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Language policy in an enacted world The organization of linguistic diversity

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Increasingly, foreign contacts are a daily fact of life for many companies. It is therefore remarkable that little to no empirical research has been conducted into the language policy applied by such organizations. Companies with transnational contacts are generally assumed to use English throughout the world as a “lingua franca”, yet whether this is actually the case is questionable. In a multicultural Europe that is striving to unite, there may well be other languages that could qualify as the international language of choice. Research is needed to investigate which language or languages are chosen, by whom the choice is made and why, in certain situations, speakers switch to different languages. This article focuses on the report of an empirical study addressing these aspects. A case study of a Dutch parent company that runs a holiday centre in Germany is presented in order to analyse micro-level interactions which can only be understood by considering the language choice as the result of the way in which the environment is “enacted”. For this analysis, use was made of an interview conducted with the Head of the Human Resource Department and transcripts of audio-recorded conversations and documents, such as the mission statement from the company’s headquarters in Amsterdam and the holiday centre in Germany.

Introduction

Day in, day out we are confronted with clashes, conflicts of interests and diverse views of reality. On the one hand, mass communication and internationalisation in the economic arena have led to an increasing mutual dependency at the global level (“globalization”), while on the other, there is a rising trend towards individualization (“localization”). Marketeers are calling this “glocalization” to characterise the process of creating products or services intended for the global market that are customized to suit the local culture:

The idea of glocalization in its business sense is closely related to what in some contexts is called, in more straightforwardly economic terms, micro-marketing: the

tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets. (Robertson 1995: 28)

“Glocalization” affects most companies. Because of the competition they come up against, many businesses (e.g. banks, insurance companies) are expanding. Either they find business partners in other countries or they establish themselves abroad. As a result, they find it difficult to know how to communicate appropriately at the local level in order to satisfy both employees and customers. Although many management textbooks stress the need to “Think global and act local”, this is, however, difficult for many companies to realise. The case study presented in this article investigates the language policy efforts made by one such company to think globally, act locally and operate successfully.

That this is far from easy can be illustrated with the help of Mc Luhan’s famous metaphor of the “global village” in which we live (Mc Luhan and Power 1989). It is a village made up of diverse, interdependent neighbourhoods, the inhabitants of which all literally and figuratively speak their own language. In order to survive, they must work together. What is necessary now is to establish the survival strategies used by inhabitants of the various neighbourhoods of the “global village” to arrive at this crucial level of cooperation. To understand how this is achieved, the process of communication between these people and the determinants of such a process should be subjected to closer study. To that end, this article focuses on their language choice.

Companies with transnational contacts are generally assumed to use English throughout the world as a “lingua franca”, yet whether this is actually the case is questionable. In a multicultural Europe that is striving to unite, there may well be other languages that could qualify as the international language of choice. Research is needed to investigate which language or languages are chosen, by whom the choice is made and why, in certain situations, speakers switch to different languages. An empirical study of this kind is therefore examined in this article.

Before presenting the case study of a Dutch parent company and its holiday centre in Germany, I will first discuss the way in which the environment is “enacted” by the management of internationally oriented companies and how this led to the formulation of a specific language policy and subsequent language choice. I will use this conceptual framework to answer the following questions by analysing quotes from an interview with the Head of the Human Resource (the interview was conducted in Dutch and has been translated in English for this article), transcripts of audio-recorded conversations and documents such as the mission statement from the headquarters in Amsterdam and the holiday centre in

Germany:

1. Which language(s) was (were) chosen by the management of the Dutch holiday centre for the communication between Dutch and German employees, and for the communication with the customers of the holiday centre in Germany?
2. Why was this language or were these languages chosen?
3. Are there situations in which a switch is made to a different language; if so, in which situations and why?

In conclusion, an evaluation is made of the way in which the “enacted environment” constituted the basis for the development of the language policy followed by an organization with transnational contacts, the ensuing language choice and the implications for the communication with and between employees and customers. In other words, the article focuses on micro-level interactions which can only be understood by considering the language choice as the result of the way in which the environment is “enacted”.

Language policy

This article analyses mechanisms underlying language policy in private organizations. What do we know about such mechanisms? Empirical research in this field has mainly been conducted at institutions of the European Union. Loos (2004: 4-5) argues that such research focuses on aspects, such as the European language constellation (e.g. Labrie 1993, European Cultural Foundation 1999, De Swaan 1999), institutional multilingualism and its possible reforms (for example Mamadouh 1999 and De Cillia 2003), linguistic capital and symbolic domination in the EU (Loos 2000). Other studies, such as Abélès (1992), Mamadouh (1995) and Loos (2004) examined the (language) practices in a specific EU institution, like the European Parliament, or analysed EU organizational discursive practices (e.g. Born and Schütte 1995, Muntigl 2000 and Wodak 2000).

