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Well said, well done

Language as a source of power in multinational teams

Jasmin Dehghani and Maria Strandberg

Supervisor: Cheryl Cordeiro and Curt Nestor
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ABSTRACT

As Multinational Corporations (MNCs) extend their span across the globe, a natural strategic consequence in managing a multilingual landscape has been the introduction of a lingua franca, in the form of a common corporate language. Language in international business (IB) studies have indicated that language proficiency can constitute a source of power in MNCs, that potentially distort working relations and thus affects cooperation. This study aims to further investigate how language proficiency can empower and/or disempower people in multinational teams (MNTs), a setting that has as of yet not received much attention in this regard. A case study approach has been adopted for this study based on 22 semi-structured interviews and observations conducted in Sweden and the US. The results indeed illustrate that language proficiency can be empowering or disempowering in several respects due to that language is inherently embedded in all work activities. The findings also show that this has an impact on team dynamics and team functioning, which is essential to address due to the increasing importance of MNTs for the performance of MNCs.

Key words: corporate language, influence, international business (IB), multinational corporations (MNCs), multinational teams (MNTs), power.

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Jasmin Dehghani



Maria Strandberg

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HQ	Headquarter
IB	International Business
MNC	Multinational Corporation
MNT	Multinational Team
TC	Teleconference

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	iii
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Problem Discussion	2
1.3 Research Question & Purpose	4
1.4 Study Limitations	4
1.5 Research Outline	5
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 The Emergence of the Language Field in International Business	6
2.2 Adopting a Common Corporate Language	8
2.3 The Role of Language in Multinational Corporations	9
<i>2.3.1 Language proficiency as power in multinational corporations</i>	12
2.4 The Role of Language in Multinational Teams	14
<i>2.4.1 Language proficiency as power in multinational teams</i>	15
2.5 Literature Framework	16
3 METHODOLOGY	18
3.1 Research Approach	18
3.2 Research Design	19
<i>3.2.1 Research unit</i>	19
<i>3.2.3 Data collection method</i>	20
<i>3.2.4 Interview protocol and interview process</i>	21
<i>3.2.5 Data analysis method</i>	23
<i>3.2.6 Qualitative assessment</i>	24
4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS	26
4.1 English as Corporate Language	27
4.2 Teamwork	28
4.3 Challenges	29
4.4 Strategies	32
4.5 Relationships	34
4.6 Language as Power	35
<i>4.6.1 The power of refined language capabilities</i>	35
<i>4.6.2 Native speaker advantage</i>	37
<i>4.6.3 Keeping silent</i>	40
<i>4.6.4 Personality</i>	41
<i>4.6.5 Reversed power</i>	43
5 ANALYSIS	45
5.1 Teamwork – Global Dispersion Exacerbates Language Issues, Industry Counterbalances and Time is Tight	45
5.2 Challenges – Time is Valuable and Language Barriers Slow You Down	46

5.3 Strategies – Written Communication Minimises the Language Gap	47
5.4 Relationships – The Importance of Language for Social Networks and Collaboration	47
5.5 Language as Power	48
5.5.1 <i>The power of refined language capabilities – nuances and language blindspot</i>	48
5.5.2 <i>Keeping silent – language as disempowering</i>	49
5.5.3 <i>Native speaker advantage – an empowering edge</i>	50
5.5.4 <i>Personality – a determining factor for the effect of language?</i>	52
5.5.5 <i>Reversed power – language as a double-edged sword</i>	53
5.6 The Multifaceted Role of Language	54
6 CONCLUSION	56
6.1 Findings and Theoretical Contributions	56
6.2 Managerial Implications	58
6.3 Recommendations for Future Research	59
REFERENCES	61
APPENDIX	66
1. Overview of Respondents and Interviews	66
2. Interview Guide	68

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

A consequence of greater global interconnectivity is that companies increasingly need to find competitive advantage on the global platform, which see them entering not only multinational but also multilingual territories. As these Multinational Corporations (MNCs) extend their span across the globe, a natural strategic consequence in managing a multilingual landscape has been the introduction of a *lingua franca* in the form of a common corporate language. The most commonly adopted is English, a language that for historical reasons (British Council, 2013) has today a prominent role in facilitating global discourse on international politics, information technology, media and, of course, business. The global demand for learning English is increasing rapidly around the world and it is likely to remain one of the leading international languages for business in the foreseeable future, with corporations adopting English as corporate language. This trend lies in contrast to what many people believed around a decade ago, with the rise of powerful MNCs from emerging economies such as China (EF, 2014).

The importance of the English language for business is established in many different ways. In a far-stretching study testing English proficiency levels of employees from different corporations and industries worldwide, EF (2014) showed that corporations where the staff, from juniors to executives, were highly proficient in English were more innovative, disseminated information more easily and engaged more in knowledge sharing. A healthy internal culture of conversation and collaboration was stated as the underlying reason behind this, which is influenced by language capabilities of the personnel.

Many studies manifest the importance of investing in language training for employees in MNCs (Welch, Welch & Piekkari, 2005; Terjesen, Tenzer, Hinger & Harzing, 2014; EF, 2014). Despite this, the majority of the investigated companies proved having troubles dealing with the increasing importance of the English language. Many experienced large disparities in English performance, and considerable room for improvement could be seen. Failure to keep pace with the necessary English skills means that companies may forgo business opportunities, which consequently will render them in a disadvantageous position (EF, 2014).

1.2 PROBLEM DISCUSSION

In recent years, scholars in the field of International Business (IB) have acknowledged language as one of the most important functions in IB activities. Language is the base of communication and knowledge creation (Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari & Sääntti, 2005) and it is through language that corporate strategies and decisions are formulated, transferred and implemented. Thus, language plays a crucial role in the efficient overall performance of MNCs (Harzing & Feely, 2008; Björkman & Piekkari, 2009; Tenzer, Pudelko & Harzing, 2014). The significant role of language in the field of IB has, however, not yet been adequately formulated or theorised (Brannen, Piekkari & Tietze, 2014). Research in the field of IB indicates that language has a history of being neglected in discussions about key issues in international business management literature. This, despite its heavy impact on many different aspects of international management, such as international negotiations, cross-cultural communication, knowledge transfer, control coordination, and integration within MNCs (Vaara et al., 2005; Welch et al., 2005; Lou & Shenkar, 2006; Harzing & Feely, 2008; Brannen et al., 2014).

An underlying reason for not studying the impact of language is that it has usually been subsumed into the broad discussion on culture as a barrier for internationalisation and communication. Cultural differences as an impediment to doing business is a notion that is widely accepted and investigated (Harzing & Feely, 2008, Björkman & Piekkari, 2009). However, research has shown that the similarities stemming from sharing the same national culture differ from the similarities stemming from a shared language (Brannen et al., 2014).

When companies implement a corporate language, the aim is usually to increase efficiency by facilitating cross-border communication and learning (Lou & Shenkar, 2006; Zander, Mockaitis & Harzing, 2011), creating a common feeling of cohesion and belonging with the firm (Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2014). Ideally, a common corporate language should create a common, more egalitarian platform upon which all participants know the rules and are 'equal' to each other. However, empirical research has proved that the adoption of a corporate language might actually have the opposite effect of creating a platform for further miscommunication and exclusion (Tietze, Cohen & Mason, 2003; Vaara et al., 2005; Welch et al., 2005; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2014).

