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Employee Perceptions of Language in a Multilingual Workplace*: "I am There Listening, Pretending to Understand Something"*

An Ethnographic Case Study

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Abstract

The international working life and globalization have affected companies by making them more multilingual. In other words, more and more individuals are finding themselves in a multilingual working environment. Thus, also the discussions on multilingual working environments are frequent both in the international business literature as well as in the wider societal discourse.

Studies has been conducted on language within international business examining language from various perspectives and integrating it to multinational corporations. However, recent research on individuals' perceptions, attitudes and feelings regarding multilingualism at work is scarce. Additionally, prior research has voiced a demand for further studies on language and multinational organizations within the international business research domain. Therefore, this study is conducted on language in a multinational organization with the focus on individual employees' perceptions and feelings towards their multilingual working environment at a multinational corporation. Thus, in this study I have examined how the employees of a multilingual and multinational organization perceive the company's multilingualism as well as their common corporate language.

In this ethnographic case study language is viewed as a social practice being born in interaction situations which further generate attitudes, experiences and feelings among individuals. The research is situated in a multilingual multinational organization in which I as a researcher work myself. I combine both interview data and my ethnographical notes to answer my research questions.

The study's findings demonstrate that language is indeed not a mere superficial concept, but a social and in-depth, embedded idea of unison, persona and inclusion to others. The results indicate that multilingualism as such is generally perceived positively. However, by examining language and language use within the social context the study shows that individuals are experiencing more problematic feelings and attitudes towards multilingualism beneath the surface. Indeed, the findings of the study reveal that individuals are often feeling left out, out of place and awkward at work in terms of formal or informal social gatherings where they do not understand the spoken language. Thus, in these situations multilingualism at work is not perceived as positive but rather as a limiting factor causing feelings of exclusion, frustration and awkwardness among other feelings. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that a multilingual working environment without a clearly defined common language and language practices can generate confusion and contribute to more people being excluded due to language at work.

Keywords language, social concept of language, multilingualism, MNC, IB, ethnographic case study

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Työn nimi Työntekijöiden näkemykset kielestä monikielisellä työpaikalla: *”Olen mukana kuuntelemassa, teeskentelen ymmärtäväni jotain”*

Koulutusohjelma Ihmisten johtamisen ja organisaatioiden kehittämisen maisteriohjelma

Valvoja Prof. Rebecca Piekkari

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Tiivistelmä

Kansainvälistynyt työelämä ja globalisaatio ovat tehneet yrityksistä monikielisempiä. Toisin sanoen yhä useampi henkilö havaitsee työskentelevänsä monikielisessä työympäristössä. Täten myös keskustelut monikielisistä työympäristöistä ovat yleistyneet niin kansainvälisen liiketoiminnan tutkimuksessa kuin laajemmassa yhteiskunnallisessa keskustelussakin.

Kansainvälisen liiketoiminnan saralla on tutkittu kieltä eri näkökulmista ja yhdistetty se monikansallisiin yrityksiin. Viimeaikaisia tutkimuksia yksilöiden kokemuksista, asenteista ja tunteista monikielisyyden suhteen työelämässä on kuitenkin niukasti. Lisäksi aiemmat kansainvälisen liiketoiminnan tutkimukset peräänkuuluttavat tarvetta lisätutkimuksille liittyen kieleen monikansallisissa organisaatioissa. Tämän takia tässä tutkimuksessa käsitellään kieltä monikansallisessa organisaatiossa ja keskitytään yksittäisten työntekijöiden näkemyksiin ja tunteisiin monikielistä työympäristöä kohtaan monikansallisessa yrityksessä. Tässä tutkimuksessa olen siis tutkinut, miten monikielisen ja monikansallisen organisaation työntekijät käsittävät yrityksen monikielisyyden sekä yrityksen yhteisen kielen.

Tutkimus on etnografinen tapaustutkimus, jossa kieltä tarkastellaan sosiaalisena käytäntönä, joka syntyy vuorovaikutustilanteissa muodostaen asenteita, kokemuksia ja tunteita yksilöissä. Tutkimus sijoittuu monikieliseen monikansalliseen organisaatioon, jossa myös työskentelen itse. Yhdistän sekä haastatteluaineiston että etnografiset muistiinpanoni vastatakseni tutkimuskysymyksiini.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että kieli ei ole pelkkä pinnallinen käsite, vaan sosiaalinen ja syvällinen konsepti, johon on sulautunut ajatus yhteydestä, persoonasta ja yhteenkuuluvuudesta. Tulokset havainnollistavat, että monikielisyyteen suhtaudutaan yleisesti ottaen myönteisesti. Tarkastelemalla kieltä ja kielenkäyttöä sosiaalisessa kontekstissa tutkimus kuitenkin osoittaa, että yksilöt kokevat pinnan alla ongelmallisempia tunteita ja asenteita monikielisyyttä kohtaan. Tutkimus paljastaa, että ihmiset tuntevat itsensä usein ulkopuolisiksi, epämukaviksi ja kiusaantuneiksi työpaikalla virallisissa tai epävirallisissa sosiaalisissa tapaamisissa, joissa he eivät ymmärrä puhuttua kieltä. Näissä tilanteissa monikielisyyttä työssä ei siis koeta myönteisenä vaan pikemminkin rajoittavana tekijänä, joka aiheuttaa muun muassa syrjäytymisen, turhautumisen ja vaivautuneisuuden tunteita. Lisäksi tulokset osoittavat, että monikielinen työympäristö, jossa ei ole selkeästi määriteltyä yhteistä kieltä ja kielikäytäntöjä, voi aiheuttaa sekaannusta ja johtaa siihen, että ihmiset kokevat jäävänsä ulkopuolelle kielen takia.

Avainsanat kieli, sosiaalinen käsitys kielestä, monikielisyys, monikansallinen organisaatio, kansainvälinen liiketoiminta, etnografinen tapaustutkimus

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Helsinki 24.01.2025

Adeliina Jämsä

Abbreviations

Abbreviations

IB	international business
CCL	common corporate language
MNC	multinational corporation

1 Introduction

Come with me on a little journey to an office of an international organization. You and I step inside a tall building with huge windows reaching from the floor all the way up to the sky. Soon we realize that it is quite calm inside as only a couple of other people are walking in the corridors chitchatting quietly together. We aim to the elevators and order us one. After a short moment we hear the elevator doors open, and step inside. We see that today's lunch menu is placed inside the elevator on to the wall next to the elevator's buttons. We check out the menu only to realize that it is written in a language you cannot fully comprehend. Luckily, I can translate the weird sounding words to you, and you get a better idea of what the lunch has to offer today. Finally, we have reached the office floor, and we step out the elevator.

When checking the time, we see that it is already almost quarter past nine. This means that we are late from our all-employee meeting held in the office coffee lobby. It started at nine so there is still however time for us to participate. Quickly but quietly, we enter through a set of glass doors separating the elevator lobby from the office area. Soon we find ourselves sitting in the coffee lobby with our colleagues listening a presentation. The PowerPoint slides are presented in a language we both understand. However, the person presenting is talking in a language which is not that common to you. It is actually rather hard for you to try to comprehend what the presenter is saying while also trying to translate the different words and phrases in your head. Suddenly, everybody around you laughs so you start to laugh as well while screening other people's faces in hopes to understand as to what we are laughing at. You don't want to seem rude, so you laugh anyway. The presentation continues and while you comprehend the main points you would still like to be able to fully understand the topic. After all, this is an important meeting affecting the whole company and you really need to know all the details to perform your work well. Therefore, while you wouldn't necessarily mind sitting quietly and listening, you decide to open your mouth and ask for the person presenting to switch to a language we all understand. *"Of course"*, you hear the answer and the language changes. Finally, you can properly focus on the matter at hand. Oh, how nice it feels to be considered!

1.1 The era of international working life

The previous short story describes the imagined reality of a person who works in an international organization with diverse linguistic environment. It demonstrates the experiences, feelings and perceptions an employee can go through in a short moment just by arriving to the office and participating to a morning meeting. As the title of my study describes and the story demonstrates, sometimes individuals are at work just pretending to grasp what is going on due to not understanding the language. While the story is imagined, it is based on my observations as well as the experiences my study's participants have shared to me during the research process. Essentially, there are multiple languages present in the everyday working life and sometimes it is not that easy to navigate in the core of an international organization's language scene and practices.

While the dominant position that English language has achieved within the international business communication is generally recognized (Fredriksson et al., 2006;

Kingsley, 2013; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018) it is certainly not the only language used in the corporate world. Indeed, according to Capo and Di Pietro (2024) globalization is driving organizations to engage in greater multilingualism. This indicates that working life is getting seemingly more international and linguistically diverse. Moreover, globalization is eroding the organizational boundaries of multinational companies and thus also making language-related issues topical in those organizations (Woo & Giles, 2017). With that also the language scene at workplaces is evolving as organizations working in multinational environments are faced with various language contexts (Bordia & Bordia, 2015). Indeed, multinational organizations' linguistically diverse nature is widely acknowledged in the literature (see e.g., Back & Piekkari, 2024; Bordia & Bordia, 2015; Sanden, 2020; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). Therefore, especially with multinational organizations the topicality of multilingual working environments is presumably rather present.

The increasingly international working life and organizations' linguistic diversity is not only present in the academic literature but also in wider societal discussion as well. Namely, Aalto University's researcher Back (2024, December 8) discusses language-based discrimination as well as the working life and language use in Finland's organizations from the viewpoint of immigrants in a local newspaper Helsingin Sanomat. The topic is clearly provoking discussion, understanding and even agitation as the comment section of this particular newspaper essay has gained nearly 100 comments in only a week from its publishment. Moreover, Back's (2024, December 8) essay in Helsingin Sanomat has motivated linguist Koskinen (2024, December 13) to write a reply to the essay questioning Back's statements regarding language-based discrimination. This letter to the editor has also provoked numerous comments, discussion and caused debate in the comment section. Thus, it is recognized and discussed both academically as well as on a more general level in news that the working life is becoming international and linguistically diverse. How people are feeling about it seems to range from easy adaptation to strong resistance. Nevertheless, now is a good time to examine these topics further. Consequently, my study is contributing to this timely matter in hopes to provide more content and topics of discussion to the language diversity issues that multilingual organization face today.

In terms of language related international business research, it is noteworthy to mention that while language has been deemed as important by many researchers, interestingly there is no unified definition as to what is meant by language in international business (Brannen et al., 2014; Karhunen et al., 2018). In addition, previous research has recognized the need for further studies of language in terms of international business and multilingual organizations (see e.g., Back & Piekkari, 2024; Fredriksson et al., 2006; Tenzer et al., 2017; Woo & Giles, 2017). Therefore, I am aiming to provide a clear understanding of what language means in the context of international business in the literature review of my study. Drawn from my conceptualization of language as a social practice as supported by for example Karhunen et al. (2018) and Ahmad and Widén (2015) and explained in more detail in the literature review section of this study, I aim to further develop this concept by focusing on people's experiences on language in a multilingual organizational setting. Thus, providing new insights to the field of international business and language related research.

Fredriksson et al. (2006) noticed in their study how multiple languages were used in their case organization despite English being positioned as the main language at the

workplace. This indicates that working life is indeed diverse in terms of language even though it would seem like English is the new normal everywhere. However, while English use in corporate world has been studied and discussed in the literature Sanden (2020) calls for empirical studies on languages other than English. Therefore, whereas my interests in this study are somewhat linked to English use in a multinational organization I am actually examining an organization in Finland where the use of Finnish and Swedish among other languages is part of the everyday life.

The case company in my research is Vattenfall and more specifically Vattenfall Oy meaning that the target is Vattenfall's operations in Finland. The main focus is the employees working at Vattenfall Oy and their experiences of multilingualism at their workplace. Vattenfall is a global organization with around 19 000 employees operating in countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands and Finland (Vattenfall, n.d.). The prevalence of different languages used in the everyday business at Vattenfall Oy provides fruitful grounds for the study of a multilingual working environment.

Moreover, Vattenfall Oy has been chosen as the main focus in my study due to Finland's interesting language base. Finland is an intriguing country in terms of language as Finland has two national languages which are Finnish and Swedish and the majority of people living in Finland speak Finnish (Oikeusministeriö, n.d.). However, the number of people speaking foreign languages in Finland has grown extensively in the recent past as in 2022 the number of individuals speaking foreign languages – meaning other languages than Finnish, Swedish or Sami – in Finland increased by 37 950 which is the highest increase in 40 years. This means that nearly half a million people in Finland are speaking foreign languages. (Tilastokeskus, 2023 March 31.) Half a million people in Finland's context are rather significant bearing in mind that Finland has only around 5,6 million inhabitants all together (Tilastokeskus, 2023 December 19). Therefore, to conduct this study specifically in Vattenfall Oy in Finland hopefully provides insights to the ongoing wider societal phenomenon related to multilingualism and multinational organizations in Finland as well.

Furthermore, thinking about language as a more general concept according to Luo & Shenkar (2006) language can be thought of as a strategic choice which makes the topic of multilingual working environments all the more interesting. Additionally, Woo and Giles (2017) note that language holds an essential part to us humans as well as to our self-perception while Bordia and Bordia (2015) also bring up language's significance to our identity. Therefore, broadening the understanding of multilingual organizations especially from the individual point of view can give valuable insight into human mind and behavior. Moreover, Fredriksson et al. (2006) highlight the need for broader discussion and examination of company languages. In addition, Woo and Giles (2017) encourage the studying of employees' real-life experiences in terms of common company languages. My study answers precisely to that as it aims to capture employee's experiences and perceptions on multilingualism at the workplace.

Recently language in international business has been studied from various perspectives such as from the perspective of foreign subsidiaries (Konara & Wei, 2021), from the linguistical ecology viewpoint (Barner-Rasmussen & Langinier, 2020) as well as from the identity perspective (Karhunen et al., 2023). Moreover, international business research has been conducted on language in terms of language-based discrimination (see Back & Piekkari, 2024), identity (see e.g. Bordia & Bordia, 2015; Karhunen et al., 2023) and language policies (see Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). However,

recent research regarding individuals' experiences and attitudes towards language seem rather scarce. Quite recently Shen et al. (2023) studied language attitudes in multinational organizations, however, also in their study individuals' experiences receive less attention. Therefore, my research will be building on this topic especially in terms of experiences on multilingualism at a multilingual working environment. Moreover, I wish to contribute to an understanding of the role of languages other than English in the context of international working life.

1.2 Research questions

Given the topicality of diverse linguistic environments in organizations, the need for further studies on language in international business and the scarcity of research on both different languages in international business as well as on understanding people's real-life experiences and perceptions related to language in organizations, my research questions are the following:

> **RQ 1:** *How do employees perceive multilingualism at a multilingual workplace?*
>
> **RQ 2:** *How do employees perceive the use of English as the common corporate language in a multilingual workplace?*

1.3 Structure of the study

I will begin this study by discussing and reviewing previous literature related to language, multilingualism, multinational organizations and international business. The previous studies covered will be primarily drawn from international business research. However, as I am focusing on language, I will also discuss some literature from the more linguistic focused domains. After the literature review, I will be combining the discussed topics into a theoretical framework. Thereafter, my focus shifts to the methodology of the study. Detailed and contextualized description of the case company and research setting will be provided in this section. Moreover, I will be presenting the chosen research methodology and participants of this study as well as describe the data collection and analysis processes. Following the methodology section, I will present the results of the study as well as the discussion section in which I discuss the findings of the study reflecting them with the prior research. Moreover, I will revise my theoretical framework as well as provide managerial implications and suggest avenues for future research agendas. Lastly, I will be concluding the research finalizing it into a coherent whole.

2 Literature review

As I am researching multilingualism and language in a multinational organization, hence my research questions, I focus my literature review on the field of international business studies and language literature. I aim to build a background for the research by starting with a literature review on past studies on international business, language and multilingualism in multinational organizations. The literature review is sectioned to Section 2.1 and Section 2.2. The Section 2.1 considers more the individual level themes such as what does language mean in terms of individuals and their interactions. The Section 2.2 shifts the discussion to the organizational level discussing topics such as multinational corporations and corporate language policies.

First, to understand the key concept of my study, namely language, I will focus on language related research and define the concept of language. Based on my definition of language I will discuss the topic from a broader perspective and link it to viewing language as a social concept. Following the discussion of language as a social concept I consider it important to talk about the lived experiences of language as well as language attitudes and linguistic identity because I see them being interlinked and closely related to each other. My intention is to form a coherent understanding of how these topics are associated with each other. In addition, I will present previous research on multilingualism and define the concept. In the Section 2.1 the emphasis is more on the individual level rather than the organizational level.

In the following Section 2.2 I shift my focus to consider more the organizational level. I will first present research on multinational organizations and multilingualism. In addition, I am going to review the literature on topics I see commonly associated with multilingualism and IB research, namely the topics of common corporate language, language policy and code switching. Lastly, I will present my theoretical framework to which the preceding literature review works as a foundation. The theoretical framework collects the prior discussed topics into a clear and unified concept explaining the relations in more detail.

2.1 Language in international business research

The relevance of language to international business (IB) has been acknowledged in the IB literature (see e.g., Brannen et al., 2014; Capo & Di Pietro, 2024; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999; Sanden, 2016). Indeed, Brannen et al. (2014) state that language is in fact in the core of IB activities. Similarly, Sanden (2016) highlights the important role that language possesses in IB by arguing that language should be considered as one of the most significant resources in IB. Furthermore, for example Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999) recognize the power that language has within multinational organisations while Capo and Di Pietro (2024) note that management researchers have highlighted language's importance especially in terms of organizations where there is a prevalence of multiple languages. In addition, language can also be considered as a strategic choice (Luo & Shenkar, 2006) or a strategic resource (Sanden, 2016) benefitting the organization. Additionally, language can be considered from the diversity perspective as well (Gaibrois, 2023). Moreover, according to Woo and Giles (2017) language works as a significant factor in terms of individual's self-perception as well as a way of describing persons and groups. Thus, it can be stated that language, whether spoken, written or motioned with gestures, is arguably an integral part of humans' everyday life and interaction with the surrounding world, especially within international business and organizational context. Next, I will focus on defining what is exactly meant with the term 'language' and following from the prior research I present my own definition of language.

2.1.1 Definitions of language

In this chapter my initial aim is to first understand how previous research is defining the concept of language. It becomes evident from the literature that language as a concept is intricate and multifaceted. In the field of international business research language is essentially often considered to refer to national languages (Gaibrois, 2023). However, language can also be perceived to have a symbolic meaning (Ahmad & Widén, 2015) or it can be considered to refer to corporate language or technical language among others (Brannen et al., 2014). Moreover, Brannen et al. (2014) remind that language can also be used to indicate gender, power or hierarchy. In addition, language can be seen as a communication and coordination tool (Konara & Wei, 2021). However, quite often language is considered as a social and evolving construct (see e.g. Karhunen et al., 2018; Karhunen et al., 2023; Luo & Shenkar, 2006). Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), though, defines language as *"a system of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar"* or as *"a system of communication used by people living in a particular country"*. Nevertheless, based on the many different definitions of language I have brought up here, I would argue that language is more than just a system for communication or grammar, words and sounds. Indeed, language can also refer to computer programming languages such as Java or to a certain type of language use such as business language or 'bad' language, as in using offensive words (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

Thus, language is in fact a rather complex concept with multiple definitions. Therefore, while numerous studies have been conducted on language within the international business research during the past years (see e.g., Back & Piekkari, 2024; Bordia

& Bordia, 2015; Karhunen et al., 2023; Luo & Shenkar, 2006) it is noteworthy that research indicates that there has not been enough conceptualization and clear definitions in the literature as to what 'language' as such essentially refers to or there has been a lack of definition altogether (Brannen et al., 2014; Karhunen et al., 2018).

