and have imposing power (internal forces). So, the different attitudes to languages inform different language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.4*).

##### **4.4.3.1 Ethnocentric attitude informs (imposes) the choice of Danish (internal forces)**

Participants assign positive or negative attributes to languages that create subjective evaluations, i.e. attitudes that inform language choices. Some participants at HQ have a negative attitude to English going hand in hand with a positive attitude to Danish (i.e. ethnocentric attitude) which motivate respondent #4 (Copywriter & Business Development\_HQ\_English) who is an international staff member to choose Danish, as he explains:

There are some colleagues who resent, no don’t resent, they reject that I speak English in a common environment. It would be, it would be viewed as unsociable, it could be viewed

as being arro... I am not quite sure how they view it but it gets commented on and that's something you learn. When there are certain people in the room you just don't speak English. Other people are at the other extreme, if you would like. They enjoy speaking English and they wanna keep using it. And they may get a decent conversation out of me, that's fine.

Some of the respondent's (#4) coworkers seem to have a positive attitude towards Danish (ethnocentric attitude) and a more negative attitude towards the choice of English which they also verbalize ("it gets commented on"). As a response to this experience, the respondent (#4) chooses Danish over English in these colleagues' presence. In this sense, the coworkers' ethnocentric attitudes also impose Danish on the third-country national which could be described as internal forces. It almost seems the choice of Danish is necessary for the international staff member to be socially integrated or accepted by these colleagues. But not all staff members share this attitude. Others choose English when addressing the respondent (#4) driven by an intrinsic motivation and possibly a more positive attitude to English (geocentric attitude). This means the respondent (#4) chooses both Danish and English based on interactants' attitudes and/or motivations. These insights indicate that staff members located at HQ think differently about Danish and English in that they ascribe different emotional values to the two languages. In other words, they do not share a common attitude forming a common ideology but have opposing attitudes that lead to different language choices. It also means that the choice and function of English as a shared group language has limitations; it does not imply that staff members attitudinally or ideologically approve this decision or endorse its choice in the HQ environment.

Similar experiences as to ethnocentric attitudes are shared by respondent #2 (Member of Regional Management\_S/DE\_German). He remembers the time he spent as an inpatient at HQ more than 20 years ago, where he had a management position. Although Danish proficiency was not a hiring criterion for his position in the first place (as opposed to respondent's #4 case), it had become useful in the course of his assignment; after a few months of employment and Danish lessons, the monthly meetings with the corporate management team started to be conducted in Danish, his bosses addressed him in Danish and all the written information was in Danish, too. This was difficult since he did not understand everything and often needed to consult a dictionary. One could say the ethnocentric attitude of his surrounding superiors and colleagues

informed or rather implicitly imposed the choice of Danish at HQ, which, similar to the previous example, represents internal forces. Gradually, the respondent (#2) has adapted to the social setting and developed a positive attitude to Danish himself. Today, he sees Danish proficiency as helpful and a ‘door opener’; he had a huge advantage over his English-speaking colleagues who did not speak Danish at the time since he was included in so much more information circulating internally. Also, Danish skills have helped him establish quite a broad network which he can still rely on, although he now works in Germany. In this sense, his choice of Danish is also aligned with both integrative and instrumental/extrinsic motivations, which will be further described below. (This illustrates the communicative side effects of inpatriation management in general and the post-assignment benefits gained from proficiency in the HQ language in particular.) Despite the respondent’s (#2) positive attitude, he also talks about the notion of “Danishization” which means he considers Danish to be chosen in too many communicative contexts.

It could be concluded that some participants’ ethnocentric attitudes and negative attitudes towards English inform the choice of Danish among participants in the HQ environment in general and its (implicit) imposition on international staff in particular, partly including Danish acquisition. This ethnocentric attitude imposing the HQ language can also be described as internal forces of a social nature. (Others do not share this attitude but choose English with an English NS out of an intrinsic motivation.)

#### **4.4.3.2 Positive attitude to the HQ language informs the choice of Danish (via help of expatriate)**

In a local example, it turns out that expatriation can have communicative side effects; Danish may be chosen for subsidiary-HQ interaction motivated by participants’ attitudes. More specifically, local staff (German speakers) may ask respondent #3, an expatriated executive and Danish speaker, for help, i.e. to communicate with HQ in Danish, as he explains below:

I don’t know if it’s because of my network in general or because there is less barriers because I am Danish but sometimes people come to me to find out if I can help with something related to the group or people in Denmark because I have the network, [...] I know people and I speak the language, not because... I think that Danes are very open and don’t have a problem in speaking English at least, but somehow this culture and national

barrier isn't there, language barrier isn't there. [...] and somebody even say: 'you speak the language'. I don't know if that's the reason they come or if it's their excuse, I don't know. (Respondent #3\_Regional Business Director\_S/AT\_Danish)

Although the respondent (#3) cannot really put his finger on why non-Danish colleagues seek his help for interaction with HQ, he has some interesting assumptions and perceptions; it could be his broad network, his national and cultural background, his Danish proficiency, or that coworkers attempt to find excuses for not doing their jobs. A possible explanation is that local staff could choose English in interaction with HQ (since "Danes are very open and don't have a problem in speaking English"), yet decide not to because they evaluate Danish to be the better (or best) language choice in this subsidiary-HQ interaction. The choice of Danish might also be associated with getting easier access to Danes, the HQ network or the necessary information linked to the HQ environment. Since the local coworkers in question do not speak Danish, but attribute a positive value to it, they seek assistance with the respondent (#3) who becomes a mediator (i.e. language node). In other words, the positive attitude to the HQ language at the local level motivates this language choice behavior.

#### **4.4.3.3 Geocentric attitude informs the choice of English for educational purposes (language training and acquisition)**

A positive attitude to English (geocentric attitude) informs the choice of English for educational purposes such as universal English training and acquisition, that is across all levels of employment. More specifically, English classes are not only offered to staff members who need (to improve their) English to carry out their daily tasks but any staff member who is interested in training and would like to learn or improve their English. At the HQ level, English language training takes place on site with external teachers and around a dozen participants are needed to set up a class. Respondent #1a (Senior Translator\_HQ\_Danish) shares his positive attitude to English, English proficiency and training, as follows:

I would say yes because one of the conditions of being employed in a DK\_1 company anywhere in the world is that you speak English to a certain level. Of course, if you are employed in Hungary in one of the production, the factories there, you need not be fluent

in English but I am sure it is a great advantage if you know a little bit of English because you will have to communicate sometimes with Danish colleagues down there or colleagues from other countries. But of course your English need[s] to be better if you are working at a higher level in your organization, of course.

It seems English proficiency with staff is more of an asset ('nice-to-have') rather than a requirement ('must-have') for local production workers. They do not need to be fluent in English, yet English proficiency is positively connotated and attributed a positive value ("great advantage"). This means offering universal training across all levels of employment (including operative staff) is more the result of a geocentric attitude rather than an actual proficiency needed. Also because the frequency of interaction outside their local setting is comparatively low and most information that needs to reach staff lower down the hierarchy is translated into major local languages such as Hungarian anyway, as we have learned earlier.

A geocentric attitude combined with a negative attitude to a local language can also be found at the individual level, as the quotation below exemplifies:

If I am communicating with a colleague in Germany and we do it in English, well then we are both speaking a foreign language, which puts us on equal terms. It would not be equal terms if I tried to speak my German and he was speaking his German. Then there would be this difference in level. And of course, if we try to speak to English colleagues, then, of course, we are at a loss, you could say, sometimes, because they are speaking their mother tongue and we are not. (Respondent #1a\_Senior Translator\_HQ\_Danish)

The fact that one of the interactants, the respondent's (#1a) German colleague, could express himself better in his L1 than English is not perceived as an asset for the communication but an impediment because it renders the conversation or rather their relationship asymmetrical, and possibly even threatens the respondent's (#1a) face. Interestingly, he realizes that interaction with English NSs is asymmetrical too but seems to interpret that less negatively. One might say the respondent's (#1a) positive attitude to English and comparatively more negative one to German makes him choose English with both English speakers (accommodation) and German colleagues (standardization), creating his own double standard.



#### **4.4.3.4 Varying attitudes inform language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation)**

Participants or rather HR executives' varying attitudes within and across organizational units inform language choices for HRM purposes, i.e. selective recruitment and staff relocation, in different ways. For instance, an ethnocentric attitude within the HQ environment informs the choice of Danish for HRM purposes in that it is a hiring criterion for certain HQ positions (selective recruitment). Respondent #4 is a third-country national and English NS and has been hired as a copywriter (for English) working in the area of marketing and business development at HQ. Danish proficiency was a requirement for getting the job, although it is not needed to fulfill his daily responsibilities. For most of his professional tasks he chooses English including e.g. text production or oral presentations about his work as in meetings. One might say that the hiring person or team had an ethnocentric attitude which translates into the fact that Danish proficiency was a selection criterion for this HQ position.

We also learn that HR executives have polycentric attitudes that inform the choice of local languages for HRM purposes, that is their alignment with job profiles. This may include staff relocation. Respondent #2 (Member of the Regional Management\_S/DE\_German), for instance, would first contact a Spanish-skilled employee who has long worked in South America if a project came up in a Spanish-speaking area. In his view it is better and also easier to find and relocate people internally than to hire externals for international assignments. Often staff members have and show an interest in the host country, its language and culture. In this sense, participants' language proficiency can be exploited in a fruitful way which makes HRM more efficient, says the respondent (#2). In this context, he mentions that HR keeps records of employees' areas of expertise, skills and interests including self-evaluated language proficiency (categorized into four levels of proficiency), which may help find and allocate staff members with certain proficiency for different tasks such as local language proficiency for an expatriation assignment.

In the context of staff development, we learn that a geocentric attitude informs the choice of English for HRM purposes; English is chosen to be a requirement for becoming a so-called 'global talent'. Potential candidates are assessed by NSs of English.

We have a global talent management program right now and now there have been 3 or 4 session groups where people have been taken in and evaluated, and a lot of people have come back and explained or complained that the assessors were speaking so fluent English and so difficult that these global talents couldn't follow them and they were disqualified because of the language skills. And it has been discussed how important it is for a global talent to be that fluent in English that he could follow these assessments and the conclusion was that if they cannot follow these assessments because of the language then they cannot be global talents. (Respondent #3\_Regional Business Director\_S/AT\_Danish)

Apparently, the question of English proficiency and its relevance for the job profile or area of responsibility had not been discussed before the assessment but came up in the assessment process which was then negotiated in the situation. It seems that the decision of English being a requirement for becoming a global talent was informed by the decision makers' geocentric attitude, possibly enforced by the fact that the evaluating group was English native speakers. In this sense, English proficiency also outweighed their professional know-how.

We learn that the CEO has a similarly geocentric attitude. Respondent #2 (Member of the Regional Management\_S/DE\_German) remembers the CEO having said a few years ago that specialized staff without English skills should learn English within a time frame of two years, otherwise they would get fired. The respondent (#2) argues that these education and HRM measures are hard to realize or implement since the company would lose valuable experts specialized in their fields. In this vein, he refers to a financial expert in the Ukraine "who knows the law by heart but his English is a disaster [*my translation*]". But this person's boss knows English who can then facilitate interunit communication. Another example is a highly specialized sales person in Finland who does not speak English. According to the respondent (#2), these kinds of exceptions need to be made in order to hire or keep skilled personnel. This means that while some HR executives pay specific attention to English proficiency informed by a geocentric attitude, as in the example with the global talents, others do not share this attitude in that English proficiency is overlooked and outplayed by professional skills.

In sum, these insights shed light on how participants', more precisely HR executives and recruitment teams' varying attitudes inform language choices for HRM purposes including selective recruitment and staff relocation (i.e. in-/expatriation). The variety of approaches illustrates that HRM is a social phenomenon undertaken by agents that may prioritize one specific

language (to expertise), value some language skills more than others, or disregard language proficiency at all. This also means they make HRM decisions as they make sense to them in a given situation. (This insight disconfirms that English proficiency is a universal hiring criterion, as reported by one respondent and mentioned in an earlier section, and confirms the multilingual nature of DK\_1 where participants choose different languages to make interunit communication work.)

#### **4.4.4 Social-psychological dimension: participants' motivations inform language choices (including language acquisition)**

Participants have personal motivations of various kinds that inform their language choices, partly including foreign language acquisition (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.5*).

##### **4.4.4.1 Integrative, instrumental/extrinsic and intrinsic motivations inform the choice (and acquisition) of HQ, local and customer languages**

A participant's individual motivations inform the choice and acquisition of the HQ language, local and customer languages. Respondent #2 (Member of Regional Management\_S/DE\_German) has over time chosen several languages he has wanted to learn, which has always been supported by the company. He describes DK\_1 as very cooperative if one takes the initiative to acquire foreign languages. He has learned Danish before and during his inpatriation assignment for both integrative and instrumental/extrinsic (i.e. utilitarian) reasons. Apart from the language classes, the respondent's (#2) colleagues supported him and taught him new words and became his 'personal' teachers (i.e. informal language buddies) which he experienced as an enjoyable activity reducing social distance and fostering social integration into the HQ setting (acculturation). In addition, the choice of Danish (including acquisition) was useful for accessing Danish information and establishing a network at HQ.

Another time, the respondent (#2) went on an international assignment in Portugal and wanted to learn the local language for integrative purposes. In this particular case too, he wanted to be socially integrated into the host community and social setting and to become an ingroup member

by choosing the local language (acculturation). In the course of his career at DK\_1, he also wanted to learn Arabic (customer language) because they collaborated a lot with Dubai and Arab countries. The company agreed to pay for evening classes which took place outside the company. The motivation behind this language choice and acquisition initiative was more of an instrumental/extrinsic nature; the respondent (#2) believed this specific language proficiency would be beneficial for these business relations by facilitating communication. Overall, his language choices, i.e. language acquisition and application, are also intrinsically motivated; he is passionate about languages and cultures, enjoys acquiring new languages and eventually employing them in business interaction.

#### **4.4.4.2 Intrinsic motivation informs the choice of local languages**

Similarly, intrinsic motivation may inform the choice of local languages (local staff members' L1); respondent #1c (PR & Language Consultant\_HQ) who works in the Corporate Communication Department is a native speaker of Danish and multilingual. She emails colleagues in Swedish, Norwegian, German, Italian and French and thereby linguistically adapts to her communication partners. Accommodation is not believed to have any particular or positive effect on the interaction, its effectiveness or their relationship. Neither does she have any particular attitudes to languages. The actual reason that she chooses all these local languages with colleagues is intrinsic motivation; the respondent (#1c) simply chooses them "for the fun of it", as she says.

#### **4.4.5 Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages**

There are also social forces that are external to the MNC community and have imposing power; they define some of the company's language choices or rather impose certain languages on DK\_1. This also makes this dimension unique and distinct from the previous dimensions in that it is not the MNC's participants any longer that choose languages but external forces of different kinds which will be elaborated below (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.6*).

#### 4.4.5.1 National (home-/host-country) laws enforce the choice of (translation into) customer languages

Apart from the buyer-seller relationship and politeness principles that inform the choice of (translation into) customer languages, as discussed earlier, there is an additional factor at play; in specific areas, such as technical documentation, the MNC cannot deliberately choose whether or not to translate into customer languages but is obliged to do so by external forces. The national legal systems normally require that the technical documentation of a product (e.g. product specifications, installation and user manuals) is available in the customer language, as elaborated below:

An installation manual has to be written in the local language. That's required by law. And our local staff translates from English into...and that's why I said: one has to master one's own mother tongue, otherwise we cannot translate properly [into the customer language] [my translation]. (Respondent #2\_Member of Regional Management\_S/DE\_German)

In this sense, national laws de facto enforce DK\_1 to choose and translate into customer languages when it comes to product information, in particular instructional text types. The respondent (#2) believes that mostly local staff members (nonprofessionally) translate this kind of texts. The translation is not considered a task that requires professional skills going beyond good L1 mastery. As we have learned earlier, the way translation is operationalized locally varies and can include both professional and nonprofessional solutions.

In sum, as opposed to more promotional text genres (e.g. marketing & advertisement), where DK\_1 deliberately chooses different customer languages in alignment with financial and administrative considerations, the MNC has, due to legal forces, little to no choice when it comes to technical documentation (e.g. product specifications) and instructional text types (e.g. user manuals). Translation quality seems to be secondary and not defined by these forces.

#### **4.4.5.2 National (host-country) authorities enforce the choice of (translation into) local languages**

External forces can also be national authorities in host countries that speak the local language only which they literally impose on the company. More specifically, it occurs that these authorities require a local language version of certain texts such as contracts, agreements or other legal documents. Then the corporate Law Department is in charge of the translation from e.g. English into the local language. Sometimes national authorities even request a certified translation which forces DK\_1 to collaborate with translation professionals. Then the company usually engages with external translation services. In this sense, host-country authorities not only enforce the choice of and translation into the local language but may also impose professionalism.

#### **4.4.5.3 National (host-country) education systems (acquisition planning) influence selective recruitment**

Another kind of external forces is national language-in-education or acquisition planning at the macro level that influences selective recruitment (i.e. language choices for HRM purposes) within the MNC. It is reported that in Eastern Europe the company often hires university graduates whose English level corresponds to Western European high school graduates. This shows how national differences in education systems and resulting language proficiency can influence corporate recruitment. This is an example of external forces that interfere with or impact on the employment domain in that the MNC chooses languages for HRM purposes (selective recruitment) accordingly.

### **4.5 Conclusions Drawn from Case Study I: Language Choice at DK\_1 Embedded in Social Context**

The case study (I) of DK\_1, a manufacturer employing 18,000 staff, has provided qualitative insights into the research phenomenon language choice in a Danish MNC context. First insights into language choices can be inferred from DK\_1's online representation. National websites are in

customer languages for representing the company and engaging in the home- and host-country markets. The so-called *international* website ([www.DK\\_1.com](http://www.DK_1.com)) is in English only. Variations in language choices can also be observed within organizational settings (as in job advertisements), which indicates that language choices are made in a contextual fashion.

Personal accounts have helped conceptualize DK\_1 as a multilingual speech community and decipher behavior norms within the community. The latter suggest that organizational units speak different (first) languages (i.e. HQ and local languages) and choose them in an unmarked way within their settings (i.e. home and host countries). English has been assigned the function of the *group* or *corporate* language which is understood as a lingua franca chosen for e.g. interunit communication purposes. (It is not perceived as a form of top-down language policy). Related to the function and definition of English as the corporate language, the “DK\_1 language guide” has been initiated in a bottom-up fashion at the department level and subsequently presented to the corporate management team. It provides guidelines on English usage and suggests language assistance (in the form of translators, language ambassadors or dictionaries, etc.). Similarly, the guide is distinguished from a formal language policy (statement). Also, informants have different ideas about the meaning of a language policy, which indicates that there is no corporate language policy they would commonly define or agree to have.

Further evidence has highlighted the rationales behind language choices which can be categorized into four contextual dimensions that inform language choices within the MNC network. One finds social-linguistic, social-relational, social-psychological (attitudes to languages, motivations) and social-regulatory (internal and external forces) dimensions, that all inform (or enforce) different language choices including English, the HQ language and local/customer languages.

#### *Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency*

The first contextual dimension is of a social-linguistic nature; participants' language proficiency informs different language choices. The participants (e.g. HQ, subsidiary, individual staff) involved in a given communicative situation or event often define which language(s) to choose based on their proficiency (linguistic repertoire). English is commonly chosen in interactions uniting different participants with different first languages or varying language proficiency for

mainly internal and occasionally external communication purposes (e.g. product launch in Asia). English represents a pragmatic choice if a shared language is needed (which might be limited to the written medium), but is also associated with some problems. These perceived problems relate to counterparts' limited or lacking English skills (e.g. 'Danglish'), including the management level, diverse cultural backgrounds and technical or legal registers (terminologies). We also learn that the HQ language is chosen within corporate management at HQ which is dominated by Danes. Danish executives are reported to partly feel uncomfortable speaking English, so Danish is chosen instead and international staff needs to accommodate. It is also chosen in interunit meeting contexts among Danish expatriates and international key managers with Danish skills. Danes might represent the majority in such encounters. Furthermore, the choice of Danish as a foreign language can be limited to easier topics owing to lower proficiency. In alignment with behavior norms, subsidiaries choose their local languages (unmarked) and for instance conduct local or regional market research in a local language. Once the knowledge needs to be shared with HQ, the language needs to shift to English, probably involving some form of translation, in order to ensure mutual understanding across units. Translation activities are also initiated at HQ informed by participants' language proficiency. More specifically, operative staff is assumed to have inadequate English proficiency which is the reason that information targeted at them is (professionally) translated into the major local languages. One might also say a double standard is applied in that users of minor languages are not accommodated but need to deal with the English version which, depending on their English proficiency, at worst excludes them from information sharing. Participants' proficiency also informs interpretation; a Russian colleague or customers in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have poor or no English skills which informs the reliance on nonprofessional interpretation. We have also learned that varying language proficiency informs code-switching/-mixing between English (FL) and Danish, German, Japanese (L1s) in both oral and written interaction, which is also interpreted as having a positive impact on e.g. efficiency or social relations. Similarly, passive multilingualism occurs in oral encounters and includes German (L1) and English (L2). Depending on participants' language proficiency, the language chosen (as a medium of instruction) for corporate training could be English or local languages. In other words, if staff does not speak English, corporate training is organized at the regional or local level in local languages. Finally, proficiency also informs the choice of English for educational purposes (language training) in a localized manner. It turned out that Russian staff's English proficiency



was partly not sufficient to communicate with Danish specialists; hence, English training was initiated at the local level and tailored to the Russian unit's needs. (By contrast, no classes are organized at the Austrian unit which means training is localized.) Overall, participants' proficiency informs several language choices including English, the HQ language and local/customer languages.

*Social-relational dimension: participants' role relationships and politeness strategies*

The second contextual dimension is of a social-relational nature; participants' role relationships (based on participant roles within the employment domain) and politeness inform different language choices. The asymmetrical buyer-seller relationship and politeness inform the choice of (translation/interpretation into) customer languages (i.e. accommodation/linguistic adaptation). This also applies to the establishment of new business relations with external partners (e.g. China). The technical documentation of products or marketing material (promotional text genre) exists in up to 35 languages. In this context, we have also learned that the company has tools assisting translation (e.g. translation memory systems, corporate dictionary) that attempt to improve or assure translation quality and consistency. Yet, some problems are encountered with nonprofessional practices; staff members (without any professional language background) translate texts word-by-word, for instance, partly also into a foreign language (e.g. English as an L2) which can lead to misunderstandings. Customers are also accommodated in oral encounters if they visit the HQ to learn about new products. The product presentations might be given in English and nonprofessionally interpreted into customer languages by third-country nationals. Overall, the buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice of numerous customer languages (involving translation and interpretation).

*Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages and motivations*

The third contextual dimension is of a social-psychological nature; participants' attitudes to languages inform different language choices. An ethnocentric attitude to the HQ language has been identified within the HQ environment (ethnocentrism) which informs the choice of Danish

and may include acquisition as for an inpatriate manager. Such an attitude also has imposing power in that it puts pressure on international staff to choose Danish at HQ, which can be classified as internal forces of a social nature. Also at the local level we have found a positive attitude to the HQ language which informs the choice of Danish for subsidiary-HQ interaction via a Danish expatriate who becomes a language node. A positive attitude to English (geocentrism) at the corporate (HQ) level informs the choice of English for educational purposes in the form of English training offered across all levels of employment including the operative level. Investing in English training or furthering English skills universally seems considered an asset ('nice-to-have'), although production workers do not need to be fluent in English. At the individual level, a participant has a geocentric attitude combined with a more negative one to a local language which informs the choice of English (rather than the local language) in interunit communication. Finally, varying attitudes to languages also inform language choices for HRM purposes including selective recruitment and staff relocation. Ethnocentrism renders Danish a hiring criterion for certain HQ positions while a polycentric attitude can lead to exploiting local/customer language skills within the company and to aligning them to expatriation assignments. English proficiency has become a requirement for so-called 'global talents' (that have been assessed by English native speakers), hence is prioritized to professional expertise. By contrast, others value expert over language knowledge in that they hire candidates without English skills (although the CEO does not like the idea). This indicates that depending on HR executives' attitudes, different language choices are made. Overall, attitudes towards languages differ among participants and can have imposing power. This being said, there is no universal or consensually shared attitude forming a dominant ideology but multiple attitudes with positive and negative attributes or values that account for different language choices including the HQ language, English and local/customer languages.

The social-psychological dimension also entails participants' motivations; these inform language choices which can include foreign language acquisition. An international staff member chooses (and acquires) the HQ language, local (i.e. Portuguese) and customer (i.e. Arabic) languages. The underlying motivations are of an integrative (e.g. social adjustment), instrumental/extrinsic (e.g. utilitarian value for business relations) and intrinsic (e.g. enjoyment) nature. A participant at HQ chooses a number of local languages with colleagues which is intrinsically motivated.

*Social-regulatory dimension: external forces (with imposing power)*

The sixth and last contextual dimension is of a social-regulatory nature, external to the MNC community and has imposing power in that it defines some of the company's language choices, or rather imposes certain languages on DK\_1. For instance, national laws require the choice of and translation into customer languages regarding information surrounding a product (e.g. technical documentation, user manuals). Similarly, national host-country authorities may request the choice of (translation into) local languages and possibly even a professional (i.e. certified) translation. In this sense, these forces also dictate the question of translation quality. Another external force DK\_1 has no influence on but is concerned with is national (macro) language policy and planning, i.e. acquisition planning, which shapes national educational systems and the average level of foreign language proficiency among the population. This kind of external forces informs the choice of English for HRM purposes (i.e. selective recruitment) insofar as in Eastern Europe often university graduates are hired because their English proficiency is perceived to be comparable to high school graduates in Western Europe.

It could be concluded that DK\_1 is a multilingual speech community that unites numerous settings (locations) all speaking different languages, English being the *group* language (*lingua franca*). This case study (DK\_1) has shed light on four contextual dimensions that inform language choice: the social-linguistic dimension language proficiency, the social-relational dimension based on role relationships and politeness, the social-psychological dimension including attitudes to languages (with imposing power) and motivations, and the social-regulatory dimension external forces (with imposing power). The contextual dimensions inform different language choices and also impose languages, including the HQ, local/customer languages and English, in different communicative situations, for internal and external communication purposes. The dimensions influence the individual staff member and/or the corporate management level which has to be refracted into individual decision makers who choose languages in a given communicative situation in their own right rather than in a consensual or unified manner. This suggests that social context is multilayered which renders language choice a complex and multilingual social phenomenon. The multilevel and multidimensional analysis of

language choice lets us conclude that language can hardly be regulated or managed in a centralized manner in an MNC network such as DK\_1. In other words, the findings indicate a limited manageability of language since language choice is contextually bound. These case study findings also undermine the usefulness of single-language policies but suggest multilingual policies and management activities, if at all necessary.

## 5 LANGUAGE CHOICE IN A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION (MNC): A CASE STUDY (II) OF DK\_2

### 5.1 About DK\_2: Facts and Figures

DK\_2 is a pharmaceutical company headquartered in Denmark. It employs roughly 6,000 people globally (2,000 in Denmark) in 57 countries and has products registered in approx. 100 countries. Production sites are in China, Denmark, France and Italy, research centers in Denmark, China and the U.S. The company is structured according to regions (e.g. Central and Eastern Europe) and functions as a matrix organization. Its total revenue for the fiscal year 2013 was DKK 15,258 million/15.3 billion ( $\approx$  EUR 2 billion).<sup>47</sup> (This case company (II) is the smallest MNC investigated in this collective case study. I gathered data from the headquarters and the subsidiary in Austria.)

### 5.2 Language Choices on DK\_2's Website

First insights into language choices can be gained from the company's online representation. DK\_2 has a corporate website ([www.DK\\_2.com](http://www.DK_2.com)) which is in English and very detailed, and provides information on the firm and its products, investors, career possibilities, policies on business ethics and health, safety & environment (HSE) or corporate governance, even remuneration guidelines. A number of documents can be downloaded; the annual magazine is available in English while a Danish version can be ordered online, documents concerning HSE are in English, (bi)annual financial reports, or corporate and press releases are available in English and Danish.

On the website there is also a section called 'media library' with videos on products, interviews with patients, medical specialists, representatives of medical associations or the CFO, where all interviewees speak English as a foreign language (FL) themselves. Some interviews are additionally supported by English subtitles. The annual general meeting has been videotaped and uploaded;

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<sup>47</sup> These data have partly been collected from the company's website. [retrieved February 19, 2014]

the chairman of the supervisory board gives an 80-min. talk in his first language (L1) Norwegian, supported by Danish slides and simultaneous interpretation into English. (The interpreted version can also be watched online.) In the introduction of his speech, the chairman says in Norwegian that his Danish is not so good. So, he chooses Norwegian to the presumably Danish or Scandinavian audience with a passive understanding of Norwegian (owing to the mutual intelligibility of Scandinavian languages). The choice of his L1 might also be related to the fact that interpretation is provided. In addition to the video, written documents are available both in Danish and English (e.g. summary of the meeting, chairman's report, presentation).

By clicking on 'DK\_2 Worldwide' one can find information about the subsidiaries and navigate to the local websites, though not all units have their own websites. If the user chooses the region Europe and then Denmark, for instance, a message pops up on the screen indicating that DK\_2 has no responsibility for the content of other websites and the user is about to leave DK\_2's website. The national websites mostly look similar in design, may contain both corporate and local contents and are in customer languages to online represent DK\_2 and engage with externals in the home- and host-country markets. (We will gain more insights into the choice of customer languages later in this case study.) Yet, there is variation in the amount of information available to customers. For instance, the Danish site has a different user interface and layout, and contains less information on e.g. diseases and drugs than the corporate one. There are brief descriptions or definitions of each disease but for more detailed information external links have to be followed. In the Danish news section the user is automatically navigated to the corporate site, which means information on media, latest press releases or upcoming events is available in English only. By contrast, the French site is very similar both in design and content to the corporate one, and has additional local information such as a link to a newly inaugurated website for French patients. There, one can watch many videos of experts and patients talking in French about different diseases. Furthermore, the French Managing Director provides information on the French site 'DK\_2 France'. This concept of visual representation is very similar to the corporate media library, as described before. In sum, there is a difference in the amount of L1 information available for the end consumers; for instance, Danish patients do not have access to the same amount of information as the French or Anglophone. The diverse solutions show that language choice is context-bound which allows for variation at both the HQ and local levels (i.e. choice of English

and Danish, choice of English and English subtitles, choice of L1 (Norwegian), or local language). Also, it seems language choice is not centralized but localized, which gives the subsidiaries certain autonomy in choosing languages.

As to HRM, job offers are posted in various languages (e.g. bilingual for Canada) in the corporate website's career section. For HQ positions, the advertisement can be in either English or Danish, and English proficiency may be specified. (Danish skills are not mentioned in the advertisements as being a requirement for working and being integrated in the HQ environment, although this seems to be the case according to the respondents, as we will learn more about subsequently.) Language choices for HRM purposes, such as the language of the advertisement and the language(s) required for a job, vary across positions and locations (settings).

Overall, these first impressions on language choice gained from DK\_2's website reflect variation in language choice within and across organizational units. The corporate website alone leaves the impression of DK\_2 being very internationally oriented (geocentric attitude) since it is in English only. Taking national websites into account, including the Danish one, one could say the company presents itself as a multilingual speech community where various national (customer) languages are chosen. In the following, I will look into the notion of DK\_2 as a multilingual speech community, language functions and its language choice norms in more detail.

### **5.3 DK\_2 as a Multilingual Speech Community: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms**

DK\_2 can be described as a multilingual speech community where different languages serve different functions, which also creates certain language choice norms within the MNC network. Within the DK\_2 network, Danish is the national language of the home country Denmark, thus assumes the function of the HQ language which is primarily chosen within the HQ environment. Similarly, the national languages of the host countries assume the function of local languages and are mainly chosen at the subsidiaries. English has been given the function of the company's *common* language (i.e. *lingua franca*) which is mainly chosen for internal communication purposes

across organizational units (settings). All these languages become customer languages if they are chosen for external communication and engaging with local markets.

In order to get a more detailed picture of DK\_2 as a multilingual speech community, it is crucial to look into these functions and their meanings in more depth and decipher the language norms within the community. The functions of English and local languages get explained at HQ as follows:

We have a number of subsidiaries around the world and obviously they speak different languages but the universal language is English. A number of my employees are from countries other than Denmark, Spain, for example, Austria, Germany, Lithuania. There is all sorts of countries and their language skills are also important in these specific countries. So, foreign languages are very important, as I can say the main language of communication is English. [...] First, I think it [English as a common language] seems like the logical choice. There is a lot of other important languages in the world but it's my opinion that the majority, of course different cultures and regions in the world, understand some English. So it would be the first choice. (Respondent #1\_Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English)<sup>48</sup>

The respondent (#1) pictures DK\_2 as a company with subsidiaries worldwide which speak different languages but they also share one language which is English. One might say that he implies some of the community norms, namely that the subsidiaries choose their national languages in host countries (“obviously”, “in these specific countries”), and the MNC needs a “universal” language which is English, in order to communicate across organizational units and ensure effective communication. Thus, the obvious candidate for having the function of the corporate language is English (“logical choice”, “first choice”). In this sense, local languages are regarded as unmarked choices within the local environments and English as the unmarked corporate language for interunit communication purposes. Respondent #5 (Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian), also located at HQ, has similar views on the function of English within interunit communication. To the question on how subsidiaries would communicate with HQ and how this has been decided, he replies:

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<sup>48</sup> Each interviewee is assigned a number (e.g. #1). Further characteristics indicated are the person's job title or function (e.g. Group Medical Marketing Manager), location (HQ or subsidiary) and first language (e.g. English). In the following, the subsidiary will be abbreviated 'S' and its location indicated by the country code (i.e. 'AT' for Austria).



It was not [a] decision because I mean Danish company, you cannot expect Hungarians speak Danish or Polish guys Russian. So, English is [an] international language and this is kind of a prerequisite that certain people [within DK\_2] [...] speak English.

Interestingly, he stresses that choosing English within the MNC network is not the result of a formal decision, rather an unmarked lingua franca, also related to the *international* function of English.

Language functions are confirmed and further described at the local level (Austria) by respondent #7 (Regional Regulatory Affairs Manager\_S/AT\_Croatian) who says “my experiences with Danish colleagues is that they often use Danish among themselves which is logical in a way, I mean this is what we do here”. The respondent (#7) describes the unmarked nature of units’ national languages and the community’s behavior norms (“logical”); Danes choose the HQ language Danish among each other and staff members (including internationals like the respondent) located in Austria choose the local language German (“this is what we do here”). Her colleague and Austria’s Marketing Manager (Respondent #8\_S/AT\_German) shares his viewpoints on the function of English for interunit communication or communicative events (e.g. meetings):

Well, from the beginning it was clear to me that I join a corporation with English as its corporate language, meaning there are meetings where I have to speak English, simply because my counterpart doesn’t understand me if I speak German. Neither do I speak Danish or Lithuanian or whatever. So I can’t say: ‘I like working for you guys, but I don’t wanna speak English [my translation].’

This describes the respondent’s (#8) understanding of the function of English as a corporate language. From his local perspective, it is clear to him that working for a non-German-speaking employer implies the choice of English in communicative situations such as meetings involving e.g. HQ (that speaks Danish) and other units (that speak e.g. Lithuanian). In other words, his rationalization suggests that English is the obvious (unmarked) choice given that the participants involved all speak different languages, and not because a corporate language exists.

Although DK\_2 has a language policy, which will be discussed below, these language choices are not described as some top-down policy or language management decisions, rather as common-sense, i.e. unmarked, choices. In other words, the respondents’ (#1, #7, #8) rationalizations of

language choices (“obviously”, “logical”, “clear”) also tell us something about the behavior norms of DK\_2 as a multilingual speech community. That is, the communicative implicatures suggest that Danish (as the HQ language) and host-country languages (as local languages) all represent unmarked languages that are chosen among L1 users in their respective settings. English is the unmarked lingua franca (for interunit communication purposes) whose function is described as ‘international language’, ‘universal language’, ‘corporate language’ and ‘common language’. In this vein, it is worthwhile mentioning that respondents #4 (Divisional Director of Corporate Communication\_HQ\_Danish) and #2 (HR Manager\_HQ\_Danish) stress the semantic distinction between a *common* and a *corporate* language, the latter having a negative connotation. According to them, a *corporate* language would prescribe the use of English in an unconditional way, whereas a *common* language serves as a lingua franca in a contextual way, in that it is only used if needed. Thus, a *common* language does not replace but rather coexists with languages other than English (HQ and local languages). These functions and community norms are also reflected in DK\_2’s language policy statement, as discussed below.

### 5.3.1 A language policy statement and its understandings

Closely linked to and associated with the function of English as a common language is the initiative of a language policy. The company has formulated a language policy statement which describes DK\_2 as a “multilingual company” (p. 3), that is, English (as a common language) coexists with the HQ language Danish and local languages, as also claimed by Communication and HR representatives. The policy has been initiated and proposed in a bottom-up manner, that is, by mainly three of DK\_2’s departments, i.e. Communication, Human Resources (HR) and Research & Development (R&D), as the Divisional Director of Corporate Communication (Respondent #4\_HQ\_Danish) explains below:

That was...we in Communication and HR have talked about it [developing a language policy] for a long time but there’s also been a huge pressure from the organization, especially in research. They have actually had a team working on English in the research organization because it is very, it’s everyday, it’s an everyday issue in research because they are...it’s very important for them that they are able to hire these senior scientists. On the other hand, they know that if they can’t offer a truly English-speaking environment, they have to figure a way out of this. So some of the, you can say guiding principles is not

something that we have invented. That is something that they have come up with, looking into what is actually the feedback from the different teams, what is working?

This sheds light on how the idea of developing a language policy has been born and on the linked decision-making process. One might say it is grounded in everyday business practice and collaboration across departments (bottom-up) rather than imposed by corporate management in a top-down manner (“not something that we have invented”). The Research & Development Department seems to play a leading role in this language policy initiative partly because the occupational area R&D is more internationally oriented per se and more dominated by English than other areas because of its engagement in the international scientific community (see also Section 5.4.5 on external forces). Having English as a corporate language or becoming an “English-speaking environment” seems to be perceived as a competitive edge or advertisement for the company since it helps attract international experts such as senior scientists. (Yet, in the following, we will also learn that there are factors (e.g. participants’ ethnocentric attitudes including the respondent himself) that foster the choice of Danish and prevent the HQ environment from becoming “truly English-speaking”. Neither does the policy actually suggest that, as we will see.) The departments Communication and HR have taken the initiative further and formulated an actual language policy which was then going to be presented or proposed to the Corporate Management Group to approve the initiative.

