

UNEARNED STATUS GAIN: EVIDENCE FROM A GLOBAL LANGUAGE MANDATE

TSEDAL B. NEELEY
Harvard Business School

TRACY L. DUMAS
The Ohio State University

Theories of status rarely address “unearned status gain,” defined as an unexpected and unsolicited increase in relative standing, prestige, or worth attained not through individual effort or achievement but from a shift in organizationally valued characteristics. We build theory about unearned status gain drawing from a qualitative study of 90 U.S.-based employees of a Japanese organization following a company-wide English language mandate. These native English-speaking employees believed that the mandate elevated their worth in the organization, a status gain they attributed to chance, hence deeming it unearned. They also reported a heightened sense of belonging, optimism about career advancement, and access to expanded networks. Yet, among those who interacted regularly with Japanese counterparts, narratives also revealed discomfort, which was manifested in at least two ways. These informants engaged in “status rationalization,” emphasizing the benefits that Japanese employees might obtain by learning English, and prevaricated on whether the change was temporary or durable, a process we call “status stability appraisal.” The fact that these narratives were present only among those working closely with Japanese employees highlights intergroup contact as a factor in shaping the unearned status gain experience. Supplemental analysis of data gathered from 66 Japanese employees of the organization provided the broader organizational context and the nonnative speakers’ perspective of the language shift. This study’s findings expand our overall understanding of status dynamics in organizations, and show how status gains can yield both positive and negative outcomes.

I wasn’t always sure that there was a career path for me here. I’m talking about five, ten years down the road. . . . Making English the official language opens up the possibility that I could be of value at different offices in the long run.

U.S.-based native-English speaker in a Japanese firm

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The quotation above is an employee’s reaction to his Japanese company’s mandate establishing English as the official business language. The mandate anointed a particular attribute—English fluency—as a salient source of “status,” defined as the prestige, esteem, worth, or relative social position of an individual or group (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Therefore, as reflected in the opening quotation, native English speakers perceived themselves as having risen in value—or status—as a result of the mandate, replete with anticipations of career enhancement. This perceived status increase was not due to achievement or effort, but, rather, to a shift in what the organization valued. We define such an experience as *unearned status gain*.

Although it has not been explicitly identified or examined in the literature, examples of unearned status gain wrought by organizational initiatives are numerous. Examples include the introduction of new technology (Joshi, 1991), a shift in a company’s criteria for hiring or promotions (Spataro, 2012), or the appointment of a new leader

or a change in a firm's market strategy (Coser, Kadushin, & Powell, 1982; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Such changes quickly render some skills, characteristics, or backgrounds more important than others, thus raising the status of those who already possess the newly valued attributes. Yet, despite its widespread occurrence, employees' experiences of unearned status gain remain remarkably understudied.

Existing theory suggests that individuals' experience of unearned status gain may differ from the experience of earning status through achievement or effort (Adams, 1963; McDowell, Boyd, & Bowler, 2007; Mowday, 1996). People usually respond positively to status gains because of the advantages associated with high-status positions (Anderson, Willer, Kilduff, & Brown, 2012; Blader & Chen, 2011; Lovaglia & Houser, 1996), but people also want to believe they have earned their status (Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007; Rosette & Thompson, 2005). As such, the experience of unearned status gain embodies the contradiction of attaining desired gains in status through undesired means. The question remains as to whether those gaining status as a result of organizational action will experience the gain as positive, given the associated advantages, or as negative, due to the fact that it is unearned.

In this paper, we develop theory about people's experience of status gain when they are aware that their improvement in social position comes from an organizational action rather than their own effort. This is an important area to examine because it enriches our understanding of potential effects of status attainment (Bothner, Kim, & Smith, 2012). Understanding unearned status gain also extends the reach of current theory on status dynamics to include those driven by organizational selection of valued characteristics (Bianchi, Kang, & Stewart, 2012), allowing us to predict more accurately the outcomes of status gains by taking origin into account. We study the phenomenon of unearned status gain through a qualitative study of 90 U.S.-based, native English speakers at a Japanese global technology company, GlobalMoves (a pseudonym), following a recently adopted policy mandating English as the language in which all business was to be conducted. We also draw from 66 supplemental interviews of Japanese members of the organization to gain a deeper insight into the context in which U.S.-based employees experienced, and responded to, unearned status gain.

UNEARNED STATUS GAIN AND STATUS HIERARCHIES

We define "unearned status gain" as an unexpected and unsolicited increase in the relative esteem, prestige, or standing of individuals or groups resulting from the organizational selection and elevation of a specific characteristic as valuable. Accordingly, the change in valued characteristic is outside of members' control and apart from their individual efforts. In developing the concept of unearned status gain, we focus on the individual's experience of moving from a relatively lower to a relatively higher status position. The difference individuals perceive between their former (lower) and new (higher) status positions is a defining feature of unearned status gain. Therefore, the focus of our analysis is on individuals' perceptions of their gain in status, rather than on others' conferral of a new status upon them. The subjective experience of status can shape how people feel about themselves, their coworkers, and the organization as a whole (Neeley, 2013). Importantly, individuals' perceptions of their status in work settings are usually accurate, as misperceiving one's status carries social costs (Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006).

Organizational Actions as Drivers of Status Distinctions

Acknowledging the role of organizational action in determining valued characteristics is central to considering the experience of unearned status gain. According to status characteristics theory (Berger & Fisek, 1974), in a given social group, member attributes are viewed as cues to competence or to the value an individual can contribute to collective goals. These perceptions of individual value are the basis for determining status (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Berger, Ridgeway, Fisek, & Norman, 1998; Kilduff & Galinsky, 2013). Therefore, status hierarchies emerge from group norms driving a shared understanding of valued characteristics in a given setting (Berger et al., 1998; Bianchi et al., 2012), an understanding that can change as a result of organizational action.

Language mandates are a specific form of organizational action that shape status dynamics between native and nonnative speakers (Hinds, Neeley, & Cramton, 2014). For instance, Neeley (2013) studied the status loss of nonnative English speakers in a French high-tech company after an "English only" mandate was issued. Importantly, Neeley's (2013) work showed that organizational action can change

the perceived value of *ascribed* status characteristics—those determined by birth, inheritance, or assignment (Duguid, Loyd, & Tolbert, 2012; Merton, 1968; Parsons, 1951)—yet *achieved* status characteristics, those determined through individual accomplishments (Phillips, Rothbard, & Dumas, 2009), remain the usual focus of theory considering status changes. Another critical finding of Neeley's (2013) study was that achieving English fluency did not buffer nonnative English speakers from feeling that their standing in the organization was diminished, which further highlights the power of organizational action to shift perceptions of status, as the mandate clearly caused French employees' self-perceived diminution in their status.

Earned versus Unearned Status Gain

When researchers study changes in status—specifically, status gains—they usually focus on the individual's active role in seeking to improve their relative position through performance, social connections, or contributions to collective goals (Bendersky & Shah, 2012, 2013; Flynn, Reagans, Amanatullah, & Ames, 2006; Willer, 2009). For example, Bendersky and Shah (2013) showed that, although extroverted team members were initially conferred higher status in groups, this initial status ranking changed over time as team members with neurotic personalities contributed more to the group's success. In contrast to our conceptualization of unearned status gain, Bendersky and Shah's (2013) study postulated that changes in individual status tend to arise as a result of individual effort and behavior: people earn status gains. In the next section, we discuss existing research explaining how people earn status gains, and how they experience and respond to these gains. We then consider why unearned status gains may differ from earned status gains.

Earned status gains. Scholars in various disciplines have documented the ways people earn status. Organizational members can increase their status by selectively disclosing status-relevant information (Phillips et al., 2009), helping others or displaying generosity (Flynn, 2003; Flynn et al., 2006; Willer, 2009), affiliating with higher-status others (De Kelaita, Munroe, & Tootell, 2001; Lin, 1999; Podolny & Phillips, 1996; Washington & Zajac, 2005), developing expertise (Bunderson, 2003), or conforming to group norms (Ridgeway, 1978, 1981). Extending beyond organizational contexts, people earn status by obtaining additional formal education, advancing in their careers, and earning more money (Del Mar Salinas-Jiménez, Artés, & Salinas-Jiménez, 2013; Jacques & Chason, 1977; Zimmerman & Reyna, 2013).

These findings suggest that the customary manner to gain status is through individual effort and pursuit.

Generally, people respond positively to status gains they believe they have earned. Lovaglia and Houser (1996) and Lucas and Lovaglia (1998) found that, when study participants attained high status in a group ostensibly based on test scores, they reported more positive emotions (e.g., happy, satisfied) during group interaction than other participants. Huberman, Loch, and Öncüler (2004) found that study participants who earned status and recognition for their performance on a payoff/resource allocation game viewed their status gain positively and allocated more resources in the game to retaining their status. Willer (2009) found that, when study participants ostensibly earned high status in their work groups, they were more willing to contribute to the group and held more positive views of the group. Del Mar Salinas-Jiménez et al. (2013) showed that educational attainment and occupational status (earned) were associated with higher life satisfaction even when controlling for other factors. Similarly, Jacques and Chason (1977) found that status attained through education and occupational prestige was associated with higher self-esteem. In short, research shows that people respond positively to status attainment that they have earned.

Unearned status gains. Unearned status gains conflict with widely shared cultural beliefs in status attainment through merit. Typically, status positions are deemed legitimate if the process for determining status is considered fair or appropriate (Chen & Tyler, 2001; George, Chattopadhyay, & Zhang, 2012; Tyler, 2006). According to meritocratic principles, which are dominant in most Western organizations (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Rosette & Thompson, 2005), earning status through achievement and effort is the legitimate way to ascend a status hierarchy (Alon & Tienda, 2007; Krauze & Slomczynski, 1985). Consistent with this view, Anderson, Willer, and colleagues (2012) found that study participants expressed preferences for lower-ranked positions in work groups when they felt that their contributions to the group were less valuable than those of others. In a nutshell, although people generally value and seek status (De Kelaita et al., 2001; Huberman et al., 2004; Loch, Huberman, & Stout, 2000), they may be uncomfortable attaining status when they do not feel they have earned it.

Moreover, equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965) suggests that an unearned status gain may be perceived as illegitimate or problematic. A central tenet of equity theory is that individuals seek parity in

the ratio of their inputs (e.g., effort) to outcomes (e.g., rewards), both in considering their own input-to-outcome ratio and in comparing their outcomes to those of others. Further, according to equity theory, people experience tension when this ratio is inequitable—whether individuals believe they are over-rewarded or under-rewarded—and seek to restore equity, often by adjusting their inputs (Adams, 1965; Adams & Jacobsen, 1964; Miles, Hatfield, & Huseman, 1994). Some scholars have argued that those who receive rewards exceeding their perceived input may also experience guilt (Gilliland, 1993; Mowday, 1996). McDowell, Boyd, and Bowler (2007) argued that those who are over-rewarded will experience the “impostor syndrome,” or the belief that they are incompetent and unsuitable for their position, and will alter their behaviors to rectify the imbalance.