Thus, I find it paramount to define the concept of language for my research. Karhunen et al. (2018) note that language can be viewed through a structural, functional or social lens. It is this social lens which I will be applying to my research as well. Drawing from the IB literature and the above presented discussion I define language in this study to mean the spoken or written national languages, however, also adding a social layer to it indicating that *"language comes into existence in interactions between its users"* as Karhunen et al. (2018, p. 982) summarize. In other words, in my research language is viewed as social interactions between individuals who speak or write national languages such as Finnish, English or Swedish. Thus, while the focus is on spoken languages the underlying and broader social concepts of language use are also considered.

Before I turn to discuss language as a social concept, I present the following table to summarize the different language definitions and perspectives to language. Moreover, I also add my own definition to further specify the definition used in this study. The Table 1, which summarizes the different views on language, can be found below.

Table 1. The different perspectives and definitions on language

Language refers to national languages.	E.g., Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.); Gaibrois (2023)
Language can have a symbolic meaning.	E.g., Ahmad & Widén (2015)
Language is a tool for communication.	E.g. Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.); Konara & Wei (2021)
Language has a special function to indicate e.g. gender.	E.g., Brannen et al. (2014)
There are different types of languages, such as business language and programming languages.	Brannen et al. (2014); Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.)
Language is a social concept.	Karhunen et al. (2018); Karhunen et al. (2023); Luo & Shenkar (2006)
Language is viewed as social interactions between individuals who speak or write national languages such as Finnish, English or Swedish.	The definition used in my research.

2.1.2 Social practice of language

Based on my definition of language having a social layer I now turn to discuss language as a social concept in more detail. The social notion of language is a topic that is frequently discussed throughout the literature on language and international business research. Researchers like Karhunen et al. (2018) and Ahmad and Widén (2015) specifically advocate for studying language from the social perspective. For example, in their research on knowledge sharing and language-based grouping Ahmad and Widén (2015) apply a social lens to the examination and emphasise the importance of language's social aspect in terms of knowledge sharing within multilingual organizations. The idea is to look beyond people's language competences to understand the socialization happening with the language use (Ahmad & Widén, 2015). This is essentially how I consider the social practice of language as well. Further, in their review of language-sensitive articles Karhunen et al. (2018) examine how has language been addressed in the in international management literature. Essentially, they argue that examining language as a social practice has the most potential in terms of future research (Karhunen et al., 2018). In addition, many researchers have acknowledged language as a socially developing concept (see e.g., Karhunen et al., 2023; Luo & Shenkar, 2006). Hence, my definition of language having a social layer and focus on social interaction.

Moreover, according to Gaibrois (2023) language as a more dynamic concept has become the subject of research and reflection only recently. In addition, Karhunen et al. (2018) are essentially stating the same as they note that earlier research has had a more unconceptualized and implicit view to language, however, the latest research has started to conceptualized language more explicitly. While previous research has viewed language as purely a mean of communication disregarding the bigger picture and context, the newer research has started to perceive language as a social phenomenon integrating it to cultural context and human interaction (Karhunen et al., 2018). In case language is viewed as a social practice it should be considered within the social context and seen as something that is established collectively by the language users (Karhunen et al., 2018).

Essentially, I follow this view in my research and integrate language to the social context by stating that language has the possibility to influence the social environment and experiences in which individuals live in. Therefore, I consider language as a social practice to involve examining the socialization happening with language use as Ahmad and Widén (2015) also note as well as examining language within the wider social context as Karhunen et al. (2018) state. Moreover, I argue that language, since I perceive it as a social practice, goes beyond the words and pure interactions to more in-depth contextualization of situations, individual experiences, feelings and attitudes as well as persona and identity. These notions add a more nuanced layer to viewing language as a social concept. I will discuss these topics in more detail in the following sections.

2.1.3 Language as a lived experience

Since language can be – and I argue that it perhaps even should be – perceived as a social phenomenon it is only reasonable to consider what it actually means to examine language from the social perspective. Viewing language as a social concept and the

lived experiences of language are closely linked, since language in a way lives through social connections as explained in the following. Indeed, as noted earlier, language becomes alive between social, human interactions (Karhunen et al., 2018). In other words, individuals in a way 'live' the language. This in turn shifts the focus towards people's lived experiences on language. According to Busch (2017), who represents the linguistic research domain, the lived experiences of language constitute of emotional and physical intersubjective interactional experiences. The fundamental point with the lived experiences of language is to make room for the social dimension of language and consider its bodily and emotionally manifesting aspects as well (Busch, 2017). Thus, the lived experiences of language and the social practice of language are connected.

Moreover, central to the lived experiences of language is also feelings related to language and language use (Busch, 2017). According to Busch (2017) those feelings might include experiencing joy, shame or fear among others. Therefore, language becomes an emotional concept as well. To conclude this, I argue that when examining language through the social lens and seeing it become alive between individuals' interactions it is important to include the lived experiences of those individuals as essentially that is where the language 'happens'. Fundamentally, the lived experiences of language become visible through understanding individual's attitudes towards language and linguistic identity. To further delve deeper to this topic, I will next discuss language attitudes.

2.1.4 Individual attitudes towards language

Experiences and language attitudes are in connection as noted by Garrett (2010), therefore I consider it paramount to also discuss language attitudes here. When discussing about language attitudes it is worth examining what is exactly meant by language attitudes. Considering feelings and emotions in terms of language and language use the term of language attitudes emerges in the literature. For example, Shen et al. (2023), Ahmad (2017) and Garrett (2010) have studied language and language attitudes within organizational contexts. According to Garrett (2010) the attitudes people hold towards language are deeply embedded in everyday life experiences. Whether consciously or unconsciously individuals are holding language attitudes in many different aspects such as in terms of words, accents and language in itself among other factors (Garrett, 2010).

Shen et al. (2023) study language attitudes by considering whether individuals are having positive or negative outlook towards mixing and using different languages. They found that people speaking multiple languages are viewing also other languages more positively (Shen et al., 2023). Further, Ahmad (2017) has also examined language attitudes in terms of positive and negative feelings with regards to language diversity, corporate language and knowledge sharing. Interestingly, according to Ahmad (2017) language attitudes did not affect the knowledge sharing in organizations. In addition, also Garrett (2010) talks about language attitudes in terms of positive–negative spectrum. Hence, language attitudes are usually considered to refer to the positive or negative feelings and outlooks towards language.

Additionally, Garrett (2010) goes as far as defining what is meant by attitudes, albeit stating that it is an elusive concept. According to Garrett (2010) attitudes are indicators of the *"favourability and unfavourability, or the extent to which we approve*

or dissaprove of the attitude object" (p. 23). Therefore, in other words this implies that language attitudes are informing us how we feel about language. Essentially, I define language attitudes as feelings towards language and language use. Indeed, attitudes are connected to feelings (Garrett, 2010), which brings me back to the lived experiences of language in which the feelings play also a key role as noted earlier.

The language attitudes and lived experiences of language further point towards the social practice of language since language is a social phenomenon coming alive through individual's lived experiences and essentially also feelings. This further demonstrates how language attitudes, lived experiences and social aspect of language are intertwined. Next, I will touch upon the topic of linguistic identity to further complement this discussion.

2.1.5 Identity and language

Hence the general consideration of the individual level in this part of the literature review, it is important to touch upon the relation between language and identity. Moreover, this topic loops back to the social practice of language as language identity is a social construct (Karhunen et al., 2023). Since language attitudes, lived experiences on language and the social notion of language are all linked, I would also connect the topic of linguistic identity to this cavalcade of concepts. Indeed, Karhunen et al. (2023) argue that identity in terms of language is a social construct developing through individual's interactions when crossing for example linguistic boundaries. Similarly, Bordia and Bordia (2015) refer to linguistic identity as a social identity and as a sense-making tool promoting psychological safety.

According to Bordia and Bordia (2015) linguistic identity is formed by being exposed to a certain language and linguistic environment. Considering organizations and employees, they argue that people who are used to local language at work have a clear linguistic identity and might consider adopting a foreign corporate language as a threat whereas employees who have been operating in a global setting might possess a multilingual identity as they are used to operating in different languages and thus are not considering other languages as threats (Bordia & Bordia, 2015). Therefore, like language attitudes, lived experiences and social practice of language the linguistic identity also goes beyond the plain and simple use of languages and words to deeper contexts and feelings. Now I will continue this literature review by talking about multilingualism in the following section.

2.1.6 Definitions of multilingualism

This is the last sub-section before I change the discussion from the individual level to the organizational level. I have now discussed language and the notions I connect to it. However, keeping in mind the aim of my study, which is essentially about researching a multilingual organization, I consider it important to touch upon the concept of multilingualism from the individual viewpoint before zooming in to the organizational level of discussion. Moreover, I will define what is meant by multilingualism in this study.

Essentially, according to Cenoz (2013) multilingual individuals utilize different languages to operate in communicative situations. Similarly, Jiang (2022) notes that the common emphasis with the definition of multilingualism seems to be on the ability to communicate in multiple languages and comprehend the messages conveyed in those languages. Moreover, multilingualism has been previously also perceived to purely indicate the inclusion of multiple national languages (Gaibrois, 2023).

According to Cenoz (2013) there is a social level and an individual level of multilingualism, the former referring to society's language use and the latter to a person's own capability to use languages. Those levels, social and individual, are also somewhat connected (Cenoz, 2013). However, the many layers of multilingualism don't stop there. Namely, multilingualism might work as a gateway to understanding different cultures (Jiang, 2022) or in addition to social and individual dimensions multilingualism can be considered from language use and proficiency perspective or through comparing bilingual and multilingual dimension (Cenoz, 2013). Moreover, according to Cenoz (2013) there is a holistic view to multilingualism which connects multilingualism to the social context. Viewing multilingualism through the social lens is also supported by Lovrits' (2022) finding that multilingualism is indeed a social phenomenon. Drawing from these definitions, it can be stated that multilingualism evidently refers to the incorporation of multiple languages in society as well as the individual's ability to use and comprehend multiple languages especially in connection to social context. Thus, this is the broad definition also used in my study.

Now considering the spread of multilingualism in more detail. It seems like it all comes down to individuals. Indeed, it can be stated that there are many reasons as to why an individual is a multilingual (Jiang, 2022). These reasons include aspects such as living in an area where there is a prevalence of multiple languages, individual's own interest in learning languages or acquaintance with different cultures (Jiang, 2022). Considering the emergence of multilingualism in terms of individuals' living areas helps to understand why for example Sanden (2020) and Cenoz (2013) argue that globalization has influenced the increase of multilingualism. For example, there are 22 national languages in India (Government of India, n.d.) and thinking about the European Union and its member countries there are 24 official languages altogether (European Union, n.d.). Even in a population wise small country such as Finland there are two national languages, namely Finnish and Swedish (Oikeusministeriö, n.d.). Therefore, it is rather easy to comprehend how globalization has accelerated the spread of multilingualism as people from multilingual backgrounds are expanding around the world and bringing their own individual linguistic heritage with them. Before I move on to the organizational level of discussion, I will summarize the Section 2.1 in the following paragraph.

2.1.7 Summary of the individual level discussion

In essence, there are multiple lenses and views to interpret the term language. However, research indicates that there are no clear definitions to the term and sometimes the definition lacks altogether (Brannen et al., 2014; Karhunen et al., 2018). Therefore, I specifically focused on defining language as a term by stating that it is viewed as social interactions between individuals who speak or write national languages such as Finnish, English or Swedish. This definition emphasizes the practice of perceiving language

within its social context without forgetting to focus on the social interactions in which the language actually 'happens'. Moreover, I discussed about the lived experiences of language, language attitudes and linguistic identity as those are connected to the emergence of language when individuals interact. Lastly, I discussed about multilingualism, which is essentially an individual level practice as it entails that an individual can utilize different languages in everyday life situations especially in connection to social contexts. Next, I will shift the focus to the organizational level and discuss themes commonly associated with multilingualism in IB and language research.

2.2 Multilingual organizations

This chapter starts the organizational level review of the literature. I will discuss how multinational organizations and multilingualism are connected. Moreover, I present my definition of MNCs. Thus, moving on to the organizational level of discussion and to reviewing multilingual organizations in terms of previous international business and linguistic literature. Globalization is often seen as one of the main driving forces of multilingualism especially in organizational context. Both Sanden (2020) and Cenoz (2013) state that due to globalization multilingualism has been increasing and spreading broadly across the globe. Moreover, this indicates that individuals speaking multiple languages can be encountered in various places such as in the family or at work (Cenoz, 2013). Indeed, globalization is influencing workplaces in terms of multilingualism as according to Capo and Di Pietro (2024) organizations have become more multilingual as a result of globalization. Furthermore, Woo and Giles (2017) mention that globalization is blurring MNCs' organizational boundaries also highlighting the relevance of language questions both internally and externally within the MNCs. Now, let us delve deeper into multilingual organizations and the concepts commonly associated with them.

2.2.1 Multilingualism and MNCs

It seems that often times language related IB research is focusing on multilingualism especially in connection to multinational organizations. Indeed, researchers such as Luo and Shenkar (2006), Fredriksson et al. (2006), Langinier and Ehrhart (2020) and Karhunen et al. (2023) among others have studied multilingualism within multinational organizations. Consequently, also the language diversity in multinational organizations is acknowledged in the literature by many (see e.g., Back & Piekkari, 2024; Bordia & Bordia, 2015; Sanden, 2020; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018) and it seems like multinational organizations are referred to in a number of ways in different studies. Therefore, before diving deeper into the different aspects related to multilingualism, I consider it important to touch upon the topic of multinational organizations and how those are presented in the literature.

Fredriksson et al. (2006) and Ahmad and Barner-Rasmussen (2019) refer to multinational organizations as multinational corporations (MNCs) whereas Langinier and Ehrhart (2020) talk about MNCs as multinational companies. To add to this plethora of terms, Fitzsimmons et al. (2023) refer to a multinational organization as a multinational enterprise (MNE) and define it by stating that *"it actively manages assets and*

people across nations" (p. 1403). Ultimately, these are all different ways to address the same topic. Indeed, MNEs can also be called as MNCs, multinationals or international corporations, however, the idea is the same: a company having operations in more than one country (Eurostat, 2019).

Moreover, Fredriksson et al. (2006) interpret MNCs as multilingual communities. In a way this approach by Fredriksson et al. (2006) indicates that MNCs are by default multilingual. It is interesting to note that multinational organizations are seen as multilingual entities in other previous studies as well (see e.g., Ahmad, 2017; Ahmad & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019; Bordia & Bordia, 2015), which essentially suggest that multinational organizations are indeed broadly seen as multilingual by definition. Furthermore, MNCs are also considered as social constructs (Karhunen et al., 2018; Karhunen et al., 2023) developing through daily interactions (Karhunen et al., 2018). Langinier and Ehrhart (2020) add an even more nuanced way into perceiving multinational organizations as they view them as an alliance of the local and global dynamics combining localization and globalization into so called glocalization.

Hence, there are different ways of addressing and perceiving multinational organizations, however, in my study multinational organizations are referred to as multinational corporations (MNCs). Drawing from the above presented discussion I define MNCs by combining Fitzsimmons et al. (2023), Fredriksson et al. (2006) and Karhunen et al. (2018) definitions. Essentially this means that in this study MNCs are considered to be not only multinational but also multilingual, socially emerging companies which manage assets and people in different countries. Now that the concept of MNCs has been addressed, I will shift my focus to topics commonly associated with multilingualism and multilingual organizations. The notion of a common corporate language is something frequently coming forward in the IB literature on multilingual organizations. Therefore, I will continue the discussion in the following by talking about common corporate languages.

2.2.2 Common corporate language

A common theme emerging from the international business research as well as from the multilingualism literature is organizations' common corporate language (CCL). Usually, organizations introduce a common corporate language to address their diverse linguistic environments (Ahmad, 2017; Sanden, 2020; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). However, research suggests that implementing a common corporate language is not always solving the issue of language diversity but rather creating more challenges for organizations, such as economical inefficiencies and miscommunication issues among others (Sanden, 2020). Moreover, sticking to one common language at the workplace might cause multilingual people to feel linguistically restricted (Capo & Di Pietro, 2024). Although, it is important to note that research is also emphasizing the benefits of taking a common corporate language in use within organizations (see Capo & Di Pietro, 2024; Woo & Giles, 2017) as it can for example bring linguistic consistency to the organization (Woo & Giles, 2017). Further, it is not always the question of whether a common corporate language is good or bad on the organizational level but also on the individual level as the perceptions regarding a company's official language might differ depending on a person's native language or geographical location as Fredriksson et al. (2006) discovered.

In terms of CCL, English is by far the most recognized common corporate language in organizations (Kingsley, 2013). In fact, Sanden and Kankaanranta (2018) found that English has become a commonly accepted communication language no longer needing a separate managerial decision since it is unquestionably considered as the principal communication language. Moreover, English language's dominant position in international business is generally recognized as the reality according to Fredriksson et al. (2006). However, while literature generally regards English as the most obvious choice as organizations' common corporate language there is also recent discussion on moving forward from the CCL approach to addressing MNCs' diverse linguistic environment with targeted activities and tools (Sanden, 2020). In addition, Langinier and Ehrhart (2020) advocate for translanguaging as in combining different languages while also highlighting how this kind of approach promotes inclusivity. Moreover, Fredriksson et al. (2006) found that in a company where English is claimed to be the company's common corporate language there is still a prevalence of other languages in the company which are being used regardless of having a common corporate language. Therefore, while English is often times the so-called lingua franca, multilingual MNCs should not necessarily toss away other languages but rather harness the benefits of their multilingual reality. Next, I will discuss the topic of organization's language policy as it relates to this section on common corporate languages. Moreover, I have identified it as a theme commonly emerging from the multilingualism related IB literature. Therefore, it is important to also discuss corporate language policies here.

2.2.3 Language policy

Language policy is a concept clearly associated in literature with the notion of CCL and multilingualism. For example, Sanden (2020) and Sanden and Kankaanranta (2018) are researching language policies in the context of multilingual organizations and CCL. Moreover, also Capo and Di Pietro (2024) are discussing organization's common corporate language together with language policies. Peltokorpi and Vaara (2012) define language policies by stating that they are *"the rules and regulations that govern language use in MNCs*" (p. 809). In other words, language policies could be perceived as the defining factor of MNCs' language use. Further, Peltokorpi and Vaara (2012) state that language policies manifest into actuality through language practices. Thus, language policies are essentially acted out through language practices.

Language policy can mean formalized and official policies or informal and un-official policies (Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). An important observation here regarding the informalized policies is Sanden and Kankaanranta's (2018) finding that the informalized policies, which are not written down anywhere and are usually passed on to new employees by word of mouth are making the organizational knowledge sharing difficult and leaving the responsibility of deciding on the organization's language to the employees. These informal language policies which might also cause confusion among employees are especially typical in organizations where English as CCL is perceived as a self-evident fact (Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). Therefore, this further emphasizes the need to question and re-think the position that CCL, especially English as a CCL, has in organizations. In the following section I talk about code switching. I deem it important to discuss this topic in unison with the notions of common

corporate language and language policy. This is because I find that code switching literature is closely related to literature on multilingual organizations.

2.2.4 Code switching

Moving on to discuss code switching, which essentially refers to individuals alternating between languages throughout an interaction (Ahmad & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019) sometimes even without noticing it themselves (Garrett, 2010). While essentially code switching discussion is largely related to the individual level I have addressed in the Section 2.1, I consider it important to discuss code switching here as a practice as I see it being closely linked to multilingual MNCs. Indeed, like CCL also code switching is something usually discussed within the IB research on MNCs and language. Consequently, Shen et al. (2023) note that code switching is probable in a multilingual MNC's context. It is not only in the IB literature but also in the research on multilingualism where code switching is usually studied as Cenoz (2013) states that code switching has long been studied in the field of multilingualism research.

