
This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Author(s): Louhiala-Salminen, Leena & Kankaanranta, Anne
Title: Language as an issue in international internal communication: English or local language? If English, what English?
Year: 2012
Version: Post print

Please cite the original version:

Louhiala-Salminen, Leena & Kankaanranta, Anne. 2012. Language as an issue in international internal communication: English or local language? If English, what English?. Public Relations Review. Volume 38, Issue 2. 262-269. ISSN 0363-8111 (printed). DOI: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.12.021.

Rights: © 2012 Elsevier BV. This is the post print version of the following article: Louhiala-Salminen, Leena & Kankaanranta, Anne. 2012. Language as an issue in international internal communication: English or local language? If English, what English?. Public Relations Review. Volume 38, Issue 2. 262-269. ISSN 0363-8111 (printed). DOI: 10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.12.021, which has been published in final form at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0363811112000033>.

All material supplied via Aaltodoc is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the repository collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone who is not an authorised user.

Louhiala-Salminen, L. & Kankaanranta, A. (2012). Language issues in international internal communication: English or local language? If English, what English? *Public Relations Review*, Special edition on Internal Communication, 38(2), 262-269.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.12.021>

**Language as an issue in international internal communication:
English or local language?
If English, what English?**

1. Introduction

During the past decade, it has become obvious that the role of an organization's internal communication is at least as decisive for operational success as has traditionally been the case with external communication. This trend is salient whether we still make the distinction between internal and external communication or rather regard communications as an integrated whole where especially advancing communication technology and the 'social media revolution' have blurred the borderline between external and internal audiences (e.g. Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Cornelissen, 2011, p. 164).

Several communication researchers have argued for the significance of internal communication for the wellbeing of employees and consequently, for the performance of the organization (e.g. Welch, 2011; Welch & Jackson, 2007; Rosenfeld, Richman & May, 2004; Morley, Shockley-Zalabak &

Cesaria, 2002). Internal communication has also been identified as an essential part of an organization's effectiveness as it enhances knowledge sharing (Burgess, 2005; Ghoshal, Korine & Szulanski, 1994). Further, White, Vanc & Stafford (2010) argue that the competitive advantage of strategic internal communication does not only come from the obvious benefits of employee satisfaction and productivity, but also from the positive contributions that well-informed employees can make to a company's external public relations efforts. Thus it seems only logical that in the 2009 European Communication Monitor survey study (Moreno, Verhoeven, Tench & Zerfass, 2010) internal communication ranked already third in perceived importance of the various strategic communication disciplines, and the respondents estimated it to rise to the second place in 2012.

The present paper discusses internal communication from the point of view of an internationally operating organization, with a focus on language as an issue. We examine and discuss language use within an organization, acknowledging the fact that increasingly this use takes place across national borders and across cultures, in the global context, enabled by present-day communication technology. Although 'language', naturally, is a resource that enables any - internal or other - communication, it has not directly been examined in public relations research, but has, largely, been taken for granted or as given, without any further problematization.

For a few years, however, public relations literature has included an "infant subdiscipline" (Culbertson, 2009, p. ix) of global public relations. Within this subdiscipline the globalization of the public relations industry and the variety of PR practices in the different parts of the world have been presented and investigated (e.g. Freitag & Stokes, 2009). Also, Sriramesh and Verčič (2003) present the global developments of PR in various country-specific contexts and build conceptual linkages between societal variables and the forms of PR in the particular social environment. Global PR literature does acknowledge the significance of culture and cultural differences for any

public relations that would be conducted across country borders or in any international context (e.g. Inoue, 2003; Rensburg, 2003), and, implicitly, language issues are included as the concepts of culture and its language are so tightly interwoven. However, the only concrete indication of the impact of the language variable seems to be the discussion of linguistic blunders in external PR campaigns (e.g. Freitag & Stokes, 2009, p. 4), such as the use of the name “Nova” for a car in Latin America, when the interpretation “ it doesn’t go” is possible.

The present paper will contribute to public relations research by examining language strategy and language use in the internal communication of organizations that operate across borders and have a need to communicate internationally, also within the organization. More specifically, on the basis of two separate empirical studies, this article will discuss language strategy and language use from the perspective of *international internal* communication. The two studies present two different corporate approaches to language strategy. In the first study (titled “multilingual strategy”, section 3.1), the organization had made a strategic decision to use four different languages in its activities whereas the companies whose employee perceptions were investigated in the second study (titled “emergent strategy”, section 3.2) had not chosen to define an official corporate language but approached the issue from the practical perspective, mainly resorting to the use of English in international communication.