Neely (2013) showed in a study how non-native English speakers in English-speaking MNCs perceived a loss in status compared to their native colleagues. Accordingly, in an in-depth study of the banking sector merger between the Finnish Merita and the Swedish Nordbanken, Vaara et

al. (2005) proved how the choice of Swedish as the official corporate language led to serious power imbalances between the Swedish- and Finnish speaking employees. Swedish speaking staff unintentionally became constructed as professionally more competent, and a correlation between career advancements and proficiency in the corporate language could be seen. That varying language competency of the corporate language positively affects the more fluent speakers has been confirmed in several other studies as well (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 1999a,b; Harzing & Feely, 2008). However, the power-yielding effect of language superiority has to date mostly been studied in headquarter (HQ) – subsidiary relationships of MNCs, which are hierarchical by nature (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2014).

In a recent study conducted at German MNCs, Tenzer and Pudelko (2014) investigated the effect of disparate language proficiency on power implications of members in Multinational Teams (MNTs) – constellations where relationships between the different actors are more egalitarian. MNTs have rapidly gained importance in organisations as a result of growing complexity of tasks and increased workforce diversity (Hajro & Pudelko, 2010) and for employees in MNCs, being part of them is becoming the rule rather than the exception (Zander, Mockaitis & Butler, 2012). In a team, people are generally considered to have different expert areas and contribute with different types of knowledge. Normally, they are hierarchically on the same level as their teammates. Therefore, they should be considered equal and their views, opinions and ability to influence should be the same. The research by Tenzer and Pudelko (2014) on MNTs proposed that when language skills among the team members varied, employees with relatively better knowledge of the language were given certain powerful positions in the team, as they were able to take advantage of the opportunity to influence how processes are carried out and messages are transferred. Similar findings have been noted by e.g. Welch et al. (2005) who proved that influence normally not granted by a formal status, could be given to individuals with high language proficiency in the working language.

The implications of such a power-yielding instrument can be severe. Not only is it a loss for companies to not make full use of the knowledge that resides within disfavoured employees, Tenzer & Pudelko (2014) proved that if power attained through high language proficiency coincided with formal authority, it was perceived as unfair by other team members. Power distortion in this manner, whether deliberate or not, has so far proven to demotivate employees and discourage voluntary cooperation. Moreover, language disparities have proven to negatively affect trust in MNTs, which is alarming due to the importance of trust among team members for the efficient functioning of the team (Pudelko & Harzing, 2014).

To this date, a full picture of how language impacts power relations in MNTs is not yet provided. In their review agenda for future research on language in IB, Terjesen et al. (2014) state that there is a scarcity of research on how language diversity affects team cooperation, illustrating that there is still an important gap that needs to be filled. In particular because of the growing role of MNTs to deal with change, implement global business solutions and integrate knowledge in MNCs (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2014).

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION & PURPOSE

The contribution of this research to the field of language in international business (IB) is the study of language and power in MNTs, specifically by conducting a case study at a large Swedish-English MNC with subsidiaries all over the world and where English has been adopted as the lingua franca.

Members of MNTs who have different native languages are interviewed, in order to gain an understanding of the concept of language as an empowering or disempowering tool and how it affects people in the teams. This is investigated in a new setting, which gives a novel perspective to the phenomenon studied, adding perspectives to this developing theory. The overall purpose of the study is to illustrate what power implications language proficiency has on employees in MNTs. With this background, the following research question has been constructed:

How can language proficiency empower or disempower people in multinational teams and what are the possible implications of this?

1.4 STUDY LIMITATIONS

This thesis focuses on how language proficiency can empower or disempower employees working in an MNT context. The aim of which is to study the possible influences and power relations that result from possessing efficient language skills that is also the lingua franca or official corporate language. The launching perspective of this study is the multifaceted aspect of language on MNTs. This study also aims to complement the small but growing field of literature of language in IB studies, as such, the generalizability of the findings to this study is thus limited to its niche field.

This study is also industry and company specific, with its data collected from one single international company. Two sites of the company are investigated, one large Swedish site and a

subsidiary in the United States. It can be assumed that the people that were interviewed were influenced by their specific backgrounds and the settings in which they worked. This implies that the results could have been different, had the study taken place in another context. While this has been a conscious decision and strategy when doing this study, the findings of this thesis should be understood in this context of a single case study approach, where findings from this study can serve as a basis for further avenues of discussion and investigation to future studies in related fields.

1.5 RESEARCH OUTLINE

This thesis is divided into six chapters, including the introduction, and is structured as follows:

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter outlines the previous research on language within the field of IB in general and language and power in particular. It extensively covers different researchers' work within the field in order to serve as framework for later comparison with the empirical results.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological approach to conducting the case study. It explains in detail the process and techniques applied for gathering, analysing and presenting the empirical data.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter presents the empirical results gathered from the interviews and observations. This includes the interviewees' views on the challenges related to working within MNTs in a company where English is the corporate language and how this can be empowering or disempowering for individuals in the teams.

ANALYSIS

This chapter relates the empirical results with the theoretical frame presented in the literature review. The various findings are compared and discussed.

CONCLUSION

This chapter highlights and summarises the main findings of the thesis. It gives a clear answer to the research questions, discusses implications for managers and suggests possible topics and methods for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims to provide an overview of the previous research that has been conducted in the field of language in IB. In order to gain a better understanding of the subject, the chapter begins with a wider perspective on language by looking deeper into the developments in the field. This is subsequently followed by findings on language in MNCs and is finally narrowed down to language as power in MNTs. The chapter is concluded by a summary of previous research regarding language proficiency as empowering and disempowering.

2.1 THE EMERGENCE OF THE LANGUAGE FIELD IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

The field of IB initially started investigating the role of language in the 1970s (Brannen, Piekkari & Tietze, 2014). For example, the importance of language, an element of psychic distance on firms' internationalisation patterns, was observed early (Luostarinen, 1979). Nevertheless, language remained largely under the radar until the late 1990s and early 2000s. To gestate languages' influence in IB, scholars have made use of a variety of theories from communication, linguistics, sociology, strategy and economics (Brannen et al., 2014; Terjesen, Tenzer, Hinger & Harzing, 2014).

Tietze, Cohen & Musson (2003) have argued that it is impossible to escape language since it surrounds us in many possible ways and is a central part of what makes us human. Because it is bound to individuals, it pervades all aspects of multinational activities and behaviour (Welch, Welch & Piekkari, 2005). In organisation studies, language is frequently defined as 'a communicative system of shared meanings that is central in constructing organizational, social and global realities' (Brannen et al., 2014:497) and it may take various forms, including national, corporate, electronic or technical (Brannen et al., 2014). Language proficiency can, in turn, be defined as 'the extent to which an individual knows and is able to manipulate the linguistic and semantic signals that together constitute a particular language, so as to be able to transfer meaning in that language' (Barner-Rasmussen, Ernrooth, Koveshnikov & Mäkelä, 2014:889).

There are different lenses through which language in IB can be viewed. Applying a cultural perspective calls for a pluralistic solution to the language issue for MNCs, as it is argued that language is culturally anchored. From an instrumental perspective, language has been seen as a factor that complicates communication in MNCs, whereby the introduction of a corporate lingua franca has been considered a remedy for this. However, from a political perspective it is argued that language is closely tied to power and that the adoption of a corporate lingua franca can be

seen as a political process, which is not neutral as put forward in the instrumental perspective (Piekkari & Zander, 2005).