The opinions on code switching seem to range from previous literature perceiving it as a negative practice (Ahmad & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019; Cenoz, 2013) to more recent literature seeing it as a beneficial and positive, supportive language practice (Ahmad & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019; Shen et al., 2023). According to Cenoz (2013) code switching can be doubted because switching between different languages during a conversation might suggest that the person switching languages is not competent enough. Ahmad and Barner-Rasmussen (2019) are adding to that perception as they note that code switching is considered to be triggered because of language competency. However, they also emphasize the benefits of code switching and demonstrate in their study how code switching is often intended to increase inclusion and collaboration among the individuals participating to the interaction (Ahmad & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019). Similarly, Garrett (2010) mentions that code switching can be used to express fellowship or attitude towards the person they are talking to. Moreover, code switching can help individuals to focus their energy on comprehending the important knowledge rather than pouring resources into tackling language and language diversity issues (Ahmad & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019).

Therefore, engaging in code switching is not necessarily automatically a bad choice as such, but rather a valid practice promoting inclusivity. Moreover, as the views on code switching seem to vary and develop over time it is perhaps good to examine the practice of code switching even more. Now I will be moving on to proposing a theoretical framework for my research.

2.2.5 Summary of the organizational level discussion

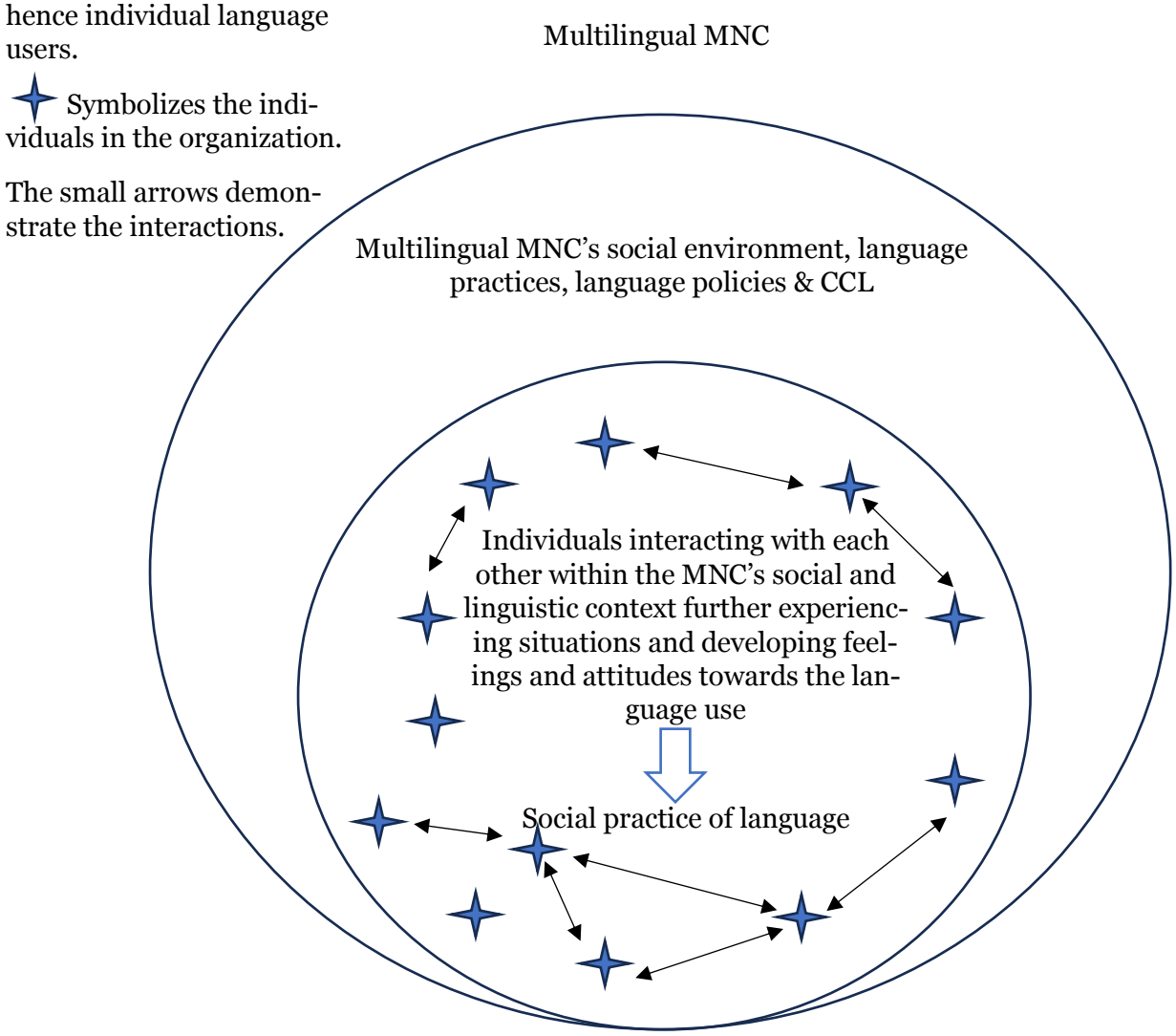
To summarize the organizational level discussion before I present my theoretical framework, I conclude that MNCs are multilingual, multinational socially emergent companies. Practices and strategies such as code switching, CCL and organizational language policies are in place in MNCs due to their multilingual nature. However, there is debate on whether these strategies and practices are beneficial or not in the organizational context. In the following section I will be presenting my theoretical framework.

2.3 Theoretical framework

Next, I will introduce my theoretical framework which I have formulated based on the discussions, literature and definitions presented in the Sections 2.1 and 2.2. Essentially, being a social construct, language becomes alive between human interactions. Moreover, as with language, also multilingualism is a social phenomenon (Lovrits, 2022). An environment where there are plenty of individuals and thus also plenty of social, language-forming encounters is a multilingual MNC. Ultimately, also MNCs are social, multilingual entities with different language policies, practices and CCLs.

Therefore, MNCs are filled with individuals who interact with each other and create language socially in their organizational context within the limits of the MNCs' linguistic practices, social environment and language policies among others. These social interactions are also influencing people's feelings, experiences and attitudes regarding language use and further also the whole organization.

Fundamentally, multilingual MNCs constitute of different individuals, hence individual language users. When zooming in from the surface to a deeper level of analysis on MNC's multilingual reality we can see that there are many aspects such as the language practices and the CCL of the company which essentially provide the framework for individuals' language use in the organization. Simultaneously individuals are living the language in to existence, forming feelings and attitudes towards it and developing linguistic identities. Essentially, language and the social practice of language in MNCs are being born during these interactions. The theoretical framework is presented below with some captions to enhance the reading process.



Multilingual MNCs' social context as well as the language practices (such as code switching), language policies and the common corporate language in the company are giving the frame for the individuals' interactions. Simultaneously individuals are living the language into existence, forming feelings and attitudes towards it and developing linguistic identities, hence the social practice of language.

Essentially, language and the social practice of language in MNCs are being born during these interactions.

3 Methodology

In this methodology chapter I will describe how I have conducted the research meaning that I delve deeper into the methodology behind my research and introduce the research design. Moreover, I will provide more information on the research context and build a coherent understanding of the case company Vattenfall focusing especially on Vattenfall Oy. In addition, I will introduce the process of selecting research participants for my study as well as give insight into the data collection and analysis. First, I will present the chosen research methodology. Thereafter, I will talk about my own role in the case company to ensure that my position as an ethnographer is properly addressed. Moreover, I will introduce the research context and the case company in more detail. The description of the case company will be followed by a go through of the selection process for the research participants. Furthermore, I will talk about the data collection and analysis processes. Lastly, I will reflect on the ethicality of the research as well as evaluate the credibility of my study through reflexivity.

3.1 Ethnographic case study

The focus of my study is to understand employees' experiences and interpret what are the experiences of multilingualism like in a specific organizational setting. In other words, I am studying the "how" rather than the "why". Moreover, one of the centre aspects of my research is to perceive language and human interaction as socially constructed and evolving concept as defined in the literature review of my study. Furthermore, I am focusing on one specific case organization and thus also providing thorough contextualization of the case organization. Therefore, as I am interested in interpreting and understanding a specific, contextualized case I turn towards qualitative research. This decision is supported by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) as they state that qualitative research recognizes reality as socially constructed phenomenon and focuses on understanding and interpreting the studied issues rather than testing hypotheses or trying to explain phenomena. Thus, my research is conducted following the research methods specific to qualitative research. In addition, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) note that qualitative research allows for a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon since the studied issue can be researched in its actual real-life context. Moreover, qualitative research is considered when examining constructs such as perceptions, feelings, and beliefs (Halkias et al., 2022). The aim of my research is studying people's experiences, in other words, I am interested in individuals' perceptions, hence qualitative research is appropriate.

Whilst I have stated that I will be conducting this study as a qualitative study it is also important to state which qualitative approach I will be using in my research. In fact, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) argue that choosing between the different qualitative approaches is as essential as deciding between whether to conduct a qualitative or quantitative research. Essentially, I am conducting a case study since I am examining a real-life case from the perspective of the organization's individuals, which is common to case studies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). One of the strengths of case studies is the possibility to do an in depth and specific examination of a phenomenon or an

institution (Lee & Saunders, 2017). This is exactly what I am striving towards in my research and why case study is the chosen strategy in my research.

To fully address my study's research design, it is important to understand my role as a researcher in this study. Indeed, I am researching an organization in which I am involved as an employee. Therefore, in addition to interview data, I am also utilizing my own observations and experiences as research material, hence I am engaging in ethnography. According to Moore (2011) essential in ethnography is indeed the researcher's own observations and experiences as the empiric data collection method. Further aligning with Moore's (2011) definition Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) note that important in ethnographic research is participant observations made by the researcher in order to understand how people are interacting with each other and the environment they are in. These observations are then further accompanied with interview data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Consequently, I will also follow this approach and utilize my ethnographic observations as well as interview data when conducting my research. In addition, central to ethnographic research is to comprehend the 'native's' perspective or the 'emic' view as Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) put it. The 'natives' in my research are the employees of Vattenfall Oy. Therefore, my position as an employee at Vattenfall Oy gives fruitful grounds for conducting my study as ethnographic research. Furthermore, to do successful ethnographic research it is important that the researcher knows the field and understands how to communicate with the individuals she is researching (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). During my three-year-long journey at Vattenfall I have learned about the company, its people and ways of working which all support me now as an ethnographer. More in-depth explanation of the case organization and my role in the company will follow in the Section 3.2.

As stated above I am engaging in both case study research as well as ethnography which ultimately indicates that my study is an ethnographic case study. In essence, ethnographic case study combines both ethnography and case study approaches (Bayeck, 2023). According to Moore (2011) applying ethnographical methods into studying a case organization enables the researcher to understand the mixture of perspectives prevailing among the members of the organization. Since my intention is to gain a holistic view of Vattenfall Oy employees' thoughts regarding multilingualism and language I will be following the ethnographical research methods while conducting a case study as Moore (2011) suggests. Moreover, applying ethnography to case study approach provides fruitful possibilities for examining the organizational members as a joint social entity (Moore, 2011). Now keeping in mind my focus on language as a social concept, this Moore's (2011) note further supports my decision of conducting an ethnographical case study. In addition, according to Bayeck (2023) ethnographic case study allows for a shorter observation period than a traditional ethnography would. Hence, due to time constrains and the nature of my research being a thesis work, I prefer to engage in ethnographic case study

A remark further supporting the choice of conducting my study as an ethnographic case study is Eriksson and Kovalainen's (2008) note regarding talk: *"In ethnographic research, talk is conceptualized as a social practice: what people say and what they keep silent about produce meaning and value in social life"* (Chapter 10). This conceptualization is in line with my study's approach to language and talk in general. Therefore, ethnographic approach is appropriate for my study.

More specifically, my study can be considered as an autoethnographic case study as well. Indeed, in addition to interview data I am also describing my own experiences at Vattenfall and using them in my research data, hence I am in a way engaging in autoethnography since according to Lapadat (2017) in autoethnographic study the researcher includes her own experiences while also doing an ethnographic analysis. This makes me both the researcher and the participant of my study (Lapadat, 2017). Next, the following section will provide more details of my role in the case company as well as describe the research context and the case organization thoroughly.

3.2 Vattenfall as my research context

In this section I will focus on establishing the research context meaning that I will be outlining the background and setting within which my study is situated. This way I hope to provide extensive contextualization on the foundations of the case study organization and further build a solid understanding of the environment in which the study is conducted.

3.2.1 My role as a Vattenfall employee

To understand my position as a researcher in this case study I will first touch upon my role at the case organization Vattenfall. The initial idea and interest to conduct this study was sparked by my work duties and role at Vattenfall. I work as a People & Culture Advisor at Vattenfall Oy, which essentially means that I work in human resources at Vattenfall's legal entity in Finland. I work with various tasks related to employment life cycle, such as updating and maintaining the employee data, training employees on HR related topics and ensuring that HR related content, policies and systems are up-to-date and accurate. While my key focus is on the employees in Finland, I am also part of bigger global projects collaborating with other Vattenfall countries' HR personnel.

Through my work as a People & Culture Advisor I get to discuss with different employees from various backgrounds who work in the different parts of the organization. Therefore, I have started to gain a thorough understanding of how employees are experiencing Vattenfall Oy as a workplace. Moreover, to circle back to the topic of my research, I have noticed that as an HR person I am often speaking to a large group of employees and I am faced with the perennial, perplexing question of a multilingual organization: Which language should I use so that the important message I am sharing is understood while also ensuring that each employee feels included? This question has been the spark of my research. Further, I am frequently involved in multilingual meetings. Thus, my work in HR at Vattenfall has given me a great platform to observe and conduct my research. Furthermore, it has also sparked my interest to study this topic. Next, I will present the case organization Vattenfall in more detail.

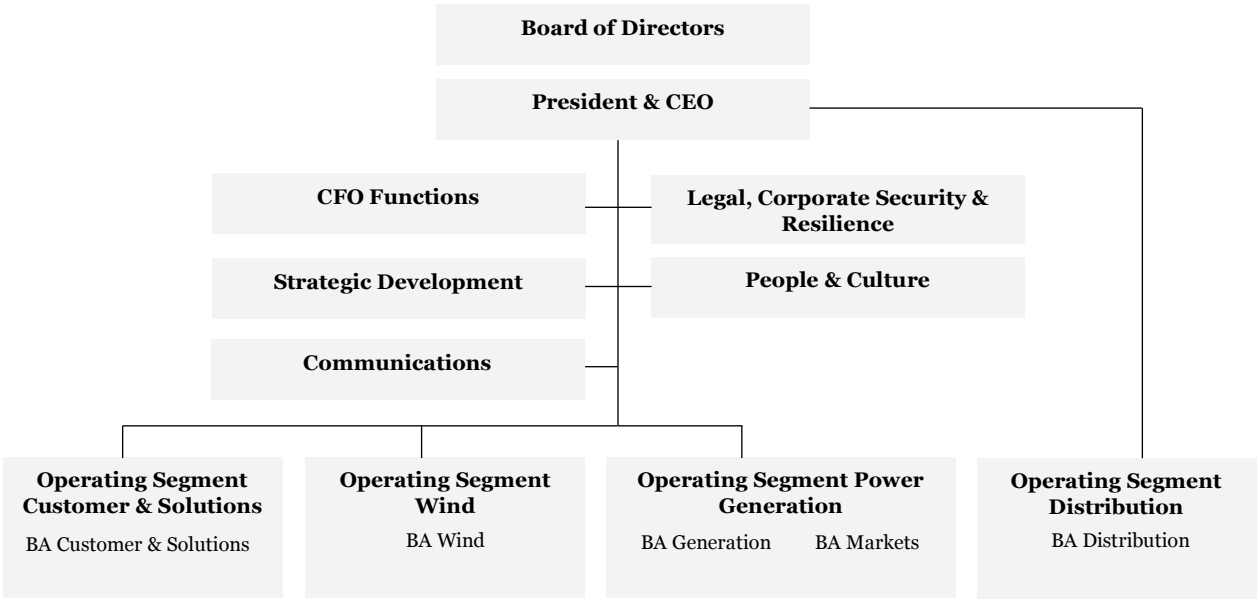
3.2.2 Vattenfall globally

Vattenfall is a global energy company dedicated to fostering fossil-free future by producing and retailing sustainable electricity and heat. The organization has worked in the energy sector for over 100 years. (Vattenfall Group, n.d.). Indeed, Vattenfall was

founded in 1909 in Sweden (Vattenfall Group History, n.d.). Currently, in 2024 the company employs about 19 000 people and has its main markets in countries such as Sweden, Germany, the United Kingdom, Denmark and the Netherlands. Vattenfall AB, which is the parent company, is fully owned by the Swedish state having headquarters located in Solna, Sweden. (Vattenfall, n.d.). Thus, in other words Vattenfall is an old, rather large European energy company striving for enabling fossil-free living.

It is also important to understand the operating model of Vattenfall. Namely, Vattenfall has five Business Areas (BA) and five business supporting Staff Functions (SF). The five BAs include BA Customers & Solutions, BA Wind, BA Generation, BA Markets and BA Distributions. Moreover, the five BAs are divided under four operational sections as seen from Figure 1 below. Vattenfall's electricity distribution is separated from the other operations. Furthermore, the five SFs constitute of SF CFO Functions, SF Strategic Development, SF Communications, SF Legal, Corporate Security & Resilience and SF People & Culture. (Vattenfall Group Organization, n.d.). The latter, SF People & Culture, is the function in which I as a People & Culture Advisor belong to. Currently, in 2024 Vattenfall's CEO is Anna Borg who is located in Sweden. She responds to Vattenfall's Board of Directors. (Vattenfall Group Organization, n.d.). The following organizational chart will demonstrate Vattenfall's organizational model.

Figure 1. Vattenfall's organizational chart (Vattenfall Group Organization, n.d.)



Next, I will focus on describing Vattenfall's operations in Finland. I will also discuss the above presented Vattenfall's organizational chart in terms of Finland's operations. Further, I will start by providing a brief of Vattenfall Oy's history in Finland to ensure that the historical context becomes clear.

3.2.3 Vattenfall's entry to Finland

After operating in Sweden for around 80 years, Vattenfall was set to focus on internationalization in the electricity industry. Vattenfall's internationalization breakthrough happened in Finland when Vattenfall acquired two Finnish electricity companies,

namely Lapuan Sähkö and Hämeen Sähkö, in the mid 1990s and thus Vattenfall entered the Finnish electricity market. (Vattenfall Group Stories, n.d.). However, Vattenfall's first steps abroad in Finland didn't flow entirely smoothly as Vattenfall decided to outsource personnel working on electricity grids and centralize local customer service which both caused mistrust and resistance among the Finnish employees of the acquired companies (Vattenfall Group the Company and the People, n.d.). Despite the hardships regarding personnel in the beginning of Vattenfall's journey in Finland, the acquiring of Hämeen Sähkö turned out to be a success since Hämeen Sähkö was the third largest electricity distribution company in Finland at the time (Vattenfall Group Medialle, 2024 November 21). Now, the company has continued its business in Finland for three decades. Indeed, during 2024 Vattenfall Oy celebrates its 30th anniversary in Finland (Vattenfall Group Medialle, 2024 November 21).

Considering my research, it is of course important to understand the history of Vattenfall Oy, however, the current status of Vattenfall's office and operations in Finland are the main focusing points as my study is situated in the present. Therefore, in the following section I will talk more about the current situation of Vattenfall Oy. In addition, I will describe the working environment and linguistic practices prevailing at Vattenfall Oy as I have gained a thorough understanding of the company and its working environment via my profession as an HR person at Vattenfall Oy. I will first start by describing Vattenfall Oy's working environment a couple of years back when I started at the company.