The objective of this article is to show that language is by no means a factor to be forgotten (see e.g. Marschan, Welch & Welch, 1997) but an issue that needs to be investigated and calls for strategic attention from organizations. In addition, we argue that ‘language matters’ (Charles, 2007; Louhiala-Salminen & Rogerson Revell, 2010) are part of the sociological stance, i.e. the macroview towards public relations, that van Ruler and Verčič (2005) propose. Today language is an essential factor in the globalization of social systems, and as argued by Ihlen and van Ruler (2009, p. 11) “it

is time to gain a better grasp of how public relations works in society”. From the language perspective, the present article responds to the above call; understanding the role of language strategy and language use in international internal communication also increases our knowledge of how the communication function of an organization works and how it is influenced by and influences social structures (see Ihlen & van Ruler, 2009, p.11).

It is important to note, however, that in the two studies to be discussed, ‘internal communication’ is understood similarly to Kalla’s (2005) conceptualization of ‘integrated internal communications’. Kalla draws from the four domains of communication (earlier discussed by e.g. Eisenberg, 1996; Reardon, 1996) i.e. corporate, managerial, business and organizational communication, and defines ‘integrated internal communication’ to incorporate all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organization. Kalla (2005, p. 306) emphasizes that “internal communications draws from the theoretical and practical knowledge of all four communication domains”, which makes the study of internal communication automatically a multidisciplinary effort. As argued by Kalla (2005, p. 307), this holistic approach has important implications for understanding knowledge sharing in the organisational context, which is a relevant dimension for the purposes of the present article as well. Therefore, it should be emphasized that the findings discussed later in this paper do not only refer to internal communications as part of the communications function of an organization, but present language use issues as a multifaceted phenomenon involved in all activities of an internationally operating organization.

2. Corporate language

This section discusses earlier research relevant for the two empirical studies that will be presented in section 3. First, the discussion of ‘corporate language’ will reveal the complex nature of the

notion. Second, as English undoubtedly is the most used international ‘corporate language’, research on English as a Lingua Franca will be briefly overviewed.

2.1. The notion of corporate language

The necessity of investigating the language and communication challenges posed by globalization has been clearly spelt out by Charles (2007, p. 261), as “only language can enable individuals and companies (and countries) to communicate”. Internationally operating organizations have, for some time, utilized the notion of ‘corporate language’, although it seems that its interpretations vary greatly. For some, corporate language refers to a formulated language strategy and an explicitly spelt out ruling to use one (or more) particular language(s) – most often at least English – in all cross-border communication. Others have assumed a more pragmatic approach and seem to conceptualize corporate language ‘ad hoc’, as the most suitable language for a particular cross-border situation; again, it is often English but may also be another language known by the communicators. Despite the differences in how systematically a corporate language is used in the various communicative practices and systems of the organization, there seems to exist an understanding that a common language works for the benefit of the organization as it, for example, facilitates coordination, increases organizational learning and value creation (e.g. Luo & Shenkar, 2006) and reduces potential for miscommunication (Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006).

As was mentioned above, English has become the ‘corporate language’ of most international organizations, both as the language used in the strategic communication by the organization and by the individual communicators working within the organization (see e.g. Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006; Maclean, 2006; Vollstedt, 2002; Vandermeeren, 1999). At first glance, it may seem that the wide use of English in international interaction is only beneficial for all

the parties involved as this common language is the resource that most often makes cross-border contacts and interaction overall possible.

However, research on communication in multinational companies and other organizations has demonstrated that the role of language in enhancing knowledge sharing and contributing towards the strategic aims of the organization is more complex. For example, as Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch (1999) argue, there is often a lack of awareness of what communicating across languages and cultures involves. This communication requires specific skills, attitudes, and values and cannot be reduced to the obvious aspect of foreign language capability – most often proficiency in English - or a knowledge of cultures, although this is an important dimension of international communication as well (Holden, 2002). Therefore, researchers have called for a broader perspective in the assessment of communicative competence, recommending that such issues as multicultural and multilingual competence and interactional skills be included. Accordingly, competence should not only be expressed as an individual's ability to use a specific language system (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; see also Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011), but importantly, the notion of communicative competence should be extended to the level of the organization as well.

Some earlier research has emphasized the importance of managing language as a corporate asset, claiming that the true cost of the language barrier cannot be measured in terms of translating and interpreting but in damaged relationships (Feely & Harzing, 2003). Language has also been shown to have a close link with the development of trust between communicators (see e.g. Kassis Henderson & Louhiala-Salminen, in press), which further emphasizes the significance of language in communication, both at the level of strategic organizational communication, in which establishing credibility is the fundamental priority, and at the level of individual communicators.