#### *A draft of a language policy*

There are two different versions. In the first one, the language policy draft, English is defined as the company’s ‘common’ language whereas all other local languages are equally ‘respected’, making DK\_2 a multilingual, multicultural and global company. It stresses and confirms the context-sensitive choice of English since a local language can be chosen as long as this language choice does not exclude any of the conversation partners. At the same time, it is specified that English is expected to be chosen “whenever a local language is not shared by employees” and “whenever written information [...] is expected to, or likely to have, readers who do not share the local language”. It is also important or recommended to announce the language chosen for a

meeting such as English or the setting's language. In the appendix of the language policy draft, questions have been formulated as to the definition of English and other foreign language skills required for job functions, possible language training solutions for existing, newly hired and international staff (in-/expatriates or third-country nationals) and the company's semiotic appearance (e.g. departments' names, job titles). These questions are to be answered by the Corporate Management Group.

#### *A final version of the language policy*

The draft was then transformed into a final version, similar to the draft, and planned to be implemented in September 2011. It is a document consisting of 7 slides with information organized in the form of bullet points. The document attempts to guide language choices. Yet, its purpose defined is to “enhance the company's strategy and growth” (p. 2 of the language policy) (by attracting global talents, ensuring efficient communication and job satisfaction all over the world). Although it very much resembles the draft, several modifications have been made; there is a more detailed description of the circumstances (e.g. oral vs. written media) under which a certain choice is to be made. As the statement says on page 4: “On the rare occasions that a participant does not understand English, please consider translation.” This implies that the authors of the language policy presuppose that in most cases English can be chosen; that participants do not speak English is assumed to be the exception, which then requires some form of translation or interpretation. Moreover, specific documents (e.g. instructive texts) may be written in local languages. Corporate information distributed in English can be translated locally if needed, which is the local managements' responsibility and decision. The policy provides useful guidelines that merely confirm language choice norms rather than aim to actively change or regulate language behavior.

#### *Ideas about the choice of English for HRM and educational purposes*

In the policy statement, English proficiency (or at least the willingness to reach the competences required) is defined as a prerequisite for management positions (selective recruitment). Also, it is

recommended to include levels of reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills in job descriptions or advertisements. It is not specified whether or not this includes languages other than English, too. Top managers are supposed to assess middle managers' English skills and perhaps suggest training if they consider it necessary. On the last page (slide), training options for managers and employees are described such as private or group training, presentation courses in English and e-learning English classes.

This idea about assessing English proficiency is further elaborated on by Respondent #2 (HR Manager\_HQ\_Danish); the HR Department's plan is to create levels from 1 to 4, each specifying a degree of proficiency. This should also help indicate which level of English competence is necessary for a given position. The assessment of job applicants' fluency and an annual performance check for existing staff (in the framework of appraisal interviews) are suggested and e-learning facilities envisaged. The HR Manager (Respondent #2\_HQ\_Danish) is concerned that such an assessment strategy might be difficult to implement across the board including the top management level, since e.g. Danish senior staff might object to such an idea. Not only their negative attitudes but also their participant role within the MNC, and relative status and power that are attributed to seniority, could be a hindrance to introducing such an evaluation system. The Divisional Director of Corporate Communication (Respondent #4\_HQ\_Danish) has similar concerns and describes it as a 'taboo': "I think that has been to some extent a taboo regarding English at a manager level because if you are, for instance, a director as I am or in higher level, you are already at a level where you'll say: 'I know what I am doing'."

In conclusion, it could be said that having a language policy statement ("DK\_2 language policy") is a way of documenting, in a written format, the functions of certain languages within an MNC network, thereby making them explicit, and suggesting their choice in different situations. Yet, it seems to only recommend rather than prescribe certain language choices in different contexts. Besides, these guidelines are very similar to the community's language choice norms (e.g. unmarked nature of local languages), but a statement could make them more transparent to staff members. More specifically, it gives the subsidiaries autonomy in local language text production or translation of corporate information into local languages. This also means that English is not imposed in any way but serves more like an auxiliary language. However, the policy also intends to

change something, that is to improve staff's English proficiency. (Note, the policy does not touch upon external communication.)

#### *Different understandings of a language policy*

Respondents are not aware of the existence of a language policy statement, except for the Divisional Director of Corporate Communication (Respondent #4\_HQ\_Danish) and the HR Manager (Respondent #2\_HQ\_Danish), who were notably involved in the initiative. This is likely related to the fact that when data were collected there was only a draft of the language policy document. When asked about the existence of a language policy, respondents mostly talk about the adoption and function of English as a corporate language. By contrast, a staff member from the Strategic Marketing Department has a different understanding:

In terms of [DK\_2] there really is no language policy; I know we do everything in English but there is no written rule. [...] It's also our corporate language, unofficially, of course. So, we're communicating... I'm in the favorable position of having my first language as the corporate language. (Respondent #1\_Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English)

The respondent (#1) associates a language policy with a written document or statement ("written rule") (which did not exist at the time). He also mentions English having the function of a corporate language, yet stresses that English is only the unofficial corporate language. It seems an official adoption is negatively connotated but not further specified. This sheds light on a specific interpretation of a corporate language and its implicit or 'unofficial' nature while at the same time the choice of English in everyday business is considered a matter of fact ("we do everything in English"), confirming its unmarked use, as mentioned earlier. This also means that the notion of a corporate language is not associated with a form of language policy per se, neither with something positive.

At the Austrian subsidiary, a language policy is associated with English being the corporate language (Respondent #8\_Head of Department\_S/AT\_German). To the local Clinical Research Director (Respondent #10\_S/AT\_Dutch), having a language policy means that meetings are held in English and written communication such as email correspondence should be in English also.

This is partly also suggested by the actual policy statement. In this sense, the policy and its perceived meaning complement each other. These preliminary insights indicate that language choices are embedded in social context, yet do not grasp the rationales underlying language choices, which will be the focus of the remainder of this case study.

## **5.4 Language Choice at DK\_2 Informed by Social Context**

The following sections will detail how social context influences language choices, more specifically, the contextual dimensions that inform language choices at DK\_2. These include English, the HQ language (Danish) and local/customer languages (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3*).

### **5.4.1 Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices**

The first contextual dimension that informs language choices is of a social-linguistic nature. Generally speaking, language proficiency stands for participants' linguistic repertoires which include usually one first language (L1) and possibly foreign languages (FLs), i.e. L2, L3, L4, etc. More specifically, the notion of proficiency embodies both ends of the continuum; proficiency ranges from high to low (nonexistent) proficiency in languages. In this sense, varying language proficiency not only informs language choices but may also induce positive and negative associations with participants, thus language can represent both a resource and a barrier. Note, participants are to be understood in a broader sense, i.e. can represent the individual language speaker but also larger entities such as departments or organizational units (HQ, subsidiaries) that have different L1s (i.e. HQ versus local languages) and make different language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.1*).

#### **5.4.1.1 Proficiency informs the choice of English**

Participants' language proficiency informs the choice of English in different communicative situations where a common language is needed. As mentioned above, organizational units

(headquarters and national subsidiaries) speak different first languages which is why they choose English as a lingua franca for interunit communication purposes. This includes both written and oral media (e.g. email correspondence, most of the intranet, corporate documentation, TV news program, speeches or presentations, meetings, conference calls or conferences, etc.).

When looking at specific departments, we learn that the Strategic Marketing Department, for instance, is in charge of developing a global strategy for the subsidiaries, produces educational and promotional material, and helps design and review clinical trials. HQ representatives also visit subsidiaries to align their strategies. English is chosen for most of the tasks, in particular in internal communication. Respondent #1 (Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English) says: “All e-mails are English, all materials that we produce, all promotional materials are also in English.” (Promotional material is distributed to subsidiaries that are in charge of translating it into customer languages, which we will learn more about later.) The department also organizes international symposia for their products, involving externals, where English and major (customer) languages may be involved:

We do international symposia as well, we produce all slides and materials in English. There are occasions where we produce materials in the major languages such as Spanish, German, French. That's becoming more common, so that we can serve these larger countries, but again predominantly English. (Respondent #1\_Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English)

The choice of English is also associated with some problems:

When we are producing materials or even communicating in a meeting, communication may not be as effective as it could be 'cos everyone is not at the same level, both in written and verbal communication. That is a slight barrier sometimes. [...] they hold back because they are shy communicating in English or their level isn't high enough to express themselves eloquently. (Respondent #1\_Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English)

The respondent (#1) has noticed variation in English fluency in both written and oral media which he perceives as a language barrier. He assumes it is a combination of nonnative speakers' limited ability of expression and shyness as to communicating in a foreign language (FL).



Furthermore, he mentions one of his Danish colleagues who struggles with working in an FL, as he details below:

I have a friend here whose English is not so good and I'd like to say to her: 'Why don't you take an English class?' but I wouldn't wanna offend them for that, so it ha[s] to be done in a special way and it's not a bad thing that her English is not...[...] I see that she frustrated, I know that she is extremely clever but when she wants to express herself in a meeting for example, she can't to the extent that I know. When we're talking face-to-face I know what she is talking. If only she had a better grasp then she could be so much more...but I'm too afraid to suggest it. (Respondent #1\_Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English)

In this example lower English proficiency is described as a hindrance to individual performance in group settings. Furthermore, although English proficiency is evaluated as "not so good" by the English-speaking respondent (#1), the problem remains unaddressed since he does not want to embarrass his colleague, i.e. threaten her face. In other words, a language problem is identified but not addressed due to matters of politeness (face-saving act). Similarly, respondent #12 (Regulatory Affairs & Drug Safety Specialist\_S/AT\_Persian/Austrian) chooses English for subsidiary-HQ interaction and has observed limited English proficiency with some of her Danish colleagues. She imagines having Danish skills would facilitate the collaboration.

At HQ, we also learn that English shortcomings can also be experienced at the management level as in oral encounters like meetings or workshops: "And what we have heard from some is, even if you have managers meetings and you have to do some workshops and you have to present the results in English, some prefer not to stand up because they don't think that their English is as good as being able to stand up", reports respondent #4 (Divisional Director of Corporate Communication\_HQ\_Danish).

It could be concluded that English is commonly chosen in interactions uniting different participants with different first languages or varying language proficiency. English represents a pragmatic choice if a shared language is needed as in interunit communication, but is also associated with some problems. These perceived problems relate to counterparts' (NNSs') limited English skills, difficulties of expression and shyness as to working in an FL, and include the management level, too.

#### 5.4.1.2 Proficiency informs the choice of local/customer languages

Related to the above, we learn that various staff members also choose several languages other than English (local/customer languages) owing to lower or nonexistent English skills of their addressees. For instance, the Dutch Clinical Research Director (Respondent #10\_S/AT) chooses German as a lingua franca with her Slovak interactants since they prefer German to English. A Czech employee with “not perfect but fairly adequate Polish” skills chooses Polish for training in Poland and better train and teach Polish colleagues in their L1, as the respondent (#10) explains. The Estonian Regional Vice President (Respondent #5\_HQ) chooses Russian at the regional level with colleagues from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, who are not so fluent in English, if at all. The Persian/Austrian Regulatory Affairs & Drug Safety Specialist (Respondent #12\_S/AT) chooses Spanish or Italian with her colleagues from Spain and Italy. On the one hand, her counterparts’ proficiency, i.e. poorer English skills, inform accommodation or linguistic adaptation. On the other hand, she also enjoys speaking FLs, which adds intrinsic motivation to the rationale behind her choices.

The English-speaking Group Medical Manager (Respondent #1\_HQ) occasionally chooses Spanish (customer language) if his external counterparts do not master English, as at the social event described below:

I did it recently at a dinner. I happened to be sitting at a table with some doctors from Peru and their English was almost nonexistent, so I had no choice. Perhaps the couple of glasses of wine helped but it came back. (Respondent #1\_Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English)

The respondent (#1) does not accommodate the conversation partners for social-relational matters, rather for reasons of proficiency, that is recipients master English poorly or not at all. On a peripheral note, as a result of acquisition planning at the macro level affecting national education systems, also people with a tertiary education such as doctors (customer group of DK\_2) may not speak English in certain countries, as the quotation also illustrates.

#### **5.4.1.3 Proficiency informs the choice of the HQ language (involving translation)**

At HQ, we learn that participants' language proficiency informs the choice of English or Danish at meetings, as illustrated by the quotation below:

In practice, for example, our meetings, they are all conducted in English, unless everybody is Danish, and as a foreigner, who understands Danish. So in rare cases...these are performed in Danish. (Respondent #1\_Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English)

Within the HQ environment, the choice of a meeting language is contextually bound, i.e. depends on the attendees involved and their respective linguistic repertoires and language proficiency; this means that mostly English but also Danish can be chosen as a common or shared language that participants master to varying degrees, i.e. as L1, L2 or FL. In this scenario, the internationals and nonnative speakers accommodate the Danish speakers.

Danish is also chosen for written media such as press releases. Or, the intranet, although meanwhile almost fully in English (90 %), still contains some sites in Danish which are predominantly used by Danes. This could also include translation from English into Danish; for instance, shorter messages from the Corporate Management Group, the employee handbook or user manuals as used at the R&D Department are text genres that are translated in house if the receivers do not understand English. In this sense, participants' language proficiency informs the choice of Danish for both oral and written media, sometimes involving nonprofessional translation.

#### **5.4.1.4 Proficiency informs the choices of English and local languages (involving translation)**

Although HQ chooses English to communicate with its subsidiaries, it turns out that local languages play a crucial role lower down the hierarchy. Any corporate message or document coming from HQ in English needs to be translated into the local language if it needs to reach every local staff member who might speak poor English or the local language only. Though, the translation task is passed on to the local affiliates, i.e. carried out locally and not centrally. In this context, respondent #2 (HR Manager\_HQ\_Danish) also stresses the significant role of host-

country managers who are mediators between HQ and their local staff in that they need to filter out the relevant information.

This process can also be reversed; subsidiaries choose local languages in the first place, in alignment with speech community norms, and HQ has to translate the information into English. According to respondent #5 (Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian), board meeting material, financial documents (e.g. local annual account balance), corporate releases, any local version that needs to be signed by his superior, i.e. the Corporate Management Group, are translated by a certified translator into English or at least at a reasonable level and cross-checked with the Legal Department in order to make sure every party is 'on the same page' and knowledge is effectively shared if it comes to important information.

At the Austrian subsidiary, we gain similar insights into the choice of the local language in an unmarked fashion. For instance, the local Medical Manager and Head of Department (Respondent #9\_S/AT\_German) gets a question from the local Sales Representative in German he cannot answer, so he has to translate it into English in order to check with HQ. The latter provides an answer to the problem in English which the respondent (#9) translates back into German for the sales person. In this sense, the subsidiary has an important mediating function.

These communicative scenarios exemplify that HQ does not speak all the local languages but still needs to supervise or advise the subsidiaries and follow their local communication processes. At the same time, not all subsidiaries speak the HQ language or English. More specifically, despite English being the common or corporate language, local documentation is not produced in English in the first place but in the local language (unmarked language). Then the information does need to be translated into e.g. English, so the knowledge can be shared with or approved by HQ.

#### **5.4.1.5 Proficiency informs the choices of English and local languages (involving interpretation)**

Participants' language proficiency, more precisely limited English skills, informs the choice of English and interpretation into local languages at internal sales meetings where presentations on

corporate strategies and goals are held in English by HQ representatives and interpreted by local nonprofessionals.

When me or our CEO or whoever from this house [HQ] presents what people want to know, where the company is heading or what we are doing or what we are thinking, then in most of the cases it is translated into local...but a local person not [an] official translator but one of the managers does the translation. (Respondent #5\_Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian)

The respondent (#5) also says that interpretation into local languages might occur “all over the place”, that is in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Russia, Spain, Turkey or the Ukraine. Furthermore, he remembers interpretation in Russia in the start-up process or at bigger conferences: “But when we started up in Russia, then, those days my boss or my peers or our president, they didn’t speak Russian obviously. And then we had a, in signing the contracts or in bigger conferences we have used translators.” This example is more of an interactive encounter (than a presentation held in front of a local audience), which requires not only interpretation from English into the local language but also back into English to ensure mutual understanding among interactants.

#### **5.4.1.6 Proficiency informs code-mixing**

As mentioned earlier, at the Austrian subsidiary the unmarked language chosen is German which assumes the function of the local language. Although also international staff generally tries to adhere to the local language German in the office, the phenomenon of code-mixing can occur; if they do not know the German word, they borrow the English equivalent instead. This choice is triggered by the users’ lower German (L3) than English (L2) proficiency.

#### **5.4.1.7 Proficiency informs passive multilingualism**

Passive multilingualism is mentioned as a possible language choice in the context of employing a third-country national for the Communication Department at HQ.

[...] she can read Danish and maybe participate in small conversations and understand what others are saying in Danish. Maybe sometimes she will speak English and they will be answering in Danish. That's okay for us. (Respondent #4\_Divisional Director of Corporate Communication\_HQ\_Danish)

Although we will learn later that the French speaker and future new employee is advised to learn Danish in the long run to be socially integrated at HQ, she may in the beginning choose English as an L2 while HQ staff may choose Danish (L1) to communicate with each other.

In another context, a multilingual employee (Respondent #12\_Regulatory Affairs & Drug Safety Specialist\_S/AT\_Farsi/German) who speaks Italian sometimes receives emails written in Italian which she understands but usually responds to in English. Similarly, the Regional Vice President (Respondent #5\_HQ\_Estonian) receives emails from Russia written in Cyrillic which he returns in English. In these examples, the participants choosing English use it as a foreign language whereas their counterparts use their first languages.

Passive multilingualism can also be symmetrical in that both parties can use their L1s as in the case of Danish and Swedish which are mutually intelligible languages. The Danish HR Manager (Respondent #2\_HQ) communicates in Danish with her Swedish colleagues who use Swedish in return. Respondent #5 (Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian) describes the same language choice phenomenon: "While our, how to say, Scandinavian colleagues, or if you take the, our Swedish Managing Director speaks Swedish to [the] Norwegian guy and [the] Norwegian guy speaks Norwegian to the Swedish guy because they understand that." Scandinavians might speak their own languages and still be able to understand each other based on the mutual intelligibility of their L1s.

Similarly, Respondent #7 (Regional Regulatory Affairs Manager\_S/AT) is a native speaker of Croatian who chooses her L1 in a passively multilingual way with colleagues or partners from Bosnia, Serbia and Slovenia who also include her in decision-making processes and ask her for advice. They might forward email correspondence in the local languages or a draft of a statement where she could make comments and corrections and they would not need to translate it into English first.

Passive multilingualism seems to be a common choice at DK\_2 that is informed by the varying proficiency of interacting participants; it involves Danish, Italian or Russian as L1s combined with English as an L2 or FL, as well as Scandinavian languages (L1s), or Croatian (L1) in connection with other Slavic L1s which is also perceived as time- and cost-efficient.

#### **5.4.2 Social-relational dimension: participants' role relationships and politeness strategies inform language choices**

Within the employment domain, participants assume various roles such as buyers or customers and sellers, which gives them inherent relationships expressing relative power or status and social closeness/distance. These also define which language choices are appropriate (polite). Role relationships aligned with politeness principles, partly combined with attitudes inform different language choices (involving translation and language training) (see also *Chapter 2, Sections 2.3.3.2-2.3.3.4*). Although the company does not have a language or translation department, and translation is mostly decentralized, as we have already learned earlier, it is carefully administered and structured horizontally when it comes to R&D, as will be detailed below.

##### **5.4.2.1 Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice of (translation into) customer languages (translation quality imposed by external forces)**

The buyer-seller relationship and linked politeness strategies inform the choice of customer languages. More specifically, we learn at HQ that within the functional area of sales, customer languages are chosen for external, local market interaction:

We call it 'sales representative', that is the person who has the primary contact with the medical community, promoting our products. [...] But definitely, it's a handicap when our Croatian person doesn't speak Croatian on the market. [...] Locally, if you don't speak [the] local language, then you cannot really work in pharma business. (Respondent #5\_Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian)

In this vein, the local units have a lot of responsibility but also independency when it comes to external communication including promotional material (e.g. brochures) or the local website, for instance. The subsidiaries can independently decide what kind of information is needed and then translate it accordingly. Also advertising and marketing campaigns acquire a relatively local twist, which means a subsidiary can act rather autonomously (e.g. translate advertising slogans from English into German in a localized manner, i.e. fitting cultural needs, so that it is meaningful in the target culture, as explained by a local Marketing Manager (Respondent #8\_S/AT\_German):

For instance, the international campaign has an English slogan which we, of course, cannot use here [in Austria]. [...] Then you collaborate with an advertising agency and work out a slogan in German that conveys the idea or meaning of the English version but makes sense to the Austrian doctor [*my translation*].

To the respondent (#8), it seems obvious that an English version cannot be used for advertising and marketing purposes in the local Austrian context where German is the customer language. Although not explicitly expressed, this implies that promotional text genres need to be translated because they are targeted to end consumers who need to be addressed in their L1 rather than in English. Similarly, other text genres, such as training or information material for doctors (e.g. studies published in medical journals) and documents concerning the patient (e.g. patient information leaflets, patient consent forms when they participate in a study) are translated in house from English into e.g. German or summarized in German for the Austrian environment or medical community.

As we learn from the Austrian subsidiary, translation is very structured and regulated when it comes to clinical trials across borders, where scales measure the efficacy of drugs or the progress in mental illnesses with patients. These studies are grouped horizontally according to medical areas, which means each subsidiary is responsible for one disease and the translation into all customer languages. The translation process is often administered by the local study management, more precisely its clinical research associate who is familiar with the local regulations and sometimes also involved in extensive research on terminology considering the specific pharmaceutical and medical registers DK\_2 deals with. The clinical trials could include self-rating questionnaires for patients or clinician-rated scales where the doctor asks the patient questions. In either case, the



translation of the documents involves both language and medical experts. First, the source text (e.g. English) is outsourced to a translation agency and translated by two translators into the same target language (e.g. Polish). The two translations are 'merged' by a key translator into a final target text, which forms the basis for back-translation into the source language again (English). The back-translation (English) is looked at internally by a nonprofessional employee (Respondent #11\_Scales Manager\_S/AT\_German) and cross-checked with the original source document (English) to avoid the slightest inconsistencies and increase the quality and equivalence of the translation. The final target text (Polish) is proofread locally by a clinical employee familiar with the medical register and terminology. The respondent's (#11) experience is that professional freelancers sometimes lack the medical background knowledge, which makes the clinical review by an expert in house really important. There are also translation agencies specialized in this area that administer and offer the whole translation process including the clinical revision. In this vein, respondent #10 (Clinical Research Director\_S/AT\_Dutch) adds that external forces such as authorities also impose some sort of quality control to ensure translation consistency:

It [the translation] is a whole business. There are people, whole companies doing this. But it's quite complex because it's all about measurements where we measure the efficacy of our drugs. So it has to be a solid tool. And also authorities want to see this tool validated and used correctly otherwise our data is not worth anything.

In sum, clinical trials or studies address different groups of patients who are DK\_2 customers and need to be addressed in their L1s related to the buyer-seller relationship and linked politeness principles in business interaction. Furthermore, clinical trials and this kind of pharmaceutical research require high-quality and consistent translations into multiple customer languages and cultural adaptations to the target groups. Translation accuracy is of utmost importance to investigate drug effects across nations (language communities), and yet obtain valid results. From this specific example we not only learn that customers are accommodated but more interestingly that sometimes customer groups (e.g. patients) become research subjects and are involved in the occupational area R&D (e.g. efficacy of drugs, progress in mental illness) where success and validity of results also depend on the quality of the translation. In other words, within sub-areas of R&D it is crucial that translations are done properly, that is based on collaboration between

professional translators and pharmaceutical or clinical experts, which is also enforced by authorities.

Overall, based on their participant role within the employment domain, more specifically, the asymmetrical buyer-seller relationship, and related politeness principles suggest that the seller needs to accommodate the buyer or customer, as in this case the local medical communities including e.g. doctors or patients. The choice of their respective L1 (customer language) may include translation activities of both nonprofessional and professional natures (e.g. clinical trials).

#### **5.4.2.2 Buyer-seller relationship and polycentric attitude inform the choice of customer language for educational purposes (language training)**

Aligned with the above, the buyer-seller relationship informs the choice of customer languages as in local hospitals in the first place which combined with a polycentric attitude can also inform the choice of a customer language for educational purposes, i.e. language training. Respondent #10 (Clinical Research Director\_Dutch) located in Austria plans to initiate some language training:

Actually I am starting quite a new thing actually, also that I am encouraging some of my people to fresh-up their Russian. [Me: "Their Russian?"] Yes, my Polish employee, she actually had seven years Russian, it was a requirement and I ask to, actually next year, to brush up her Russian. Because when we do local visits also to hospitals we have to speak the local language, of course. And she speaks of course Polish, English and a little bit German but it would be of great advantage if she also could be fluent in Russian again because then she also could work in Russia and Ukraine where they speak Russian. So actually I am encouraging her to, next year, to take that language skills and brush them up.

This is another example of a localized language choice where we learn about the decision maker's reasoning; first, the target groups addressed are local hospitals with doctors and patients, comparable to customers, who need to be accommodated, as she explains ("we have to speak the local language"). Second, the executive (#10) believes that competences in local or customer languages are beneficial for the company and the individual employee's career opportunities. So she has a positive attitude towards these languages in that she associates a utilitarian value with them. This example not only shows how language choices are made locally (informed by the

buyer-seller relationship) but also how these local or regional circumstances together with an executive's attitudes can lead to localized customer language training, i.e. Russian classes, for some of her employees. Also, we learn that language choices for educational purposes differ between HQ – that focuses on English classes – and subsidiaries where choices seem to be shaped by the individual manager with executive power.

### **5.4.3 Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages inform language choices**

Participants have different attitudes to languages in that they assign positive and negative values or attributes to languages. We learn about positive attitudes to the HQ language (ethnocentrism), to English (geocentrism) and to local languages (polycentrism). These multiple attitudes vary across participants, i.e. do not form a consensual ideology, and even have the power to impose languages (internal forces). So, the different attitudes to languages inform different language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.4*).

#### **5.4.3.1 Ethnocentric attitude informs (imposes) the choice of Danish (including language acquisition) (internal forces)**

Participants' ethnocentric attitudes foster the choice of Danish within the HQ environment. These also put pressure on international staff to eventually choose, i.e. acquire and employ, Danish at the headquarters, which can also be classified as internal forces. Thoughts along those lines are expressed by a representative of the HR Department:

[T]here is also the whole, the social part of the aspect. And one thing is that are we in Denmark and having to learn Danish to be part of the social setting here. (Respondent #2\_HR Manager\_HQ\_Danish).

The respondent's (#2) ethnocentric attitude suggests the choice of Danish for educational purposes; international staff members have to acquire Danish in order to be socially integrated in

the home-country setting. This becomes even more explicit in the specific example of recruiting a third-country national for the Corporate Communication Department:

So, we are not saying to XY [...] 'English is our corporate language. You don't have to learn Danish.' No, we say: 'It's very important that you are continuing with your Danish lessons. Because, of course we can have meetings in English, so professional meetings would be in English but you should expect that some of the colleagues will talk about what they did in the weekend in Danish. [...]' On the other hand, we should of course all others make an effort and not excluding her. And that's the balance, I think. (Respondent #4\_Divisional Director of Corporate Communication\_HQ\_Danish)

The respondent's (#4) rationalizations reflect an ethnocentric attitude that informs the choice of Danish for social matters among Danish speakers that might be less willing to discuss them in English. This also shows that the topic can influence language choices within the employment domain; English is chosen for professional matters while for social topics Danish is chosen more likely. Furthermore, the ethnocentric attitude includes the encouragement of further language training. In the long run the international staff is expected to choose Danish at HQ (internal forces).

Respondents #2 and #4 both touch upon Danish acquisition which gets more elaborated on by the non-Danish respondents. More specifically, it could be said that the ethnocentric attitude also informs the choice of Danish for educational purposes in the form of optional language acquisition offered to international staff members at HQ. Usually these are intensive, on-site private lessons (up to 40 hours) taking place during working hours, as reported by three third-country nationals (Australian, Estonian and German) working in Denmark. Depending on their working area and position, they use the HQ language to varying degrees. The German scientist (Respondent #3\_Head of Department\_HQ) has been living and working in Denmark for many years and chooses Danish as an L3 on a daily basis. By contrast, the English-speaking respondent is more reluctant and chooses mostly English. Also, he does not endorse the ethnocentric attitude that informs Danish training:

I think they should be a bit more proactive when it comes to English language. They are very proactive for teaching Danish but less so when it comes to English. (Respondent #1\_Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English)

Interestingly, the respondent's (#1) more negative attitude to Danish acquisition seems to go hand in hand with a more positive attitude to English (training) (geocentric attitude).

Ethnocentrism in more general terms is similarly criticized at the local level in Austria, where DK\_2 is referred to as a 'Danish' rather than 'international' company.

So, I am fairly often in Copenhagen [...] it's more like [a] Danish company than anything else. But of course with all these subsidiaries it is getting more and more international. It's just that this internationality, if I may say so, is not so much represented in the headquarters.

In summary, it could be argued that the ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of Danish; Danes may choose Danish for discussing social topics, HQ chooses Danish for educational purposes in offering Danish classes to foreign staff. Both puts pressure on internationals to in the long run choose Danish at HQ to be fully integrated into the social setting. These ethnocentric attitudes informing the choice of Danish are also internal forces.

#### **5.4.3.2 CEOs' ethnocentric and geocentric attitudes inform(ed) the choices of Danish and English (internal forces)**

CEOs of different nationalities are associated with different attitudes that are believed to influence their language choices in different ways, as we will learn below.

I would say, if it was the old CEO, he would have said: 'Here in Denmark we speak Danish.' But I think that has changed. [...] Today we have an, for the last 18 months, we have a [non-Danish] CEO [...] who worked most of his life in UK, U.S. and other places. So for him that, using English as the common language and the preferred language is natural. [...] I would say the CEOs before him w[ere] more Danish. So they were not ready to take the step to be truly global in the mindset. So it was more a Danish company with international activities. Now, I think we are going to see a transformation to be a more global company both in mindsets, in practices and the language will have an impact. (Respondent #4 Divisional Director of Corporate Communication\_HQ\_Danish)

From the respondent's (#4) perspective, the former Danish CEOs have had more of a Danish mindset (ethnocentric attitude) which would imply the choice of Danish ('speaking Danish in

Denmark') whereas the current CEO, who is non-Danish, is perceived as having a "truly global" mindset which implies a positive attitude to English (geocentric attitude) that favors the choice of English as a common or even preferred language, also making it an unmarked language (the choice of English being a "natural" choice). In this specific example, the respondent (#4) evaluates ethnocentrism negatively with regard to global business activities ("they were not ready to take the step to be truly global") while he endorses the current CEO's geocentric attitude and the choice of English representing a more positive development ("global company both in mindsets, in practices and the language will have an impact"). (On a peripheral note, the respondent (#4) also adopts an ethnocentric attitude that suggests international staff located at HQ has to learn Danish, as discussed earlier.)

Similarly, respondent #1 (Group Medical Marketing Manager\_HQ\_English) distinguishes between the former and current CEOs in the following way: "Even the CEO, when he gives a speech to the whole company, it's in English as well. This has changed since first July three years ago [2006], there was still a lot more focus on the Danish language and the CEO still spoke in Danish to everybody regardless of...". The respondent (#1) even mentions the exact date of shift in attitudes or focus and language choices. He also says that the former CEO apparently chose Danish with everybody, possibly not proficient in Danish. It sounds as if the CEO basically imposed Danish on his staff.

Another observation is the diverse reception of the current CEO's geocentric attitude among participants. Similar to respondents #4 and #1, certain departments and functional work areas such as R&D welcome and share this attitude in order to attract international experts, as already mentioned in the beginning. By contrast, Human Resources are more critical since the choice also excludes staff that lacks English proficiency, as the HR Manager (Respondent #2\_Danish) at HQ argues:

I think we need to consider [...] how we make sure that we do not disconnect the employees that do not, at this moment in time, understand English. We should be aware of the corporate information that is sent out and communicated via our CEO. So we need to be aware of that as a challenge. [...] But when he does that in English he also excludes some people that don't speak English. And so, we are looking into 'how can we actually have, how can we have this common language in English if not everyone speaks the common language?'

As opposed to some other respondents, the respondent (#2) does not perceive the current CEO's focus on English and the notion of a supposedly common language as a necessarily positive development. It is rather seen as a challenge simply because not all staff members master English, hence are excluded from this corporate information exchange. Her reservations also point toward her more negative attitude to English. Similar to the imposition of Danish by the former CEO in the previous example, the current CEO somewhat imposes English on his staff.

Overall, we learn that a single executive such as the CEO has the status, power and freedom to choose any language s/he wants – informed and associated with certain attitudes – and can thereby impose a language on their staff. This kind of language imposition could be categorized as internal forces. Attitudes to languages may differ across executives, can therefore change with the recruitment of a new CEO from one day to another. Staff members may or may not share these attitudes, thus respond to the language choice behaviors and internal forces controversially. These insights also indicate that attitudes are multiple and do not necessarily represent a common ideology within the MNC.

#### **5.4.3.3 Geocentric attitude informs the choice of English (divergence) combined with ethnocentrism**

A geocentric attitude informs the choice of English for written documents such as the company magazine to be shared within the MNC. This is manifested by the following insights gained from the Divisional Director of Corporate Communication (Respondent #4\_HQ\_Danish):

You can say we've excluded the rest of the world with our magazine for ten years because it would all be in English and Danish. You know, the people in Latin America, they have said: 'We have difficulties. Some of our representatives, they don't understand English. It's a fantastic magazine, they're really seeing its nice pictures and they can see they are part of a huge company.' But if you really want them to understand the content, it has to be in Spanish. So if we should say, if we should go the way saying we are a multicultural company or multilingual company which would then say that we respect all languages. Then we should translate everything to every language. We should. But we don't think that that would be the most effective way and furthermore it will not help us being a global international company.

It has to be added that this account was part of the question about the function of English as a common language. The respondent (#4) expresses a positive attitude to English and its function as a common language within the company (“most effective way”, “global international company”) that justifies the choice of English for interunit communication purposes. Strictly speaking, we are dealing with the phenomenon of divergence rather than standardization (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.2*) since it is known that some receivers or certain local language speakers do not understand English, ergo are knowingly excluded from the information. Hence, standardization becomes counter-productive. One can also find traces of an ethnocentric attitude that interferes with the geocentric attitude and creates a double standard; on the one hand, HQ chooses English (standardization) for sharing the company magazine with the subsidiaries, on the other hand, HQ does not choose English for Danish staff, but produces or translates the magazine in Danish (accommodation). Finally, the more positive attitudes to English and Danish than to local languages (e.g. Spanish) also create a certain language hierarchy that prioritizes English and Danish, and favors accommodation of those language speakers.

#### **5.4.3.4 Geocentric attitude informs the choice of English for educational purposes (language training and acquisition)**

A positive attitude to the English language can lead to offering universal English training (choice of English for educational purposes) across all levels of employment, also or especially to operative staff, as the quotation below exemplifies:

Actually that depends on your, on your job and whether it is deemed necessary. But it's also so that we actually have a Training and Education Department that can set up English courses for groups of, especially blue-collared employees and actually receive some compensation from the government as well, due to the fact that this is something, this is further education of employees [...] as it makes sense. So it can be done for employees locally also. It's something that we do set up but there need[s] to be an interest and there need to be employees that select to go and so many have in Denmark in the past. (Respondent #2\_HR Manager\_HQ\_Danish)

DK\_2 offers optional English classes to staff that has an interest in improving their English proficiency, which is also supported by the Danish government. It could be argued that this



language choice for educational purposes is the result of a geocentric attitude not only at the corporate (DK\_2) but also national level (Danish government). One might say that English proficiency with blue-collar workers is considered an asset or evaluated in a positive way but has de facto no immediate utilitarian or economic value for the company because blue-collar workers scarcely, if at all, need or use English for carrying out their daily jobs, as the respondent (#2) also details: “We have blue collar workers that definitely, for whom English plays no role or very little role. It might play a role in them actually accessing SAP, the, a system, but other than that their work is very Danish.” Furthermore, she contrasts them to expatriates who might need or want to learn a foreign, local language which they can use in the host country:

Another part is, English language that we offer in our factory, for the employees that are not expected to go anywhere and who [are] just working in the factory everyday and for whom it might just be quite nice to improve their English language skills.

Enhancing English proficiency at the factory-floor level is perceived more of a ‘nice-to-have’ than actually needed, as opposed to expatriates to be. It also implies that the staff members’ individual rationales may include intrinsic motivation such as the pleasure, interest and satisfaction associated with foreign language acquisition.

Overall, these insights show that HQ’s positive attitude to English (geocentrism) informs language training and acquisition offered to operative staff (choice of English for educational purposes). The geocentric attitude does not seem to be limited to DK\_2 but also present within Danish society – at the national level – which becomes apparent through the government’s financial support of English training across all levels of employment.

#### **5.4.3.5 Varying attitudes inform language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation) (double standard)**

An ethnocentric attitude not only imposes Danish (learning) on international staff, as mentioned earlier, but also influences HRM in that Danish skills become a hiring criterion, as the example with the recruitment of the third-country national for an HQ position has illustrated. This does not seem to apply to international scientists, also mentioned before; one of the reasons for

initiating a language policy and choosing English as a corporate language was to appear 'international' or 'global' and 'English-speaking' and thus become attractive to senior scientists. In this sense, ethnocentric and geocentric attitudes are in conflict with each other, i.e. inform different language choices for HQ positions and thereby set different criteria for recruitment or create a double standard within the HQ environment.

Similarly, participants' geocentric attitudes inform the choice of English regarding selective recruitment, as respondent #5 (Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian) explains:

But we don't standardize that, so it's not that you have to pass certain grade or test in language in order to get the job or to have job, to keep the job. [...] However, when we employ either Managing Directors or Product Managers or Sales, or let's say mid level managers, then this is in the advertisement that written and spoken English has to be on a decent level.

From an HQ perspective, the respondent (#5) argues that "decent" English skills are required for the mid-management level upwards. The hesitation as to which organizational levels or jobs require English skills indicate that there is little structure or guidelines. There is no formal assessment of the candidate's English proficiency or any test s/he has to pass in order to be hired. Neither is English proficiency a reason to fire a person ("to keep the job"). In this sense, English proficiency is considered somewhat necessary, though it is not very transparent in which way. One might assume that the choice of English for different positions is made on the basis of the hiring team's more or less geocentric attitude. This is confirmed by the fact that the language policy is less explicit and only states that managers need to be willing to reach the English level necessary (see *Section 5.3.1*).