This is in stark contrast with the lack of empirical research into language choice in private organizations. As Herrlitz and Loos first noted in 1994, studies of international joint ventures of this kind have focussed mainly on the question of the extent to which national cultural differences form an impediment to successful cooperation (see for example Hofstede 1984 and Olie 1996), with the implications for the language policy of such corporations rarely being examined (Herrlitz and Loos 1994: 144-147), an observation that remains valid to this very day. Examining the literature on intercultural business communication, it is surprising to

discover that little or no attention is paid to language choice. Questions relating to the reasons for selecting a particular common language are rarely asked. Asante and Gudykunst's (2000) *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication* and in particular, Shuter's contribution 'The International Marketplace' provide useful examples of the extent to which this question has been neglected. After critically reviewing current research, Shuter (2000: 400-404), for example, provides a new conceptual framework of his own relating to research into intercultural organizational communication, where consideration is given to questions such as "what to say, and how to send it?". The first question has to do with the information that has to be conveyed and the second with the technical means at one's disposal for relaying such information. The decision as to which common language should be adopted, however, is not included in their conceptual framework. Why this should be so emerges inadvertently from a remark made by Gudykunst and Nishida (2000: 39) in their introduction to the same volume, 'Theoretical Perspectives for Studying Intercultural Communication':

Our summary, out of necessity, has been limited to approaches to the study of intercultural communication used in English-speaking, Western countries.

Although there are a few exceptions (see for example Clark 1999 and Fixman 1990 about the foreign language needs of respectively English speaking exporters and US-based corporations, Feeley and Herzing 2002, 2003, 2004 and Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch 1997, 1999 about the role of language in cross-cultural management settings), in most research projects, it is taken for granted that where intercultural business communication is concerned, English will inevitably be used as the "lingua franca". Most research into intercultural business communication generally focuses upon international organizations (often multinationals) that use English as a common language and that mainly carry out their business in English speaking countries. This has led to a one-sided view, which only represents the reality of the European situation to a certain degree. In a rapidly integrating Europe, the choice of language is the first (and rarely the least important) problem confronting internationally operating companies. The choice is by no means in all cases the "lingua franca" English; other languages can also qualify (depending on the given specific relations) as the vehicle for international communication. Language choice thus has a major impact on whether the communication, and hence the commercial activities of such companies, is successful or not. Research into language choice in private organizations is therefore imperative.

Language choice

In order to investigate the question of language choice, Herrlitz and Loos (1994: 150-153) differentiate between three models. The first of these, the “lingua franca model”, is viewed as the prototype for multinationals with many subsidiary companies in different countries. The subsidiary companies have a high degree of autonomy, and in general, their internal and external communications are conducted in the standard languages of the countries in which they are situated. In that respect, they resemble national organizations. For certain internationally oriented matters, for example the annual report, the “lingua franca”, e.g. English, is used. This “lingua franca” does not have the same characteristics as the language used by native speakers (see Seidlhofer 2001 for differences between English as a “lingua franca” and British or American English). Furthermore, it is not linked to a national culture: During their interaction, actors using a “lingua franca” construct an interculture (Koole and Ten Thije 1994: 69), which is independent of their national cultures.

The second possibility is that actors do not speak a “lingua franca”, but that the dominant actor decides which language is to be used. Herrlitz and Loos (1994: 150-155) refer to the German multinational Siemens where the language policy is that employees should communicate in German. The people employed in the foreign subsidiary companies are therefore also expected to communicate with the parent company in German. The native language of the dominant actor, in this case German, is the same as that used in intercultural business communication. In contrast to the use of a “lingua franca” which is independent of the cultural context, the language that is used is linked to the national culture of the dominant actor. Only in exceptional cases will foreign language speakers reach near native proficiency level in the foreign language, while the majority will continue to express themselves through different language usage patterns, i.e. those of their own national culture, even if they do have a good grammatical command of the foreign language.

To avoid this problem there is a third possibility, called “koordinierte alternierende Mehrsprachigkeit” by Beneke (1996: 3), where each actor speaks his or her own native language, but also understands the language of his communication partner. In considering this possibility, it is useful to distinguish between receptive and productive communicative competence, since, as Saville-Troike (1989: 23) suggests, often only shared receptive competence is necessary for successful communication:

In considering the nature and scope of communicative competence, it is useful to distinguish between receptive and productive dimensions (Troike 1970); only shared receptive competence is necessary for successful communication.

