Language Matters:
Status Loss and Achieved Status Distinctions in
Global Organizations

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How workers experience and express status loss in organizations has received little scholarly attention. I conducted a qualitative study of a French high-tech company that had instituted English as a lingua franca, or common language, as a context for examining this question. Results indicate that nonnative English-speaking employees experienced status loss regardless of their English fluency level. Yet variability in their self-assessed fluency—an achieved status marker—was associated with differences in language performance anxiety and job insecurity in a nonlinear fashion: those who believed they had medium-level fluency were the most anxious compared with their low- and high-fluency coworkers. In almost all cases where fluency ratings differed, self-assessed rather than objective fluency determined how speakers explained their feelings and actions. Although nonnative speakers shared a common attitude of resentment and distrust toward their native English-speaking coworkers, their behavioral responses—assertion, inhibition, or learning—to encounters with native speakers differed based on their self-perceived fluencies. No status differences materialized among nonnative speakers as a function of diverse linguistic and national backgrounds. I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of these findings for status, achieved characteristics, and language in organizations.

Key words: language; lingua franca; status loss; achieved status distinctions; anxiety; fluency; globalization
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The most difficult thing is to admit that one's value as a second-language English speaker overshadows one's real value. In other words, we haven't had the chance to develop our foreign languages for the last 30 years because the company did not ask us to or offer us the opportunity to do so. Now, it is difficult to accept the fact that we are disqualified.
> —*Manager at a French technology firm following an English-only language policy*

Organizational life is rife with instances in which people assume a loss of their status—the prestige, respect, and influence that inhere in social relations (Ridgeway and Correll 2006, Magee and Galinsky 2008). I conceptualize *status loss* here as the subjective experience of a decreased professional regard, and hereafter I refer to status loss as this *perceived* evaluation of status diminution. For example, employees perceive status loss when an acquisition marginalizes their formerly high-status functional group. Functional groups may perceive status loss when they are no longer prioritized in a firm's growth plan. A move from an engineering-centric to a marketing-centric strategy can lead engineers to feel a diminution of status in their organization. Globally distributed team members may perceive status loss when their on-site leader moves to another location. In some cases, people sense the reversal of their status positions when subordinates gain visibility over them.

Indeed, perceived status loss is widespread for individuals and groups in organizations. Yet we know very little about how individuals experience and respond to their status loss.

Scholars have paid far more attention to how individuals evade or reverse low status through gains in achieved status, usually by acquiring skills and special expertise that are recognized by the organization. Achieved status may enable members of low-status groups to compensate for their standing, altering how others assess them (Thomas-Hunt and Phillips 2011) and potentially distinguishing them from other low-status individuals (Phillips et al. 2009). Achieved status distinctions may, in some circumstances, be psychological and social motivators for workers who experience status loss. Understanding whether, how, and why individuals with varied levels of achieved status respond differently to perceived status loss would contribute significantly to our knowledge of status in organizations. This paper examines these status processes in the context of an increasingly globalized organization that set an English-only language policy. The linguistic divide between native and nonnative English speakers and differences in levels of fluency among nonnative speakers provide a powerful lens into how employees manage their status loss and the distinguishing role of their achieved status.

Language matters are increasingly the focus of status struggles, as global organizations designate English

as a *lingua franca* to capitalize on the rise of globalization and the increased productivity promised by more cross-national workforce collaborations. The lingua franca mandate is intended to sanction a mutually accessible language to unite a workforce whose members speak different native languages (Crystal 2003), replacing naturally occurring multilingualism in which employees communicate via a cocktail of languages (Henderson 2005). From a managerial perspective, unrestricted multilingualism, in which verbal and written communications are generated in multiple languages, seems adequate only for intersubsidiary interactions marked by limited collaborations between interdependent employees (Piekkari and Zander 2005). The proliferation of integrated organizational systems, which increases the need to tightly coordinate work spanning national and linguistic boundaries, has accelerated the move toward adopting English as a lingua franca in global organizations (Feely and Harzing 2003).

A lingua franca mandate, however, can occasion an experience of status loss for nonnative English speakers. Bourdieu (1991) posits that linguistic encounters in a "legitimate language" or mandated language create a context in which some members are endowed with socially structured resources and competencies that they bring to bear in interactions. Accordingly, I argue that native English speakers in an organization may experience a status gain under a lingua franca mandate because of the benefit they reap from speaking in their native language. The reverse may be the case for nonnative speakers who, by definition, have a linguistically subordinate position relative to native speakers; that is, nonnative speakers may perceive a loss in their status based on the language that the organization mandates. Bourdieu (1991) also argues that those who may not possess mastery in a designated language may become self-conscious about their reduced capacity in the legitimate language. The contours of these elements suggest that the common protocol in global organizations to mandate a lingua franca provides a fruitful context in which to examine the experience of status loss in organizations.

Although Bourdieu's (1991) concept of legitimate language has direct bearing on status differences that might be experienced when a lingua franca is mandated, Bourdieu never articulates whether or how the organizational legitimation of a language might have differential effects on individuals, depending on their circumstances and achieved status characteristics. Although the official designation of a preferred means of communication might contribute to a symbolic linguistic divide between native and nonnative lingua franca speakers (Bourdieu 1991), replete with expectations of competency (Berger et al. 1972, Ridgeway 1991) and intergroup differentiation (Tajfel and Turner 1979), nonnative English lingua franca speakers may not experience their feelings

of status loss monolithically. They are likely to possess varied fluency levels despite their overall linguistic limitations. It is unclear, however, whether fluency levels are directly correlated with the experience of status loss. In fact, the analysis in this study suggests that perceptions of achieved status characteristics can be distorted in surprising ways when people underestimate their fluency skills.

My study of a French high-tech company that issued an English lingua franca mandate provided the opportunity to explore several related research questions: Do nonnative speakers of a lingua franca perceive status loss in the context of a lingua franca mandate? And to the extent that they do, how do nonnative speakers of the English lingua franca respond? How do differences in achieved fluency shape these responses? I draw on theories of status to understand the experiences of the nonnative speakers I studied and, based on this understanding, develop theory about status loss and distinction among status loss groups.

Theoretical Background

Status Loss
The basis for understanding status loss emerges from a long tradition in sociology and social psychology. Originally framed by Weber (1914/1978) to capture the dynamics of esteem and privilege that accrue to social groups with a shared lifestyle, status has been more broadly construed as the relative rankings of individuals or groups in terms of prestige, respect, and influence (Ridgeway and Correll 2006, DiTomaso et al. 2007, Magee and Galinsky 2008, Pearce 2011). Scholars have articulated extensively the foundational role of status in intergroup differentiation, social identity threat, and intergroup conflict (Tajfel and Turner 1979, Nadler and Halabi 2006). Status hierarchies gain a foothold on the social terrain when expectations, resources, and values map onto differentiating social characteristics (Berger et al. 1972, 1977; Berger and Zelditch 1985; Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway and Correll 2006). In organizations, status processes are ever present, for example, in impromptu differentiation in teams based on expertise (Bunderson 2003), hiring processes based on informal networks (Reskin and McBrier 2000), willingness to work with distant team members (Metiu 2006), and the ability to build quality work relationships (Phillips et al. 2009).

The voluminous literature on status processes, however, has largely overlooked the phenomenon of *status loss* and its impact on individuals and groups (Magee and Galinsky 2008). One notable exception, Hambrick and Cannella (1993), investigated the impact of changes in relative standing for executives in recently acquired firms, but much of the theoretical and empirical literature has favored explanations of status creation, elevation, and durability (see, e.g., Gould 2002, Correll and

Ridgeway 2003, Berger and Fişek 2006, Berdahl 2007). More recently, organizational scholars have been attentive to the desire to maintain status in the face of the potential for loss. In his research on status leakage, Podolny (2005) finds that high-status investment banks were loath to engage in exchanges with lower-status banks out of a well-founded fear of reducing their own status positions. Indeed, experimental evidence on social identity threat found that high-status individuals (i.e., men) exhibited more physiological stress when intergroup status relations were deemed unstable and thus faced the possibility of future status loss (Scheepers et al. 2009). Perhaps more importantly, Pettit et al. (2010) find that when individuals were primed to think about status loss in the eyes of their work colleagues, they were willing to pay more to avoid this status loss and, when placed in a group setting, put forth greater effort when striving to prevent status loss than when striving to gain it.

Although the subjective experience of status loss is similar to concepts that highlight status-threatening situations like fear of status loss (e.g., Scheepers et al. 2009, Pettit et al. 2010), stereotype threat (Steele 1997), and status leakage (Podolny 2005), it is distinct and may have differential impact on behavior. Conceptually, individuals or groups who perceive status loss already hold the belief that their status positions have been lowered, rather than fearing a threat to their current status positions. For example, at the individual level, stereotype threat revolves around responses to the threat of low-status confirmation for durable ascribed characteristics (e.g., confirming the negative stereotype associated with race or gender), rather than a reaction to perceived loss per se.

Along these lines, the experience of status loss also diverges conceptually from the experience of ingrained low-status membership. Systems justification theory, for example, holds that low-status group members tend to support existing social arrangements as a means of reducing uncertainty and maintaining a sense of shared reality, even if those arrangements do not benefit them (Jost and Banaji 1994, Jost et al. 2004, van der Toorn et al. 2011). Similarly, status characteristics theory holds that status distinctions are viewed as widely shared and legitimate by low-status group members (see, e.g., Ridgeway and Correll 2006). In contrast, perceptions of change in relative standing instigate reevaluations, rather than acceptance, of a new status quo. Although perceptions of status loss may at once instigate social categorization processes common in extant social hierarchies (for a description, see Dovidio et al. 2009), as well as individual-level responses similar to low-status group members, both the relatively acute nature of the change and the uncertainty around its institutionalization underscore the distinctiveness of status loss processes.