As to staff relocation, we learn about different attitudes that evaluate different languages needed for expatriate positions. For instance, a participant with a polycentric attitude not only considers local language proficiency important but also suggests local language acquisition for future expatriates (choice of the local language for educational purposes), as can be learned from the account below:

So when we send an employee to Italy for two years to work on a certain project, part of this expatriation package is, is, is Italian classes and the same...Yeah, and I think it's also

necessary. So it's, it's a, I think it's definitely a must. It's also something that we expect that they do. You cannot succeed and you shouldn't... [...] but Italian to a person that's going to be in Italy for two years. That is probably more of a...and we wouldn't probably actually send someone that wasn't interested in learning about the language and actually getting integrated into, to the local culture. So that is obviously part of moving away and taking your family with you and staying two years in another country. I think one of the things you get with you back home is that you can speak another language. (Respondent #2\_HR Manager\_HQ\_Danish)

The respondent (#2) is convinced of the need of local language proficiency for long-term assignments in host countries. Expatriates are expected to learn the local language to be successful and integrated into the host culture. Yet, it seems to be a mutual agreement between HR and the expatriate to be and their willingness to learn the local language. She also reports that it is less important for short-term stays. Classes may take place in advance before going abroad or be organized locally in the host country. This is not formalized but decided on contextual grounds. This attitude is not necessarily shared by other executives; respondent #5 (Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian) says: "When it's like expatriates, there are a lot of people who don't speak the local language. And you can be a successful manager in Russia without speaking Russian because the rest of the management group who deals with the local issues, they speak the local language." In this sense, polycentric attitudes interfere with more geocentric attitudes and can shape language choices for HRM purposes in that the local language or English might be considered needed or enough for expatriate positions.

#### **5.4.4 Social-psychological dimension: participants' intrinsic motivation informs the choice of local languages**

There are participants who are personally motivated to choose their interactants' first language in conversational encounters (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.5*). More specifically, an intrinsic motivation informs the choice of a local language, as we learn from respondent #7 (Regional Regulatory Affairs Manager\_S/AT\_Croatian) who says: "If I deal with Italian colleagues or meet to attend a meeting, then we will both use English, maybe in the breaks, for fun, we'd speak Italian." She chooses Italian in one-on-one interaction with colleagues because she enjoys it ("for

fun”) which reflects an intrinsic motivation. One might also argue that it shows how topics inform language choices; English is chosen for professional topics as in meetings whereas the local language Italian for social matters in meeting breaks.

As already mentioned earlier, respondent #12 (Regulatory Affairs & Drug Safety Specialist\_S/AT\_Persian/German) chooses Spanish or Italian with her colleagues who have limited English skills, which she also enjoys. Thus, the language accommodation is not only informed by participants’ proficiency but also by intrinsic motivation.

#### **5.4.5 Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages**

The last contextual dimension informing language choices is social forces external to the MNC community that also have some kind of imposing power; that is they define some of the company’s language choices or rather impose certain languages on DK\_2. This also makes this dimension unique and distinct from the previous dimensions in that it is not the MNC’s participants any longer that choose languages but external forces of different kinds which will be elaborated below (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.6*).

##### **5.4.5.1 International scientific community enforces the choice of English within Research & Development**

External forces of various natures impose the English language in one way or another in DK\_2. Since the MNC works in the pharmaceutical industry, it also conducts research in this area and is therefore engaged in the international scientific community outside the speech community. As such, the company in general and its R&D departments in particular have to deal with research-based knowledge that is available in the international pharmaceutical market. In this regard, it is stressed (both at HQ and locally) that the literature and research relevant to the company are published mostly in English; “but the issue is that there is a lot, I think the whole medical literature or scientific papers, they are in English now. Or, if we take top, I don’t know, five or ten medical journals, they are all in English and so it’s useful”, says respondent #5 (Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian). Consequently, English dominates this occupational area and also the

daily work (processes) of the headquarters' R&D Department, for instance. Also, the R&D's work or research used to be mostly in Danish but has gradually shifted toward English documentation in order to reach out and engage in the scientific discourse worldwide. Furthermore, the English used not only belongs to an academic or scientific but also pharmaceutical and medical register. The external forces are in this case manifested by the function of English as an international language of academia and science which impose English on the MNC's internal occupational area of research and development.

#### **5.4.5.2 Supranational institutions and legal regulations enforce language choices**

Supranational institutions and legal regulations enforce the choice of English. For instance, the interaction with specific organizations such as the European Medicines Agency (EMA) is in English by default. The EMA is an EU agency which is responsible for the evaluation of medical products and located in London, UK. Apart from institutions, there are also supranational legal regulations such as EU laws and guidelines within the pharmaceutical industry that are in English and have to be dealt with. These external forces somewhat impose English on DK\_2.

Supranational legal regulations also enforce the choice of customer languages by requesting certain text genres to be translated into customer languages; the Regional Regulatory Affairs Manager located in Austria (Respondent #7\_Croatian) explains that standard patient information sheets or drugs' package inserts have to be translated. Package inserts usually involve around 25 language versions if a marketing license for a drug has been approved for the whole EU. This text genre is standardized by the authorities and thus repetitive in nature, which facilitates the translation task and favors in-house translation. Though, translation may also be outsourced if it is too much text (60-70 pages), time is short (max. 7 days) or not enough staff is available. The target text version is cross-checked in house by a medical person. Sometimes interlingual consistency is checked and adaptations are made, if necessary. Then the whole dossier is sent to the European Authority that does another language check of all the language versions. Sometimes the revision process involves NNSs of the languages who change single words, which leads to severe inconsistencies, explains the respondent (#7). Quality requirements seem to be fluid, although the translation targets end consumers. In this particular example, choosing and

translating into these customer languages is not the MNC's choice but rather imposed by external forces; supranational, i.e. EU-wide, legal regulations that prescribe the existence of customer language versions of this informative text addressing end consumers (i.e. patients). (As opposed to more promotional and research-related genres, as mentioned earlier, where DK\_2 can still choose whether or not to accommodate its customers, in this case the MNC does not have much of a choice but to comply with the external regulations.)

In sum, in these examples, supranational organizations and their legal regulations represent external forces that impose both English and customer languages on DK\_2 that has to act accordingly.

#### **5.4.5.3 National (host-country) authorities and customers enforce the choice of local/customer languages (involving translation)**

National authorities in host countries may request the choice of the local language. At HQ, respondent #5 (Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian) reports that he is occasionally involved in visiting local authorities in different countries where the local language is chosen. He mentions the Ministry of Health in Russia, yet stresses that this happens once or twice a year.

At the local level, we gain further insights into the nature of Austrian authorities the subsidiary has to deal with and the types of documents that have to exist in the local language. The authorities may be involved in market access and launching of products.

We have that [German documentation] a lot, of course, regarding market authorization, market access and cost reimbursement and so on. Well, as to market access, there are medical guidelines that are produced in Austria, obviously in German. Of course, we get that translated [into English]. Or, if we, for instance, launch a product and negotiate with the Main Association of Austrian Social Security Institutions, then the parent company has to know, since we don't have any power of implementation, you know, we cannot do what we want here. We do have to inform our headquarters about that and need their approval. Therefore, it is necessary that certain documents get translated, partly also the written correspondence [*my translation*]. (Respondent #8\_Marketing Manager\_S/AT\_German)

The respondent (#8) elaborates on the local situation in Austria, the launching of products in the market and the linked necessary interaction or negotiation with host-country authorities that need to be dealt with in German. There may also be written documentation such as medical guidelines that are issued by authorities in German. These local circumstances defining the choice of German in the first place enforce the subsidiary to assume a mediating role between the local and HQ levels. The Austrian unit gets most of the documentation (including written correspondence) translated into English to report to HQ, keep it informed but most importantly to get approval for local procedures. Furthermore, in particular legal cases, as in a patent litigation, even certified translation from German into English is relied on to make sure that HQ can follow the whole process and local documentation involved. Another example could be a complaint concerning a drug written in German by external customers (e.g. doctors, patients) that needs to be translated into English for HQ, so that the Quality Assurance Department in Denmark can do some research on the problem and write an investigation report. This is an interesting example where a customer (buyer) communicates with the MNC (seller); while in unidirectional seller-buyer communication or distribution of information to the customer the MNC can choose whether or not to accommodate buyers, in this case the MNC or subsidiary for that matter has no choice but gets addressed in German by definition. In this sense, customers can become external forces, too.

In sum, external local authorities or customers impose the local/customer language which renders the subsidiary an important mediator, i.e. in-house translator between subsidiary and HQ, as also mentioned earlier.

#### **5.4.5.4 National (host-country) education systems (acquisition planning) influence selective recruitment**

As mentioned before, from an executive's perspective (Respondent #5\_Regional Vice President\_HQ\_Estonian), English proficiency has become crucial, primarily for management positions from the middle level upwards. Though, we learn that external forces partly hinder the choice of English for HRM purposes, i.e. selective recruitment at the management level; the respondent (#5) has experienced that English is not widely spoken in e.g. Russian-, German- or Spanish-speaking countries. Also, he explains that in Eastern Europe, a market the company has

entered not so long ago, the awareness of the importance of English skills or any second language proficiency is only gradually developing among local staff. This can be related to different national education systems or rather their macro language-in-education planning (acquisition planning). Consequently, English proficiency on average varies across countries and is thus not equally easy to include in management profiles across the board. These nationally bound circumstances represent external forces the MNC has no influence on but needs to deal with; these macro forces shape recruitment within the employment domain and the DK\_2 community.

## **5.5 Conclusions Drawn from Case Study II: Language Choice at DK\_2 Embedded in Social Context**

The case study (II) of DK\_2, a pharmaceutical company with 6,000 employees, has provided qualitative insights into the research phenomenon language choice in a Danish MNC context. First insights into language choices can be inferred from DK\_2's online representation. National websites are in customer languages for representing the company and engaging in the home- and host-country markets while the corporate website ([www.DK\\_2.com](http://www.DK_2.com)) is in English only. Variations in language choices and the amount of information provided to end consumers and other receivers are observed across and within organizational settings (e.g. videos, job advertisements, corporate news). This indicates that language choices are made in a contextual and localized fashion.

Personal accounts have helped conceptualize DK\_2 as a multilingual speech community and decipher behavior norms within the community. They suggest that organizational units speak different first languages (i.e. HQ and local languages) and choose them in an unmarked way within their settings (i.e. home and host countries). English has been assigned the function of the *common* or *corporate* language which is understood as the unmarked lingua franca chosen for e.g. interunit communication purposes. (It is not perceived as a form of top-down language policy). Though, related to the function and choice of English as the common language, a language policy statement ("DK\_2 language policy") has been initiated in a bottom-up fashion at the department level and subsequently presented to the Corporate Management Group. It is argued that the policy is grounded in everyday practice with pressure coming from the R&D Department at HQ.



(R&D has become an English-dominated department owing to external forces which will be detailed below.)

The policy statement does not regulate language choices per se, rather puts forward recommendations on language choice in various communicative situations which more or less confirm the speech community norms or make them more explicit. It also contains some ideas about English language training and assessment of proficiency. Among respondents, the notion of a language policy may be both associated with or distinguished from English being the corporate language. Locally, it is understood as meetings being conducted in English or internal written communication being primarily in English. These perceptions partly confirm the contents of the actual statement.

More in-depth case study evidence has shed light on the rationales behind language choices which can be categorized into four contextual dimensions that inform language choices within the MNC network. One finds social-linguistic, social-relational, social-psychological (attitudes to languages, motivations) and social-regulatory (internal and external forces) dimensions that all inform (or enforce) different language choices including English, the HQ language and local/customer languages.

#### *Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency*

The first contextual dimension is of a social-linguistic nature; the participants involved in a given communicative situation or event often define which language(s) to choose based on their proficiency (linguistic repertoire). In line with community norms, English is commonly chosen in interactions uniting different participants with different first languages or varying language proficiency for both internal and external communication purposes (e.g. international symposia). English represents a pragmatic choice if a shared language is needed but is also associated with some problems. These perceived problems relate to counterparts' limited or lacking English skills, including the management level, and shyness of expressing oneself in English. In this vein, it is revealed that DK\_2 staff members also choose German, Italian, Polish, Russian and Spanish with colleagues or customers who have inadequate English skills. We have also learned that the HQ language is chosen in meetings at HQ when attendees are Danes and internationals with Danish

skills. In this sense, international staff accommodates the Danes. Danish is also chosen for documents relevant within the HQ environment and other written media (i.e. intranet). This can also involve nonprofessional translation from English into Danish. Interestingly, we also learn that translation is a two-way street; it could be that HQ information sent in English needs to be translated into the local language at the subsidiary level in order to reach staff members lower down the hierarchy with assumed limited English skills. (To this end, local managers have a mediating role in filtering the relevant information for their staff.) Or, it could be the other way around, i.e. the communication starts in the host country in the unmarked local (national) language (e.g. local financial documents, board meeting material, corporate releases, questions from sales representatives). If HQ has to sign important documents or provide some input, local documentation needs to be translated from the local language into English, often even in a professional (certified) fashion, which might be administered at the HQ level. In this sense, local units also disregard the language policy suggesting that information likely forwarded to an audience that does not share the local language (e.g. the Corporate Management Team) should be produced in English. Furthermore, if HQ management visits local units to present corporate development or new information in English, speeches are usually nonprofessionally interpreted into local languages (e.g. Czech, Hungarian, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Turkish or Ukrainian) due to the limited English proficiency of local staff. Similarly, interpretation has been involved in the start-up process in Russia or bigger conferences to ensure mutual understanding. Finally, international participants' varying proficiency informs code-mixing between German (L3) and English (L2). Similarly, passive multilingualism occurs and includes Danish, Italian, Russian (L1s) combined with English (FL), Scandinavian L1s, Croatian (L1) with Slavic L1s. Both phenomena include oral and written interaction. Overall, participants' proficiency informs a myriad of language choices including English, the HQ language and local/customer languages.

#### *Social-relational dimension: participants' role relationships and politeness strategies*

The second contextual dimension is of a social-relational nature; participants' role relationships (based on participant roles within the employment domain) aligned with politeness strategies inform different language choices. The asymmetrical buyer-seller relationship and politeness

inform the choice of (translation into) customer languages (linguistic adaptation/accommodation). This case study's customers are the local medical communities including doctors, patients, hospitals, etc. At the local level, we have gained very detailed insights into the administration of translation activities concerning clinical trials that measure the efficacy of drugs across languages and cultures. This specific area requires high-quality translation to get valid results, which is also enforced by authorities. In this sense, the buyer-seller relationship and politeness inform the choice of customer languages in the first place and external forces such as national authorities request professionalism and thereby ensure an enhanced accuracy of translations. At the regional level, the buyer-seller relationship and politeness together with an executive's polycentric attitude inform the choice of a customer language for educational purposes. She plans to offer Russian training to one of her staff which is considered valuable for visiting local hospitals and developing the employee's career opportunities. Overall, the buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies, partly combined with external forces or attitudes inform (impose) the choice of numerous customer languages.

*Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages and motivations*

The fourth contextual dimension is of a social-psychological nature; participants' varying attitudes to languages inform different language choices. Participants' ethnocentric attitudes at HQ inform the choice of Danish over English, in particular for social topics. This also means that international staff is in the long run expected to acquire Danish to be socially integrated at HQ. Hence, internationals are also offered Danish classes. In this sense, the ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of Danish for educational purposes (language acquisition). More importantly, the attitude not only informs but in fact imposes Danish on internationals, which can be described as internal forces of a social nature. Another interesting aspect is that the former and current CEOs are associated with different attitudes. The former CEO was a Dane who was perceived as having had an ethnocentric attitude informing the choice of and focus on the HQ language also with non-Danish speakers. By contrast, respondents describe the current CEO who is a non-Dane as having a more positive attitude to the English language (geocentric attitude) that informs and favors the choice of English. The change of CEOs and with them their individual

attitudes have been noticed by staff. These perceived rival attitudes, i.e. pro-Danish versus pro-English, are not only associated with the choices of Danish and English but also with negative ('national') and positive ('global') attributes respectively. It also illustrates that the CEO has the status and power which gives them the freedom to choose any language – informed by and associated with language attitudes – which they somewhat impose on their staff in an active or more passive manner. This shows that attitudes to languages vary across participants and can have imposing power (internal forces). A positive attitude to English (geocentrism) also informs the choice of English for the company magazine; although some of the subsidiaries knowingly do not understand English (phenomenon of divergence), the choice of (translation into) local languages would hinder DK\_2 to become a 'global' company. Yet, this argument does not hold true when it comes to Danish speakers; they are still accommodated owing to an ethnocentric attitude. This language choice behavior is also a kind of double standard. Furthermore, a geocentric attitude at the HQ level informs the choice of English for educational purposes in the form of English training offered specifically to blue-collar workers. Investing in English training or furthering English skills at the factory-floor level seems to be considered an asset ('nice-to-have'), though is de facto less needed, if at all; production workers hardly work across language borders but mostly within the local setting. Such a geocentric attitude is also reflected at the national level since the Danish government financially supports this kind of staff development. The training is aligned with the participants' willingness that is dependent on their (intrinsic) motivation. Finally, participants' varying attitudes inform different language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment); while a position within Communications explicitly requires Danish proficiency (ethnocentrism), R&D's geocentric attitude favors English over Danish skills. In fact, the department even tries to promote this attitude within HQ or present itself and brand HQ as an 'English-speaking' environment to attract high-profile scientists which is, considering other insights, not reality, at least not yet. Which level of employment or which positions require English proficiency is neither standardized nor clear-cut; it seems to depend on the recruiter's more or less geocentric attitude. Finally, decision makers' varying attitudes (polycentric vs. geocentric attitude) can also shape expatriation management; an HR manager values the proficiency and acquisition of the local language while another executive considers English skills enough. Overall, attitudes towards languages differ among participants, can have imposing power or create a double standard. There is no universal or consensually shared attitude forming a

dominant ideology but multiple attitudes with positive and negative attributes and values that account for different language choices including the HQ language, English and local languages.

The social-psychological dimension also encompasses participants' motivations informing their language choices. Staff members choose the local languages Italian and Spanish because they find it enjoyable or fun. The intrinsic motivation for the accommodation of their counterparts is partly accompanied by the latter's lower English proficiency.

*Social-regulatory dimension: external forces (with imposing power)*

The last contextual dimension is of a social-regulatory nature, external to the MNC community and has imposing power in that it defines some of the company's language choices, or rather imposes certain languages on DK\_2. This case study has illustrated that the international scientific community is dominated by the English language. This means that for disseminating research findings internationally the default (i.e. unmarked) language being chosen seems to be English. These forces external to the MNC community to a large degree impose English on the R&D Department at HQ; their daily work and research have shifted from Danish to a primarily English documentation. (This is also one of the reasons why the department welcomed or even pushed towards the choice of English as a corporate language and initiating a language policy.)

Similarly, the English language is also imposed by other kinds of external forces, namely supranational (EU) institutions (e.g. located in London) and legal regulations in English (e.g. EU laws) the company has to comply with. These kinds of forces also apply to languages other than English; supranational (EU) legal regulations prescribe the existence of customer language versions of certain informative texts (e.g. standard patient information sheets, drugs' package inserts) addressing end consumers (i.e. patients). In this sense, external forces request the choice of customer languages which may include both nonprofessional and professional translation services. Also, interaction with or documentation from local authorities (in Austria) enforce the choice of the local language which needs to be communicated to HQ, ergo translated into English. So the subsidiary becomes an important mediator or translator between the local medical community and HQ. In this vein, we also learn that the subsidiary has to deal with e.g. complaints from external customers written in German which enforces the translation into English since it

has to be reported to HQ. In this buyer-seller communication the MNC (subsidiary) has no influence on the language choice which renders customers possible external forces, too. Furthermore, it is reported that English proficiency is lower in countries with major languages (e.g. Russian, German, Spanish) and in Eastern Europe which is related to national, host-country education systems (acquisition planning) leading to varying English fluency on average across countries. These external circumstances influence selective recruitment insofar as it becomes more difficult to find and hire English-skilled candidates for local management positions who need to report to HQ. Overall, these social forces external to the MNC community enforce different choices including English, customer and local languages.

It could be concluded that DK\_2 is a multilingual speech community that unites numerous settings (locations) all speaking different languages, English being the *common* language (*lingua franca*). This case study (DK\_2) has shed light on four contextual dimensions that inform language choice: the social-linguistic dimension language proficiency, the social-relational dimension based on role relationships and politeness, the social-psychological dimension including attitudes to languages (with imposing power) and motivations, and the social-regulatory dimension external forces (with imposing power). The contextual dimensions inform different language choices and also impose languages, including the HQ, local/customer languages and English, in different communicative situations, for internal and external communication purposes. The dimensions influence the individual staff member and/or the corporate management level which has to be refracted into individual decision makers who choose languages in a given communicative situation in their own right rather than in a consensual or unified manner. This suggests that social context is multilayered which renders language choice a complex and multilingual social phenomenon. The multilevel and multidimensional analysis of language choice lets us conclude that language can hardly be regulated or managed in a centralized manner in an MNC network such as DK\_2. In other words, the findings indicate a limited manageability of language since language choice is contextually bound. These case study findings also undermine the usefulness of single-language policies but suggest multilingual policies and management activities, if at all necessary.

## 6 LANGUAGE CHOICE IN A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION (MNC): A CASE STUDY (III) OF AT\_1

### 6.1 About AT\_1: Facts and Figures

AT\_1 is a large manufacturing business and stock corporation headquartered in Austria. It has 500 group companies and locations in 50 countries and employs around 46,400 employees globally (20,000 in Austria). It is divided into five divisions with different areas of expertise, products and legal structures. In principle, these divisions are all subsidiaries but may also have their own regional headquarters in e.g. different provinces of Austria or Singapore. Depending on the area, international contacts and operating markets, the degree of internationalization differs. One of the five divisions is unique in its organizational structure since it is quite autonomous and internationally oriented, and has specialized sales and production companies in 50 markets. The division (subsidiary) itself has around 11,300 staff members in total; the number of employees at the division's local sites ranges from 10 to 300. The MNC's earnings were EUR 11.5 billion ( $\approx$  DKK 85.8 billion) in the fiscal year of 2012/13.<sup>49</sup> (This case company (III) is the largest MNC investigated in this collective case study. I gathered data from the headquarters and the globally operating division located in Austria too, which means the home and host countries are the same.)

### 6.2 Language Choices on AT\_1's Website

First insights into language choices can be gained from the company's online representation. The company website ([www.AT\\_1.com](http://www.AT_1.com)) opens up in English but can be switched to German. Either language version provides an overview of the organizational structure, products, corporate identity, management and history. The amount of information in both languages seems identical and the internet user can swap between language versions without losing track. Different types of documents can be downloaded (e.g. annual report, letters to shareholders, corporate presentation,

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<sup>49</sup> These data have partly been collected from the company's website. [retrieved February 6, 2014]

environmental statement) or are available (e.g. latest press releases or news for shareholders) in both languages. This gives the impression that from the headquarters' perspective both English and German are important in that it presents itself as a bilingual HQ.

The firm is also represented in social media such as blogs (e.g. Twitter) and social networks (e.g. facebook, XING, LinkedIn). YouTube videos are used to present audiovisual information; an interview with the CEO in German about the results of the business year of 2010/11 is supported by English subtitles. In other videos, different sites around the world are presented by means of autobiographical stories of managers or representative key persons. These stories are dubbed by a native speaker's voice (German and English respectively), which gives a very professional impression from a Translation Studies' perspective. The same goes for the introductory video on the homepage that starts automatically in either German or English once the corporate website is opened or returned to.

The company's organization chart gives an overview of the five divisions and the multiple companies and sites belonging to the different divisions, with links to local websites. The subsidiaries' websites are organized and designed in the same way as the corporate one. They are mostly bilingual, i.e. English and the local language. As to acquisitions, their homepages differ from the corporate site in design, content and language profile; some include more corporate design elements than others. They can be monolingual (i.e. local language or English), or bilingual (i.e. local language and English, or local language and German as in the Czech case) and multilingual (i.e. local language, English and German as for a Dutch company; the Brazilian unit has information in Portuguese, whereas the languages Spanish and English are 'under construction'). The local sites' differences in content, design and language versions, i.e. varying prioritization of languages, suggest that language choices as to local online representation and customer communication are localized rather than centralized.

Current online job offers are written in the setting's language, e.g. German for an HQ position or Dutch for the Dutch site. This should probably imply that the language in which the advertisement is written is also a requirement for getting the job advertised, yet language proficiency as such is not explicitly discussed. It seems recruitment is localized and needs (including languages) within HRM vary across organizational units.



Overall, these first impressions on language choice gained from AT\_1's website reflect variation in language choices across organizational units (settings). The corporate website alone, which opens up in English but switching to German is possible, leaves the impression of AT\_1 being a German-speaking MNC with an international outlook (ethnocentric and geocentric attitudes). Taking local websites into account, one could say the company presents itself as a multilingual speech community where different languages (and language combinations) are chosen. In the following, I will look into the notion of AT\_1 as a multilingual speech community, language functions and its language choice norms in more detail.

### **6.3 AT\_1 as a Multilingual Speech Community: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms**

AT\_1 can be described as a multilingual speech community where different languages serve different functions, which also leads to certain behavior or language choice norms within the MNC network. At AT\_1, German being the national language of the home country assumes the function of the HQ language which is predominantly chosen at the HQ setting. Other languages have the roles of local languages which are mainly chosen within the settings of the national subsidiaries. All languages become customer languages once they are chosen for external communication purposes such as engaging with buyers and customers in local markets. The function of English and the question of a corporate language are slightly ambiguous, or the perceptions differ across organizational settings (locations). At HQ for instance, the Corporate HR Controller (Respondent #2\_HQ\_German) argues that "there are German and English as main languages, as corporate languages, so to speak [*my translation*]". However, the respondent (#2) appears to associate an 'official adoption' of a corporate language with the replacement of the HQ language. She believes that this would be problematic since the central production together with almost half of the workforce are based in Austria and two thirds of those are blue-collar workers whose English or foreign language skills on average are assumed to be rather limited. This would then impair production processes. Her explanations indicate a negative connotation with the notion of a corporate language. To her, English also has the role of a "working language" (i.e. lingua franca) for global communication purposes (e.g. international sales conferences) and

interunit activities (e.g. interaction with local managements, leadership training programs or HR meetings involving several units). The choice of English or German depends on the work area, its international scope and the specific target group; the leadership training is a program that targets future international executives trained at a global scale.

If the communication targets a group that somewhat requires the choice of English, then it's English, and I don't cover both German and English. That applies to the leadership training program. This is conducted in English only. [...] Well, if the group of participants requires it. I believe, as soon as one attendee does not master German, then we speak English. [...] But if you have 15 people sitting there who are all Austrians, then we don't run it in English. This would be unnatural [my translation]. (Respondent #2\_Corporate HR Controller\_HQ\_German)<sup>50</sup>

In other words, if the communicative situation unites participants with different first languages, then English is chosen as the unmarked lingua franca, as it makes sense. By contrast, if there are no international participants but Austrians only, German is the unmarked choice (English “would be unnatural”).

The functions of German and English also seem to differ across organizational units. As mentioned in the introduction of this case study, a division (subsidiary) has been included owing to its structure and history. In 1991 AT\_1, as the owner of an Austrian company ‘X’ specialized in one of AT\_1’s manufacturing areas, acquired a Swedish company ‘Y’ operating in the same specialized area, and merged these two into ‘XY’. As such, the new merger integrated in the parent company AT\_1 also chose English as its corporate (divisional) language to address the question of communication. Also, two HQ staff members (respondent #2 and the respondent from the pilot interview) associate a strong focus on English with the division (subsidiary) or describe it as more international than the rest of the MNC network. At the division, there is common agreement among respondents that English is their corporate language considering its merger history, international business partners and clients, and also that the MNC’s corporate language is de facto German (rather than German and English, as claimed at HQ). This is detailed by

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<sup>50</sup> Each interviewee is assigned a number (e.g. #2). Further characteristics indicated are the person’s job title or function (e.g. Corporate HR Controller), location (HQ or subsidiary) and first language (e.g. German). In the following, the division/subsidiary will be abbreviated ‘S’ and its location indicated by the country code (i.e. ‘AT’ for Austria).

respondent #6 (E-Business Manager\_S/AT\_Swedish) who also shares his understanding of a corporate language (within the division):

I don't know if it's a[n] official policy but AT\_1, as far as I know, their corporate language is German but we continued English otherwise it would not work. Most of our people don't speak German and in some countries like Brazil, they don't speak English. Even English is a problem in some cases. [...] A corporate language is a necessity to ensure that the management, that the top level decision can be communicated. When it reaches the local company, you can set up processes or make decisions. Then it's the responsibility of the Managing Director to communicate it in the local language downwards, outside and down. You can't expect everyone to speak the [local] language because companies are bought and sold; it could be Russian tomorrow or [Hindi] [...] So, the decision to have a corporate language, from my point of view, is a necessity to allow this basic information flow to run.

From the respondent's (#6) divisional perspective, English in its function as a corporate language facilitates interunit interaction at the management level in that it allows the corporate management to communicate with local managements. English is also seen as the unmarked language in this context ("you can't expect everyone to speak the [local] language").

In this vein, it is stressed that English is only chosen when needed, e.g. for sharing information across units, but would not be chosen among German speakers, as explained by respondent #1 (Divisional Head of HR\_S/AT\_German):

Certain areas are dealt with in English only. For instance, we write 'hotlines' when a new Managing Director joins the corporation. Then we inform all the other MDs. And those [hotlines] are in English. In that case, I don't distinguish. If there are corporate guidelines, these might be in English only. In this case, yes, but if I communicate with, I don't know, with an MD in Germany about the deal for his company car, I don't have to do that in English. Don't see any need for doing that since I don't have to forward that or anything [*my translation*].

The respondent (#1) has a similar understanding of the function of English, i.e. being chosen for internal communication at the management level. Other internal communication does not necessarily require the choice of English but could very well be German ("I don't have to do that in English"). This illustrates the unmarked nature of German as a shared L1.

Similarly, a local lawyer (Respondent #7\_S/AT) argues as follows:

We also have a Swede working here, and two Americans who unfortunately left the company a few months ago. This is natural to me, even if there were five Austrians, for instance, and one of them were present, then it is obvious that English is spoken. But I wouldn't speak English with my Austrian colleagues, unless...no, that's hard to imagine [*my translation*].

The respondent (#7) explains that the choice of English is unmarked ("natural") as soon as international staff members are part of the interaction, also if they represent a minority, similar to the insights gained at HQ. By contrast, German appears as the unmarked language chosen for addressing other German speakers, confirming respondent's #1 (Divisional Head of HR\_S/AT\_German) understanding.

Despite the function of English as a divisional language and its use for interunit communication, English proficiency is not a requirement for executives, at least not for German speakers, as explained below:

There are, of course, Managing Directors who probably understand German only, which is also okay since we speak German here [*my translation*]. (Respondent #7\_Lawyer\_S/AT)

The explanation given is related to the fact that German also assumes the function of the division's (subsidiary's) local language being the unmarked language ("of course"). Furthermore, this illustrates that English proficiency is not a given resource at the executive level.

Comparing the participants' perceptions within and across units, one could conclude it is well known at HQ that the division and former merger is more 'English-oriented' than HQ in that English has a different function due to the division's merger and acquisition history. Also, the division is aware of the stronger focus on German or the function of German at HQ. This gives German and English different functions within the MNC network. In other words, the functions of languages can knowingly differ across organizational units (social settings), which might be accepted or tolerated. Despite the different perceptions of the different language functions, community norms are quite similar; English is the unmarked language and chosen in contexts

where a shared language is needed as for interunit communication purposes where participants speak different first languages. Otherwise, German is chosen instead, representing an unmarked language too, as among German speakers. These preliminary insights indicate that language choices are embedded in social context, yet do not grasp the rationales underlying language choices, which will be the focus of the remainder of this case study.

## **6.4 Language Choice at AT\_1 Informed by Social Context**

The following sections will detail how social context influences language choices, more specifically, the contextual dimensions that inform language choices at AT\_1. These include English, the HQ language (German) and local/customer languages (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3*).

### **6.4.1 Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices**

The first contextual dimension that informs language choices is of a social-linguistic nature. Generally speaking, language proficiency stands for participants' linguistic repertoires which include usually one first language (L1) and possibly foreign languages (FLs), i.e. L2, L3, L4, etc. More specifically, the notion of proficiency embodies both ends of the continuum; proficiency ranges from high to low (nonexistent) proficiency in languages. In this sense, varying language proficiency not only informs language choices but may also induce positive and negative associations with participants, thus can represent both a resource and a barrier. Note, participants are to be understood in a broader sense, i.e. can represent the individual language speaker but also larger entities such as departments or organizational units (HQ, subsidiaries) that have different L1s (i.e. HQ versus local languages) and make different language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.1*).

#### 6.4.1.1 Language proficiency informs the choice of English

Participants' language proficiency informs the choice of English. At a more abstract level, participants such as organizational units (headquarters, regional headquarters, divisions and national subsidiaries) all speak different L1s (as also the speech community norms suggest). English is chosen in different communicative situations when a shared language is needed as in interunit communication. These situations include both written and oral media (e.g. written legal documentation, email correspondence, presentations, meetings, leadership training program, etc.).

English is chosen for written legal documentation to be shared across units. At the divisional (subsidiary) level, most of the legal documents within the functional area of HRM (e.g. work contracts, work regulations) are written in English by an in-house lawyer (Respondent #7\_S/AT\_German), as she explains: "We or I write up a lot of contracts in English by default. They don't exist in German. Then the language is English only [*my translation*]." Usually local law applies and English serves as a legal lingua franca to communicate across units. The documents can be in English only or in combination with a local language version. The respondent (#7) may collaborate with other subsidiaries on local legal affairs and their local lawyers. The latter may provide English versions themselves, or arrange translations into English in the host country. Sometimes the division (subsidiary) relies on Austrian translation agencies, too. On that note, AT\_1 has no language or translation department. Language and translation are also decentralized and dealt with on a case-by-case basis. On the one hand, the repetitive nature of e.g. contracts, precise definitions of terms and conditions are mentioned as factors facilitating the text production or translation task. On the other hand, the respondent (#7) also seeks language assistance from coworkers who are NSs of English and crosschecks the terminology and their understanding of the terms used in context. Also, she has developed her own working style and filing system that help store and retrieve English documents or templates more easily. This enables her to reuse the legal terms and concepts more consistently. What the respondent (#7) mentions as problematic is the technical register and specialized terminology of the industry in which the company navigates. She remembers having to master both technical and legal registers in English was challenging when she started working for AT\_1. Overall, for legal matters within HRM (e.g.

work contracts) English is chosen as a third language, more precisely as a legal lingua franca, to ensure mutual understanding between the interacting participants that speak different L1s.

Participants' language proficiency also informs the choice of English in oral encounters such as international or interunit gatherings, which is also associated with some problems. The oral medium is mentioned to be more difficult to communicate in than the written medium. Respondent #5 (Corporate Strategy Planner\_S/AT\_German) points out that "some Japanese are really bad at English" and "Koreans also have such an English problem [*my translation*]". It has become better over the past years since older generations are replaced by younger English-skilled personnel. Internal written communication is acceptable but it is more their pronunciation which makes it hard to understand them. The respondent (#5) also recalls an event (7 or 8 years ago) where a Korean manager gave a speech in English (which he read from a script that had been written by the English-skilled inferior employee) but was then not able to answer a question from the audience owing to inadequate English skills. In this case, a combination of poor language proficiency and cultural differences (e.g. power distance and relationships) impaired lingua franca communication. Similar experiences are shared by respondent #2 (Corporate HR Controller\_HQ\_German) who has a hard time following oral conversations when collaborating with Japan and Korea. As mentioned earlier, English is also chosen in leadership training programs if international staff members attend and a shared language is needed, i.e. in order to run the training. In this context, German speakers (Austrian and German staff) are mentioned having trouble speaking English. Problems concern the different levels of English proficiency and shyness to speak and participate in an FL.

In sum, participants' varying language proficiency informs the choice of English for both written and oral media for primarily interunit communication purposes. The choice is also associated with some challenges such as variation in English fluency, the difficulty of legal and technical registers, pronunciation issues or shyness to speaking English.

#### 6.4.1.2 Language proficiency informs the choices of English and local languages (involving translation)

The changing of participants in internal communication and their varying language proficiency entails different language choices including local languages. Within the occupational area of HRM, we learn that important issues, objectives, ideas for change, development and measurements are discussed with the local top management teams in English. However, the actual implementation of the corporate goals happens in a decentralized way, i.e. is the responsibility of the local managements. This local responsibility or autonomy also includes a language shift by filtering the relevant knowledge for local staff and translating it into the local language. The functional area of sales communication is structured likewise; production information is passed on in English to local managers who are responsible for conveying the important information to local staff, e.g. by translating it into the local language since they may speak the local language only.

In this vein, employee satisfaction surveys are commonly translated into local languages since not all staff members master English, as explained below:

English is simply not widespread enough, especially among staff, that we could send out a questionnaire in English. This needs to be translated [*my translation*]. (Respondent #1\_Divisional Head of HR\_S/AT\_German)

This means that linguistic adaptation to subsidiaries or their staff – the choice of local languages – can be explained by participants' lower or nonexistent English skills (language proficiency). In the example of employee satisfaction, the translation process is coordinated by the division and external translation agencies are involved. The division's local units do language checks, proofread their local versions and adapt them to their needs and the company-specific terminology.

In the case of negotiating and drawing up a contract with a Spanish counterpart who had trouble understanding the legal complexities (register) in English, the Divisional Head of HR (Respondent #1\_S/AT\_German) offered to write the contract in Spanish. For this purpose, he took an old Spanish contract as a starting point, made adaptations and sent it to a Spanish lawyer to go through the contract. In the end, the contract also needed to be translated into English for



the corporate management team in order not to exclude HQ from the communication. The choice of Spanish over English and thereby accommodating the Spanish partner is informed by the latter's poor English skills and the executive's Spanish skills, as explained in the following:

Okay, my Spanish is better than his English [...] but to make it easier for him, because with these legal issues you often have complex formulations and clauses, etc. And if he says: 'Sorry, but I don't understand all that, what's in the contract.' Then we sometimes meet them halfway if it's possible, and say 'okay'. But this is the exception not the rule [my translation]. (Respondent #1\_Divisional Head of HR\_S/AT\_German)

It seems the default language choice is English ("rule") but under given circumstances ("exception"), as described above, a local language may be chosen, too. The reported reason is the Spanish participant's inadequate English proficiency. Additionally, the language choice could also be described as a polite gesture and face-saving act which the respondent refers to as 'meeting the counterpart halfway'.