Yet, the predicted effects of over-reward based on equity theory have received little empirical support. Rather than discomfort, a number of studies have documented positive outcomes of over-reward (Austin & Walster, 1974; Davidson, 1984; Evan & Simmons, 1969; Hassebrauck, 1986; Pritchard, Dunnette, & Jorgenson, 1972). Further, even equity theorists acknowledge that the threshold for inequity is likely higher when the individual experiences over-reward (Adams, 1965; Miner, 2002). Taken together, the literature does not provide a clear answer to the question of how people will respond to receiving rewards or gains that they perceive as unearned.

Research Question

To provide theoretical and empirical clarity into the experience of unearned status gain, this study grapples with the contradictions inherent in obtaining an increase in status without effort or apart from achievement. Specifically, we address the following question: *How do people experience and respond to unearned status gain?* To develop theory on this uncharted line of inquiry, we turn to our empirical research on native English speakers' responses to unearned status gain resulting from their company's selection of English as a company-wide lingua franca.

The ascent of the English language as a lingua franca or common company language over the past three decades is unprecedented in scope and scale (Crystal, 2007). Nearly 50% of multinationals operate with a lingua franca that links to their strategy of acquiring and servicing customers worldwide, as well as improving communication and coordination among their global offices (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Tenzer, Pudelko, & Harzing, 2014). English mandates

provide a fruitful opportunity to study status processes because they introduce a new basis for assessing competency and worth in the organization (Hinds et al., 2014; Neeley, 2013), sometimes elevating native over nonnative speakers (Bourdieu, 1991).

METHODS

Data Sources

Research setting. GlobalMoves (not the company's real name) was the setting for our study. A multibillion-dollar high-tech organization headquartered in Tokyo, Japan, GlobalMoves designated English as the company's lingua franca a year prior to our study. The company operated an Internet marketplace where retailers, product manufacturers, and other service providers built online storefronts on the company's website. It generated revenues from such retailers in three primary ways: fixed monthly fees, sales of advertising and other consulting services, and a percentage of gross merchandise sales from its online shopping channel. GlobalMoves aspired to replicate its e-commerce financial model internationally.

Approximately a year prior to this study commencing, the CEO of GlobalMoves held a company-wide meeting to announce his decision to make English the company's official language. In that address, the CEO stipulated that, within two years, employees would need to demonstrate sufficient skill with English, as measured by their performance on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC).¹ Those who failed to meet the required TOEIC score would be subject to demotion, which translated into a downgrade in their ranking and associated salaries. If demoted, employees could return to their original ranking and salary once they cleared the required TOEIC threshold. Within the company's Japanese workforce, roughly 10% had adequate English skills at the time the mandate was defined. The vast majority had to develop proficiency in the language. During the same period, native English speakers comprised approximately 5% of GlobalMoves's workforce, and another 5% were bilingual speakers who had native-level mastery of English and their native language.

¹ The TOEIC is designed to assess English-language proficiency for nonnative English speakers working in international contexts. It is widely used in Asia, Europe, and the United States. An estimated 1.5 million people in Japan take the test yearly.

According to the first author's interviews with the CEO, three primary objectives drove the introduction of English as a business language for GlobalMoves. First, growth goals required a global agenda. GlobalMoves had become the dominant player in the Japanese e-commerce domain, with more than 90 million customers, accounting for nearly 85% of the market share. The potential for further growth in Japan was therefore seen as limited, and, instead, the company planned to deploy operations in 27 countries and raise the overseas portion of their revenue to 70% within 10 years. An important market for the global growth strategy was the United States, as a leader in the e-commerce industry with companies such as Amazon, eBay, and Yahoo. Also, GlobalMoves already had several initiatives in place to penetrate the U.S. market—many more than for other global markets. The CEO believed that their aggressive global expansion plans gave him little choice but to ask his workforce to relinquish their reliance on communicating exclusively in their own language.

Second, migrating to a business lingua franca was expected to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration across current and future global operations. The CEO described language as the bottleneck that precluded the organization from leveraging knowledge accrued within the Japanese headquarters and existing subsidiaries more quickly and effectively. English, the CEO believed, would facilitate interactions between the employees in GlobalMoves' Japanese headquarters, and the acquired firms, including U.S.-based firms, and would accelerate the integration of newly acquired country-sites such as Brazil, Canada, France, and Germany.

Finally, the English mandate was expected to increase the organization's capacity to attract, hire, and deploy worldwide talent dramatically. For example, during the period of the study, engineers from India and China who did not speak Japanese were steadily joining the Tokyo office. Non-Japanese managers were also taking on leadership positions as expatriates in the Tokyo office. The prospect of widening the talent portfolio globally was an important part of expanding the employee base at the company.

Similar to stipulations commonly issued in multinational organizations that have designated a corporate lingua franca (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen, & Piekkari, 2006; Harzing & Pudelko, 2013; Hinds et al., 2014; Neeley, 2013), employees at GlobalMoves were required to use English for both oral and written communication. Employees were expected to hold all meetings, compose internal e-mails, generate reports, and engage in internal social

media communication in English, for example. Collaboration with foreign subsidiaries was also expected to occur in English. As a result of these all-encompassing demands and a two-year timeline, the vast majority of Japanese employees actively studied English with the expectation of strengthening their language skills through immersive training, private coaching, or online learning.

Research informants. Data for this study came primarily from semi-structured interviews with 90 native English-speaking American employees across two subsidiaries in the northeast of the United States over a 15-month period. As we will detail later, in order to understand the impact of the language mandate in the organization as a whole, we also drew from a total of 66 interviews with Japanese members of GlobalMoves, including the CEO and five executives.

The leaders of the U.S. subsidiaries sent e-mails to their employees inviting them to participate in a study on their experience of the English language mandate at GlobalMoves. Participants were assured that interviews were voluntary and anonymous. To ensure that participants could discuss their organizational life before and after the language stipulation, we limited our pool of informants to those who had worked at GlobalMoves for at least one year before the CEO set English as the lingua franca. Our criteria restricted our sample to 90 informants, composed of 54 men and 36 women. Twenty-two informants were interviewed twice and four were interviewed a third time in an effort to track changes people were experiencing as a result of the English language mandate.

As is the nature of inductive theory building, we discovered that the experience of unearned status gain due to the English language mandate differed depending on whether our informants interacted with Japanese colleagues. Two groups of native English speakers emerged. The first, composed of 67 employees whose job roles required serving global clients, had regular interactions with their Japanese counterparts. The second, smaller group contained 23 employees (local staff and domestic client consultants) who had limited contact with Japanese coworkers. In turn, we supplemented our primary data with a secondary source of data comprising interviews with the CEO, five executives, eight expatriates located in the United States, and 52 Japanese employees who worked with members of the U.S. subsidiaries (see Table 1 for an overview of interviews). Although the latter 52 Japanese interviewees were not dyadic matches

TABLE 1
Overview of Interviews

Primary Data	Total Number of Interviews
U.S. subsidiary 1	33
U.S. subsidiary 2	57
<i>Total—Primary Data</i>	90 ^a
Supplemental Data	Total Number of Interviews
CEO	1
Japanese executives	5
Japanese expatriates assigned to U.S.	8
Japanese HQ employees who work with U.S. employees	52
<i>Total—Supplemental Data</i>	66
<i>Total—All Data</i>	156

^a 67 U.S. informants had regular interaction with Japanese counterparts, whereas 23 U.S. members had limited interaction.

with our primary informants for this study, they were structurally equivalent to the types of Japanese employees with whom members of the two U.S. subsidiaries worked during the period of data collection. Examining the Japanese collaborators' experience of the English language mandate (described in the Nonnative Speakers' Reaction section below) augmented our understanding of the organizational context.

Finally, we triangulated our interview data with publicly and privately available data. Such data included company-specific internal websites; company artifacts, collected in order to better understand organizational cultural features (Yin, 2014); material provided by informants; and informal observations of the locales that we examined. Data triangulation is a useful corroborating strategy that helped us fully capture the richness and complexities that are inherent in a field study (Patton, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews. Following standard procedures for conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), we organized our interview protocol into two sections. The first covered background questions, including work history at the organization, demographic details, and a description of current job roles. In the second section, we posed questions to discern informants' perspectives on and experiences of the English language mandate. For example, we asked informants to provide in-depth descriptions about their daily tasks and how the language mandate affected (if at all) these tasks. Sample prompts in this section included

“What role has the language mandate played in your daily work?” and “How have you experienced the language change? Is it right for the organization?” We also posed “grand tour” questions (Spradley, 1979), such as “Describe a typical work week.” The latter allowed us to then use “mini tour” questions (Spradley, 1979) to probe for details about specific events and participants' experience of them. This line of inquiry was particularly useful when exploring delicate subjects such as perceived advantages of, and changes associated with, the introduction of their native language as a lingua franca. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, and were conducted in either private offices or conference rooms. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Forming first-order codes and provisional second-order themes. Data analysis began with our coding, in an iterative fashion, the interview transcripts, following recommended practices for qualitative data analysis (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and using NVivo Qualitative Research Software. We started by associating the data with first-order codes that addressed the main topic of interest in this study: native English speakers' narratives of their status gain as a result of the language mandate, and the impact of the related status boost on their work, their relationships with colleagues, and the organization as a whole. During this stage, we moved back and forth between data analysis and the literature to help make sense of the emerging concepts, as well as to refine our coding scheme. Next, we used common themes to link together data fragments from differing but related categories developed in open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This step enabled us to cluster our initial first-order codes into more precise yet provisional second-order themes. For example, statements reflecting a belief that informants now had more to offer the organization, or could now potentially aid in global integrations, led us to see that informants had a “perception of increased professional value,” which was noted in a second-order theme encompassing these related first-order codes. We then cycled back through the data, first-order codes, and second-order themes until we reached theoretical saturation, such that no new categories or concepts emerged.

Integrating first-order codes with second-order themes. In the next stage of analysis, we revisited our data to ensure precision across our provisional

second-order themes. We iteratively discussed the second-order themes over numerous meetings, abandoning or refining provisional themes while creating new themes for categories emerging from our analysis. Following the refinement of existing, or creation of new, second-order themes, we evaluated these constructs to ensure the themes accurately reflected the first-order codes. As an example, first-order coding statements relating to informants' increased levels of communication with nonnative speakers led us to a provisional second-order theme describing a dynamic of "increased contact with people." We later refined this concept as "increased access to people," defined by first-order coding statements expressing new opportunities to communicate without intermediaries, as well as collaborations on joint projects with coworkers. This analysis allowed us to add precision to this category, while simultaneously allowing us to better analyze and refine other emerging concepts, such as "increased access to information."