Actors in a situation like that described above, such as, for example, actors from neighbouring countries, will generally understand the language, albeit only rudimentarily, of the communication partner, especially if both languages belong to the same family (e.g. Dutch and German, which are both Germanic languages).

“Enacted environment”

In order to understand how the management of internationally operating companies arrive via their language policy at their language choice, it is important to study closely the role of the environment. Karl Weick, in his 1969 publication *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, was one of the first to attach significance to the way in which people in organizations make sense of their environment (also see Weick 2001: 176-236). A person will only be sensitive to stimuli that enable him to do as he wishes. Weick (1969: 27, 64) introduces in this connection, the concept of “enacted environment”:

Rather than talking about adapting to an external environment, it may be more correct to argue that organizing consists of adapting to an enacted environment, an environment which is *constituted by* the actions of interdependent human actors. (...) The phrase “enacted environment” preserves the crucial distinction that we wish to make, the most important being that the human *creates* the environment to which the system then adapts. The human actor does not *react* to an environment, he *enacts* it. It is this enacted environment, and nothing else, that is worked upon by the process of organizing.

In order to gain insight into what people in organizations can distinguish in their environment and what it is that determines their actions, use can be made of the ideas of Emery and Tryst (1965), about “transactional” and “contextual environment”, and Ackoff (1981) about “stakeholders”. In the “transactional environment”, Ackoff (1981: 32) identifies actors – whom he calls “stakeholders” – who are directly connected with an organization, such as customers, suppliers, union representatives and shareholders. The “contextual environment” refers to background variables in the environment that indirectly impact on the behaviour of actors in an organization by restricting their possibilities or rather by creating new

opportunities, depending on the situation and their assessment of this. Terpstra and David (1985) identified the following background variables: language, religion, standards and values, politics and law, education, social relationships and technology.

Assuming that ‘an organization is no open system that exists within an independently given environment’, but that ‘organization members actively form (enact) their environments through social action’ (Smircich en Stubbart 2002: 141), will help us to identify managers’ actions concerned with strategic issues, such as the development of a language policy. The way they “enact” their environment determines their choice of a particular language. By making this choice, they not only prescribe the use of a specific communication tool; there is also a symbolic effect. By choosing a specific language (part of the “contextual environment”) they are also showing the employees who the dominant actor is in their “transactional environment”, and that this actor is vital to their company.

In the following case study, I examined the “transactional” and “contextual environment” of the management in Amsterdam, in order to understand how the Dutch management “enacts” its environment. This is important, as insight into the “enacted environment” is essential for understanding how the language policy of an internationally operating company is adopted.

Case study

The field research was based on several days spent at the company’s headquarters in Amsterdam and a week spent at the holiday centre in Germany. An interview was conducted with the Dutch Head of the Human Resource Department and corporate documents (e.g. mission statement, information booklets) and transcripts of audio-recorded data (fifty conversations between Dutch and German employees and guests) were collected. Several of these conversations were recorded:

- a) at the Reservation Department in Amsterdam, where Dutch employees interact by telephone with German guests in order to make a reservation at a holiday centre;
- b) at the same department, where Dutch and German employees interact by telephone to provide each other with information on reservations;
- c) at the reception in the holiday centre in Germany, where Dutch and German employees interact with Dutch guests.

First, quotes from an interview with the Dutch Head of the Human Resource

Department and corporate documents such as the mission statement are used to reconstruct the way in which the Dutch management in Amsterdam “enacts” its environment in relation to the company’s language policy and the language choice ensuing from this policy.

Next, the interaction of Dutch and German employees and guests is examined. Transcripts of oral communication and documents are examined to determine which common language/s is/are really used.

“Enactment”: global language policy and local practice

For many years, the Dutch company has operated four holiday centres in the Netherlands. Until very recently, however, no attempt had been made to expand across the border. Because of the saturation of the Dutch market, the German market is becoming increasingly important. It is for this reason that two holiday centres in Germany were recently opened. The case study was conducted in one of them. The mission statement reads (originally in German, translated in English for this article):

In the Netherlands: to preserve market share in the existing, saturated market.

In Germany: to grow market share in the as yet unsaturated market.

In two years: market leader in Germany.