Status loss refers to an existing evaluation and perceived experience of loss, rather than an objective measure of positional change. Direct social or organizational messages are not necessary conditions for the interpretation of status loss or its concomitant effects on emotion and behavior; that is, the impact of status loss may occur regardless of any actual downward placement of a focal actor's status position. Rather, focal actors' frame of inevitability and the belief that they are in a lowered state steers their feelings and responses. For example, one particularly trenchant belief associated with feelings of status loss is that one suffers an organizational disadvantage (Pearce 2011). The literature has well established the advantages that accompany high-status positions. Possessing high status boosts reputations (Kilduff and Krackhardt 1994), perceptions of competence, and performance (Elsbach and Kramer 1996), all of which are often linked with social and organizational rewards (D'Aveni 1996). If actors believe that they have lost status, they are also likely to believe that they will be excluded from advantages that desirable status positions afford. For example, employees may believe that they have reached a ceiling to upward mobility including promotions, high-impact assignments, and leadership roles. In organizations, however, the permeability of people's achieved status characteristics can influence their response to status loss.

Distinctions Based on Achieved Status
Achieved status can modify status valuation. Achieved status is a form of status "filled through competition and individual effort" that represents acquired skills such as education, occupation, and income (Linton 1936, p. 115). Cultural anthropologist Linton was the first to describe the relationship between achieved status and other social status categories that people are born into, such as race, gender, and family lineage. Linton's (1936) original formulation opened the discourse on the role of status beliefs, which has received considerable attention from contemporary scholars. Scholars have emphasized expertise (Bunderson 2003), educational attainment (Sauer et al. 2010), and task experience (Wittenbaum 1998) as vehicles for low-status groups to improve their overall status valuation. As Thomas-Hunt and Phillips (2011, p. 247) note, achieved status characteristics may exist alongside a number of other status cues that can become salient and influence interpretations of social positions (e.g., "black male and Stanford educated"). These couplings might enable individuals who have low status in one social category to compensate through achieved status in another.

A number of studies have documented how a strategy of acquiring, drawing on, or demonstrating achieved status characteristics can help in overcoming perceived obstacles. Major and O'Brien (2005) find that overweight women may develop advanced social skills to

compensate for their discrediting weight. Derks et al. (2006) show that low-status women had positive attitudes toward a task when they perceived that their integration and creativity skills were valued, suggesting that outgroup contexts for groups are less negative when they publicly excel in another area. For their part, Phillips et al. (2009) theorize that individuals with high achieved status, being less worried about their credibility, may be more willing to disclose personal information in interactions with dissimilar others than individuals with low achieved status.

An achievement strategy in the face of obstacles, however, does not always diminish the impact of being a member of a lower-status group and may carry costs of its own (see Bendersky and Shah 2012 for the performance decrements associated with attempts to enhance status). For example, achieved status among women did not compensate for gender effects in work groups (Thomas-Hunt and Phillips 2004). Despite one's achieved status, Thomas-Hunt and Phillips (2011) theorize that racial stereotypical views will likely activate a low-status characteristic for observers even if those attributions are inaccurate. Achievement, thus, could be a means of bolstering a valued strength to offset a perceived weakness in some conditions, but not in others, and may depend on the perceived status levels of the individual involved.

Native language status and nonnative language ability are important forms of ascribed and achieved status, respectively, and provide a fruitful arena to understand the interaction between ascribed and achieved status characteristics. I posit that one's mother tongue is an ascribed characteristic that people are born into. The term "native language" connotes a durable, binary characteristic, which can take on value in the context of a language mandate. In particular, the categories of native and nonnative speakers can take on a meaningful status characteristic when English is imputed with value in a social system. For example, as less fluent speakers of the primary language chosen by the organization, nonnative speakers of a lingua franca can perceive a demotion in their status (Bourdieu 1991). People, however, can capitalize on their achieved fluency in a nonnative language to overcome their perceived status diminution.

Because language competence is variable, we can investigate how and under what conditions nonnative speakers' fluency levels affect their experience of status loss. Although nonnative speakers may feel especially subject to status loss based on their linguistic shortcomings in the context of a lingua franca mandate, advanced language fluency as an achieved characteristic might improve their sense of overall status. Lack of fluency might lower it. The conditions under which achieved characteristics such as fluency shape the experience of status loss are unclear, however. Moreover, the achieved status literature does not provide a deep understanding of

the self-perception or behavioral responses that are influenced by achieved characteristics from the point of view of the actor. Most studies instead examine the observers' point of view. Even then, as described earlier, the findings are not conclusive. Understanding the relationship between achieved linguistic status and the experience of status loss can help us build more robust theories of achieved status that articulate their contingencies and boundaries. Determining how the subjective experience of nonnative speakers relates to their achieved status will help in predicting, identifying, and overcoming problems that will increasingly occur as organizations continue to globalize and diversify.

To better understand these complex relationships, I conducted a qualitative study of a French high-tech company that had issued an English lingua franca mandate, exploring how nonnative speakers responded to their perceived status loss as a function of their achieved fluency. Regardless of their English fluency level, nonnative speakers expressed a sense of status loss. Yet their attendant levels of language performance anxiety and job insecurity were nonmonotonically shaped by their self-assessed fluency level: those with medium-level fluency were the most anxious compared with their low- and high-fluency coworkers. Status loss, and the responses that accompanied it, largely corresponded to self-assessed rather than actual fluency levels where they differed. Moreover, although nonnative speakers shared a common attitude toward their high-status native English-speaking coworkers—whom the nonnative speakers resented and found untrustworthy—nonnative speakers' responses stemmed from their self-perceived fluencies, differentially employing assertion, inhibition, or learning strategies in the face of their status loss. None of these responses were found in interactions among nonnative English speakers of diverse nationalities (e.g., non-French), however, further underscoring the linguistic divide between native and nonnative speakers.

Methods

The Research Setting
To address my research questions, I conducted in-depth interviews at Frenchco (a pseudonym), a $25 billion high-tech organization headquartered in Paris, France. Customers with operations in multiple countries purchase Frenchco's products and services to integrate their Internet, mobile, and other communication software and hardware technologies. At the time of data collection, Frenchco had approximately 210,000 employees, of which 40% worked in countries other than France, including but not limited to China, Egypt, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Looking forward 10 years, Frenchco expected more than 60% of its employees to be outside of France.

Lingua Franca at Frenchco. Two years prior to this study, as its first step toward globalization, Frenchco had designated English as the lingua franca for cross-national communication in their internationally focused areas. Employees in these areas were mostly middle and senior managers who routinely worked with colleagues in other countries, of which approximately 30% were native English speakers located in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. According to Roland (a pseudonym), one of the Frenchco executives who set the English language stipulation, mandating English had been inevitable for three key reasons. First, some of their customers, partners, suppliers, and competitors had started to use the language exclusively—a trend that the company's management felt pressure to follow. Second, the increasing global spread of tasks and the need to have dispersed employees working closely together to accomplish them raised efficiency concerns in the absence of standardized communication protocols. Third, recent acquisitions of companies in Poland and the United Kingdom, and a newly established subsidiary in China, had already made English the de facto language for many parts of Frenchco's operations. According to Roland, "Our business was growing internationally very fast, and we needed to operate in the same language everywhere; we are not a French company—we are an international company."

The French chief executive officer announced the lingua franca policy via an email that laid out the leadership's rationale behind the decision to stipulate the use of English as the official business language in select, internationally focused divisions. Employees were required to communicate in English for both oral and written corporate interactions in these regions. More specifically, those employees were instructed to exclusively use the English language when communicating with coworkers for both synchronous (e.g., face-to-face, teleconference) and asynchronous (e.g., email, memos, shared documents) communication.

Before the English lingua franca rule, many employees communicated inconsistently in English when addressing foreign colleagues. For example, in midcommunication, they might have code switched (i.e., reverted back to their native language) for parts of a conversation. Employees might have generated emails or written documents to discuss a situation in their native language, thinking that such communiqués would only be read by other French coworkers. However, because of the increasingly globally interdependent nature of operations, written communiqués often needed to be addressed by non-French colleagues in countries such as Poland or China. Writing the original documents or email threads in French made it impossible to instantly engage colleagues located in foreign countries. With the growth of global collaborations at Frenchco, company executives thought that promoting the uninterrupted flow of information required the use of one language for all official communication.

Data Collection

Data for this study come from semistructured interviews with a total of 41 employees, conducted in two rounds, as well as brief informal observations of three informants in the research and development (R&D) division.

Interviews. Two Frenchco human resources (HR) representatives assisted in selecting the interviewees for this study. The eligible pool of interviewees comprised employees, mostly French native speakers, with several common characteristics: they collaborated with colleagues from countries other than their own, they were required to work in the English lingua franca, and they relied on non-French global coworkers, including both native (e.g., American and British) and nonnative English lingua franca speakers (e.g., Polish, Chinese, German), to complete their work. To be assigned international tasks, each informant was required to have a working knowledge of English, although the fluency levels varied across individuals. The 41 employees I interviewed (see Table 1 for an informant profile summary) comprised 17 women and 24 men who were middle to senior managers relatively evenly distributed across the following functional areas: information systems (IS), technology product group, research and development, alliances, sales, marketing, human resources, communication, finance, legal and regulatory, and supply chain. Of the 41 informants, 38 were French, 2 were Chinese, and 1 was Portuguese. The three non-French informants spoke French at a mastery/native level, and they were far more fluent in French than the most fluent nonnative English speakers.

Informants were interviewed according to their preferences, in either French or English. Seven informants asked to be interviewed in French, 12 were interviewed predominantly in English but switched to French to convey individual words or ideas as necessary, and the remainder were interviewed entirely in English.[1] Each interview averaged about 75 minutes and was conducted in a company conference room or private office. The interviews were digitally recorded, translated into English when necessary, and transcribed in English.

In the first round, I interviewed 25 employees, asking questions aimed at generating detailed accounts of nonnative lingua franca speakers' perceived fluency, as well as daily work and narratives on collaboration experiences in the English lingua franca. To facilitate an ongoing understanding of the data collected, following each interview I emailed digital files of the interviews to a transcriber in the United States who sent back text files of the interviews overnight. I read over those transcripts closely and identified emerging themes, which helped to focus my continuing data collection efforts (Spradley 1979).