3.2.4 Vattenfall Oy's recent past and contemporary operations

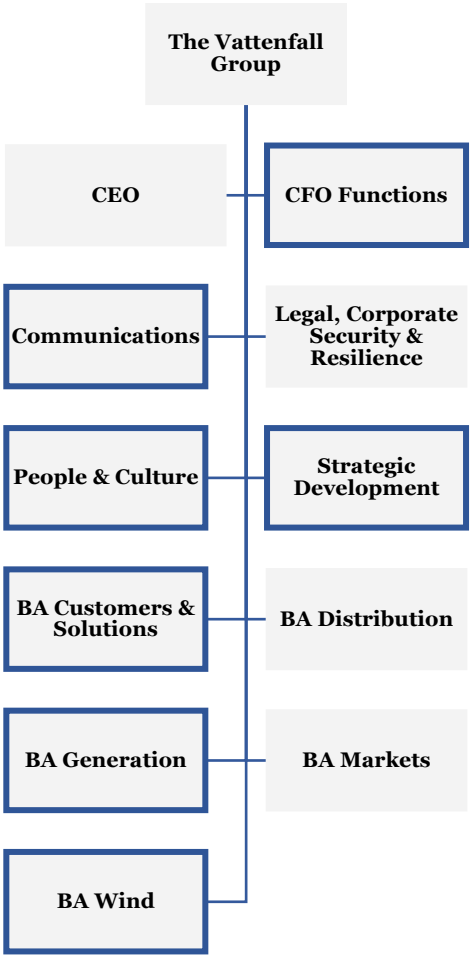
To understand the complete picture of Vattenfall Oy's current working environment, linguistic practices and employees habits it is important that I describe what the company was like when I started there. Two years ago, in January 2022, when I first entered Vattenfall Oy's only office in Finland there were less than 80 employees working in the company. Starting my career at Vattenfall I thought that less than 80 people working in one rather compact office would make it easier to get to know other colleagues. However, I was wrong since Vattenfall Oy is following the hybrid way of working which results in many people working remotely and therefore they don't meet other colleagues that often. This further leads to employees not knowing or recognising other employees of the company. It is understandable, though, that some people prefer to work from home since most of Vattenfall Oy's employees are part of global teams. Therefore, they don't have any immediate colleagues at the Finland office which might decrease the need and willingness to come to the office. Moreover, naturally, people get to know each other little by little, albeit it might take more time than expected due to the remote work culture. Therefore, it was not a surprise to me when during the 2023 Christmas party an employee came to me and asked my name even though I had spoken to the whole office on several occasions and given numerous presentations to all employees throughout the year. Thus, the small head count doesn't guarantee that everyone knows each other thoroughly.

In terms on language and linguistic environment Vattenfall Oy consisted of linguistically relatively homogenous group of people in 2022. The main language used in the office in Finland was Finnish. Other languages such as Swedish and English were heard and used at the office when there were visitors from other countries such as

Sweden and Germany. At that time, the language practices at Vattenfall Oy were rather straightforward. Everyone at the office understood Finnish and therefore there was no need to consider other languages when creating monthly info letters, planning the program for the Christmas party or having all employee meetings at the office coffee lobby to name a few. For example, when I was training the employees on how to use our new time writing system, I had to prepare the training materials only in Finnish and hold the training sessions only in Finnish. Internally almost everything related to only Finland was done in Finnish. However, even during that time Vattenfall's common corporate language was nonetheless English. It just wasn't that visible in Vattenfall Oy's office at the time.

Today, in 2024, Vattenfall Oy continues to operate in the energy sector. Specifically, Vattenfall is one of Finland's largest electricity companies providing fossil free electricity all over Finland, except Åland (Vattenfall Group Finland, n.d.). Therefore, it can be stated that Vattenfall has established its business rather well in Finland. Moreover, Vattenfall has nine hydro power plants in Finland and the company is currently developing Finland's first big wind farm in Korsnäs (Vattenfall Group Finland, n.d.). Thus, Vattenfall's operations in Finland have increased from acquiring two electricity companies to owning and establishing power plants and being one of the major operators in Finland in the electricity business. The Figure 2 below shows the organizational structure of Vattenfall Group, and it demonstrates the organizational parts found in Vattenfall Oy. The Business Areas (BAs) and Staff Functions (SFs) found in Vattenfall Oy are marked with blue lines. Moreover, it is important to understand that while it seems that almost every BA or SF is represented in Finland, in reality the majority of Vattenfall Oy's employees belong to the BA Customers & Solutions making it the main BA in Finland in terms of head count. The Figure 2 can be found below.

Figure 2. Vattenfall's organization in Finland

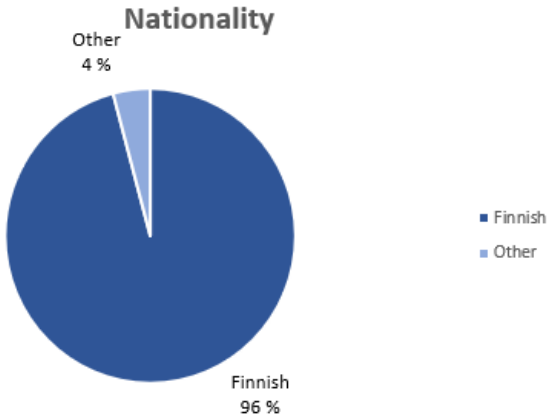


Now moving on to discuss Vattenfall Oy's working environment and personnel in more detail. Even though Vattenfall entered the Finnish market already 30 years ago and has increased its operations in Finland, personnel wise the growth is not visible in the current head count of Vattenfall's Finland office. In fact, Vattenfall Oy has still quite a small presence in Finland in terms of head count when comparing to other Vattenfall countries. Only approximately 100 employees out of the total 19 000 Vattenfall employees are part of Vattenfall Oy (Vattenfall Group Finland, n.d.). Therefore, while being one of the largest energy sector companies in Europe (Vattenfall, n.d.), Vattenfall has arguably a rather minor presence in Finland when considering the company as an employer. For example, compared to Sweden where Vattenfall has nearly 11 000 employees (Vattenfall Group, n.d.) the number of people working in Finland is marginal.

Now, let us consider Vattenfall Oy's office in terms of language and language use. As noted in the earlier section up until recently people working at Vattenfall Oy have been either Finnish or Finnish and Swedish -speaking people. However, during the past two years from 2022 to 2024 there has happened a change since nowadays Vattenfall Oy employs also people who speak other languages, such as Italian, as their native language. Therefore, the use of English at the office in Finland has visibly increased. This has also made Vattenfall Group's common corporate language, namely English, more visible at the Helsinki office. It is noteworthy however, that the number

of people speaking other languages than Finnish or Finnish and Swedish as their mother tongue at Vattenfall Oy remains relatively low as only little less than 10 % of Vattenfall Oy's employees are not native Finnish or Finnish and Swedish speakers. Moreover, the Figure 3 below demonstrates the division of nationalities at Vattenfall Oy. Albeit nationality and mother language do not always go hand in hand, the figure below illustrates the small presence of other nationalities at Vattenfall Oy quite well.

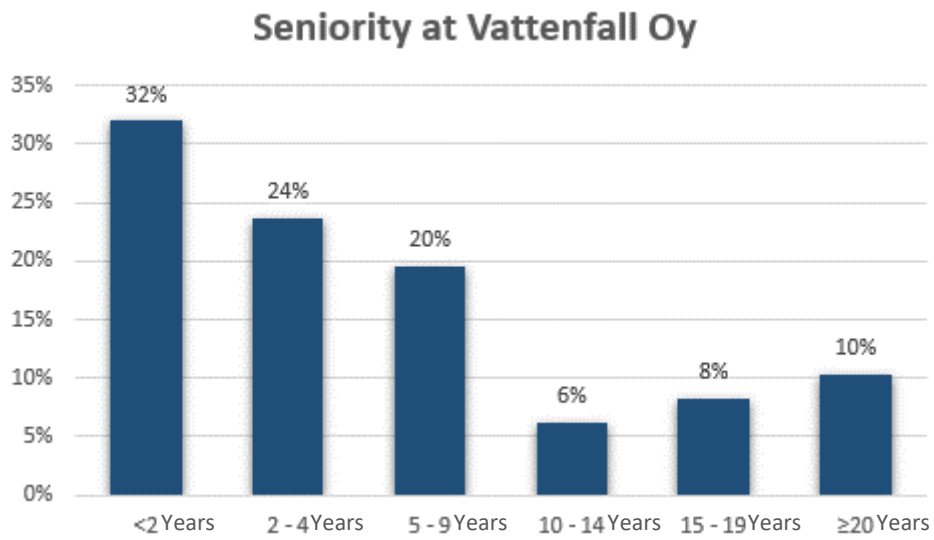
Figure 3. Division of nationalities at Vattenfall Oy



The rather new multilingual setting at the Helsinki office has forced Vattenfall Oy to change some of its language practices. For example, the monthly newsletters are now written in English and while a couple of years ago I made training materials for all employees in Finnish, I now translate them into English. However, there is still a lot of improvement to be done. The 2024 Christmas party works as a great example of the needed improvements. Namely, during the 2024 office Christmas party the welcome speech was held in English, yet the highlight of the evening – a talented mentalist – performed in Finnish leaving a couple of non-Finnish speakers automatically to a more disadvantageous position. The new prevalence of other languages has led to a more case-by-case approach to Vattenfall Oy's language practices. For example, when I am training employees on HR related topics or generally addressing a big group of employees at the office or via Teams, I tend to check who are present and choose my language based on that. Currently, this is a common practice at Vattenfall Oy followed by other employees as well. This is partly because the diverse language environment prevailing at Vattenfall Oy has not been properly officially addressed.

It is also important to consider the tenure of people working at Vattenfall Oy. Figure 4 below demonstrates the seniority structure at the company. Noteworthy here is that majority of the people working at Vattenfall Oy have a tenure maximum of four years indicating that there have been quite a few newcomers joining the company during the recent years. This is mostly due to Vattenfall Oy growing as a company. As noted earlier many of these new joiners have been non-native Finnish speakers which has shaken Vattenfall Oy's language practices and language environment.

Figure 4. Seniority structure at Vattenfall Oy in 2024



Moreover, a further layer to this linguistic diversity is added by the fact that Vattenfall Oy's working language is English even though Vattenfall Oy operates in Finland. However, no formal documentation or policy has been created to indicate that the official working language in Finland is in indeed English. In addition to English, employees at Vattenfall Oy are used to using or at least hearing Swedish since around 40 % of Vattenfall Oy employees have a Swedish manager which results to Swedish people visiting the Finnish office and vice versa. Further, everyone working at Vattenfall Oy collaborates and works with the other Vattenfall countries which means that Vattenfall Oy's employees are often using various languages during the working day.

Furthermore, many of Vattenfall Oy's employees are part of international teams meaning that they have a non-Finnish manager. In fact, 27 managers out of a total of 36 managers are international, non-Finnish managers. This entails that there are only 9 managers for the employees in Finland who are Finnish. This also affects the linguistic diversity in Vattenfall Oy as many international managers visit Finland quite often. Indeed, usually there is one international manager visiting the office per week, which means that the corridors of Vattenfall's Finland office are also frequently filled with languages such as Swedish and English. Sometimes the international managers visiting the Helsinki office want to join some all-employee events or meetings. This happened during the 2024 office Christmas party since one Swedish manager wanted to join the party while on a business trip to Helsinki. As noted earlier, everything else was covered in English, but the most interesting part, namely the mentalist, was performing in Finnish which left the international manager as sort of an outsider.

As the above indicates, employees at Vattenfall Oy are somewhat used to multilingualism. However, the multilingual setting in Finland's context is quite new and nowadays highly visible at work in various situations such as general all-employee meetings, HR updates, emails and Christmas parties a like. In the following section I will go through the participant selection process through which I selected the interviewees for my research. In addition, I will introduce the participants in the study.

3.3 Participant selection and participants in the study

According to Boddy (2016), the suitable sample size for qualitative research is largely depending on the study in question as well as its context and its approach. As my study focuses on Vattenfall Oy which is a rather small organization with only around 100 employees, I don't have the possibility nor the need or intention to interview hundreds of people. However, to gain a thorough understanding of Vattenfall Oy employee's perceptions on multilingualism I have interviewed eight (8) people.

The eight participants were chosen for my research through purposeful sampling, which essentially means that participants are chosen by the researcher based on specific criterion such as the participant belonging to a certain group or the participant portraying certain characteristics (Stratton, 2024). Since the focus of my research is on language related topics it makes sense to purposefully choose participants which represent different language backgrounds. Therefore, it felt crucial that I interviewed as many non-local language speakers as possible to understand their view on Vattenfall Oy's multilingual environment. Thus, half of the participants (N=4) were non-local language speakers. The other half (N=4) spoke local language(s), meaning Finnish or Finnish and Swedish as their mother tongue. Furthermore, it is important to note, that none of the interviewees were native English speakers and their English skills vary from each other.

These eight participants were chosen due to their potential to provide valuable information on the topic of my study. Indeed, according to Emmel (2013, Chapter 2) the point of purposeful sampling is the studying of *"information rich cases"* which provide crucial insights into the research question. This is my intention with the research, hence purposeful sampling is appropriate and the selection of these eight interviewees is justified. Moreover, purposeful sampling is a pragmatic approach to qualitative research sampling (Emmel, 2013), which I personally enjoy. Next, I will describe the participants of the study in more detail.

The participants are all employees at Vattenfall Oy. The roles and responsibilities each participant have at Vattenfall Oy vary. Moreover, different business areas are represented in the sample. However, a common factor for all the participants was that they all need to use languages other than their mother tongue in their daily work. Participants' tenure at Vattenfall Oy varied from 10 months to 25 years. Although, most participants had worked at Vattenfall Oy for around two to three years. This also reflects the seniority structure presented earlier in the Figure 4 as in 2024 56 % of all Vattenfall Oy employees have been working in the company for maximum of four years. In fact, 32 % have been working in the company for less than two years.

The participants will remain anonymous throughout the study. This was promised to the interviewees at the beginning of the interviews and in the Privacy Notice (see Appendix 1) which the participants signed prior to the interviews. The interview data is anonymous as I wanted the participants to be able to honestly and openly discuss with me. Moreover, in terms of ethicality I consider keeping the participants anonymous as an enhancement to the ethicality of the research. Therefore, no names, age or other personal identificatory information is used in this study. However, the interviewees are pseudonymised to provide a better contextualization of the interview quotations. Next, I will delve deeper into the participants, their roles and pseudonyms

to ensure a thorough contextualization and understanding of the interviewees' situation at Vattenfall Oy.

The below presented Table 2 provides a detailed introduction to the participants and their pseudonyms. The participants are grouped by their native language in terms of whether their native language is the local language, i.e., Finnish or Finnish and Swedish, or non-local language, e.g., Italian. In addition, these groups are then further subdivided by the participants tenure at Vattenfall Oy. The tenure is given in ranges to foster the anonymity of the interviewees. The participants' roles in the organization are described on a high-level meaning that I disclose the group-level Business Areas (BAs) or Staff Functions (SFs) in which they belong to. It is noteworthy, that the BA Customers & Solutions is the major business area in Finland in terms of head count as majority of Vattenfall Oy's employees belong to the BA Customers & Solutions. This is reflected in the participants' BAs / SFs since most of the interviewees belong to the BA Customers & Solutions. However, as with other BAs and SFs there are different Business Units (BUs) and teams within the BA Customers & Solutions. Therefore, almost every interviewee belongs to a different team within the BA Customers & Solutions. Furthermore, I briefly introduce the participants' job descriptions and teams based on what the interviewees told me during our discussions. This enables further contextualization of the participants' position at Vattenfall Oy. The following Table 2 will also describe the participants' language use at work. Thereafter, I will focus on describing the data collection and analysis processes.

Table 2. Participants in the study

Language group	Pseudonym	Tenure	Business Area / Staff Function	Job	Team / Colleagues	Language use at work
Local language (LL)	LL1	2-4 years	People & Culture	Human resources	Has colleagues both locally and globally, is part of an international team.	Own native language(s) & English
	LL2	2-4 years	Strategic Development	IT & data handling	International team with colleagues in e.g., Sweden and Germany.	Own native language(s), English, Swedish & German
	LL3	>20 years	Customers & Solutions	Tasks related to marketing and electricity retail to consumers	Majority of the team is local, Finnish speaking people.	Own native language(s), English & Swedish
	LL4	2-4 years	Customers & Solutions	Tasks related to certain electricity products	International team with colleagues in e.g., Sweden and Germany.	English, own native language(s)
Non-local language (NOL)	NOL1	<2 years	Customers & Solutions	Analyst & data handling	Has colleagues both locally and globally, is part of an international team.	English, own native language(s) & Finnish
	NOL2	<2 years	Customers & Solutions	Analyst & data handling	Team consists of mostly local people.	English
	NOL3	<2 years	Customers & Solutions	Analyst & data handling	Has colleagues both locally and globally, is part of an international team.	English, own native language(s) & Finnish
	NOL4	<2 years	Customers & Solutions	Analyst	Mostly international team with colleagues e.g., in Sweden.	English

3.4 Data collection

Gaining access to a case company can sometimes be a rather difficult challenge when doing qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This problem is especially present in ethnographic studies which require comprehensive access to do detailed fieldwork in the studied contexts (Moore, 2011). However, there is no such problem in terms of my research as I work at Vattenfall Oy and thus I have an easy access to the case company, its employees and documents. I gained consent from Vattenfall Oy to conduct my study there after I spoke to the company's CEO as well as to my own manager and got their approval. As I have the contact information of all Vattenfall employees due to my work, I reached out to some of Vattenfall Oy's employees via my work email. As I got confirmation from the people who wanted to participate to the study, I sent them the Privacy Notice (see Appendix 1) which they signed before participating into the study.

To answer the research questions primary data in the form of interviews was collected via semi-structured interviews. The aim was to have guiding questions and a clear outline for the interviews but still be able to delve deeper into certain topics as the interview goes. Semi-structured interviews make that possible and additionally also help in keeping the interviews rather conversational (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the interviewing approach for my study. The interviews were conducted during May and June 2024. It was essential for me to conduct the interviews face-to-face at Vattenfall Oy's premises as I wanted to be able to grasp the whole essence of our interview discussions. I interviewed one person at a time. The interviews were done either in Finnish or in English depending on the interviewees own mother language. Thus, the participants speaking Finnish as well as Finnish and Swedish were interviewed in Finnish. The people using other than Finnish as their native language were interviewed in English.

All eight interviews lasted approximately one hour during which I discussed with the participants following my interview guide and the principles of a semi-structured interview. I crafted the interview guide well before the actual interviews took place. However, the interview guide lived with the interviews, and following the semi-structured interview method I was able to add questions and focus on certain topics in more detail in case needed. The interview guide can be found from Appendix 2. For data analysis purposes all the interviews were recorded with the consent from the participants.

When conducting the research at Vattenfall I had to adapt to two different roles, namely being an employee and a researcher. The transition from being a fellow employee to being the researcher was rather clear when doing the interviews. Indeed, during the interviews I adapted the role of a researcher and made that also clear to the interviewees. However, regarding my ethnographic notes, I noticed that I made notes and formulated thoughts and ideas in my head throughout my working day which blurred the line of being a researcher versus an employee. I wrote down my own observations, feelings and experiences whenever something interesting and meaningful arose during the daily work. Quite frequently I worked on my research after the working day which enabled me to describe the observations and reflect on them straight

after they had occurred. The observations I have made during the study process are visible throughout the Results-chapter as I reflect on the interviewees' experiences utilizing my own observations. However, I am always indicating that these observations are my own so that they are easily separated from the interviewees' quotes.