Understanding the impact of language on daily operations is increasingly essential in order to fully grasp organisational processes and improve MNC effectiveness. Language is the core of international business, broadly impacting many of its aspects, including management, knowledge transfers, HQ – subsidiary relations, international negotiations, cross-cultural communication as well as internal integration, coordination and control (Tietze et al., 2003; Welch et al., 2005; Brannen et al., 2014).

Despite these rather strong statements highlighting its importance, language in IB has as of yet been insufficiently theorised (Brannen et al., 2014). The role of language has been dubbed ‘the forgotten factor’ in IB (Marschan, Welch & Welch, 1997:591). Furthermore, Maclean (2006:1377) made a succinct point when stating that ‘Companies deal with language issues every day. (...) How they do so, however, remains largely absent from the literature.’ Considering the fact that we live in an information intense society and that language is crucial for knowledge and information transfers, the reality of this exclusion from the literature is somewhat odd (Welch et al., 2005).

It has been found that the importance of language on its own is frequently neglected as it is most of the time treated as an implicit part of culture (Kassis Henderson, 2005). Many scholars agree that language is inevitably related to culture and that it is difficult to detach language effects from the broader cultural effects. Nevertheless, it has been argued that the bundling of the two has concealed the very influential role of language in MNCs’ operations (Welch, Welch & Marschan-Piekkari, 2001). Consequently, the interpersonal interaction process that is enacted through language is also overlooked (Kassis Henderson, 2005). For these reasons, many argue that language needs to be studied and theorised separately in order to capture its unique effects (Welch et al., 2005; Tenzer, Pudelko & Harzing, 2014; Terjesen et al., 2014).

Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt and Jonsen (2010) provide support to these claims when proving in their analysis of cultural diversity in teams that there is a significant difference between similarity stemming from a shared national culture and similarity based on language. Furthermore, Luo and Shenkar (2006) agree on the point that language needs to be decoupled from culture, because even though there is no question about its relatedness, the choice of language in MNCs is strategic, in contrast to national culture.

On this note, it has been argued that managers in MNCs ought to take issues associated with language more seriously and that language needs to be an issue at the heart of strategic decisions concerning global operations (Welch et al., 2005). Luo and Shenkar (2006) also agree on this point, calling for an inclusion of language in a strategic context. The majority of companies do not know in which state of corporate efficiency they find their language resources. As a response to this, Welch et al. (2005) argue that language audits of current and future needs are needed in order to craft better management strategies. In his quantitative study based on data from 547 foreign subsidiaries in Japan, Peltokorpi (2015) showed that subsidiaries with expatriates as top managers tend to have a greater number of language policies compared to subsidiaries that are managed by host country nationals. Moderating effects were also found depending on age and size of the subsidiary, where larger and older subsidiaries were proven to have more language policies in comparison to smaller and younger.

Overall, three distinct developments in the language stream in international business can be seen. First, language is now separated from culture. Secondly, the level of analysis has gone from merely a focus on the individual to include the organisation level as well. Lastly, since the late 1990s and early 2000s the somewhat scattered studies on language have been united in one legitimate, identifiable field of study (Brannen et al., 2014).

2.2 ADOPTING A COMMON CORPORATE LANGUAGE

To combat communication issues and pave the way for collaboration and more rapid exchange of information, many companies have chosen to adopt a common corporate language (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari and Säntti, 2005; Welch et al., 2005), where the choice increasingly has fallen on English (Feely & Harzing, 2003; EF, 2014). Overall, the use of English as a corporate language among MNCs is exhaustive. In the Nordic countries, where the English proficiency of the work force is very high, 88 percent of MNCs have adopted English as their corporate language, followed by 74 percent of the MNCs in continental Europe. An exception to this can be seen in Asia, where only 16 percent of MNCs have adopted English as the corporate language (EF, 2014; Harzing & Pudelko, 2012).

However, even though a common language is implemented to facilitate information exchange, it is not something that is improved from one day to another, as attaining the necessary proficiency level takes time (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 1999a). One of the pioneering studies by Marschan et al. (1997) saw language from a new light. Instead of viewing it as an external problem the researches shifted the focus to everyday internal issues that take place in an MNC.

The qualitative case study investigated subsidiaries' reactions to 'language standardization by headquarters', i.e. the adoption of a common corporate language, in the Finnish multinational Kone. It was found that a common language does not automatically entail that meaningful communication takes place. Theoretically, this introduction of a so called corporate language should create an even playing field for employees within the MNC and, in addition, foster a sense of belonging (Tietze et al., 2003; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch 1999b). However, research has shown that this is far from reality seeing as there is no guarantee that people use the same frame of reference in terms of meaning systems, behavioural rules and cultural codes (Tietze et al., 2003; Kassis Henderson, 2005). There is thus a false illusion that controlling for language diversity solves the issue of transfer of meaning (Brannen et al., 2014).

The adoption of a lingua franca as corporate language was initially considered a neutral form of communication unbiased by cultural or political influence (Brannen et al., 2014). However, it has been argued that there is no neutrality in the use of English as a lingua franca since a great number of the world's leading economies use English as the official language as well as five of the G-20 members and that MBA programmes all over the world are taught in English (Archbugi, 2005; Tietze, 2004).

In line with the political perspective on language, it has thusly been argued that the choice of language is not simply a practical decision with the aim to improve efficiency, but is rather linked to control, influence and power (Welch et al., 2005). Therefore, as found by Piekkari and Zander (2005), adopting e.g. English as the common working language of an MNC may strengthen and support power relationships in settings with a variety of mother tongues.

In contrast, it has also been found that the absence of a shared language in MNCs has caused misunderstandings, conflicts and the creation of parallel communication channels, which could harm interaction between the HQ and subsidiary. An additional aspect is also that the level of oral communication was found to be lower whenever a shared language was lacking (Harzing & Pudelko, 2014). On this note, Andersen and Rasmussen (2004) summarised their study by stating that it does not matter which language is selected as the official corporate language, communication issues will always be present for an MNC.

2.3 THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

A number of studies have highlighted the important role that language skills play for MNC functionality (e.g. Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman, 2003; Björkman & Piekkari, 2009; Pudelko &

Harzing, 2014). Language skills ultimately reside in people, implying that the difference in abilities will be considerable and seeing as language skills are people skills, language is closely linked to the management of people (Welch et al., 2005). However, in spite of the centrality of a lingua franca in MNCs' work, there is a lack of understanding in terms of how employees are affected (Harzing & Feely, 2008).

The relationship between language and socialisation has been established in previous research (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; Barner-Rasmussen, 2003; Kassis Henderson, 2005; Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman, 2007). Vaara et al. (2005) argued that the role of languages in social life cannot be overvalued and that languages play a central role in the creation of new informal social networks. Informal social networks within MNCs have proven to be very important in regards to knowledge transfer between individuals (Welch & Welch, 2008), as well as in internal recruitment processes, especially for managers who are often recruited as much because of their contact network as for their technical and managerial competence (Marschan, Welch & Welch, 1996). Language plays a role in this as it has been shown that it impacts inclusion or exclusion of individuals from networks in many ways (Welch & Welch, 2008). Furthermore, in their quantitative study Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman (2007) examined 310 inter-unit relationships of subsidiaries based in Finland and China. The authors showed that language proficiency relates to perceived trustworthiness and shared vision and further found evidence that there is a positive relationship between socialisation mechanisms and shared vision.