Table 1   Informant Profile Summary

Informant	Gender	Functional area	Nationality	Education	Tenure (years)	English language background	Self-perceived English fluency	Actual English fluency
1	M	Alliances	French	Bachelor's	2	High school, some college; worked for an American firm in France for 15 years	High	High
2	F	Finance	French	Master's	7	High school, worked in the United Kingdom for 4 years	High	High
3	F	Legal and regulatory	French	Bachelor's	3	High school, some college; worked in the United States for a year	High	High
4	F	R&D	French	Ph.D.	25	Lived in the United States for 5 years	High	High
5	M	HR	French	Bachelor's	1	Studied in the United States for a year	High	High
6	M	Sales	French	Bachelor's	6	Some college, worked with a colleague in the United Kingdom daily	High	High
7	M	Sales	French	Master's	4	Worked in the United Kingdom for a year as a teenager	High	High
8	F	Marketing	French	Master's	6	High school; lived in the United States for 6 months as a teenager, worked in the United States for 2 months	High	High
9	M	Alliances	French	Bachelor's	15	High school, some college; traveled to the United Kingdom for work regularly	High	High
10	M	Communication	French	Master's	5	High school, some college	Medium	High
11	F	Alliances	Portuguese	Master's	7	High school	Medium	Medium
12	M	Alliances	French	Bachelor's	5	High school, some college; an American exchange student lived in his house	Medium	Medium
13	F	Marketing	French	Bachelor's	8	High school	Medium	High
14	M	HR	French	Bachelor's	7	High school	Medium	Medium
15	M	IS	Chinese	Bachelor's	3	Some college	Medium	Medium
16	F	R&D	French	Ph.D.	12	Elementary and high schools, studied in the United States for a year	Medium	Medium
17	M	Technology	French	Bachelor's	2	High school	Medium	Medium
18	M	R&D	French	Ph.D.	11	High school, some college; traveled in the United Kingdom and United States	Medium	Medium
19	F	Supply chain	French	Master's	4	High school, master's degree in English program	Medium	High
20	M	Technology	Chinese	Bachelor's	3	High school	Medium	Medium
21	F	Technology	French	Bachelor's	5	High school, some college	Medium	High
22	M	Technology	French	Master's	3	High school, some college	Medium	Medium
23	M	Sales	French	Master's	6	High school, spent one month in the United Kingdom	Medium	High
24	M	Finance	French	Bachelor's	8	High school, worked for a British company	Medium	High
25	F	Marketing	French	Master's	2	High school, extensive travel	Medium	High
26	M	Legal and regulatory	French	Bachelor's	10	High school	Medium	Medium
27	F	Legal and regulatory	French	Bachelor's	4	High school, some college	Medium	Medium
28	M	Supply chain	French	Bachelor's	3	High school, some college	Medium	Medium

Table 1 (cont'd)

Informant	Gender	Functional area	Nationality	Education	Tenure (years)	English language background	Self-perceived English fluency	Actual English fluency
29	M	Supply chain	French	Bachelor's	3	High school, worked for a British company	Medium	Medium
30	F	Marketing	French	Bachelor's	4	High school, worked for a U.S. company	Medium	High
31	M	Communication	French	Bachelor's	4	High school, some college	Medium	Medium
32	F	Communication	French	Bachelor's	7	High school, some college	Medium	Medium
33	F	Communication	French	Bachelor's	8	High school	Medium	Medium
34	F	HR	French	Bachelor's	12	High school	Medium	Medium
35	F	R&D	French	Bachelor's	7	High school	Low	Low
36	M	IS	French	Master's	4	High school, some college	Low	Low
37	F	IS	French	Bachelor's	6	High school	Low	Low
38	M	Finance	French	Master's	11	High school, some college	Low	Low
39	M	IS	French	Master's	8	High school	Low	Low
40	M	Finance	French	Bachelor's	9	High school	Low	Low
41	F	HR	French	Master's	7	High school	Low	Low

Four months later, I returned to France to conduct the second round of interviews with the remaining 16 informants. This second set of interviews elaborated on the previous informants' reflected experiences of the lingua franca mandate itself, including how they first learned about the policy and how, over time, they viewed themselves, their colleagues, and Frenchco as an entity.

Informal Observations. In addition to the interviews, I informally observed three of the interviewees from the R&D division during a three-day period as they conducted their work. During this period, I observed six teleconference meetings in English with colleagues who spoke different native languages, paying attention to the interaction patterns between speakers and asking for interpretations of the various behaviors that I had observed. For example, following a conference call between a nonnative lingua franca speaker and a native speaker in Boston, Massachusetts, I asked the nonnative speaker what he had expected to cover during the meeting, his overall sense of how the interaction actually unfolded, what motivated his responses, and his overall level of comfort and satisfaction with the encounter. Such follow-up questions helped me gain a richer understanding of informants' vantage points during particular encounters.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began by aggregating and coding, in an iterative fashion, interview transcripts from both rounds of data collection following recommended practices for qualitative data analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994, Strauss and Corbin 1998). Using NVivo qualitative research software, I followed three stages of coding practices: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). In the first stage—open coding—I associated the data with codes that addressed the two broad themes of interest in

this study: nonnative speakers' narratives of their status loss in the context of an English lingua franca mandate and the impact of their fluency (achieved status) on those experiences. This analysis captured the informants' narratives about their situation. During this stage, I moved back and forth between data analysis and the literature to help make sense of the emerging themes, as well as to refine my coding scheme. In the second stage—axial coding—I assembled data that were fractured during open coding into categories that linked together along common dimensions (Strauss and Corbin 1998). This step enabled me to more precisely cluster the relationships among the various categories that surfaced during open coding. I then cycled back through the data, categories, and concepts until I reached theoretical saturation, such that no new categories or concepts emerged in my theoretical development process. Next, I started the third and final stage of analysis—selective coding—in which I integrated the codes into a set of core findings that explicated how achieved language fluency characteristics created distinctions among nonnative English speakers. Below, I provide detail on the themes that emerged from these analyses.

Status Loss. Because I was interested in documenting the *status loss* experience of nonnative speakers, I flagged every instance in informants' own reflections of feeling a diminution at the workplace and during the course of interactions with others. For example, I looked specifically for informants' terms like feeling "diminished," "devalued," "reduced," "disqualified," or "less sophisticated."

Language Fluency as an Achieved Status Characteristic. Fluency was measured in two ways: subjective self-assessments and objective assessments. The subjective self-assessment of speakers' fluency was coded in line with communication behavior research, suggesting that

people experience themselves and make decisions about whether to engage in interpersonal interactions based on their self-definitions of communication competence (McCroskey and McCroskey 1988). Research, however, has also shown that people's self-assessments can be flawed (Dunning et al. 2004, Caputo and Dunning 2005, Ehrlinger et al. 2005). Therefore, an objective assessment of fluency was also coded to examine any gaps between perceived and actual fluency and to analyze any associated factors.

Regarding self-assessed fluency, a research assistant and I coded nonnative speakers' perceived English fluency levels separately using their own *subjective English fluency*, designating them as high, medium, or low. We categorized as "high fluency" the informants who expressed comfort with the English language, such as the participant who said, "I am very comfortable with English . . . . I've been speaking English in my professional background because my first job out of college 15 years ago was at an American company." We categorized people who expressed somewhat less confidence in their English language proficiency as "medium fluency," such as the participant who said, "I think I'm okay in English." Finally, we categorized as "low fluency" informants who described feeling uncomfortable speaking in English and who, as a result, elected to be interviewed in French. After discussing and resolving discrepancies in coding (which arose with five cases), we coded 7, 25, and 9 informants as possessing low, medium, and high self-perceived English fluency, respectively.

We also assessed informants' *objective English fluency* levels. We followed guidelines from previous research (Brown et al. 1985, Molinsky 2005) and determined fluency levels based on speakers' rate of speech, command of English grammar, accents, pause structures (hesitancy), and the number of times they reverted to their native language (code switching) during discourse. We categorized speakers into low, medium, and high fluency levels to have designations that corresponded with their self-assessment codes. Seven informants were excluded because they were interviewed in French. As expected, the extremes were easily identified. However, for those whose fluency levels were questionable, we recruited three linguists trained in phonology and English speech to serve as expert raters (e.g., see Brennan and Brennan 1981 for similar procedures). The linguists completed Brennan and Brennan's (1981) phonology measures with items such as "simplification of final consonant clusters where initial consonant is nasal or liquid and final consonant is voiced stop, such as 'world' and 'word.'" The linguists were also asked to categorize each speaker into low, medium, or high fluency levels based on their rate of speech, command of English grammar, and pause structure (hesitancy). Last, each

linguist was asked to comment on any unusual speech features. Interrator agreement was very high at 98%.

Intrapersonal Outcomes. Two categories emerged from analyzing status loss perceptions as described by informants: *language performance anxiety* and *job insecurity*. The first of these, language performance anxiety, refers to informants' worries about their English competence in an environment that demands its use exclusively. Several informants expressed worries, for example, about making communication errors or having their English skills evaluated. The second effect, job insecurity, refers to informants' concerns about their job advancement, revealed through comments such as "What's going to happen to my career?" I combed through the data to capture any other intrapersonal effects that stemmed from the perception of status loss, but none materialized.

Language performance anxiety and job insecurity were operationalized by parsing the data according to the degree to which informants said they experienced these two states. More specifically, I classified informants according to three levels: low, medium, and high. The low level characterized cases in which informants indicated experiencing minimal anxiety, for example, the participant who said that he tends to be a passive listener to avoid language-related anxieties. The medium level characterized cases in which informants indicated that they experienced anxiety some of the time. The high level characterized cases in which informants directly expressed fears in their narratives, such as participants who said that they are "really worried" about their evolution at Frenchco because of their English ability. A research assistant coded the data independently to establish interrator agreement on the categories of language performance anxiety and job insecurity yielding a very high (90%) reliability.

Interpersonal Outcomes. To examine nonnative speakers' narratives of how they interacted with others, I flagged every instance in which nonnative lingua franca-speaking informants mentioned interacting with coworkers in the lingua franca. This analysis generated two interaction categories: (1) interactions with other nonnative lingua franca speakers such as those from Brazil, Germany, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Switzerland, and (2) interactions with native lingua franca speakers such as those from the United Kingdom and the United States. The first category surfaced themes around the sameness in experience among nonnative speakers, specifically, the *comfort* and *ease* that they felt during interaction. The second category emphasized nonnative speakers' attitudes toward their native-speaking colleagues, which included feelings of *resentment* that

native speakers were unaffected by the mandate and *distrust* of native speakers who might take advantage of nonnative speakers because of their superior linguistic agility. Interrator agreement was very high at 98%.