3.5 Data analysis

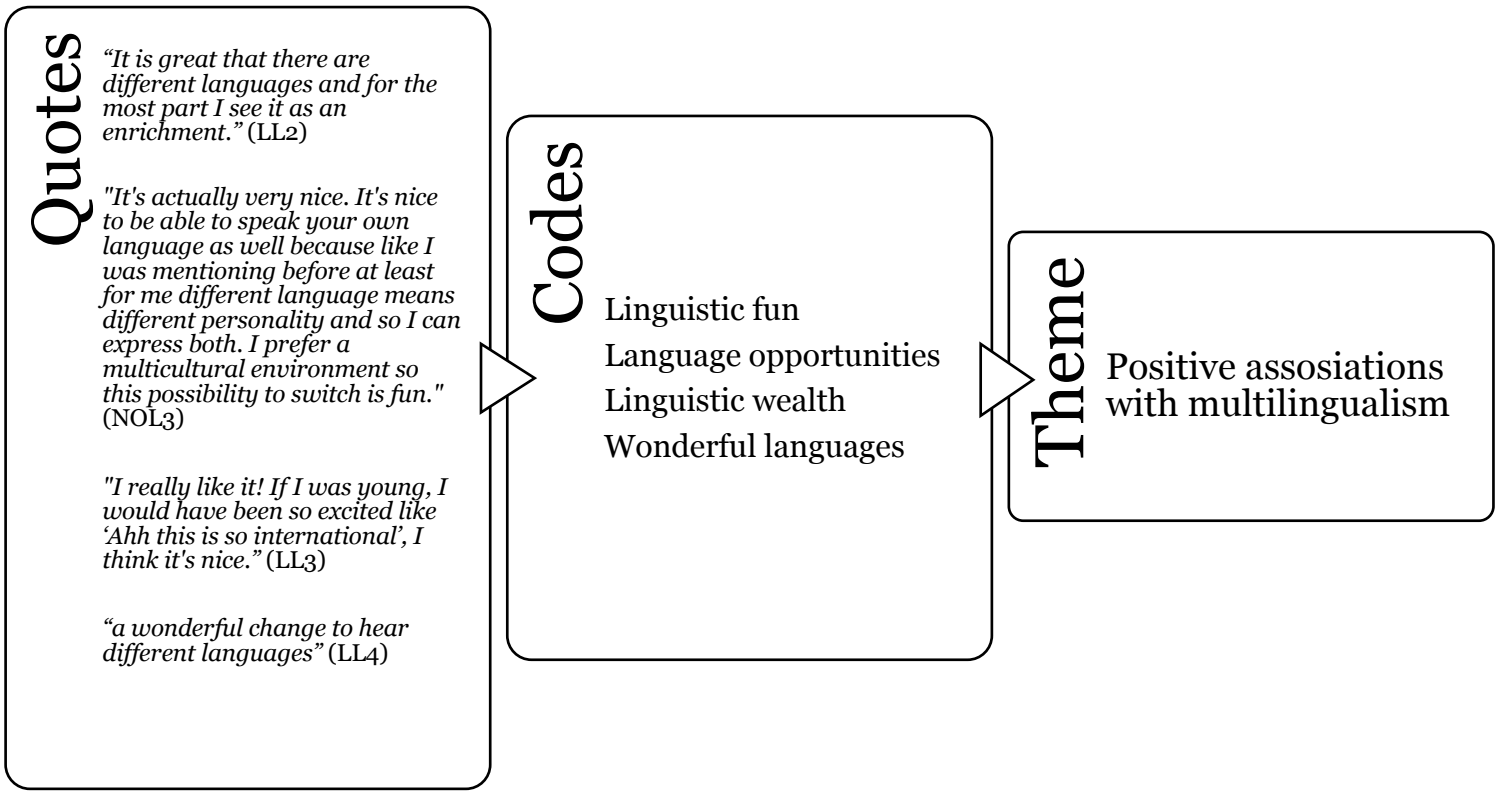
I transcribed the interview data gained from the semi-structured interviews while also starting the initial steps of data analysis. The data analysis was done by coding the transcribed data. Coding is essentially about labelling empirical material in a way that summarizes the content of the material in question (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). I have used coding in my study because it prepares the data for an easier data analysis process as Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) note. Furthermore, coding and data analysis are somewhat linked and typically the analysis of the data starts already when initially engaging into coding (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). However, for me the data analysis started already when interviewing as I started to form the broader topics and issues of my study in my mind initially during the interviews. Moreover, I did some analytical work also when noting down my ethnographical field notes as I formulated connections and identified issues through making the observations.

As stated, I prepared my data for the analysis and after that I conducted thematic analysis for my interview data as well as for my ethnographical field notes. Thematic analysis is used to create meaning by interpreting patterns in the data and the analysis works as a useful framework for describing the insights of a research (Clarke & Braun, 2017). My quest for understanding the experiences and perceptions Vattenfall Oy's employees have regarding multilingualism at their workplace can be answered with the help of thematic analysis because according to Clarke and Braun (2017) thematic analysis is especially useful when trying to interpret aspects such as participants' feelings, thoughts, lived experiences and views. Therefore, my research called for thematic analysis. Through thematic analysis I focused on identifying common themes and perceptions Vattenfall Oy's employees have while also trying to understand the underlying thoughts and defining the perhaps deviant perceptions from the mainstream. Moreover, I combined my ethnographical field notes with the interview data and reflected them together. Thus, I formulated themes and framed an overall picture of the situation at Vattenfall Oy.

3.5.1 An example of the data analysis process

To further demonstrate the data analysis process of this study, an example of the coding of the interview data is presented below. The example visualises how I have come up with one of the key results of this study, namely employees' general understanding, thoughts and atmosphere regarding Vattenfall Oy's multilingual working environment. The other key themes of my study were identified in similar manner; first reading the interview data as well as my ethnographical notes. Thereafter, I coded the data with relevant codes after which I clustered similar codes into one and defined themes based on the codes.

Figure 5. Example of the data analysis process



3.6 Evaluation of my qualitative ethnographic case study

Before moving on to discuss the results of the study I will touch upon the ethicality and credibility of my research and methodology. I will first discuss the ethicality of my study by reflecting on Eriksson and Kovalainen's (2008) nine research ethical consideration points from the perspective of my study. Thereafter, I will reflect on the credibility of my research through discussing the reflexivity of my study.

3.6.1 Ethicality

To reflect on the ethicality of my research I essentially reflect on the conducting methods of the research as well as the ways in which I report about my research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). While I would argue that ethicality is to be prioritized in research regardless of the chosen research methodology, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) state that in the context of qualitative business research, ethical considerations are often only associated with data collection methods such as interviews or ethnographic approaches within case studies or ethnography. Therefore, since my study is an ethnographic case study in which I have engaged both to ethnographical data collection as well as interviews, I consider it paramount to address the ethical aspects of my methodology. Thus, I will discuss my study's ethicality following Eriksson and Kovalainen's

(2008) nine research ethical consideration points which are: relations and responsibilities towards research participants, voluntary participation, informed consent, professional integrity, ensuring that research is not harming the participants, covert research, anonymity, silencing and plagiarism.

Regarding the relations and responsibilities towards the participants of my study I made it clear during the interviews that I am interviewing them in the role of a researcher and not in the role of an HR person which is my profession at Vattenfall. I encouraged the interviewees to voice their concerns, point out possible problems and bring forward their own honest experiences to me as a researcher. However, I do have to admit that there is of course a risk that my role in the company, albeit I am not in a manager position, could have affected the participants' answers and willingness to be completely transparent. My role in HR could have possibly made the interviewees more wary with their answers in case they were afraid to reveal something that would not be seen as a good or acceptable practice in the eyes of an HR person.

Moving on to the second and third point, namely voluntary participation and informed consent as they are linked with each other as noted by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008). Information regarding voluntary participation and informed consent were provided to the participants in the form of a Privacy Notice (Appendix 1) well before the interviews took place. In addition, I went briefly through the main points of the notice and ensured that the interviewees' possible questions regarding their participation were answered prior they signed the notice. Moreover, the participation to my study was completed voluntary as informed in the Privacy Notice (Appendix 1). The interviewees were informed that they can withdraw from my study at any point if they so wish. Furthermore, I explained the participants that the theme of the research, the scope and the case organization were all my ideas, and I am not commissioned by Vattenfall to do the research.

Touching upon professional integrity which according to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) means that the conducted research is understandable to outsiders. I strive towards rich contextualization of the case organization and its linguistical situation with the aim of providing understandable research setting and further comprehensible results. However, I am working on my study as an ethnographer and an insider to the company. Therefore, I acknowledge that it might be difficult for me to gain the 'outsider view' and thus, my research might appear somewhat obscure in some respects. Nevertheless, my aim is to ensure a coherent and easily understandable study.

Now moving on to discuss briefly about the next three ethical considerations. My research is not intended to harm or distress anyone. I am conducting this study in the field of business research and thus, I am not conducting any physical examinations. Therefore, no physical harm or other pain will be inflicted on anybody. Moreover, the participants of my study will remain anonymous which ensures that they won't get any psychological harm or distress by participating to my research. Additionally, I am not engaging in covert research. Instead, I have made it clear that I am collecting the data through interviews with the participants' consent. Moreover, my ethnographical notes concern my own experiences, feelings and observations. Thus, I am not researching anyone without them knowing about it. In terms of anonymity, privacy and confidentiality I have ensured that my study doesn't contain any names other than myself. In addition, the privacy and anonymity of the participants are protected by using pseudonyms. Most importantly, I have not, and I will not reveal any of the interviewees'

answers and identity together nor disclose any discussions I have had privately with the participants.

Lastly, moving on to silencing and dismissing other scholars work and plagiarism. I am diligent with writing references as well as separating my own results and thought from previous work. I am following a four-eye principle indicating that I am asking another person to read my study and double check my references before submitting the research. Next, I will move on to discuss my study's credibility by reflecting on the reflexivity of the research.

3.6.2 Credibility

I will analyse my study's credibility through the lens of reflexivity which essentially means that I am reflecting on how I have acknowledged myself, my persona and me as a researcher in relation to the study (Dodgson, 2019; Holland, 1999). According to Holland (1999) there are different levels to reflexivity, however, I am not delving deeper into those various aspects but rather discussing reflexivity on a more general level.

As Dodgson (2019) notes, reflexivity in research is a holistic process emphasizing transparency. Therefore, I have put effort into being as precise and transparent as possible when describing the research setting, the case company and especially my role in the said case company. Moreover, I have provided as many details of the study's participants as possible without jeopardizing their anonymity in this study. Additionally, I hope to have thoroughly described the justifications for the chosen research methodology and the participant selection process. Further, I have written myself into this study and allowed my own voice to come through, however, being diligent with ensuring that my persona, thoughts and views are easily separated from the participants' thoughts or from prior research and findings. With these practices I hope to provide the readers of this study an easily comprehendible whole and thus promote the credibility of my research.

4 Results

In this chapter I will present the findings I obtained from the interviews through the previously described data collection and analysis process. In addition, I will add my own ethnographical notes and combine them with the interview data. The results of the study will be discussed through the lens of the research questions as aligned in the introduction of the study:

> **RQ 1:** *How do employees perceive multilingualism at a multilingual workplace?*
>
> **RQ 2:** *How do employees perceive the use of English as the common corporate language in a multilingual workplace?*

I will present the results and build a coherent understanding of how Vattenfall Oy's employees experience and feel about the multilingual working environment. Three key themes emerged from the interview data which also provide the structure for this chapter. The first essential findings address the overall atmosphere around multilingualism at Vattenfall Oy. This also includes the main language practices in the company and how employees are coping with multilingualism at the workplace. Following this, the second key results indicate that language is a broader and social concept which shifts my focus into discussing the many layers of language use such as social aspects and the experiences people have when operating in a foreign language environment. Lastly, I address the third key theme which is essentially about English as a common corporate language. The first two themes answer the first research question, and the third theme provides findings for the second research question.

4.1 Multilingualism at Vattenfall Oy

To understand how people are experiencing and feeling about Vattenfall Oy's multilingual working environment I first wanted to comprehend how the participants describe Vattenfall's overall language practices and the language environment that prevails in the company. Therefore, in this chapter I will present the results I gained from the discussions with the participants related to Vattenfall Oy's overall language environment and practices. The below described results will provide answers to my initial research question: *How do employees perceive multilingualism at a multilingual workplace?*

4.1.1 Positive perceptions and deeper connections

As the multilingualism and linguistic environment prevailing at Vattenfall Oy have not actually been addressed previously, my expectation regarding the participants' answers on multilingualism at Vattenfall were low as I feared the interviewees would perceive the multilingualism negatively. Moreover, my own experiences regarding Vattenfall Oy's multilingual working environment are somewhat conflicted. On one hand I am thrilled to be able to utilize other languages than my native tongue Finnish

at work as I enjoy the variety of languages. On the other hand, though, especially in terms of language practices I often find myself fluxed due to not knowing which language to use and when. Further, I have been involved in meetings where there has been confusion as to whether to use English or Finnish and ultimately the minority language users have been forced to make the decision on behalf of everyone. For example, I recall one all employee meeting which was initially started in Finnish since it wasn't clear whether the meeting should be held in English or Finnish. After the meeting had gone on for a while one person who doesn't speak Finnish asked for the language to be changed to English. Even though I don't know how this person experienced the situation it nevertheless appeared as slightly puzzling to me. Thus, these kinds of situations also contributed to me being sceptic about the answers I would get from the interviewees of this study. Indeed, some of the interviewees also talked about similar situations and described these occurrences as complex and confusing.

However, despite my expectations I was positively surprised by the responses I got from the interviewees as everyone seemed rather pleased with the multilingual working environment they are involved in. Indeed, Vattenfall Oy's multilingual working environment was portrayed through a positive lens by the participants and the variety of languages at the workplace didn't seem to bother the interviewees. LL2 and LL1 describe the multilingual working environment in the following quotes:

> *"It is great that there are different languages and for the most part I see it as an enrichment."* (LL2)

> *"I think it is actually quite fun* [to hear and use different languages at work]! *I think it is fun to kind of challenge myself a little bit to see if I understand e.g. Swedish without a translator. And it is a nice feeling when you realize that you understand it."* (LL1)

The above presented quotes reflect two interviewees' opinions when I discussed about Vattenfall Oy's language environment with them. However, they were not the only ones perceiving Vattenfall Oy's multilingual working environment in a positive light. Indeed, in actuality each participant of this study mentioned that hearing and using different languages at work is something that they truly enjoy. The discussions with the participants reinforced my own observations of Vattenfall being a multilingual and linguistically diverse workplace. In fact, every participant recalls hearing English and Finnish at work, but also for example Swedish is used rather frequently. Moreover, as all the participants are part of bigger global teams, they also hear languages such as German and Polish during their working day. Additionally, many interviewees mentioned Italian as a language they hear at the office and some also use it at work. My own observations are strongly aligned with the interviewees' descriptions. I have counted that during a working day at the office I often hear about four different languages, sometimes even five. Moreover, I do not only hear those languages but also get to use them during my daily tasks. Therefore, it was easy to agree that there are multiple languages present in the daily lives' of Vattenfall Oy employees and that those languages are perceived in a positive light.

In addition to the participants viewing multilingualism in a positive light, it is worth to note here that many also perceived multilingual working environment as a

practical way of doing business. Moreover, when talking about the fact that English is used a lot at Vattenfall also in the Finnish office LL1 reflects it saying the following:

> *"I don't mind. I think it's only fair because it's not anybody's, you know, mother tongue. And everyone can understand it."* (LL1)

It is good to highlight here once again that when the participants talked about using and hearing different languages at work their general experiences and expressions of that were positive. As noted earlier this is something that came as a surprise to me because my initial thought – or maybe even a worry – was that the multilingualism at Vattenfall Oy would be perceived as difficult. However, the interviewees' responses consistently conveyed a distinctively positive feeling and attitude towards Vattenfall Oy's multilingual environment. This becomes especially clear when I talked with one interviewee who had been working at Vattenfall Oy for over 20 years. I asked how the participant was feeling about the diverse language environment, and their visibly excited response goes as follows:

> *"I really like it! If I was young, I would have been so excited like 'Ahh this is so international', I think it's nice."* (LL3)

Further, when I asked how it feels to hear different languages at the office, one person who speaks both Swedish and Finnish started to reflect on language's connection to personality and ultimately concluded that it is wonderful to hear variety of languages:

> Interviewer: *"As you mentioned we hear many languages here at the office, both your native languages and others. So how does that make you feel?"*
>
> Interviewee: *"Oh, that is a great question! Languages are kind of a part of our personality, but from my point of view it is a wonderful change* [from hearing own native language(s)] *to hear different languages."* (LL4)

Moreover, the feeling was mutual regardless of the language group the interviewees belong to. One participant who also speaks Italian reflects on Vattenfall's multilingualism and other people's opinions regarding the linguistic diversity at the workplace. Their response indicates that people who are not speaking Italian are also enjoying the language at work:

> *"We* [the interviewee and their Italian speaking colleagues] *use a lot of Italian and we look around and think are we creating Little Italy here? No one blames us for that, actually people are having fun in here with Italian. But sometimes we think OK maybe we shouldn't use it so much* [laughs]. (NOL1)

Additionally, for example interviewee NOL3 who has also the opportunity to speak their own mother language at work described the experience related to Vattenfall Oy's multilingual working environment positively while also referring to having a different persona attached to different languages:

> *"It's actually very nice. It's nice to be able to speak your own language as well because like I was mentioning before at least for me different language means*

different personality and so I can express both. I prefer a multicultural environment so this possibility to switch is fun." (NOL3)

Noteworthy here is that both interviewee LL4 and interviewee NOL3 talked about language and personality together with multilingualism. Moreover, interviewee LL3 talks about multilingualism feeling "international" and thus also exciting signalling a certain impression of multilingualism being perhaps something cosmopolitan, thrilling and foreign. In addition, NOL1 refers to Little Italy through which they essentially express a sense of community and cultural unison. These examples indicate that language at work goes beyond the simple language use to deeper psychological and cultural levels as well as to formulating mental images. Additionally, LL2 describes Vattenfall's multilingual workplace and also refers to having a work persona and a free-time persona due to speaking one language at work and another at home:

"I really enjoy the richness of language at work and personally I feel that it's a pretty ideal situation for me as it brings cultural diversity to the workplace and sometimes it's easier to separate yourself from work matters when you use one language at work and another in your free time. So, it is also quite easy to change your identity between work and leisure. I would say that for me it's really fun to have different languages at work." (LL2)

Thus, multilingualism in organizations is not just about using and hearing different languages but also perhaps adapting to different personas and incorporating different cultures when speaking and hearing various languages. Importantly, even though the interviewees talk about persona's connection to language and cultural concepts, those are not described in a negative light at least when purely considering the use of different languages at work.

In terms of Vattenfall Oy, multilingualism as such is clearly not seen as an issue. The participants' reflections on multilingualism at Vattenfall are further supported by my own observations since I don't have problems with using and hearing different languages at work, in fact I quite enjoy it. Moreover, I too, feel like I adapt a slightly different persona when speaking English, for instance. Since it is not my native language, I have grown into it rather than with it. This makes my English-speaking persona a bit different from my true, Finnish-speaking persona. In terms of my other ethnographical notes, I have not noticed anyone complaining about the multilingual environment. Therefore, my notes align with the interviewees' answers. However, as mentioned earlier I was a bit sceptical regarding people's perceptions on multilingualism since some meetings have demonstrated that the multilingual nature of Vattenfall Oy is not always properly addressed. Thus, in the next section I will be discussing about the language practices at Vattenfall Oy and talk more about how multilingualism is handled in the company.