Trust and rapport building have been examined in studies investigating the use of local languages alongside and in addition to English in various organizational settings (e.g. Goodall and Roberts, 2003; Kassis Henderson, 2005; Louhiala-Salminen, 2002; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta, 2005, Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011; Poncini, 2004) and the findings indicate that multilingual communicative competence enhances communicative success. For example, individuals who know or choose to learn other languages spoken within the organisation are perceived as more cooperative communicators than monolinguals, and establishing trust can be achieved through making the effort to speak the language of other team members in occasional situations and in small talk even if it is not the dominant shared working language.

2.2. English as a Lingua Franca

In the global business context, the use of English as a shared language among non-native speakers (NNS), i.e. English as a lingua franca (ELF), has been on the research agenda since the mid-2000s (e.g. Nickerson, 2005; Planken, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Du Babcock, 2009; also Rogerson-Revell & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010). Such leading linguists as Jenkins (e.g. 2000, 2007), Seidlhofer (e.g. 2001, 2004; also Seidlhofer, Breiteneder & Pitzl, 2006) and Mauranen (e.g. 2003) had already earlier embarked on conceptualizing ELF in, for example, academic communication.

The concept of ELF entails that it is used by speakers of different mother tongues, but it does not distinguish its purpose or domain of use in any way. Since such a distinction was considered relevant for investigating business and corporate communication, Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta (2005) introduced the notion of BELF (English as Business Lingua Franca) to emphasize the purpose of communication and distinguish the domain of use. BELF thus specifically addresses the shared language facility used in professional communication in global business (see also Bargiela-Chiappini, Nickerson & Planken, 2007; Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009;

Ehrenreich, 2010). In other words, the ‘B’, i.e. the business context, emphasizes the difference from ELF. BELF is a neutral code that is shared among the members of the international business community for the function of working in multinational companies and doing business. Similarly to ELF, the ‘E’ in BELF refers to English, whose vocabulary, structures and discourse practices serve as the lingua franca ‘core’ (Jenkins, 2000). And, the lingua franca aspect, i.e. ‘LF’, automatically suggests that the speakers come from different cultural backgrounds, as suggested by their different mother tongues, which is also evident in their BELF communication (for more, see e.g. Kankaanranta, 2006; Louhiala-Salminen & Charles, 2006; Lu, Kankaanranta & Kampf, forthcoming).

3. Two different ‘corporate language’ strategies

Next, we will discuss the findings of two research projects investigating language issues in international internal communication from the perspective of the ‘corporate language strategy’ adopted in the organizations. The first project investigated language use and language choice in a major international non-governmental organization that had adopted the strategy of using multiple corporate languages (“multilingual strategy”), whereas the second project (“emergent strategy”) explored the issue in the context of global business; the five companies examined had not declared a strict ruling for an official corporate language but in practice used English as the shared language of the internationally operating organization. In both projects, we examined the perceptions of the employees (‘informants’) of the respective organizations.

3.1 ‘Multilingual strategy’

A research project of International Business Communication (IBC) at our university investigated the role of language in internal communication within a global non-governmental organization from

the perspective of employees (for the full report, see Lehtovaara, 2009). The case organization - here referred to as NGO - assists countries around the world to reduce poverty and suffering by providing different types of aid; it is headquartered in the UK but operates in over 70 countries. The case study focused on the problematic issues raised by the organization related to the use of its four official ‘corporate languages’, i.e. English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. In particular, we wanted to find out what languages were actually used by employees, if (and how) language skills had an effect on career progression, and how employees perceived the language choice at work. Two points, however, need to be noted: first, NGO was investigated as an organization in general, without any specific emphasis on the NGO status as such, and second, the focus was on integrated internal communications (Kalla, 2005) including, in addition to formal communication, all informal communication within the organization as well.

The study was conducted in 2008-9 in three geographical regions of NGO: Latin America & Caribbean (LAC), West Africa (WAF) and South Africa (SAF). A variety of methods, such as focus groups, interviews and a survey on language use (for more details, see Table1), were used to investigate the role of language in the internal communication of NGO.

<u>Method</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Where performed</u>
Focus group	7	3 in LAC, 4 in WAF
Semi-structured interview	22	10 in LAC, 12 in WAF
Questionnaire survey	176 respondents (response rate 33%)	LAC, WAF, SAF

Table 1. Methods used in the ‘multilingual strategy’ study.