Next, I looked for behavioral responses during interpersonal encounters in light of status and fluency levels. Three broad set of interpersonal strategies emerged, which I labeled as assertion, inhibition, and learning. *Assertion* consisted of instances in which informants discussed their tendency to assert themselves to counteract status loss by, as in the case of medium-fluency speakers, proving their credibility during discourse with native speakers, or, as in the case of high-fluency speakers, status tempering by asking native speakers to stop or slow their rhetorical dominance. *Inhibition* consisted of withdrawing from ongoing discourse among medium- and low-fluency speakers and avoiding encounters also common among low- and medium-fluency speakers. *Learning* responses consisted of efforts to improve English ability, a response found only among high-fluency speakers. To establish reliability, a research assistant independently coded the typology of responses yielding very high intercoder agreement at 94%.

I now lay out the findings that emerged inductively in two steps. First, I describe nonnative speakers' shared experience of status loss, resentment, and distrust toward native English speakers and their contrasting comfort and ease with nonnative speakers from other countries. Second, I describe distinctions that emerged from the data on the basis of nonnative speakers' achieved status characteristics (fluency) including nonnative speakers' emotional responses (language performance anxiety and job insecurity) and their behavioral responses (assertion, inhibition, and learning; see Table 2 for a summary of results across self-assessed fluency). I conclude with a discussion of the theoretical contributions and implications of this study for our understanding of status and achieved fluency characteristics in organizations.

Table 2   Summary of Results Across Self-Assessed Fluency

	Fluency (%)		
	Low	Medium	High
Perceived status loss	71	56	44
Resentment	42	64	44
Distrust	85	76	66
Comfort with nonnative speakers	71	88	77
Language performance anxiety	14	72	—
Job advancement concerns	42	56	—
Assertion	—	48	66
Inhibition	100	52	—
Learning	—	—	55

Note. The percentages of informants who reported emotions and behaviors by fluency level are shown.

Shared Perceptions, Experiences, and Attitudes

Status Loss

Irrespective of their self-perceived English fluency levels, nonnative speakers viewed Frenchco's mandate of English as a shift in valued characteristics, which they described as leading to their experience of status loss. Workers who had viewed themselves as adequate bilingual workers (e.g., native French and average English language speakers) that aided a functional multilingualism felt they had been relegated to the lower position of second-language speakers of the lingua franca. They spoke about feeling "stupid," "diminished," "reduced," and "devalued" when communicating and in achieving their work goals, especially when a level of abstract conversation or nuanced discussion was required. Informants stated that before the mandate, their ability to leverage their other language skills in the context of shared communication made their lack of fluency go less noticed; everyone lacked fluency to a degree in each other's native language but worked together to make each other understood. The lingua franca eliminated the many other native languages that speakers used to convey their perspectives. Communication had to occur singularly in English. Reactions to the universal use of English were similar regardless of informants self-perceived fluency levels. For example, the following excerpt from a low-fluency informant typifies feelings of being devalued in the context of the exclusive usage of English:

> If you cannot express your ideas because you lack language skills, the collaboration becomes a nightmare. You lose interest to continue and you feel you are being devalued.

Speaking of his loss of abilities, a highly fluent French marketing manager explained,

> I feel more of an expert in my natural language. Speaking your own language helps you to master your communication. When you don't speak your native language, you are diminished because you lose a great proportion of your abilities.

A medium-fluency informant stated,

> Unless I am perfectly focused, when I have to speak English, it pains me to have to reduce drastically what I want to say because I lack the sophisticated language skills. If I am fully focused and free of stress, everything goes fine. But that's rare.

This informant, who worked as part of an international team that held biweekly teleconference meetings, clearly experienced similar personal struggles to those of his French coworkers.

Moreover, the vast majority of nonnative speakers expressed their feelings of status loss compared to when

they could communicate in their native languages, and they consistently voiced frustration about their inability to convey their ideas with the same degree of eloquence in the lingua franca. This loss of status is consistent with Bourdieu's (1991) exhortations about the devaluing nature of legitimate languages for those who are not proficient at a native level. Additionally, from the perspective of nonnative speakers, the salient nature of the language difference heightened and legitimized the status distinctions between them and native English speakers (Tajfel and Turner 1979, Ridgeway and Correll 2006). In particular, speakers communicated in English with varying accents that demarcated their second-language status, and even the most advanced high-fluency informants spoke with accents (Brown et al. 1985, Gluszek and Dovidio 2010); in turn, the experience of status loss was almost universally experienced by the nonnative speakers I interviewed.

Resentment and Distrust Toward Native English Speakers

Informant accounts suggest that after the lingua franca mandate, they also came to experience misgivings about their native-speaking counterparts who had mastery over them in the daily language that all were asked to use exclusively. Nonnative English speakers perceived native speakers as having experienced an undue enhancement in their influence and prestige, provoking resentment and distrust. Many began to look askance at native speakers' motivation in interaction, with the expectation that native speakers might try to use their linguistic advantage unfairly, and often took umbrage at their unearned status.

Resentment. Rather than derogating native speakers directly, however, nonnative speakers as a whole expressed more subtle pejorative attitudes toward them. The following quotes illustrate this point:

> I'm not really happy with English people thinking that we don't need any other languages, that English is the most shared language...and they believe "we can go anywhere and we can do better than you because at least we are native speakers."...It's annoying. (High-fluency informant)

> English speakers think it is normal for everyone to speak English, and they make no effort to speak other languages. (Medium-fluency informant)

> Arrogant natives [of the English language] who know only one language do not understand difficulties of nonnatives. (Low-fluency informant)

> We produce every document in English so that everyone can read it, and when we work with non-French speakers, we have to talk in English. This means that English people don't learn French: they don't need to learn French, and we have to speak to them in their English language.... At one time, the company was paying for English speakers to learn French, but most didn't

take the classes. Now they really don't need to. (Medium-fluency informant)

In short, nonnative speakers resented the fact that for native speakers, business was still business as usual.

Distrust. Across the board, nonnative speakers described feeling distrustful of native speakers, concerned that native speakers could—and well might—deceive them because of their superior language ability. Although few informants described times when they had actually experienced such deception, the majority of them, regardless of their self-perceived English language fluencies, feared the possibility of it occurring. For example, a medium-fluency French accountant said that, even in basic administrative matters, he never digressed from the agenda he set for encounters with native speakers because he felt that he must avoid any chance, deliberate or otherwise, of a misunderstanding that could lead him to get "stabbed in the back." A high-fluency informant who was part of a conference call with her San Francisco counterparts twice a week said that she found those calls stressful because of her self-imposed need to be vigilant, especially because the meetings were held toward the end of her working day. As she explained, "We need to be extra cautious, because the Americans' mastery of the language may lead them to take advantage of us and try to fool us." She was unable to give examples of instances in which this had occurred, but others corroborated this fear. For example, another medium-fluency informant mistrusted Americans for what she perceived as a lack of transparency:

> I think that they're less transparent than the other four [non-English-speaking] countries I work with.... I just have this feeling. I'm not always sure that they're fully transparent.

In sum, as illustrated by the above quotation, nonnative lingua franca speakers within Frenchco were on guard in the presence of native speakers.

Consistent with research on intergroup conflict in organizations, a perceived linguistic divide by nonnative speakers fostered intergroup differentiation and disparate evaluations (Tajfel and Turner 1979, Hogg and Terry 2001). On one hand, the perceived change in the status hierarchy engendered suspicion and indignation from nonnative speakers toward native speakers. On the other, nonnative speakers expressed a shared resentment and distrust toward native speakers' elevated position in the lingua franca divide (Hogg and Abrams 1990). Accordingly, nonnative English speakers also began to feel more comfortable with other nonnative colleagues.

Comfort and Ease with Nonnative English Speakers
The majority of informants across all levels of fluency reported their sense of comfort when communicating with other linguistically and culturally diverse nonnative

lingua franca speakers. Informants described those inter-actions as relatively benign, such that when each speaker used English as a second language, employees perceived parity in the communication, distinct from communica-tion experiences with native English speakers. Nonnative speakers characterized interactions among themselves as a cooperative effort among equals. As one informant put it, "[M]y colleague in Poland and I say that we speak 'broken English'; we both make a lot of mistakes but that's OK because we manage together." Another informant took the same view of his communication pattern with nonnative English-speaking colleagues and elaborated,

> When we are talking English with Spanish, Italian, and German people, we are creating our own language in a way, for the intonation, the grammatical rules...in a way, we are emerging a new kind of English.

In describing a joint project with a coworker in Poland, another informant said that it was easy communicating with him because he has "the same problem as I do." Yet another informant said, "I find it easy to speak with the Italian guys and with German guys in English." This sentiment was corroborated by many informants who described the absence of a feeling of diminished status when interacting with non-Anglophone speakers. For example, an informant described his interactions in terms of comfort:

> I feel more comfortable with the other countries that I work with, like the Netherlands, Slovenia, etc., even though there is still the language [fluency] problem. I know my English is not good enough for me to express exactly what I mean, but I am comfortable with that. I don't feel that way with the UK. I'm not in the same relation with UK colleagues as I am with the ones in the other countries.

Whereas this informant discussed his comfort level with other nonnative lingua franca speakers based on similar-ity in proficiency, another informant's common ground involved spoken accent:

> I have no problems speaking with someone who is like me, with an accent. I know mine is there too, so I don't care as long as the structure is good enough and we both can be understood.

As research on ingroup and outgroup conflict would suggest, data analysis revealed that nonnative English speakers felt greater ease and assurances with other nonnative English speakers. Nonnative English speak-ers who were nationals of diverse cultures found com-monality around being second-language users of the lin-gua franca rather than focusing on differences based on national culture. The national background of speakers tended to be irrelevant to the inquiries in this study. Rather, interacting with a native or nonnative speaker of the lingua franca determined whether an interaction was viewed as equitable or not contingent on the perceived disparity in language proficiency.