Aggregating the theoretical dimensions. After finalizing these second-order themes, we investigated their underlying theoretical dimensions in order to understand how various themes interacted with and related to one another within a larger context. For example, some themes were indicative of informants' own experiences of unearned status gain (e.g., "sense of belonging"), while others resembled informants' response to their unearned status gain (e.g., "status rationalization"). We evaluated multiple conceptual models to understand how second-order themes fit together, incorporating existing organizational theory whenever possible. We scrutinized potential models against the data to determine how well our emergent theoretical understanding explained our research setting (e.g., Becker, 1970; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001). Figure 1 outlines our methodology, showing the first-order codes, second-order themes, and aggregate theoretical dimensions that best explain informants' experience of, and response to, their unearned status gain.

In the sections that follow, we lay out the findings that emerged inductively in four steps. First, we describe native English speakers' experience of unearned status gain. Second, we detail the distinctions that emerged from the data on how people responded to their unearned status gain contingent on whether informants interacted with Japanese collaborators struggling with the language mandate. In particular, we describe how perceptions of their Japanese colleagues changed little for informants whose interactions with Japanese employees were limited. In

contrast, informants who regularly interacted with Japanese employees responded in three distinct ways: through perspective taking, status rationalization, and status stability appraisal. Third, we describe Japanese nonnative speakers' experience of the language mandate, to provide insight into the context in which U.S.-based employees experienced, and responded to, unearned status gain. Finally, we propose a general model of unearned status gain, which we lay out with corresponding testable propositions.

EXPERIENCE OF UNEARNED STATUS GAIN

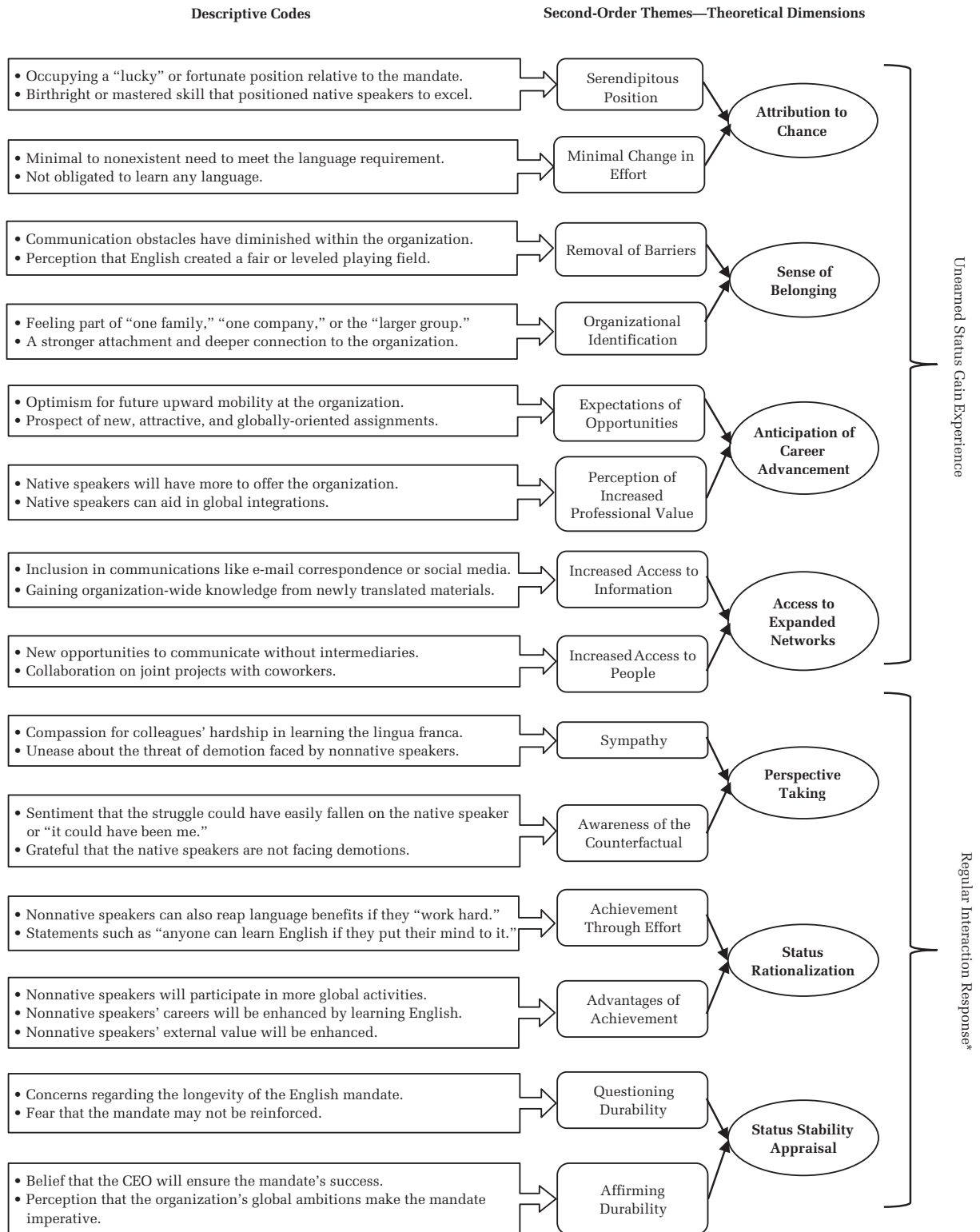
The language mandate at GlobalMoves rendered English fluency a newly designated source of value. Narratives of the native English informants reflected their perceptions of holding higher worth in the organization after the mandate relative to their standing before the mandate. It is important to note that, despite this status gain, the U.S.-based native English speakers continued to be lower-status members of the organization. This is due to the fact that they were in the minority, and were also employees of a subsidiary, whereas Japanese employees, who were primarily located in the headquarters, held relatively higher status positions than the U.S.-based informants. Thus, while the language mandate may have rendered English fluency a new high-status characteristic in the organization, boosting the native English speakers' overall status, their status still did not surpass that of their Japanese colleagues.

Four emergent dimensions capture native English-speaking informants' experiences of unearned status gain due to the language mandate: (1) attribution to chance, (2) sense of belonging, (3) anticipation of career advancement, and (4) access to expanded networks (see Table 2 for representative quotes). Below, we define and elaborate on each of the emergent theoretical dimensions that characterize the experience of unearned status gain.

Attribution to Chance

GlobalMoves's strategy to implement English as the company lingua franca occasioned status elevation for native English-speaking informants. These employees' narratives revealed what we label "attribution to chance"—the recognition of a favorable boost in standing within the organization, which is credited to luck. Attribution to chance was manifested in the expression of two distinct beliefs: that their newfound position was "serendipitous" and that their gain required "minimal change in

FIGURE 1
Overview of Data Structure



*Native speakers who have regular interaction with nonnative speakers exhibit these three categories of responses.

TABLE 2
Representative Supporting Data for Each Second-Order Theme

Second-Order Themes	First-Order Codes
Serendipitous Position	“We’re lucky that English is the language of business and that the CEO has recognized that . . . We have that benefit and leg up because it’s our language.”
Minimal Change in Effort	“How lucky for me to be a native English speaker. How incredible that we’re able to make stronger connections—even if it’s as simple as ‘How’s it going?’ That’s irreplaceable.” “ Oh, thank goodness I don’t have to do anything extra here. I already know the language. They’re not going to force me to do anything.” “The fact that they’re learning English makes things a lot easier for me because I don’t have to learn Japanese to be able to communicate.”
Removal of Barriers	“English breaks down the barrier and makes us less distant. I think we’re closer and more accessible to [the parent company]. Because we speak the same language now, we’re on the same page and there’s not that barrier anymore. I think it facilitates more cooperation and collaboration.” “ They’re helping to remove the language barrier. If we weren’t on the same page when we were working together on projects and trying to get things done, the projects wouldn’t be as successful. The mandate puts us on the same page . . . we are able to come together.”
Organizational Identification	“Getting messages and communications from headquarters in English definitely makes you feel like you’re part of the group rather than just your own business unit . . . it helps you better understand and feel more connected. There is a bigger, grander vision here; it’s not just me sitting at my desk working for this [subsidiary] company.” “ I definitely feel like we’re much closer to the parent company now than when I arrived. [The mandate] made us feel like ‘they’re going to speak our language.’ I think it does make an impact over time, making you feel like an integral part of the company and part of this larger organization.”
Expectations of Opportunities	“There are going to be more opportunities for folks who want to take advantage of them. And, since English is my first language, it’s just a question of wanting to take the next step and letting my management know that’s something I’m interested in!” “ We were always limited by language . . . Without [the mandate], those kinds of opportunities would be very limited for people who didn’t speak Japanese. I hope now there’ll be more opportunities for myself and for other people to be sent to Japan.”
Perception of Increased Professional Value	“In the past, we functioned just as our subsidiary and in some cases just as the U.S. network. We only worked within our bubble. But, with English, we’re able to work more closely with our counterparts in Japan, and have a better sense for where we fall within that ecosystem and how we can contribute to the overall bottom line.” “ I think English speakers are relied upon more in the company to move things forward and to be in positions where they can influence, and try to understand miscommunications.”
Increased Access to Information	“On a practical level, English made things more transparent. Before the mandate, many documents were in Japanese . . . English removed a lot of the communication inefficiencies. It’s much easier now that English is the standard language—everything that we do or document is in English.” “ The [mandate] allowed us to actually learn things firsthand. . . we’re able to read the CEO’s speeches and see him on video weekly. We’re able to keep a pulse on what’s going on in Tokyo.”
Increased Access to People	“The best experience where I saw [the mandate’s] potential was at headquarters. I was sitting in a room with people from Brazil, Germany, France, Taiwan, and China—and everybody was speaking the same language. You can actually share ideas and figure out what they’re doing. They’re learning things from us, we’re learning things from them, and it’s the realization that we’re sharing these ideas across the entire globe. Now I communicate regularly with my counterpart in Japan.” “ The [mandate] has created the opportunity for more direct collaboration with headquarters employees who are typically native Japanese speakers. It certainly has created the opportunity to collaborate more directly with an even larger group of employees because they’re working on their English proficiency.”
Sympathy	“We speak the language that we learned to speak from day one. When we present to the Japanese executives or the company as a whole, we’re speaking the language that they are now struggling to learn. So the impact it’s had on me is, ‘Can I help? Can I speak slower? Is there anything I can do to make this easier?’” “ They have to cross so much further. I don’t ever have to conduct myself in Japanese. They are stretching across the Pacific and carrying the ball 99 yards. It must be tremendously frustrating, especially when you’re doing a presentation to conduct it in a foreign language and have your meaning come through.”
Awareness of the Counterfactual	“If all of a sudden I was told, ‘OK, you now have to speak in Japanese,’ I would be so afraid because I know the excruciating amount of work involved.”