The findings clearly indicate that – despite the four ‘corporate languages’ - the employees of the regions did not consider the official four-language policy their everyday reality. Although many languages were used in all three regions (in addition to, for example, English and French in the African regions, many local African languages were used in informal internal communication), the dominance of the language of the headquarters, i.e. English, was clearly pointed out. For example, the organization-wide intranet was offered in the four official languages, but the content covered in English was significantly larger than that in the other three languages. Also, our informants perceived that being proficient in English eased communications in general and career progression in particular.

The informants also referred to the lack of translation of various official documents and poor quality of translations, which led to a situation where language became a barrier to knowledge as the same information was not available to all employees. For instance, in Latin America, emails directed to the whole region were required to be sent in all four languages, but in many cases this did not happen. Sometimes an email was sent only in Spanish, which meant that some employees merely deleted the message because of lack of comprehension, and sometimes emails in English from the headquarters were just not forwarded at all – or forwarded a few days later – to other employees because of the lack of time to translate them.

The multilingual strategy caused feelings of inequality and confusion among the informants and had a negative effect on their work. They often felt that some languages, in particular English, were preferred over others. Also, everyday routines were often disturbed by the fact that employees did not know what language they should be communicating in. The situation was due to the fact that the organization did not have any clear and explicit guidelines as to when, how, and why each of the four languages should be used.

To summarize, the findings of the NGO study indicate that ‘language’ was a significant issue in the internal communication of the case organization: it was either an enabler or hinderer of communication. Our informants felt that some structure and guidelines to the use of languages was needed and that the timeliness and quality of translations had to be improved. Not surprisingly, sharing of knowledge was considered problematic in the organisation: without a common language, internal communication was challenging.

3.2 ‘Emergent strategy’

In the ‘emergent strategy’ project, we focused on language issues in internationally operating companies that used English as their working language in internal communication. Through employee perceptions, the project aimed at increasing knowledge of the role of English, or rather BELF, and that of other languages in internal communication. Specifically, we examined perceptions of the nature of BELF discourse in everyday interactions among employees.

The methodology of the project was two-fold: an on-line questionnaire survey targeted at internationally operating business professionals in five globally operating Finland-based companies (in 2007-8) and follow-up interviews in two of the companies (spring 2008). With the help of a contact person in each company, we were able to confirm that English was the shared language used in cross-border contacts with other corporate units, and thus the situation was dissimilar to that in the ‘multilingual strategy’ study. In addition, English may be characterized as the ‘corporate language’ in the sense that it was the only language used in the companies’ international websites. The five surveyed companies operated in such fields as logistics, business intelligence services and consulting, and the number of their employees ranged from 34,000 to 9,500; three of the companies were listed on the NASDAQ OMX Helsinki Ltd., Finland. The survey link was sent to almost 2000 professionals, of whom 987 responded, yielding a response rate of 52%. To obtain a deeper insight

into the opinions and attitudes of business professionals whose work involves regular international interaction, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with survey respondents from the two largest of the surveyed companies.

Although the 987 survey respondents represented 31 different native languages, the native language of almost 40% of them was Finnish and Western European languages dominated (e.g. German, 11%; Norwegian, 8%; and Swedish, 6%) accounting for 85% of the total. The most common non-European languages were Chinese, Korean and Tamil. Other demographic data about the respondents shows that 75% of them were males, 60% were under 40 years of age, and more than 80% had a university degree (for details about the data, see Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011). The demographics of the interviewees are somewhat different since all the 15 interviewees were Finns of whom only three were women, 60% of the sample were older than 40 years of age, and all but one had university level education (see Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010 for details about the Finnish interviewee data).

Our findings show that the role of English and other languages in international internal communication was highly context dependent. In their everyday corporate work context, our informants used English, or rather BELF, with their non-native speaker (NNS) colleagues, be it, for example, on the phone, in email or face-to-face. Indeed, approximately 70% of English communication took place between NNSs (can be characterized as BELF) and around 70% of all communication took place within the company. Typically, our informants needed two languages in their work: mother tongue and English; the share of other languages was minimal. The mother tongue was needed slightly more although it depended on, for example, where the informant was based or who his/her closest colleagues were. For instance, if the informant worked in his/her home country, the native language was always used in face-to-face encounters with colleagues having the

same mother tongue, whereas expatriates did not use their mother tongue nearly as much. In email, however, English messages were exchanged between colleagues sharing the same mother tongue if there was a possibility that the exchange had to be forwarded to other members of the international organization.