What are the consequences of the new focus on the German market for the company’s language policy? No documents were available that could clarify the Dutch company’s language policy and the choices that were made on entering the German market. I therefore started looking for a manager who could explain how these had been decided. As a staff member, the Dutch Head of the Human Resource Department appeared to be well informed. In an interview, he first emphasized the importance of the German market:

We are dependent on the German holiday centres. We need these centres to survive. It isn’t enough to count on our four holiday centres in the Netherlands.

Then, he went on to declare that German was used as global language within his company, because of the strong dependency on German visitors. Asked whether there was truly never any question of using English as the official language within the company, he responded:

No, quite simply because the Germans on the other side do not have a good command of English, not such that we could make use of this. And, I should add, what I think is very important, at a certain point we asked ourselves, when we started to expand, and our expansion is particularly focussed on Germany, we then said, so what should we take as our language of communication – it would make things easier if we all chose the same language, say English, that’s pretty international, and the advantage would be we’d all have the same handicap, that’s no small advantage. (...) But we said (...)

let's respect the German language, because, let's be honest, we have to communicate in German with our German visitors. And then to say that at management level we communicate in English, I mean we can't communicate in English with our visitors, because that won't work and we said, okay then German. Yes, it was a stipulation of the staff here in Amsterdam.

The staff in Amsterdam consciously chose to have their Dutch personnel adapt to the language and culture of the country in which the company wished to expand. Asked whether this never caused problems, the Head of the Human Resource Department answered that communication in German with a German colleague yielded few problems, as in such cases both sides tried their best to make it work, as they are dependent on one another and share a common goal. He did go on to note that German was not always used as the language of communication throughout the company:

If you are in a customer versus suppliers relationship, that's a whole different kind of relationship, I think. If I were to order something in Germany from a supplier and I were to be an interesting customer for that supplier, well, even if I talked just regular Dutch to him, he'd have to find a way to deal with it, that's his problem.

In short, a German supplier is supposed to view his company as a customer and is not necessarily required to be addressed in German. In that case, his company is the dominant partner who determines the choice of language used. There were no employees – Dutch or German at either the company's headquarters in Amsterdam or the holiday centre in Germany, who objected to the use of German as common language. Even during ordinary social conversations, no tension related to the use of German could be observed.

An alternative explanation for this language choice is that the Dutch use German as part of a Dutch identity strategy that seeks to heighten their self-esteem by demonstrating that Dutch are more 'modern' or 'advanced' because of their knowledge of another language. One could argue that the Dutch actually see themselves as the dominant (or more superior) partner precisely because they are using a language other than their own. Explanations of this kind are often advanced in research into the motives for establishing language policies and there are certainly situations conceivable in which choice of language should be viewed as an identity construction strategy (see for example Ager 2001). Despite this interesting alternative explanation, I nonetheless feel that, in the business setting of this case study, the choice of German instead of the native language, Dutch, was made on business grounds. It was explicitly made clear during the interview with the Head of the Human Resource Department that the Dutch company was particularly focussed on expanding into Germany, that the majority of visitors were Germans and

that it was therefore a mark of courtesy to respect the German language. Hence, the Dutch opted in favour of the language of the most important customer: German.

Barth (1969), and after him numerous others, have rightly noted that people from different cultural backgrounds, with different native languages, often consciously establish boundaries in order to distinguish themselves from the rest, thus to strengthen their own identity. Erickson (1976) refined on this somewhat by arguing that there are situations that arise, in which language and cultural differences are irrelevant, such as, for example, in the case of a common interest. This case study will show that both the Dutch guest and the German receptionist have an interest in collaborating and in overcoming cultural and linguistic differences: the former, who is on holiday, wants to get into his bungalow as quickly as possible, while the latter seeks to deliver good service. In other words, there is a “common bound” (Erickson 1976: 134-135) between them, beyond their national cultures, which facilitates the creation of a “common ground” (Clark and Brennan 1993: 128). We may even call this an “interculture” (Beneke and Eggers 1995: 45, Koole and Ten Thije 1994: 68-70, 200-202, Loos 2004: 19-20) which is independent from these national cultures and constructed in their conversation by the Dutch and German actors.

In the following sections, authentic conversations between Dutch and Germans and documents from the company’s headquarters in Amsterdam and the holiday centre in Germany are used to examine how the Dutch language policy is implemented in actual practice.

Dutch-German communication at the Reservation Department in Amsterdam

Do Dutch employees really communicate in German with German colleagues and guests? One transcript shows that a German receptionist, who phoned the Dutch telephonist at the Reservation Department in Amsterdam, immediately started talking in German without even asking if her Dutch colleague spoke German. The Dutch telephonist accordingly answered in German.

