

## the language of global management

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Over the past two decades, organizations seeking global expansion have been mandating an English lingua franca, or common language, to facilitate global collaboration regardless of the country location of their headquarters. With well over a billion English speakers worldwide, organizations adopt English as a lingua franca for multiple reasons: (i) to more efficiently manage tasks that are spread across members in different countries with diverse native languages (Neeley, 2013, 2012; Feeley and Harzing, 2003); (ii) to ease knowledge sharing and foster integration after mergers and acquisitions of companies with employees from multiple linguistic backgrounds (Welch, Welch, and Piekkari, 2005); and (iii) to streamline communication with customers, partners, suppliers, and competitors who have started using English exclusively as a result of their own globalization (Neeley, 2012, 2013). In short, organizations migrate to an accessible and unifying language to more effectively extend their global reach.

Historically, powerful civilizations that have extended their global reach have influenced the language that ultimately becomes the lingua franca (Crystal, 2003; Tietze, 2008). In the modern era, Anglophone dominance of communication technologies and trends in market growth have promoted the rise of English as the lingua franca for international work, particularly over the last century (Graddol, 1997; Maurais, 2003). The emergence of English as a global lingua franca is also attributed to the social, political, military, and worldwide economic power of its native speakers (Pennycook, 1994); in particular, Britain's colonial history and America's prominence on the world stage have contributed to the diffusion of the English language (Crystal, 2003). Many studies have placed this discussion of Anglophone influence in other historical contexts: Pennycook (1994) notes the role of the British as educators in underdeveloped nations; of Americans as large-scale philanthropists; Graddol (1997) highlights the role of American popular culture, such as MTV, in spreading knowledge of English on a global scale; and Labrie and Quell (1997) cite

the economic role of the British and America in abetting the spread of English worldwide. Despite abundant research on English's ascent as a global language, much less intellectual energy has been dedicated to understanding its use as a lingua franca in global organizations.

### LANGUAGE BROKERS VERSUS ADOPTING A COMMON LANGUAGE

Lingua franca use has dominated as the means of international communication, but it has not been the only strategy to level diversity of language backgrounds among communicators. Language brokers, such as translators and interpreters, have been widely used to help bridge language barriers for international bodies such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and the International Atomic Energy Agency. International corporations, however, find exclusive use of language brokers for cross-national collaborations cost prohibitive, because such practices are inefficient. The need to hire yet another staff person to facilitate communication between two staff people adds an extra – otherwise redundant and costly – link to the chain of communication. For this reason, language brokers who are either independent contractors or internal employees are typically few in number in international corporations, and even then are used only minimally to translate formal documents or interpret in special situations.

The problem for organizations regarding language brokers lies not only in their cost and paucity of numbers, but also on their use as a conduit of information is replete with other difficulties. For instance, many studies have found that scenarios involving a “go-between” communicator may pose accuracy and timing problems (Pearson, 1989). First, those engaging in written translation might not have important technical expertise necessary to discern shades of meaning for professional jargon (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, and Welch, 1999). Second, the use of translators and interpreters may introduce a time lag in communication; for example, if a translator cannot be found when needed, the time to accomplish a work task is prolonged (Fixman, 1989). Thus, to avoid these problems, mandating a primary lingua franca continues to be the preferred solution

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for leveling native language diversity among international personnel.

### PHENOMENON OF NATIVE AND NONNATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Debates about whether English can be a neutral lingua franca have raged for decades (Kayman, 2004). By definition, a lingua franca's purpose is to be an auxiliary medium of communication between people of diverse speech; the debate about neutrality, then, focuses not only on the auxiliary nature of a lingua franca, but also on its identity as a formally recognized language. To those for whom the lingua franca is not a native language, it can never be a neutral auxiliary, but must always be a replacement for their own native tongue. The seemingly neutral linguistic solution to such an impasse would be a pidgin language. Bickerton (1999), a scholar of pidginization, argued that pidgin language is a third auxiliary mode of conversation, that is, it is the product of the merging of two primary languages, for example, English and French. Thus, a pidgin tongue serves as the contact language that can be considered a truly democratic and neutral lingua franca for social interaction, as neither of the two primary languages can claim primacy over the pidgin language.

Scholars attempting to address other inherent linguistic biases have advocated the invention of low-cost artificial languages such as Esperanto that could facilitate interaction between international speakers as an egalitarian form of communication (Pool and Fettes, 1998). Although the concept of Esperanto is attractive because of its simplicity, proposing it as a means to promote equal communication rights fails to take into account that people still have the daunting task of learning a language, as McGroarty (1998) has pointed out.

Despite the debates over optimal and democratic contact languages, for many global companies, English serves as the standardizing official language to unify a diverse workforce and capitalize on extensive international markets. Doing so, however, has given rise to two distinct groups: elite, often monolingual native English speakers and nonnative English speakers (Maurais, 2003; Neeley, 2013, 2012). As a result, an imbalance of power in the organization's structure is created

by bringing together the two groups of people, in which native English speakers are poised for better communication than their nonnative peers (Welch, Welch, and Marschan-Piekkari, 2001).

Scholars indicate that native English speakers are able to think through and execute work tasks more effectively than nonnative speakers, when English is the designated lingua franca (Crystal, 2003; Meierkord and Knapp, 2002). Crystal (2003) argued that native speakers have advantages during communication because they are able to manipulate their linguistic superiority at the expense of their less proficient colleagues. Henderson (2005) demonstrated that trust becomes difficult to achieve in mixed language teams. Professional dissension for nonnative speakers who experience status loss can impede collaborative efforts, generating the perception on the part of the less competent speakers, that they take on most of the common burden of language communication (Neeley, 2013, 2012; Neeley, Hinds, and Cramton, 2012). Scholars have further highlighted the emotionally charged cyclical intergroup dynamics that emerge within organizations. For example, Neeley, Hinds, and Cramton, (2012) found that both native and nonnative English speakers suffer anxiety when faced with conducting business in English. Nonnative English speakers respond with anxiety-mitigating strategies, such as avoiding English-only speakers or reverting to their native language, thus passing the problem to their native English-speaking colleagues. Native English speakers respond with strategies to reduce their own anxiety, such as exiting meetings and demanding that English be spoken, which passes the burden back to their nonnative English speaking colleagues. This back-and-forth dynamics often occurs because the feelings and experiences of native and nonnative coworkers are hidden. Although scholars are beginning to theorize about the dynamics that are borne out of language use, future research can uncover causes, effects as well as moderating variables, to boost our insights and related prescriptions.

As the number of multinationals globalize and collaborations across boundaries rise, the need to examine the effects of language diversity in such collaborations, and the impact of the increasingly common move to mandate continue

to be pressing issues for international management scholarship and practice. Language is so basic and pervasive; a lingua franca mandate is likely to be among the most influential of coordination mechanisms in organizations. In-depth studies at the micro-, macro-, and meso-levels can shed important light on this nascent field of research.

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