4.1.2 Language practices at Vattenfall Oy

Now I will move on to the language practices described by the participants. Based on the interview data there seems to be some sort of an understanding, albeit some confusion as well, regarding the use of different languages at work. According to the interviewees, formal meetings such as all employee meetings where, for example HR is informing people about annual holiday practices or someone has come to give a DEI

training, are usually held in English and informal chatting and events are in Finnish or in Finnish and English. In addition, since most of the interviewees are part of global teams, they all have work meetings generally in English. However, there is no clear policy regarding the language practices at Vattenfall Oy. This is reflected on the quote of interviewee LL1:

> *"We don't have a sort of clear process but instead we go a little bit case by case. It is actually easier when we have someone from Sweden visiting our joint events because then it is quite obvious that of course we use English. But now usually we have to every time contemplate like 'Okay well there is this attendee who doesn't basically speak Finnish or this one who wasn't born in Finland but understands Finnish very well, so maybe it would be beneficial to have the meeting in Finnish', and so on. So, we always have to kind of contemplate these. We don't have a situation where everyone would know before the event starts that in which language this will be held. It would be nice to have some clarity on the topic. We have not agreed on anything, it is when the event starts when we see how we will go about it."* (LL1)

Interestingly, this indicates that while all of the interviewees seemed to have a clear understanding of the language practices the truth is actually more complicated. This is further visible in the comment made by LL2 when we discussed about the language practices and language use at Vattenfall Oy:

> *"I see the language practices as quite straightforward. In my opinion, it appears so that the language at the office is usually Finnish, and if there are bigger, official meetings for the whole office they are usually in English. Then there is also some Swedish, which is quite normal considering that Swedish is the other official language in Finland. So formally we use English as it is the official language, but when it comes to the coffee table discussions it is usually so that English switches to the native language."* (LL2)

The quotation of LL2 demonstrates that while the interviewee considers that the language practices are clear and that English is the official language, moments before they state that the main language used in the office of Vattenfall Oy is in fact Finnish. This quotation expresses the ambiguous nature of Vattenfall Oy's language practices, and it also supports my observations. Indeed, I have noticed that while generally everything should work in English as it is Vattenfall Group's common corporate language, the Finland's office is ultimately Finnish since majority of the communication happens in Finnish. For example, most of the discussions on Vattenfall Oy's general Teams channel are in Finnish which one interviewee who doesn't speak Finnish talked about while explaining their own language practices they have adopted:

> *"We have this Teams channel and of course stuff there is sometimes still only in Finnish. But I guess it makes sense. I mean you cannot expect that everything just switches immediately, but it's nice to see that at least the most important stuff that for sure you are interested in is already kind of available also in English. –– I mean it's nice to have that channel. I mean it's good because I recall one example from last week, I think that someone needed a charger so it's an easy way I mean just to kind of post something there and find someone. And for me it's just I mean as said even if it's in Finnish I usually just translate it. It's not that I ignore it because you never know maybe there's something that you can help with or that you may be interested*

> *so it's always good to translate it and see what's happening so. –– It's fine to translate. I mean I kind of recognise that it's me that I don't speak the main language, so I know that it's on me to kind of at least try to translate. It's not that I'm expecting that everyone speaks English, but I mean of course it's nice but I kind of recognise that I have to do at least some kind of effort so that's totally fine."* (NOL4)

While describing Vattenfall Oy's multilingual environment, NOL4 states that they have started to use a translator to understand the messages and discussions taking place on the Teams channel. Also, other participants talked about using a translator at work to cope with the multilingual working environment. Therefore, one of the language practices at Vattenfall Oy seems to be the utilization of a translator tool.

In terms of other language practices, code switching was the main practice that emerged from the interview data as well as from my own field notes. It turns out that the most established practice is to see who are present in a situation and then switch the language based on that. This indicates that even the general all employee meetings can be held in Finnish if all attendees understand it. Moreover, for example Italian speaking people usually speak Italian when they are together at work, and they switch to English in case needed. Same goes for Swedish speaking Finns as well as Finnish speaking people discussing together. My own observations are in alignment with these findings made from the interview data. Namely, usually every bigger meeting is started by scanning the crowd to see who are present and the language is then chosen typically between Finnish or English based on the attendees' languages. Thus, the language practices are tailored to the people involved. Essentially this means that situations are dealt case by case which can cause confusion and awkward situations among the employees. One interviewee reflects on a situation where the interviewee was speaking Finnish to a large group of people even though there was one person who doesn't speak Finnish involved which the participant had not noticed:

> *"I looked into the audience and thought that everyone involved were speaking Finnish. Then one of our colleagues pointed out that there was someone who doesn't speak Finnish and we should switch languages. Then I was like 'Oh no, I'm sorry, really, I didn't realize'. And I was thinking that hopefully the person won't get upset about this."* (LL1)

The switching between languages, so code switching, emerged clearly from the discussion as a common language practice. It seems like the employees actively engage in switching languages when needed. Especially, all the interviewees belonging to the non-local language group noted how they are considered in meetings and language is switched for example from Finnish to English quickly.

> *"Everyone is comfortable in speaking English or everyone can speak English so it's quite common that when I'm around and I could be interested in something then people just switch to English for me, and I have to say I mean I always had the feeling that it's totally fine."* (NOL4)

Furthermore, the interviewees belonging to the non-local language group mentioned how it feels great to be noticed and considered:

> *"Well, the meetings in our team are in English. Again, they try to accommodate me so that's perfect or when I join a meeting, and they notice that I'm there they switch as well. So, it feels good that people like take their time and are mindful."* (NOL2)

Reciprocally, also the participants belonging to the local language group recognized the culture of switching languages:

> *"I think that we in Finland are so polite that we quite quickly switch from Finnish to English if we notice that there is someone around who doesn't speak Finnish, especially at work."* (LL1)

In terms of switching from one language to another it was interesting to notice that interviewees who didn't speak Finnish as their mother language were also quite keen on trying to utilize Finnish instead of switching to English:

> *"We had a meeting two weeks ago where all the other participants where Finnish. When I entered the meeting, they were already speaking, or you know chitchatting in Finnish just before it started and then the person who arranged the meeting said 'Oh oh there is* [the interviewee]*! We need to switch to English' and I said, 'No please continue in Finnish, I myself will probably speak in English and if I don't understand something I will ask but I will try to follow in Finnish' and it worked pretty fine."* (NOL1)

Thus, to conclude this section I would say that Vattenfall Oy's main language practice as a branch of a bigger MNC seems to be code switching. Whether it is a smaller meeting or a bigger event the key convention in terms of handling language diversity is switching between different languages. I would further argue that at a company like Vattenfall Oy where the language practices are not clearly addressed, multilingualism can work well in case the employees are willing to engage in code switching proactively. In addition, in Finland people have adjusted to code switching and it is not seen as difficult.

4.2 Multifaceted nature of language at work

In the previous section I talked about the overall atmosphere at Vattenfall Oy regarding multilingualism. As it turns out people's feelings and attitudes towards multilingualism are remarkably positive. Furthermore, there seems to be a general climate of acceptance and understanding towards using and hearing multiple languages at the workplace. However, the discussions with the participants of this study revealed to me that while multilingualism in itself is accepted well there are some underlying factors related to the use of a language which can cause frustration and other more negative feelings among the employees at Vattenfall Oy.

Essentially, the discussions I had with the participants highlighted the multifaceted nature of multilingualism at work especially in terms of the social side of language use. Indeed, every participant talked about experiences where language has had a tremendous influence on the feeling of being either included or excluded in a social situation at work. I will first discuss the findings from the non-local language group's perspective after which I will turn to look at the local language group's viewpoint. The findings

presented in this section provide answers to my first research question: *How do employees perceive multilingualism at a multilingual workplace?*

4.2.1 Social impact of language on the non-local language speakers

> *"Sometimes in the office what can happen is that when someone is leaving and there is some celebration cake or whatever and then there is a speech or something usually that's at least what I recall it has always been in Finnish so of course in that case I'm there listening pretending to understand something. –– And actually, it was the same for example when I was in Sweden when my manager left. And I was there in the office and kind of my manager's manager he said something, and it was in Swedish. So also, there in that case I was like pretending to understand. So, in these kinds of situations, but again I think it's also it's different because as I see it it's a different type of communication* [than strictly work related]." (NOL4)

The previous quote is made by NOL4 when they reflect on the language environment at Vattenfall. While indicating that strictly work-related situations go usually well, the interviewee talks about social, work-related events where the participant has been pretending to understand the ongoing discussions when they have been happening in a language the person doesn't understand, e.g. Swedish. Moreover, the underlying theme detectable from the interviewee's reflections is the social and perhaps also the cultural side of language use and the inclusion linked to those, hence the previous as well as the next quote:

> *"I mean sometimes I can still try to catch some words because I mean I haven't really studied Finnish, but I mean with time you still get used to something. So, it's still fun to try catch some words and maybe imagine what's the topic behind it, but that's it. I mean you can think something like 'OK it would be nice to understand' because I think sometimes there are some nice epistles that are told during this, some funny stories and so in that case it would be nice to understand because it would be funny."* (NOL4)

Ultimately, what shines through from these quotes of NOL4 is the desire to fit in socially and understand the bigger context of the linguistic interactions. Essentially, the interviewee describes situations where a lot of people are present and funny stories are shared, stories which other people seemingly get. Yet, the interviewee is forced to pretend to understand and thus pretend to be included to the wider group comprehending the jokes and stories. Similarly, NOL2 talks about work events in which the language is other than English, e.g. Finnish, and describes the feelings the interviewee gets when participating to those events without completely understanding the discussed topics:

> *"Well, it doesn't feel good. There is this sense of feeling powerless. So, I think that's it. If you are speaking another language even if you are fluent in it, it would not be like your native language anyway. So, you already feel like you're missing a lot of contexts, cultural contexts and such. But then if you are not even fluent so just at intermediate level, let's call it like that, then you really feel powerless because it's like 'Hey I could be making a joke here or I could be intervening in a faster time' but no one has time for you to ask like 'Hey what was this part that I need here' and these kind of things. So, there is no time to be spontaneous and to be prompt and such. So,*

> *I am bit left to the side meaning 'OK I do my own job, I do what I'm supposed to do' but then it brings a bit of limitations maybe to the fun part of the job where you can communicate with your colleagues on other topics other than not necessarily work or having a chat in the corridors or something."* (NOL2)

Essentially, NOL2 describes feeling powerless and a bit left out of the bigger, social group due to not being fluent enough to understand the spoken language. The desire to fit into the cultural context as well as to the social group is clearly there as NOL2 describes wanting to make jokes, comments and chitchat with others, yet having no possibility, time or chance to do those. Consequently, this indicates that the issues with multilingualism at Vattenfall Oy are mostly related to the feeling of being socially excluded from the bigger group. This also further aligns with my definition of language being a social concept and highlights the realization that language has potential to influence the social experience at the workplace. The interviewee is feeling excluded especially in terms of the *"fun part of the job"* meaning social gatherings and informal, by-passing chitchats. Moreover, this further validates the finding that usually work-related communication is handled well in terms of language, but the importance of language choices during fun, informal events and get-togethers is forgotten at Vattenfall Oy.

Similarly to NOL2 describing how they don't have the possibility to comment or intervene in certain situations at work, also NOL1 reflects on the issue by stating that their energy goes to translating the language rather than understanding the deeper meaning:

> *"When the whole thing is in Finnish I can follow but then it means that my brain is 100% focused on the language and I don't have any patch memory to actually think about the business side or the bigger side of things."* (NOL1)

Therefore, using a language that only part of the people at work can understand puts individuals in an unequal position. Hence, NOL1 describes how they don't have capacity to really put effort into to the work aspects and connections, or the *"bigger side of things"*.

The discussions with the participants belonging to the non-native language group emphasized the cultural and social aspects related to different languages and language use. In fact, every one of the non-local language group's participants talked about how language and culture are interlinked. They also brought up how they sometimes feel misplaced, left out or confused because they can't properly grasp the jokes or cultural references when Finnish is spoken for example in informal work events. I have noticed that the office Christmas parties at Vattenfall Oy are examples of these kind of situations since usually the main language used in those parties is Finnish. For example, the band performing in the party talks Finnish and asks for song suggestions in Finnish as well as the performer, such as a mentalist, performing in the party talks Finnish thus singling out people who don't understand Finnish from the wider social group. Therefore, my own observations align with the interviewees' experiences regarding social, work-related gatherings and language use. Indeed, one interviewee described an office Christmas party where almost every Vattenfall Oy employee was present and the main language in the event was Finnish. The interviewee recalled the event being *"–– awkward because it is like one of those situations where you feel like you should be part of what's happening but it's difficult ––"* (NOL3). The participant then continued

to further describe the event and brought up the cultural and social context as well as the feelings a person goes through in such a situation:

> *"So, at a party it's you know it's not necessarily always so easy to properly hear what people are saying. Maybe they're far away or there's music or something and that makes it hard to understand and there is also a cultural thing very much you know. There might be a lot of cultural references or jokes that I don't necessarily understand. I have been here a long time but still I wouldn't say that I am fully integrated in that sense that there are jokes and things that fly right above my head because I don't get the references. So that sort of situation is a bit awkward like you feel a little bit out of your comfort zone while at the same time maybe trying to come across as though everything is fine because at the end of the day it's not a big deal."* (NOL3)

Interesting to note here is that both NOL4 and NOL3 describe how they are trying to look like they are included and part of the bigger group when in reality they are feeling left out. Hence, NOL4 talking about *"pretending to understand*" and NOL3 *"trying to come across as though everything is fine"*. To continue this, I would also like to point out that the interviewees express feelings of being left out mainly when talking about work related informal events and the social side of the language use rather than meetings or strictly business-related matters. Therefore, there is usually no feelings of being an outsider when considering the official work meetings. The feeling of exclusion usually arises when looking beyond the simple language use to language's deeper societal and cultural linkages such as understanding jokes and stories. Moreover, noteworthy here is that language use and the absence of linguistic inclusion in social, informal situations evokes more somewhat negative feelings amongst the non-local language group than what language use in regular business meetings does. As the work environment consists of much more than purely business meetings it is necessary to focus on these other aspects as well. At least at Vattenfall Oy, there are several informal work events happening throughout the year and thus, the feelings of the interviewees are present throughout the year as well.

In addition to not understanding cultural references, certain jokes as well as feeling like an outsider at informal work events due to not understanding the spoken language, the interviewees also mentioned that they are not always able to be themselves around Finns or when speaking the Finnish language at work. For example, one interviewee told that they have a different persona when they speak Finnish or other languages. Moreover, the interviewee added that they want to have a personal connection to the language they speak. This, yet again, emphasizes the finding that language is so much more than just words and grammar. In addition to the social inclusion or exclusion that language might contribute to at the workplace, it also connects to individuals' sense of self, persona and manners:

> *"When it comes to you know the confidence with which we speak a language it also depends on how much you feel that it* [the language] *is yours, that you have some kind of persona attached to it. If that makes sense. And I can't really say that I have some Finnish personality so to speak or if there is one it's rather undeveloped, so I don't feel very much myself when I speak it* [Finnish]. *I also tend to adapt to the intonations and mannerisms of the people that I learned the language from. So, when I speak Finnish typically, I've become more Finnish in the sense that I am less*

talkative, and I don't necessarily use my hands as much as I do when I speak in English." (NOL3)

Furthermore, another interviewee also described how language and persona are connected. The participant talked about tailoring their sense of humour at work which is closely linked to their own personality:

> *"You have to tailor your sense of humor. Different cultures have different sensitivity to different topics and to what is considered funny or not in a culture and such. So, then the sense of humor is something that comes with you, you get it from the very beginning and also, it's something you don't want to change just because you are in a different team. So yeah, just one thing but specially in the beginning you feel it quite a lot and it's quite hard. I make a joke, and everyone seems like they feel like this was a personal attack or something when to me it was just a joke."* (NOL2)

Moreover, one interviewee talked about having a hard time adjusting to the Finnish culture even though their own personality would stereotypically fit the Finnish environment:

> "*The fact that Finns are much less talkative, they approach a bit less etc. I realized I suffered for a while because I thought that no one was interested in getting to know me, like I'm an introvert and perfectly happy being left by myself but sometimes it's too much here for me and it took time to realize that this form of – I call it pathological respect – that you know if you fall in the middle of the street they don't help you up but not because they don't want to help you it's because they're afraid of embarrassing you if they come to help. This kind of completely different attitude and once I understood the root of that I could cope much better."* (NOL1)

Therefore, these quotes further highlight the finding that even though multilingualism and language as concepts are fine at Vattenfall, what comes to the underlying factors besides the language such as cultural and social aspects as well as social inclusion is where the issues arise. Moreover, the reflections of the interviewees emphasize the power that language has to influence the social environment at work as well as the feeling of being comprehensively included at the workplace.

4.2.2 Social impact of language on the local language speakers

Moving on to discuss this theme from the local language speakers' perspective. It was interesting to realise that like the non-local language group also the interviewees in the local language group recognised feelings of being left out from a group when operating in a foreign language environment at work. Naturally, these feelings were related to the use of other languages than Finnish or Finnish and Swedish depending on the interviewee's own native language(s). Much like the non-local language group's participants also every local language speaker brought up the topic of feeling like an outsider and the odd one out at work when surrounded by people who speak a language they can't comprehend, such as Polish or German.

As I would also categorize myself as a local language speaker in terms of Vattenfall Oy, I can say that I relate to the feelings of the interviewees. I recognize sometimes feeling like an outsider at work when surrounded by people speaking other languages. This feeling is especially present during business trips and business dinners where the

informal chatting and joking is more present. In addition, at Vattenfall Oy's premises in Finland I often find myself a bit distressed in situations where for example a Swedish speaking person talks in Swedish to someone sitting next to me and I would like to contribute to the discussion, but I can't because I am not as fluent in Swedish as my colleague. Thus, while I would truly enjoy joining the discussion and making a comment or two, I opt out and rather just sit quietly and continue my work as if I am not in the situation at all. Based on my observations these kinds of informal chitchatting sessions are quite common at the Vattenfall office in Helsinki. These situations represent perfect opportunities to either enhance or decrease the sense of belonging to the workplace community and social group through language. Consequently, the language use in these situation matter:

> *"Yeah, well, language is somewhat like a portal to understanding and to social influence. Whenever a larger number of people have the opportunity to join it or the more people are able to pass through that portal, then in a way, the more functional I see the organization. So, I would personally experience a situation where I would not understand the spoken language as limiting."* (LL4)

Here LL4 reflects on Vattenfall's multilingual working environment and highlights the social impact and influence language has at work. Hence, the interviewee talks about language being a portal to understanding and to social influence either enabling more people to be included or excluded in an organization. Moreover, LL4 continues to recall an experience where the participant felt excluded from a group. What becomes evident is that social exclusion due to language can happen in very quick and passing instances such as during informal chatting before a meeting starts:

> *"Before the meeting starts, the Dutch people have started to speak loud Dutch to each other and that has caused a reaction in me, like feeling like an outsider."* (LL4)

Additionally, also LL2 has similar experiences regarding the start of a meeting:

> *"We have an internal meeting starting and then people are speaking in German. Then I join the Teams call and the German still continues for a while."* (LL2)

These situations LL4 and LL2 are describing are also happening at the Vattenfall office in Finland, only the discussions are happening in Finnish. I have noticed that when a meeting is starting the initial conversation and chitchat is usually happening in Finnish even though there are people involved who don't understand Finnish. Therefore, it is interesting to realize that while the participants belonging to the local language group have personally experienced these kinds of situations and felt like an outsider, they are not necessarily changing their own behaviour to socially include others in a similar situation. Naturally, there can be individuals who are considering other people in these situations. However, my general observation is that especially in terms of bigger meetings where most people are speaking Finnish, the chatting in the beginning of the meeting is in Finnish. Thus, the social inclusion happening via language is disregarded easily.