#### **6.4.1.3 Language proficiency informs the choices of local languages and English (involving interpretation)**

At the division (subsidiary), we learn that their local units choose local languages for written purposes in an unmarked way. More specifically, the division sometimes receives data, letters, contracts, technical documentation, reports, presentations and single charts in Danish or Swedish from the Nordic units. It could also be a chain of emails containing some Danish or Swedish correspondence. Or, if the division wants to fire a local person, it is necessary to know what the conditions of the local Swedish contract are. In these cases, the Swedish E-Business Manager (Respondent #6\_S/AT) who is German-skilled and on an assignment at the division (subsidiary) gets contacted and serves as a mediator. Usually he and the colleagues who need information translated orally discuss and decipher the content of the documents and also compare terms and their meanings across languages (German, English), comparable to a sight interpretation. These insights show that local languages are chosen in the first place, which then requires some form of language assistance or mediation if information needs to be shared with other units or rather if the division wishes to understand local language documentation. In this specific example, it is

written documentation that is nonprofessionally sight-interpreted into either English or German or both by a Swedish staff member. What is interesting is that local units do not choose English in the first place to share knowledge across units more easily or do not translate it into English but also forward information in local languages, as to the division.

Participants' language proficiency informs the choice of local languages, which involves some form of interpretation or mediation. In the context of product management, Turkey and France are mentioned as examples where mediation had to be relied on (local languages  $\leftrightarrow$  English) due to a lower English proficiency of the participants. Respondent #6 (E-Business Manager\_S/AT\_Swedish) explains that he needed a mediator in both countries:

I was in Turkey and then the management had to select people that they knew spoke English or I needed a translator [i.e. interpreter]. I needed even a translator in France. So, then it's up to the management to ensure that the communication would work. I tell them: 'I'll be coming, I speak these languages, please select some people that are suitable or arrange a translator that can sit with me.' But it's up to the management to smoothen out the difficulties. [...] Actually in Turkey, it was quite good. Everyone...there was a translator for two persons out of eight, I would say. And in France the Sales Manager, she sat with us for all of the, no three of the four people. That was not so good because then she came with answers... I was trained to tune in on the French and then get what they really said but since she translated to me, I [do] not know how, if it was colored. Finally she said: 'It's okay, we don't have any problems.'

What is interesting is that the condensed or brief target language version makes the respondent (#6) suspicious in that the Sales Manager might not be objective but subjective, thus translates in her favor. It could be that the Sales Manager being a nonprofessional did not shorten the information intentionally but could not cope with the interpretation task, that is did not have the skills to interpret satisfactorily. Either way the respondent's (#6) impression was overall negative since he was not satisfied with the interpretation product, and felt somewhat excluded from the conversation. In this sense, bilingual employees may not be able to interpret adequately or well enough to ensure mutual understanding. Also, in-house interpretation can be perceived as subjective and thus affect internal and interpersonal relations negatively.

In the case of a conference held in the Ukraine, the conference language chosen was Russian. The only attendee without Russian skills was an Austrian Strategy Planner (Respondent #5\_S/AT)

who was provided with an English language teacher who interpreted nonprofessionally between Russian and English.

I attended a conference in the Ukraine where I was the only one who didn't speak Russian. There you can see the linguistic diaspora. I had a simultaneous interpreter who translated the entire conference for me. I gave a speech myself which was also a disaster, even though he was an English teacher, but...it is exasperating. Then we had a guided tour through the factory and he didn't understand anything. He cannot translate if he doesn't understand what they are talking about. That's the problem. The person that is the mediating interface has to know the *métier*, otherwise he cannot translate [my translation]. (Respondent #5\_Strategy Planner\_S/AT\_German)

The conference presentations and the tour through the factory (Russian → English) as well as the respondent's (#5) presentation (English → Russian) were interpreted. According to the respondent (#5), the mediation was "a disaster" since the language trainer – teaching English to local staff in the Ukraine – was not familiar with the complex and technical terms (register) and could therefore not provide an acceptable target language version. This account illustrates the difficulty of interpretation within a technical register and the limitations of nonprofessional interpretation as carried out by a language trainer.

#### **6.4.1.4 Language proficiency informs code-switching/-mixing**

Participants' language proficiency also informs code-switching/-mixing. In an example of written communication, the division (subsidiary) was about to negotiate a contract and its conditions. In the early stages, the Spanish counterpart communicated in English via email with the Divisional Head of HR (Respondent #1\_S/AT\_German) and the in-house lawyer (Respondent #7\_S/AT\_German). Once the Spanish speaker realized that respondent #1 also mastered Spanish, he switched to Spanish because it was easier to explain in Spanish than in English. Respondent #7 who only speaks English (and German and French) was then excluded from the subsequent correspondence. Code-switching can be triggered by participants' language proficiency and the need for clarification but at the same time can have exclusive effects.

Respondent #1 (Divisional Head of HR\_S/AT\_German) also associates the phenomenon of code-switching/-mixing with a fun and casual atmosphere as at board meetings in Colombia where Spanish and German are switched between naturally, depending on which language comes to one's mind first. (In such a situation the board meeting attendees share Spanish and German; if they do not, English is usually chosen.) In this sense, code-switching/-mixing has a positive effect on interpersonal relations in that it reduces social distance between participants.

Respondent #6 (E-Business Manager\_S/AT), a Swedish national with basic German skills, reports that in one-to-one interactions with colleagues, code-switching/-mixing may occur due to the lack of technical vocabulary (register) in German. When talking to the CEO, for instance, the conversation may start out in German and switch to English or single words might be borrowed if the topic becomes too complex. The respondent's (#6) varying fluency in his L2 and L3 is responsible for the switching or mixing of codes.

#### **6.4.1.5 Language proficiency informs passive multilingualism**

Furthermore, the Swedish E-Business Manager (Respondent #6\_S/AT) may receive a German email which he usually returns in English for practical or efficiency, i.e. timesaving, reasons. Since it takes him longer to write an email in German (L3) than in English (L2), he chooses English over German. He also chooses English when communicating with the board of management which in turn communicates in German, which is accepted. The interviewee also corresponds in English with external partners in Switzerland, Germany or within Austria, and very often receives a German reply. The trigger for passive multilingualism seems to be the participants' language proficiency in the sense that everyone chooses the language s/he is most comfortable communicating in.

#### **6.4.2 Social-relational dimension: participant roles, role relationships, politeness strategies and power relations inform language choices**

Within the employment domain, participants assume various roles such as buyers or customers and sellers, which gives them inherent relationships expressing relative power or status and social closeness/distance. These also define which language choices are appropriate (polite). Role relationships and/or politeness principles inform different language choices (involving HRM and language acquisition) (see also *Chapter 2, Sections 2.3.3.2 and 2.3.3.3*).

##### **6.4.2.1 Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice of customer languages for HRM purposes (selective recruitment)**

The buyer-seller relationship informs the choice of a customer language for HRM purposes, i.e. recruitment. At the division (subsidiary), we learn that for certain positions within the functional area of regional sales, English-skilled candidates with knowledge in one of the Eastern European languages are hired since it is helpful for the collaboration with these markets, as explained by respondent #3 (HR/Management Development\_SS/AT\_German):

For instance, for the position of the office sales employee that engages in the Central and Eastern European markets, but is located here, we said: ‘Desirable: an Eastern European language’. And we have had plenty of good applicants who live in Vienna but are originally from Poland, from Romania, from the Czech Republic, Slovakia or from Hungary. In this respect Vienna is a large market; it is no problem to find people. But you need the Eastern language for these specific markets [*my translation*].

The hiring team chooses one Eastern European customer language for this regional office sales position. It is not clear how one language can serve all customer, country-specific needs, especially if the languages are not all mutually intelligible (belonging to Slavic, Romance and Indo-European language groups). Yet, the rationale behind seems to be the asymmetrical buyer-seller relationship and related politeness strategies that suggest the choice of buyers’ L1s (linguistic adaptation/accommodation). Proficiency in a customer language is considered useful for external

relations and communication purposes. This informs the choice of an Eastern European language for HRM purposes (i.e. selective recruitment) in this example.

#### **6.4.2.2 Politeness strategies and participant role (relative power) inform the choice of the HQ language (double standard)**

We learn that the occupational areas of HR Controlling and Finance are headed by mostly Austrians, which has implications for language choice. The Corporate HR Controller (Respondent #2\_HQ\_German) considers it an act of politeness to provide these executives with information in German. Within the area of HR Controlling, for instance, there might be information that also exists in English if it has to be shared with local managements that speak different local languages. This creates a bilingual form of communication since German speakers with executive power would not be addressed in English but in German only driven by matters of politeness (face-saving act). In other words, it would be impolite or inappropriate to address them in English (face-threatening act). This is an example where politeness strategies aligned with participants' role (i.e. executive) and the status and relative power attributed inform the choice of their first language (German). One might also say that this contextual language choice also reflects an ethnocentric attitude considering the fact that these top managers would likely understand information in English. It could also be argued that it is some kind of a double standard; local managements are all addressed in English in these functional areas (standardization) while German-speaking management is accommodated.

#### **6.4.2.3 Politeness strategies and social relationships inform the choice of the local language for educational purposes (language acquisition)**

The division (subsidiary) bought a company in Brazil, which entailed language choices for educational purposes (language training and acquisition) in both Austria and Brazil. Respondent #1's (Divisional Head of HR\_S/AT\_German) remembers the situation as follows:

My boss said: 'Well, one of us should learn Portuguese since we have acquired a large corporation in Brazil. They are now all trying to learn English.' And he also

said that it would simply be a sign of goodwill on our part if there were someone here [in Austria] who learned Portuguese in return, as some kind of compensation. And the next thing was: 'Well, it should probably be someone who already speaks Spanish.' I was the only one, so I said: 'Alright, no problem. If you say I should do it, I'd like to learn it, I'm interested.' Then I learned it [*my translation*].

We learn that at the time, only a handful of the Brazilian top management team had basic knowledge of English since the unit had earlier belonged to a Spanish corporation where English was of minor importance (which was probably related to the similarity between Portuguese and Spanish). Since they became part of an Austrian MNC and one of its international divisions, they learned English in order to communicate primarily with the division. From an Austrian perspective, learning the local language was considered “a sign of goodwill”, and attempted to compensate for the Brazilians' effort to learn English (“some kind of compensation”). The respondent's (#1) former boss suggested that an Austrian employee should acquire Portuguese, preferably someone already possessing Spanish skills. The respondent (#1) who was Spanish-skilled was the obvious candidate for learning the local language. To this end, he had 40 on-site private lessons with a NS of Brazilian Portuguese from a language school before visiting the subsidiary for two months and monitoring its HR Department. Furthermore, his experience in the functional area of HRM, in particular with Brazil and Portuguese proficiency, shows that the counterparts are very grateful, open up and feel more comfortable, which he believes is important when it comes to HRM or HR-sensitive topics. In this sense, linguistic adaptation (accommodation) intends to reduce the social distance between participants and positively impact on interpersonal relationships.

One could conclude that the choice of a local language for educational purposes (i.e. Portuguese acquisition) is informed by politeness strategies in alignment with social relationships; the choice of the local language is described as a way of showing goodwill and a compensating gesture. It could also be seen as a respectful move that attempts to save the Brazilians' face. This example also illustrates that a language choice can be made by a single decision maker. It is this executive's understanding of the social relationship between the division and the Brazilian unit, their role relationships within the MNC network, and the degree of politeness that is required. Another executive in a similar situation might disregard politeness strategies or may not intend to come

across as polite and consider the choice of the local language unnecessary. In other words, the choice of the local language is contextually bound, based on subjective politeness strategies, and is not formalized in any way. On a peripheral note, English proficiency is rare at the top management level of the Brazilian acquisition (due to its previous ownership).

### **6.4.3 Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages inform language choices**

Participants have different attitudes to languages in that they assign positive and negative values or attributes to languages. We learn about positive attitudes to the HQ/local language ((local) ethnocentrism) and to English (geocentrism). These multiple attitudes vary across participants, i.e. do not form a consensual ideology, may change over time and have imposing power (internal forces). So, the different attitudes to languages inform different language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.4*).

#### **6.4.3.1 Ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of German and interferes with standardization (double standard)**

Although the division (subsidiary) chooses English for many interunit communication purposes, German gets chosen too, informed by an ethnocentric attitude which creates some double standard, as the quotation below shows:

So why do they have different standards? I know that a lot of people say: 'Well, people don't speak so good English in Germany and Austria.' But that's the same, that's true in Brazil. Maybe we came to something interesting. It's kind of a dual standard then. Officially English but we also do a lot of communication in German because it is such a big audience. And we say: 'Well, they [German speakers] don't understand English, so we have to communicate in German.' (Respondent #6\_E-Business Manager\_S/AT\_Swedish)

According to the respondent (#6), English still has the function of a corporate or divisional language ("Officially English") suggesting its choice for internal communication purposes (standardization). However, linguistic adaptation (accommodation) is pursued with the German-



speaking audience but not with the Portuguese speakers; the latter are addressed in English instead of their L1s. From the international respondent's (#6) point of view, both target groups are less English-skilled, which makes it illogical to choose German for German speakers but English over Portuguese for Brazilians. Put simply, he does not understand why German speakers get 'special treatment' while other language users are addressed in English. This "dual standard", as he calls it, or double standard can be described as a positive attitude to the HQ language (ethnocentrism) on the one hand and a comparatively more negative one to local languages on the other hand. In this sense, the ethnocentric attitude informing the choice of German somewhat interferes with the choice of English (standardization). The latter also seems to be partly counter-productive or might even exclude Brazilian staff from information (divergence). Overall, this also leads to a form of language hierarchy giving English and German higher priority than local languages within the division.

#### **6.4.3.2 Ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of German for educational purposes (internal forces)**

We also learn about the manifestation of an ethnocentric attitude informing the choice of German at the interactional level. Respondent #6 (E-Business Manager\_S/AT\_Swedish), an international staff member, reports that German gets chosen in oral encounters such as one-to-one conversations:

Then, of course, I have colleagues that have only spoken German with me all the time. [...] From day one. [...] Ah, [I understood] very little. And especially, sometimes they speak a little dialect it's not really 'Hochdeutsch' but they have explained, they did it because they want me to learn. [...] They might in some cases be perfectly fluent in English. [...] It has been in some cases that I have spoken so to speak German with someone and it has just continued. And then later on I found out that English would work in one or two cases. The person decided from the beginning that he or she would not speak English with me.

On the one hand, German seems to be chosen for educational purposes in that German learners can improve their proficiency in German and even a regional variety of it. (It is harder for the international to follow a meeting or conversation if participants do not make an effort to speak

standard German.) On the other hand, this kind of explanation also reflects an ethnocentric attitude, that is international staff members eventually need to be willing to acquire German and employ it within an Austrian work environment. This also implies that some Austrian participants are reluctant to choose English as a lingua franca instead, which would sometimes be easier for the Swedish employee. The respondent (#6) does not really know the rationale behind the Austrian colleagues' language choice behavior; yet, it seems their ethnocentric attitude (with imposing power) informs the choice of German in interaction with international staff members who in turn have to comply, which can be seen as internal forces.

#### **6.4.3.3 Local ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of the local language (involving interpretation/translation)**

An Austrian repatriate who works in the area of controlling (Respondent #8\_HQ\_German) was on an international assignment in Hungary for two years. The respondent's (#8) daily life was dominated by different language choices; either he was able to communicate with Product Managers and Managing Directors directly in English or even German, or the counterpart chose Hungarian and the professional interpreter in house facilitated the interaction. Although the interpretation was of high quality, he sometimes felt that not the entire message but only parts of it could be conveyed, and that it was a time-consuming solution. Hungarian was also chosen for internal meetings and in-house simultaneous interpretation was relied on (Hungarian → German), as the respondent (#8) elaborates:

One always gets by [with English] if it is necessary. However, the meetings were still conducted in Hungarian because we were three Austrians there, and this wouldn't have worked without an interpreter. So, we would have understood too little. [...] Indeed, [at the management level] they all spoke English. They did, but the meetings were not conducted in English because we had an interpreter anyways [my translation].

This indicates that the predominant choice of the local language is motivated by the local participants' attitudes rather than their language proficiency ("they all spoke English"). The subsidiary prioritizes the local language over English, which resembles a local ethnocentric

attitude. In other words, the local participants' positive attitudes to the local language (local ethnocentrism) inform the choice of the local language Hungarian (rather than the choice of English as a lingua franca), which involves interpretation for the Austrian expatriates. The in-house professional together with another one would also translate documents for the expatriate managers if necessary.

#### **6.4.3.4 Varying attitudes inform language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation)**

From an HQ standpoint, German is not only essential for local operative job functions but also for long-term (management) positions, in particular within the old divisions that are less 'internationally orientated'.

Well, we shouldn't forget that people de facto still work for an Austrian corporation. This means they are of course challenged in a different way. If they, you know, want to move forward professionally, one needs the German language at AT\_1. English is, well, if I pursue a local career, that's fine. But, of course, as soon as I am somehow involved or deal with the corporation, also the divisions, particularly with the old divisions, German is necessary. [The Austrian-Swedish merger] which has been our fifth division for a couple of years, there, it might be comparatively easier to get by with English. But they have traditionally always been operating globally, which is not so much the case with the old divisions. The division X, for instance, is headquartered in Austria and has one German subsidiary. They actually don't need English [*my translation*]. (Respondent #2\_Corporate HR Controller\_HQ\_German)

The respondent's (#2) account reflects her positive attitude to the HQ language. This ethnocentric attitude underlines the significance of German and suggests the choice of German within the HQ environment, specifically within the older divisions. German proficiency is considered a requirement for an HQ career because AT\_1 is an Austrian corporation. This also confirms community norms in that German is the unmarked choice in the home-country setting. The ethnocentric attitude goes hand in hand with a more negative attitude to English. More specifically, the former not only suggests the choice of German but also implies that English is not enough to get by at HQ and its older divisions.

An ethnocentric attitude may also inform the choice of German for local HRM purposes. In the case of a Hungarian unit, the headquarters hired either bilingual (German/Hungarian) or trilingual (+English) candidates for various positions. Yet, for the positions of the local secretariat, German was considered more important than English. The repatriated respondent (#8\_Controller\_HQ\_German) explains this language choice for HRM purposes by referring to the ownership of the local unit:

AT\_1 owned 50 % or a bit less of this company, and the rest was Hungarian. Well, then you also search people who have a certain linguistic background, know German. For key... well for positions in the secretariat or sales, and so on, German speakers were preferred [*my translation*].

This could be interpreted as the ownership gives AT\_1 the freedom or power to choose German over English when recruiting. More interestingly, it illustrates that in this case HQ is not willing to speak English but prefers German for interunit communication. This prioritization or even language hierarchy can also be described as an ethnocentric attitude (manifested by a positive attitude to the HQ language). In other words, such an attitude informs the choice of the HQ language for HRM purposes, that is making German a hiring criterion for certain local positions (in Hungary).

We also find variation in attitudes within HQ. The Department of Investor Relations (IR) is an interesting example as to attitudes. The department believed or assumed that its 'working language' was English due to the fact that most of its work within international finance and the stock market is conducted in English by default (unmarked language) (see also Section 6.4.5 on external forces). This was the reason that an Anglophone third-country national (Australian) without German proficiency was hired (who left the department again after six months). According to the Department Head (Respondent #4\_HQ\_German), he and his staff were almost enthusiastic about 'practicing English' and choosing it as much as possible to accommodate an international coworker. Though, this positive attitude to English (geocentrism) gradually decreased and turned into resentment, i.e. a negative attitude. This has been amplified by the international employee's lack of interest in acquiring German, which was partly interpreted as a negative attitude to German.

The fact that he didn't learn German or didn't want to learn or speak it, whatever, was interpreted in many ways. [...] It was interpreted as 'well, either he can't be bothered or he doesn't want to stay in Austria anyways'. Then people around him got frustrated, maybe not frustrated, but the understanding, which was very strong in the beginning, and maybe even the joy of being able to speak English have vanished. Our daily work gets extremely complicated because of the comfort of a single person. And then the willingness basically dropped to zero, you could say [*my translation*]. (Respondent #4\_Head of Department\_HQ\_German)

The respondent's (#4) perceptions could be described as rival attitudes that have influenced each other and changed over time. The Austrians interpreted the Australian's reluctance to learn German as a negative attitude to German. Influenced by that, the Austrians, who initially had a positive attitude to English and toward its choice at the workplace, developed a negative attitude to English, combined with a shifting focus on or positive attitude to German (ethnocentrism). In this sense, the German speakers had gradually become reluctant or less willing to choose English and reevaluated German instead. The respondent (#4) adds the fact that it was only a single third-country national in an otherwise German-speaking department. One might say that he tries to justify the ethnocentric attitude by German being the majority language and English the minority language within the IR Department. Another problem was related to the question of language proficiency ("render our daily work way more complicated"). Over time, IR staff had realized that they chose German quite frequently, especially when it came to discussing complexities in the functional area of finance (e.g. accounting) with a complex register, which was considered difficult even in German. Shortcomings in the English register informed the choice of or switching to German. The respondent (#4) reflects on this experience by arguing that the choice of English "breeds constraints, and at the end of the day, we still need to work and not only practice language [*my translation*]". This means within the department, the situation was perceived as an 'artificial language learning setting' rather than a work environment with English as its unmarked working language, which they had initially anticipated to be the case or reality. In this sense, the experience was also an 'eye-opener' for the participants because it made them realize that German is de facto frequently chosen on a day-to-day basis, which renders German proficiency necessary for working in the department. As a result, the Department Head explains that German proficiency or at least the willingness to acquire it would be a hiring criterion for future job candidates. In other words, the ethnocentric attitude he has developed and language proficiency

inform the choice of German for HRM purposes, i.e. selective recruitment. These insights shed light on how attitudes to languages influence language choice in general and how they can change over time through e.g. contextually-bound, negative experiences in particular. That is to say an initially geocentric attitude informing the choice of English (including recruitment) may shift towards an ethnocentric attitude that favors the choice of German (including recruitment), influenced by a perceived negative attitude to German of an English native speaker. In other words, attitudes are not static but influence each other and may change over time.

Within the division (subsidiary), it was the other way around; it used to have an ethnocentric attitude that informed the choice of German for HRM purposes such as selective recruitment. Certain local key management positions required proficiency in German ('must-have'). The attitude has changed to a more geocentric attitude that has turned German into a 'nice-to-have' skill, as explained by respondent #5 (Strategy Planner S/AT\_German). Today, English skills have priority over German proficiency for management positions in e.g. South America. The executives within HR argue that English as an L2 is more widespread than German and deemed necessary for horizontal communication. Seeking German-skilled applicants would be too costly and time-consuming. This implies that the (divisional) executives have become more willing to choose English for communicating with them and across units. These HRM practices are localized and differ from those at HQ.

#### **6.4.4 Social-psychological dimension: participants' motivations inform language choices (including language acquisition)**

Participants have individual or personal motivations of an integrative, instrumental/extrinsic and intrinsic nature that inform their language choices, partly including foreign language acquisition (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.5*).

#### **6.4.4.1 Integrative and instrumental/extrinsic motivations inform language choices (including acquisition)**

Participants have integrative and instrumental/extrinsic motivations to choose a language; this includes its acquisition and application within the employment domain. For instance, respondent #6 (E-Business Manager\_S/AT\_Swedish), the Swedish staff member with some basic German skills, was assigned to the division (subsidiary), where he was offered further German classes (taking place after work at a local language school). In his daily work, he tries to choose German as much as possible in order to adapt to the Austrian working environment and be integrated professionally: “But for other meetings I try to stick to German as much as possible. I have to adapt to the environment.” In this sense, it could be argued that both integrative and instrumental/extrinsic motivations inform the choice of German. The latter is also fostered by some of his interactants’ ethnocentric attitude, as mentioned earlier, also interpreted as internal forces. For the same motivations, respondent #8 (Controller\_HQ\_German) acquired basic skills in Hungarian when he was expatriated to Hungary. Although he had a personal translator/interpreter ‘following him around’, local language skills helped him integrate locally and master simple business conversations or small talk. The respondent (#8) associates both relational or social and utilitarian benefits with Hungarian proficiency, as he explains: “Well, Hungarian, the things I know, that was a necessity since you still wanna talk to people, even if I didn’t get that far with my skills [*my translation*].” In this sense, the respondent’s (#8) efforts to learn basics in Hungarian and choosing it (for simpler topics) in the host-country environment have both integrative and instrumental/extrinsic motives. In these examples, relocated participants’ individual motivations inform the choice and acquisition of the setting’s or organizational unit’s language which are the home-country language (German) or a local language (Hungarian). One could add that these participants also seem to have a positive attitude to these languages.

#### **6.4.4.2 Instrumental/extrinsic and intrinsic motivations inform the choice of a local language**

Motivations are not necessarily linked to staff relocation and their integration, as in the above examples. Also, they can be of an intrinsic nature; that is languages are acquired for non-work-

related and non-extrinsic reasons, before working for the company in question. As already mentioned, the Divisional Head of HR (Respondent #1\_S/AT\_German) is fluent in Spanish, which he learned out of personal interests during his studies (intrinsic motivation), yet now enjoys actively using it for professional purposes (intrinsic and extrinsic motivations) within the employment domain, as he explains in the following:

Lots of people didn't know that there was someone in the corporation who spoke Spanish. I received calls from people who needed something and they were speaking English and I figured they were really struggling. Well, Spaniards or Spanish speakers struggle a lot with English. And then I replied in Spanish: 'We can also speak Spanish if you like.' And I remember, once a guy said: 'I thank God that there is someone in the corporation who knows Spanish.' And then he started talking...and the rumor started to spread and my former boss also told people: '[Respondent #1] speaks fluent Spanish indeed.' And then people took advantage of it and I was glad because I was able to practice it [*my translation*]. (Respondent #1\_Divisional Head of HR\_S/AT\_German)

In this participant's case, it is a combination of several contextual dimensions that inform his choice of Spanish; the respondent's (#1) experience is that Spanish speakers' English skills are poor (language proficiency), which gives his Spanish proficiency an immediate utilitarian value (instrumental/extrinsic motivation). In addition, the respondent's (#1) former boss, who seems to have a polycentric attitude, spreads the word and informs Spanish speakers about his Spanish-skilled employee. Also, the respondent (#1) enjoys speaking Spanish ("I was glad"), which is a language choice that is intrinsically motivated. In addition, he mentions he accommodates Spaniards "out of courtesy". In other words, politeness strategies also influence his language choice behavior vis-à-vis Spanish or Latin American colleagues.

#### **6.4.5 Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages**

There are also social forces that are external to the MNC community and have imposing power; they define some of the company's language choices or rather impose certain languages on AT\_1. This also makes this dimension unique and distinct from the previous dimensions in that it is not the MNC's participants any longer that choose languages but external forces of different kinds which will be elaborated below (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.6*).



#### **6.4.5.1 International stock market enforces the choice of English within Investor Relations (IR)**

AT\_1 is a stock corporation and as such operates in the international stock market. The Investor Relations (IR) Department at HQ is in charge of the continuous communication with external financial partners and customers (e.g. investors, shareholders, book runners, analysts, etc.) and is involved in annual transactions supported by international investment banks. These activities are reported to take place in English by default (unmarked language) since the international stock market 'speaks English'. This means the English language serves as a financial lingua franca which dominates the external international financial market. These external forces impose English as a kind of working language on the IR Department and its responsibilities. Among those are e.g. dealing with different financial reports, providing information on shares, etc. Most of the written documentation is not only of a financial but also of a legal nature and the department usually collaborates with an international law firm providing legal advice to businesses, also in English. The text products are often highly complex in content and terminology (financial and legal registers) and contain information from different sources and authors (i.e. lawyers, AT\_1 staff, translators). The collectively written final version may be monolingual (i.e. English) or bilingual (i.e. English and German; the German version of a bilingual bond description, for instance, is legally binding since local law applies – Austrian Stock Corporation Act, Austrian Capital Market Act, Austrian Stock Exchange Act). Occasionally translation agencies are involved in the process.

We also learn that the department's staff members have needed to gradually adapt to this English-enforced work environment. For instance, the Head of Department (Respondent #4\_HQ\_German) describes English as the default (unmarked) language in his job, which he enjoys, yet has also been challenging in the beginning. Trained as an engineer, the financial market has been new to him and he has made an effort to familiarize himself with the occupational area of international finance and its specialized terminology (financial register). To this end, the respondent (#4) has read and studied plenty of literature in German and English. This also involved finding the English equivalents of the German terms and definitions. Similarly, these external forces have also had an effect on some of his staff such as his German-speaking assistant who needs to interact with externals in English, e.g. when the latter call the office (secretariat). Since the assistant's English proficiency could be improved, English has been chosen

for educational purposes (language training). As opposed to conventional language training in a classroom, the assistant has been on a stay abroad in the UK for a week or two in order to immerse in an English-speaking environment and thereby being somewhat forced to employ and practice her English, thus improve her language skills.

In sum, external forces such as the international financial (stock) market (with English as its legal lingua franca) impose English on the company's functional area of Investor Relations (IR) which leads to a default (i.e. unmarked) language choice (i.e. English) within this area. This includes the choice of English for written communication and different educational purposes (e.g. auto-studying of terminology, stay abroad). This also shows that certain areas and departments may be more English-dominated than others. In other words, these external forces impose English on a specific department working in a specific area in an otherwise German-speaking headquarters. Thus, language choices may differ across departments and occupational areas even within a single organizational unit.

#### **6.4.5.2 National (host-country) work regulations enforce the choice of (translation into) local languages**

National, i.e. host-country, legal regulations within HRM enforce the choice of and translation into local languages. At the division (subsidiary), many work contracts are written in English by default, as also mentioned earlier. Respondent #1 (Divisional Head of HR\_S/AT\_German) reports that their contracts are usually written in English but “sometimes they are bilingual if it is a local requirement [*my translation*]”. This could occur with Russian partners or employees where contracts are first written in English and then translated into Russian. Or, it might also be the other way around, that is documents are written in the local language and then translated into English, as respondent #7 (Lawyer\_S/AT\_German) explains:

Occasionally we have, that's very rare, we have contracts... We have worked out a Russian contract for a Managing Director. Since we don't speak Russian, but there always has to be a Russian text locally, we then have it, for instance, in Russian and English. In this case, we hired someone in Russia to translate it into English. And this always gets outsourced. It is never done internally [*my translation*].

This is an example where different national legal structures suggest the choice of the local language or demand a local language version of certain legal documents such as (work) contracts. This involves some form of translation, either from English into the local language or vice versa, from the local language into English, so the information can be shared between the division (subsidiary) and its local units or partners. In this sense, the choice of the local language (including translation) is not the company's (division's) deliberate choice but requested by external forces, namely national work regulations possibly of a legal nature in host countries.

## **6.5 Conclusions Drawn from Case Study III: Language Choice at AT\_1 Embedded in Social Context**

The case study (III) of AT\_1, a manufacturer with 46,400 employees, has provided qualitative insights into the research phenomenon language choice in an Austrian MNC context. First insights into language choices can be inferred from AT\_1's online representation. The company website ([www.AT\\_1.com](http://www.AT_1.com)) opens up in English but can be switched to German. National subsidiaries choose one (i.e. local language or English), two (i.e. local language and English or German) or more languages (i.e. local language, English and German or Spanish) for representing themselves in the local markets. Variations in language choices across organizational units can also be observed within HRM (e.g. job advertisements), which indicates that language choices are localized and made in a contextual fashion.

Personal accounts have helped conceptualize AT\_1 as a multilingual speech community and decipher community norms, also confirming the above; organizational units speak different (first) languages (i.e. HQ and local languages) and choose them in an unmarked way within their settings (i.e. home and host countries). Although English assumes different functions across organizational units (HQ versus division), it is described as unmarked for similar purposes, namely for interunit communication purposes when a lingua franca or shared working language is needed. The function and unmarked nature of English also differs within the HQ environment, i.e. across divisions and departments. While English has become the unmarked language in the Investor Relations Department (due to external forces), German dominates older divisions at HQ.

More in-depth case study evidence has shed light on the rationales behind language choices which can be categorized into four contextual dimensions that inform language choices within the MNC network. One finds social-linguistic, social-relational, social-psychological (attitudes to languages, motivations) and social-regulatory (internal and external forces) dimensions that all inform (or enforce) different language choices involving English, the HQ language and local/customer languages.

*Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency*

The first contextual dimension is of a social-linguistic nature; the participants involved in a given communicative situation or event often define which language(s) to choose based on their proficiency (linguistic repertoire). In order to share knowledge within the MNC across organizational units (i.e. among participants with different L1s), English is chosen as a *lingua franca*. Participants' language proficiency informs the choice of English for communicating with local managements, collaborating across units, legal documentation within HRM, for presentations and meetings or as a medium of instruction for leadership training programs. This is also associated with some problems such as variation in English fluency or lacking English skills, including the management level, the complexity of technical and legal registers, pronunciation problems and shyness that hinders participants to express themselves in English. Interestingly, we have also learned that the translation/interpretation is a two-way street; it could be that information within HRM or sales communication is sent in English to local units where it is translated into local languages if it needs to reach staff members lower down the hierarchy with assumed limited English skills. (To this end, local managements have the responsibility to filter the relevant information for their staff.) Translation into local languages can be carried out at a larger scale, administered centrally and outsourced (e.g. employee satisfaction surveys) or might concern occasional cases where the individual executive writes or translates contracts in Spanish primarily informed by the counterparty's lower English proficiency. Or, translation could be the other way around, i.e. the communication starts in the host country in the unmarked local (national) language (e.g. email correspondence, work contracts). If the division (subsidiary) gets involved and needs to decipher local documents, (sight) interpretation into English or German is

provided by an international employee assigned to the division (subsidiary). (In this interunit communication, English becomes more of an auxiliary language rather than a lingua franca or corporate divisional language.) Interpretation is also relied on in sales and product management meetings in France and Turkey or a conference in the Ukraine where locals mediate between French, Turkish or Russian and English chosen by staff visiting from the division (subsidiary). In these examples, the nonprofessional interpretation is perceived as allegedly subjective and/or inadequate. Furthermore, we have learned that varying language proficiency can inform the choice of more than one language in written and oral interaction such as code-switching/-mixing (involving German as an L1, L2 or L3, Spanish as an L1 or L2 and English as an L2) which may also be perceived as having a positive effect on interpersonal relations such as reducing the social distance. Similarly, passive multilingualism (involving German as an L1 and English as an L2) is encountered in written communication and regarded as a timesaving and more efficient choice than the choice of German as an L3.

*Social-relational dimension: participant roles, role relationships and politeness strategies*

The second contextual dimension is of a social-relational nature; participant roles within the employment domain, role relationships and politeness strategies and power relations inform different language choices. The asymmetrical buyer-seller relationship and politeness inform the choice of an Eastern European customer language for HRM purposes (selective recruitment). This intends to help engage in regional sales in Eastern European markets and accommodate external customers (accommodation/linguistic adaptation). Politeness strategies aligned with the participant role (i.e. executive) and relative power and status attributed inform the choice of German for addressing Austrian senior executives working within e.g. HR Controlling or Finance at HQ. Since local managers are addressed in the lingua franca English (standardization) and not accommodated, the adaptation to German speakers creates a double standard, which also reflects an ethnocentric attitude. Furthermore, we have learned that at the division (subsidiary), politeness strategies inform the choice of a local language (i.e. Portuguese) for educational purposes in that an HR executive with Spanish skills acquires Portuguese in order to 'show goodwill' towards a Brazilian acquisition where the local management team learns English in return. In this sense, the

choice is believed to have a positive impact on their social relationship by reducing the social distance.

*Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages and motivations*

The fourth contextual dimension is of a social-psychological nature; participants' varying attitudes to languages inform different language choices. Similar to different politeness standards at HQ, an ethnocentric attitude at the division (subsidiary) informs the choice of German, which creates a double standard. More specifically, within the division (subsidiary), English in its function as a divisional corporate language is chosen for internal communication, e.g. with the Brazilian unit (standardization). Yet, this does not apply to German speakers in that the same information which locals receive in English might be translated for German speakers (accommodation/linguistic adaptation). Since both target groups knowingly do not speak well English, the choices create a double standard informed by an ethnocentric attitude. At the interactional level, German speakers' ethnocentric attitude can also inform the choice of German for educational purposes in that it is chosen for communicating with international staff so they can improve their German proficiency. Such an attitude somewhat imposes the HQ language on internationals, which could be described as internal forces with imposing power. These social forces leave the addressee with little to no choice. Ethnocentrism is not limited to the home country but can also be found locally, as in Hungary where it informs the choice of the local language (i.e. Hungarian) involving interpretation and translation activities for the Austrian expatriates. Furthermore, varying attitudes within and across organizational units inform language choices for HRM purposes such as selective recruitment. For instance, a positive attitude to the HQ language can be observed within the HQ environment (ethnocentrism), which informs the choice of German for HRM purposes (selective recruitment); German proficiency is a requirement for a long-term career at HQ especially at the older divisions but possibly also in host countries for key positions as at the Hungarian unit. In this sense, HQ staff is not willing to choose English in internal communication. At HQ, we have learned about participants' rival attitudes at the IR Department that not only inform but also change language choices. German speakers' initial geocentrism turns into ethnocentrism influenced by an English speaker's negative

attitude to German. Consequently, the resulting ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of German for future HRM purposes (selective recruitment). Also, at the division (subsidiary), we have learned that attitudes informing HRM (selective recruitment) have changed over time. The division (subsidiary) used to focus on German proficiency with local key managers while HR executives have meanwhile developed a more geocentric attitude that informs the prioritization of English over German for local management position. This also implies they are more willing to choose English for communicating with them and across units. In this sense, ethnocentrism turned into geocentrism. Overall, attitudes towards languages differ among participants, can have imposing power or create a double standard. They may also influence each other, thus are not static but may change over time. In sum, there is no universal or consensually shared attitude forming a dominant ideology, but we have found multiple attitudes with positive and negative attributes or values that account for different language choices including the HQ, local languages and English.

The social-psychological dimension also entails participants' motivations; they inform their language choices (including foreign language acquisition). Relocated staff members choose (and acquire) German and Hungarian in order to be socially (integrative) and professionally (instrumental/extrinsic) integrated into settings. (The choice of German is also fostered by coworkers' ethnocentric attitudes with imposing power, as mentioned before.) An executive chooses the local language Spanish based on instrumental/extrinsic and intrinsic motivations (e.g. enjoyment when employing languages) which are accompanied by positive attitudes to foreign languages, counterparts' lower English proficiency and matters of politeness.

*Social-regulatory dimension: external forces (with imposing power)*

The last contextual dimension is of a social-regulatory nature, external to the MNC community and has imposing power in that it defines some of the company's language choices, or rather imposes certain languages on AT\_1. In the international financial or stock market, English serves the function of a financial lingua franca by default (unmarked) which also imposes English as the unmarked language on the IR Department's daily work which is characterized by communication with external investors in the stock market. These external forces have also led to the choice of

English for educational purposes; the Department Head himself has studied the financial and stock exchange register and sent his assistant on short-term stays in the UK. Other forces are related to HRM; national work regulations or requirements, maybe of a legal nature, request the choice of and translation into the local language Russian when it comes to work contracts. Overall, these social forces render the MNC and its choices multilingual by definition.