Researchers have also cast light on issues of hierarchy and dominance in relationships brought about by language proficiency, where the dominance of the English language has often been discussed (Brannen et al., 2014). In their case study on corporate boards, Piekkari, Oxelheim and Randøy (2015) found a 'silencing effect' in companies that were less prepared to switch to English as the working language. It was indicated that board meetings were limited in English as opinions were not easily articulated, and therefore contribution to the board meetings was cramped. Thus giving more strength to the argument that language is a separate dimension of diversity. What is more, it is not uncommon that having English as one's second or third language is seen by the individual as an obstacle to overcome, rather than a resource (Tietze & Dick, 2013). In their case study on language and foreign subsidiary control at Siemens, Björkman and Piekkari (2009) revealed that subsidiaries that are considered to have low language competencies are more tightly controlled by formalisation and centralisation measures. Subsidiaries with a high language competence are on the other hand able to influence the decisions that are taken.

An additional language-related regard for MNCs is the issues of time and costs that are directly associated with language barriers. As found by Harzing, Köster and Magner (2011) tasks tend to consume more time, thus leading to slower and more inefficient decision making processes. According to behavioural sciences, the scarcity of a resource increases its value (King, Hicks & Abdelkhalik, 2009), which is an aspect that DeVoe and Pfeffer (2010) found evidence for in terms of time as well.

The role of language in terms of exercising power in the MNC is a theme that has emerged in the late 1990s and 2000s (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; Vaara et al., 2005). Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999a; 1999b), dubbed pioneers in the field of language in IB, investigated the internal implications of the adoption of a corporate language on HQ – subsidiary relations. The researchers showed in their case study on Finnish Kone that language proficiency can result in power for individuals serving as so called ‘language nodes’, by granting them the opportunity to control communication and information flow by acting as ‘language mediators’ and ‘bridge builders’. Since this study, researchers in the field have started to refer to expatriates as ‘language nodes’, instead of ‘cultural boundary spanners’, which was previously the case when language was not decoupled from culture (Brannen et al., 2014).

Boundary spanners can be defined as ‘individuals who are perceived by other members of both their own in-group and/or relevant out-groups to engage in and facilitate significant interactions between the two groups’ (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014:888). Boundary spanning activities can be broadly categorised into four different functions, namely information exchanging, linking, facilitating and intervening. In their combined quantitative and qualitative analysis Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014) found that an employee’s boundary spanning ability is clearly related to cultural and language skills, where those individuals who hold both these skills can serve as more multifaceted boundary spanners. Additionally, the researchers provided evidence of how language skills are in fact essential in terms of exercising more demanding boundary spanning function such as facilitating and linking.

Language proficiency can thereby allow some individuals to play gatekeepers (Welch et al., 2005) and language-based networks may thus be created in order to circumvent the barriers introduced by the language standardisation requirement (Marschan et al., 1997). In the Kone study it was in fact revealed that some individuals discarded key information in English, simply because their language proficiency was not up to par (Marschan et al., 1997). Therefore, these language based communication flows are very brittle as they are bound to individuals, whose influence and power may at the same time be vast (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b). Information is power and

whether this gatekeeping behaviour is intended or not, it becomes evident that language can serve as an important divider in terms of who is included versus excluded from decision making and other key information processes, which is something that is typically seen as counterproductive (Welch et al., 2005; Macdonald & Williams, 1992). This may, in turn, also generate resentment regarding managers and the processes of management (Welch et al., 2005).

Feelings of distrust and resentment towards English native speakers have been found to be common among non-native employees (Neely, 2013). An additional further complicating issue is the fact that even though some individuals may be highly proficient in a foreign language, they may still be reluctant and have a negative attitude toward interaction in this language (Welch et al., 2005). The studies by Vaara et al. (2005) and Welch et al. (2005) of corporate language in merged companies ultimately showed that the company with the language that was not chosen, perceived the choice as political, which led to disintegration rather than integration that had been the intended outcome. This was also shown in the Kone-study, where introduction of English as a corporate language did not erase barriers stemming from its cross border activities (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a). Nevertheless, earlier research has also indicated that the effects of language differences might vary depending on the communication method that is used, e.g. written or oral (Shachaf, 2008; Harzing et al., 2011).

2.3.1 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AS POWER IN MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

Power can be defined in many different ways; according to Oxford Dictionaries (2015) it can be broadly defined as the ability to control people or things, or as a strength or influence in a particular area or activity. Greer and Bendersky (2013:239) define power as ‘control over socially valued resources’. Language has been argued to be crucial when it comes to influencing (Tietze et al., 2009:) and as was also concluded by Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999a), language can be viewed a means to gain influence and power in MNCs. Neely (2013) further depicts language proficiency as a highly valued resource within an MNC, implying that whoever masters the corporate language will enjoy more power. Therefore, using English as the corporate lingua franca may certainly disadvantage some people as language dominance is frequently associated with influence and power (Tietze et al., 2003; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2014).

On this note, Schneider and Barsoux (1997) argued that there is a considerable difference when someone is talking in his/her mother tongue as facial expressions, tone of voice, body language as well as the confidence that is projected changes drastically. It has further been argued that even if individuals have a high degree of proficiency, there is an inevitable loss of rhetorical skills

in terms of sensitivity, symbolism, humour, motivation, negotiation and persuasion when work cannot be done in the mother tongue seeing as a very high level of proficiency is required in order to master these skills (Harzing & Feely, 2008). As illustrated by Neely (2013), non-native speakers can feel a loss in status, regardless of their English proficiency level. The ability to converse is constrained for those unable to communicate in their mother tongues, which lowers their access to information and consequently power within the MNC (Luo & Shenkar, 2006). Thus, it has been stated that native English speakers are more likely to reach power positions based on language in MNCs using English as a corporate language (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2014).

High corporate language proficiency thus poses as a substantial source of power for certain individuals, which may, as a result of this, be granted influence that their formal status normally would not grant them (Welch et al., 2005). On a similar line of thought, Andersen and Rasmussen (2004) and van den Born and Peltokorpi (2010) showed in two different studies that when employees are proficient in the relevant languages they can gain informal power in the MNC. Nevertheless, Welch et al. (2005) also found that if proficiency in the corporate language is high among all employees, the ability to use language as a power instrument will diminish. Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999a) additionally found an internal hierarchy of languages, where the home as well as the corporate language is more privileged in comparison to other less esteemed languages found in the company.

There has been little attention to the role language assumes in leadership activities, nevertheless Tietze et al. (2003) argue that leadership is, in fact, a language game. A comprehensive cross-sectional study by Harzing and Pudelko (2012) using survey data from 13 different countries, revealed that the role of language as a source of power is considered less important for managers in native speaking English countries. On the same note, that language is used as a source of power was mainly felt by non-native English speakers when communicating with native speakers. The study concluded that proficiency in the language of the HQ is a significant source of both formal and informal power in the MNC (Harzing & Pudelko, 2012).

Language skills can become both empowering and disempowering resources in MNCs as showed by Vaara et al. (2005) in their case study on the merger between Swedish Nordbanken and Finnish Merita where Swedish was adopted as the corporate language. It was found that the implications of a language policy were felt most acute by those who lacked skills, i.e. in this case the Finns suffered. Those who spoke Swedish were also unintentionally seen as more knowledgeable in terms of their competence. However, at the same time Finnish could be used as a secret language in e.g. negotiations as the Swedes did not understand it.