Distinctions Based on Achieved Status Characteristics

Despite these shared perceptions of status diminution and outgroup unease, nonnative English speakers did not experience the heightened importance of the lin-gua franca equally. Accounts indicate that perceived language fluency acted as an achieved status mod-ifier that shaped nonnative speakers' feelings about their job performance and stability within Frenchco (see Table 3 for illustrations). Rather than a lin-ear relationship between achieved status characteris-tics (low, medium, and high) and job-related concerns, those who were in the medium range demonstrated the highest distress compared with their low- and high-leveled coworkers. In almost all cases where fluency ratings differed, self-assessed rather than objective flu-ency determined how speakers explained their feelings and actions. Of the 25 informants who considered them-selves medium-fluency speakers, experts categorized 7 (28%) as possessing high fluency, indicating skewed self-perceptions.[2] Yet, as discussed in the next section, informants adopted job-related anxieties and behavioral patterns that mapped according to their own lower self-assessments, even if those assessments were skewed below objective evaluations.

Intrapersonal Outcomes: English Performance and Job Advancement Concerns

Language Performance Anxiety. High-fluency speak-ers often contrasted their English skills to that of their more sophisticated native language abilities. Those informants said that they were always aware of and accepted their language imperfections, an awareness that seemed to result in their limited language perfor-mance anxiety, referring to fears aroused when using or preparing to use the English language. As one manager described,

> So often in my mind when I'm talking, I say, "Okay, if I have some interesting thing to tell, I will do my best to tell it." I know I make some mistakes, of course, I make some inappropriate comments sometimes, but that's life.... I'm accepting that that's a fact.

Other highly fluent speakers were more focused on achieving their business imperatives than on speaking perfectly. One high-fluency manager who earned an MBA at an English-speaking institution in Europe noted, "[I]t would be limiting to business if I think about my English.... I don't care about being perfect."

Low-fluency speakers also had low anxiety about their English use, although their reasons were different. Because they perceived their English competence to be too low, they dramatically minimized its use, resulting in

Table 3 Nonnative English Speakers' Reactions to Status Loss as a Function of Achieved Fluency

Reactions	Illustrative quotes
Status loss (low-, medium-, and high-fluency speakers)	"I felt like I was reduced bit by bit [when communicating in the lingua franca]." "How can you be in equal footing without your native language? I feel always like I am in a lower position. It's very difficult to express myself in a nice way and to sound really relevant because I don't have the same vocabulary that I have in French. I feel like I remain at a very basic level."
Resentment toward native speakers (low-, medium-, and high-fluency speakers)	"It's not fair that we adapt to native speakers and they don't have to adapt to anybody." "Working with natives from UK is sometimes stressful, as they don't predict that others may not speak so fluent English. They often don't care to use simpler English or to speak a bit slower to be better understood."
Distrust toward native speakers (low-, medium-, and high-fluency speakers)	"I am always suspicious, always looking for signals. I have the problem of trust with native speakers." "You may speak the language [English] perfectly, you may understand and feel the culture perfectly, you may be married to a native, [but] you will always remain less good and suffer the consequence. It is important to know this and take it into consideration when working with Americans. It does not mean you cannot have a successful relationship but only if you keep this in the back of your mind, without fully becoming paranoid."
Comfort and ease with other nonnative speakers (low-, medium-, and high-fluency speakers)	"Very often non-English people can share ideas with each other using English much more easily than with native English speakers." "For example, there are other Europeans who speak in English as their foreign language and we understand each other, and that's fine with me. I think sometimes Americans make me repeat what I say. I know it is for two reasons. I speak with a lower voice with Americans.... Even if I know stuff in English, I don't say it loudly, and they don't always understand my accent."
Language performance anxiety (low- and medium-fluency speakers)	"I wanted to be a leader and I know that I have to talk in meetings but I became timid about my English and people listening to my mistakes and mispronunciations after it became mandatory. The whole thing is stressful." "I don't want to look stupid speaking in English. I don't feel like I can control the language. One time I used a word and everybody started laughing. I still don't know why. I felt silly."
Job advancement concerns (low- and medium-fluency speakers)	"I worry that my English will be compared to better speakers, and they will get promoted and I won't." "My colleague is worried that in two years these young colleagues will take better assignment than him. So, sometimes he doesn't look at them in a good way."

their low anxiety, as represented by the following interview excerpt:

> I try not to stress myself with English.... I can listen and I can understand what they're talking about. I can express myself by maybe laughing. I can just follow them...[and] even though I don't participate actively, at least I can understand.

Minimizing their effort in the English language appeared to deflect language performance anxiety for the low-fluency group.[3]

Surprisingly, and in contrast to low- and high-fluency interviewees, the majority of medium-fluency speakers reported heightened fears of having their English evaluated after the mandate. Encounters with the English language stirred anxiety most strongly within this group because their skills seemed adequate to them at certain times but not at others, thus raising their general self-consciousness when communicating in English. These medium-fluency employees' narratives suggested that although their English fluency was flawed prior to the mandate, it was adequate to articulate ideas for areas in which they had local expertise. When speaking of the mandate, however, their narrative centered on their English proficiency becoming a new source of anxiety;

they were now vulnerable to criticism on the basis of their language skills as nonnative speakers in a way that they were not before. A medium-fluency hardware engineer described his language anxiety as follows:

> I knew that I was an expert, I knew what I was talking about, and I knew that I was right about it. I was proud of my opinions, so I accepted that the language [lingua franca] was a little bit frustrating because I wasn't as sophisticated as I would be in my native language.... This rule now limits things because I'll perhaps be evaluated on how I talk.

Another medium-fluency informant, who held a doctorate from a prestigious French university, shared these concerns:

> When you're in a big group, you are expected to have proper English; so, you better be careful about your English. Then, you focus too much on your English. I think it [the mandate] is bad luck. For me, I worry that my English mistakes are more visible now. Before, when I was on a conference call in English...I knew that I wasn't expressing myself well and that I might not have been very easy to understand, but I was confident about the fact that I had information.

A self-identified medium-fluency informant who was categorized as highly fluent by linguists said that even

though she had worked on a task force with international colleagues for a year and a half, once the language policy was issued, she remembers becoming self-conscious about her English usage. Thereafter, she became anxious when communicating in English, and she described how from time to time her anxiety became physical: "I become red and I sweat, and I think to myself, wow, everybody is looking at me, so I should not make any mistakes."

In sum, employees evinced different levels of language performance anxiety according to their perceived English fluency assessments. When speakers perceive that they are being evaluated, they become increasingly anxious (Horwitz and Young 1991), especially if they fear that their performance will confirm their own feelings or other's perceptions of second-language inadequacy (Steele 1997, Paladino et al. 2009). In the context of the English mandate, many nonnative speakers perceived English proficiency, rather than their own work domain expertise, to be the salient axis of judgment. Yet medium-fluency speakers had the highest performance anxiety levels, whereas high- and low-fluency speakers had comparably low anxiety levels, suggesting that performance concerns are not uniformly experienced as we might expect in the context of stereotype threat, for example.

Job Insecurity. Unlike their high-fluency counterparts, participants with medium or low levels of (perceived) fluency described a postmandate sense of job insecurity—the feeling of "powerlessness to maintain desired continuity in a threatened job situation," in which people fear losing a job or diminished opportunities for promotion (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt 1984, p. 438). In contrast, high-fluency speakers expressed little concern about losing opportunities for job advancement; despite their sense of diminished status, they felt confident their language skills would not hinder their upward mobility. Low- and medium-fluency employees, for their part, feared that their potentially discrediting lingua franca abilities would thwart their workplace advancement. One manager who perceived himself as a low-fluency English speaker discussed his job concerns:

> It's embarrassing when [Frenchco] says, "We want to go international."... I'm out of the game because I don't have the language skills.... There will be more reorganizations, and all the international jobs are going to be given to people...who can show that they can master both English and French, and I don't have these skills.

A self-assessed medium-fluency manager who was coded as highly fluent by linguists expressed similar concerns:

> What's going to happen to my career if I don't master the English that's considered to be so important that [Frenchco's] executives are imposing it in meetings? What's my future?

This loss of communication competence was even more poignant among employees with long tenures at Frenchco, as described by a medium-fluency finance executive who said that he, along with his French coworkers, used to be proud of their jobs. He explains,

> But [we] suddenly find ourselves in a situation where we're not able to master the business language and know that we're probably too old to get the training we would need to do so. It's humiliating.

It should be noted that the insecurity was about job stagnation, not loss. This situation might have been different had the target company been American, but with French labor laws being significantly more protective of employees, career concerns were primarily experienced as having reached a ceiling within the organization. This ceiling seemed even more impassable because of the common belief that language skill deficiencies are difficult to overcome for the medium- and low-fluency speakers of the lingua franca.