Although the actual use of languages other than the mother tongue or English in the daily interactions within the company was small, the significance of knowing a third language was highlighted since it opened doors to new cultures, other ways of seeing things, and creating rapport with the communication partner. Our informants also explained how they used the partner's language, for example, in small talk and salutations simply because "it felt so nice if somebody used a bit of Finnish in an English message for example". In addition, a third language was used for practical reasons. An illustrative example of such a pragmatic attitude was the parallel use of languages. One of our informants, a Finnish Managing Director of a German subsidiary, described it like this:

I speak English, they speak German. When we share the topic, it works fine.

Although the nature of BELF discourse was extremely context-dependent, it seemed to have three features in common: it was void of complicated structures, it was highly specialized, and it reflected mother tongue discourse practices. First, BELF was described as 'simplified English' since typically it did not contain complicated phraseology, idiomatic expressions, or complex sentence structures. Indeed, grammatical correctness was secondary and was not perceived nearly as important for successful communication as specialized vocabulary, as the following quotation illustrates:

As long as the core message gets across, your English doesn't need to be perfect.

Overall, communication with other NNSs of English was typically considered easier and more equal than that with NSs. In particular, the informants pointed out how communication with NSs could be intimidating because they were able to use English in such a skilful manner that they gained the upper hand automatically and could not be trusted at face value, as the following quotation shows:

When a native speaker wants to hide something, or wants to be only partly truthful, or uses understatement – that is, says something totally different from what he/she actually means – and uses difficult structures, words, idiomatic expressions ... it can be really disturbing. And you get a feeling that you are being manipulated. With other NNS this is not common simply because they don't know how to use such fancy structures. They just don't have it.

The second feature of BELF discourse, in stark contrast to the simplified structure of the language, was the importance of mastering the specialized vocabulary and genres of one's specific field of expertise. Without a thorough knowledge of such professional vocabulary and genre-specific practices everyday work could not be done.

Third, because the users of BELF come from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, the BELF discourse includes a hybrid of features reflecting the speakers' mother tongue discourse practices. Such features were recognized by the informants but typically they were not considered a hinderer of communication. Indeed, such differences in communication styles were taken for granted in the international context.

To sum up, our informants seemed to be happy with the ‘emergent strategy’ of using English, or rather BELF, in their daily interactions of international internal communication. None of them expressed a wish to have more languages to choose from. For our informants, English was also a highly pragmatic choice: they all knew it to such an extent that they were able to use it in their everyday work. It is also important to notice that in their work with international colleagues, they perceived themselves as being on an equal footing: everybody was using a language which was not their own and thus nobody ‘owned’ the language. However, some of the informants reported that it was not always easy to trust a native-English-speaker colleague who was playing with his/her mother tongue to their disadvantage. Such a remark did not come up when they talked about their NNS colleagues, even though the question of different English proficiencies was acknowledged.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed language as an issue in international internal communication. The findings of two empirical studies were presented and contrasted in the light of two different strategic approaches towards ‘corporate language’. One organization had made an explicit decision on a language strategy of four ‘corporate languages’ and others had adopted a somewhat implicit practice of using English, or rather BELF, in international internal communication. Our findings showed that overall, the employees in the globally operating NGO were not happy with the strategy of multiple corporate languages - in spite of the fact that at the outset the decision seemed to nurture equality and fairness. The lack of clear and explicit guidelines as to when, how, and why each of the four languages should be used was perceived as problematic. Also, in practice, the status of English, i.e. the language of the headquarters, was remarkably higher than that of the other three ‘corporate languages’. Consequently, in spite of seemingly good intentions the end-result was not satisfactory for the employees and thus not for the organization either.

In contrast, the ‘emergent strategy’ referring to the pragmatic choice of using basically one language, English, in international communication was appreciated by the employees in the five case organizations. English, or rather BELF seemed to be a language mastered, to a sufficient extent, by the communicators and this enabled knowledge sharing throughout the organization. As most of the internal communicators were non-native-speakers of English, nobody gained the upper hand, and equality and trust prevailed in the sense that each speaker had an equal right to the language used. Although there were no explicit guidelines about language usage here either, it did not seem to arouse any problems since the language conventions and communication practices had emerged from practice and were negotiated *in situ*.