It could be concluded that AT\_1 is a multilingual speech community that unites numerous settings (locations) all speaking different languages, English being the lingua franca or divisional *corporate* language (lingua franca). This case study (AT\_1) has shed light on four contextual dimensions that inform language choice: the social-linguistic dimension language proficiency, the social-relational dimension based on participant roles, role relationships and politeness, the social-psychological dimension including attitudes to languages (with imposing power) and motivations, and the social-regulatory dimension external forces (with imposing power). The contextual dimensions inform different language choices and also impose languages, including the HQ, local/customer languages and English, in different communicative situations, for internal and external communication purposes. The dimensions influence the individual staff member and/or the corporate management level which has to be refracted into individual decision makers who choose languages in a given communicative situation in their own right rather than in a consensual or unified manner. This suggests that social context is multilayered which renders language choice a complex and multilingual social phenomenon. The multilevel and multidimensional analysis of language choice lets us conclude that language can hardly be regulated or managed in a centralized manner in an MNC network such as AT\_1. In other words, the findings indicate a limited manageability of language since language choice is contextually bound. These case study findings also undermine the usefulness of single-language policies but suggest multilingual policies and management activities, if at all necessary.



## 7 LANGUAGE CHOICE IN A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION (MNC): A CASE STUDY (IV) OF AT\_2

### 7.1 About AT\_2: Facts and Figures

AT\_2 is a construction business headquartered in Austria. It employs around 7,400 employees and has subsidiaries in all Austrian provinces, 16 European countries and Australia. The main markets are however adjacent ones, such as Hungary, Germany or the Czech Republic. The MNC has expanded to Eastern Europe relatively recently whereas business relations with Germany have existed for decades, (probably influenced by sharing a language or belonging to the same language community). The company is structured into smaller units, specialized in different construction areas, which work independently but are supervised by corporate management. The area of track construction and maintenance is highly technical and innovative. It is directed by the division *Rail* (subsidiary), which itself operates more internationally and centrally. The firm's clients are primarily from the public sector, e.g. national governments and local authorities or institutions, occasionally private businesses and international firms from the industry. The company's contracted turnover in the fiscal year of 2012/13 was EUR 1,463.52 million/1.5 billion ( $\approx$  DKK 10.9 billion).<sup>51</sup> (This case company (IV) is the second smallest MNC investigated in this collective case study.)

### 7.2 Language Choices on AT\_2's Website

First insights into language choices can be gained from the company's online representation. The corporate webpage ([www.AT\\_2.com](http://www.AT_2.com)) is in German with a condensed English version which gives more or less the same information, e.g. extensive descriptions of AT\_2's expertise and services or news on current projects in Austria. In a language drop-down menu, the user can change the language and choose between Hungarian, Czech and Slovakian. The local language versions are structured a little differently and contain information that is relevant within the local context (e.g.

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<sup>51</sup> These data have mainly been collected from the company's website. [retrieved February 19, 2014]

on local projects, financial situation, visual material). In the investor relations section of the German version, financial documents can be downloaded (since 2007/08); there are biannual reports (spring/fall) and a final financial report. Only the spring report is translated into English, which might be hard to find for an English-speaking readership because it is uploaded on the German website. The foreign language versions do not contain any financial reports.

The Hungarian website differs from the other sites not only in content but also design. It is not possible to navigate back to the German corporate site. The local contents are in Hungarian which are translated into German and English. A user can easily switch back and forth between these three language interfaces. It seems to be a rather comprehensive trilingual local website with its own design and functions. The only documents that can be downloaded are press-related documents in the original language they have been published in, regardless of language interface. This illustrates that language choices regarding the company's online representation can be both localized as in the Hungarian subsidiary's case and fairly centralized as to the remaining local websites where one de facto stays on the corporate website but can swap between language interfaces. The fact that the local subsidiary also has a German version suggests a stronger focus on the HQ language.

AT\_2's online job advertisements for Austria and Germany are available in German. No foreign language skills are required or specified in the job descriptions. Neither can one find any postings written in English. Overall, these first impressions on language choice gained from AT\_2's website reflect variation in language choice across organizational units (settings). One could say the company presents itself as a multilingual speech community where participants choose different languages in different social contexts (e.g. home and host countries). The corporate website alone (which opens up in German and has a multilingual interface) leaves the impression of AT\_2 being a German-speaking MNC with a polycentric outlook. In the following, I will look into the notion of AT\_2 as a multilingual speech community, language functions and its language choice norms in more detail.

### 7.3 AT\_2 as a Multilingual Speech Community: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms

AT\_2 can be described as a multilingual speech community where different languages serve different functions which also lead to certain language choice norms within the MNC network. Within the AT\_2 network, German being the national language of the home country assumes the function of both the HQ and corporate languages which are chosen within the HQ environment and for internal communication across organizational units (settings). English serves the function of a lingua franca (also for internal communication purposes). Other languages have the roles of local languages which are primarily chosen within the settings of the national subsidiaries but also in interunit communication. All languages become customer languages once they are chosen for external communication purposes such as engaging with buyers and customers in local markets.

In order to get a more detailed picture of AT\_2 as a multilingual speech community, it is crucial to look into these functions and their meanings in more depth and language norms within the community. First of all, the question whether there is an official corporate language is interesting since it reveals the overall unmarked nature of German:

Well, that is of course German. I mean we are an Austrian business if I may point that out. And many of us... I might add to the question of a corporate language, we are of course an Austrian corporation that has expanded only in the past years. Well, that hasn't been the case for a very long time. Also, the structures are still in the process of being developed. There are also only a few in house that speak English at an acceptable level [*my translation*]. (Respondent #1\_Managing Director International\_HQ\_German)<sup>52</sup>

The respondent (#1) seems almost offended and stresses that German is undoubtedly the corporate language. This also means it is often chosen for communicating across organizational units (setting). Yet, he associates foreign market expansion and internationalization with the choice of English, which is a relatively new development. Similarly, the Head of Corporate Controlling (Respondent #3\_HQ\_German) argues that “we see ourselves as a German-speaking international business relying on English, only if necessary [*my translation*]”. In this sense, German

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<sup>52</sup> Each interviewee is assigned a number (e.g. #1). Further characteristics indicated are the person's job title or function (e.g. Managing Director International), location (HQ or subsidiary) and first language (e.g. German). In the following, the subsidiary will be abbreviated 'S' and its location indicated by the country code (i.e. 'AT' for Austria).

is the unmarked language while English seems to be the marked language, yet unmarked business lingua franca if German is not an option.

The unmarked nature of German and its function as both the HQ and corporate languages which are chosen for internal communication purposes are confirmed at the division by respondent #6 (Head of Department\_S/AT\_German):

The main communication, meaning internally is of course German. [...] [The corporate language] is German, yes. The corporation is... I'd say 60-70 % of the corporate staff is located in Austria or Germany and key players and also the shareholders all master the German language. Therefore, the communication in the corporation is in principle German [*my translation*].

Also, the fact that local subsidiaries speak local languages and choose them in daily business in an unmarked fashion is described as a well-known fact by respondent #4 (Project Manager\_HQ\_German):

Then he, of course, employs local people who only speak Serbian or Greek, and then it has to continue in the local language. [...] The daily business in the host countries is of course conducted in the national language, that's obvious, otherwise it would get too complicated. But at some point it stops since a construction worker on site will neither speak German nor English, obviously [*my translation*].

The choice of local (national) languages among local language speakers e.g. at a construction site is considered an 'obvious' phenomenon or language choice behavior.

These language choices, as described above, are not perceived as some top-down policy/management measures, rather as common-sense, i.e. unmarked, choices. In other words, the respondents' (#1, #3, #6, #4) rationalizations of language choices ("of course", "obviously") also tell us something about the behavior norms of AT\_2 as a multilingual speech community. The communicative implicatures suggest that German (as the HQ and corporate languages) and host-country languages (as local languages) all represent unmarked, yet contextually-bound languages that are chosen in their respective contexts. The function of English could be described as an auxiliary business lingua franca which is chosen if German is not possible. These preliminary insights indicate that language choices are embedded in social context but do not

grasp the rationales underlying language choices, which will be the focus of the remainder of this case study.

## **7.4 Language Choice at AT\_2 Informed by Social Context**

The following sections will detail how social context influences language choices, more specifically, the contextual dimensions that inform language choices at AT\_2. These include English, the HQ language (German) and local/customer languages (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3*).

### **7.4.1 Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices**

The first contextual dimension that informs language choices is of a social-linguistic nature. Generally speaking, language proficiency stands for participants' linguistic repertoires which include usually one first language (L1) and possibly foreign languages (FLs), i.e. L2, L3, L4, etc. More specifically, the notion of proficiency embodies both ends of the continuum; proficiency ranges from high to low (nonexistent) proficiency in languages. In this sense, varying language proficiency not only informs language choices but may also induce positive and negative associations with participants, thus can represent both a resource and a barrier. Note, participants are to be understood in a broader sense, i.e. can represent the individual language speaker but also larger entities such as departments or organizational units (HQ, subsidiaries) that have different L1s (i.e. HQ versus local languages) and make different language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.1*).

#### **7.4.1.1 Proficiency informs language choices for foreign market expansion**

The company's language proficiency informs possible language choices which also influences or de facto limits foreign market expansion. The industry in which this particular MNC operates is quite specialized, competitive and nationally bound through national funding and local governments or authorities being crucial interactants. It is therefore hard to compete with

national, local competitors, which also prevents the company from entering e.g. French-speaking markets. Foreign market entry often requires the choice of the local language. This also explains that France is very dominant in the African French-speaking countries, and Spain in South America, as reported by respondent #1 (Managing Director International\_HQ\_German). Furthermore, he details:

We don't even enter these markets because we simply lack experts who could navigate and operate in the French-speaking or in the Spanish, Portuguese areas [my translation]. (Respondent #1\_Managing Director International\_HQ\_German)

This reflects the local linguistic requirements, i.e. the choice of the local languages which prohibits AT\_2 from entering these 'closed' markets. The account also indicates that English does not have the function of a business lingua franca in these major-language markets within the construction industry.

In this vein, we learn that German is chosen for different business transactions (including entering new markets). One way of expanding globally within the construction industry is 'following' local internationalizing clients abroad, as respondent #4 (Project Leader\_HQ\_German) explains. This means that AT\_2 constructs a building in a foreign market, but for a German-speaking client. The same phenomenon has been experienced with a Belgian joint venture in Hungary where the Belgian construction company had primarily French-speaking clients who entered the Hungarian market. One could say that participants' language proficiency informs the choice of German for external communication purposes which not exclusively but to some degree also defines AT\_2's foreign market expansion. (Note, AT\_2 also engages in Non-German-speaking markets and construction projects, as we will see in the following sections.)

#### **7.4.1.2 Proficiency informs the choice of English**

Participants' proficiency informs the choice of English for interunit written communication, as explained by respondent #1 (Managing Director International\_HQ\_German):

Every Friday we get a commercial report by email, which is sent to me, to Mr. X and Mr. Y. This one contains a list with four bullet points summarizing the essential things that have happened this week. And here you can read about what he has to report to us. And this is between our subsidiary in Serbia, in Belgrade and between us at HQ in English. That's how it works. Well, and I work a lot in English, I've also been travelling the entire last week, am engaged in three projects in Bosnia. Then I actually speak English from morning to night [*my translation*].

The respondent (#1) explains that his work and responsibilities include interunit supervision and collaboration. In this communicative event English is chosen as a lingua franca given that the participants involved speak different L1s but share English.

Participants' proficiency informs the choice of English for interunit oral communication. According to a Department Head (Respondent #5\_S/AT\_German), the division (subsidiary) hosts international annual meetings with local managements visiting from e.g. England, Hungary, Romania, where English is chosen as a lingua franca. Though, not all participants master the English language, and so the Polish assistant from England interprets for two Polish colleagues in a nonprofessional fashion.

The choice of English is also associated with some problems among participants. For instance, the business navigates in a highly technical area dominated by engineers whose English skills are described as being inadequate in some contexts. This technical industry includes a complex terminology (register), which renders working in English as foreign language more difficult. Apart from this group of staff, several host countries are mentioned where local staff has lower English proficiency. Respondent #1 (Managing Director International\_HQ\_German) mentions the Hungarian and the Czech units that are very localized in that they engage in mostly nationally-funded construction projects: "It's rare to find someone with English skills there [*my translation*]." Lower English proficiency is also associated with the former Yugoslavian countries, Italy or Greece. Some respondents believe that the linguistic situation will change in the future and English will become more dominant as L2 and eventually replace German, a phenomenon that is partly already observed among the younger generation.

Also, respondent's #6 (Head of Department\_S/AT\_German) experience with Romania and the unit there is that English has gradually become more important and notably senior managers have

only started speaking English in the last five years. He recalls that first contacts and the start-up process were realized with interpreters because at the time they had no language in common. In the context of Romania, respondent #5 (Head of Department\_S/AT\_German) shares his critical thoughts on the choice of English as a lingua franca in communicative events like meetings, as detailed below:

It also happens that we, I am thinking of Romania, that we sit around a table and say: 'Well, do we try it in English, do we do it in Romanian or German?' What I have noticed is, especially if you don't sit together with [English] native speakers, a meeting conducted in English is often a problem because both parties cannot fully express themselves or often one party at least cannot express what it wants to say. You also lose quality when translating, of course, but if two nonnative speakers confer, the ambiguity gets worse. That's also something I've observed; you discuss things for minutes until you realize we do mean the same, just use different labels for the same thing. So often it's me who says: 'No, please, stick to Romanian, our colleague translates into German for me instead we try in English.' Of course, there are many native speakers, especially in Eastern Europe, or people who speak really good English, then it's no problem. But if a Romanian communicates with a Hungarian in English, forget it; the conversation is going nowhere [my translation]. (Respondent #5\_Head of Department\_S/AT\_German)

In the respondent's (#5) point of view, the choice of English as a lingua franca entails that one or both parties cannot fully express themselves, which may lead to a loss of information, inaccurate communication and misunderstandings. In interaction with Romanian colleagues, he often prefers mediation to the choice of English, since it seems more convenient and efficient to him in certain situations, as expressed above. Contrary to most of the other respondents, he has also been in contact with English NSs and fluent L2 users of English in Eastern Europe.

With regard to external interaction, we also learn that the choice of English for doing business or engaging in international construction projects is a relatively new phenomenon, as explained below:

Often the language [English] is a deal breaker because there is no one in house or there used to be no one who would understand the contents of the documents [my translation]. (Respondent #2\_Managing Director Commerce\_HQ\_German)



In the past, AT\_2 often had to resign from ‘English-speaking’ projects which is seen as a competitive disadvantage or even business loss (“deal breaker”). (We will learn more about these large-scale projects later in this case study.)

#### **7.4.1.3 Proficiency informs language choices (involving interpretation)**

Participants’ proficiency informs language choices for internal communication purposes; oral encounters such as meetings are characterized by the attendees with varying proficiency, which makes language choices context-dependent in that they differ across communicative events, as elaborated below:

No, there is no policy. Before every meeting, it is decided, depending on who is present, in which language the meeting is conducted. Well, everybody assumes that it is conducted in German and if there is someone attending who does not at all master the language and if no interpreter is around, then we decide to have the meeting in English. But this is decided on situational grounds, there is no policy or rule for that [*my translation*]. (Respondent #3\_Head of Corporate Controlling\_HQ\_German)

According to the respondent (#3), the unmarked choice for an internal meeting is German; attendees may choose German as an L1 or FL, language assistance (interpretation) may be relied on, or English is chosen as a lingua franca which seems to be the last resort. (The account also reflects the respondent’s (#3) attitudes to languages, to which I will return in *Section 7.4.3*.) Respondent #1 (Managing Director International\_HQ\_German) draws a similar, maybe less ethnocentric but more neutral picture with regard to contextual language choice:

It also always depends on who is sitting around the table. There are people who only speak the national language. There are people who speak the national language and English. There are people who speak the national language and maybe only German [L2]. And then we navigate or prepare a meeting with interpreters, so that everybody can understand everything [*my translation*].

This account stresses that the participants involved in a communicative situation, more precisely their language proficiency informs the language or languages to be chosen. This could involve interpretation.

The division (subsidiary) also provides insights into language choices involving interpretation. Respondent #5 (Head of Department\_S/AT\_German) is involved in a joint venture with four Hungarian firms that include meetings both in Austria and Hungary. If the respondent (#5) visits Hungary, he might be the only German speaker at the table. In the opposite case, when the Hungarian delegation visits the corporate management or controlling team at the division (subsidiary), Hungarian speakers may represent the minority. Regardless, in both communicative scenarios meeting attendees choose their L1s, and nonprofessional interpretation is provided by local staff.

In Serbia, Serbian may be chosen at a meeting while the local Technical Manager nonprofessionally interprets for the Austrian Managing Director Commerce (Respondent #2\_HQ) into English. The latter also chooses English which needs to be interpreted back into the local language for locals. In this context, we also learn that the technical register can be difficult to deal with; participants' proficiency or rather their shortcomings and need for clarification lead to visual expression.

If the engineer lacks a word, he takes a piece of paper, then he's drawing it, then everybody gets it, when we talk about technical stuff. If it's small talk or politics, it's more difficult, of course. But when we only talk about technical stuff, about a street and the English word is missing or the word in the local language is missing, then you draw it, and then everybody actually knows what you mean [*my translation*]. (Respondent #2\_ Managing Director Commerce\_HQ\_German)

The respondent (#2) considers the technical register easy compared to social or political matters (topics) and yet engineers sometimes lack a word in English or the local language. This leads them to draw, i.e. visually express what they are not able to express orally. Normally, every engineer understands and can decode the visual illustration on paper. Serbia is also mentioned in the case of an expatriated Austrian construction foreman who needed language assistance 24/7 since no common language could be chosen. This was provided by a local Serbian coworker who nonprofessionally interpreted at meetings, at the construction site or at social events. Respondent

#1 (Managing Director International\_HQ\_German) refers to another case in Serbia where conditions for project collaboration were negotiated among corporate management teams in three languages. It could be described as a semi-external interaction which is not part of the daily agenda. Since the question of language choice had not been discussed in advance, the monolingual Serbian counterpart had two assistants to the management team with him, one proficient in German and the other in English, to be prepared for any language choice on the Austrians' part. At the end of the meeting, the Serbian negotiation partner summarized the main points in Serbian which were mediated into both German and English to make sure that every party or attendee had fully understood the conditions of the collaboration.

As to interpretation, the Managing Director Commerce (Respondent #2\_HQ\_German) remembers a case where the Serbian business partner relied on a professional simultaneous interpreter. In this respect, the respondent (#2) mentions a few problems regarding nonprofessional, in-house solutions; first, employees are not able to interpret simultaneously but only consecutively which is more time-consuming. Second, they may also have trouble conveying information correctly, accurately and consistently. Only through extensive discussions and explanations do the misunderstandings become explicit. Third, the potential subjectivity of the mediator is pointed out. This means staff members from the business counterpart mediating for all participants, including AT\_2 staff, may not interpret in an objective way but in favor of their bosses or colleagues. Overall, these examples of (nonprofessional) interpretation are informed by the participants' language proficiency; they do not share a language or lingua franca to communicate in and need a 'third party' to assist.

#### **7.4.1.4 Proficiency informs language choices (involving translation)**

First of all, the case company does not have a language department in charge of language matters or translation. These things are taken care of individually, although some information, e.g. selection of or experience with translation agencies, is exchanged across two or three departments at the headquarters.

We learn that participants such as subsidiaries often choose their local language in the first place (unmarked language) for written internal communication. If the information needs to be shared with HQ, it needs to be translated into either English or German. Text genres such as reports, requests for proposal and offers, contracts and general internal documentation are often translated locally by managers' assistants from the local language (e.g. Serbian) into English. If the document has a broader internal readership (across units), English is chosen (over German) as the second document language. If the internal correspondence concerns only two people such as respondent #4 (Project Leader\_HQ\_German) and a Serbian local manager, the latter may translate from Serbian into German.

Some documents written in the local language are not translated locally, and yet sent to HQ. So, respondent #4 (Project Leader\_HQ\_German) may receive an invoice written in the local language from Serbia that needs to be approved. He reports to have some knowledge of Serbian key words giving him a rough idea of the content. But if he is not completely sure of the description of e.g. the service, then he uses online translation tools (machine translation). For this specific purpose, the quality of the translation product (target text) is considered adequate.

These texts are translated in order to keep HQ informed about local processes. In other words, we learn that the source language chosen is the local language, that is the texts are written in the local language in the first place, which then need to be translated (into English or German). It illustrates that the participants, i.e. the organizational units, speak different languages or have different language proficiency and translation is needed to ensure mutual understanding between the settings.

#### **7.4.1.5 Proficiency (and channel) inform(s) code-switching (English, German)**

Participants' language proficiency informs code-switching; in international meetings, participants may not always adhere to the common language previously agreed on (e.g. English) but switch to their native languages for clarification purposes. If this happens, and AT\_2 staff communicates in German, they try to explain and summarize the content in English in order not to exclude their counterparts. The phenomenon of code-switching is informed by the lower skills in the L2 than L1, which makes it harder to explain complex matters (topics).

For internal communication purposes, a Project Leader (Respondent #4\_German) located at HQ and his Serbian colleague, a local manager, switch between English and German in interaction since these are the participants' common languages:

Those who speak German, we actually speak German with them, but not with my commercial executive since he's not totally comfortable speaking German. He lacks words and then he switches rather quickly to English and then we speak English. That doesn't mean that we don't have some German sentences every now and then, when we are on the phone, for instance. That's quite funny. [...] he is more comfortable speaking English and then he is like: 'Well, I didn't get that' or 'can we continue in English?'. And then we switch to English, which works most of the time. Well, of course, misunderstandings can always occur, but that's just normal [my translation]. (Respondent #4\_Project Leader\_HQ\_German)

According to the respondent (#4), German is chosen in interaction with participants who master it as an FL. In this sense, HQ staff is accommodated or linguistically adapted to by their counterparts. Similarly, the respondent (#4) may start a conversation with the Serbian local manager in German during which they often switch to English, possibly back and forth between the two languages. Not only the Serbian's language proficiency, i.e. variation in L2 (English) and L3 (German) fluency, but also the medium being oral and the channel (telephone) seem to have an influence on language choice or rather trigger code-switching. The respondent (#4) seems to perceive the phenomenon as positive or amusing ("That's quite funny.") rather than as negative or problematic. One could argue this language choice behavior also reduces the social distance between the interactants, thus affects their interpersonal relations.

In these examples, participants' proficiency informs code-switching involving German as an L1 and L3 (also being the HQ/corporate language) and English as an L2 (lingua franca).

#### **7.4.2 Social-relational dimension: participants' role relationships and politeness strategies inform language choices**

Within the employment domain, participants assume various roles such as buyers or customers and sellers, which gives them inherent relationships expressing relative power or status and social closeness/distance. These also define which language choices are appropriate (polite). Role

relationships aligned with politeness principles inform different language choices (involving translation and language acquisition) (see also *Chapter 2, Sections 2.3.3.2 and 2.3.3.3*).

#### **7.4.2.1 Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice of (translation into) customer languages**

Biannual and annual reports are written in German at HQ and translated into English by an Austrian translation agency in order to reach out to the international, external readership, e.g. shareholders, etc. which also reflects a geocentric attitude. The subsidiaries receive the annual report in either German or English and are responsible for translating it into the customer languages (e.g. Czech, Hungarian) for host markets. The responsibility of the translation is transferred to the local level, which is an example of decentralizing or localizing the question of language choice and linked translation activities.

In this vein, the translation of promotional text genres (e.g. brochures, catalogues, calendars, product information, corporate image leaflets) is organized in an even more localized way. This means that the decision whether or not material should exist in the customer language lies in the subsidiaries' hands. As to contents, the larger units (in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia) may use e.g. the corporate design folder only as a guideline and localize it to a great degree, i.e. adapt contents to their local linguistic and cultural needs. The smaller units probably translate HQ material more or less conventionally, that is it involves less localization. We also learn that the division (subsidiary) does not have a lot of promotional material per se; yet, if it participates in an international fair and presents its specialized services, the supporting documentation is either written in or translated into the local language by the local employee who interacts with the customers on site.

#### *Problems and advantages associated with nonprofessional translation*

Different opinions on translation quality prevail within AT<sub>2</sub>. For instance, respondent #4 (Project Leader\_HQ\_German) believes that translating is a task that requires time and concentration. He argues that being familiar with technical or legal registers and the related

terminology is required to produce an acceptable translation. This can be challenging for the bilingual or multilingual secretary. Yet, the repetitive nature and structure of e.g. contracts are mentioned to facilitate the translation task. According to respondent #5 (Head of Department\_S/AT\_German), in-house translation practices have certain advantages; a bilingual assistant acquires the background knowledge over time and can also clarify uncertainties regarding terminology more easily and quickly since she has the possibility to simply contact an engineer in house. (The language assistants seem to be females only.) In this vein, we learn that the translation task may also get outsourced to professionals if the genre, register or topic is too complex, there is too little time available in proportion to the number of pages to be translated, or if the language pair(s) cannot be covered by staff members (e.g. Arabic). Either an external translation agency or a free-lance translator is sought, ideally in a host country, which is always the cheaper option. The last resort is to contact an agency in Austria, which is avoided, if possible, for economic reasons.

Overall, participants' role relationship, that is the buyer-seller relationship, and linked politeness strategies within the employment domain inform the choice of and translation into customer languages, often of a nonprofessional nature. In other words, the financial, promotional and legal text genres that target customers and other external stakeholders are translated since accommodation/linguistic adaptation is the appropriate (polite) language choice considering their asymmetrical role relationship.

#### **7.4.2.2 Buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies inform the choice (and acquisition) of the customer language**

The buyer-seller relationship and linked politeness strategies also inform the choice and acquisition of the customer language within the host-country environment to be able to communicate with externals in the local market. In the context of the Romanian unit and its local projects, we learn that two Austrian managers have been expatriated. Neither of these managers took language classes but learned Romanian on the job. They have acquired the local language over time and reached an acceptable level today.

No, none of them took a course but through everyday life they have gradually learned more and more. My commercial executive's Romanian is surely weaker but this is also

related to the fact that he has an assistant with very good German skills and relatively little contact with externals in comparison to the engineer who still constantly interacts with clients, suppliers, who also talks to people. The business administration is more of a desk job, I'd say. The technical executive is the one who is out in the field, who meanwhile speaks perfect Romanian, I was told [*my translation*]. (Respondent #5\_Head of Department\_S/AT\_German)

The respondent (#5) reports on the case of two Austrian expatriated managers who both speak the host-country language Romanian. He stresses that the external interaction with clients and suppliers in the local market requires the choice of Romanian ("constantly interacts with clients", "talks to people") compared to the local business administration that is dealt with 'from the inside' and facilitated by a German-skilled assistant. Overall, the buyer-seller relationship and the related politeness strategy or appropriate choice in customer interaction suggest the choice of the latter's L1 (accommodation/linguistic adaptation).

#### **7.4.3 Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages inform language choices**

Participants have different attitudes to languages in that they assign positive and negative values or attributes to languages. We learn about positive attitudes to the HQ language (ethnocentrism), to English (geocentrism) and to local/customer languages (polycentrism). These multiple attitudes vary across participants, i.e. do not form a consensual ideology, and may even stir controversies among executives (rival attitudes) and have imposing power (internal forces). So, the different attitudes to languages inform different language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.4*).

##### **7.4.3.1 Varying attitudes inform language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation)**

In the context of attitude to languages, we gain first insights into the HQ's ethnocentric orientation as to market entry. New business units are always established by expatriated Austrians or Germans with the support of local partners. After four or five years it may be taken over by



local managers, once trust has been established. Ideal are also people that once migrated to Austria, started working for the company (at HQ) and at some point want to go back to their home country (e.g. one of the Serbian Managing Directors has lived in Austria for many years). However, the organizational structure is rather centralized since the local management remains a shared responsibility between the subsidiary and HQ, where the former is in charge of the daily business and the latter has a supervisory function. An example is mentioned where the number of expatriates and the degree of centralization have decreased over time. Within the division's (subsidiary) specialized area of track construction and maintenance (division rail), a project in Romania was inaugurated with 80 Austrians, of whom only two managers are left, together with 120 to 250 Romanian employees. Sometimes only top management, sometimes the top and middle management levels contain of (N)NSs of German, the rest are locals (with possibly some German proficiency). Expatriates have a supervisory function or disseminate knowledge in the first place and are often HQ personnel.

Furthermore, we learn that ethnocentrism informs the choice of German for selective recruitment, as explained at HQ:

...since we actually have the philosophy, from the corporation's perspective, some departments see that a little differently, but generally speaking we have the philosophy that we are a German-speaking firm and for a lot of our employees, also in foreign countries far away, German is a hiring criterion. [...] Well, as I said before, we see ourselves as a German-speaking international business relying on English, only if necessary [*my translation*]. (Respondent #3\_Head of Corporate Controlling\_HQ\_German)

The respondent (#3) shares his views on the company's philosophy and thereby his attitudes to German in comparison to English. More specifically, we learn how a positive attitude to German (ethnocentrism) informs the choice of German for HRM purposes, namely for local selective recruitment. In other words, German-skilled workforce is explicitly sought, so German can be chosen for internal communication purposes ("German-speaking firm"). It seems the ethnocentric attitude goes hand in hand with a comparatively negative attitude to English in that the company or rather the respondent (#3) – others do not share his attitude – prefers German and is not willing to speak English, unless he has to, which could also be described as internal forces, which will be discussed subsequently. At first, the executive's (#3) account resembles the description of

an implicit language policy or commonly shared ideology (“philosophy”) that fosters the choice of German at different levels. Though, it also reveals that there are internal discrepancies among executives (“some departments see that a little differently”), namely rival attitudes which affect language choice in different ways or allow alternative choices to German. More specifically, what the respondent (#3) means by that is the attitudes to German and English respectively vary within the company, in fact within HQ, and are not universally shared; some departments or their agents disagree with the respondent (#3) in that they have a less ethnocentric but more geocentric attitude, which will be further shown below.

Aligned with an ethnocentric attitude, as illustrated above, selective recruitment is operationalized in a way that local staff (with the local language as their L1) is often German-skilled (L2) or multilingual (+ English), so they can mediate between HQ and the local site as well as external third parties (e.g. local clients, authorities, governments). In Slovenia, for instance, a German-skilled Slovenian has been appointed as the local project leader who had lived in Austria for 20 years. Also in Serbia, the local key contact persons master German. At the Polish subsidiary, a local linguist of German has been employed. What facilitates selective recruitment, although not explicitly mentioned in this context, are participants’ language proficiency; AT\_2’s experience with the markets in which it operates is that the latter tend to speak German as a foreign language, less commonly English, as mentioned earlier, or no second language at all (see also *Section 7.4.5* on external forces).

German is not equally important to all HR Managers. Participants’ geocentric attitudes also inform the choice of English for various positions (selective recruitment). For instance, respondent #4 (Project Leader\_HQ\_German) does not mind using English, which also means he hires skilled workforce without German but English proficiency only (in addition to the local language). Similarly, respondent #5 (Head of Department\_S/AT\_German) values multilingualism but prioritizes technical expertise over German proficiency; if a qualified engineer with a local/customer language as his L1 speaks English as an L2 or FL, he does not need to master German. Aligned with a geocentric attitude, insights gathered at HQ reveal that English proficiency will be a hiring criterion for the International Department’s future assistant, when the current one not speaking English will retire. (The department was established in 2005, is still

growing and has a consulting function in the initial decision-making process as to which projects to make a bid for.)

An interesting expatriation case or rather the post-expatriation reflections reported at HQ shed light on the role and influential power of attitudes on language choice including language acquisition for expatriates and selective recruitment at the local level. More specifically, two respondents (#2, #4) recall an Austrian being expatriated to the local site in Serbia and describe various language choices and problems from their individual perspectives which also reveal different attitudes to English and the local language Serbian (which account for two rival language choices for HRM purposes.) First, the Managing Director Commerce (Respondent #2\_HQ\_German) recalls the case and shares his understanding as follows:

We had a site foreman in Serbia, for instance, who was expatriated to provide local support. When I visited, he told me he would take Serbian classes...I was like: 'First, you'll never learn it anyway, forget it!' I said: 'You better learn English because that's what most people understand. 95 % of those on site understand English, but no one will ever understand your Serbian [my translation].' (Respondent #2\_Managing Director Commerce\_HQ\_German)

Interestingly, the respondent (#2) is frequently involved in business collaboration with Serbia, where (nonprofessional) interpretation is usually relied on because the Serbian senior executives do not speak English, as he himself explains, and also mentioned earlier. He seems to neglect or at least is not aware of his own experience where he has struggled with Serbian business partners not mastering English. Yet, the respondent (#2) has a positive attitude to English (geocentric attitude) that influences his language choices or advice for that matter regarding language acquisition. Thus, he recommends the site foreman that he learns English instead of the local language. (The geocentric attitude also informs his individual language choices, as he explains.)

This expatriation case is also recalled by a Project Leader at HQ (Respondent #4\_German) who draws a completely different picture. He shares his perspective on the local situation in Serbia, its unmarked language choice, and provides an explanation for the nonexistent English skills at a Serbian construction site or in Belgrade in general:

He has been at the construction site for half a year. At any event, also at on-site meetings, he sat next to him [local mediator] and asked him: ‘What are they talking about?’ That’s of course tedious. But obviously, the local client is actually Serbian and as such doesn’t necessarily have to speak English. He doesn’t need to. It’s not necessary. He is in fact constructor of the city of Belgrade and in this capacity carrying out the project. And therefore they, of course, speak Serbian at the table; seems just logical. It’s very, very difficult and you need to hire and train local people who can run the daily business on the construction sites in the local languages [*my translation*]. (Respondent #4\_Project Leader\_HQ\_German)

One could say that the respondent (#4) has a positive attitude to the local language (polycentric), believes that it might be overtly chosen at the local site (unmarked language) and finds it more profitable or efficient to train and hire local staff in host countries. The problems the expatriate was facing locally, namely that he felt excluded, could hardly communicate with anyone but constantly needed an interpreter, and the local language choices appear rather obvious to the respondent (#4) (“of course”, “obviously”, “logical”).

These two quotations illustrate how executives’ subjective opinions and evaluations (attitudes) can express the opposite as to which language local participants primarily choose and consequently which language skills are needed for expatriates to be. These attitudes influence language choices for HRM and educational (training) purposes in different ways; respondent (#4) would hire local candidates with local language proficiency and train them the professional skills needed for running a local construction site, whereas respondent (#2) would expatriate a German-speaking skilled worker and advise him to acquire English to be able to communicate with local staff. Put simply, one says the expatriate would need to learn the local language because local staff does not speak English, while the other executive believes learning English would be most useful or efficient. This expatriation case also illustrates that attitudes to languages may not only differ across the organizational units of an MNC (HQ versus subsidiaries) but also within an organizational unit as the headquarters.

More on polycentric attitudes and their influence on HRM can be gained at the division (subsidiary); a Department Head (Respondent #5\_S/AT\_German) has employed their former Hungarian teacher as his assistant and a trilingual (i.e. Romanian, German, English) secretary in Romania who both have been in charge of most of the internal correspondence. He also says that

in order to facilitate foreign market expansion and entry, the division (subsidiary) may recruit (or headhunt) nationals from potentially interesting markets with local/customer language proficiency and the local cultural knowledge. For instance, a Polish national working for a German joint venture partner and competitor has been headhunted because the Polish market being quite 'closed' seemed profitable. This could also include staff relocation; a German speaker with Italian skills has been located in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland and is in charge of Switzerland and Italy.

A polycentric attitude can further encompass the choice of local languages for educational purposes (language acquisition for expatriates). The division (subsidiary) once had a large project in England where approximately 50 German speakers (upper management) and 140 Polish speakers (operative staff) were expatriated to the local unit in Reading, west of London. English language classes were locally, externally organized at the University of Reading and also partially funded by the English government, the rest being paid by the MNC. The management staff did the three levels of the Cambridge language test whereas the operative employees passed the first level, so that they could communicate at a basic level in the host country. These training and acquisition measures were initiated in order to ensure communication at and integration into the foreign local unit (setting). In general, these kinds of classes are paid for by the company and take place during working hours or after work, depending on the offer of the language school. (On that note, it is mentioned that the willingness of participating in evening or weekend classes is greater among the higher educated staff members.) Besides, offering local language learning to staff is also regarded as a form of language policy (Respondent #5\_Head of Department\_S/AT\_German).

In 2005, AT\_2 bought a company in Hungary closely collaborating with the (division) subsidiary. Although the Hungarian Managing Director of the local unit had a decent command of the English language and passive understanding of German, the Austrian core team to be expatriated wished to learn Hungarian, driven by polycentric attitudes. They acquired some basic knowledge in order not to be totally dependent on the language mediator but to get an idea themselves of what was going on in daily business and internal meetings. This team consisted of a Department Head (Respondent #5\_S/AT\_German), who initiated the language learning, a construction manager and two operative staff members. They had an external teacher coming to the office and

teaching them Hungarian twice a week, sometimes during working hours, over a period of six months. Although the Hungarian counterpart knew English and German, and mediation was provided at meetings, Hungarian skills were believed to make daily business for the expatriated Austrians easier. This is an example where polycentric attitudes and motivation overlap, so do the executive and individual levels. We could say that the executive (#5) endorses local language acquisition (choice of a local language for educational purposes) for both integrative and instrumental (extrinsic) motives. In addition, one might also argue that the respondent (#5) has an overall positive attitude to the local language and believes he and his team should all learn Hungarian.