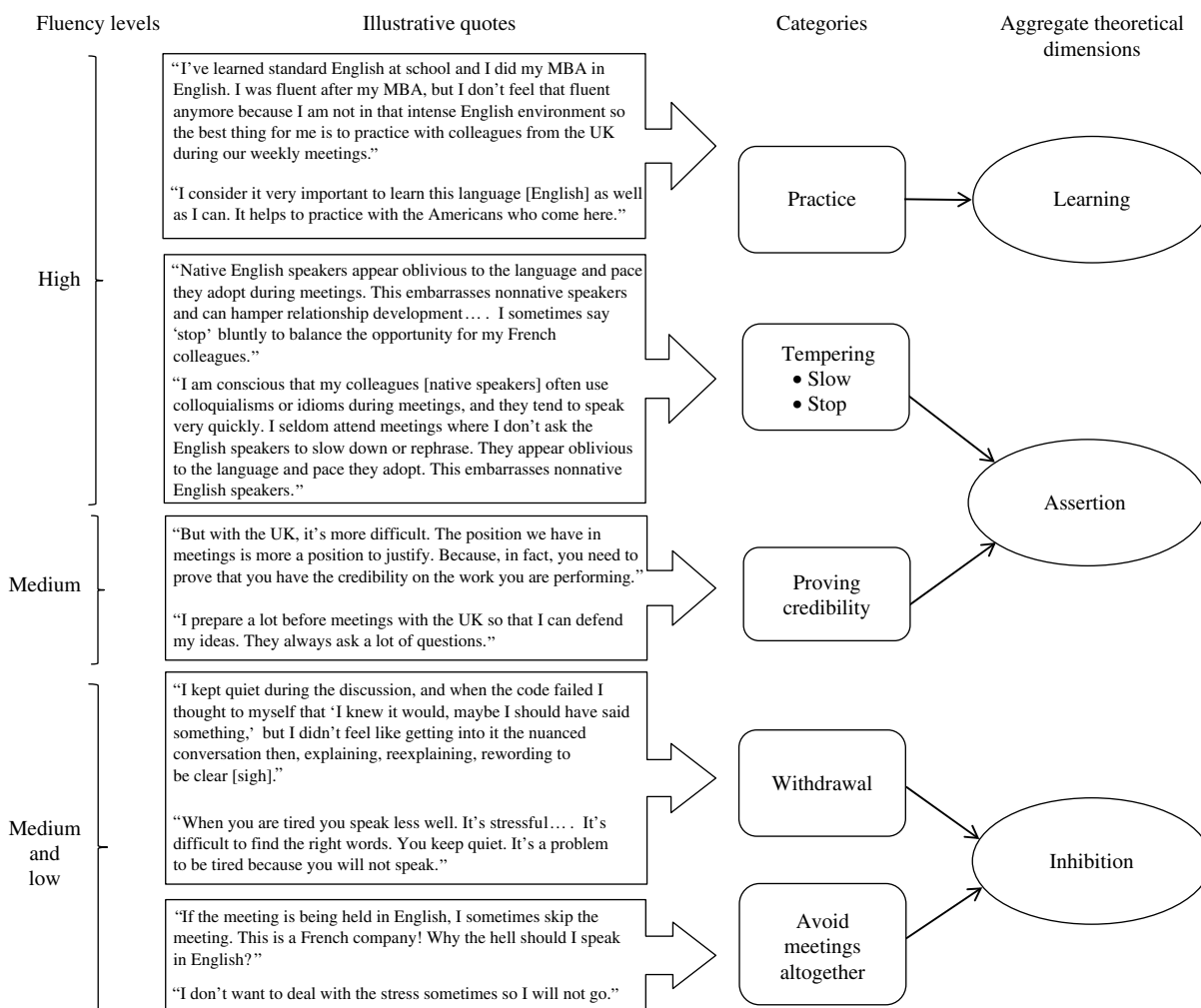### Interpersonal Outcomes: Assertion, Inhibition, and Learning

Fluency as a form of achieved status shaped how nonnative speakers interacted with native speakers. Depending on their self-perceived fluency level, nonnative English speakers responded in three ways: *assertion*, *inhibition*, and *learning* (see Figure 1). Assertion consisted of efforts to prove credibility, common among medium-fluency speakers, and status-tempering behaviors, common among high-fluency speakers. Inhibition consisted of withdrawing from ongoing discourse and avoiding encounters, common among low- and medium-fluency speakers. Learning responses consisted of efforts to improve English ability, a response found only among high-fluency speakers. I describe each response in turn.

Assertion. Nonnative speakers who recognized a status imbalance with native speakers attempted to assert themselves to counteract this perceived inequality in different ways: medium-fluency speakers tried to prove their credibility, whereas high-fluency members focused on tempering the status benefit of being a native English speaker, both for their own sake and for other nonnative speakers.

Medium-fluency speakers' narratives were replete with statements centered on proving their credibility, often coupled with the perception of being in a lower-status position. As one informant explained,

> My English is not bad (TOIEC [Test of English for International Communication] 865 [out of 990]), and I do quite well [speaking English] in meetings with colleagues from France, Poland, the Netherlands, Spain, etc. ...but the problems start when a true English speaker is present.... A real English person is in a stronger position, and I find myself justifying myself much more in those interactions.

Figure 1   Interpersonal Outcomes: Assertion, Inhibition, and Learning

Fluency levels	Illustrative quotes	Categories	Aggregate theoretical dimensions

High

"I've learned standard English at school and I did my MBA in English. I was fluent after my MBA, but I don't feel that fluent anymore because I am not in that intense English environment so the best thing for me is to practice with colleagues from the UK during our weekly meetings."

"I consider it very important to learn this language [English] as well as I can. It helps to practice with the Americans who come here."

→ **Practice** → **Learning**

"Native English speakers appear oblivious to the language and pace they adopt during meetings. This embarrasses nonnative speakers and can hamper relationship development.... I sometimes say 'stop' bluntly to balance the opportunity for my French colleagues."

"I am conscious that my colleagues [native speakers] often use colloquialisms or idioms during meetings, and they tend to speak very quickly. I seldom attend meetings where I don't ask the English speakers to slow down or rephrase. They appear oblivious to the language and pace they adopt. This embarrasses nonnative English speakers."

→ **Tempering**
- Slow
- Stop

→ **Assertion**

Medium

"But with the UK, it's more difficult. The position we have in meetings is more a position to justify. Because, in fact, you need to prove that you have the credibility on the work you are performing."

"I prepare a lot before meetings with the UK so that I can defend my ideas. They always ask a lot of questions."

→ **Proving credibility**

Medium and low

"I kept quiet during the discussion, and when the code failed I thought to myself that 'I knew it would, maybe I should have said something,' but I didn't feel like getting into it the nuanced conversation then, explaining, reexplaining, rewording to be clear [sigh]."

"When you are tired you speak less well. It's stressful.... It's difficult to find the right words. You keep quiet. It's a problem to be tired because you will not speak."

→ **Withdrawal**

→ **Inhibition**

"If the meeting is being held in English, I sometimes skip the meeting. This is a French company! Why the hell should I speak in English?"

"I don't want to deal with the stress sometimes so I will not go."

→ **Avoid meetings altogether**

This example was corroborated by many medium-fluency informants who said that, in response to their feelings of inadequacy when communicating with native English-speaking American or UK-based colleagues, they would work hard to prove their legitimacy. For instance, a representative from Frenchco's headquarters felt inferior to a regional product manager because of the fluency gap between them:

> It's when you have someone whose native language is English you're at a disadvantage.... Life is tough. You know that you're underneath the native English person: he's got a tool that you don't have, and you've got to fight if you want to bring your relationship to the same level. I don't feel competent during calls with the UK; it's difficult for me to explain exactly what I mean and to give reasons [as to] why I'm making certain suggestions.

In contrast, high-fluency nonnative English speakers tempered the status effects of the lingua franca by using tactics such as slowing down and stopping native speakers during conversation. Doing so created space for themselves and their less fluent fellow nonnative team members to communicate their perspectives more fully during meetings. In this regard, the strongest group members amended an unfavorable status balance (Tajfel and Turner 1979, Ellemers et al. 2002). The following example from a high-fluency informant is illustrative of high-fluency speakers' attempts to stop their American colleagues from monopolizing a discussion:

> Sometimes it's hard to get our American colleagues to be quiet, but we manage.... I usually say "stop."... This strategy is a means to block or reverse this kind of thing when you see that people are trying to take advantage of the language.... I say, "If you don't stop, we're going to talk in French."

This example illustrates a tempering scenario in which an informant is halting the experience of a native English-speaking colleague's rhetorical domination of a discussion.

Another means of tempering involved directly asking native speakers to slow their pace. Indeed, higher-status actors often use pacing in work groups as an assertion of their power (Chen et al. 2004). For example,

a high-fluency informant, who described conversations with native English-speaking colleagues as "confrontational situations," stated that native speakers were "very bad because they talk very fast, and they know that we're not at their pace; I ask them to slow down or to repeat themselves many times just to slow them down." In contrast to the tendency of nonnative speakers to submit to dominant behaviors (Tiedens and Fragale 2003), high-fluency speakers often intervened. The informant above went on to explain that she could keep up with native speakers' speed but always felt like she needed to intervene on behalf of her less fluent colleagues, who might be too inhibited to make such a request for themselves, a work-group pacing behavior reflective of higher-status members who perceive their group welfare as critical and valuable to their own self (Chen et al. 2004).

Inhibition. Inhibition is a reaction that manifests among low-status members during or in anticipation of interactions with high-status others (Keltner et al. 2003). At Frenchco, inhibition consisted of avoidance behaviors, which occurred in two forms: withdrawing from ongoing discourse and avoiding interactions altogether. Often unseen in the organization, this response pattern was common among low- and medium-fluency speakers who believed that their contribution to a conversation was not essential in group settings with three or more people.

Informants who often avoided speaking during common discourse stated that when they decided whether to speak, they constantly wondered whether their efforts on the project were necessary. Their decisions were predicated not on the need to contribute to the efficacy of a task, but rather based on the extent to which communicating aroused anxiety for them. If a situation triggered anxiety, some informants chose to remain quiet even if they had a meaningful contribution to offer. For example, Jean (a pseudonym) said that he decided not to point out what he deemed to be an obvious issue with licensing a software component during a project discussion because he was too anxious to elaborate on his rationale. It took the project team two weeks to encounter and resolve the licensing issue that eventually surfaced, adding an extension to the project that could have been avoided altogether had Jean spoken up. Yet his anxiety was stronger than his resolve to contribute to the team process. Like Jean, another low-fluency informant described his withdrawal from discussions stemming from fears of appearing incompetent:

> I understand [English] because I'm trained in English, but I might not say anything or may stop talking during the meetings [with U.S. counterparts] because I'm afraid of looking silly [and of] making mistakes.

Another medium-fluency informant similarly stated that he does not say much during meetings with native speakers because he fears "being viewed as not astute in English," though he was adamant in considering himself astute in French.

My informal observations corroborated that nonnative speakers would refrain from expressing opinions because of fears of appearing incompetent. For example, I observed a conference call between a self-identified medium-fluency French informant who was objectively rated as highly fluent, Philippe (a pseudonym), and a native lingua franca-speaking American coworker, Bob (a pseudonym). During the call, Bob said that he had missed a deadline for producing a report because of competing priorities. Five minutes into the call, Philippe suggested that they reschedule the meeting pending Bob's completion of the report. Immediately after hanging up the phone, Philippe told me in French that he was extremely angry at Bob, whom he perceived to be "taking him for a ride." He went on to say that he hated not having expressed his discontent to Bob, because he feared that doing so in the second language would make him sound "stupid." Had the meeting been held in French, he said that he would have communicated his sentiment easily.

Driskell and Mullen (1990) conduct a meta-analysis on the effects of status hierarchies among individuals and found wide empirical support that low-status actors participate less in group tasks, which in turn limits their influence. Medium- and low-fluency informants generally recognized that their withdrawal responses affected their abilities to influence task decisions, but they expressed greater concern about being discredited because of their language use, which was seemingly amplified by the presence of their U.S. and UK counterparts. The challenge of debate or dissent in a conversational context proved too overwhelming for them to speak up. Such a scenario was aptly illustrated by a medium-fluency manager:

> I don't feel all right about not speaking up early on. And once we have started work, it's too difficult to say, "Hey, no—by the way, I don't agree because ... ." By not giving feedback [at the start of the discussion], others think that I agree when in fact I don't and never did.