2DTf \ / Ja

2GGf () guten Morgen. Sprechen Sie Deutsch?

3DTf

3GGf - Ich habe gestern Abend mit Ihrer Kollegin gesprochen

4DTf - / / Ja

4GGf und habe ein Bungalow reserviert (für) sechs Personen.
((Conversation continues.))

In this conversation, German is also used as the common language, but it is interesting to note that the German guest actually asks at the beginning of the call if the Dutch telephonist speaks German ('Sprechen Sie Deutsch?'), prompting the telephonist to answer that, indeed, she does ('Ja'). Apparently the German guest feels that it is polite to ask first if a telephonist in a foreign country speaks his or her own language.

All other transcripts of conversations between Dutch and German employees or Dutch employees and German guests confirm that the use of German as a common language is in accordance with the Dutch management's language policy.

Written Dutch-German communication at the holiday centre in Germany

At the German holiday centre, 60 per cent of the guests are Dutch, 30 per cent are German and 10 per cent are from other countries. Although in the future German guests, and therefore the German market, will be the main marketing target, Dutch guests are by far in the majority. This means that the Dutch company is faced with a complex intercultural situation.

The following examples illustrate the implications of the complex nature of the situation for written communication at local level in the holiday centre. The text below is taken from a menu used in one of the restaurants:

Bitte geben Sie Ihre Bestellung an der Croissanterie-Theke auf, wir bringen Sie Ihnen gerne an den Tisch.

Geeft u uw bestelling a.u.b. op in de croissanterie. Wij brengen het dan graag by u an de tafel.

Although this is a bilingual text it is clear that the first sentence has been translated from its original German into Dutch. The use of 'by', 'an' and 'het' instead of the correct forms of

‘bij’, ‘aan’ and ‘deze’, indicate that the German guests are more central to the Dutch company than the Dutch guests. The information booklet placed in each of the holiday centre’s residential bungalows provides a similar example:

In der heutigen Zeit müssen wir Alle an die Umwelt denken. Wir handeln auch danach. Bisläng wurde es so gehandhabt, daß unsere Hausdamen die frische Bettwäsche in Tüten verpackt, vor die Haustüre gelegt haben. (...)

Tegenwoordig moeten we allen aan ons milieu denken. Ook wij nemen hieraan deel. Tot voor kort hebben onze huisdames het beddegoed in plastic zakken voor de deur gelegd. (...)

Although the German text also contains several mistakes, e.g. ‘Alle’ instead of ‘alle’, the mistakes in the Dutch text are of much more significance, e.g. the literal translation of ‘Hausdamen’ as ‘huisdames’.

Dutch-German “face-to-face” communication at the holiday centre in Germany

Most of the time, both a German and a Dutch receptionist are available at the reception in the holiday centre. They wear a badge with their name and a little German or Dutch flag on it which shows which language or languages they speak. The Dutch receptionist speaks German, but the German receptionist does not speak Dutch. This means that when the Dutch receptionist is busy or is not at the reception, Dutch guests cannot use their own language. In which language(s) do Dutch guests, who had booked by telephone in the Netherlands, in Dutch, with a Dutch company, actually expect to communicate with the receptionist on visiting the holiday centre in Germany?

One group of guests started in Dutch, but switched to German when the receptionist appeared to be German.

GRf = German female receptionist at the holiday centre in Germany

DGm = Dutch male guest (accompanied by wife and child)

1GRf	/ \	Guten Tag	/	Bitteschön	\	Bitte
1DGm	/ \	Goeiedag	/	Zijn we veel te vroeg?	/	
2GRf	/	(sehr)?	!/	Nein nein nein		
2DGm	/	Sind wir viel zu früh . oder	/	geht		

4DGf / Voor de auto.

! Hadden

“Enacted environment” as a sensemaking mechanism for language policy and language choice

What language or languages did the management of the Dutch company with a holiday centre in Germany choose as communication medium between Dutch and German employees and to speak with the guests at the holiday centre in Germany, why was this language or these languages chosen and are there situations in which a different language is used; if so, in what kind of situation and why? The analysis presented in the case study of the empirical data gathered (an interview, audio recorded conversations and documents) enables us to answer these questions and to reconstruct the language policy and language choice of the company ensuing from this policy.