However, as the discussion in Section 2 above indicates, there are more dimensions to the language issue than the formulation of language strategy. Although the employees of our ‘emergent strategy’ study seemed to communicate and share knowledge within the international organizations smoothly in BELF, there are still aspects that should be noted for international internal communication to fully contribute towards achieving organizational goals. As, for example, communicative competence has been shown to include a variety of interactional abilities (e.g. Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011) and as cultural knowledge and competence in other languages seem to enhance trust and rapport building (Kassis-Henderson & Louhiala-Salminen, in press; Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010), it should not be concluded that only the use of English – or BELF – is the guarantee for successful international internal communication. In addition, the more internationally internal communication is conducted, the larger is the number of languages involved, and the more probable it is that there is wide variation in levels of multilingual competence in general. Also, the levels of English proficiency vary, and the fact that English is used

as the corporate language in geographical areas where it is not generally mastered, may again cause inequality and imbalance of power and hinder knowledge sharing.

As was argued in the Introduction, we find the language perspective of the present paper as contributing to the macroview towards public relations that van Ruler and Verčič (2005) call for. The ever-intensifying globalization in all societal sectors requires language issues to be acknowledged and investigated and this development is taking place in public relations as well. Thus on the basis of our findings and the earlier literature discussed above, we argue that the language issue cannot be taken for granted but should be addressed when discussing internal international communication. What language to use in 'integrated internal communications' (Kalla, 2005) is no simple matter, and it cannot be resolved by any single management decision. Since well-functioning internal communication is crucial for the performance of an organization in general and knowledge sharing in particular (see e.g. Rosenfeld et al., 2004; Burgess, 2005), it is, indeed, imperative that the role of the language used in such communication is acknowledged, problematized and discussed.

As we have shown, internationally operating business professionals are able to accomplish their work by using BELF (English as Business Lingua Franca), which – unlike 'standard' English - does not have any strict rules governing its grammatical form, structures, or 'correctness'. BELF communication seems to function well in its context of use, where its users are experts of their respective fields, but do not share any other language, and would thus not be able to do their work without this common 'language'. We want to emphasize that BELF performs its task as an *enabler of communication*, be it external or internal, as was mostly the case with our informants in the 'emergent strategy' study. BELF users do not 'own' the language; rather, everybody is entitled to BELF, and consequently, hybridity, variation, contextuality and dynamism are primary. Here, it

should be remembered that the role of BELF in international interactions is different from that of other (foreign) languages, which are typically used with native speakers of the respective languages. With speakers of such languages, rules for ‘correct usage’ exist and the discursive power rests with the native speakers automatically.

Since BELF usage is different from native English usage and NNSs may feel intimidated by NSs because of their ability to resort to the whole repertoire of their native tongue, we would agree with Charles & Marschan-Piekkari (2002; also Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010) and suggest that NSs of English would benefit from some BELF training; for example, techniques to simplify idiomatic expressions could be on the training agenda. Also, such training could focus on enhancing NSs’ understanding of NNSs’ various accents and ways of speaking.

Now that English has increasingly been adopted as the ‘corporate language’ of most international organizations (e.g. Fredriksson et al. 2006), and it seems that the choice – be it explicit or implicit as in our case companies - has obvious advantages, it is still important that the role of other languages is acknowledged in the inherently multilingual international environment. For example, simultaneous use of multiple languages could be promoted in the organizational context when appropriate. Such policy would mean that an employee’s expertise would not be weakened by his/her language competency but rather each employee would be able to show and share the expertise in the language he/she feels most comfortable with.

Still, a question should be raised: what kind of English should be used in formal internal communication such as the organization’s Intranet, which typically employs ‘standard’ English? As our findings show, formal internal communication may not be easily accessible to all employees – neither to those not proficient enough in English nor to those who use BELF in their work but find

‘standard’ English demanding. For this reason, we argue that organizations should pay attention to the English of their formal internal communication and consider the language from the perspective of BELF interaction, in which the main criterion for ‘correctness’ is the degree to which the messages of internal communication truly reach their international audiences.

References

- Bargiela-Chiappini, F., Nickerson, C. & Planken, B. (2007). *Business Discourse*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, MacMilan
- Burgess, D. (2005). What motivates employees to transfer knowledge outside their work unit? *Journal of Business Communication*, 42, 324-348.
- Charles, M. (2007). Language Matters in Global Communication. *Journal of Business Communication*, 44(3), 260-282.
- Charles, M. & Marschan-Piekkari, R. (2002). Language training for enhanced horizontal communication training: A challenge for MNCs. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 65, 9-29.
- Cheney, G. & Christensen, L. (2001). Organizational identity linkages between internal and external communication. In Jablin, F.M. & Putnam, L.L. (Eds), *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cornelissen, J. (2011). *Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. London: Sage.
- Culbertson, H.M. (2009). Foreword. In Freitag, A.R. & Stokes, A.Q. (Eds), *Global Public Relations. Spanning borders, spanning cultures*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge
- Du Babcock, B. (2009). English as a business lingua franca: A framework of integrative approach to future research in International Business Communication. In L. Louhiala-Salminen and A. Kankaanranta (Eds.), *The Ascent of International Business Communication*, B-109, (pp. 45-66). Helsinki: HSEPrint. <http://hsepubl.lib.hse.fi/FI/publ/hse/b109>
- Eisenberg, E.M. (1996). Hearing voices: Speculations on the future of our disciplines. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 10, 124-130.
- Ehrenreich, S. (2010). English as a Business Lingua Franca in a German multinational corporation. *Journal of Business Communication*, 47(4), 408-431.
- Feely, A.J., & Harzing, A-W. (2003). Language Management in Multinational Companies, *Cross-cultural Management*, 10(2), 37 – 52.