TABLE 2
(Continued)

Second-Order Themes	First-Order Codes
Achievement through Effort	<p>“If someone came to the U.S. and said, ‘You have to learn . . . Spanish or whatever else,’ I think a lot of folks would be on their way out.”</p> <p>“What’s nice, I think, from—maybe not self-actualization because that’s probably a bit strong for business—but the employee who ends up learning English and follows through and actually believes in the vision will get to see the fruits of that learning.”</p> <p>“Their struggle—taking classes and potentially going to night classes in order to communicate effectively—I’m sure that’s extra work for them and they’re the ones making this happen. But, I can tell you, I see the benefits.”</p>
Advantages of Achievement	<p>“From an objective perspective, learning English certainly makes them more marketable to the world beyond [GlobalMoves]. So, personally for them, I feel like it’s a neat experience because they’ll have a great career because of it whether they stay at the company or not.”</p> <p>“I don’t see how it couldn’t benefit everyone—even a [Japanese] engineer who might never be exposed to an American company otherwise.”</p>
Questioning Durability	<p>“It’s like, ‘Is there something that I might be lacking and unable to acquire in the future that would then make me not acceptable to [GlobalMoves]?’”</p> <p>“And I guess people here wonder what that means . . . about the [GlobalMoves]’ mindset, right? Because, right now, it’s English, right? But what if they came up with something like, ‘Everybody has to learn how to code?’”</p>
Affirming Durability	<p>“[The CEO] will back up what he said 100 percent. He is a man of his word, and I don’t think he would back down on that. Every resource will be made available to ensure nobody [fails]—they will bring in tutors, have extra classes, and extra time to train and learn. I do not think he will change his mandate.”</p> <p>“We have to go global. We have to replicate our success that we’ve experienced in Japan. We have to replicate that worldwide, and English is the language that will do it.”</p>

effort.” Each belief reflected informants’ subjective experience and appraisal of their fates in the context of the lingua franca.

Serendipitous position. As subsidiary employees who held subordinate status positions vis-à-vis the organization’s headquarters, native English-speaking informants felt that they immediately occupied a more favorable standing (albeit still lower in status) in the organization due to the mandate, solely because they were fluent communicators in the strategically relevant language. They felt “lucky.” As Table 2 illustrates, informants expressed an awareness of their favored and serendipitous position. Representative comments include: “I felt so lucky that I was born and grew up speaking English fluently,” “Being in the United States and having English as my first language puts me in an incredibly lucky position,” “We’re at a benefit here. We speak English. It’s our native language,” “Thank God [the CEO] picked my language,” and “The first thing I thought was that I was speaking the ‘right’ language. I am already really good at this!” In these statements, informants suggested that their increased value was accidental good fortune.

Minimal change in effort. The sentiment of being lucky was not confined to a positional advantage; it also extended to workload expectations and

work-related benefits. Native English-speaking employees easily identified their exemption from fulfilling the corporate-wide mandate. As one informant put it bluntly, “We’ve got that box checked.” Not only did informants understand that the new language requirements would not apply to them, but they also saw the advantages they would receive with minimal effort. “It’s great for us here. We don’t have to put in any work and we get all the benefits.” He went on to explain that native speakers’ perspectives were different from those of their Japanese counterparts, who had to undertake a much more arduous path. For the Americans, the language mandate promised to bring positive changes without any cost to them.

In sum, the imposed lingua franca at GlobalMoves activated and imbued favorable and effortless value on a dormant personal attribute (native language) for native English speakers due to a fortunate happenstance. This shift in status contributes to and highlights the importance of recent research that views status as dynamic (Bendersky & Shah, 2012, 2013; Neeley, 2013; Pettit, Yong, & Spataro, 2010). Moreover, our findings show how status characteristics can be activated or deactivated when an organization sets a new course that favors a particular personal or professional characteristic (Bianchi et al., 2012; Spataro,

2012). Native English speakers at GlobalMoves thus had the advantage of an elevating birthright: they did not have to earn their new status position.

Sense of Belonging

Research has long established that lower-status members of an organization often feel marginalized (Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012). Indeed, many U.S.-based native speakers in our study noted that they initially felt left out of the company's central activities because they did not speak Japanese. In contrast, after the mandate, they felt a relative rise in their status, which fortified their "sense of belonging"—defined as individuals' feelings of membership and acceptance (Good, Rattan, & Dweck, 2012). Specifically, employees' sense of belonging at GlobalMoves came from an acute awareness of the "removal of barriers" and a related increase in their "organizational identification."

Removal of barriers. When GlobalMoves migrated to English, U.S.-based employees felt the linguistic wall that had previously held them at a distance was eliminated. For many, the choice of English signaled the opening of an organization that had previously felt closed—creating, as one informant noted, "a more open atmosphere." Practically, English bridged the communication gap that had formerly made individuals feel segregated. Consider a manager's description of his new ability to draw from materials that used to be generated only in Japanese:

From my team's perspective, I think it's welcoming. The English [change] feels like it tears down a wall and makes it easier for us to be a part of the parent company. If we have something we wanted to leverage from [HQ], we sometimes asked them for PowerPoint pages and they'd send the PowerPoint pages over in Japanese, and we're like, "Okay, we can use the graphic!" But now, they're in English and it really is welcoming.

A second illustration of this removal of barriers comes from one of the leaders of the U.S. operation, who observed stronger alignment between the U.S. and Japanese work groups because language was a priority at the company. He described how, after the mandate, individuals in the U.S. office had the opportunity to fully process and adapt to the overall company's perspective:

Changing the language of business to English has given us a much closer tie to the parent company. . . . It's allowed [the company leaders] to espouse their

mission and their philosophy to us and has allowed us to really interpret it in a way that makes sense to us because the translations weren't exactly spot on. Now that they're more sensitive to English, it's coming across more effectively.

Having a better grasp of the role that the U.S. subsidiaries played within the broader organizational context augmented the individuals' sense of membership. It also provided insight as to how native English speakers could better advance the goals of the company as a whole.

Speaking English directly, rather than in translation, gave native English speakers more nuanced knowledge of the true needs and functions of the organization, and a greater understanding of how they fitted into the workings of the firm overall. Such was the experience of an informant who had worked at GlobalMoves for three years and had previously relied on translators to communicate with colleagues in Japan:

Whether it's client facing or whether it's internally, the English language helped bring us all together so that it's not a bunch of pieces moving independent of each other. We understand better how we can fit or what our role is in achieving that goal. Having the common language really helped us understand—in a way that translation wouldn't—where we fit into the larger picture.

Taken together, then, the lingua franca afforded communication, tacit and explicit, in a way that went further than translators could allow. Translators, commonly used at GlobalMoves before the lingua franca designation, can significantly aid in the exchange of information between two parties who do not have sufficient fluency to communicate directly. They are, however, limited when it comes to discerning and conveying organizational, profession-specific, or technical content accurately (Neeley, 2014). Precisely because translators became irrelevant at GlobalMoves, U.S.-based native speakers experienced a more expansive and direct connection with colleagues through the lingua franca.

Organizational identification. The sense of "oneness" with GlobalMoves, also known as "organizational identification" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994), was the second way in which native English-speaking employees felt a heightened sense of belonging due to the mandate. Informants used terms like "being part of the family" and "one company" to evidence organizational identification. One informant, for example, illustrated how opening communication channels

solidified her feeling that she was an important part of the organization despite her non-Japanese background:

I felt like I was part of the team. And I think that's really important. We are one company. We're one big organization. We're doing the same thing. We're the same company. We're the same people. We look different, we might sound different, but we're doing the same thing at the end of the day.

In addition to feeling like part of "one" group, the quote above also demonstrates a clearer connection to a common mission. This perspective was echoed by many informants who considered the language mandate as the glue that connected employees into a united whole with a common fate. As one informant explained, "It's like we're in this together."

Beyond the increased feeling of connectedness brought about by an accessible language, many informants experienced growing membership in the company's internal social media system, which also began to take place entirely in English. Unsurprisingly, being included in the broader organizational discourse through the window of social media occasioned lingua franca native speakers equal opportunity to engage and connect with others. This privilege had been previously unavailable. The English stipulation made one informant "feel more like a part of the company." He elaborated as follows:

They [Japanese employees] would mostly communicate in Japanese before the initiative. But now we use [the internal social media system], and people do most of their posting in English. . . . I get a feel for what everyone's doing over there, the types of projects, and how they're doing. So I definitely feel more connected to the parent company because there is communication in a language that I understand. . . . I can actually read what people are posting, respond, and make online connections.

On the whole, removal of barriers and organizational identification captured the heightened sense of belonging experienced by native English speakers. Belonging not only enhances positive feelings, but it also produces feelings of inclusion, which is associated with higher status and worth (Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011; Wegener, 1992). Moreover, heightened identification with a collective entity (e.g., a group or organization), and the associated salience of the superordinate group identity, can generate a sense of higher standing in the group.

Anticipation of Career Advancement

Native speakers of the lingua franca also expressed "anticipation of career advancement," defined as optimism about future professional growth prospects at their organization. Such anticipation was evident through two related beliefs: (1) the expectation of a rise in opportunities for professional growth and (2) the perception that English speakers would offer greater value to the organization.

Expectation of increased opportunities. Informants expected the language mandate to become an open-ended and enduring source of opportunities for career growth. They believed that impending opportunities would allow them to reap the rewards of their heightened status, as well as to better serve the needs of the greater organization because of their mastery in English. In particular, many individuals expressed optimism in taking on new, attractive, and globally oriented assignments across GlobalMoves.

In the era before the lingua franca, many viewed their inability to speak the company's main language, Japanese, as a constant disadvantage. The company's adoption of English lifted language as a limiting factor, as one employee expressed:

Without [the mandate], being able to evolve inside [GlobalMoves] wouldn't be possible. I'd probably look for outside opportunities to grow my career. Now, I can move around and work with other groups, getting positions that are open to me. So, for me, it's great. Switching to English definitely opened up opportunities for my career path.

Thus, native English speakers could now realistically picture themselves taking advantage of these career choices. As one informant noted in relation to the mandate, "It could expand opportunities. If this wasn't an English[-speaking] company, it would be hard to visualize myself working in other countries." Another informant envisioned the limitless future that awaited her: "I see lots of opportunities for advancement, movements between the different offices, opportunities to go head up offices in different departments. . . . Just growth, growth, growth!"

Moreover, native English speakers' career expectations rose when they witnessed members of their subsidiary taking on company-wide leadership positions. A director of an engineering group expressed his enthusiasm about a colleague's new assignment as follows: "You will actually have an American who is going over there [to Japan] to take over! That's totally amazing." Another employee described the advancement of a U.S. colleague similarly: "His role

has expanded. He's not just doing work for the [U.S. subsidiary], but for the entire company as a whole, even other locations overseas." The advances of informants' peers were a palpable marker of the potential for personal career movement. These informants associated such opportunities with what they perceived to be their higher capacity to contribute to the firm.

Perception of increased value to the organization.