A qualitative case study of ENOQ by Logemann and Piekkari (2015) illustrated that translation may be used as a tool to exert control over meanings by HQs as well as by subsidiary managers. HQs exercised control over practices and attitudes while subsidiaries reacted by resisting control, which subsequently altered some power positions. The authors stated that ‘the crossing of language boundaries offers a window onto shifting power positions and micro-politics in the MNC’ (Logemann & Piekkari, 2015:30). Harzing and Feely (2008) also found that power distortions between the HQ managers and subsidiary managers might occur when the latter have a higher level of language proficiency in the corporate language.

2.4 THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN MULTINATIONAL TEAMS

The importance of MNTs has increased over the last years and this has also been linked to the emergence of virtual teams, teams in which members are dispersed globally. This way of organising work is already established in many MNCs (Zander, Mockaitis & Butler, 2012). MNTs can be defined as ‘organizational teams consisting of three or more individuals from two or more different countries who are provided with tools and procedures to address certain sets of organizational tasks over a longer period of time’ (Harjo & Pudelko, 2010:175)

The past decade has also resulted in research on teams that are globally dispersed which has shown that team dynamics are particularly fragile in those teams, which has been linked to missing information, geographic distance, the lack of a local identification as well as power disparity (Hinds, Neely & Cramton, 2014). It is also argued that power relations differ greatly in teams in comparison to other corporate constellations (Halevy, Chou & Galinsky, 2011; Greer, 2014). Teams tend to provide a different environment in terms of hierarchy. Despite the fact that they usually consist of team members and a leader, they tend to have a culture of equality, less defined by authority and accountability (Romme, 1996). This could be a result of the fact that employees are often part of many teams simultaneously and because of the temporary nature of teams (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2014).

When teams are comprised of members speaking a host of mother tongues, specific challenges arise. In her qualitative study on MNTs in French MNCs, Kassis Henderson (2005) demonstrated that some managers have been shown to never consider this aspect but believed that since team communication took place in English, there was no point in examining this seeing as all team members’ proficiency was seen as ‘good enough’. The study also shows that interpretation plays a large part in the problems related to language diversity. The reason for this is because even though English is often used as a ‘common’ language, team members still use

their own frames of reference and therefore attach their own meanings to the words and expressions. The author argues that since English is used there is thus a false impression that the same context is shared, which ultimately, leads to miscommunication and hampers trust building in the team. Purposeful communication is therefore difficult to reach (Brannen et al., 2014). As illustrated by Tietze et al. (2003), this can also be the case even if the same mother tongue is shared but the individuals are from two different countries, for instance the United States and the United Kingdom.

Ethnocentric behaviour may also follow as a result of this, with a belief that one's own language is superior to others' (Piekkari & Zander, 2005). In a qualitative study on MNTs based on 90 semi-structured interviews, Tenzer et al. (2014) showed that language influences trust formation in MNTs, as emotional and cognitive reactions affect the intention to trust as well as the perceived trustworthiness of other team members. This language based finding is noteworthy, particularly seeing as trust has also been found to be central in an efficient team (Pudelko & Harzing, 2014). Furthermore, findings by Harjo and Pudelko (2010) also suggested that in order for a team leader to motivate members in the MNT to optimise their knowledge, he or she has to be multilingual in addition to culturally aware.

2.4.1 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AS POWER IN MULTINATIONAL TEAMS

As previously mentioned, there is to date not much research on language as a source of power in MNTs. Power structures have, however, been investigated and Greer, 2014 present three different power structures in teams. *Team power level* is the individual member's power in a team. A management team, for example, is an example of a high power level team. *Team power variety* is related to the degree to which team members obtain power from different sources. If team members draw their power from different sources, e.g. authority, task knowledge, language skills, it is high, and low if the same source of power is used for all team members. *Team power dispersion* measures the hierarchy in the team, if power is concentrated to one leader the dispersion is high and if all members are on the same level power is low.

Ronay, Greenaway, Anicich, and Galinsky (2012) argue that power dispersion in teams provides for role clarity, which in turn facilitates coordination, reduce conflict and thus increase productivity. In cases with no clear hierarchy, it is likely to be more conflicts and competition, which undermines performance of the team. In contrast, Tost, Gino and Larrick (2013) argue that power dispersion can instead lead to lower performance by the team as it inhibits open communication and information sharing. Greer (2014) argues that whether or not power

structures negatively affects team dynamics depends on their perceived legitimacy, i.e. whether the power structures are seen as fair and justified within the team. As an example of this, Halevy et al. (2011), state that hierarchy is more often considered fair in teams where interdependence is emphasised in contrast to independence.

The first study to investigate power dispersion in MNTs from a language perspective is conducted by Tenzer and Pudelko (2014). The researchers looked deeper into power relations in 15 MNTs in three automobile companies in Germany and their results showed that relative language proficiency, rather than absolute skill levels, is of much greater importance in terms of power and influence in MNTs. When looking further into this aspect, the researchers found that in teams in which the difference in proficiency in the corporate language varied greatly, power shifted to those who mastered both the corporate language and the mother tongue of one or more national subgroups. These people were often requested to act as translators, whereby they gained gatekeeping power. The study further revealed that whenever power coincided with language proficiency and the power dispersion in the team increased, it was regarded as illegitimate. The same applied to situations in which language proficiency did not coincide with formal positions of power since authority was undercut by language proficiency. The power shifts were lower in teams in which the level of proficiency was more equal. Furthermore, when these power shifts were reduced and consequently lowered the power dispersion in the teams, they were considered to be legitimate.

Hinds et al. (2014) demonstrated that language asymmetries could act as a 'lightning rod', creating tension around emotions and power that ultimately leads to the formation of subgroups. The researchers demonstrate in their study that disparities in language proficiency can create power contest and thusly lead to an 'us versus them' dynamic in MNTs.

2.5 LITERATURE FRAMEWORK

In summary, previous research on the role of language in IB has shown in different ways how language proficiency can be used as a source of power. These findings will subsequently be used as a framework to investigate the role of language on power for employees in MNTs. The various findings on language and power presented in this chapter have been summarised and compiled in Table 1 below as either empowering or disempowering.

Table 1: Empowering and Disempowering Effects of Language Proficiency (based on literature review)

Empowering	Disempowering
Inclusion	Exclusion
Knowledge ascribed more validity	Silencing effect
Networking	Projected confidence lower
Language nodes – control over communication and information flows	More controlled by formalisation and centralisation
Secret language	Loss in status
Rhetorical skills	

Source: Table compiled by authors.

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methodology used to collect the empirical data as well as the techniques applied to analysis and assurance of reliability and validity of the findings.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

The focus of this study is to look at how language proficiency can be an empowering or disempowering tool for employees who work in MNTs in MNCs. The research in the field to this date is scarce and insufficient in order for it to be properly theorised (Brannen, Piekkari & Tietze, 2014; Terjesen, Tenzer, Hinger & Harzing, 2014), which is why this thesis aims to add new insights and findings to the growing discipline. An exploratory approach to the study has been taken, in which the multiple facets of the phenomenon can be uncovered. It is for this reason that a qualitative research method has been adopted, due to that it allows for a more nuanced analysis to be made.