- Fredriksson, R., Barner-Rasmussen, W. & Piekkari, R. (2006). The multinational corporation as a multilingual organization: The notion of common corporate language. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 11(4), 406-423.
- Freitag, A.R. & Stokes, A.Q. (Eds), *Global Public Relations. Spanning borders, spanning cultures*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge
- Gerritsen, M. & C. Nickerson. (2009). BELF: Business English as a Lingua Franca. In (Ed.) F. Bargiela-Chiappini, *The Handbook of Business Discourse* (pp. 180-192). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ghoshal, S., Korine, H. & Szulanski, G. (1994). Interunit communication in multinational corporations. *Management Science*, 40, 96-110
- Goodall, K., and Roberts, J. (2003). Only connect: teamwork in the multinational, *Journal of World Business*, 38, 127 - 140
- Holden, N.J. (2002). *Cross-cultural Management: A Knowledge Management Perspective*. London, Financial Times/Prentice Hall
- Ihlen, O. & van Ruler, B. (2009). Introduction. Applying social theory to Public Relations. In O.Ihlen, B. van Ruler & M. Fredriksson (Eds.), *Public Relations and Social Theory. Key Figures and Concepts*. (pp. 1-20). New York and London: Routledge.
- Inoue, T. (2003). An overview of public relations in Japan and the self-correction concept. In Sriramesh, K. & Verčič, D. (2003). *The global public relations handbook: theory, research, and practice*. Mahwah: Erlbaum.
- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The Phonology of English as an International language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. Oxford University Press.
- Kalla, H. (2005). Integrated internal communications: a multidisciplinary perspective. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 10, 302-314.
- Kankaanranta, A. (2006). Focus on Research: "Hej Seppo, could you pls comment on this!" – Internal Email Communication in Lingua Franca English in a Multinational Company. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 69, 216-225. For full report, see <http://ebooks.jyu.fi/solki/9513923207.pdf>.
- Kankaanranta, A. & Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2010). "English? – Oh, it's just work!": A study of BELF users' perceptions. *English for Specific Purposes*, 29, 204-209.
- Kankaanranta, A. & Planken, B. (2010). BELF competence as business knowledge of internationally operating business professionals. *Journal of Business Communication, Special issue of Language Matters, Part 2*, 47(4), 380-407.
- Kassis-Henderson, J. & Louhiala-Salminen, L. (in press) Does language affect trust in global professional contexts? Perceptions of international business professionals. *Journal of Rhetoric*,

Professional Communication, & Globalization.

Kassis Henderson, J. (2005). Language diversity in international management teams, *International Studies of Management and Organisation*, 35, 66-82.

Lehtovaara, H. (2009). Working in four official languages: The perceptions of OGB employees on the role of language in internal communication. Master's Thesis. Helsinki: Helsinki School of Economics. http://hsepubl.lib.hse.fi/FI/ethesis/pdf/12186/hse_ethesis_12186.pdf

Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2002). *Communication and Language Use in Merged Corporations: Cases Stora Enso and Nordea*. HSE Working Papers W-330. Helsinki: Helsinki School of Economics.

Louhiala-Salminen, L. & Charles, M. (2006). English as the lingua franca of international business communication: Whose English? What English? In J. Palmer-Silveira, M. Ruiz-Garrido, & I. Fortanet-Gomez (Eds.), *Intercultural and international business communication* (pp. 27–54). Bern: Peter Lang.

Louhiala-Salminen, L. & Kankaanranta, A. (2011). Professional Communication in a Global Business Context: The Notion of Global Communicative Competence. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, Special issue on Professional Communication in Global Contexts*, 54(3) September, 244-262.