Another medium-fluency informant said that he found himself reducing his participation in situations that may have required extended rhetorical involvement, such as those in which he disagreed with the direction the team was taking: "More and more if I disagree or if there is something that I'm not happy with, I don't say anything."

Beyond silence, medium- and low-fluency speakers at Frenchco enacted a second form of inhibition: they refused to attend meetings that were held in English. These employees said that fluency in the lingua franca seemed unattainable to them, and thus they would not even try to achieve it. This self-handicapping strategy may also have provided a plausible explanation

for future language-related failures (for a review, see Rhodewalt 2008). As a consequence, they avoided occasions in which they had to communicate with native English speakers, as evidenced in the following testimony by a low-fluency informant:

> When we have a conference call to make decisions, or even just when my input is needed...if I'm uncomfortable, my first solution is not to attend the meetings with English coworkers.

A medium-fluency informant described a commonly observed rationale for missing lingua franca meetings with native English speakers:

> I didn't choose to join an English-speaking company—I joined a French company. The shareholders didn't consult me before making English the business language. If I don't have to go, I just don't go.

As indicated by the example above, employees avoided interactions when they concluded that their presence was not essential and as a self-protection strategy.

Withdrawing from discourse and avoiding meetings altogether are subtle, inconspicuous, and self-perpetuating coping mechanisms that can go unnoticed by coworkers, because remaining quiet during a conversation is often viewed as a normal default, and absence may be equally inconspicuous. Speakers' willingness to communicate resides in their self-assessment of competency (McCroskey and McCroskey 1988). The vast majority of low- and medium-fluency nonnative informants said that they would sometimes feel insecure, worrying that their relatively limited communication abilities would make them appear incompetent to native English speakers. Indeed, the perceived status distance, coupled with the language expertise afforded to native speakers, tended to increase the importance that low- and medium-fluency speakers placed on native speakers' evaluations (Vorauer 2006). This heightened apprehension caused them to withdraw or refrain from speaking as naturally as they would have done had the meetings been conducted in their native tongues, a reaction not uncommon among low-status group members, who are often especially concerned about being perceived as incompetent (Dovidio and Gaertner 2010). The withdrawal behaviors of speakers who believed they had medium fluency in English—especially those who actually possessed high English fluency—suggest that these reactions are not only about language skill but also about being perceived as belonging to a lower-status group. People will have and enact assumptions about their own ability, which determines their contributions to group tasks (Webster and Driskell 1978, Ridgeway and Erickson 2000).

Learning. In contrast, a small number of highly fluent English speakers viewed interactions with native speakers as an opportunity to practice, to strengthen their English skills. These informants would actively ask for vocabulary help or feedback on their sentence formation during conversations with their native-speaking counterparts. Interestingly, self-assessed medium-fluency communicators whose language aptitude was actually in the high-fluency category were not among the learners; those who believed that they already had a high baseline in the English language were the most motivated to improve their English. A highly fluent informant expressed this orientation when describing less fluent colleagues:

> Sometimes in some meetings, there are some people who speak poor English, and you see that they're almost suffering. It's very difficult for them and they don't say too much. I think they're worried about their evolution in the group. But I am motivated to learn more, to learn English and to try to improve my English.

Other informants said that they actively sought to join meetings that included native speakers just to practice their English communication skills, as illustrated by the following interview excerpt: "I always try to participate in as many meetings as possible and to express myself in English. I want to practice...to be always connected with the English language." Another informant echoed,

> A very good way to learn is through a person who speaks English very well in your office. There was a colleague—she's no longer here—but she was Canadian. Having conversations with her was very good practice. Working in English is a very, very good way to improve our English.

In addition to practicing their conversational skills, highly fluent speakers said that interactions with native speakers increased their vocabulary. For example, nonnative speakers would at times ask for their English-speaking counterparts to repeat unfamiliar words and phrases. On other occasions, native speakers provided a better way to express an idea. For instance, an informant said that she commonly uses the word "threshold" that she learned from her American coworker. This proactive approach to learning helped them continuously improve their English skills, providing yet more evidence of their achieved language status.

In sum, nonnative speakers who were already highly fluent capitalized on their regular contact with native speakers. Paradoxically, analysis across fluency levels revealed that those who possessed the strongest English were the ones who were most motivated to learn. In this regard, the rich seemed to get richer.

Discussion

This study generated several important insights into how achieved status markers—subjective English fluency—shaped the experience of status loss in organizations and the concomitant emotions, behaviors, and attitudes to that loss. Regardless of their English fluency level,

nonnative speakers expressed a sense of status loss. Yet their attendant levels of language performance anxiety and job insecurity were distinctly shaped by their self-assessed fluency level: medium-fluency speakers exhibited the greater anxiety than their low- and high-fluency coworkers. Status loss, and the responses that accompanied it, mostly corresponded to self-assessed rather than actual fluency levels, specifically for objectively high-fluency speakers that underestimated their objective language abilities. Moreover, although nonnative speakers shared a common attitude toward their high-status native English speaking coworkers—whom the nonnative speakers resented and found untrustworthy—they responded differently depending on their self-perceived fluency, using differing assertion, inhibition, or learning strategies. The linguistic divide between native speakers and nonnative speakers is made all the more prominent by the fact that none of these three responses were found when informants described interactions between nonnative English speakers of diverse nationalities. In the following section, I discuss the theoretical contributions and implications this study makes to our understanding of status and achieved fluency characteristics in organizations.

Theoretical Contributions

This study expands our understanding of status in organization in several ways. My analysis documents and explains the subjective experience of status loss processes in organizations. Examining status loss as a subjective experience is critical because, as this study shows, people's self-definition of status shapes how they feel and behave regardless of whether others have conveyed a diminution of their status positions. First, perceived changes in organizationally valued characteristics, in this case, English fluency, occasioned feelings of diminished standing and ingroup–outgroup valuations for all nonnative speakers, even in the absence of coworker disparagement or explicit organizational divisions. Indeed, what may appear as benign and beneficial organizational actions can instigate status loss processes as workers perceive new valuation hierarchies. Second, informants at Frenchco adopted job-related anxieties and behavioral patterns that mapped on to their own lower linguistic self-assessments, even if those status characteristic assessments were skewed lower than objective evaluations. Thus, although it is important to develop theories of status as the prestige, respect, and influence that others confer onto actors, this study shows that it is equally important to take into account self-definition of status positions. Using this combined understanding of self-derived and other-derived status loss, organizational scholars can uncover the causes of skewed perspectives to deepen our understanding of how achieved status processes operate in organizations.

The findings in this study further expand our understanding how the experience of status loss compares to that of durable low-status group members. As mentioned previously, system justification and status characteristics theory make a compelling case for the implicit acceptance of status inequality and outgroup favoritism by those who gain the least value from their social standing. The present research suggests that the experience of status loss mirrors and departs from these findings in important ways. For example, low-fluency informants at Frenchco withdrew from encounters, suggesting the same depressed sense of entitlement found in the system justification literature, whereas high-fluency workers behaved in ways demonstrating positive valuation of native speakers, in their attempts to improve their English, for example (cf. Jost et al. 2004).

Yet many who experienced status loss both expressed an acute sense of resentment and contested their positions differentially based on their achieved fluency status. This finding suggests that multiple status cues may impact how those in lower-status positions experience the legitimacy of the status order after perceived status loss. For example, far from accepting and justifying the established order, medium- and high-fluency speakers attempted to counter—by proving credibility or tempering dominant behaviors—the status asymmetry with higher-status actors during the course of interaction. Considering how actors perceive and react to status hierarchies as a function of their achieved status characteristics can provide insights into status dynamics that may be lost when focusing solely on the maintenance of status hierarchies.

Along these lines, findings in this study also contribute to an emerging line of inquiry that examines how the aggregation of multiple cues, i.e., ascribed and achieved status characteristics, shape our understanding of social systems (see, e.g., Rosette et al. 2008, Phillips et al. 2009, Sauer et al. 2010). In their theory of racial activation, Thomas-Hunt and Phillips (2011) emphasize that individuals possess multiple status cues, such as an ascribed race and an achieved education characteristic, which observers draw on simultaneously when making evaluative judgments. For example, experimental research suggests that observers will undervalue firms led by blacks compared to whites with similar educational credentials (Sauer et al. 2010). This study extends this approach by empirically demonstrating the ways in which *focal actors* draw on their achieved characteristics to diminish perceived decrements related to their ascribed status. Specifically, status loss group members drew on their fluency as a marker of their achieved status to manage what they perceived to be an overall decline in their prestige as a result of the category of nonnative speaker. Although it is difficult to strip informants in this study of their achieved characteristics, we can speculate from their varied emotional and behavioral responses

that if people do not recognize and tap into an immediate achieved characteristic to enhance themselves, they may enact similar deferential behaviors as low-status group members.

Moreover, this study reveals and explains some novel and subtle characteristics of achieved status that can refine our understanding of status loss processes. Extant literature in social psychology, for example, has commonly overlooked the impact of self-evaluated achieved status on low-status group heterogeneity in favor of a focus on individual differences such as ingroup identification or acceptance of legitimizing ideologies (e.g., Major et al. 2002, Nadler and Halabi 2006, Derks et al. 2006). This research has shown how intragroup differences in perceptions of achieved status mold the behavior of low-status group members, albeit in a nonlinear fashion. Importantly, the perception of achieved status affected the Frenchco informants in a nonadditive manner. In their survey research with nonnative English speakers in the United States, for example, Gluszek et al. (2011) find a significant impact of self-perceived accent on communication challenges but not on feelings of social belonging; by modeling these relationships linearly, however, they might have missed the importance of divergent, nonmonotonic anxieties among nonnative speakers as shown here. For example, high-fluency nonnative speakers who experienced a diminution in their status position did not experience job-related anxieties, unlike medium-fluency speakers. In fact, medium-fluency English speakers, who represented the largest number of informants in this study, also demonstrated the highest level of communication and job-related anxieties.