Overall, informants believed that they had more to offer the organization in light of the language mandate. In some cases, they anticipated having a more direct role in the continued expansion and integration of the global organization, as one informant observed: "You can actually contribute to the growth of the company and where we need to go. On both sides, we are able to integrate into organizations." As the quote illustrates, the mandate enabled some native speakers, in tandem with heightened opportunities, to conceive of themselves as having the potential to contribute more value to the organization. A marketing executive's response was emblematic of this belief: "I think you become more valuable. Imagine the next time [GlobalMoves] enters another country where English is not the first language but they speak English." In this regard, fluency in the lingua franca was perceived as a fundamental qualifier for informants' contributions as the company entered new regions. The following quote describes this dynamic, wherein the ability to add value melds with the acceptance of greater professional opportunities:

I anticipate that there will be more growth ... [and] lots of opportunities for people to do interesting non-U.S. work integrating new businesses into the company. ... And I think there will be people here [in the United States] that will be excited about that opportunity.

In sum, following the language mandate, informants perceived that they possessed an enhanced ability to contribute to their greater organization. Whether their contribution involved serving in existing subsidiary locations or in aiding the integration of future acquisitions, a majority of informants anticipated that this increased professional value would advance their careers.

Access to Expanded Networks

The networks of U.S.-based employees expanded with increased access to (1) information (Burt, 2004) and (2) people (Krackhardt, 1987; Krackhardt & Kilduff, 1999; Labianca, Brass, & Gray, 1998; Mehra,

Kilduff, & Brass, 2001) across the organization, especially for those who had responsibilities outside of the U.S. marketplace.

Increased access to information. Following the implementation of the English lingua franca, information that was previously hidden from native speakers (i.e., because it was only available in Japanese) became newly visible. The influx of information came in one of two forms: as e-mail correspondence, via the organization's internal social media system, and through access to newly translated organizational documents. Many native speakers benefited from the enhanced exposure to organizational information, whether actively exchanging information with co-workers directly or passively acquiring information through indirect media.

E-mail and social media communication were at the forefront of the proliferation of information for native English speakers in ways that were productive for them. For example, a manager of a technology group was better able to align his team to the organization's operational goals because he was copied in on executive management e-mails—newly written in English—that kept him abreast of important developments. Another informant described how reading e-mails in English facilitated the transfer of knowledge and best practices:

Well, we share information via e-mails, and the lines of communication have opened up incredibly by sharing the e-mails in English. I can skim through the high points of e-mail updates from Tokyo and it's amazing. Eight times out of ten, I have some sort of response to the update e-mail. They're not even sending it directly to me ... but I'm able to say, "I noticed you did this for your client. We want to do something similar. Tell me more about what you did." There's a lot we can learn and share ... [that] I really didn't even know about before.

Similarly, the company's social media platform created a virtual environment for information exchange in English across countries, as one informant described:

You could write notes about different things that are going on in different offices. ... And it's all in English. Someone can say, "Oh, I have a question about this." If you're nominating an employee of the month, you're doing it [through social media]. If you want to know information about intramural sports, you're finding out about it [through social media]. ... So, the users might be welcoming somebody or asking a question about an individual project, and other people can chime in and post.

For others, knowledge previously unknown to them emerged through newly translated materials. For example, an American account manager joined forces with a counterpart in another market after learning that a potential customer was already in the system through English-language sales forecast reports. Another manager who focused on corporate strategy attested to the increased transparency of information: "If PowerPoints are done in English, then it helps me see the process and data that other departments or [headquarters] are working with." English speakers described the ability to reach across the organization to access or share new information, while simultaneously gaining insight into available information formerly barred to them. Those gains significantly expanded their access to information networks at GlobalMoves.

Increased access to people. Without a shared language, native English speakers were stunted not only in their ability to access information, but also in their ability to access people. The English-language strategy helped expand their networks in two ways: it allowed them to communicate directly with coworkers with limited assistance from intermediaries, and it facilitated collaboration on joint projects with coworkers.

The English language mandate opened up nodes of interaction that had previously been limited to circumstances when a translator was on hand. Prior to the mandate, intermediaries in the form of translators were indispensable to communication between the United States and Japan, as one informant described:

Normally, one or two people spoke English to speak to us. But that leaves out a lot of people in that company, because there's a big percentage who were never able to communicate with us. I don't think it was that we were never getting the information, but we could only get the information from a select number of resources.

Post-lingua franca, however, this type of access to people began to open. Even at the highest levels, many U.S. managers noted how the English language enabled them, for the first time, to have a direct link to Japanese executives. One manager noted:

I am actually really happy I get a chance to have direct communication with some of the executives. That's an opportunity that's only possible when English is a priority. Otherwise, the executives always expect to be briefed by someone in Japanese. English speakers could never have direct interaction with senior people.

In other cases, individuals' expanded networks emerged by contributing to joint projects with Japanese

colleagues. Within a year of the English implementation, native English-speaking informants who interacted with Japanese colleagues cited at least one new joint project that they felt had benefited the company as a whole. A U.S.-based human resources employee described collaborating almost daily with her Japanese colleagues on the deployment of a company-wide integrative software database—a global human resources initiative for the company. After the platform went live, she described the six-month project as a collaborative and overall "great experience." She attributed the relative ease and success of the project to GlobalMoves' English language mandate, which allowed the U.S. team to access the Tokyo-based team daily to advance their shared task.

RESPONSE TO UNEARNED STATUS GAIN

The Role of Interactions with Nonnative Speakers

An analysis and comparison of informant attributes such as gender, educational background, and tenure revealed that the only attribute associated with differences in the response to unearned status gain was whether native English speakers had interactions with Japanese coworkers. A subset of native English speakers had limited contact with Japanese members of GlobalMoves because their jobs were domestically focused and called for little communication outside of the United States. Their limited contact with Japanese members primarily took place through participation in the company's social media platform, or when Japanese executives visited their locales. Still, their day-to-day work activities remained unchanged. The remaining native English speakers communicated with Japanese coworkers regularly. The level of contact ranged from several times per week to collaborate on joint cross-border projects, to weekly knowledge and problem-solving meetings among those who held similar functional roles in their respective locales (a common company practice). In brief, informants with limited interactions with Japanese employees evidenced little reaction to their unearned status gain experience because their day-to-day work did not expose them to the impact of the language change on their Japanese colleagues. By contrast, those with regular contact with Japanese employees expressed more nuanced views of their perceived elevated status. Below, we discern the extent of interaction with Japanese employees under the mandate, and then discuss how informants with regular interaction engaged in "perspective taking," "status rationalization," and "status stability appraisal."

Limited interactions with nonnative speakers.

U.S.-based native English speakers who had limited interaction with Japanese counterparts saw little impact in their day-to-day work experiences. As a result, these informants did not seem to consider the larger impact of the mandate. As noted above, informants recognized broadly that GlobalMoves was actively globalizing and that fluency in English was a competence aligned with that vision. Yet, for those whose job roles were domestically driven, their lived experience in the organization had not changed. As one informant explained, “There hasn’t been anything new for me because of the language, but I do feel that’s potentially coming down the road.” Similarly, a sales associate, who was responsible for relationships with domestic partner organizations, explained:

The whole initiative and the whole effort is driving this big opportunity bubble for us where I think that it hasn’t so much directly impacted my day-to-day work right now, but I do feel that I’m on the cusp of being in a place where the expansion is going to be there, and we’re going to be living and breathing, and we’re going to be offering customers a lot more in a lot of different markets. And all in English.

Another informant had a similar experience of the move to English as the lingua franca: “I thought it was a smart move, but it never really impacted my day-to-day work very much.” His colleague in the same unit echoed, “I don’t have a lot of contact with the Japan office. . . . I’ve only gotten one or two clarifying questions about some statistics or a report.” The following informant similarly described that the nature of her job precluded engagement with colleagues in Japan, “I don’t really interface with a lot of [Japanese] folks. It’s mostly just internal here and sort of outward-facing folks. So, you know, being able to communicate with the [Japanese] people hasn’t been a huge impact for me.”

As could readily be seen, U.S.-based informants whose current job roles required limited—and, for some, no—interaction with Japanese nonnative English speakers went about their daily business as usual. Their narratives reflected optimistic and abstract views about the English language mandate and their Japanese colleagues, with little specificity. Compared to their counterparts who regularly communicated with their nonnative-speaking Japanese colleagues, these informants did not engage in the more sophisticated and reflective status considerations associated with more frequent and collaborative interactions.

Regular interactions with nonnative speakers.

Informants who directly observed their colleagues’ struggles with the English language appear to have engaged in greater sense-making about their unearned status gain (see Table 2 for representative quotes). In brief, the communication struggles Japanese workers experienced were salient to the U.S.-based informants who engaged in frequent communication with these colleagues. First, these informants expressed sympathy for their Japanese counterparts’ linguistic struggles. Second, observing these struggles made native English speakers keenly aware of the counterfactual: if the official communication strategy undertaken by the firm did not involve their native tongue, the language struggle could have befallen them.

Expressions of sympathy and awareness of the counterfactual were particularly important because they were related to perspective taking by these unearned status gain informants. Moreover, these informants exhibited status rationalization—justifying others’ efforts to earn the standing and benefits that focal actors had come to enjoy without additional effort. They also appraised the stability of their status gain by questioning, although ultimately affirming, the durability of the language mandate as an enduring benefit.

Perspective Taking

As previously mentioned, GlobalMoves’ language mandate set a challenging task for its Japanese employees, the enormity of which was widely recognized by the organization’s U.S. subsidiaries’ employees. Many informants exhibited “perspective taking”—perceiving the vantage point (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005) of Japanese lingua franca learners—through the expression of “sympathy” and an “awareness of the counterfactual”: that they could have been forced to learn Japanese. Combined, these two aspects of perspective taking showed native speakers’ cognizance of their advantageous position in the language divide.

Sympathy. Informants, particularly those in regular contact with Japanese colleagues, expressed sympathy for those employees who had to acquire a new work language. For example, following a video-conference call, one informant observed: “English is a really hard language to learn. I could just imagine how difficult it might be. . . . I could see that they were struggling.” One executive also expressed concern and wondered if the mandate would affect some Japanese workers more severely

than others: "Some situations are phenomenally unsympathetic. There are people with varying degrees of linguistic ability, and it causes more suffering here and less suffering there." These comments are consistent with the increased feelings of sympathy inherent in perspective taking (Batson et al., 1997), and typify the sympathy that informants expressed for the plight of nonnative speakers having to learn a new language.

Moreover, many informants expressed sympathy about the possibility of demotion that their Japanese coworkers faced if they did not clear their proficiency goals. The effort needed to achieve the required TOEIC scores in two years was enormous for an average learner. One U.S.-based informant, discussing her group's reaction to the threat of demotion faced by Japanese colleagues, noted, "One of the things that we talk about a lot is how harsh it seems in an official capacity." Furthermore, a U.S.-based product manager saw the language stipulation as overly exacting, potentially limiting the career prospects of Japanese employees:

You're alienating your employee base. From what I understand, you can only escalate so high now unless you have a certain English level. You can't be a manager unless you speak English. So you can see how an employee can be frustrated. From the outside, you may think that, "This is silly. You're hurting your own countrymen. You can't do this to them." I can certainly see that side of the coin.