#### **7.4.3.2 Geocentric attitude informs (imposes) the choice of English (internal forces)**

Participants' attitudes may not only vary but literally compete with each other affecting interpersonal encounters, i.e. informing language choices at meetings. The Head of Corporate Controlling's (Respondent #3\_HQ\_German) positive attitude to German (ethnocentrism) and negative attitude to English conflict with some colleagues' positive attitude to English (geocentrism); the respondent (#3) claims that some of his coworkers intentionally take a person without German skills to a meeting, so the meeting has to be conducted in English, and they can 'show off' their English skills. To the question whether there are things he would like to improve or change, he replies the following:

I would promulgate a much stronger directive that we are German. Some are simply, some find it cool to speak English, although German were possible too. And that's not necessary. Just that I can show off, that I speak good English. Unfortunately, it happens that meetings are held in English because someone likes that and he intentionally takes someone with him to the meeting who doesn't speak German well enough, so that the meeting is conducted in English, and all the others know that he is a great English speaker. That's a shame. I find that stupid. That's something I would change [*my translation*]. (Respondent #3\_Head of Corporate Controlling\_HQ\_German)

This is an indication that there is a variation in English proficiency in that these colleagues speak better English than others (maybe including the respondent himself). It is not totally clear

whether the respondent (#3) feels uncomfortable conducting a meeting in English due to his comparatively lower English proficiency, or simply does not like such a behavior since it makes other meeting attendees feel (linguistically) inferior and could be avoided. In this sense, language is also regarded as a powerful or even manipulative tool that attempts to patronize and mark power relations. It could be argued that his perceptions and evaluation of this kind of communicative event can be described as an overall negative attitude to English and its choice as a lingua franca at meetings. More specifically, the personal account shows how participants' varying attitudes collide in that the colleagues' geocentric attitude and related behavior (of choosing non-German-skilled personnel to accompany them) competes with or manipulates and in this example overrides the respondent's (#3) ethnocentric attitude since the outcome is that English is chosen at the meeting. This language imposition is a manifestation of social internal forces. Overall, these insights are an indication that language choices are shaped by participants' attitudes which seem to vary among them, as will be further illustrated in the following sections.

#### **7.4.3.3 Negative attitude to English and participant role inform the choice of the local language (involving interpretation)**

Participants might have a negative attitude to English that informs the choice of their L1 instead, especially if they are in a higher position. It is reported that the usual meeting among Managing Directors from the division and Italy is not conducted in English. Respondent #5 (Head of Department\_S/AT\_German) assumes Italian executives' negative attitude to English to be the main reason for the choice of their L1:

In Italy you have, and that is comparable to Montenegro, the young generation that speaks English, I'd say people between 25 and 30, 35, that manage in English and grew up with it very naturally. Executive staff that is somewhat around 50 is rarely willing to speak English. I don't know if it is really related to their capacity or simply their willingness [...] But I'd say the classic meeting, [where] Managing Directors meet and talk, is almost always assisted by an interpreter. English is seldom an option [*my translation*].

Although the respondent (#5) does not know the exact reason for the language choice, he shares his impressions; first, he relates age to language proficiency in that older participants seem to have

lower English skills (than the younger generations). At the same time, though, the respondent (#5) doubts that language proficiency is the actual or the sole reason for Italian executives avoiding the choice of English. He believes that they simply do not want to speak English (“willingness”), that is it has more to do with their negative attitude to English rather than with their actual skills or ability. Second, it seems that the participants’ level of employment or their seniority and related status give them flexibility and power in choosing their first language (Italian) over English. Eventually, the participants choose their L1, i.e. Italians choose Italian and the Austrians choose German, and some form of language assistance or mediation is organized. To this end, a German-speaker, who is located in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland and also responsible for Italy, is in charge of most of the (nonprofessional) interpretation tasks concerning communication between the division and counterparts in Italy. In this example, participants’ negative attitudes to English, their participant roles with relative status and power (level of employment or seniority), possibly age, and less likely limited English proficiency account for language choice, more specifically inform the choice of the participants’ first language (local language) in communicative situations such as meetings. Consequently, some form of interpretation is necessary.

#### **7.4.4 Social-psychological dimension: participants’ instrumental/extrinsic motivation informs the acquisition and passive use of local languages**

Participants have an instrumental/extrinsic motivation that informs their language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.5*). Respondent #5 (Head of Department\_S/AT\_German) has acquired a passive understanding of several languages on the job, in addition to English, Latin and French he had at school. These passive skills are applied to written and oral media, as he explains:

I understand, seldom speak [them] though. I understand Italian, French, Spanish, meanwhile Romanian relatively well. Reading is no problem. [...] to the extent that if somebody hands me over a note, I understand it, get an idea. If it goes into detail, I use a translator, of course, also at meetings, in Romanian, in Italian, of course, in French. Well, my French learned at school got a bit rusty, but we rarely enter the French-speaking area. [...] That’s a bit rusty but the other languages do the trick actually. I still sit with interpreters in meetings but I understand a lot of what is being said already before the translation. And as I said, in writing, given that all



these languages are Latin-based, there is no problem [*my translation*]. (Respondent #5\_Head of Department\_S/AT\_German)

The respondent (#5) chooses local languages in a passive fashion for utilitarian purposes within the employment domain. The passive proficiency is beneficial or useful in that he can understand written and oral information in local languages. In the case of Romanian and Italian, the choice includes acquisition, i.e. he has learned them on the job for the same reason. The frequent exposure to these languages as in meetings and the shared Latin roots seem to have facilitated the acquisition process. In sum, the respondent's (#5) instrumental/extrinsic motivation informs the passive choice and acquisition of local languages.

Respondent #6 (Head of Department\_S/AT\_German) has Russian skills which sometimes prove useful for the clarification of German translations of Slavic source texts. Understanding the original language version of a contract or other legal documents helps better interpret the translation. The closeness of Russian and the southeast European (i.e. Slavic) languages they deal with makes this language check possible. In this example too, certain utilitarian benefits of passive local/customer language skills have been identified. In other words, the respondent (#6) is instrumentally/extrinsically motivated to rely on his passive language skills.

These two examples might leave us with the question if passive proficiency can be classified as a language choice or rather a response to a choice others have made. Yet, the motivation for the behavior seems to be of an instrumental/extrinsic nature, that is beneficial in the employment domain.

#### **7.4.5 Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages**

There are also social forces that are external to the MNC community and have imposing power; they define some of the company's language choices or rather impose certain languages on AT\_2. This also makes this dimension unique and distinct from the previous dimensions since it is not the MNC's participants any longer that choose languages but external forces of different kinds which will be elaborated below (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.6*).

#### 7.4.5.1 (Supra)national funding enforces language choices (involving translation)

Financial resources seem to correlate with project size and together can be a decisive indicator for language choices and possible translation procedures involved. Larger projects may be financed by the European Investment Bank (Luxemburg), European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (London) (supranational funding), branches of the World Bank or other international financiers (e.g. the U.S.); under these financial circumstances, the project language chosen is English, which gets described as the somewhat unmarked language. This means all written documentation concerning the offer, and contracts are written in English by default.

This is because of the fact that the contracts and construction projects that we [the respondent and his department] have are also very much dominated by English through the funding. Then I prefer that he [local staff] speaks English with me instead of German, but then covers the local language. And then he has covered both languages. [...] We can manage in English very, very easily, thus preferably English and the local language. That's actually the norm with us [*my translation*]. (Respondent #1\_Managing Director International\_HQ\_German)

What the respondent means by 'covering the local language' is that at times, contracts need to be bilingual, i.e. English in combination with a local language, if the local authorities request it (e.g. in Serbia, Bosnia, Romania). Then German gets dropped. This may also involve certified professional translators. In some cases, external legal advice is sought with Austrian law firms that provide English documents. (In these larger projects the English version is usually legally binding.)

If the projects are small(er), they are often nationally funded; then they are conducted in the local language in the first place.

They hardly have projects that are handled via English and this kind of funding. The Czech and the Hungarians at AT\_2 take the approach that they say: 'Well, here and there I get a little order.' In fact, only Hungarian clients, Hungarian budgets, Czech funding, and even if it's European funding, everything is still in Czech [*my translation*]. (Respondent #1\_Managing Director International\_HQ\_German)

This influence of financial forces is confirmed at the local level: "If the orders are tied to a national budget, the contracts are usually in the local language, too. Of course, we then get those

translated that we can go through them in greater detail [*my translation*].” The fact that the source language for documents is the local language also means that contracts or orders need to be translated into English (or German) to ensure mutual understanding between contractors. External translation services might be relied on. In all these projects of different sizes, the (supra)national financial forces, combined with clients and national (host-country) authorities inform or impose language choices regarding the written documentation, which forces AT\_2 to linguistically comply and often undertake translation measures accordingly.

#### **7.4.5.2 National (home/host-country) authorities enforce the choices of HQ/local languages**

Apart from AT\_2’s direct clients such as national construction authorities (‘Straßenverwaltung’), they also have to collaborate with other host-country authorities (e.g. tax offices, financial institutions) further in the process; it is common-sense understanding that these counterparts do not speak English but the local language only. As respondent #1 (Managing Director International\_HQ\_German) explains in relation to the tax office:

If it’s the tax authorities, financial institutions and the like, they, of course, don’t care at all if we have an English contract with our client. [...] They need to be dealt with in the local language. Well, you cannot go to the local tax office in Serbia, neither can you do that in Austria, and say: ‘Well, my contract is in English, I am speaking English only with you.’ They will be like: ‘Pardon me? That doesn’t work for us [*my translation*].’

We are dealing with an asymmetrical role relationship similar to the buyer-seller relationship. Though, in comparison to external customer-buyer interaction, where the company can still deliberately choose a language (customers’ L1, English, etc.) for addressing them, it has much less option here, if any at all; in fact, the local authorities choose their own languages and impose them on the communicative situation, which then enforces the MNC to undertake translation/interpreting activities. Related to the example above, this could also mean the translation from English into the HQ language if the source language of an international contract is English.

Similarly, respondent #4 (Project Leader\_HQ\_German) mentions Greece in relation to this issue. If local authorities or institutions are involved in the course of a project, Greek is chosen as the language of interaction; it is usually the local Greek Project Manager who serves as a nonprofessional interpreter. If a local bank is consulted, he can mediate for HQ personnel (Greek ↔ German) because he has lived in Germany.

These are examples where external forces impose the local language and the company has to comply with these local circumstances or local language choice by e.g. translating written information or interpreting between parties in oral interaction.

#### **7.4.5.3 National (host-country) regulations enforce the choice of local languages (involving further training)**

Another example where external forces define language choices is the local setting Poland which is one of AT\_2's larger units; national, host-country requirements enforce the choice of and often legally certified translation of documents (coming from HQ) into the local language. To this end, the company hires a local linguist and further trains her to comply with these national requirements.

In Poland, there is a linguist who used to be a German teacher in Poland. We hired her as a permanent linguist, trained her as a certified translator, paid for her expenses, so she has the authorization, that if we need something locally, since we send almost everything in German from Austria, she translates it straight away, and also certifies legal translations if it is required locally, and the job is done. [She translates] always into Polish. Many of these translators, interpreters or let's call them assistants, linguistically talented assistants usually speak the national language, German and English [my translation]. (Respondent #3\_ Head of Corporate Controlling\_HQ\_German)

First of all, the respondent's (#3) account confirms once again that organizational units speak different languages such as German at HQ and Polish at the local unit. In order to ensure mutual understanding across these settings, language mediation in the form of translation is needed and organized locally. When it comes to external interaction with the local Polish market, certified translations (e.g. of legal documents) may be requested. AT\_2 reacted to these local circumstances

by investing in the assistant's further education and train her as a certified translator in order to have this qualification in house whenever needed. In this example, local requirements not only impose the local language – as the previous examples have demonstrated – but also define the level of professionalism in that only professional translations are accepted. (The fact that the translations have to be certified may be specific to the Polish market.)

Another example of national requirements or circumstances that enforce the choice of (impose) the local language and make the company invest in further education of its staff is a project in the UK. These host-country regulations concern local tests for getting a work permit in the functional area of track construction and maintenance. In this vein, an English course has been organized at the division (subsidiary) with an external trainer coming to the site. This language choice for educational purposes has been necessary to prepare future expatriates for these tests that they can pass them and get work permission in the UK. One might say that in this case, host-country regulations have forced the MNC to offer training or rather acquisition of the local language to the staff members to be expatriated.

#### **7.4.5.4 Local suppliers enforce the choice of the local language (involving translation)**

We also learn that local suppliers can represent external forces that impose the local language by issuing offers in the local language which the local subsidiary has to deal with. In order to involve HQ, the subsidiary nonprofessionally translates into German or English, which has involved negative experience in the past, as the following quotation illustrates:

Well, of course, you have to be careful on who translates it. We have had employees who have been quite good at speaking German, for instance. And when she then translated an offer from some firm, often one was wondering what exactly it was about, if it was a cooking recipe...yeah, if it was a recipe or some offer for some materials for the construction site. But once you have experienced these kinds of things, you say: 'Well, please, she shouldn't do this anymore. Guys, find someone else who can actually do this and who also knows the correct terms in German or in English [*my translation*].'

(Respondent #4\_Project Leader\_HQ\_German)

This example illustrates that local suppliers choose their first language in the first place and impose it on the MNC or on the subsidiary for that matter which deals with the information in the local language. Since HQ is involved in the communicative event, the subsidiary also needs to translate the information into either German or English to keep HQ in the loop. It seems common practice to seek local administrative staff with German or English skills to translate this kind of text. Though, they have not always been qualified to produce highly technical translations, as in this case related to the terminology (register) of the construction industry. It also shows that professionalism is not taken into consideration in the first place; rather nonprofessional staff members are sought in an informal fashion on a case-by-case basis.

#### **7.4.5.5 National (host-country) education systems (acquisition planning) influence selective recruitment**

As mentioned earlier, AT\_2 chooses German in various communicative encounters; there is a crucial factor at play that facilitates this language choice. The MNC operates in adjacent markets where German proficiency is still found among the national populations due to the national education systems (acquisition planning). German being taught as a second or foreign language gradually gets replaced by English. Yet, German is still a widespread L2, at least among older managers who may speak the local language and German instead of English as an L2, and can thus be chosen for both internal and external communication purposes. This also facilitates the choice of German for HRM purposes such as selective recruitment for local positions.

### **7.5 Conclusions Drawn from Case Study IV: Language Choice at AT\_2 Embedded in Social Context**

The case study (IV) of AT\_2, a construction company with 7,400 employees, has provided qualitative insights into the research phenomenon language choice in an Austrian MNC context. First insights into language choices can be inferred from AT\_2's online representation. The corporate website ([www.AT\\_2.com](http://www.AT_2.com)) opens up in German but can be switched to several customer languages with different localized information for representing the company and engaging in the

home- and host-country markets. There is an independent local website that is trilingual. The variations in language choices and amount of information indicate that language choices are to a certain degree made in a localized fashion.

Conceptualizing AT\_2 as a multilingual speech community has shown that organizational units speak different (first) languages (i.e. HQ and local languages) and choose them in an unmarked way within their settings (i.e. home and host countries). Since German assumes not only the function of the HQ language but also of the corporate language, so to speak, it is also the unmarked language chosen for interunit communication, sometimes in interaction with local languages. English assumes the function of a lingua franca.

More in-depth case study evidence has shed light on the rationales behind language choices which can be categorized into a number of contextual dimensions that inform language choices within the MNC network. One finds social-linguistic, social-relational, social-psychological (attitude to languages, motivations) and social-regulatory (internal and external forces) dimensions that all inform (or enforce) different language choices including English, the HQ language and local/customer languages.

#### *Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency*

The first contextual dimension is of a social-linguistic nature; participants' language proficiency informs language choices in various ways. The participants involved in a given communicative situation often define which languages can be and are chosen based on their shared proficiency. The company's proficiency informs language choices and thereby also limits foreign market expansion. More specifically, AT\_2 does not have the local language skills that are necessary for entering French-, Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking markets. By contrast, an alternative market entry or internationalization strategy within the construction industry is to follow internationalizing clients abroad; that is AT\_2 constructs something for German-speaking clients in foreign markets. In order to share knowledge within the MNC across organizational units (i.e. among participants with different L1s), English is chosen as a lingua franca. Participants' language proficiency informs the choice of English for communicating with local managements including both written and oral media (e.g. email correspondence, meetings). Yet, the choice of English is

associated with some problems such as counterparts' low or lacking English proficiency, including the management level and specific units (e.g. the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania), and the difficulty of the technical register. At the interactional level, we have learned that the language skills possessed by interactants inform the choice of the HQ language, local languages or English, usually involving some form of mostly nonprofessional interpretation that is perceived as time-consuming, low-quality and at times not objective. We have also learned that engineers may lack terms of the technical register in English or the local language and then they visually illustrate what they mean on a piece of paper. Moreover, varying language proficiency can inform the choice of more than one language in interaction such as code-switching; it occurs at meetings where Austrians switch from the meeting language English to their L1 for clarification purposes. In one-on-one phone calls between HQ and subsidiary staff, code-switching involves German as an L1 and L3 (also being the HQ/corporate language) and English as an L2 (lingua franca). The channel seems to trigger the switching, too. The findings have illustrated that various documents are written in the local language in the first place (unmarked language). If documentation needs to be shared with HQ, the information is translated into English (for a broader internal readership) or German (for individual HQ staff members). In this vein, problems but also advantages in relation to in-house nonprofessional translators have been shed light on. Sometimes local bilingual staff lacks the language skills to translate an acceptable target text. Yet, the advantages are that personnel can gradually familiarize themselves with the company-specific terminology and technical register relevant for the construction industry, and they can always crosscheck with an in-house engineer.

*Social-relational dimension: participants' role relationships and politeness strategies*

The second contextual dimension is of a social-relational nature; participants' role relationships (based on participant roles within the employment domain) and politeness inform different language choices. The asymmetrical buyer-seller relationship and politeness inform the choice of customer languages (linguistic adaptation/accommodation) involving acquisition and translation. Documents such as biannual reports that target external receivers are translated into customer languages, usually locally. Subsidiaries autonomously decide what promotional material gets



translated or produced in customer languages. Interestingly, the buyer-seller relationship and politeness strategies can also translate into the need for being able to talk to local customers. These have led Austrian expatriate managers, in particular the technical executive, acquire the local/customer language Romanian on the job. They did not take any formal language training. In this sense, this social-relational dimension has informed the choice of a customer language for educational purposes, i.e. language acquisition, though in a learning-by-doing manner.

*Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages and motivations*

The fourth contextual dimension is also of a social-psychological nature; participants' varying attitudes to languages inform different language choices. This case study has provided interesting details on the manifestation of attitudes since they are not only very explicit but also distinct, controversial, rival and far from consensual, which leads to a variety of language choices, in particular for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation). Participants' ethnocentric attitudes inform the choice of German as to local recruitment in that it renders German a common hiring criterion in host countries. Also, new business units are always started up by Austrians or Germans (which is not only related to languages but also to the centralized structure and matters of trust). Yet, many expatriates in management positions are German speakers informed by an ethnocentric attitude and HQ orientation. By contrast, other executives have a more geocentric attitude that informs the choice of English over German proficiency when they hire people. In this vein, an expatriation case in Serbia has revealed interesting insights; an executive with a geocentric attitude suggests the expatriate acquires English (which is less useful in Serbia though) while an executive with a polycentric attitude argues for the recruitment and training of locals (and against the expatriation of Austrians based on the assumption Serbians speak Serbian only). This illustrates how subjective attitudes are and how they influence decision making when it comes to choosing languages for HRM purposes. Complicating matters further, other managers have a more polycentric attitude, so they value and prioritize local/customer languages; hence, a divisional executive has hired assistants with Hungarian and Romanian skills for divisional (in Austria) and host-country positions, relocated staff with Italian skills (to the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland) or would headhunt candidates with local/customer languages

from competitors in potentially interesting markets (e.g. Poland). This can also entail local language acquisition for expatriates, including the executive himself (i.e. English, Hungarian). This is an example where attitudes overlap with personal motivations. Furthermore, this case study has elaborated that attitudes not only differ or vary among participants but can also be explicitly rival at an interactional level. An executive with an ethnocentric attitude combined with a negative attitude to English prefers the choice of German in communicative events like meetings. He dislikes it when coworkers with a geocentric attitude impose English on a meeting by bringing a non-German-skilled person along. In this example, the geocentric attitude has imposing power and enforces the choice of English as a meeting language. Another manager believes that Italian senior executives have a negative attitude to English in that they are less willing than able to speak English and thus choose Italian instead facilitated by their status and relative power. Overall, attitudes towards languages differ among participants, can be rival and have imposing power. In sum, there is no universal or consensually shared attitude forming a dominant ideology but multiple attitudes with positive and negative attributes or values that account for different language choices including the HQ and local/customer languages and English.

The social-psychological dimension also comprises participants' motivations; they inform their language choices (including foreign language acquisition). A participant has through frequent exposure acquired a number of local languages on the job of which he passively chooses (uses) in particular Romanian and Italian at meetings. Another respondent passively chooses (relies on) his Russian skills to crosscheck translations from Slavic languages into German. The reasoning behind these choices is instrumental/extrinsic motivation, which means they have a utilitarian value for the participants in their workplaces.

*Social-regulatory dimension: external forces (with imposing power)*

The last contextual dimension is of a social-regulatory nature, external to the MNC community and has imposing power in that it defines some of the company's language choices, or rather imposes certain languages on AT\_2. An interesting finding in this case study is external (supra)national financial forces that dictate the project language dependent on where the funding

comes from. Large-scale projects financed via supranational funds are conducted in English partly in combination with local languages if the host-country authorities involved request it. If projects are nationally funded, the first project language is the local language and documentation needs to be translated into German or English to include HQ. External (certified) translation services might be relied on. Also, national including both home- and host-country authorities such as tax offices or financial institutions speak the local language only, which is considered somewhat common-sense knowledge. One might even say it is described as an unmarked choice (which involves translation or interpretation). Similarly, national host-country requirements impose local languages, which informs the choice of local languages for educational purposes. In Poland, the subsidiary often had to provide certified translations into the local language. Thus, AT\_2 invested in training a linguist as a professional translator. In the UK, a test had to be passed to get a local work permit which informed the choice of English for educational purposes (language acquisition). In this sense, one could say external forces also impose different training measures. Another external force in the AT\_2 context are local suppliers that issue offers in the local language and the subsidiary has to deal with them, i.e. translate them into German for HQ (where problems with nonprofessional translations have been encountered). Finally, there is national (macro) language policy and planning, i.e. acquisition planning, which shapes national educational systems and the average level of foreign language proficiency among the population. This kind of external forces facilitates the choice of German in business encounters, but also for HRM purposes (selective recruitment) specifically in Eastern Europe.

It could be concluded that AT\_2 is a multilingual speech community that unites many settings (locations) all speaking different languages, German being the HQ/corporate language and English as a lingua franca. This case study (AT\_2) has shed light on four contextual dimensions that inform language choice: the social-linguistic dimension language proficiency, the social-relational dimension based on role relationships and politeness, the social-psychological dimension including attitudes to languages (with imposing power) and motivations, and the social-regulatory dimension external forces (with imposing power). The contextual dimensions inform different language choices and also impose languages, including the HQ, local/customer languages and English, in different communicative situations, for internal and external

communication purposes. The dimensions influence the individual staff member and/or the corporate management level which has to be refracted into individual decision makers who choose languages in a given communicative situation in their own right rather than in a consensual or unified manner. This suggests that social context is multilayered, which renders language choice a complex and multilingual social phenomenon. The multilevel and multidimensional analysis of language choice lets us conclude that language can hardly be regulated or managed in a centralized manner in an MNC network such as AT\_2. In other words, the findings indicate a limited manageability of language since language choice is contextually bound. These case study findings also undermine the usefulness of single-language policies but suggest multilingual policies and management activities, if at all necessary.

## 8 SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS ACROSS CASES

In the previous four chapters I presented the individual case study reports of two Danish (DK\_1, DK\_2) and two Austrian (AT\_1, AT\_2) multinational corporations (MNCs). While the individual reports intended to provide in-depths insights into each case company, this chapter's focus is to synthesize those by highlighting both similarities and differences and reach cross-case findings. I will discuss each result in the light of the extant literature.

### 8.1 Language Choice in four MNCs with Particularities and Commonalities

To begin with, this collective case study has compared Danish and Austrian MNCs for two reasons. First, MNCs, in particular Anglophone businesses, have been 'accused' of being 'blind' towards language matters in business (Fredriksson et al. 2006). Inspired by calls in the current literature to counterbalance Anglophone insights (e.g. Fredriksson et al. 2006, see also Thomas 2008, Graddol 2006, Crick 1999, Clarke 2000, Hagen 2005), this study investigated non-Anglophone companies. Second, I also compared different home-country environment with different national languages (HQ languages) and different corporate languages, as suggested too (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b, Welch et al. 2001) (see *Chapters 2 and 3*). (I will deal with corporate languages in *Section 8.2.1* below.)

From comparing home-country settings and their HQ languages we can learn that they choose them differently for internal and external communication purposes. In the Austrian companies German is chosen as a first language (L1) or foreign language (FL) for interunit communication purposes, and partly also in external business encounters (in combination with customer languages) (AT\_2). Danish as an L1 or FL, on the other hand, is limited to internal communication. As far as external communication goes, both Danish MNCs do not choose Danish but partly English instead (in combination with customer languages). This seems to be related to the characteristics of the HQ languages being major (German) and small (Danish) languages in terms of number of language users. This means German is spoken as an FL outside of Austria or German-speaking areas such as Eastern Europe which facilitates the choice of

German when engaging with these markets or recruiting local staff (AT\_2). This is related to national education systems (acquisition planning) representing external forces which I will detail later in this chapter (see Section 8.3.4). While macro language planning in Eastern European countries, for instance, could be described as an advantage for the Austrian companies, it is as a disadvantage for the Danish companies since they perceive it harder to find and hire English-skilled personnel in these markets. The insights into HQ languages confirm previous research indicating that businesses located in Nordic countries are more accustomed to having to choose English as an L2 (rather than 'their own' L1s, being small languages) in international trade and therefore focus more on English per se than companies headquartered in Western (or Southern) European countries. The latter are often able to choose their HQ languages, representing larger language communities, also in external encounters. In other words, the number of language speakers (including both NSs and NNSs) influences language choices in international business (e.g. Truchot 2003, Vollstedt 2002, Weber 2008). The number of language speakers and influence on language choice are not limited to HQ languages. Major local languages are more significant than smaller languages in that they are translated into (DK\_1). Major language communities (e.g. Spanish, Portuguese, Russian) are also mentioned in connection with limited English proficiency which can influence language choices (for HRM and educational purposes) (DK\_2, AT\_1).

Apart from home countries or HQ locations and HQ languages, I have also worked with the attribute company size; AT\_1 is the largest (in number of staff) company followed by DK\_1, both manufacturing companies, then AT\_2 which is a construction business, and finally DK\_2 operating in the pharmaceutical industry. The companies' rationalizations as to corporate languages and the function of English are very interesting if one takes their size and degree of internationalization into account. To provide an example, let us take the two extremes; AT\_1, the largest operator with 46,400 employees and foreign subsidiaries around the globe, argues that almost half of its staff is located at HQ with a high proportion of blue-collar workers with primarily German skills. Therefore, it would not 'make sense' to choose English as a corporate language. Nonetheless, one could argue that this still renders more than 20,000 employees international, which is more than three times the size of DK\_2. DK\_2, on the other hand, the smallest MNC with 'only' 6,000 employees, 2000 in Denmark and the rest in around 50 countries, a few production sites and research centers, wants to define itself as a 'global' company and has thus adopted English as a corporate language. One could argue that AT\_1 is more of a

global operator than DK\_2, and it would with regard to their internationalization (including their staff) 'make more sense' to choose English as a corporate language in AT\_1 than DK\_2 and yet they argue the opposite case; both have their individual justifications for language choices or perceptions of language functions. In a similar vein, AT\_2 which is still larger than DK\_2 does not even consider having a corporate language other than its HQ language German. At a closer look, these cross-case insights are manifestations of attitudes to languages, i.e. positive and negative attributes assigned to languages. Although we will later in this chapter learn that attitudes are multiple and vary within MNC networks, i.e. they do not form a consensual ideology on how languages are or should be chosen, one can still observe differences across Denmark and Austria, and similar attitudes within Danish (DK\_1, DK\_2) and Austrian (AT\_1, AT\_2) contexts respectively. In other words, Danish HQs have a comparatively more positive attitude to English, i.e. geocentric attitude, (fostering the choice of English) than the Austrian HQs. The latter's more negative attitude toward English is combined with an ethnocentric attitude (informing the choice of the HQ language) and a more polycentric attitude, that is valuing (and choosing) local/customer languages. These insights into attitudes at a more general level could also be confirmed by the ways the companies present themselves online including corporate ('.com') and national (i.e. home-/host-country) websites. (The way participants' attitudes inform language choices in context will be detailed in *Section 8.3.3* on attitudes later in this chapter.) Overall, these perspectives on corporate languages and English have not been so transparent in the individual case studies but can be inferred from the comparison of the companies' sizes. The discussion on language functions will be taken up again in the next section (8.2).

Focusing on particularization rather than generalization makes it impossible, based on two companies per country, to say anything about, let alone predict, the language choice behavior of Danish or Austrian companies in general. This was not the aim of the study. However, the findings can contribute to the national research communities and confirm prior research (e.g. Millar & Jensen 2009, Verstraete-Hansen 2008) (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3.1*) in that the Danish case companies do focus on English (more than the Austrian companies) at least based on the insights gained from HQ (e.g. English-related policies or documents, the corporate function of English, participants' attitudes), sometimes at the expense of local (customer) languages (e.g. local language training and acquisition). The Austrian cases focus more on their HQ language in combination with English and local (customer) languages, and sometimes suffer from English

shortcomings. This results in a mix of language choices, which corroborates Austrian studies (e.g. Archan & Dornmayr 2006, Weber 2008) (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3.2*). Choices initiated at the corporate level include e.g. local language acquisition in the home country (AT\_1, AT\_2) or the training of a linguist as a professional translator (AT\_2). These kinds of choices cannot be found in the Danish cases; local/customer language acquisition is initiated at the individual level only (DK\_1). Although these cross-case insights are different, they can be fruitfully reconciled. Cross-fertilization not only helps deepen our knowledge about language choice in its social context but also to perhaps combine the particular insights, learn from each other, and apply them in order to improve language choices and international business communication. (I will return to the application of the findings in the conclusions – see *Chapter 9, Section 9.3*.)

The last attribute next to HQ locations (HQ languages) and company size has been industry. As for industries, the companies have both different and similar characteristics. Although they operate in different industries, they are specialized in either technical (DK\_1, AT\_1, AT\_2) or pharmaceutical/medical (DK\_2) areas. This means they are all dealing with specialized terminologies and registers, which makes language matters similarly complex across cases. Functional work areas such as HRM, or legal matters are relevant to all case companies while Investor Relations is specific to AT\_1 or R&D to DK\_2. These areas have different terminologies and registers of similar difficulty, too. All cases mention the enhanced difficulty of special language, specifically in the context of text production or translation, and deal with it to varying degrees, such as collaborating with translation agencies specialized in the (pharmaceutical) industry (DK\_2), hiring bilingual/multilingual staff that can gradually familiarize themselves with the (construction) industry's terminology (AT\_2), and studying the financial terminology (AT\_1). Also, advantages of professional interpretation services (AT\_2) or shortcomings of nonprofessional ones owing to a technical terminology (AT\_1) are highlighted in the Austrian companies. This implies a reevaluation of professional translation and interpretation and of translation studies as a field within international business (see Gouadec 2007, Janssens et al. 2004, Steyaert & Janssens 1997, Piekkari & Tietze 2011) (see *Chapter 2*). (I will return to this discussion later in this chapter.)

In conclusion, the comparison of four multinationals with similar and varying attributes (HQ location/HQ language, size and industry) has yielded new insights into the area of language



choice in international business contexts and offered diversified answers to the question of language choice and alternatives to Anglophone perspectives often characterized by ‘English only’. It is important to remember that these case studies can be seen as exemplars of the research phenomenon language choice in MNC contexts with the aim of learning about the phenomenon and the manageability of language rather than generalizing to these attributes, or inducing propositions, or reaching any law-like explanations along these dimensions at a broader scale.

## **8.2 Four MNCs as Multilingual Speech Communities: Language Functions and Language Choice Norms**

Inspired by the *business* literature claiming that the MNC is a multilingual organization (e.g. Luo & Shenkar 2006) and sociolinguistic theory (see *Chapter 2*), I have conceptualized the MNC as a multilingual *speech community* in its sociolinguistic meaning (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.1*). This has illustrated language choice norms or the behavior norms and conventions within the multilingual MNC community. Speech community norms or rather their rationalizations and verbalizations (through participants) indicate that certain language choices are informed by common-sense understandings, rather than any form of implicit or explicit language policy, or more or less formalized top-down language management. In other words, community norms are not to be confused with policies since participants and members of a speech community or language users do not believe they are told which language to choose in which context. They have communicative or sociolinguistic competence which lets them infer the behavior norms and choose languages appropriately. So we are dealing with social implicatures rather than official rules, policies or conscious efforts by corporate management to change language choice behavior (i.e. language management) (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1*). In this vein, participants agree and acknowledge that they have varying proficiency, i.e. speak different first languages (L1s) that are nationally bound, and which they ‘naturally’ choose within their setting or physical location (organizational unit). Hence, headquarters choose the HQ language in the home country while subsidiaries choose local languages in host countries (all four cases). Furthermore, they choose, among others, English as a lingua franca (L2 or FL) for interunit communication purposes to ensure mutual understanding and interunit knowledge sharing. These languages with different

functions (HQ language, local languages, lingua franca) are unmarked languages, that is, they describe taken-for-granted language choice behaviors within the MNC communities.

### 8.2.1 Corporate languages and their understandings

We have also gained insights into the understandings of corporate languages (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.1.2*). If English assumes the function of a corporate language within the MNC network (DK\_1, DK\_2) or in a part (i.e. division) of the corporation (AT\_1), it is also understood or interpreted and used as a lingua franca. This means its choice would be perceived unnecessary or unnatural (i.e. marked) among L1 users of languages other than English (all cases). Furthermore, the term *corporate* language often has negative connotations in that it is associated with an unconditional imposition of English ('English only'). This is also the reason that the Danish case companies have found alternative terms for describing the functions of English within their MNC networks (DK\_1: *group* language, DK\_2: *common* language). In so doing, they mark or stress the conditional, i.e. context-sensitive, choice of English as a lingua franca, which means it is only used when needed. Also, AT\_1 has illustrated that an MNC can also have more than one corporate language but operate with two corporate languages across different divisions and work areas. At AT\_2, the HQ language is also its corporate language and is thus also chosen in interunit communication in an unmarked way.

In sum, participants' rationalizations regarding speech community norms have been insightful as they confirm the multilingual nature of MNCs. The organizational units speak different first languages and might choose a lingua franca to communicate among each other (unmarked languages). The idea of an official adoption of a corporate language partly stirs controversial perceptions or even resentment among staff members (DK\_2, AT\_1, AT\_2) and is once even described as 'unofficial' (DK\_2). This finding questions the usefulness or effectiveness of defining or implementing corporate languages or giving languages any kind of more or less official functions, especially if it is not really supposed to change language behavior. Language policy and management theoretically aims at language change (e.g. Baldauf 2006), with management "reflecting conscious and explicit efforts by language managers to control the choices" (Spolsky 2009: 1), for instance (see *Chapter 2, Section, 2.3.1*). Such efforts could result in participants all

choosing English within (and outside) the MNC (standardization). Yet, the case companies with English as a corporate language do not expect the local units to choose English in the first place, as, according to prior research, Anglophone businesses might do (e.g. SanAntonio 1987). In other words, their understanding of a corporate language basically just confirms speech community norms – everyone chooses their own language (including HQ) in combination with English if necessary – but does not intend to change language choice behavior per se. This also has conceptual implications; what has emerged from these case study insights is that the function of a corporate language in such MNC contexts can be better conceptualized as an optional *lingua franca* for primarily internal communication purposes. Consequently, this undermines the effective advantages of standardization since it does not necessarily accelerate processes or standardize language. Hence, this insight contributes to the whole discussion about the adoption of one or more corporate languages, as dominant in the *business* literature; the adoption of English as a corporate language, as suggested by Anglophone businesses (e.g. SanAntonio 1987) and pro-English scholars, is argued to standardize and facilitate interunit communication and successfully manage languages in MNCs (Luo & Shenkar 2006, Luring & Selmer 2012, Neeley 2012, 2013) (see *Chapter 2*). Based on my research taking on a non-Anglophone (i.e. Danish and Austrian) perspective, I argue that we may need to abandon the idea that a corporate language necessarily renders processes more efficient or facilitates interunit communication. The limited usefulness can also be supported by the negative reactions and resentment of some staff, as identified in three cases. In this sense, the results align with Fredriksson et al.'s (2006) work and the notion of 'non-management' that suggests not to define a corporate language or leave its function ambiguous. This insight also resonates with Spolsky's (2009) question whether language *should* be managed at all (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2*). In other words, the findings point towards better leaving the actual function(s) of English and/or any other corporate language candidate(s) vague or even undefined. This argument can be supported by the insights gained into speech community norms that imply a 'natural' understanding of language functions and when to choose which language(s).

### 8.2.2 Language policy, language guide and their understandings

Related to the discussion on language functions and corporate languages, we have also learned about corporate documents dealing with language choice and related matters. DK\_1 has a language guide (“DK\_1 language guide”) or ‘common reference book’ that aims to standardize English *usage* (i.e. improve staff’s writing and communication skills) and offers internal language assistance. DK\_2 has a language policy statement (“DK\_2 language policy”) that confirms or spells out speech community norms (in the sense of ‘all choices are allowed or possible’) and suggests a few more concrete ideas about the assessment of English proficiency and training measures. Interestingly, both documents are the results of initiatives taken at the department level rather than at the top management level. This means smaller groups of staff from different departments with an interest in language or communication generated the idea of having some form of documentation or guidance surrounding language, which was subsequently presented to the corporate management teams (bottom-up). The Austrian companies do not have any documents guiding language choices.

Language policy as an overall concept (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1*) has multiple meanings within the case companies. Respondents may associate the concept language policy with a set of rules guiding situational language choices, the level of English proficiency that is required for attending corporate training or with in-/expatriation management (DK\_1), associate it with written correspondence or meetings being dominated by English (DK\_2), or with having (a) corporate language(s) (DK\_2, AT\_1), dissociate and clearly distinguish it from the notion of a corporate language (DK\_1), perceive it as foreign language training and acquisition for staff and local language learning for expatriates (AT\_2), or insist that there is no policy at the corporation (DK\_2, AT\_2). The understandings of language policy are multiple, which means there does not seem to be an explicit or well-defined meaning of policy upon which respondents commonly agree. This applies to both the case companies with a statement or document, and those without any explicit documentation. Also, the term *language policy*, comparable to some reactions toward the term *corporate*, is negatively connotated by some participants in the Danish companies. They seem to be associated with some form of regulation or regulatory constructs. This also supports the idea of ‘non-management’ or relying on alternative labels such as *language guide* or *common reference book* (DK\_1).