Louhiala-Salminen, L. Charles M., Kankaanranta, A., (2005). English as a lingua franca in Nordic corporate mergers: Two case companies, *English for Specific purposes*, 24, 401- 421

Louhiala-Salminen, L. & Rogerson-Revell, P. (2010). An Introduction to Language Matters (Editorial). *Journal of Business Communication, Special issue of Language Matters, Part 1*, 47(2).

Lu, W., Kankaanranta, A. & Kampf, C. (forthcoming). Is there a “yes” or “no” for a Chinese business professional? - The effect of cultural identity on Chinese professional communication. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.

Luo, Y. & Shenkar, O. (2006). The multinational corporation as a multilingual community: Language and organization in a global context. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 37, 321-339.

Maclea, D. (2006). Beyond English: Transnational corporations and the strategic management of language in a complex multilingual business environment. *Management Decision*, 44(10), 1377-1390.

Marschan, R., Welch, D.E. & Welch, L.S. (1997). Language: The forgotten factor in multinational management. *European Management Journal*, 15, 591-598.

Marschan-Piekkari, R., Welch, D. E. & Welch, L.S. (1999). In the shadow: The impact of language on structure, power and communication in the multinational. *International Business Review*, 8(4), 421-440.

Mauranen, A. (2003). The Corpus of English as Lingua Franca in Academic Settings. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(3), 513-527.

- Moreno, A., Verhoeven, P., Tench, R. & Zerfass, A. (2010). European Communication Monitor 2009. An institutionalized view of how public relations and communication management professionals face the economic and media crises in Europe. *Public Relations Review* 36 , 97–104.
- Morley, D., Shockley-Zalabak, P. & Cesaria, R. (2002). Organizational influence processes: 26, 103-120. Perceptions of values, communication and effectiveness. *Studies in Communication Sciences*, 2, 69-104.
- Nickerson, C. (2005). Editorial. English as a lingua franca in international business contexts. *English for Specific Purposes*, 24, 367–380.
- Planken, B. (2005). Managing rapport in lingua franca sales negotiations: A comparison of professional and aspiring negotiators. *English for Specific Purposes. Special issue: English as a lingua franca in international business contexts*, C. Nickerson (Ed.), 24(4), 381-400.
- Poncini, G. (2004). *Discursive Strategies in Multicultural Business Meetings*. Linguistic Insights 13: Studies in Language and Communication. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Rensburg, R. (2003). Public relations in South Africa: From rhetoric to reality. In Sriramesh, K. & Verčič, D. (2003). *The global public relations handbook: theory, research, and practice*. Mahwah: Erlbaum.
- Rogerson-Revell, P. (2007). Using English for international business: A European case study. *English for Specific Purposes*,
- Rogerson-Revell, P. & Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2010). An Introduction to Language Matters (Editorial). *Journal of Business Communication, Special issue of Language Matters, Part 2*, 47(4).
- Rosenfeld, L. B., Richman, J. M., & May, S. K. (2004). Information adequacy, job satisfaction and organizational culture in a dispersed-network organization. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 32, 28–54.
- Reardon, K. (1996). The crossroads of organizational communication: Definition or dichotomy. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 10, 106-111.
- van Ruler, B. & Verčič, D. (2005). Reflective communication management: Future ways for public relations research. In P.J. Kalbfleisch (Ed.) *Communication Yearbook* (Vol. 29, pp. 239-274). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2001). Towards making Euro-English a linguistic reality. *English Today*, 68, 14-16.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2004). Research perspectives on teaching English as a Lingua Franca. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 209-239.
- Seidlhofer, B., Breiteneder, A. & Pitzl, M. (2006). English as a lingua franca in Europe. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 26, 3-34.
- Sriramesh, K. & Verčič, D. (2003). *The global public relations handbook: theory, research, and practice*. Mahwah: Erlbaum.

Vandermeeren, S. (1999). English as a lingua franca in written corporate communication: findings from a European survey. In F. Bargiela-Chiappini & C. Nickerson (Eds.), *Writing business: genres, media and discourses*, (pp. 273-291). London: Longman.

Vollstedt, M. (2002). English as a language for internal company communications. In K. Knapp & C. Meierkord (Eds.), *Lingua Franca Communication* (pp. 87-108). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Welch, M. (2011). The evolution of the employee engagement concept: communication implications. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 16(4), 328 – 346.

Welch, M. & Jackson, P.R. (2007). Rethinking internal communication: a stakeholder approach. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 12(2), 177-198.

White, C., Vanc, A. & Stafford, G. (2010). Internal Communication, Information Satisfaction, and Sense of Community: The Effect of Personal Influence. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 22(1):65–84.