A human resources professional revealed similar views:

The word "demotion" is so shocking to hear in the U.S. . . . The first time [the CEO] said it, we were all kind of like, "Are they really going to demote people?" . . . It's like I don't even know who those people are, but oh, God, if anybody gets demoted, it just feels terrible.

Overall, witnessing the threat of demotion that Japanese employees had to endure evoked feelings of sympathy from native U.S. speakers. Their sympathy reached further heights when, as we describe next, the informants noted how these language demands could have easily fallen on them had the organization chosen an official lingua franca that was not their own.

Awareness of the counterfactual. Recognition that native speakers could have been subject to the same challenges as their Japanese colleagues, or awareness of the counterfactual, was another manifestation of perspective taking. Informants' narratives

reflected such counterfactual thinking, as native speakers were able to imagine facing the struggle to learn a new language themselves. By imagining the alternate possibility of being placed in the position of the Japanese employees, native English speakers better understood their colleagues' perspective and hardship, as well as the advantageous position they themselves occupied as native speakers of the lingua franca. An American marketing executive's response was indicative of that awareness: "Can you imagine if our CEO said, 'We're all going to learn Japanese and we're going to be fluent a year from now?'" Another informant considered: "If the tables were turned and everyone here had to learn Japanese, it would be incredibly stressful. So we can only imagine what it's like for the people in Japan."

Native English speakers also expressed an awareness of the counterfactual in their gratefulness for not having to face the prospect of demotion. A U.S.-based operations manager was relieved that she did not have to worry about the same potential consequences as her Japanese colleagues did: "If I were working in Japan and my English wasn't so great, and all of a sudden I couldn't be promoted unless I knew the language, that would be a pretty big stress." Another informant reflected:

They have a deadline and if they don't pass these [tests], they get demoted. . . . People here who I work with would feel too overwhelmed and be like, "You know what? It's not for me. I love this job and everything, but this is one thing that I can't handle."

In sum, perspective taking for native English speakers took the forms of sympathy and awareness of the counterfactual. Importantly, perspective taking allowed informants to imagine the position of their Japanese counterparts, and highlighted their linguistic advantage in the organization.

Status Rationalization

Although sympathetic, native English speakers also asserted that, through hard work, others might benefit from learning a new language. Such assertions appeared to be linked to discomfort with the knowledge that they, themselves, had done nothing to merit their status gain, thus justifying the linguistic status order that native English speakers reaped. We label this second response "status rationalization"—native English speakers' insistence that their Japanese colleagues would derive benefits from the hard work of learning English. In particular, status rationalization was manifested

in two interrelated ways: (1) emphasizing that achievement is possible for Japanese employees through effort and (2) that such achievement will yield many advantages.

Achievement through effort, advantages of achievement. Native English speakers argued that Japanese employees should learn English as a way to bolster their career prospects. These responses centered on a narrative of achievement through effort, defined by informants' claims that nonnative speakers could also reap benefits offered by the language mandate if they worked hard enough. Consider, for example, the following statement: "I think anybody can [learn English] if they put their mind to it." Similarly, an American executive discussed the intense work that the Japanese faced in learning a new language, but maintained that the benefits outweighed the associated costs: "English is extremely important for them and they're thankful for it. Although it isn't necessarily easy, it's going to help them in the long run. . . . English is a very valuable tool."

Another informant expressed her admiration of Japanese employees for their demonstrated hard work and commitment while emphasizing her belief that learning English is a skill that could open doors in the future: "English is going to be a skill that they're going to be grateful for the rest of their lives, but also really help their careers, no matter where they go." Moreover, informants expressed their belief that nonnative speakers who learned English would be able to participate in more global activities, while their overall careers would also be enhanced and their marketability for roles outside of the company would increase. In a sense, informants believed that the Japanese employees of the organization would also experience the career advancements that they, as native speakers, anticipated. For example, one native English speaker stated:

[English] is something that they're going to be able to add to their résumé. By being able to speak English fluently, it opens up your job opportunities a lot more—possibly going overseas and working in other countries. So [the CEO] is not actually looking out only for the best interests of his company, but he's also looking out for the best interests of his employees by making them really well-rounded.

Ultimately, regular interaction with Japanese counterparts who were visibly working hard to learn English (i.e., the opposite of native English speakers' experience) was a constant reminder for native English speakers that their status gain was unearned in the

context of the language change. This heightened awareness crystalized an understanding that the language mandate doled out status unequally across the organization. Importantly, such heightened awareness led to the need to rationalize extant gains.

Status Stability Appraisal

Data analysis revealed a third response to unearned status gain that focused on the durability of the mandate itself. Whereas informants lauded GlobalMoves's introduction of English as the official business language, they also engaged in what we term "status stability appraisal." At GlobalMoves, since the status gain was unearned, native English-speaking informants initially felt uncertain about the stability of their gains. Status stability appraisal manifested in two interrelated processes that informants engaged in. They first questioned the durability of the mandate, drawing on organizational rationales to maintain the language mandate; subsequently, they affirmed the stability of the mandate as a source of enduring status.

Questioning durability, affirming durability. Native English speakers conveyed concerns about whether the language mandate might provide only a temporary source of advantage for them. Simultaneously, these same informants would articulate a belief in the durability of the language change in light of the organization's future growth potential. Repeatedly, they exhibited the pattern of (a) expressing fear, then (b) talking themselves out of it with affirmation. Informants made these assessments during the course of the same interview, highlighting both the uncertainty that people experienced and their attempts to assuage those concerns. For example, one informant observed how quickly the English mandate took on importance at the organization, as well as the drastic changes that followed. While happy to reap the benefits of this new change, he saw it as a sign of how quickly the tables could be turned if the organization chose to focus on a new initiative:

Maybe the hype about [the mandate] will die down a little. Maybe the company's main goal will change and they don't want to concentrate on English as much. Maybe they'll come up with another concept. Maybe they'll want to focus on technology. . . . I just have a feeling it may not stay.

Later on in the same conversation, however, the same informant affirmed that the language mandate

was enduring: "It will definitely remain a policy. . . . I'm sure it will continue."

A second illustration of questioning and then affirming the durability of the mandate came from an informant who initially wondered whether English is as universal in global business as company officials led him to believe. He speculated whether employees would be expected to learn a second or third language in order to remain competitive in the technology industry:

If you want to buy businesses around the world or build businesses around the world, I think speaking additional languages is going to become quite key also. . . . It's shortsighted to think that English will be the only language people need to speak in the future.

But, later, this informant vehemently maintained that English is the universal language of business that helps global companies to stay competitive in the international marketplace:

Everything has to be in English. . . . I know right now English is key [in order] to have a common thread across the organization. . . . Every global business has to speak English.

The above examples demonstrate how the experience of unearned status gain prompted feelings of uncertainty about the durability of the status position. In fact, it seemed to render more salient the possibility that subsequent organizational changes could similarly result in status loss. In particular, the experience of a status change highlighted the dynamic nature of status in organizations. It illuminated concerns regarding the nature of those changes. Further, we see the power of the organization to select and elevate a particular status characteristic and the impact of that choice on members' perceptions of their status (Bianchi et al., 2012; Ocasio, 2011; Ocasio & Kim, 1999).

NONNATIVE SPEAKERS' REACTION TO THE LANGUAGE MANDATE

In the next section, we briefly present data from the study's Japanese informants who regularly engaged with U.S. subsidiary members as part of their regular work. These additional data provide a more complete picture of the organizational context during the period of the language shift, and, in particular, help to situate further the responses of the native English speakers who worked regularly with Japanese non-native native speakers.

Interestingly, the vast majority of Japanese informants felt that the lingua franca strategy was

necessary for the future of the organization,² despite the significant demand it placed on them. Their narratives suggest that they were convinced that English was crucial for GlobalMoves' future trajectory in a number of ways. First, its use was perceived to be important in achieving the organization's expressed vision of becoming "the number one Internet services company in the world." As an example, one informant noted:

English is absolutely essential to a corporation that aims to be number one in the world for an extended period and that hopes to deal with the speed at which Internet business is evolving. As a company employee committed to its corporate principles and culture, I am definitely supportive.

This informant expressed general support for the language initiative. Others also argued that the lingua franca would be necessary for them to take part in the organization's positional aspiration. One informant noted, "Given that [GlobalMoves] aims to be the number one Internet service company in the world, English is an indispensable tool for me to broaden my field at [GlobalMoves]."

Second, and relatedly, informants linked the language change as a vital enabler to the organization's pursuit of a global agenda. A manager in the technology group, for example, explained that he expected English to be the conduit by which the firm would be globalized. In his words, "English will turn our company into a global organization." Another informant presented a similar perspective: "Looking at the future, there is a clear need for globalization, and we will not have a bright future if we cannot even speak English." Moreover, informants viewed the lingua franca initiative as an important source of competitive advantage because people would have the capacity to engage in better and faster cross-border communication. An executive characterized the English language strategy as an inevitable decision for stronger cross-border communication despite his cognizance of the turnover risk for some employees:

² While the strategy was observed to have been embraced almost universally by the study's Japanese informants, there was variation recorded in their perceptions of whether the language change should have been deployed simultaneously versus employing a more sequential approach throughout the organization. Some also questioned whether it would have been best if the lingua franca were deployed only in areas that had a global focus.

English is “inevitable,” not just good for the company. As [GlobalMoves] globalizes, we need to communicate with our overseas subsidiaries more often. I understand that there is a risk for us to lose people who cannot keep up with [the mandate]. Considering the balance of the risk and necessity, the necessity wins. We have to do this.

Another informant echoed the notion that more effective cross-border interactions would enhance the organization’s overall performance: “English will help communication among our various entities globally be much smoother, much faster, and in real time. It will help increase the competitiveness of the company.” In addition, the English language use could make the organization more competitive by leveling the playing field in the broader marketplace, as acknowledged by another informant, “We can do whatever we want if we have good people; we have excellent services, but, if we want to compete, we have to get to the level where our competition is.” Taken together, Japanese nonnative speakers’ dominant view was that the English strategy was a necessary condition for GlobalMoves to operate effectively and compete for the top position in the global Internet industry.

Yet sentiments about the need for an English lingua franca were fraught with concerns about its potential adverse effects on people’s careers. Such concerns are common for nonnative speakers of a lingua franca who worry that their limited fluency in the selected language could overshadow their task competence (Neeley, 2013). Similarly, informants in the present study worried that they would be appraised for their verbal and written agility rather than their job performance. An informant who had been with the organization for seven years before the lingua franca was introduced explained his concern as follows:

I may be really good in my job but my poor English skills may affect me. It is harsh to evaluate and appraise people on their English ability as a measuring stick and this is what I am facing now.

Another informant said that he constantly worried about his fluency trumping all other elements of his work performance: “I am worried that English skill is going to be the main factor to measure my ability.” A further participant soberly explained her experience thus:

Being competent at work is different from speaking good English. Here, unless you speak English, you cannot be promoted. It is decided. When I think about

my career, I know the only option I have is to study English hard.