Qualitative research methods are particularly suitable for studies that seek to understand the meaning and beliefs of an underlying action in depth, i.e. questions that are focused on ‘how’ and ‘why’. They are investigative and theory building, as opposed to quantitative research methods, which are concerned with empirical testing of theories and focusing on ‘what’ and ‘how many’ (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004). Furthermore, qualitative methods are better suited to answer complex issues, which is the case in this study as well as in international management research in general, and allows the researcher to capture rich details of the phenomenon under scrutiny to obtain more meaningful results and better understand connections between core factors (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004). Added to this is the fact that the topic of this thesis can be considered not only complex but also rather sensitive. This makes it unlikely that the alternative to a qualitative research, such as a quantitative social survey, would gain the required confidence or trust of the respondents involved in order to provide the necessary data for us to make correct inferences (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

When deciding on what type of qualitative method to pursue, the choice fell on the case study. A case study allows the researcher to thoroughly investigate the ‘case’ i.e. a contemporary phenomenon, within its real-world context, especially when it is difficult to distinguish how the contextual factors affect the phenomenon in question (Yin, 2014). Case studies provide an opportunity to deepen the understanding of the research phenomenon. In fact, they are

particularly well suited for research within IB, where the data stem from settings that are both cross-cultural and cross-national, as it does this thesis. These factors make comparability difficult in quantitative surveys or experiments, as cultural differences and translations of questionnaires may lead to different understandings and interpretations of questions by respondents. A qualitative case study, however, allows the researcher and respondents to re-ask and clarify questions in order to assure correct understanding and interpretation of questions (Ghauri, 2004). In this way, the case study allows one of the essential criteria of the qualitative research to be fulfilled, which is that the ideas and perspectives that emerge from qualitative research are represented by the meanings given to real life events experienced by the people who live them, not by the values, preconceptions and meanings that belong to the researcher(s) (Yin, 2011).

In terms of reasoning, this thesis follows both an inductive and deductive approach. The theoretical chapter was developed prior to data collection in order to attain a good understanding of the subject, however, it has been revisited and adapted throughout process. During data collection, new understandings and information connected to power aspects in MNTs arose. The gathered data was critically reflected upon and when the findings differed from the theoretical framework, the literature was revisited and reworked and then adapted accordingly. By doing this, we allowed ourselves to not be biased by the gathered data and to critically confront the theories presented earlier. Hence our reasoning has been abductive (Ghauri, 2004). This responsiveness during the research process has also helped ensure validity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2008).

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design outlines how the data was systematically collected and analysed in order to answer the research question. The design of the study is important in order to achieve reliability and validity, which measures the rigour and quality of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

3.2.1 RESEARCH UNIT

The empirical gathering of data was conducted through a single case study at AstraZeneca, a large MNC in the pharmaceutical industry with one of its main sites located on the Swedish west coast. The company is headquartered in London and is present in over 100 countries in the world (AstraZeneca, 2015). The choice fell on this particular company for different reasons. Firstly, job rotation within the different subsidiaries is common and both the Swedish and American sites employ people from a large variety of nationalities. Secondly, the majority of the

employees work in international teams and projects, and close collaboration with colleagues in other countries is common as the teams often span over national borders. Thirdly, a company in the pharmaceutical industry suits this research well in the way that it is a player in a truly global industry. Pharmaceutical companies are typically very dispersed as they conduct R&D in some countries, manufacture in others, and use a global supply chain, distribution and sales operation in order to be present all over the world. Global sharing of knowledge regarding research, information on diseases and epidemics as well as clear and precise instructions on usage of new products and technologies is essential for the functioning of business. Research and global conferences in the field are in more than 90 % of the cases conducted in English. Moreover, organisation-wide communication in the common language English is helpful in order to detect possible risks in certain markets and divisions at an early stage, as the industry is very dependent on reputation and compliance with rules and regulations (EF, 2014). Hence, smooth, clear and accurate communication across and within borders is crucial, and all these reasons make the industry interesting for a case study of the role of language skills for power implications in teams.

A single case study can provide important contribution and theory building by confirming, challenging or extending established theory (Ghauri, 2004; Yin, 2014), and conducting the study at a single company allowed us to control for industry and company effects, making the data more comparable.

3.2.3 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

Since the aim of this thesis is to gain an in-depth understanding of how language proficiency can lead to power in MNTs, primary data in the form of semi-structured interviews were considered being the most suitable data collection method. Semi-structured interviews are good for theory building purposes (Daniels & Cannice, 2004), they permitted us to focus directly on the topics we wanted to study, and more importantly, allowed insightful information to surface as we were able to take part of personal views in the form of attitudes, perceptions and meanings of the interviewees (Yin, 2014). The method further allowed for comparability seeing as the common theme and main questions were the same in all interviews. At the same time, it gave us the opportunity to explore new themes and subjects that that the interviewees considered being important (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

We gathered the data through 22 face-to-face interviews with respondents based in Sweden and the United States, at their respective sites. Our contact person at AstraZeneca compiled a list of

people who had volunteered to participate, which we contacted and eventually met with those who matched our criteria for participation and whom we believed could provide with different perspectives. We wanted to interview team members with as mixed national and language backgrounds as possible, who all had experience of working in teams where at least two or more nationalities were represented, therefore interviewees were chosen according to these criteria. The interviewees were thus picked purposefully in non-random manner, which is typical for qualitative studies (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). This was a precondition for our study to be as information-rich as possible and for us to optimally answer the research questions. Over the course of time, additional interviews were booked through interviewees that referred us to other contacts that they believed would be valuable to our study, a phenomenon referred to as 'snowball sampling' (Bryman & Bell, 2003:105). In the end, out of the 22 semi-structured interviews, 14 were held in Sweden and 8 in the US. They were conducted with team members in different levels of the company, coming from 11 different nationalities, namely: Swedish, Georgian, French, German, Indian, Ukrainian, Russian, Iranian, American, British and Chinese. An overview of respondents and interviews can be found in Appendix 1.

Moreover, 18 of the interviewees were non-natives as it was mostly their experiences that we thought would be useful, but to provide with perspectives and using different reference points we also interviewed four native speakers, two in the US and two in Sweden. This allowed us to triangulate our findings (Yin, 2014).

The number of interviews was determined by time constraints but also data saturation. As recommended by Andersen and Skaates (2004) we kept collecting data until we noticed that interviewees brought up the same themes over and over again, a process that also strengthens the validity of our findings.

In addition to the interviews, as a second data collection method we conducted observations in the company's open areas such as open offices, lunch restaurants and different coffee break areas during the two weeks we were allowed in the company facilities. This gave us an overview of what languages were spoken and how people interacted with each other linguistically. Field notes were taken that were written up later in the day, which therefore helped prevent the shortcomings of memory (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

3.2.4 INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW PROCESS

Prior to the interviews, we made a thorough literature review in order to gain a preliminary understanding of the subject and consequently ask better, more relevant questions. We

constructed an interview guide based on the literature review in order to ensure that all topics of interest were covered, the conversations were steered in accordance to the framework of questions in order to make comparable the interview transcripts (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Daniels & Cannice, 2004).