Overall, these insights reflect some features of explicit and implicit language policy as defined in the traditional language policy and planning (LPP) literature (Baldauf 2006, Spolsky 2004) and applied to research in business contexts (Kingsley 2010, Lüdi et al. 2010) (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.1*). As far as explicit documents and statements are concerned, we could conclude that they do not resemble top-down measurements initiated at the top management level but evolve in a bottom-up fashion at the department level via participants with an interest in language and communication and make their way up to the corporate management level where they are approved. No active or actual implementation process of the documents could be observed. In this sense, these business (micro) activities differ from national (macro) language policy and planning undertaken and implemented by governments. With regard to the implicit nature of policy, the findings point towards a broader conceptualization transcending the ones developed for macro-level contexts but including education and training, along the lines of Lauridsen's (2008) definition. At the same time, the multitude of interpretations resembles the conceptual diversity (including the overlap and confusion with language management) as discussed in the literature review (see *Chapter 2, in particular Section 2.3.1*). Hence, the evidence could also be interpreted as supportive of the claim that the notion of language policy and planning/management as understood in LPP research, i.e. for national (macro) purposes, may not be transferrable to corporate (micro) contexts (Baldauf 2006). In other words, the concepts have limited applicability to business research sites. The author refers to the question of agency and stresses that in macro LPP it is often government officials that undertake language planning activities. He questions whether the language phenomena occurring in business (micro) can still be captured by language policy and planning/management frameworks developed for macro contexts or whether they fall into a different area such as sociolinguistics or related fields (offering conceptual alternatives). Based on my study's evidence, we can conclude that they are indeed better positioned within the broader area of sociolinguistics and the notion of language choice.

In conclusion, the present research feeds back into and refines conceptual inadequacies; participants' realities concerning language functions and policies, as discussed above, indicate that agency is one aspect that makes the applicability of LPP concepts and thus the manageability of language in international business contexts difficult. The employer as the language policy maker or language manager has many faces, so to speak. An MNC has various agents with more or less executive power, also below the top management level, that undertake language management

activities such as formulating a language policy in a bottom-up rather than top-down manner, with limited top-down implementation. This renders a clear distinction between the corporate and individual levels difficult. More importantly, it has raised the question whether current phenomena observed in MNC contexts can still be captured by the notion of language management. So far, the answer points towards sociolinguistic alternatives. The following sections will further challenge extant conceptual understandings of language management and how language operates in MNC contexts by scrutinizing the social contextual dimensions that influence language choices.

### **8.3 Language Choice in four MNCs Informed by Social Context**

#### **8.3.1 Social-linguistic dimension: participants' language proficiency informs language choices**

The MNCs investigated have all been categorized as multilingual speech communities uniting different participants speaking different languages; therefore, it is not surprising that language proficiency plays an influential role in informing language choice in all case companies. The participants (e.g. HQ, subsidiary, individual staff) involved in a given communicative situation or event often define which language(s) to choose based on the languages they speak, i.e. language proficiency, also forming the speech community's linguistic repertoire. In other words, participants' varying language proficiency, i.e. L1s and possible FLs, represents a contextual dimension of a social-linguistic nature that informs different language choices (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.1*).

For instance, HQ managers and local managements often choose English to communicate with each other. This means English is chosen as a lingua franca (or corporate language) for interunit communication purposes (all cases). The Danish companies occasionally choose English also for external communication purposes (e.g. regional product launch, international symposia). Reported problems or associations with the choice of English concern counterparts' limited or lacking English skills, including the management level (all cases), different cultural backgrounds (DK\_1), shyness expressing oneself in English (DK\_2, AT\_1) and the enhanced difficulty of some terminology and registers (DK\_1, AT\_1, AT\_2).

Participants' language proficiency can also inform the choice of HQ languages for internal communication (DK\_1, DK\_2, AT\_2) and external communication purposes (AT\_2) if they represent a shared language (L1 and FL) among interactants. In this sense, international staff as FL users accommodate Danish and German speakers respectively. The choice is fostered by the fact that Danish speakers (executives) are not comfortable speaking English or represent a majority in the communicative event (DK\_1). Regarding the choice of German at AT\_2, it can also represent the only shared language among participants. (Local language speakers do not speak English but German as an L2 instead.)

Participants choose various local languages if their addressees have lower English proficiency (DK\_2). The choice of local languages also includes translation; if written information needs to reach staff lower down the hierarchy (with assumed limited English proficiency), translation into local languages is organized centrally and professionally translated (DK\_1, AT\_1) or localized in that local or regional managers filter relevant information for their staff and organize translation accordingly, mostly of a nonprofessional nature (DK\_1, DK\_2, AT\_1). Prioritization of and translation into only major local languages creates a double standard and language hierarchy among local languages since minor language users are not accommodated (DK\_1), as touched upon earlier.

Another interesting insight is that subsidiaries, following speech community norms, choose the local (unmarked) languages in everyday business in host countries, as mentioned before; this also means a great deal of written documentation exists in the local language in the first place. If information needs to be exchanged with HQ, most commonly because it has to supervise, to be informed about or approve local procedures and processes, the information has to be translated from the local languages into English (all cases) or into German (AT\_2). The translation is done either locally in-house (DK\_1, AT\_2) or sent in the local language to the home country that has to take care of the translation or decipher the contents of the material itself; both professional translations in important matters (DK\_2) or nonprofessional approaches (e.g. sight interpretation by staff, machine translation) (DK\_2, AT\_1, AT\_2) have been identified. The choice of local languages in oral encounters also involves interpretation of a nonprofessional nature informed by participants' varying language proficiency, i.e. poor or lacking English skills among participants from e.g. Eastern Europe (all cases), Central Asia (DK\_1), Turkey (DK\_2, AT\_1), Italy, Spain

(DK\_2), France (AT\_1). Nonprofessional interpretation has been perceived as inadequate, time-consuming and subjective (Austrian cases).

Participants' varying language proficiency also informs code-switching/code-mixing between English and the HQ or local languages as FLs and L1s in written encounters (DK\_1, DK\_2, AT\_1) and oral contexts (all cases) for clarification purposes or lack of vocabulary. The channel of oral media can also be an additional trigger (AT\_2). This phenomenon is also associated with a positive, i.e. pleasant or timesaving, experience (DK\_1, AT\_1) rather than a language problem, as prior research has indicated (e.g. Harzing et al. 2011) (see *Chapter 2*). So it has a positive impact on social relations in that it reduces the social distance between interactants. Similarly, passive multilingualism informed by participants' language proficiency has been identified in the Danish companies and AT\_1 including English as an FL combined with different L1s or mutually intelligible L1s (e.g. Scandinavian or Slavic languages). It could be argued that these diverse and multilingual choices at the interactional level seem efficient or to work well; hence, language standardization would be counterproductive in these kinds of situations.

Insights specific to DK\_1 have shown that the language chosen as a medium of instruction in corporate training depends on the attendees' language proficiency, and is thus not only in English (as a group language) but also in local languages. Also, the choice of English for educational purposes (language training) can be localized, i.e. initiated at the local level, and based on local staff's insufficient English skills. So they can communicate with HQ specialists in English.

What we can learn from this social-linguistic dimension is that the participants interacting or involved in a given communicative event or situation, more precisely their language proficiency is often the contextual or situational reason behind language choices. These language choices include English, the HQ languages and local(/customer) languages. Choices made at the individual and interactional level resemble or can relate to the findings of Steyaert et al. (2011) and their proposition of 'linguascaping' whereas the negotiation aspect is less pronounced in the present study (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1*). A crucial insight is that the choice of English as a foreign language is associated with problems such as limited or lacking English proficiency of interactants. Prior research has problematized that English competences are not a given resource in MNCs, especially lower down the hierarchy (Marschan et al. 1997, Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002) (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1*). My research has shown similar results and beyond;



English proficiency is not only limited among operative staff but can also be problematic at the middle and top management levels, as reported in all case studies. In addition, as reported at DK\_2, executives' English proficiency is somewhat 'tabooed' owing to their status, which makes it harder to assess their skills. This finding is insightful insofar as it illustrates that ELF communication can be impaired across all employment levels, which also has practical implications for evaluation and training initiatives, which I will detail in the conclusions (see *Chapter 9, Section 9.3*). With regard to choices for educational purposes (language training), we have also learned that decisions can be localized. This disconfirms that language training and acquisition (e.g. for staff) are centralized language management solutions, as previously suggested in the literature (Feely & Harzing 2003, Hagen 2006) (see *Chapter 2*).

Many of the language choices informed by participants' language proficiency also include some form of translation or interpretation, which has turned out to be a two-way street; the headquarters translates into local languages for staff members with lower English proficiency or choose English to communicate with local managements that subsequently translate into local languages for their staff. This can also include the interpretation of presentations into local languages. These choices render subsidiaries or local management not only mediators between HQ and their staff but also turns English into an intermediate or auxiliary language rather than a shared choice or common language for internal communication purposes, as also argued by Sørensen (2005) (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.1.2*). This raises once again questions about the effectiveness of choosing a corporate language and of language standardization, as mentioned before, which is avoiding multilingualism and cutting related costs including translation expenses in the first place. This study can also contribute a new insight on this matter, namely that the translation does not only concern information sent by HQ but also goes the other way; plenty of documentation is produced in the local language (source language) which eventually often needs to be shared with the headquarters, meaning translated into English or the HQ language (target language), sometimes even involving professional translation. Acknowledging the fact that translation is an integral part of the functioning of an MNC could be a first step into this direction (see Janssens et al. 2004, Steyaert & Janssens 1997, Piekkari & Tietze 2011) (see *Chapter 2*); this includes having in-house professionals (DK\_1, AT\_2) and could also involve the establishment of language or translation departments, as the current literature suggests, too (Hagen 2006). Already this first dimension of social context, i.e. interacting participants' language

proficiency, informing language choice at both the executive and individual levels within and across organizational units has illustrated that language choice is a social, context-dependent and multilingual phenomenon, which renders top-down language management in an MNC context hard and monolingual approaches maybe even impossible.

### **8.3.2 Social-relational dimension: participant roles, role relationships, politeness strategies inform language choices**

Another contextual dimension that could be found in all case companies is of a social-relational nature; participant roles within the employment domain, role relationships and politeness strategies, all shaped by relative status and power, inform different language choices. The asymmetrical buyer-seller relationship and politeness inform the choice of customer languages; that is buyers or customers are in a superior position and the appropriate or polite choice to address them is the choice of their respective L1, which is referred to as language accommodation or linguistic adaptation (see also *Chapter 2, Sections 2.3.3.2 and 2.3.3.3*). The choice of customer languages includes translation (DK\_2, AT\_2) and interpretation (DK\_1), and concerns mostly promotional text genres or product presentations for customers. Interestingly, at DK\_2, we have gained particularly detailed insights into the translation of customer information at the local level. Customer information not only needs to be translated into customer languages to engage in the local markets but also requires high-quality translation, which is also enforced by the authorities when it comes to clinical trials and measuring the efficacy of drugs interlingually. (The role of external forces, e.g. authorities, will be further discussed in *Section 8.3.4* below.) This is specific to the pharmaceutical industry; DK\_2 sells drugs on a global scale, which includes international research on and development of their products. In order to accommodate their customers (e.g. patients/study subjects) and yet get valid results on their drugs across cultures, collaboration with professional translation agencies specialized in pharmaceuticals is needed. In other words, it is of utmost importance that translations (e.g. of questionnaires on drug effects) are translated in a localized manner, i.e. adapted to the target culture, so that patients understand and interpret the information asked about in the same way. In another customer-related context, we have learned that within the area of technical marketing DK\_1 also has in-house translators who initiate or

even develop corporate dictionaries (term databases) and administer a translation memory system (TMS). These terminology management tools intend to improve consistency in translations.

Yet, translation quality is not necessarily related to the target group (e.g. customers) as such; in other areas customers are also accommodated in a nonprofessional fashion (DK\_2, AT\_2) which can lead to translation errors and misunderstandings (DK\_1). In this context, it is worth mentioning that nonprofessional translation is associated with both advantages and disadvantages or problems. On the one hand, bilingual or multilingual staff does not necessarily have the ability to translate promotional, yet highly technical texts, in particular not *into* a foreign language (DK\_1, AT\_2). On the other hand, AT\_2 also argues that administrative staff can gradually familiarize themselves with the company-specific terminology and technical register, which can be an advantage compared to external professionals who might not be accustomed to the company's specialized area.

Furthermore, apart from translation or interpretation, the buyer-seller relationship and politeness also inform the choice of customer languages for HRM purposes, i.e. the selective recruitment of a customer-language-skilled candidate for a regional sales position to engage with customers of a region (AT\_1) or the acquisition of the customer language on the job in a learning-by-doing fashion through being immersed in the host country in order to interact with external partners and customers (AT\_2). (This also represents an alternative form of acquisition, i.e. different from language classes.) Similarly, the buyer-seller relationship and politeness combined with polycentric attitudes inform initiatives as to language training of a customer language for staff to better interact with customers at a regional level (and to develop their international career opportunities) (DK\_2).

At AT\_2, politeness strategies and the participant role with relative status and power (i.e. executive) inform the choice of the HQ language to accommodate home-country executives. Since the respondent does not pursue this politeness strategy with local managers, one might say she applies a double standard, maybe also related to an ethnocentric attitude. By contrast, another decision maker's understanding of politeness does inform the choice of a local language, more precisely its acquisition in the home country, in order to show goodwill and positively affect social relationships with a newly bought company (AT\_1).

Linking these findings to the extant literature (see *Chapter 2*), one could say that the language choice behavior of buyers, that is a preference for their L1, and the resulting asymmetrical relationship between buyers and sellers as well as the need for accommodating buyers or customers have been discussed in both *business* and *language* studies (Håkansson & Wootz 1979, Feely & Harzing 2003, Lavric 2008, Domke-Damonte 2001, Ammon 2010, Vandermeeren 1998). Some have applied politeness theory to understand this phenomenon within exporting SMEs (Bäck 2004, Lavric & Bäck 2009). Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio (2011) have added that subsidiaries become ‘key translators’ translating information sent by HQ in English into customer languages at the local level. My research has confirmed this overall understanding of choosing customer languages based on their role relationship (aligned with politeness principles), which usually involves translation. DK\_2 has provided the most profound insights into professional translation and also translation theory. The occupational area of R&D regarding their products (specific to the pharmaceutical industry) has illustrated the relevance of functional or purpose-oriented translation theories. They suggest the cultural adaptation (localization) of target texts to their target audiences in that they function (i.e. create meaning) just as well as the original version (source text for a translation) functions in the source culture (Reiß & Vermeer 1991, Lambert 1994, Pym 2010, Trosborg 1997) (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.3.3*). This strongly supports earlier calls within the literature for integrating translation studies and their theoretical insights into the field (Piekkari & Tietze 2011, see also Janssens et al. 2004, Steyaert & Janssens 1997, Gouadec 2007), so we can learn about and better understand language choices involving translation and interpretation within international business which can benefit both research and business practice.

What can be further added is that choosing customer languages not only involves translation and interpretation services, as previous studies have indicated, but also areas such as selective recruitment and the training of customer languages. More specifically, this social-relational dimension also motivates individual decision makers to seek and selectively recruit job candidates with customer language skills or to offer customer language training to their staff, which is partly accompanied by managers’ polycentric attitudes. An expatriate manager also acquires the customer language on the job in the host country to be able to communicate with externals in the market. These are certain executives’ decisions unique to a given communicative situation.

Despite the variation across cases and participants, it could be argued that based on participants' rationalizations we also learn about (cross-case) community norms; it seems the choice of customer languages, sometimes involving translation/interpretation, selective recruitment and language acquisition or training, is not exclusively but often understood as a common-sense reality, i.e. the unmarked choice for external communication purposes. In this sense, participants mostly share the perception that customers and buyers are a target group that cannot be addressed in a foreign language or lingua franca such as English. As opposed to the previous social dimension with a focus on staff members and internal communication, this dimension involves external communication and customers, which enhances pressure for language accommodation. This means standardization for external purposes is less of an option than in interunit encounters. I argued in the literature review (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2*) that external communication is the 'forgotten' dimension in language research focusing on MNCs; prior studies have often focused on internal communication only (e.g. Marschan et al. 1997). The present study suggests that the external dimension is as important and concerned with language choice as the internal one; it is maybe less visible or transparent at the HQ level because the choice is often shifted toward the local or regional level. Though, this does not mean it is 'not there' or that MNCs can fully operate in English across all levels, as also pointed out by (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011). This finding has crucial implications in that it puts customer languages on the business agenda of MNCs, moving one step further away from monolingual language management. Contrary to prior research (e.g. Neeley et al. 2012, Neeley 2013), this study concludes that the notion of standardization is hardly applicable to external communication.

Moreover, the dimension politeness has provided interesting insights that go beyond the choice of customer languages (cf. Bäck 2004). Politeness strategies can also inform the choices of the HQ and local languages. This has shown that politeness is a social phenomenon in that it is not universally applicable but context-bound and subjective. Participants subjectively assess the roles and role relationships of their counterparts involved in a communicative situation and act politely accordingly, i.e. choose the language that seems appropriate to them. This can lead to various language choices such as accommodating HQ executives out of courtesy but choosing English for local managers, which creates some sort of double standard. Politeness can also translate into offering local language acquisition in the home country (division) in order to show politeness (goodwill) towards the local unit.

In sum, this social-relational dimension such as participant roles, role relationships and politeness strategies, all shaped by relative status and power, inform different language choices including customer, local and HQ languages. The choices are made at both the executive and individual levels and cross organizational units. This social-relational dimension adds a second layer to social context confirming the multilingual nature of the phenomenon language choice, hence rendering once again (centralized and monolingual) language management in MNCs complex and difficult.

### **8.3.3 Social-psychological dimension: participants' attitudes to languages and motivations inform language choices**

#### *Participants' attitudes to languages (internal forces)*

A crucial contextual dimension of a social-psychological nature that has been identified in all four case studies to inform language choices are participants' attitudes to languages (see also *Chapter 2, Sections 2.3.3.4*). First, an ethnocentric attitude to the HQ language within the home-country environment informs the choice of the HQ language among participants as well as offering language acquisition to international staff. This attitude becomes manifest in the facts that internationals are expected to choose the HQ language in the long run, feel more or less under pressure to choose it, or are simply addressed in the HQ language in the home-country setting. In this sense, the attitude also has imposing power on them, which can be classified as social forces internal to the MNC community. The participants have little to no choice but to eventually use the HQ language (DK\_1, DK\_2, AT\_1). While these insights have been gained from the HQ environments, we have also learned that ethnocentrism is not restricted to the home country but could also be found in one of AT\_1's host countries (i.e. Hungary) where the willingness to choose English is limited. This form of local ethnocentrism informs the choice of the local language which includes in-house interpretation and translation services for those without or limited local language proficiency such as expatriate managers. This suggests that attitudes vary across organizational units which lead to diverse choices within an MNC network. An ethnocentric attitude can also inform the choice of the HQ language and 'interfere with' divisional standardization (AT\_1) or a geocentric attitude (DK\_2), which creates some kind of double standard vis-à-vis language choices; standardization is applied to local units and

accommodation to HQ language users (ethnocentrism). Strictly speaking, the examples resemble more an example of the phenomenon divergence rather than standardization, given that the sender is aware of the fact that the receivers do not understand the language chosen (English). Furthermore, the Danish companies have a geocentric attitude in that they offer universal English training across all levels of employment, including operative staff that does not necessarily need English for effectively carrying out their jobs. Yet, English is perceived as a ‘nice-to-have’ proficiency. From a practical perspective, one could question the efficiency of investing in this kind of language training (see *Chapter 9, Section 9.3*).

We have also gained deeper insights into rival attitudes of individual participants. Some of DK\_2’s staff have a shared understanding of the former Danish and current non-Danish CEOs’ opposing attitudes to languages and how these inform(ed) choices and partly impose(d) languages on staff by actively choosing Danish or English in a more or less unconditional way (internal forces with imposing power). Similarly, at AT\_2, managers’ opposing attitudes to German and English (at HQ) (ethnocentrism vs. geocentrism) are even more pronounced in that they literally ‘compete’ with each other at an interactional level, i.e. in communicative situations such as meetings where English is perceived as being imposed. This stirs controversies and negative feelings regarding social (interpersonal) relationships. Also, negative attitudes to English are suspected among some local executives which means they are not willing (rather than able) to speak English but choose their L1 instead (involving interpretation) (AT\_2). At the local level (DK\_1) we have also learned that local staff can have a positive attitude to the HQ language since they choose the HQ language over English for subsidiary-HQ interaction by asking an expatriate (language node) for help. An employee at HQ does the opposite, i.e. prefers English to the local language for HQ-subsidary communication motivated by a more positive attitude to English than to the local language (DK\_1).

Finally, participants’ attitudes have also turned out to be a crucial factor when it comes to HRM including selective recruitment and in-/expatriation. Which language(s) to choose for which position is contextually informed, i.e. by recruiters’ varying attitudes. They subjectively assess the situation and assign different values to languages and their importance for a position in question, as it makes sense to them. This has become apparent through the variety of language choices as to recruitment or staff relocation across units and even within units. There are departments, more

precisely department heads or single HR executives that have their own recruitment agenda; for instance, an ethnocentric attitude informs the choice of the HQ language for certain positions at HQ (all cases) and locally (Austrian cases). This implies that HR executives are not willing to speak English with them or work in English. By contrast, there are others who do not mind working in English or even argue for English skills as one or the only linguistic selection criterion for the same kind of positions (geocentrism) (DK\_2, AT\_2). Also, attitudes are not static but may change over time and thereby inform different language choices for the same or similar positions; an ethnocentric attitude turns into a geocentric attitude at the divisional level, or initial geocentrism turns into ethnocentrism at the department level (AT\_1). A geocentric attitude at the department level may also serve to attract international skilled staff by claiming to provide an English-speaking work environment (HQ) while an otherwise ethnocentric attitude suggests the choice of Danish for other HQ positions (DK\_2). As far as polycentric attitudes are concerned, we have learned that they can lead to exploiting local/customer language skills within the company and aligning them to expatriation assignments in host countries (DK\_1, AT\_2), inform the choice of local languages for educational purposes, i.e. language acquisition for expatriates (DK\_2, AT\_2), or the choice of local/customer language for home- and host-country positions (AT\_2). On this note, executives may have once again different (polycentric vs. geocentric) attitudes and thereby disagree on what language proficiency is needed for an expatriate in a host country; some argue the local language is important while others believe English is enough (DK\_2, AT\_2). Language proficiency can also be disregarded if professional expertise and skills or supervisory functions are considered more important than language skills; this applies to both recruitment (DK\_1) and expatriation management (AT\_2). In sum, participants' or rather decision makers' attitudes to languages are far from united or consensual, thus inform these varied choices for HRM purposes. The explicitness and multitude of attitudes illustrate that there is no consensus regarding these language choices, making them hard to reconcile or harmonize within an MNC network.

With regard to previous discussions in the literature, one finds Fredriksson et al. (2006) who address the variation in perceptions among staff that allows for multilingual choices and different language needs for positions. Others have investigated the impact of language ideologies on language choice in an MNC (Lønsmann 2011) or language beliefs and their influence on both policy/management and practice levels, and touched upon attitudes in MNCs (Kingsley 2010).



Despite these valuable insights, current knowledge on attitudes in general and their influence on language choice in business contexts in particular are still scarce. The notion of attitudes as a socio-psychological concept has been discussed from a sociolinguistic perspective (Deprez & Persoons 1987), going back to Labov's (1966, cited in Mesthrie 2009) seminal work on participants' attitudes, i.e. their positive or negative reactions to English accents, making the codes more or less prestigious (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.4*). Attitudes have been discussed in the LPP literature by e.g. Ricento (2013) at the national (macro) level or Deumert (2009) who argues that "[e]ffective planning depends on the understanding of the relevant social, cultural, political and historical variables, knowledge of language attitudes and the direction of social change in a given society" (p. 387). This seems as if objective knowledge about participants' attitude were integrated into planning or taken into consideration at the policy level. The separation between policy/planning and practice levels leaves out the fact that policy makers and language planners have attitudes themselves that may influence their decision making. My research can relate to this broader discussion by adding the dimension of attitudes to languages and their influence on language choice in micro contexts, i.e. MNCs. Participants assign positive ('good') and negative ('bad') attributes to languages which inform different language choices. From a corporate perspective, attitudes to languages may inform different choices for similar target groups, which creates some sort of double standard and leads to language hierarchies (HQ vs. local language speakers). Also, participants' attitudes towards languages can influence their own language choices but also choices of others (e.g. subordinates, colleagues). Attitudes then become internal forces that impose a certain language on others. This is an example where the corporate or executive and individual levels become hard to distinguish from one another. More interestingly, we learn that within the speech communities there are social forces related to attitudes of an implicit nature that are not related to any form of language policy, and yet have a regulatory impact on participants' language choices.

Another important implication learned from attitudes is that the corporate level is decomposed and represented by individual executives who have attitudes and make decisions in their own right, which has been particularly pronounced in language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment and staff relocation). Decision makers' attitudes to languages are far from united or consensual, thus inform a great variety of choices for HRM and educational purposes. The relevance and multitude of attitudes illustrate that there is no consensus regarding these language

choices, making them hard to harmonize within an MNC network. This also disconfirms that HRM (selective recruitment and in-/expatriation management) and language training and acquisition (e.g. for expatriates, operative staff) are formalized language management solutions, as prior research has suggested (Feely & Harzing 2003, Hagen 2006). Hence, individual agents' attitudes would probably need to be reconciled first if one tried to effectively manage language in MNCs and within HRM or education of staff in a vertical and structural manner. (I will discuss this practical implication of my research later in this chapter, in *Section 9.3*.) This resonates with van den Born & Peltokorpi's (2010) propositions on aligning language policies with HRM policies and practices. Related to this discussion is the fact that in-/expatriation and language nodes have been discussed as possible language management decisions made at the corporate level (Feely & Harzing 2003, Hagen 2006) (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.3.5*). The present study suggests that staff is primarily relocated for their professional knowledge and not for language-related reasons; language (proficiency) may be discussed or may not be taken into consideration at all, depending on decision makers' attitudes. For instance, an HR executive with a geocentric attitude believes English is enough for the assignment (fostering the idea of standardization). Similarly, expatriates may turn into language nodes but are not intentionally used or exploited as language resources by the employer in the first place. Yet, DK\_1 has provided insights how language skills can be fruitfully exploited and integrated into international assignments, that is by searching local language-skilled staff for expatriate positions. In this sense, the phenomenon can be a language choice for HRM purposes or simply represent staff relocation as part of the functional area (international) human resource management in MNCs. In other words, the notion of in-/expatriation as a formalized or uniform way of managing language within the MNC is not reflected in my research. Overall, these insights suggest that the concepts selective recruitment, in-/expatriation and language nodes are no centralized language management solutions or strategies pursued by the employer to solve communication problems. The phenomena all do occur but in various ways, for different reasons and are not necessarily linked to language. In this sense, the phenomena that could be observed can be better captured by language choices for HRM purposes, or HRM and its implications.

In sum, case study evidence suggests that attitudes represent a contextual dimension of a social-psychological nature (with social-regulatory traits) that informs (partly enforces) different language choices in MNCs including the HQ language, English and local/customer languages. Choices are

initiated at or involve both the corporate/executive and individual levels, within and across organizational settings. The dimension adds up to the complexity of social context and language choice, which once again undermines the centralized manageability of language in MNC contexts.

#### *Participants' motivations*

The social-psychological dimension also includes participants' motivations. These inform their language choices in interactional encounters or for educational purposes, i.e. foreign language (FL) acquisition. The case studies have evidenced that (relocated) staff members (passively) choose (and acquire) the HQ, local and customer languages driven by instrumental/extrinsic (AT\_2), together with integrative (AT\_1) and with intrinsic motivations (DK\_1), partly combined with coworkers' ethnocentric attitudes (with imposing power) (AT\_1). I have also identified employees that simply choose local languages out of personal enjoyment, that is they find it entertaining, fun or pleasant (intrinsic motivation) (DK\_1), combined with interactants' lower English proficiency (DK\_2), and instrumental/extrinsic motivation as well as politeness (AT\_1). A new insight into the form of foreign language acquisition in this context is that it can go beyond classroom language teaching but may be acquired on the job, i.e. in a learning-by-doing fashion, through frequent interaction with local language users (AT\_2). Furthermore, AT\_2 has illustrated that motivation is not limited to the individual level; an executive wants to learn a local language himself and initiates learning for him and his team. This is an example of a language choice that merges the individual and the corporate levels. It is combined with the decision maker's positive attitude to local languages (polycentric attitude).

Participants' motivations to choose and possibly also acquire FLs add another dimension to language choice in MNC networks, which renders attempts of corporate language management more complex, in particular single-language approaches. As for motivations, staff members choose languages as it pleases them or makes sense to them. In many interactional instances, it is a manifestation of a 'win-win' situation; for instance, participants may not be so proficient in the FL English while their counterparts do not mind or even like choosing the former's L1. Participants' motivations have proven effective and efficient alternatives to the choice of English. Thus, suppressing such multilingual choices by monolingual hegemony seems counterproductive. Overall, the dimension of motivations and their influence on language choice including their

language acquisition initiatives has largely been absent from the research agenda. Nekvapil & Nekula (2006) discuss language learning initiated at the individual level as a form of ‘simple’ (individual) language management and solution to a language problem (language management theory) (see *Chapter 2, Sections 2.2.1 and 2.3.1*). Applying motivation (for FL acquisition) theory (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.5*) to the present study could add a new insight to the phenomenon of foreign language learning in MNC contexts; participants do not identify or perceive language problems but may have intrinsic/extrinsic or integrative motivations for learning a language. In this sense, my study contributes first insights into the social-psychological dimension motivation and how it informs different language choices in MNC contexts.

To sum up, participants’ motivations represent another social-psychological dimension which informs the choices of local/customer and the HQ language and can involve language acquisition. Choices are initiated at the individual level, but can interact or merge with the executive level, and vary within and across organizational settings. The dimension adds to the complexity of social context and language choice that once again undermines the centralized manageability of language in MNC contexts and illustrates that standardization can be counterproductive in contexts where multilingual interaction is an explicit resource, as explained above.

#### **8.3.4 Social-regulatory dimension: external forces impose languages**

The last contextual dimension is of a social-regulatory nature, external to the MNC community and has imposing power in that it defines some of the company’s language choices. One could even argue that they de facto have *no* choice but must comply with these external circumstances and requirements. In other words, these external forces, as identified in all four case studies, impose various languages (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.6*).

First, national laws in home and host countries (DK\_1) or supranational legal regulations (DK\_2) require the choice of and translation into customer languages when it comes to product information targeted to end consumers. This can include the request for certified translations (DK\_2). We have also learned that customers (DK\_2) or local suppliers (AT\_2) can represent external forces too; if they communicate with the MNC or rather the local subsidiary regarding e.g. product complaints or supply offers, they would do that in their L1 (i.e. customer language).

This also imposes translation on the company if the information needs to be shared with HQ, ergo translated into English (DK\_2, AT\_2) or German (AT\_2), and sometimes even back into the customer language (DK\_2). In this sense, the subsidiary assumes a crucial mediating function between the local market and HQ, as already touched upon earlier.

National (e.g. home- and host-country) authorities (DK\_1) such as tax authorities or financial institutions (AT\_2) or supranational organizations (European Union) (DK\_2) usually speak their own language only, hence request the choice of or translation into local languages as well as interpretation from/into the local language (AT\_2). In addition, certified translations might be demanded (DK\_1, AT\_2). This means these forces can also mandate professionalism, which adds additional costs if there are no professionals in house. Such local requirements also informed AT\_2's choice of the local language for educational purposes, that is it invested in training an in-house linguist as a professional translator (authorized to certify translations) at the local level. When subsidiaries and local authorities share information in the local language in the first place, which needs to be reported to HQ, translation into English is required (DK\_2).

Furthermore, the international scientific community (DK\_2) and international financial or stock market (AT\_1) are perceived as 'English-speaking'. This means the default language in the community or market is English, comparable to an unmarked language (choice). This has imposing implications for individual departments such as Research & Development (DK\_2) or Investor Relations (AT\_1) in that their daily work processes have become dominated by English. At AT\_1, this also involved the choice of English for educational purposes (i.e. stays abroad, study of financial terminology and register in English).

AT\_2 operating in the construction industry has illustrated that external forces can be of a financial nature as well. Supranational funding dictates the choice of English in construction projects, also in combination with (certified) translations in local languages if host-country authorities or local clients request it. By contrast, national (host-country) budgets impose the local language in the first place where the second project or contract language chosen in order to include HQ in the communication could be the HQ language or English.

Finally, national education systems shaped by macro language policy and planning, more precisely acquisition planning, influence a population's foreign language skills. Acquisition planning is external to the MNC community and employment domain, and represents an influential force

the MNCs have to cope with. This can influence HRM regarding selective recruitment; DK\_1 often hires university graduates in Eastern Europe in order to also enhance candidates' English proficiency. DK\_2 has difficulties finding English-skilled candidates for local managements in host countries where major languages are spoken and in Eastern Europe. Macro planning in Eastern Europe in turn facilitates selective recruitment for AT\_2 because it is possible to find German-skilled candidates for local positions. Furthermore, the Austrian cases have generated HRM-related social forces; national work regulations or requirements (possibly legal in nature) can enforce the translation of e.g. work contracts into the local language (AT\_1). This kind of HRM forces could also inform local language training and acquisition (language choice for educational purposes) offered to expatriates, in order for them to get a work permit in the host country (AT\_2).

Overall, external forces represent the last contextual dimension of a social-regulatory nature that enforces different language choices. External forces are particularly interesting because they have imposing power in that they impose languages on the MNC which has to comply with these linguistic requirements. The abovementioned social contextual dimensions (except for internal forces with similar regulatory traits) inform language choices, that is MNCs' agents choose one or more languages from a linguistic repertoire. As far as social forces external to the speech community are concerned, they leave the MNCs little to no actual choice. This also makes any employer's internal attempts to manage language within the company somewhat irrelevant in and nonapplicable to this communicative situation. In other words, this knowledge is comparable to external communication (with customers), as touched upon earlier (see *Section 8.3.2*), which has shown that the MNC is not an isolated managing entity concerned with internal communication only, but in fact interacts in an international business environment with different participants with various (external) communication needs such as customers. Although comparable, this insight is also different in that the pressure for language choice is even higher than in external buyer-seller interaction. External forces not only represent communication *needs* but *requests* or *mandates* of different kinds, one could say.

The extant literature does not offer many insights that relate to these findings. Some authors have discussed the interrelationship between the macro and micro levels, that is the possible influence of e.g. national language policies or planning on corporate language policy and management

(Dhir & Gòkè-Pariolá 2002, Bäck 2004), or the influence between policy/management (forces) for different domains (e.g. employment vs. family) within a speech community (Spolsky 2009) (see *Chapter 2*). My study has confirmed the influence of national acquisition planning on language choices within the MNCs such as selective recruitment. Though, this is just one type or kind of external forces. The latter are not exclusively macro policies or planning activities but alternative influences such as (supra)national organizations, national authorities, laws and regulations of various kinds, the international scientific community, external financial resources and funding, the international stock market, which are partly industry-specific and/or product-related or linked to the company's ownership. These are novel insights that represent one of the social contextual dimensions surrounding language choice in MNCs, hence contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon language choice in its integrity. With regard to the manageability of language in the MNC, this contextual dimension suggests that language cannot be managed at all from the MNC's or employer's perspective. In contexts where the MNCs meet external forces they can only respond to them, that is in a *multilingual* way.

This contextual dimension also offers conceptual insights. I have applied Spolsky's (2009) typology of internal and external forces, though more openly (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.6*). He uses them mostly synonymously with policies of various domains that can influence each other. In other words, Spolsky (2009) uses forces to describe the domain-internal and domain-external relationships and impact of macro policy and planning on micro contexts and vice versa. First, the present study suggests that forces are distinct from policies (and its components), in fact more 'powerful' than them and yet of an unwritten or implicit nature. Therefore, forces can better capture the characteristics of the phenomena occurring in MNC contexts. Second, the distinction between internal and external forces with regard to domains was not useful for my research purposes or maybe too confusing; for instance, authorities or local institutions relevant to the industry could be conceptualized as domain-internal. Also, local requirements within HRM and work law are in fact internal to the employment domain but external to the speech community. With regard to social forces, I omitted the domain concept and stuck to the MNC (speech community) as the unit of analysis in alignment with the internal-external communication dichotomy.

In this regard, a conceptual adaptation can also be offered to Fishman's domain concept, as also applied by Spolsky (2009) to language management (see *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3.2*). Although I heavily used the domain concept and its elements, it also has its limitations (see also Holmes 2008). The individual domains within society (e.g. employment, family, religion, etc.) are mainly understood as being monolingual entities which, put together, create a multilingual speech community. This does not apply to an MNC network. The MNC is a multilingual speech community in *itself* which is why I conceptualized the MNC as a speech community (Gumperz 1968) (see also *Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2.1*) rather than as domain, which has also provided insights into community norms in an international business environment. However, it shares features with an employment domain such as its participants (e.g. employer, employee, customer, etc.), setting (location) and topic, which I also made use of. In order to refine the domain concept, I suggest the integration of external forces (social-regulatory dimension) as another 'participant' into the employment domain concept. Participants assume roles within the domain partly leading to asymmetrical role relationships that also create some form of hierarchy and power relationships. Social external forces would need to be positioned at the highest level, i.e. above the employer, given they have power over the employer (MNC), representing an external forces-employer relationship. The employer or MNC needs to choose language(s) as mandated by external forces. In the hierarchy, social external forces are followed by customers who also put pressure on MNCs to accommodate them (i.e. customer-employer, buyer-seller relationship), which are followed by the employer (executive) and the employee (i.e. employer-employee relationship).

These forces also have important implications for translation and interpretation services within a business context. As mentioned in the literature review (see *Chapter 2*) and earlier in this chapter, translation and interpretation in general and professional services in particular have trouble legitimizing their need in the corporate world and their existence as a field (Gouadec 2007, Janssens et al. 2004, Steyaert & Janssens 1997, Piekkari & Tietze 2011). This new knowledge shows that translation at a *professional* level and interpretation in general are needed in MNCs. This once again supports the claim that translation studies need to be an integral part of language choice in international business if we want to further the area in an interdisciplinary fashion (Piekkari & Tietze 2011). This is an area where the companies could benefit from harmonizing or better coordinating decisions (language management), for instance by establishing language departments (Hagen 2006), given it is a common need. So far, the evidence has suggested that



choices involving translations can be very unstructured, ill-informed, and situational; it comes down to the individual participant who makes the call, i.e. chooses languages and takes care of translations on a case-by-case basis. Similar to the area of HRM, translation and interpretation is a functional area that is not centralized or formalized per se but administered by individual agents within the MNC network. This challenges current language management concepts such as translation and interpretation being centrally managed (Feely & Harzing 2003, Hagen 2006, Nekvapil & Nekula 2006) (see *Chapter 2*), but at the same time encourages businesses to do so, yet in a localized, maybe regional, and context-sensitive manner. (I will discuss practical implications in *Section 9.3* below.)