The above quote captures the reality for Japanese employees who were subject to demotions if they did not meet the English language-proficiency assessment (TOEIC) threshold stipulated by the organization. As one informant explained:

Even though work performance may be good, if my TOEIC score does not reach the target, promotions will be difficult and my salary may not rise. . . . I don’t agree with this. It will be hard for me to stay motivated.

In sum, nonnative English-speaking Japanese informants worried about being misjudged professionally because of their limited English facility. Further, informants feared the possible consequence of demotion that loomed large should they fail to meet the language requirement demands.

In addition to language acquisition and career concerns, informants reported a loss in productivity because of the sheer increase in their work as they attempted to operate effectively in English. Depictions ranged from simply stating, “My productivity has greatly declined,” to descriptions of more laborious work realities. A team leader whose responsibilities consisted of codifying knowledge that was often disseminated widely described a dramatic spike in the time it took him to generate documents. For example, a documentation task that used to take him 30 minutes was taking him up to 4 hours to complete in English. Additionally, he had to complete more steps to verify that the document was ready for sharing:

We create the materials in Japanese first and then translate them into English. Simply speaking, we have twice as much work as we used to. In addition, if some of these materials are important, we have to ask someone in our team who can speak English or native speakers to check them. It just takes much longer to prepare materials.

Ironically, one of the main impetuses for imposing a lingua franca mandate—namely, gaining efficiencies from standardizing communication—departed from the realities on the ground. Our analysis showed that productivity had, in fact, declined as Japanese employees struggled to generate work in English.

Finally, Japanese informants who interacted with U.S.-based coworkers as part of their jobs felt that communication during meetings post-mandate was impoverished because they struggled to convey

their thoughts and ideas in English. Many informants described their encounters with U.S.-based counterparts as anxiety provoking and inhibiting. One informant shared, “I feel a lot of stress when I am trying to communicate something and find that others just don’t understand me.” Another informant similarly described his anxiety as follows:

When speaking in English, I cannot fully convey what I think, unlike when I speak in Japanese. This is so stressful. I was in a meeting recently and I found that, when we got into our work and became serious, I was very anxious about not communicating the critical information. I didn’t know if people understood me.

Finding the right words to articulate their thoughts in English was often challenging, and a number of informants reported contributing less to conversations. They attempted to convey what they deemed to be the bare minimum (“fewer words”) compared to the level of unconstrained communication that they would offer in their native languages. These findings are not surprising, given that nonnative speakers often report a stark decline in the breadth and depth of their contributions when adopting a *lingua franca* (Neeley, 2013). Understanding the Japanese response to the *lingua franca* is insightful, as it both informs and serves as a context for the native-speaking informants’ responses to their unearned status gain. Overall, the narratives of the Japanese informants corroborated the native English speakers’ observations regarding the hardship experienced as a result of the English language mandate. Moreover, considering the firsthand accounts of the Japanese employees serves to illuminate the discomfort experienced by the native English speakers as they enjoy the benefits of unearned status gain in light of the struggles of their nonnative English-speaking colleagues.

TOWARD A THEORY OF UNEARNED STATUS GAIN

Our investigation of native English-speaking employees’ reactions to their company’s English language mandate yielded a clear set of constructs associated with both the experience of an unearned gain in status and the response to that experience. Moreover, our informants’ narratives reflected patterns suggesting relationships between these constructs that form the basis of an emerging model of unearned status gain. Below, we propose a model that serves to explain our findings, prompts testable hypotheses, and extends existing theories of status gain in organizations.

Outcomes of Organizational Action

The first link we propose is between organizational action and the four features defining the experience of unearned status gain: (1) attribution of the status gain to chance, (2) sense of belonging, (3) anticipation of advancement, and (4) access to expanded networks. All of the native English speakers in our data had these experiences following the language mandate due to their newly elevated status.

Attributions to Chance and Perspective Taking

We next propose a connection between feeling that one’s gains are due to happenstance and reactions to those who did not experience a status gain. Native English-speaking informants clearly felt chance had been on their side when the mandate was chosen. At the same time, their narratives also reflected an ability to take the perspective of many of their counterparts whose jobs now required them to learn English. The sense of having received a good outcome based on luck is connected to counterfactual thinking—thoughts of what might have happened—both in our data and in existing research (Teigen, 1997, 2005). Indeed, seeing others suffer and feeling that “it could have been me” (Wayment, 2004) leads the “lucky” ones to take the perspective of those who experience misfortune. Thus, we propose that attributing an unearned status gain to chance will lead recipients of unearned status to take the perspective of those who did not reap such benefits. Moreover, given that people are better able to take the perspective of those with whom they interact frequently (Parker & Axtell, 2001), we propose that those who have regular contact with non-holders of the elevated status characteristic, compared to those who do not, will engage in greater perspective taking.

Attributions to Chance and Status Rationalization

Informants in our study engaged in status rationalization, asserting that the gains they experienced were earnable through hard work and that Global-Moves’ Japanese employees would reap many benefits of working to learn English. This type of rationalization is consistent with research showing that people are often motivated to rationalize or justify inequities experienced by others (Uhlmann, Brescoll, & Machery, 2010). We therefore propose that attributing status gains to chance will lead recipients to rationalize those gains. As with perspective taking, the effect of chance attributions on status rationalization may have been heightened for native

English speakers by direct observation of their Japanese colleagues struggling under the new mandate. Extending this finding to other contexts, we propose that, compared to those who do not, those who have regular contact with non-holders of the elevated status characteristic will be more likely to engage in status rationalization.

Attributions to Chance and Status Stability Appraisals

Next, our model connects the experience of unearned status gain, specifically the attribution to chance, with responses regarding the newly attained status itself. Classic research on perceptions of luck shows that it is considered to be an externally based and unstable source of success (Weiner et al., 1987). In our analysis, attributing status gains to chance clearly precluded feeling in control of one's own status. Moreover, native English speakers expressed uncertainty over the stability of their newfound status boost; they expressed both concern that the status gain would be temporary while also asserting that it was durable. Our findings, coupled with existing research on attributions (Weiner, 1985; Weiner et al., 1987), suggest that attributing status gains to chance will lead holders of the elevated characteristic to evaluate the stability of their status gains (i.e., status stability appraisals). Further, given that the presence of those who suffered a different fate likely serves to bolster perceptions of chance, we propose that the effects of attributing a status gain to chance on status stability appraisals will be stronger among those who interact with non-holders of the elevated status characteristic compared to those who do not.

The Mediating Role of Attributions to Chance

Comprehensively, as reflected in our predictions above, we posit that, in our data, attributing status gains to chance serves as the central mechanism leading to responses associated with the experience of unearned status gain. Considering how these processes may operate more generally, we posit that attributing a status gain to chance will mediate the effects of organizational action on (a) taking the perspective of non-holders of the elevated characteristic, (b) status rationalization, and (c) status stability appraisal. Moreover, as we explain in the discussion section, below, these responses to unearned status gain differ from those typically associated with *earned* status gain.

Taken together, our propositions represent an interpretation of patterns reflected in our data informed by existing research. They also represent predictions that may be generalized to other organizational contexts and tested therein. Overall, we propose that organizational action, which serves to select and elevate a specific characteristic, leads to the experience of unearned status gain for holders of that characteristic.

DISCUSSION

Our goal in this study was to develop theory about the experiences of organizational members who perceive an increase in their status as a result of organizational action. In doing so, we introduced the concept of unearned status gain. In our study of U.S.-based native English speakers at a global high-tech Japanese company, the “English only” mandate represented a salient change causing native English speakers to perceive themselves as having risen in status. Although native English speakers clearly expressed appreciation of their status gain, a well-established outcome in status research (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), they also expressed discomfort and an awareness of the plight of their Japanese counterparts—responses not easily explained by existing status research, which generally touts the benefits and attractiveness of attaining status (e.g., Pettit et al., 2010). In the following sections, we elaborate on the processes outlined in our model and discuss the contributions this study makes toward understanding the dynamics associated with status in organizations.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to an understanding of status in organizations by showing how individuals' responses to the experience of unearned status gain differ from tenets of existing research. To start, our findings depart from predictions associated with studies on related topics such as “privilege,” defined as the unearned societal advantages experienced by some groups rather than others (Case, Iuzzini, & Hopkins, 2012). Unearned status gain addresses the process of *change* in social position and highlights the dynamic nature of status within organizations, whereas privilege is considered to be a stable and predetermined property enjoyed and retained by dominant societal groups (Case, 2012; Case et al., 2012; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Moreover, whereas unearned status gain—particularly that resulting from organizational

action—is highly salient, privilege is conceptualized as invisible and taken for granted by those who hold it (Case et al., 2012; Rosette & Thompson, 2005; Rosette & Tost, 2013).

Contrary to findings on the effects of privilege, informants in our study freely admitted that their change in status came from “luck.” The salience of the organizational action, and the contrast between their current, improved status position and their previous, relatively lower status prohibited native English speakers from claiming credit for their gains, whereas those experiencing privilege often attribute advantages to their own skill and effort (Rosette & Thompson, 2005). Similar to individuals who are alerted to their privilege on one status characteristic upon experiencing disadvantage based on another (McIntosh, 1988; Rosette & Tost, 2013), informants in our study recognized the unearned nature of their status gain. However, unlike the white women in Rosette and Tost’s (2013) study, for example, who recognized race-based privilege because of their gender disadvantage, our findings suggest that our informants had the unique perspective of having experienced both high and low status on the same dimension: language. The change in status based on an unchanged characteristic highlighted the decoupling of the status gain from individual achievement or skill. This demonstrates that unearned status gain is a distinct process, and further distinguishes our work from the considerable contributions of privilege researchers.

The contrast between the stable nature of privilege and the change in status highlighted by unearned status gain also connects our study to a growing body of research on the dynamic nature of status. Thus, we join other researchers in answering the call to generate more dynamic models of social hierarchy (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). In particular, by identifying reasons for status change, we augment existing work that mostly emphasizes the anticipatory or actual change of status (Pettit et al., 2010). Our study suggests that it may be insufficient to focus on movement in status without considering why the movement occurred in the first place. With this added perspective, scholars might have a better grasp on how people perceive themselves and others in the context of a status change. Future research can enrich this line of inquiry by further identifying and exploring the reasons for status change in organizations and their associated processes and responses.

The responses of our informants to their unearned status gain were due, in part, to the experience of change and the comparison to their perceived status

before the mandate. Importantly, although still clear minorities in the organization and still lower status than the Japanese employees, native English speakers’ increased value to the organization seemed to reduce their perception of status distance (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Phillips et al., 2009) between themselves and the Japanese. Native English speakers made explicit comparisons to their work experiences and lower expectations for advancement before the mandate. Observing this comparison offers a valuable insight into the perceived experience of attaining status in an organization and can inform existing research, particularly work examining the effects of having a relative rise in status.