The interview guide was constituted in the following manner: 1) Background questions covering years with the company, previous experience and current role, 2) General questions asking for descriptions of meeting settings, how dependent they were on each other in the teams, how often and how they interacted with their colleagues etc. 3) problem-centred questions regarding challenges they faced when working in MNTs and; 4) Language-specific questions, where we asked them to describe what languages they used, if they used their language differently, what languages they considered important for working in the organisations and if they could rate their own English skills compared to their teammates as suggested by Tenzer and Pudelko (2014). In the last part of the interview we asked questions regarding whether good language skills was helpful in meetings or if they felt that being a native English speaker would be an advantage in their profession. A full list of the questions is provided in Appendix 2.

The majority of the questions were open-ended, allowing the interviewees to provide us with new insights and information that we would not otherwise attain. For the same reason, we were flexible and did not firmly stick to the interview guide but picked up and elaborated on interesting themes that were brought up by the interviewees.

The interviews took place between the 2nd and 20th of March and over the course of time we transcribed, discussed the findings, overlooked our questions and added new ones as we saw that some common themes were emerging. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, and all except for one were conducted by the both of us in quiet meeting rooms where we were not disturbed.

Interviews were conducted in both the United States and Sweden, as such the interviews were held in both Swedish and English. Language choice, as well as the language skills of the interviewee and interviewer has an effect on the dynamics of the interview (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004). When evaluating the alternatives we reasoned that it was important for the purpose of the study that the interviewees felt comfortable and were able to speak easily. Therefore we let them decide what language they preferred to be interviewed in. Consequently, 10 interviews were conducted in Swedish and 12 in English.

Although semi-structured interviews were considered the most suitable method for our study, it is important to note that the technique has some drawbacks. The results of semi-structured interviews can be biased due to poorly articulated questions, interviews can be inaccurate due to poor recall of the interviewer and reflexivity may appear, which is when the interviewee responds what s/he thinks the interviewer wants to hear (Yin, 2014). In order to avoid poor recall of information, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. To avoid reflexivity and bias due to leading questions, we asked as open questions as possible and the word 'power' was avoided at all times as recommended by Welch and Welch (2015) and Piekari (2015).

3.2.5 DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

Transcription of interviews was done shortly after the interview had taken place. Data collection and data analysis were made simultaneously in an interweaving manner from the first interview. These procedures done in tandem strengthened both the data collection as well as the analysis as it allowed for theories to develop while data is still being collected (Ghauri, 2004). The interviews were transcribed so that we could make a thorough examination afterwards and to increase the transferability of our study (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

There were 226 single spaced pages of transcribed interviews in total. Inter-rater reliability was accounted for by reading all transcripts and coding them separately, later comparing our notes to be able to discuss discrepancies and confirm information that had been interpreted the same way, as suggested by Daniels and Cannice (2004). Clarification with respondents was also done in order to diminish the impact of misinterpretation of data.

All transcribed interviews were entered into the qualitative analysis tool NVivo in order to code and categorise the different findings. Coding and categorisation of data facilitates interpretation and relation of data to the research question and theoretical framework, and using software programs helps make the data analysis more systematic (Ghauri, 2004). Every passage of the interviews was studied, allowing us to discover the most common trends and emerging themes. We created categories based on the interviewees' own words, for instance, the category 'nuances' was used for every time an interviewee said that they did not feel that they could understand or make use of the different nuances in English which gave them a downside in discussions. To provide an example:

The struggle isn't that you can't say things, but that you perhaps can't express exactly what it is you want to convey. You don't have the same width or possibility to use nuances. So sometimes you get stuck because you can't express the exact thing you want to say.

In other cases we grouped together different findings in categories that we named based on common contents, such as the category 'Native speaker advantage'. An interviewee did not necessarily need to mention the word 'advantage' or that s/he was advantaged in order for the passage to be coded this way, but give an explanation or describe a situation that we interpreted as advantages, based on our literature review. The following passage was, for example, coded as 'Native speaker advantage' without the words being mentioned:

I'm asked to review quite a few documents, so I don't like to correct people, cos I think they write better than I do, if I'd be writing in Swedish but at the same time, if it would just be altered slightly, it would really read better and your message would come across (...). If you go about it the right way, you can be quite helpful (...) it's not to correct people or anything; it's just to help them do a better job.

By this quote, this native English-speaker explained how he would help people 'do a better job' because he could improve their written piece of material in a certain study, not because of his expertise in the matter, but because of his language skills. Thus giving him an advantage, a kind of power, vis-à-vis the non-native speakers.

All categories were then, in a later stage of analysis, grouped into larger overarching themes, (Tenzer & Pudielko, 2014). Such situations as the above-mentioned quote where someone's English language skills granted influence or advantages, or lack of English skills granted disadvantages, were first coded in more distinct categories and in a later phase captured as a sub-category under an overarching theme 'Language as power'. Whenever interviewees expressed a feeling of inferiority or superiority due to their language proficiency this was also, in a later stage of grouping categories together, coded under 'Language as power'. A more detailed account of this will be given in the next chapter.

3.2.6 QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

There are several ways of validating the findings of a study (Andersen & Skaates, 2004). In qualitative research, external validity, i.e. the extent to which the findings of a study are generalizable in other settings than the actual study, is often referred to as *generalizability* (Yin, 2014; Tsang 2014). Case studies are traditionally considered to be weak in terms of this, which we are aware of as a shortcoming in this thesis. However, according to Tsang (2014), case studies can in several respects be more generalizable than those of quantitative studies, because of the case study's ability to investigate and describe the mechanisms that generate an observed pattern. This holds true when it comes to *theoretical generalization*, which is concerned with developing

explanations to the relationships observed between different variables in a study that can be applied to other populations. Theoretical generalization aims at building new, modifying or refining existing theory by focusing on new concrete situations (i.e. cases). To ensure this, we have in our findings and analysis chapters thoroughly provided different explanations on how language skills can be empowering or disempowering. Yin (2014) calls this type of generalizability *analytical generalization*, and further emphasises the importance of thoroughly having investigated existing theories at the onset of the study, in order for the analytical generalization to be valid. Thus, the in-depth literature review presented in chapter 2 was conducted prior to collecting data and is another way of strengthening our analysis in terms of generalizability, to the extent possible.