It is noteworthy, that the situations where the interviewees feel as an outsider were both related to informal work events, such as dinners on business trips, as well as work meetings and discussions. LL3 describes an older situation when the interviewee was

attending a work event in Sweden. The interviewee's quote demonstrates the social exclusion of not fitting into the culture and to the wider social group because the participant couldn't sing traditional Swedish drinking songs:

> *"Back in time when I didn't speak Swedish my experience was that I was completely excluded from everything. When you go to an event, at that time they were still singing drinking songs you know already in the evening, and then you try to sing next to a Swedish person that Swedish drinking song, so like you always remain as an outsider in some way."* (LL3)

Being an outsider and feeling as tough you are not included can also become a problem in the sense that valuable information might be missed due to not understanding work related discussions as one interviewee describes:

> *"I'm involved in such Teams groups that even if there is something really important, I have no idea what it is because it's in a language that I can't understand at all, you know, I can't understand if it's like an important thing or if someone has made a funny joke. –– I get the feeling that I should not be there, and I have no sense to be there and then I also get the feeling that people might think that I would have received the information, even if it is in Polish. In a way, it's a bit dangerous because I haven't received the information even though I'm there in the group, because it's only in Polish."* (LL1)

Yet again the stories and experiences of the local language group mirror the reflections of the non-local language group. This becomes evident in the previous quote made by LL1. Hence, LL1 talks about being involved in a Teams group where the discussions are mainly in Polish and how the interviewee doesn't have any idea on what is going on and also they fear that some important information is missed. Similarly, non-local language group's interviewees have been describing that they are involved in Finnish Teams channels or email chains in which the information might be missed unless they use a translator. This further showcases how people might get blinded to their own actions which either enhance or decrease the social inclusion enabled by language. However, interestingly the interviewees talked about how they recognize the situation in which the non-native language speakers at Vattenfall Oy live:

> *"Well, if you put yourself into their shoes, it can feel quite tricky as Finnish is such a language that I can't even imagine what it feels like. –– I mean Finnish is difficult, and it can feel quite tricky."* (LL3)

Moreover, in terms of language as a broader concept the interviewees recognize how language is power and a form of social influencing. For example, after highlighting inclusivity in terms of language use, LL2 reflects the multilingual working environment in the following:

> *"There is a risk that language or words become a means of power to favor one group or exclude another."* (LL2)

Thus, to conclude the local language speakers are also experiencing social exclusion due to language at the workplace and they are in a way recognizing the feelings the non-local language group's participants are undergoing. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that language can socially impact the workplace especially when

operating in a foreign language environment. However, what is also interesting to point out is that while the interviewees are experiencing exclusion at the workplace due to language my observations indicate that people are not necessarily realizing how their actions in their own local language environment might further contribute to someone else feeling socially excluded. Before moving on to the discussion section of my study I will still discuss the concept of common corporate language at Vattenfall in the following section.

4.3 CCL at Vattenfall Oy's multilingual working environment

The previous two sections have been addressing my first research question and the first and second key theme of my study. Next, I will discuss the third theme emerging from the interview data, namely the notion of Vattenfall Oy' common corporate language. Thus, my focus shifts on providing results for my second research question: *How do employees perceive the use of English as the common corporate language in a multilingual workplace?*

In this section I will describe and analyse the findings regarding the interviewees' perceptions of Vattenfall's common corporate language. As I have mentioned earlier in this paper the common corporate language at Vattenfall Oy, as well as throughout the Vattenfall Group, is English. However, evidently Vattenfall's common corporate language is a rather ambiguous concept to almost every participant of this study. Interestingly, I found out that there was a lot of uncertainty and hesitation related to the matter among the interviewees. This is intriguing because when observing the working environment at Vattenfall Oy, English is present in many instances. For example, as mentioned earlier all the interviewees are part of global teams and they are having daily meetings in English. In addition, all group wide newsletters are in English and the CEO of Vattenfall Group, Anna Borg, is speaking to all employees in English in group wide events. Thus, I assumed that English as Vattenfall's common corporate language would be clear to all. However, as will become clear from the following discussion there is unclarity related to the matter.

4.3.1 Common, but not clear corporate language(s)

"Now I actually have to make sure that is it so that our official working language is English?" (LL2), asked one interviewee during our discussion. This made me discuss the topic of official working language with the other interviewees as well. Even though Vattenfall is a global company and everyone working at Vattenfall Oy are in contact with other Vattenfall countries I was surprised to find out that most of the interviewees were uncertain about the official working language at Vattenfall Oy. As noted above, my observations at the company and perhaps also my own understanding of Vattenfall's working environment contributed to me considering Vattenfall Oy's CCL as a self-evident fact. However, when asking the participants if they could tell me what the official working language at Vattenfall Finland is, I understood that CCL at Vattenfall Oy is not as straightforward as I initially thought. In fact, uncertainty and hesitation were the two most prominent reactions among the interviewees when discussing Vattenfall's CCL. Almost every interviewee paused and started to hesitate with their answer

regarding Vattenfall's CCL. For example, one participant knew the correct answer but was quick to indicate that there was uncertainty with the answer:

> *"The official working language? That's such a good question. I believe it to be English.* [laughter] *I might be wrong. –– 90% of the time I use English at work, yes."* (NOL2)

Interestingly, NOL2 continued to describe how 90% of the time they use English at work. Yet the interviewee was not able to confidently distinguish the CCL at Vattenfall Oy. When asked about the remaining 10% the participant indicates that some chats and emails which are targeted to bigger audience, for example to all employees in Finland, are written in another language than English, which may partly explain why NOL2 was hesitating with their answer. Essentially, English is not always used as a common corporate language since emails and chats to employees are sometimes sent in other language than English, such as in Finnish:

> *"It's more like when I am reading different chats and such or certain emails are in Finnish and so on, but they* [the emails] *are not necessarily targeting me only, I am just part of the big group."* (NOL2)

Similarly to NOL2 also NOL4 couldn't confidently state the CCL at Vattenfall Oy, albeit getting it right. In addition, like NOL2 also NOL4 told that English is the main language they use at work. This further emphasizes the finding that even if the interviewees use mainly English as their working language there is still underlying confusion as to what the real CCL in the company is. Thus, revealing that English is not perceived as the real CCL in the company because it is perhaps not clearly used as one:

> "[Hesitating] *Is it English? ––* [The main language that I use at work] *is English, just English. I mean it happens that maybe I have to translate some emails from Swedish but luckily Google Translate helps me so. ––* [Using English] *is the only way we can actually communicate. I mean it's of course on my side, but it's let's say it's the only way for me to communicate so that's why I use English. But of course there are limitations if you can understand only one of the languages others speak so."* (NOL4)

Furthermore, NOL4 continues to recall an example of a situation which validates the finding that English is not the CCL in the company, at least not the only CCL:

> *"What I can say is that for example I would like to have the first aid training, I would like to participate to this training. But I know it's on me that I don't speak Finnish but for example then in that case I cannot participate because the trainings are in Finnish."* (NOL4)

The quotes from NOL4 demonstrates that while the interviewee's main language at work is English, the multilingual nature and linguistic diversity of Vattenfall Oy influences the everyday language practices and thus also the CCL of the company. English is widely used across the company albeit it still doesn't guarantee equal opportunities for all employees if it is not used as a common corporate language should be used. In fact, some trainings offered to employees such as the first aid trainings are only held in Finnish, which also increases the inequality between the employees.

Moreover, hesitation and uncertainty regarding the CCL followed through almost all interviews. It does not matter whether the interviewee belongs to the local language group or the non-local language group since everyone seemed to be equally confused regarding the CCL at Vattenfall. Moreover, it is interesting to note that a person's tenure at the company doesn't matter since one interviewee who has been working for Vattenfall Oy for longer than 20 years stated the following:

> *"Good question!* [laughter] *Vattenfall Finland... well, I guess in Finland the official languages are Finnish and Swedish, but it seems that the official language is finally English, which I was promised in my first interview when I came here. –– Well, I came to work here and well, pretty quickly I had a business trip to Sweden and there were 20 men waiting for me who only spoke Swedish and well, I wasn't quite prepared for that, but I've survived a lot."* (LL3)

Noteworthy with the quote of LL3 is that their response indicates that English has been named to be the official working language up to two decades ago, however, according to the interviewee this has been starting to show in reality only recently, hence the *"seems that the official language is finally English"*. LL3 recalls a business trip from the early days of their career at Vattenfall Oy during which the interviewee had to go to Sweden and speak Swedish even though English was named to be the common language used at the company. Moreover, the participant in question can't confidently state the correct language even though it has been informed to them in the beginning of the employment. Once again, this demonstrates that English, while appointed as the CCL in the company, has not been concretely and visibly used at Vattenfall Oy, nor at Vattenfall in general, as the official working language. Indeed, one participant points out that currently English as the common corporate language is not that clearly visible at Vattenfall Oy:

> *" If we consider that English is our official language, then strictly speaking it should mean that all official documents and all official meetings should be in English, but now they are not."* (LL2)

Some participants also suggested that the official working languages at Vattenfall Oy are Finnish and English. Nevertheless, it became clear that the common corporate language at Vattenfall Oy was not a self-evident fact to the majority of the interviewees. In fact, almost every participant expressed uncertainty and hesitation when they were asked if they could describe the official working language at Vattenfall Finland. In other words, only one person could confidently state that the official working language used at Vattenfall Finland is in fact English. Further, it is important to note here that the person in question knows this due to their functional role in the company and not necessarily because the working environment suggests so.

What I gathered from the interview data as well as from my ethnographic research is that in actuality Vattenfall Oy has at least two common corporate languages. Namely, Finnish and English. For example, while HR related information and the intranet is in English some policies and common meetings, whether they are strictly work related or informal, are in Finnish. The interviewees couldn't confidently state the common corporate language, because there isn't one clear language, but two. Also Swedish is deemed as the common language by many employees at Vattenfall since it

is also used and heard frequently. Therefore, some people could perceive that they have three common corporate languages they use at work.

4.3.2 Missing a language policy

It is indeed surprising how people working in a global organization do not really have knowledge of the company's official working language. Thus, I have searched through Vattenfall's intranet and Vattenfall Oy's official policies from the employee's perspective. Through my research I learned that the employees at Vattenfall Oy can't find a company policy indicating the common corporate language. Actually, I am not even sure if there has ever been an official documentation clearly indicating the working language. The use of English as the CCL can be deduced from the fact that usually Finland related intranet articles and for example HR information is written in English. However, the communication at the Finnish office during for example all employee meetings is not always in English, thus the cause for the confusion regarding Vattenfall's CCL is evident. In fact, one participant pointed out the missing documentation when asked to describe the official working language at Vattenfall Oy:

> *"Well, I don't know that there is like... I haven't read any documentation that says that this is the official language, but my guess would be that since it's an international company then it's probably English."* (NOL3)

In addition to this, couple of interviewees were mentioning that they have never checked what the official language is, therefore, they cannot name any specific language. This further demonstrates that there is indeed a need for a clear language policy, hence the interviewees talking about checking the CCL from somewhere, e.g. intranet:

> *"The official working language at Vattenfall Finland? Oh no, I haven't checked it actually."* (LL4)

> *"Official... I guess we have two Finnish and English? I don't know that's my guess. I don't remember checking it."* (NOL1)

Therefore, I argue that also the fact that there is no clear and unified language policy available for the employees contributes to the participants' confusion and uncertainty regarding the common corporate language at Vattenfall Oy. When discussing about the topic of CCL the interviewees were visibly trying to recall a policy, a note or an email in which the corporate language would have been stated. As they couldn't remember seeing or hearing about one, they turned to guessing the language.

4.4 Summary of the results

I have now presented the findings of the study and before I move on to discuss the findings in terms of their theoretical contributions, I consider it important to provide a short summary of the results. In essence, I studied how the employees at Vattenfall Oy perceive both their multilingual working environment as well as the use of English as the company's CCL. I identified three key theme which I discussed about in the previous chapters.

Considering the first research question a part of the answer is that employees at Vattenfall Oy perceive their multilingual working environment as positive and enriching. Moreover, the main language practice I identified at Vattenfall Oy is code switching. Albeit the research demonstrates that employees at Vattenfall Oy engage in code switching quite well specifically in terms of purely work-related contexts, the practice of code switching is clearly forgotten in many bigger, social work events. Therefore, the individuals report experiences of social exclusion due to language, awkwardness and confusion especially in these kinds of situations. In other words, language is connected to the socialization happening during formal and informal work events as well as to individuals' identity.

The results indicate that while multilingualism as such is seen as positive, it is these formal and especially informal work events where the multilingual nature of Vattenfall Oy is causing limitations, social exclusion and more negative experiences among the employees. Therefore, as an addition to the answer of the first research question I state that multilingualism is sometimes perceived to generate issues in terms of enabling individuals to feel socially included and to understand the important topics discussed at work. Consequently, multilingualism at work is considered to be fun, however, the interview data as well as my observations demonstrate that multilingualism and language touch upon deeper connections such as individuals' persona, socialization and the feelings and attitudes people go through in different situations.

In terms of the second research question, I found that employees did not in reality know the real CCL of the company. This reflects Vattenfall's multilingual nature as English is not used as the only common language in the organization. Actually, there are at least two common corporate languages, namely English and Finnish, at Vattenfall Oy. Therefore, the employees are not perceiving English as their common corporate language, at least not as the only common language. Moreover, the missing language policy and the absence of clear linguistic practices leave room for confusion and uncertainty regarding the language use and CCL in the organization.

5 Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine how employees at Vattenfall Oy are experiencing the organization's multilingual working environment. In this chapter, I will be analysing the findings of the study in relation to prior research. Moreover, I will be revising my theoretical framework from the Chapter 2 as well as I will be providing managerial implications based on the findings and discussion. Lastly, I will discuss the limitations of this study as well as provide suggestions for future research.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

I will now focus on discussing and interpreting the findings in the context of their theoretical contributions. The results of this study demonstrate that language in a multilingual MNC is a multifaceted concept having an emphasis on the social aspects that language can contribute to. Indeed, language as such entails much more than plain and simple language use and grammar. Essentially, the findings indicate that language is a concept which links to people's identity, sense of self and feelings of being included or excluded from a wider social group. These findings align with for example Woo & Giles' (2017) notion on language having influence on individuals' self-perception as well as Karhunen et al. (2018) and Ahmad and Widén's (2015) perception of language being a social concept.

Let us first talk about multilingualism. Multilingualism at the workplace was largely considered as a positive and enriching factor among the employees at Vattenfall Oy. Indeed, their attitudes towards different languages and the multilingual working environment were remarkably optimistic. The feeling was mutual regardless of the native languages of the employees. However, a common factor for all was that every employee talks at least two different languages. Therefore, my findings are further in line with the study made by Shen et al. (2023) as they found that the presence of other languages in an organization is perceived positively by people who speak multiple languages. Although, my study indicates that the number of different languages spoken by individuals does not increase or decrease the positive feelings towards multilingualism since everyone experienced the workplace's multilingualism in a positive way regardless of their linguistic repertoire.

In terms of linguistic repertoire, Bordia and Bordia (2015) state that local language speakers in organizations might consider adopting foreign languages as a threat whereas people using multiple languages at work might not. My findings challenge this view as the local language speakers in my study were not considering other languages as threats or inconveniences but rather as enhancing and enabling factors. However, as with Bordia and Bordia (2015) I too noticed that individuals who are used to using multiple languages at work also describe having multilingual identity or even multiple identities. Building on this topic of multilingualism, language attitudes and linguistic identity my findings show that individuals' attitudes to language are related to deeper connections than just perceiving different languages in a positive or negative light. Essentially, using and hearing different languages means that individuals are switching between different personas and projecting certain mental images and perceptions towards the language and language use, hence they are adopting different linguistic

identities. These aspects then further influence the attitudes individuals are having towards languages and multilingualism.

The findings I arrived at in my study are also providing insights into the otherwise scarcely researched topic of language being a social concept and the capabilities language has to influence individuals' experiences and feelings in a multilingual MNC. While the overall experiences, attitudes and feelings towards multilingualism might be positive as noted earlier, the more negative experiences and feelings occur in social situations, such as coffee table discussions when telling stories or jokes, during which people are anticipating reactions and interaction from others. This is because during these social circumstances an MNC's multilingual nature becomes more visible and concrete to employees, especially those who are being excluded due to not understanding the workplace's language. Essentially, the language use in a multilingual MNC has the possibility to enable the feelings and experiences of being socially included or excluded in a situation at work. Moreover, it is interesting to note that this social side of language use in a multinational MNC affects both the people speaking the local languages as well as the people speaking non-local languages.

In terms of language practices in a multilingual MNC my findings demonstrate that code switching is the most commonly used language practice at least at Vattenfall Oy. This aligns with Shen et al. (2023) as they also state that code switching is probable in a multilingual MNC. Essentially, the opinions regarding code switching vary from seeing it as a negative practice (Ahmad & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019; Cenoz, 2013) to perceiving it in a more positive light (Ahmad & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019; Shen et al., 2023). Either way, it is a topic that has been causing discussion and debate. However, based on the findings of my study I argue that code switching can also be seen as a neutral and normal language practice which does not generate big feelings among employees of a multilingual MNC. In fact, code switching was viewed as a standard practice at Vattenfall Oy in which everyone could engage. In terms of negative-positive spectrum code switching was considered as a positive practice as it made people feel included and good in the workplace. Moreover, switching between languages enabled more people to join discussions and thus, it promoted inclusivity in the workplace. Ahmad and Barner-Rasmussen (2019) have noticed the same as they deem code switching as a practice which increases inclusion and collaboration between individuals. Therefore, my findings are aligning with the notions made by Ahmad and Barner-Rasmussen (2019).

Now considering CCL which at Vattenfall Oy seemed to be a topic causing confusion as there were no language policies to indicate the company's CCL as well as Finnish and English both being used a lot like a CCL would be used. The prior research shows that there has been a debate ongoing regarding companies' common corporate languages as well as language policies. For example, Sanden (2020) has been highlighting the problems of corporate language policies. So has also Capo and Di Pietro (2024) as they comment on CCL and language policies being linguistically restricting for employees. I argue against this as my study demonstrates the problems which can occur in case there is no clear CCL stated in the company. In addition, also Woo and Giles (2017) have emphasized the benefits of a CCL. My study's contribution to this discussion is that a clear CCL is beneficial to organizations especially in terms of multilingual MNCs where the language scene is diverse. For instance, should everyone at Vattenfall Oy know the CCL and use it in all emails, Teams discussions, trainings and Christmas

parties alike, there wouldn't be situations in which employees would feel left out or awkward due to not understanding the language and discussions. Therefore, I see a clear common corporate language as a unifying factor enabling employees to feel included in all aspects of work. This would further decrease g the social exclusion due to language.

Currently, at Vattenfall Oy English as the company's CCL is not properly communicated to all employees but rather it is considered to be known by all by default. As my research shows, English as the CCL is in fact not known by all and it is not used as the only CCL. This causes confusion among employees and ultimately leads to people missing out on information. Moreover, it has forced employees to be the ones to decide the language on the go. Sometimes the decision on the language is left to the minor language users which is fundamentally not the ideal situation. My findings are aligning with Sanden and Kankaanranta's (2018) study in which they state that in organizations where English as a CCL is considered as self-evident, the informal and unestablished language policies are causing confusion, difficulties in the knowledge sharing and leaving the decisions on language to employees.

I would also add that the informal language policies, which are not written down anywhere, are leaving room for other languages to take the place as the company's CCL. This is something that can be seen at Vattenfall Oy since Finnish has strongly taken the place as the company's CCL alongside English. Fredriksson et al.'s (2006) study demonstrates that even though English is deemed as the company's CCL other languages are also used alongside it in the organization. This is strongly in line with my findings as well since a lot of different languages were used at Vattenfall Oy during everyday business despite English being the official language. Therefore, I argue that even though a workplace subscribes to having one CCL it does not realize in actuality in case everything, including Christmas parties and all employee meetings, are held in that language. Essentially, using multiple languages as CCL in an organization adds on to the confusion regarding the company's CCL. Next, I will revise my theoretical framework.