Our findings suggest that the experience of high status may vary depending on whether the individual has experienced a change in status, a discernment that should enrich our theorizing and predictive ability when considering high status organizational actors. For example, future research should consider whether the experience of unearned status gain would differ from our findings and predictions if it entails a change in the status order, whereby a low-status organization member actually surpasses others in status. We believe that the basic dynamics would be the same, but that perhaps the effects might be more extreme if unearned status gain leads to a reordering of status positions. For example, among unearned status gain recipients who surpass their colleagues in status, the impact of perspective taking might be even stronger, leading them to help and support more actively their new lower-status colleagues. In a nutshell, taking the perspective of someone who has experienced a status loss in the form of a wholesale change in status position may invoke a more powerful reaction than that that we observed in our data.

Our study also makes a theoretical contribution by connecting the source of status gain—in this case, an organizational policy—to research addressing perceptions of status stability. In our study, the dynamic nature of unearned status gain is connected to informants’ perceptions that the status gain itself was unexpected, attained without effort, and outside of their control—an attribution to chance—prompting concerns over the stability of the status gain. Specifically, knowledge that they had not earned the status gain seemed to fuel native speakers’ continual appraisal of their status stability. Informants’ expressions of concern that the language mandate would be temporary were usually coupled with the opposite assertion that it was permanent, suggesting that they were attempting to reassure themselves, but

also that they were simply uncertain about the future. Psychological and organizational research considers extensively how people respond when they feel that a status hierarchy is unstable. For example, high-status people who feel their status is unstable will exert more effort, presumably to avoid losing their high-status position (Pettit & Lount, 2010; Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, & Manstead, 2006). What remains less clear is whether this established effect might vary based on whether their high status was earned or unearned. Our finding that those who experienced unearned status gain questioned the stability of their status may suggest that they acknowledge a lack of control over changes in their status, perhaps lessening their motivation to exert effort to maintain their status. This is consistent with research showing that people may be less motivated when they have an external locus of control or believe that their outcomes are not directly connected to their actions (Erez & Judge, 2001; Giles, 1977).

Prevailing research focuses on the general positive responses associated with status gains (Pettit et al., 2010; Pettit, Sivanathan, Gladstone, & Marr, 2013). In contrast, we found a more nuanced set of responses such that acknowledging the unearned nature of status gain against the backdrop of a meritocratic norm resulted in status stability appraisal. This suggests that theorizing about status change should take into account the basis of the status gain in predicting reactions to the newly obtained social position.

Existing research on status gain focuses primarily on the status change itself, with less attention devoted to the relationship between those who ascend in status and those who do not (e.g., Pettit et al., 2010), yet our findings present a unique set of responses to outgroup members in the face of a status gain. Specifically, our informants' perspective taking and stronger sense of belonging and connection to the organization suggest a more communal perspective on their status gain, rather than an individualized, competitive perspective (Bunderson & Reagans, 2011). Whereas people generally respond positively to status gains because of the associated individual benefits (Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012; Blader & Chen, 2011), they may respond differently to unearned status gain because it evokes greater consideration of the experiences of others in the organization. This is consistent with research showing that high-power individuals with a communal orientation use their power to take on more responsibility and are more considerate of others' perspectives than those with low power or

those with high power and individualistic orientations (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). By rendering recipients more aware of others who did not experience a status gain, unearned status gain may yield similar effects.

We would expect several positive organizational implications to emerge from a communal orientation due to unearned status gain. In particular, unearned status gain members may feel greater affective commitment or emotional attachment to the organization and its priorities (Meyer & Allen, 1991). As noted, some informants did report feeling greater identification with the company and were looking forward to seizing opportunities within the firm, suggesting that their attachment had indeed grown. We would therefore expect that these displays of positive job attitudes could enhance employees' job performance (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002) and lower their turnover intentions (Dougherty, Bluedorn, & Keon, 1985). Together, these effects could further the organization's goals, particularly during a process of change. Empirical studies could test these relationships and deepen our understanding of these status dynamics.

Finally, our research contributes to research on the relationship between achieved and ascribed status. Conventional wisdom on status gain highlights the role of individual effort in status increases (Bunderson, 2003; Flynn et al., 2006; Sauer, Thomas-Hunt, & Morris, 2010), essentially focusing on changes in achieved status only. However, our analysis highlights the fact that the potential for status gain in organizations is not limited to an individual's effort or achievement. Our study focused on the individual's native language, an immutable ascribed characteristic. Importantly, although ascribed characteristics are often associated with history, societal norms, and values (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Duguid et al., 2012; Ivanic, Overbeck, & Nunes, 2011; Phillips et al., 2009), our analysis shows that the actions of the organization can change the shared interpretation of any characteristic—*ascribed or achieved*—causing a change in the value associated with it (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Neeley, 2013; Spataro, 2012). Thus, we show that, although ascribed status characteristics themselves are usually fixed, theorizing on the dynamic nature of status can explain gains based on ascribed as well as achieved characteristics. In so doing, we contribute to the growing body of research addressing the interplay between ascribed and achieved characteristics in organizations (Neeley, 2013; Phillips et al., 2009; Sauer et al., 2010).

It is important to note that the theoretical contributions of our findings can be applied to attributes other than employees' native language and to organizational changes other than language mandates. Employees bring to work a variety of characteristics, such as personality, cultural values, and abilities, any of which could be rendered more valuable by a variety of organizational decisions, including a change in management style, a shift to team-based rewards and project assignments, or a change in customer base. For example, a number of researchers have identified personality traits (e.g., extraversion, neuroticism) as a source of status differences, whereby extroverts and those with dominant personalities are usually granted higher status in work groups (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011). More recently, however, the strengths of introverts and the value they bring to organizations are increasingly gaining attention in both the popular press and organizational scholarship (e.g., Bendersky & Shah, 2012; Cain, 2012). Such increased attention could lead to shifts in organizational practices yielding unearned status gains for quieter, more reserved employees. This is but one example of how a change in what the organization values might lead to unearned status gain for some organizational members, illustrating that the dynamics of unearned status gain could apply to a variety of characteristics. Taken together, understanding the processes and outcomes associated with unearned status gains in the context of a company lingua franca mandate provides a fruitful context that can strengthen theory around status changes in general.

Practical Implications

In addition to contributing to theory, this study suggests several important lessons for organizational practice. First and foremost, setting an important strategy like a language mandate can have profound implications for the relative status positions of people in an organization. Those who gain status as a result of the change may simultaneously enjoy their new status and experience concern over the source of the status gain. Therefore, leaders have to devise change strategies that target not only people who are disfavored by a change process but also those who are favored, with special emphasis on supplanting notions of "luck" with a sense of responsibility.

Relatedly, the unearned status gain experience revolves around intergroup dynamics, warranting attention to potential challenges that may arise

when organizational actions elevate some characteristics over others. When considering language as a status characteristic, asymmetry in language fluency in global teams can activate and sustain power contests that manifest in negative emotions (Hinds et al., 2014). It is therefore important for organizations to hold training programs with the purpose of developing people's capacity to work effectively across language or other differences. At the same time, it may be necessary for organizations to assign third-party facilitators for key groups or projects to both model the desired behaviors and ensure the success of joint efforts.

The unease that we document in this study could be harnessed in a positive way. Recent work on "ambivalence," defined as the simultaneous presence of positive and negative emotions about a target, suggests that conflicting positive and negative emotions can in fact yield positive adaptive effects (e.g., Fong, 2006; Plambeck & Weber, 2009; Pratt & Pradies, 2011). For example, ambivalence can involve divergent, complex thinking (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Fong, 2006), enhance information processing and internalization (Plambeck & Weber, 2009; Rothman & Wiesenfeld, 2007), and increase the capacity to adapt to various stressors (Larsen, Hemenover, Norris, & Cacioppo, 2003). Accordingly, as regards to the U.S.-based employees at GlobalMoves, for example, it may be fruitful to integrate them into the organization's core activities, especially since informants' identification with the organization also seems to increase with such integration. Leaders can assuage native speakers' uncertainties and engage them in aiding others who are potentially struggling. More broadly, leaders need to support those organizational members who may potentially need it due to a move in their status positions.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although the findings from the present research contribute to our understanding of unearned status gain, it has several limitations that we must acknowledge. First, within this study of U.S. workers, the norm for increasing one's status through achievement, effort, and merit is central in shaping perceptions of unearned status gain. Our model of employees' experiences of unearned status gain, however, may not apply in societies within which status ascription is the norm, or where there is less expectation of status mobility based on achievement. Indeed, even in considering the global context

of the current study and our informants' assertions that the unique cultural norms of the Japanese are what made the language mandate possible, it is unclear how other societies would assess unearned status gain itself. Examining processes associated with status gain in other organizations and a variety of other countries would be a fruitful avenue of future research.

Second, although prior work has established language as a status-relevant characteristic (Bourdieu, 1991; Neeley, 2013; Wiley & Lukes, 1996) and language mandates that highlight language as a critical status characteristic are on the rise (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Neeley, 2013), other types of organizational changes and policy decisions abound. Therefore, an in-depth study of unearned status gain processes in varied settings is warranted to broaden understanding of the overall phenomenon. Third, although we interviewed employees at least one year after the "English only" mandate, we do not know how the effects of the unearned gain in status will play out in the long term. Particularly when considering the fact that the nonnative speakers will presumably increase in English proficiency over time, the status dynamics could also change gradually. Therefore, a longitudinal examination of these processes would provide additional valuable insights.

Finally, one clear strength of our qualitative design is the in-depth understanding of employees' experiences of status change it provided, allowing us to build a theory of unearned status gain. However, the qualitative data gleaned from our interviews do not allow us to test our theory and draw clear causal inferences regarding our proposed mechanisms. Future quantitative studies, both in the laboratory and field settings, would serve to test the theory we have outlined here.

CONCLUSION

A variety of organizational actions can shift internal status dynamics, yielding unearned status gains for some members. In studying the responses of U.S.-based native English speakers to an English language mandate in a Japanese company, we learned how this manner of attaining status shapes perceptions of the status gain itself and also creates ramifications for intergroup dynamics. Gaining status is generally a positive experience, yet the knowledge that a status gain is unearned also causes unease. By understanding and attending to the experience of unearned status gain and the dynamics that ensue, organizations can better predict and manage both the positive and negative effects of gaining status.

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Tsedal B. Neeley (tneeley@hbs.edu) is an associate professor in the Organizational Behavior Unit at the Harvard Business School. She received her PhD from Stanford University. Her research focuses on the challenges that global collaborators face when attempting to coordinate work across national and linguistic boundaries, with

special emphasis in the impact of language, power, status, and emotions on social dynamics.

Tracy L. Dumas (tldumas@fisher.osu.edu) is an assistant professor of management and human resources at the Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business. She earned her PhD from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. Her research primarily considers how employees' personal identities and non-work roles shape their experiences in the workplace.



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