This finding is not completely surprising, given that middle-status actors commonly experience more insecurity surrounding their position than their low- or high-status counterparts: they are at once poised for mobility but not insulated from the consequences of failure (see, e.g., Phillips and Zuckerman 2001). Research on biculturalism shows similar anxieties for those who straddle two cultures. Biculturalism leads to stress and isolation because bicultural individuals constantly experience pressures to be more or less like the dominant culture and may ultimately fail to fully bridge a second culture in addition to their own (Vivero and Jenkins 1999, Rudmin 2003). Consequently, bicultural individuals may internalize the deficiency, feel alienated (Vivero and Jenkins 1999), and become inhibited (Ichheiser 1949), a finding that resonates with the experience of the medium-fluency informants in this study.

An important contribution of this study is clarifying the role of language as a source of status loss in global organizations, with particular emphasis on the experience of nonnative speakers of a legitimate language. Gluszek and Dovidio's (2010) recent work on the

stigmatizing nature of possessing nonnative accents further highlights the importance of emphasizing the perspective of nonnative speakers. Although research on language in organizations is in its infancy, the topic promises to expand our understanding of status processes in unique and significant ways. This research has discussed language as a context in which to examine both the source of status loss as an ascribed characteristic and the distinguishing factor as an achieved characteristic among status loss groups. Studying language departs from the extant literature on status in organizations by highlighting its organizational role in affecting people's subjective experience of their status positions. Research in this domain tends to discuss situations that pertain to preexisting attributes. For example, Ridgeway et al. (1998) posit that preexisting nominal characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, and region of origin acquire value in society and are reinforced through emergent status beliefs in group interactions. In their study of personnel practices, Reskin and McBrier (2000) likewise show how organizations can mitigate tendencies carrying over from extant macro-status beliefs that have led to the inequitable hiring of women. Both of these views, however, assume that nominal characteristics predate entry into organizations. What has yet to be explored is how organizations can ascribe status based on personal attributes in the absence of previously held macro beliefs. In particular, this paper is the first to consider status distinctions that are reflected by actors in the context of an organization's imposition of a lingua franca.

It is important to note that the phenomena described in this study are not about language skill alone. Instead, they encompass an entire set of intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics that attach to language skills in an organization. In particular, this study shows that nonnative lingua franca speakers enacted response strategies such as assertion or learning during meetings and other professional contexts that involved substantial use of the lingua franca. One might argue that those strategies may simply be the effect of the speakers' lack of language skills, as an alternative explanation of these behaviors. There are two reasons, however, that give me confidence to rule out a language skill-based explanation.

First, highly fluent speakers in this study, rather than separating out completely from medium- and low-fluency speakers, behaved in some cases like medium- and low-fluency speakers (e.g., had a negative attitude toward native speakers) but differed in other cases (e.g., participated in learning). In addition, several high-fluency speakers who self-identified as medium-fluency communicators responded like the majority of medium-fluency speakers rather than other objectively and subjectively high-fluency speakers. These patterns counter a purely language-fluency based argument, which would suggest

the relationship between fluency and behavior to be linear. Second, findings of this study indicate that language challenges were pronounced and handicapping only in certain contexts. Respondents from different non-English-speaking countries cited the experience of a diminished ability to communicate in English only in the presence of native speakers. Among nonnative lingua franca speakers, in contrast, the experience of feeling diminished and the notion of language competence ceased to exist. Thus, rather than being due to linguistic capability, anxiety in the presence of native speakers may be the underlying motive that leads to inhibition. Given these points, I conclude that it is status loss—and not simply linguistic adeptness—that begets uncommunicative behavior.

The theoretical insights of this study extend well beyond the language domain to other situations that evoke a sense of status loss for people. Professional backgrounds tend to be viewed as durable characteristic (e.g., programmer or accountant), but they contain skills that can be achieved. For example, if an organization moves from a core competence of engineering to marketing, engineering may take on a newly subordinate position that diminishes engineers' perceived status positions. The findings of this study suggest that in these perceived status loss situations, people are likely to draw on an achieved characteristic that is valued in their work contexts. An engineer who feels status loss with high fluency in the language of marketing may go into a learning versus an inhibition mode.

Implications for Practice

This research suggests several important lessons for organizational practice. At Frenchco, the experience of status loss seems to have become salient when one dominant language was explicitly stipulated to facilitate collaboration among colleagues. Inherent in a one-language policy is the assumption that employees will adjust, seamlessly transitioning to the lingua franca, and begin communicating in a nonnative language without consequence. Thus, the potential status loss experience for nonnative speakers of a lingua franca points to the need for organizations to design policies that are accompanied by an explicit socialization plan, one that actively involves the organization, nonnative speakers, and even native lingua franca speakers to avoid the kind of performance detriments known to accompany conflict around symbolic hierarchies (Bendersky and Hays 2012, Bunderson and Reagans 2011). The Frenchco case also shows how learning can occur during interaction between native and nonnative speakers, although only high-fluency English speakers, uninhibited by fear of judgment from native speakers, exhibited this learning orientation. This finding suggests that a deliberate socialization process that engenders psychological

safety (Edmondson 1999) could possibly reduce the anxiety around linguistic judgment to promote learning in all employees.

Such socialization programs should serve two purposes. First, each program should expose the potential intrapersonal and interpersonal costs that a nonnative language might have on employees to alleviate the fears associated with status loss. Furthermore, the Frenchco study demonstrated how employees hesitate to expose their language deficiencies because of fears of revealing an inadequacy in a required skill—one that may impact the stability of their employment. However, if an organization publicly acknowledges the challenges for nonnative speakers to speak a foreign lingua franca, many fears could possibly be eliminated before they are ever allowed to germinate. This openness would counter what research indicates—that language challenges for nonnative speakers at work are typically a hidden problem (Marschan et al. 1997). Second, a socialization program could create excitement centered on collectively learning English, the business language that is being utilized by globalizing enterprises worldwide. Organizations could create a communal and supportive atmosphere of acclimating all employees to the increasingly Anglophonic communication norm. In so doing, the divisive nature of the experience of status loss, as highlighted in this study, would be resolved because employees would view the lingua franca issue not as an individual problem but as a collective challenge that may also involve native speakers.

From this perspective, native speakers are not exempt from the challenge—that is, it is not that nonnative speakers have a "problem" and native speakers do not; rather, they all share in the challenges of cross-lingual communication, and all should be invested in working and speaking together. Doing so is likely to disrupt the creation and sustenance of distinct symbolic categories for nonnative and native speakers. Evidence suggests that native speakers invested in this collective goal may not only mitigate the negative effects of these hierarchies, but they may have additional positive effects on learning by helping to identify, legitimize, and elicit contributions from nonnative speakers (Bunderson and Reagans 2011).

Managers should also be attuned to differences in self-assessments when considering the experience of nonnative speakers. In this study, some nonnative speakers underestimated their language skills. Although the reason for their flawed assessments remains an empirical puzzle that future research can address, assessing employees self-perceived versus their actual fluency can potentially provide managers insight into how to shape employees experiences positively. For example, if people are tested on their fluency, it might give them a more realistic perspective on their language skills, calm their anxieties, and offer them benchmarks for making progress in learning to speak English more

fluently. Likewise, when making personnel decisions, managers should not assume objective fluency metrics map directly onto how nonnative speakers feel about their fluency.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this research provides valuable insights into status loss and corresponding responses based on achieved status in the context of a lingua franca mandate, it has several limitations that future work could address. First, to better understand the lingua franca phenomenon in the workplace, empirical inquiry needs to be replicated at other companies, in other industries, and at organizations headquartered in other countries (e.g., Japan). Replication would further solidify the notion that the lingua franca itself is the preeminent source of feelings of status loss. Second, the initial stage of a lingua franca mandate and its long-term impact need to be explored further so that we may gain greater insight as to whether and how nonnative speakers adapt to the policy over time. Although this paper captures the context in which the language policy was introduced two years prior to the study, it remains unclear how the mandate would affect nonnative speakers if the policy had been in place longer than two years.

Third, an important issue in a qualitative study of language use is the extent to which the interview process might introduce biases based on the interviewers' own language fluency. It is plausible that I could have connected more with some informants, influencing their responses and even my subsequent inferences. Although a study such as this cannot discount every possible bias, my native-level fluencies in both English and French make my own language skills distinct from any of the informants who were all second-language speakers of the English language, reducing the possibility that I would have a stronger connection based on informants' achieved fluency levels. Moreover, because the systematic categorization of people's language fluency levels by independent raters yielded robust reliability results, it is likely that my dual fluency did not play a significant role in my evaluations in this study.

Fourth, the present study is a qualitative study that does not enable causality to be established. Additional examination involving controlled experimental designs and longitudinal studies may help us make causal claims related to language-based status loss. Last, this study focused on the perspective of nonnative speakers. An explicit understanding of how native speakers behave under a lingua franca rule may provide insight into factors that either trigger or eliminate the feelings of anxiety and insecurity discussed by nonnative speakers. Research might further uncover the dynamic between nonnative speakers and native speakers, and—more explicitly—examine the theme of language skill asymmetry underlying the lingua franca struggles that

nonnative speakers experience. For example, it would be useful to assess whether limiting participation and contribution is a way for nonnative speakers to retain a sense of control that gets lost in the interaction between native speakers and nonnative speakers. Gaining a better understanding of native speakers' communication behavior could help unveil the factors that provoke or deepen feelings of incompetence in nonnative speakers.

Language mandates in global organizations provide a fruitful context in which to understand status loss as a subjective experience for nonnative workers. As this study demonstrates, although nonnative speakers can experience status loss near universally, their reactions will vary based on their achieved fluency characteristics. Perceptions of language fluency have an important, if uneven, impact as workers actively manage their encounters in the lingua franca. By understanding and attending to the dynamics that underlie these responses, organizations and their employees may be better equipped to realize the promise of effective global collaboration.

Endnotes

[1] Although all of the study participants were offered the choice to interview in their French native language, only low-fluency speakers elected to be interviewed in French. It is likely that the remainder of the participants were adhering to the English company language.

[2] Probing available data did not uncover the reason why members of this subgroup underestimated their language abilities.

[3] In line with their minimal efforts in the English language, members of the low-fluency group also requested to be interviewed in their native language for this study.

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