According to the Head of the Human Resource Department, what it comes down to is that the English of most Germans is simply not good enough, which led the management in Amsterdam to stipulate that all communication be made in German (a factor from the “contextual environment”). Nonetheless, this is more than merely an instrumental language choice by which the Dutch management officially requires its Dutch employees to use German in their contacts with German colleagues and customers. Next to the strategic marketing reason for this language choice, there is also a symbolic impact. In this way it is clear to both the Dutch and German employees that German customers are vitally important to the Dutch company. With Germany as the main target market for the Dutch company’s expansion, German customers are viewed by the management as the dominant “stakeholder” in the “transactional environment”. The way the management “enacts” the environment determines the choice of language. The perception of Germany as a growth market prompted the Dutch management to implement German as the official language of communication in situations in which they are dependent on Germans, whether colleagues or customers. In short, the management of the Dutch company chose to apply neither the “lingua franca model” nor “koordinierte alternierende Mehrsprachigkeit”, but opted instead for a language policy in which the language of the dominant partner, the German guest, was given precedence.

The operationalisation of the company’s language policy would appear to be rather simple, as this merits not a single mention in the staff handbook. Everyone in the Netherlands learns German at school, so the Dutch telephonists are able to communicate with their German colleagues and guests in the holiday centre in Germany. The Dutch receptionists working at the holiday centre in Germany also have a sufficient command of German. The case study showed, however, that if the German language competence of the Dutch is good enough to communicate

with German guests, the same cannot be said about the Dutch language competence of the German employees for their communication with Dutch guests at the reception in the holiday centre in Germany.

A complicating factor for the global language policy laid down in Amsterdam is that the focus should in actual fact still be on the Dutch guests, as, at least for now, they widely outnumber the German guests in the German bungalow centre. Locally, this is resolved by the fact that some Dutch guests decide to speak German: they apparently assume that when in Germany, one speaks German. Others “enact” their environment in another way: at a Dutch holiday centre, even at one that is located in Germany, they expect to be able to communicate with the receptionist in Dutch. So they continue to speak Dutch even when the receptionist appears to speak only German, a good example of “koordinierte alternierende Mehrsprachigkeit”. A third group speaks Dutch, but switches to German (“code-switching”) at certain moments, such as when the receptionist has trouble understanding what they want. Whether or not the growth of the German market performs as expected, and the number of German guests expand to become the majority, remains to be seen. Clearly, this point has not yet been reached.

The “enactment” of the environment – the growth of the German market implying the number of German guests to be the majority – currently does not reflect the actual situation, in which Dutch guests are by far the larger group. At present, most of the guests to the holiday centre in Germany have a different native language: Dutch. Armed with this knowledge, the Dutch management would do well to reconsider the assumptions underlying the company’s current language policy, which dictates the choice of German as the only company language, by allowing, next to German, at least for the time being the use of Dutch as a complementary company language for communication at the German holiday centre. Or, in the words of Smircich and Stubbart (2002: 141):

Enactment means action as well as thinking. (...) Assumptions about what is related to what, what works (or doesn’t), what we can do (or can’t), should be tested periodically by acting as if counter assumptions are viable (Weick 1979).

RÉSUMÉ

Politique linguistique dans le secteur privé

De plus en plus d'entreprises franchissent leurs frontières nationales pour fournir leurs produits et services à des clients étrangers. Il saute aux yeux que peu de recherches ont été conduites pour répondre à la question de savoir quelle est la politique linguistique de ces entreprises. On entend souvent dire que l'anglais est utilisé comme langue véhiculaire, mais en général cette supposition ne repose sur aucune base empirique. Aussi est-il nécessaire de conduire des recherches afin de savoir quelle(s) langue(s) est/sont utilisé(e)s et dans quelle(s) situation(s) il est question de "code-switching". C'est la raison pour laquelle je présenterai dans cet article, une recherche empirique dans ce domaine. Dans cette recherche, il s'agit de la filiale d'une entreprise néerlandaise en Allemagne. J'utiliserai des documents et des conversations authentiques pour analyser de quelle façon les employés néerlandais et allemands communiquent avec leurs clients et dans quelle mesure la politique linguistique de l'entreprise fonctionne dans cette situation interculturelle.

APPENDIX

Transcription conventions

Info bar:

- ((laughs)) nonverbal information
- sound (e.g. syllable) that is extended
- / rising intonation
- \ falling intonation
- ! said with emphasis
- * strong Dutch accent

Speech bar:

- () inaudible
- (laufen) this is probably what is said
- . dot preceded by a space: very short pause in speech
- . . dots with two spaces: longer pause
- word or sentence broken off
- | end of transcript

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