5.1.1 Revising the theoretical framework

To revise my theoretical framework, I state that my research follows rather well the theoretical framework I have conducted. In essence, my study demonstrates that a multilingual MNC constitutes of individuals who interact with each other within the MNC's social context and through those interactions they form experiences, feelings and attitudes towards language use. However, I also noticed that within the context of a multilingual MNC the organization's language practices, environment and CCL as well as language policies, whether formal or informal, influence the way people interact with each other. In other words, these aspects are giving the guidelines for the interactions and discussions happening in the employees' working life. Therefore, since language has the power to affect the experiences and feelings individuals go through at work, in a way the organizational language practices are also influencing the way employees feel about the organization's multilingual working environment. Interestingly, my study demonstrated that the individuals' interactions are also influencing the organization's language practices and the CCL since employees are forming the practices, such as using code switching, when interacting with each other within the

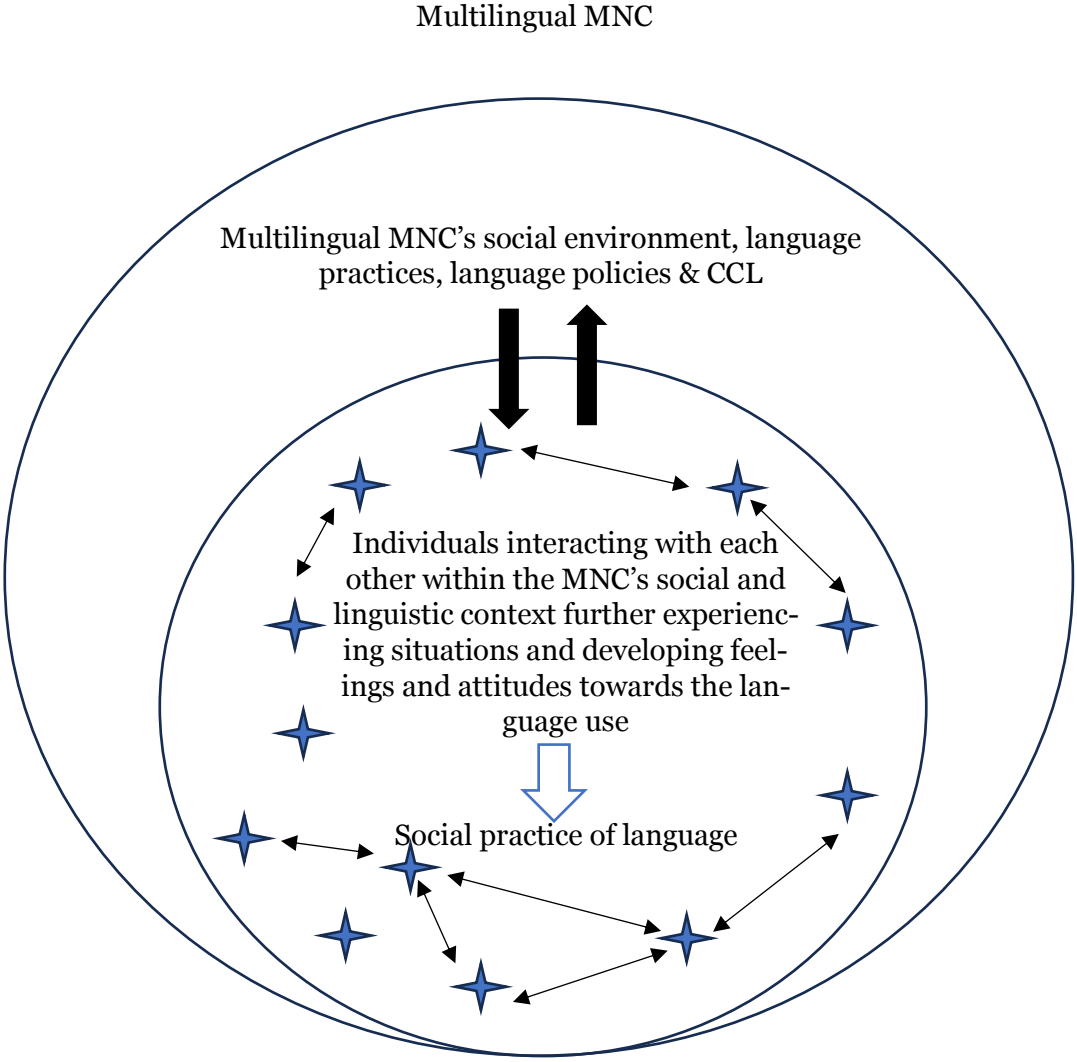
multilingual MNC. Thus, in the below presented, revised theoretical framework the two black arrows going from the organizational level to the individual level indicate the transactional influence happening between the two levels.

Multilingual MNCs constitute of different individuals, hence individual language users.

Symbolizes the individuals in the organization.

The small arrows demonstrate the interactions.

The two black arrows going from the organizational level to the individual level and vice versa indicate the transactional influence happening between the two levels.



5.2 Managerial implications

Based on the findings and the earlier presented theoretical contributions I will now provide practical recommendations and insights for Vattenfall Oy and to other organizations as well. Essentially, what became clear from my research is that it is beneficial to interview employees regarding their organization's language practices and linguistic environment. The discussions I had with the participants of the study provided unique insights to the organization's operational environment especially in terms of language and multilingualism. The insights and experiences the interviewees shared would not have been heard and addressed had I not conducted the study. In addition, the insights gained from the research enabled the examination of the linguistic state of the company and opened the discussion to broader issues such as the social connection to the working environment and colleagues. Therefore, my first recommendation is to truly examine and understand the employees' perspective and experiences on organization's language scene and practices. Through the research it is easier to identify potential problem areas and focus points for improvement. At Vattenfall this should be implemented so that other Vattenfall countries are also researched in terms of employees' perceptions on the organization's language practices and multilingualism.

Moreover, in terms of language practices and language use in multilingual organizations I recommend paying close attention to language's possibility to influence employees' feelings of inclusion and exclusion within the organization's social context. The importance of this topic could be emphasized in organizations through trainings which promote language sensitivity and language's ability to influence the sense of belonging to a workplace. Further, in terms of language both formal and informal work events should be organized so that everybody has an equal opportunity to comprehensively take part in the events. Essentially meaning that individuals can participate not just by being present but also by genuinely understanding the topic and having the opportunity to join to the broader discussion.

Ultimately, this all comes done to the organization's CCL, language practices and language policies. A clear language policy is missing at Vattenfall Oy which has created confusion and ambiguity in many aspects within the company. Therefore, as a concrete and practical implication a clear and unified language policy indicating the company's CCL and language practices should be conducted. Furthermore, this policy should then be distributed to all employees and managers alike and stored in a place where everyone can see it, for example the intranet. Before I will discuss the study's limitations and suggest avenues for future research, I will conclude the managerial implications and concrete actions to a table which can be found below.

Table 3. Managerial implications

Identified results	Concrete actions
Exploring employees' perceptions on multilingualism and CCL in an organizational setting is beneficial and provides valuable insights.	Conducting similar studies on employees' perceptions and experiences in other Vattenfall countries as well to get a holistic understanding of the group-wide state of language issues.
Organizational language use affects individuals' feelings and experiences of inclusion and exclusion to work events and situations. Language is especially potential to enable social inclusion in organizations.	To raise awareness of this issue, trainings regarding language sensitivity at work should be organized to all employees. Moreover, all meetings and events, whether formal or informal, should be held in a language everyone can understand. Essentially meaning English, which is Vattenfall's CCL.
Missing language policy and the absence of clear linguistic practices create confusion and increase the chances of utilizing a language which excludes people at the workplace.	After examining the employees' perceptions regarding the language practices and language use at their workplace, a clear and unified language policy should be formulated based on the employees' views as well as the organization's needs. The language policy should contain information on the CCL and instructions on language practices. I recommend forming a taskforce which focuses on the creation of the organizational language policy as well as is responsible for distributing the policy and educating others.

5.3 Limitations and avenues for future research

My study has certain limitations. Considering the limitations of my study I would say that one of the main limitations is the fact that I limited the study to consider only Vattenfall Finland. In other words, I only interviewed people working at Vattenfall Oy. As many Vattenfall Oy's employees have international managers it would have been interesting to gain data also from the international managers' point of view. This would have provided more thorough understanding and additional dimension to how employees are feeling about the multilingual working environment. Therefore, as a possible suggestion for future research it would be interesting to broaden the scope of the research to studying other Vattenfall countries as well. This goes to other companies as well since I believe there is a need for wider discussion on corporate language practices and linguistic environment especially in terms of understanding the employees' perspective.

Another limitation is related to the participants and my role as a researcher and an employee at Vattenfall Oy. Even though I encouraged the interviewees to be as transparent and as honest as possible there is always a chance that some participants felt

uncomfortable sharing their experiences and thoughts with me as I am a fellow employee at Vattenfall. While there were no signs of awkwardness during the interviews, I acknowledge that my role in the HR department could potentially influence the answers I got from the interviewees. Thus, I would encourage future researchers to study the same issues in other multilingual MNCs but remain somewhat distant to the participants to maintain a clear researcher identity throughout the process. Moreover, it would be interesting to gain even more participants to take part into a study like this to get a grasp of the bigger picture. Perhaps studying multiple multilingual MNCs and their language environment would provide valuable results to the field of IB and language research.

Moreover, due to time constrains and the nature of my study being a thesis work I didn't have the resources to delve even deeper into the social part of language use in a multilingual MNC. I believe I have only scratched the surface regarding language's role as an enabler of social inclusion or exclusion in a company. Therefore, I encourage future researchers to take a more in-depth view on this topic and examine it thoroughly.

Lastly, due to Vattenfall Oy being a rather small company with limited number of individuals speaking non-native language(s) I was not able to disclose the native languages of the participants. Otherwise, I would have risked the anonymity of the participants in case the study is read by the employees working at Vattenfall Oy. I consider this as a limitation as disclosing the native languages would have enhanced the contextualization of the findings. Therefore, future research of employees' experiences on multilingualism in a multilingual MNC could strive to conduct studies in larger organizations in which the anonymity of the interviewees is not that easily risked.

6 Conclusions

The aim of my study was to understand how employees working in a multilingual MNC perceive their workplace's multilingualism and further also the company's language practices. Moreover, as a second research question I aspired to find out how the employees view English as their common corporate language. My specific focus was on employees' perceptions and feelings as I wanted to grasp the MNC's multilingual reality from the employees' perspective. Furthermore, while studies have been conducted on language in the field of international business research the examination of individuals' lived experiences, feelings and attitudes towards language in a multilingual MNC has been scant. In addition, the topicality of multilingual MNCs in news and societal discussion as well as in literature underline the importance of my study. Therefore, by examining multilingualism and employees' perceptions and experiences in a multilingual MNC my study has provided new findings to the field of international business and language research as well as contributed to the ongoing wider societal discussion. In addition, the results of my study are shedding light on to previously unresearched domain of the case organization Vattenfall's language practices and the employees' experiences related to the language use in the company.

The findings of my research show that on a surface level employees working in a multilingual MNC perceive their multilingual working environment in a positive light. However, as the findings demonstrate language is not a shallow concept, but a social and deep, embedded idea of unison, persona and inclusion to others. Therefore, more turbulent and negative experiences come to the forefront when it comes to the social get-togethers at work, sharing jokes and dinner table discussions. During these instances the multilingualism at work is not perceived as a positive aspect but rather a limiting factor causing feelings of exclusion, frustration and awkwardness among other feelings. Moreover, regarding English as the CCL of the company, my findings indicate that employees working in a multilingual MNC don't necessarily truly know their organization's CCL. This is due to the multilingual nature of the company confusing the employees. Even though English is appointed as the company's CCL, other languages are used alongside English making it hard to differentiate the real CCL. In addition, the absence of a clear language policy is contributing to the confusion.

To conclude my research, I state that language is a concept to which individuals give life by interacting with each other in their respective contexts. These interactions and language use then further generate attitudes, feelings and experiences. This process becomes visible within the context of a multilingual multinational corporation as there are many individuals interacting with each other utilizing different languages. Essentially, language has the possibility to shape the way people experience and feel about social gatherings, events and meetings at work. Fundamentally, based on the findings of the study individuals working in a multilingual MNC experience language as an integrated part of their sense of self and persona influencing the experiences individuals have in the workplace. Moreover, language works as an enabler of inclusion or exclusion especially in terms of feeling socially included or excluded to a situation at work. Furthermore, in terms of company's language practices and CCL, I conclude that their significance in a multilingual MNC diminish in case both the CCL and language practices are not clearly and systematically defined and used the way they are intended in the company.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Privacy notice for the Master's Thesis of Adeliina Jämsä

(Aalto University's template)

What is the purpose of processing the personal data?

The purpose of processing the personal data is to collect material for a master's thesis on the topic of language practices at Vattenfall. The focus is especially on your experiences and perceptions regarding those practices. Moreover, the research focuses on multilingualism at a multinational organization. It is a qualitative case study. The thesis research material will be collected from Vattenfall's employees via semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face at Vattenfall's premises. The interview questions are based on the interview guide Adeliina Jämsä has made.

What personal data will be processed in the thesis work?

The personal data collected for this thesis are:

- Participants name and contact information (i.e. email)
- Consent forms including the name and signature of the participant
- Interview responses in the form of audio recordings and written text
- Transcribed versions of the interview responses

Special categories of personal data (sensitive personal data)

☒ Data belonging to special categories of personal data or other specially protected personal data **will not be processed** in the research study.

Personal data is collected from the following sources:

From the participant: Through interviews

From a data register: N/A

Processing of personal identifiers in the analysis stage and thesis

Direct identifiers, such as your name, are processed in the collection and analysis of the materials.

The direct identifiers will be removed or replaced with random identifiers in the published thesis.

- Direct identifiers (name & contact info) appearing in the interview are removed when the interview is transcribed. The original sound recording is deleted immediately once the master's thesis is completed and approved.
- The data will be pseudonymised meaning that a participant will be referred to as e.g. "Participant 1"
- Sensitive data that is revealed by the research participant and does not need to be processed in the research is deleted during the transcription phase.
- Data is presented in aggregate form, for example, the tenure at Vattenfall will be presented as a range instead of the exact number of years to make identification more difficult.

Your identity will be impossible to determine in the published thesis.

Legal basis for processing personal data

☒ The legal basis for processing personal data is the express consent of the research participant to data collection and analysis.

Withdrawal of consent will have no effect on an approved thesis, because an approved thesis is an academic publication, where the processing of personal data serves the purpose of academic expression (Articles 6 and 85 of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and section 27 of the Data Protection Act of Finland (1050/2018)). No data may be erased from an approved thesis.

Sharing personal data

Material containing your personal data may be shared with the thesis advisor Rebecca Piekkari if necessary for the advising process.

International data transfers

Any transfers of research data containing personal data outside the EU/EEA countries or to international organisations comply with the provisions of the current data protection legislation.

Storage and protection of personal data

During this research, the privacy of the research participant is protected as follows:
The thesis research follows a research plan.
The thesis research has a thesis supervisor / thesis advisor Rebecca Piekkari, Rebecca.piekkari@aalto.fi

Protection of manual material: Consent forms and notes done on paper are stored securely by the researcher.

Information processed in information systems: The computers and information systems used are protected with a username and password. Access to research data containing personal data has been restricted so that only the student and the thesis advisor have access to your personal data.

Retention and deletion of personal data

Deletion during and after the research

The research data will be deleted no later than a month after the approval of the thesis. I will send you a confirmation when the data deletion has been done.

Rights of the research participant

According to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), you have the right to: be informed of the processing of your personal data access the personal data collected concerning yourself request the rectification of your personal data request that the processing of your personal data be restricted object to the processing of your personal data request the erasure of your personal data. It should be noted,

however, that an approved thesis is an academic publication, where the processing of personal data serves the purpose of academic expression (Articles 6 and 85 of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and section 27 of the Data Protection Act of Finland (1050/2018)). No data may be erased from an approved thesis.

If the research does not require or no longer requires the identification of a data subject by the controller, the controller shall not be obliged to maintain, acquire or process additional information in order to identify the data subject for the sole purpose of the data subject using his or her rights. If the controller does not recognise the data that may be linked to a specific data subject, the data subject has no right to access or rectify their personal data, to object to their processing or to request the erasure of data. However, if the data subject provides additional information that allows their identification from the research data, the rights will not be restricted.

Contact details of the controller

The controller of this research is student Adeliina Jämsä, 0407755199.

Contact details of the Aalto University data protection officer and those of the supervisory authority

If the research participant has any questions regarding data protection or personal data processing, they can contact the Aalto University data protection officer, tel. (09) 47001 (exchange), dpo@aalto.fi

If the research participant considers the processing of their personal data to be an infringement of privacy protection legislation, they have the right to lodge a complaint with the Data Protection Ombudsman, which is the supervisory authority. (Read more at https://tietosuoja.fi/en/home.)

Consent to participate in thesis research and to the processing of personal data

I understand that participating in the thesis research is voluntary and that I can notify the student at any time that I no longer wish to take part in the research. In such cases, any data collected up until that point can be used in the thesis research. I consent to the use of my personal data in the manner described in the privacy notice for the thesis.

I have received sufficient information about the thesis research, I have had the possibility to have my questions answered, I have understood the information given to me and I wish to participate in the thesis research.

I understand that an approved thesis will be published, and that changing or erasing anything from it after its publication will not be possible, because a thesis is a permanent academic publication protected by the freedom of academic expression.

_____

Date and signature of research participant.

Appendix 2

Interview guide

Part I – Before the actual interview starts:

- **Greetings**
- **Does the interviewee have any questions regarding the privacy notice they have received?**
- **Background information and a brief explanation of what is going to happen:**
    - *I am currently doing my Master's Thesis and I am using Vattenfall Finland as the case organization in my study. I have agreed on this with Iiro and Kristiina, therefore everything is fine on that regard. Next, you and I will have a discussion where the main topic is going to be language practices at Vattenfall and we especially focus on your experiences and perceptions regarding those practices. We are here together with you to discuss, reflect and you have an excellent chance to share your experiences regarding the language practices at Vattenfall. Please don't hesitate to provide examples and details.*
- **Data handling, anonymity and retention:**
    - *For data analysis purposes the discussion will be recorded and deleted after my Master's Thesis is done.* ***Are you okay with that?***
    - *The data will be anonymous, but I'll be using pseudonyms such as "Interviewee 1 said…".*

Part II – The interview

- **First, I would like to know a bit more about you:**
    1. How long have you been working for Vattenfall?
    2. Could you tell me about your current role?
    3. Could you tell me about your team and the people you work closely with?
    4. As the focus is now on language practices, I would like to know what languages do you speak?

5. Which language would you say is your strongest one and the one you are most comfortable using?
6. Could you tell me what is the official working language at Vattenfall / Vattenfall Finland?
7. What languages are you using in your daily work? Why?
    - How does that make you feel?
    - Could you provide an example of when you are using XXX language?
    - Do you encounter any other languages at work? Where? Why?

- **Next, I would like to move on to discussing the language practices. Please feel free to bring up any examples and experiences you have had related to Vattenfall Finland's language practices:**

7. Can you tell me how do you feel about the language practices at Vattenfall Finland?
    - Could you give me an example of what makes you feel that way?
8. What do you think about the language practices at your workplace?
    - Could you elaborate on that please? Please give an example of why you think that.
9. In your opinion how does the language practices work at Vattenfall?
    - How do you feel about that?
10. Could you tell me about your experiences of situations where the language practices have been working well?
11. Could you tell me about your experiences of situations where the language practices have not been working well?
    - Why?
12. Could you describe what the ideal language environment at Vattenfall Finland could be like?

13. Can you tell me if you have noticed or if you have been in a situation where there has been unfair behavior due to not speaking the same language as others?
14. Is there something there something more you would like to bring to my attention?

Part III – Wrap up

- **Thank you**
- **The next steps:**
    - *This will be all from your side, please contact me in case you have any questions or further comments either regarding the topic and our discussions or then regarding my thesis and the process. I'll let you know once my thesis is done so that you can read it in case you would like to. Thank you again.*