In sum, case study evidence suggests that external forces represent a powerful and – in comparison to the other contextual dimensions – the most influential contextual dimension emerging from this research. It is of a social-regulatory nature that enforces or mandates different language choices, hence imposes languages on MNCs including the HQ language, English and local/customer languages. Choices are made by individuals (e.g. customer, local supplier), institutional bodies and organizations, discourse communities and other socially constructed forces or powers (e.g. money) external to the MNC communities, and then imposed on the companies. The imposition may concern different organizational units in a similar way (HQ, subsidiaries) or start at the local (subsidiary) level and then shift upwards and involve HQ later in the communication process; both forms of imposition eventually affect the MNC as a whole. This dimension adds the last facet to social context that informs language choice. As the previous dimensions, it confirms the limited manageability of language undertaken by employers and beyond. Given that external forces are beyond control of the MNCs, this finding suggests that language cannot be managed at all by the employer or corporate management. Therefore, it has, compared to the discussion above, the most crucial implications for both research and international business practice.

## 8.4 Summary

It could be summarized that the findings, as detailed in the previous sections, suggest that language choice is a social, contextually-bound and multilingual phenomenon. MNCs are

multilingual speech communities whose language choice norms imply the choices of the HQ and local languages in the home and host countries respectively and the choice of English as a lingua franca only if necessary. This is also the common understanding of the function of a corporate language. This insight challenges the concept of a corporate language (standardization) which is largely understood as a means to standardize or harmonize both internal and external communications through the predominant choice of English. Furthermore, the study has evidenced that the terms *corporate languages* and *language policy* are partly negatively received or connotated, and point towards non-management such as leaving the function of languages undefined or finding different labels such as *group* or *common* language and *language guide*. Initiating and formulating language policies or related documents for corporate purposes originate at the department level in a bottom-up fashion, and involve little to no implementation efforts. These characteristics are quite different from governmental language policy and planning (LPP) activities which points towards the limited applicability of traditional LPP concepts to international business contexts and the adoption of alternative frames such as language choice in a sociolinguistic sense.

Moreover, by investigating language choice in its social context, scrutinizing its deeper social structures and participants' rationales underlying language choice, we could also learn that social context informing language choices is complex and multidimensional. First, participants (HQs, subsidiaries, individual staff, etc.) have varying language proficiency, that is knowledge of one (L1) and possibly more languages (L2, L3, etc. – FLs), belonging to major and minor language communities, which informs the choices of English, the HQ and local/customer languages. These choices may involve code-switching/-mixing, passive multilingualism at the interactional level, language training initiated at the executive level and translation and interpretation covering both levels. Second, participants also assume roles within the employment domain (e.g. executive, employee, customer) which creates role relationships, social relationships and politeness principles, also shaped by relative status and power, which inform the choice of customer languages. The choice can involve translation and interpretation and human resource management undertaken at the executive level and language acquisition at the individual level. Politeness may inform the choice of the HQ language at the individual level or the choice of a local language undertaken at the executive level for educational purposes (language acquisition). Third, participants have ethnocentric, geocentric and polycentric attitudes, which can represent

internal forces with imposing power, fostering the choices of the HQ language, English and local/customer languages respectively. The choices may involve HRM and language acquisition initiated at the executive level. Fourth, participants have personal motivations that inform the choices of local/customer and the HQ language. The choices can include language acquisition initiated at the individual level and merge or overlap with the executive level. Finally, there are social forces external to the MNC community with imposing power that enforce the choices of or impose the HQ, local/customer languages and English on the companies. These enforced choices can involve translation and request professional solutions, and may be made by external individuals (e.g. local supplier) or authoritative bodies and other social forces of an e.g. legal or financial nature, all beyond the control of the MNCs.

At a more abstract level, it could be summarized that participants' accounts for language choices could be categorized into four dimensions: (1) social-linguistic dimension (language proficiency), (2) social-relational dimension (participant roles, role relationships, politeness all shaped by relative status and power), (3) social-psychological dimension (attitudes to languages, motivations), and (4) social-regulatory dimension (internal and external forces) that define social context in selected MNCs. These contextual dimensions inform the choices of the HQ language, local/customer languages and English.

The choices cross all organizational levels of the MNC, that is the HQ level, divisional, regional, and local levels of the MNC network, are made for internal and external communication purposes, and in different communicative situations. The choices include a great variety of languages and vary across locations, purposes and situations dependent on the participants and social forces involved.

Furthermore, language choices are made at both the corporate and individual levels which are not always clearly separable, overlap to some degree and have a dialectical relationship. Also, the corporate or employer level is decomposed or refracted, which means individual executives or agents make decisions and choose languages in their own right in a given communicative event, which challenges current language management concepts. For instance, translation and interpretation, HRM (selective recruitment, staff relocation, language nodes) or language training and acquisition are broadly understood as formalized or structural language management solutions undertaken by the employer at the top management level in order to solve language and

communication problems. My study has shown that choices or decisions involving these areas vary across participants or decision makers involved. This leads to multiple choices across organizational units and communicative situations that are not formalized or centralized in that manner, and are not perceived as problem-solving activities. This suggests that the phenomena observed in the MNC contexts can be better conceptualized by language choices (involving translation and interpretation, or choices for HRM and educational purposes) embedded in social context (dependent on participants involved). In other words, the concept language management can be better captured by sociolinguistic frames, i.e. the overall notion of language choice. (On this note, extant individual language management concepts suggesting that the individual participant acquires a language due to communication problems have been challenged by motivational concepts.)

In sum, these insights have provided a holistic understanding of language choice in four MNCs which is a social phenomenon of a complex, multifaceted and multilingual nature. The findings feed back into the research question about whether language can be managed in international business contexts. It can be concluded that language can hardly be managed by the employer in a centralized and top-down manner. Language standardization or 'English only' cannot be applied in these kinds of MNCs, especially not for external communication purposes (such as interaction with customers). In the context of external forces, language management on the MNC's part is not possible at all but multilingualism is enforced or imposed on the MNC. As far as language functions such as corporate languages and language policy are concerned, language probably should not be managed owing to the ill-reception of the concepts. Another area that points toward non-management is the individual and interactional level characterized by fruitful and efficient multilingualism; suppressing these diversified choices often representing some sort of win-win situation regarding language proficiency would be counterproductive.

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this research in selected MNCs is that language choice is a social, multilingual and context-sensitive phenomenon which renders centralized language management hard and single-language management (standardization) basically impossible. These in-depth insights suggest the development of context-sensitive, multilingual rather than monolingual policies and management for international business (MNC) purposes, if necessary at all. In other words, language management in MNCs may need to be abandoned and

left to the individual choosing language as it makes sense, which can be captured by language choice from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Finally, we have learned that the MNCs are multilingual speech communities whose individual members or participants open towards multilingualism choose a great variety of languages in different ways including both individual and executive levels when engaging in international business activities. This form of multilingualism is in many respects efficient; diversified choices have been perceived as time-efficient and having a positive impact on social relationships. This includes creating a more casual atmosphere, a feeling of solidarity or showing goodwill, which also contributes to reducing the social distance between interactants. Also, multilingualism often represents a kind of win-win situation in that participants choose various languages and draw from their shared linguistic repertoire in a way that seems most resourceful, convenient and pleasant to them. From the Danish and Austrian, non-Anglophone perspectives, multilingualism in the MNC can be conceptualized as a *resource* for doing international business (rather than a *barrier*), in alignment with sociolinguist frames.



## 9 CONCLUSIONS

In this concluding chapter I will summarize the broader empirical, theoretical and practical contributions. Then, I will address the study's limitations and suggest avenues for future research.

### 9.1 Empirical Contribution

In taking up the study's point of departure and discussion from the literature review, I will summarize the empirical contributions to both *business* and *language* studies. As the state of the art has outlined (see *Chapters 1* and *2*), one of the current stances within *business* research suggests an instrumental approach to language and advocates the manageability of languages by e.g. deliberate language design (Luo & Shenkar 2006). Along those lines of research, the adoption of a corporate language ('language standardization') intends to "harmonize internal and external communications through general rules and policies" (Piekkari & Tietze 2011: 267) and thereby solve the problem of multilingualism (Lauring & Selmer 2012, Luo & Shenkar 2006, Neeley 2012, 2013, Neeley et al. 2012, Vaara et al. 2005). In this vein, language tends to be conceptualized as a *barrier* compromising international business (IB) (Harzing et al. 2011, Lauring & Selmer 2011). Among the main advocates of 'English only' are Neeley and her colleagues who argue that "English is the common business language of choice in the 21st century, regardless of company origin or headquarter location" (Neeley et al. 2012: 236), or "[t]here's no question that unrestricted multilingualism is inefficient and can prevent important interactions from taking place and get in the way of achieving key goals" (Neeley 2012: 118). By contrast, there are a number of "language-sensitive scholars", as Piekkari & Tietze (2011: 267) refer to them, within the *business* community who take up an opposing stance. They argue, for instance, that the idea of a single business lingua franca has long been 'oversold', and multilingualism is an everyday phenomenon in IB practice (Janssens et al. 2004, Piekkari & Zander 2005, Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011). Hence, 'language standardization' is replaced by 'language contextualization' driven by the argument that language use is context-dependent and can hardly be managed by general policies (Piekkari & Tietze 2011, Janssens et al. 2004, Steyaert et al. 2011). Similarly, Feely &

Harzing (2003) claim that MNCs need to operate multilingually in order to be internationally successful, and Dhir & Gökè-Pariolá (2002) suggest they develop multilingual rather than monolingual corporate language policies.

Within the *language* sciences, the notions of language and multilingualism are usually conceptualized as a *resource* rather than a *barrier*, also in workplace environments and business contexts (e.g. Li 2007, Roberts 2007, Meyer & Apfelbaum 2010). The community's dominant voices echo the positive effect of multilingualism on business performance and success (usually with a focus on SMEs) (e.g. Vandermeeren 1998). Along the lines of the intradisciplinary discussion described above, one finds Spolsky (2009: 260f) who argues that:

language management requires a detailed understanding of multilingualism and social structure, as well as of multidimensional social and demographic space. [...] Because so much of language management produces questionable results, apparently supporting monolingual hegemony and discouraging pluralism and multilingualism, is this not an area (like religious belief) better left to individual free choice? [...] We are left then with two basic questions; can language be managed? And if it can, should it be managed?

In this sense, *language* scholars share viewpoints with the 'language-sensitive' *business* scholars, which has generated a cross-disciplinary research gap. The latter centers around whether language can (and should) be managed in IB contexts given that language choice is presumably contextually bound, i.e. embedded in social context. This has required a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon language choice in MNCs which existing knowledge could not provide. In addressing this gap, I formulated the following research question (see also *Chapter 1, Section 1.2*):

***Can language be managed in international business contexts? Language choice in four multinational corporations (MNCs)***

In order to answer this research question empirically, I conducted a case study of two Danish and two Austrian MNCs that aimed to learn about language choice in its social context and ultimately about the manageability of language in such IB contexts. In brief, the research phenomenon



language choice captures which language(s) is/are chosen by whom, where, for which purpose, in which communicative situation and most importantly for which reason.

We have learned that the MNCs investigated operate as multilingual speech communities with certain language choice norms. Community norms can be described as taken-for-granted or common-sense choices. This means participants share a natural understanding that headquarters and subsidiaries choose their own language in home and host countries respectively. English is often chosen as a lingua franca if a 'third' language is needed. If English assumes the function of a corporate language, its meaning and understanding is similar to the function of a lingua franca. A corporate language does not replace other languages but merely coexists with them. This has counterbalanced or rather challenged Anglophone perspectives and contributes to the discussion on 'language blindness' Anglophone businesses often suffer from (e.g. Fredriksson et al. 2006, see also Thomas 2008, Graddol 2006, Crick 1999, Clarke 2000, Hagen 2005). However, the term *corporate* language often has negative connotations in that it is associated with an unconditional imposition of English ('English only'). Therefore, the Danish companies have generated new labels such as *common* or *group* language. This contributes to the discussion on the function of a corporate language in general (Marschan et al. 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, 1999b, Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002, Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005, Piekkari et al. 2005, Vaara et al. 2005, Fredriksson et al. 2006, Tange & Lauring 2009) but also questions its usefulness given it may stir resentment among staff, only confirms speech community norms rather than changes language choice behavior per se and represents in many instances only an auxiliary language (due to frequent reliance on translation). This contributes to the intradisciplinary discussion in *business* research on 'language contextualization' including 'non-management' (Piekkari & Tietze 2011, Fredriksson et al. 2006) versus 'language standardization' (Lauring & Selmer 2012, Luo & Shenkar 2006, Neeley 2012, 2013, Neeley et al. 2012).

In relation to the choice of English as a *common* or *group* language, the Danish companies have developed a language policy and a language guide which put forward some guidelines rather than regulate or manage language per se. Also, they confirm their speech community norms by objecting to 'English only' and are more or less open to multilingualism. This finding contributes to the discussion on multilingual corporate language policies (Loos 2007, Dhir & Gökè-Pariolá 2002). Interestingly, they have been initiated and developed at the department level in a bottom-

up fashion by staff with an interest in language and communication rather than by top management, and feature limited implementation efforts. This provides empirical evidence for how language policies are understood in international business practice and how they differ from language policies for national contexts (Baldauf 2006).

In order to learn more about whether language can be managed or not, language choice has been explored in its social context; four social contextual dimensions that define language choices in the MNC contexts have emerged, which represents the main empirical contribution of the study. In more detail, participants' language choices are informed by (1) their language proficiency (L1 and possible FLs), (2) their roles, role relationships within the employment domain, and politeness strategies, all shaped by relative status and power, (3) their attitudes to language and motivations, and (4) social forces external to the MNC community. At a more abstract level, social context is defined by (1) social-linguistic, (2) social-relational, (3) social-psychological and (4) social-regulatory contextual dimensions that inform or impose the choices of the HQ language, local/customer languages and English (as a lingua franca). The language choices can involve code-switching/-mixing, passive multilingualism, translation and interpretation, language learning and acquisition, human resource management (selective recruitment and staff relocation). Most of the choices are in fact made at both the individual and corporate levels, which are hard to separate from one another. The corporate level is fragmented into individual executives who make language choices in their own right which are far from harmonized. An additional level is external forces (e.g. authorities, laws) that impose the use of multiple languages on the MNCs. Finally, language choices vary across the MNCs' organizational units, internal and external communications and communicative situations, depending on the participants and social forces involved.

It can be concluded that language choice is a social, complex, context-dependent and multilingual phenomenon which makes it hard to control or regulate by central language policies and management approaches. As already touched upon above, these empirical findings contribute to the intradisciplinary debate on 'language standardization' versus 'language contextualization' by clearly supporting the latter, similar to Janssens et al. (2004), Piekkari & Zander (2000), Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio (2011), Fredriksson et al. (2006), Steyaert & Janssens (1997). In other words, my research has indicated that language management in international business contexts

undertaken by MNCs can hardly be centralized or monolingual. Under the influence of external forces, it is even beyond the companies' control. This suggests that language management needs to be localized, multilingual and sensitive to social context. Ultimately, one could question whether language needs to be managed at all or should be better left to individual choice, as Spolsky (2009) suggests.

In fact, we have learned that the MNCs as multilingual speech communities whose individual members or participants open to multilingualism choose a great variety of languages in different ways when engaging in international business activities. This form of multilingualism has in many respects been efficient; participants choose various languages and draw from the community's linguistic repertoire in a way that seems most resourceful, convenient and pleasant to them in a given situation. From the Danish and Austrian, non-Anglophone case study perspectives, we could conclude that this form of "unrestricted multilingualism" is in fact not "inefficient" (Neeley 2012: 118), as claimed in the *business* literature, on the contrary; in many cases language choices are perceived efficient. This implies that restricting or suppressing multilingualism by English-only policies might be more 'expensive' than 'tolerating' or welcoming and fostering such language choice behavior, ergo counterproductive. In this sense, it is not a costly constraint or *barrier* per se but rather confirms the notion of multilingualism being a *resource* or asset, as largely claimed by sociolinguists (e.g. Li 2007, Roberts 2007, Meyer & Apfelbaum 2010, Vandermeeren 1998) and LPP scholars (e.g. Spolsky 2009). This being said, the empirical insights further contribute to the broader field of *language* science including language (code) choice in business studies (Vandermeeren 1998), in both Austria (Bäck 2004, Weber 2008) and Denmark (Millar & Jensen 2009, Lønsmann 2011), LPP research in business (Kingsley 2010), as well as 'language-sensitive' *business* research, as outlined above. The study's empirical insights gained have also had theoretical implications which I will summarize in the following section.

## 9.2 Theoretical Contribution

As elaborated on in *Chapter 2* (in particular *Section 2.3*), this research has conceptually and theoretically drawn on several fields; I have deployed classic sociolinguistics, language policy and planning/management, applied linguistics, social psychology (within sociolinguistics), translation

studies and international business and management. By adopting an interdisciplinary working framework centered on the broader concept language choice and confronting it with empirical evidence, we have gained theoretical insights that have eventually challenged concepts that are currently used in both *business* and *language* research. These can be seen as the study's theoretical contribution.

Applying the sociolinguistic concept of a speech community (Gumperz 1968, 2009) has helped understand and learn about the language choice norms (Fishman 1971, Scotton 1983) and language functions within the MNCs. Empirical evidence on the function of a corporate language in general and the function of English in particular has challenged extant concepts of (English as) a corporate language and the notion of standardization, largely understood as a means to standardize and harmonize both internal and external communications through the predominant use of English (e.g. Piekkari & Tietze 2011, Thomas 2008, Luring & Selmer 2012, Luo & Shenkar 2006, Neeley 2012). My case study insights could add that the function of a corporate language in these (non-Anglophone) MNC contexts were better conceptualized as an optional lingua franca for primarily internal communication purposes. Otherwise the MNCs choose multiple languages, i.e. function as multilingual speech communities, which has suggested the conceptualization of multilingualism in MNCs as a *resource* and abandoning the notion of a *barrier*, as already touched upon above. (This also suggests that the communities' linguistic resources can or should be exploited and leveraged in an informed way; some practical suggestions on *multilingual* and context-sensitive language management will be detailed in Section 9.3.)

Moreover, working with the broader sociolinguistic concept language choice has helped conceptually reassess the frames of language policy and planning (LPP) (Ricento 2006, 2013, Baldauf 2006, Jernudd & Nekvapil 2012) and language management (Spolsky 2009). This has enabled me to address the research question about the manageability of language in international business (IB) contexts conceptually. Most of these concepts are rooted in language policy and planning/management developed by authoritative bodies for national (macro) purposes. Macro language planning activities are mostly undertaken by government officials, may involve the formulation of language policies, and aim at changing language behavior (practices) in larger speech communities like nations (e.g. Rubin & Jernudd 1971, Baldauf 2006). Some LPP scholars have attempted to develop or modify the concepts for and apply them to business (micro)

environments (Spolsky 2009, Kingsley 2010, Nekvapil & Nekula 2006, Lüdi et al. 2010). Despite their valuable insights, I argue differently; my study has confirmed the limited applicability of the concepts, initially developed for macro-level contexts, to micro-level contexts such as businesses, as also questioned by Baldauf (2006). We have learned that policies and management activities do not operate in the same way; policies may be developed in a bottom-up fashion, management activities are not restricted to the top management level but undertaken by many different agents, which renders decision making fluid and a clear distinction between the policy and practice levels almost impossible. That is to say the phenomena identified in this case study could be better captured by sociolinguistic frames (see also Baldauf 2006), i.e. by the overall notion of language choice. In this vein, formerly developed organized, formalized or structural language management solutions such as translation and interpretation, HRM (selective recruitment, staff relocation, language nodes) or language training and acquisition, etc. with the purpose of solving language and communication problems by the employer (e.g. Feely & Harzing 2003, Nekvapil & Nekula 2006, Harzing et al. 2011, Hagen 2006) have been refracted and scrutinized as to who ‘manages’ or chooses which language(s) for which purpose, or whose language(s) in which communicative situation. The present study has shown that choices or decisions involving these areas vary across participants or decision makers involved. This leads to multiple choices across organizational units and communicative situations that are not formalized or centralized in that manner and are not perceived as problem-solving activities. This has suggested that the phenomena observed in the MNC contexts can be better conceptualized by language choices (involving translation and interpretation, or choices for HRM and educational purposes) embedded in social context (dependent on participants involved). These insights contribute to the theoretical discussion raised by Baldauf (2006, see also Spolsky 2009) and supports the idea of abandoning macro LPP concepts and positioning micro context phenomena in alternative or neighboring fields such as sociolinguistics (e.g. Hymes 1968, Fishman 1971, 1972b). This research has confirmed the usefulness of the concept language choice (e.g. Fishman 1965).

In this vein, a conceptual adaptation could also be offered to the sociolinguistic domain concept (Fishman 1972a). Case study evidence has suggested the integration of external forces (social-regulatory dimension) as another ‘participant’ into the employment domain concept. Social external forces need to be positioned at the highest level, i.e. above the employer, given they have power over the employer (MNC), representing an external forces-employer relationship.

Related to the above, external forces represent one of the four contextual dimensions that emerged from this study: (1) social-linguistic dimension, (2) social-relational dimension, (3) social-psychological dimension and (4) social-regulatory dimension. They describe the multidimensional nature of social context within the MNC cases that informed language choices. These dimensions being socially constructed accounts based on participants' meanings and realities and their rationales behind language choices represent a conceptual framework that helps better understand the research phenomenon language choice in MNCs. These conceptual categories could be understood as a first step into capturing language choice in MNCs, hence are open to further refinement and development to deepen our theoretical understanding. They theoretically contribute to both *business* and *language* research communities. This being said, it has to be stressed that theory development as such was not the prime focus of this collective case study. I believe that the case studies in themselves all demonstrating idiosyncrasies and unique manifestations of the social contextual dimensions and their interplay offer rich theoretical insights. In other words, particularization and naturalistic generalizations within the naturalistic contexts are more valuable and useful for learning about language choice in MNC contexts, how it operates, becomes manifest and sheds light on the limited to impossible manageability of language. In other words, the case studies serve as exemplars of the phenomenon language choice and thereby also contribute rich theoretical insights. This is based on the stance that context-free propositions limit the opportunity to learn from cases and their rich descriptions necessary for understanding (see also Stake 1995, Dyer & Wilkins 1991) (see *Chapter 3*). This suggests that the main theoretical contribution of the present thesis lies in the naturalistic generalizations that the readers of this collective case study can make with the ultimate goal of learning about language choice in MNCs and the manageability of language in such IB contexts.

### **9.3 Application and Managerial Relevance of Findings**

Continuing the previous discussion of my study's findings and their empirical and theoretical contributions, this section deals with their practical implications, i.e. how the findings can be best applied by practitioners. Generally speaking, it could be argued that being open-minded toward language matters and developing language awareness are essential when it comes to choosing

languages in international business contexts. More specifically, it could be concluded that practitioners may need a multilingual mindset that pays specific attention to the social context in which they navigate internationally. This means broadly speaking being attentive to and reflexive about interactants' language proficiency, their relationships, attitudes to languages and motivations, and external forces such as authorities when making language choices. Considering these contextual dimensions might fruitfully guide practitioners (both managers and employees) in their language choices.

It has to be remembered that the findings about language choice embedded in its social context are based on selected Danish and Austrian multinationals of varying sizes operating in manufacturing, pharmaceutical and construction industries. Most obviously, the knowledge gained can be applied by MNCs with similar characteristics or attributes and possibly MNCs in general since many insights gained are neither nationally bound nor related to size and industry. This also suggests that the application is not necessarily limited to but transcends MNC contexts in that SMEs might consider some of the knowledge, which is not bound to size or organizational structure, relevant too. In other words, they might share national, industry- and product-related attributes or foreign market interests with the cases, hence can compare the findings to their own experiences and possibly learn from and apply them.

The MNCs investigated operate as multilingual organizations (i.e. speech communities), which means headquarters and subsidiaries speak their own languages in the first place and choose English (or any other language that works) for internal communication purposes. This also applies to the cases with English as a corporate language. Customers' first languages are usually chosen for external communication purposes. Overall, a loose and open-ended approach to language choice has been observed rather than a monolingual or 'English only' approach. 'English only' would not be possible in such MNCs, considering the social context in which they are embedded. In this sense, multilingual management, if necessary at all, can be recommended on the basis of current case study evidence.

As for attempts of language management, we have also learned that the adoption of English as a corporate language or the term *corporate* language is often negatively connotated, that is with an English-only policy. The Danish companies have proposed alternatives for the term *corporate*, i.e. *group* or *common* language. In this sense, it is important to clearly describe and define the function

of English and communicate this knowledge within the MNC, maybe supported by a document or statement, in order to avoid unnecessary resentment among staff. In order to avoid any negative reaction from staff toward language functions, an MNC may not define languages' functions after all, and leave their meanings with the interpretation of the individual staff member.

With regard to documents and policy statements, it could be summarized that they are tools to help raise language awareness within the MNC, given they are of a multilingual and context-sensitive nature. As the Danish cases have shown, they can spell out community norms and remind staff of the multilingual nature of the company and maybe suggest how to choose language in a multilingual and efficient way. Furthermore, they can point towards language assistance in house (e.g. translators, corporate term databases and other dictionaries), or external agencies, may put forward tailored language assessment and training initiatives, provide guidance on how to improve (English) writing skills, disseminate intercultural knowledge, etc., In order for these documents to have an actual impact on language awareness and achieve context-sensitive language choices among staff members, they also, first of all, need to be made aware of their existence. In other words, they need to be promoted, communicated and shared across the entire MNC network. On a terminological or semantic note, the term *policy* has also partly been received negatively in the Danish companies. Based on this insight, it is advisable to follow the Danish example that works with an alternative label that is more positively connotated such as *language guide* or *language (hand/reference)book*.

We have also learned a lot about the area of translation and interpretation across several contextual dimensions. Problems with nonprofessional translation/interpretation services have been reported. In an attempt to avoid such problems as much as possible, the recruitment of professionals or education of staff members to professionals – so they can also certify translations where needed – as well as the engagement in terminology management tools (e.g. corporate term database, translation memory systems) can be recommended. These are evidence-based practices that can help minimize translation errors or misunderstandings and improve translation quality, accuracy and consistency. This ties in with the establishment of language or translation departments, none of the case companies had, yet as prior research has already suggested (e.g. Hagen 2006). This could help better coordinate translation and interpretation tasks. Overall,



these forms of context-sensitive language management would also facilitate the administration of professional solutions (e.g. certified translations), which the case companies commonly need for both internal and external communication purposes (e.g. translation of important documents or interaction with authorities, which I will further detail below). This finding has managerial relevance for MNCs in that practitioners are advised to take professional translation and quality improvements into consideration of their language management activities.

Another area that has provided interesting insights and suggests practical implications is human resource management (HRM). Choices for HRM purposes including selective recruitment and staff relocation are far from united because they are often shaped or even biased by HR executives' varying attitudes. These attitudes can compromise their judgment as to language proficiency necessary for a given position, e.g. expatriation assignments. In this sense, HR managers could learn from some of the study's participants who have demonstrated a positive attitude to multilingualism (polycentric attitude) in that they attempt to align local language skills to expatriation assignments, for instance. In this sense, they exploit existing language resources within the MNC more strategically, also assisted by having language profiles of staff (as in one Danish case). The dimension of attitudes to languages has similarly shaped choices for educational purposes in that language training and acquisition is more informed by attitudes rather than needs for carrying out a specific task at hand or the position in question; the findings suggest to better invest in English training for middle and top management levels since they engage in international and interlingual encounters (but may have limited English skills) than for operative or blue-collar staff whose work is more locally bound, thus usually do not need English skills. In this vein, the companies have reported limited English skills among their staff including top management and encountered communication problems (e.g. lack of expression in English, enhanced difficulty of technical or legal English). This has further practical implications for language training. A key to improving lingua franca communication would be enhancing English proficiency where needed, including the management level. It is important that executives are not excluded from this and not assumed to master English anyway; owing to their status and power they might be immune to such evaluation and training initiatives, as problematized in a Danish company. In this sense, the evaluation of English skills and tailor-made English training need to start at the management level and then proceed towards the lower levels where needed. In sum, if corporate management as an MNC's language manager or policy maker tried to harmonize and

maybe better tailor language choices for HRM and educational purposes, it would need to start with reconciling their own attitudes to languages and consensually define language choices for HRM and educational purposes.

Finally, I would like to draw practitioners' attention to external forces this study has shed light on, as briefly mentioned above. These are e.g. (supra)national authorities and institutions such as the EU, tax offices, financial institutions or funding, laws and legal regulations, the international research community, etc. that all have the power to impose languages on the MNC in one way or another. For instance, they might mandate a certified translation of an English document into the local language, and the MNC or its organizational units have to respond and take actions accordingly. These insights support the multilingual recommendations or suggestions, as outlined in this section, in order to be better prepared for external circumstances and possible constraints.

#### **9.4 Limitations of the Study and Avenues for Future Research**

The limitations of this study concern the research context, the methods applied and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. With regards to the research context, it can be said that I studied multinational corporations (MNCs) which limits the discussion and contribution of my research primarily to these international business contexts. (As argued in the previous section, results that are not related to company size or organizational structure might also be applicable to and relevant for SMEs.). Consequently, it would be interesting to see how phenomena occur in SMEs and alternative micro environments such as academic environments and other public institutions, non-governmental organizations, etc., given that the micro level as opposed to the macro level is still an under-researched area in the LPP literature (see *Chapter 2*).

This comparative study has provided first insights into differences between home-country environments, HQ languages with different numbers of speakers (minor versus major language) and different corporate languages. It would be interesting to further explore different HQ and corporate languages such as Romance or Eastern European languages, etc. to broaden our understanding of contextual language choice in IB. Furthermore, I have focused on different industries (manufacturing, pharmaceutical and construction industries), which has shed light on industry-specific characteristics that shape language choices such as financial forces specific to

construction projects and the like. This not only shows that different industries require different language choices but also opens up new avenues for future research, namely on language choice in more different industries to deepen our understanding on the subject matter.

As to research design and methods, it has to be pointed out that this research is a purely qualitative piece since the overall goal was to generate and construct in-depth knowledge about the research phenomenon language choice in its naturalistic context and learn from the case studies. This means it was not the aim to generalize to MNCs, national contexts (Danish and Austrian HQs), company size or industries or any other attributes, which may be regarded as a methodological limitation. This invites quantitative researchers with explanatory research goals to contribute to the discussion on language choice in international business.

With regard to conceptual and theoretical limitations, it can be argued that adopting the overall concept of language choice was in many ways useful, but also had certain shortcomings. For instance, social forces of an internal and external nature capture language imposition on participants who eventually have little or no choice. Languages are imposed and participants have to use them or somehow respond to the choice that has basically been made *for* them. Though, internal forces leave more room for de facto choice than external forces. Similarly, in the context of passive language proficiency, one might argue that only the sender chooses a language and the recipient with a passive understanding of the language chosen uses or relies on (rather than chooses) their passive skills. These imprecisions open up for future research to refine and improve our conceptual understanding.

Further limitations center around the concept language policy. Having an explicit language policy, i.e. language policy statement, was no case selection criterion since I was first and foremost interested in language choice in its broader sense. Language choice was the point of departure to learn about the manageability of languages and possible implications for language policy and management in MNCs. Yet, one could argue that the multitude of language choices and the ‘noise’ around multilingualism is the result of not having an actual policy. In order to compensate for this limitation, one could investigate companies with much clearer directives from corporate management supported by explicit language policy statements or documents that have been implemented for a certain period of time to reassess the policy and practice levels again and refine

our empirical and theoretical understanding of the phenomena. To this end, a longitudinal study could be insightful.

Another limitation of this research is the lack of theoretical grounding in international business and management studies. Considering myself a *language* researcher, my analysis and understanding of the MNC, its structure and organization (design) were not very comprehensive. In this sense, follow-up research could benefit from a cross-fertilization of IB and sociolinguistic theories. In general, I urge *business* and *language* scholars to join forces and benefit from each other's theoretical and empirical understandings in order to develop an effectively interdisciplinary field (rather than a cross-disciplinary field with occasional cross-references to each other's works). This could perhaps remedy the theoretical discrepancies and overlaps within and across disciplines to ultimately improve and advance our understanding of language choice and related phenomena in IB contexts.

Finally, a question I have often been asked in the course of this study is why I did not study cultural aspects, often related to the argument that language is inseparable from and embedded into culture, specifically in an IB or MNC context. Although I do not object to this at a general level, I believe one can study or focus on language. Hence, I considered culture only marginally, i.e. in the context of English as a lingua franca and the influence of culture attached to the L1 on ELF communication (Palmer-Silveira et al. 2006, Meierkord 2002, Henderson 2005), and as far as it is integrated into translation studies (e.g. Holz-Mänttari 1984, Snell-Hornby 1988, Reiß & Vermeer 1991, Lambert 1994). Apart from that, I did not include cultural dimensions or adopt cultural frameworks (e.g. Hall 1976, Geertz 1973, Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, Moore 2005) or cross-cultural (management) perspectives (Adekola & Sergi 2007, Holden 2002, Trompenaars & Woolliams 2003, Söderberg & Holden 2002) because I was primarily interested in the sociolinguistic angle of language choice in MNC contexts. Also, language is – compared to culture – an under-researched area within international business studies (see also Harzing & Feely 2008). I leave this possible research avenue to other scholars and future interdisciplinary studies.

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## **Appendix (Interview Protocol)**

### **PART I – Opening of interview**

- 1) What is your position and could you briefly describe your area of responsibility?
- 2) What is your educational background?
- 3) What is your mother tongue and do you speak any foreign languages?
- 3a) Can you use the languages you speak at work?
- 4a) Which role do foreign languages, do you think, play at [Company name]?
- 4b) Which role do foreign languages have personally for you?

### **PART II – Overview of language choices in the MNC (internal and external communication)**

- 5) Apart from [FLs mentioned], are there any other languages used or needed at [Company name]?
- 6) [At HQ] The corporation has a lot of subsidiaries located in different countries with different local languages. How do you communicate with those? // [At S] You are part of a large corporation with its headquarters in Denmark/Austria; how do you as a subsidiary communicate with the headquarters?
- 7) [At HQ] Do the subsidiaries communicate with each other as well? // [At S] Do you communicate with other subsidiaries too?
- 8) Can they/you act more or less independently or are they/you strongly connected to the headquarters?
- 9) Let's assume that [Company name] wanted to explore a new market where it didn't have any subsidiaries yet; in which language would first contacts with external partners be established?

### **PART III – More on language choices...**

- 10) Does [Company name] have a language policy or strategy?
- 11) Does [Company name] have an official corporate language?

### **Language choices involving translation and interpretation**

- 12) Does [Company name] have an in-house language or translation department?
- 13) Are there any written documents that need to be translated?
- 13a) [If so] Who translates these documents?
- 13b) [If so] What is the reason for translating them?
- 14) Does the company have a corporate glossary or term database that you or translators could use?
- 15) Are there any circumstances under which you rely on interpreters for oral contexts, for example at meetings?
- 15a) [If so] What is the reason for using interpreters?

### **Language choices for educational purposes (training and acquisition)**

- 16) Is language training or even learning offered to you and your colleagues?
- 16a) [If so] Are the language courses paid by the company?

16b) [If so] When (working hours/spare time?) and where (on site/outside?) do they take place?

**Language choices for HRM purposes (selective recruitment, staff relocation)**

- 17) Could language skills be a hiring criterion, such as being a native speaker of a particular language or knowing many foreign languages?
- 17a) When you were hired, were language skills somehow discussed in your job interview?
- 18) Does the firm relocate personnel? So, do people come to the headquarters or the other way around, are they assigned to one of the subsidiaries?
- 18a) Do you know the reason for this?

**PART IV – Perceived problems and proficiency**

- 19) When you think of an internal or global meeting, for instance, including representatives from the subsidiaries or maybe suppliers and local agents; have you ever experienced any communication challenges?
- 20) Do you have subsidiaries or foreign markets in mind where the collaboration is more complicated than with others?
- 20a) [If so] Could you maybe explain why?
- 21) Have you ever noticed differences in language skills among colleagues or business partners?

**PART V – Respondent's language choices, code-switching/-mixing, passive multilingualism**

- 22) Which language or languages do you personally use with a foreign customer or a colleague?
- 22a) Can you explain which factors influence your language choices?
- 23) Does the way [medium/channel] of communication make a difference for you; do you prefer oral (phone, face-to-face) or written communication (email)?
- 23a) Does the topic influence your language choice? (business vs. small talk)?
- 24) Do you or your colleagues ever switch between or mix languages in a conversation?
- 25) Could it happen that people stick to their mother tongues and understand each other? As if I spoke German with you and you replied in your first or preferred language, and we would understand each other?

**Closure – Improvements**

- 26) Is there anything that could be improved regarding communication or language matters? What would you change, if you could?

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*The semiautomatic expansion of existing terminological ontologies using knowledge patterns discovered*

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Kultur- og identitetsarbejde ved skabelsen af en ny sengeafdeling gennem fusion*
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*Hybrid Governance of Standardized States  
Causes and Contours of the Global Regulation of Government Auditing*
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De institutionelle mulighedsbetingelser bag den individuelle udforskning i professionelt og frivilligt arbejde*
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*Brand Community Innovation  
An Intrinsic Case Study of the Adult Fans of LEGO Community*
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Organizational and Institutional Perspectives*
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– Studier af indrulleringsprocesser i forbindelse med introduktionen af kliniske kvalitetsdatabaser i speciallægepraksissektoren*
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Value creation and ambiguity in client-consultant relations*
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How to exploit the potential for management accounting of information technology*
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A European Study*
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Identitet som mulighed og restriktion  
blandt fabriksarbejdere på det aftayloriserede fabriksgulv*
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– A Neo-Institutional Understanding of Change Processes within the Business Press – the Case Study of Financial Times*
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An Exploration of first-mover advantages among Danish e-grocers through a resource perspective*
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A Critical Political Economy Perspective*
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*Collaborative R&D Capabilities*  
*In Search of Micro-Foundations*

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|--|--|
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- 2010**
- |  |   |
|--|---|
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*Et empirisk casestudie af omstillingsforløb i fire virksomheder*
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The Contingent Value of Networked Collaboration*
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An application to China*
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- A Complexity Approach*
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in Accelerated Medical Relationships*

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Et casestudie om styring og menings-  
skabelse i relation til CSR ud fra en  
intern optik*
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finansieringsudgifter  
En skatteretlig analyse af SEL §§ 11,  
11B og 11C*
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Models  
Their Merits and Sophistication  
across Contexts*
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En analyse af dansk skatteret*
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Evidence from Danish Micro Data*
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covered, by the Public Sector Directive"*
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- patientfigurer i hospitalets strategiske  
kommunikation*
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Commerce*
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Reporting decision and content of the  
report*
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working practice:  
- an understanding anchored  
in pragmatism*
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Enhancing Social Entrepreneurship and  
Stakeholder Theory*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
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|---|---|

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