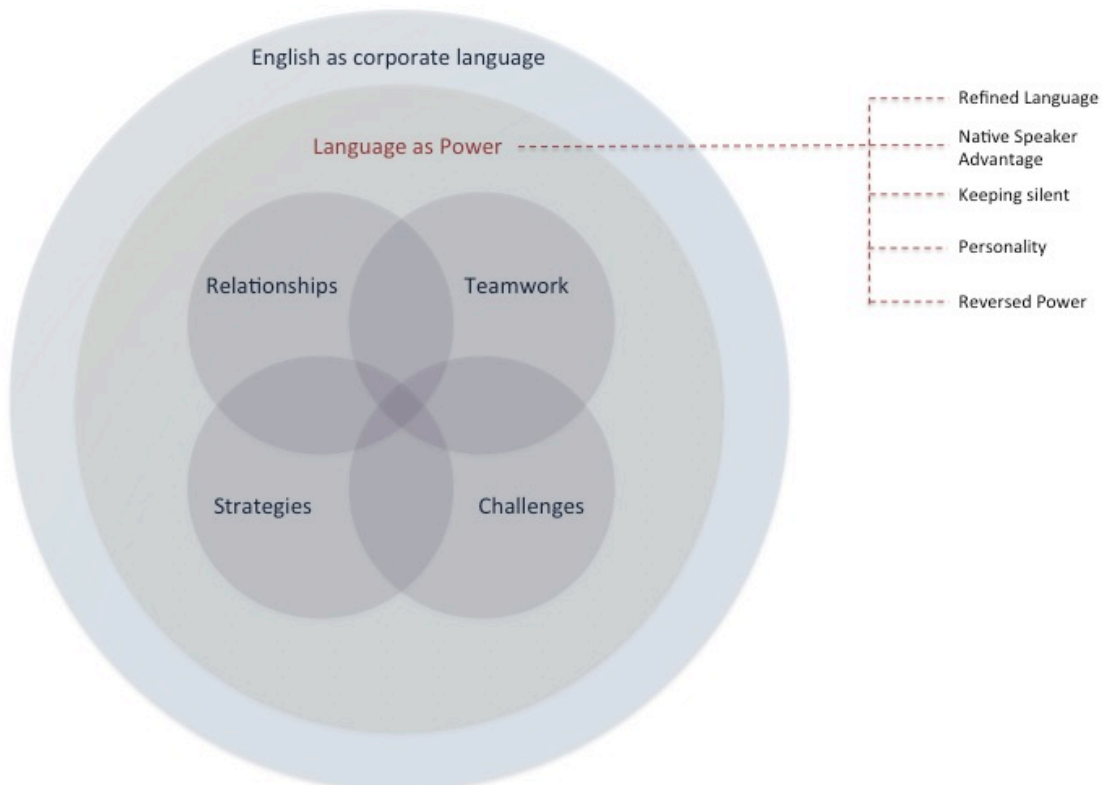
Lincoln and Guba (1985) present an alternative framework for qualitatively assessing a research process. Instead of reliability and validity, a central concept in this framework is *trustworthiness*, which essentially concerns whether or not the research was conducted in ethically, transferable and correct manner. Apart from what has already been mentioned throughout this chapter, we have assured trustworthiness in this thesis by being open during the research process and allowing the interviewees to talk about their experiences in the way they have perceived them. We have interviewed people with different backgrounds and positions in order to triangulate and we have complemented our interviews with observations. In our findings, we have provided a fair, rich account of what was discussed, including contrasting opinions and viewpoints. All interview material, field notes and observations are available for others to study and possibly reconstruct this research in future cross-comparative studies.

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter assembles the primary data collected through the interviews and observations. The aim is to provide a fair and complete view of how language empowers or disempowers employees working in MNTs at AstraZeneca. Therefore, these findings are based on the themes that were most prominent during the interviews. In addition, general findings that help portray the working environment as well as the employees at the company are also presented in order to better complete the picture.

As explained in the methodology chapter, categories were created based on the interviewees' own words as well as on our own categorisation of what was said during the interviews. These categories, as shown in Figure 1, were later grouped into larger themes, namely Teamwork, Challenges, Strategies and Relationships, which constitute important findings of this study and will be discussed from a power perspective in the next chapter. In addition to this, a broader theme, i.e. Language as Power is included where categories are presented as subheadings, namely, The Power of Refined Language Capabilities, Native Speaker Advantage, Keeping Silent, Personality and Reversed Power. The setting in which these themes take place is AstraZeneca's choice of English as a corporate language. This aspect is consequently presented first.

Figure 1: Language as Empowering or Disempowering: Thematic Findings at AstraZeneca



Source: Figure compiled by authors.

4.1 ENGLISH AS CORPORATE LANGUAGE

It was gathered throughout the interview process that the two sites in Sweden and the US had undergone an organisational change in the last few years which had been felt and seen, and was thus highlighted by most of the interviewees. This change has meant that AstraZeneca now has more global interconnectivity. At the two sites, a greater number and range of internationals are joining the company. Even though English has always been the corporate language, Swedish has historically played a vital part in terms of communication on the Swedish site and to learn Swedish was expected from the internationals that joined the company. Due to the organisational restructuring this is, however, changing and English is therefore becoming more important. This move to English was generally looked upon as necessary in terms of facilitating and collaboration and communication between employees. The corporate language was also seen as an important means to quick information access, where time as a factor was important, being that the company operates globally and it is a 'business that never sleeps'. The vast majority of the interviewees have quite extensive experience in working in MNCs and there was only one employee that was new to working in English. The non-native interviewees believed that they had a good level of English, average or slightly better in comparison to their non-native peers. It was, however, emphasised that they did not consider themselves to be on an equal proficiency level as their English native co-workers. Nevertheless, the overall level of English language skills in the organisation was considered high. Mastery of written and oral English is expected when joining the company and one employee phrased it:

...even people in China in AstraZeneca, they speak English anyway. They have to. Because that's the requirement. They have to know English in order to join the company, even in China (TM12).

The interviewees also agreed that this is a necessary condition if one should be able to perform the tasks that the job stipulates.

Well you have to be on a pretty high level in order be able to work in an international environment like this, and you cannot do that if you are not reasonably good at English, because we speak English pretty much all day long. So it is a basic condition (TM3, our translation).

The company did generally not test English skills through any other method than a job interview conducted in English and a sufficient proficiency level was in many cases simply assumed. Furthermore, other than English being the corporate language, there was no awareness of any other potential language policies among the employees in the company. Many had the attitude

that 'it is what it is', i.e. an aspect of work that they simply had to deal with. Non-natives tended to see it as a barrier that they had to find ways around in order to overcome. However, after having worked in the environment for a long time, several non-native employees stated that working in English is a part of work that they get used to and it becomes more a matter of habit. One employee put it this way:

You do develop and get used to it, the difference was most noticeable in the beginning when you were new to it, at that time it was difficult' (TM2, our translation).

It is important to state that all interviewees felt that their level of English was sufficient when it came to performing one's job, especially when having worked in the industry for a while, as illustrated above. The high amount of technical language and jargon used in the pharmaceutical industry was one of the most commonly stated reasons for this.

We are talking about science, so many terms came from Latin, if we're talking about medicine almost all the terms came from Latin (TM5).

Sometime, I have problem understanding. But for work-related, the terminology, I am familiar with (TM12).

It's rarely only the actual language skills, I would say that there is such a high amount of technical language, [at the company], it's a certain kind of jargon that is used (SM1, our translation).

4.2 TEAMWORK

Almost all teams to which the interviewees belong are comprised of a number of different nationalities where the team members are dependent on each other's work to a significant extent. They all work in their different roles, which are then incorporated into one larger project or task. It was also gathered that it is very common for the employees to be part of multiple teams simultaneously and it was clear that in some cases employees do not know the number of people that are part of their team. Furthermore, many teams are dispersed globally, where Sweden, the UK and the US were mentioned as the most common host countries where the members of the interviewees' virtual teams are situated.

The degree to which team members had to perform more demanding rhetorical skills such as negotiating, persuading and motivating, differed according to their role in the organisation as well as on the type of meeting that was held. In relation to this, many interviewees stated that

providing evidence in the form of statistics and scientific facts was used to build these arguments.

The frequency of team members meetings was found to vary to a great extent and the most commonly used forms of meeting were face-to-face, teleconferences (TCs) and video calls. Seeing as many of the team members are located in different countries face-to-face meetings were infrequent in comparison to TCs that were highlighted as the most common form of conducting a meeting in the company. TCs were also stressed as the most difficult and problematic form of meeting. One employee described it as follows:

It's terrible to say, but that is how it is, when you speak on the phone it easily happens that you look at some other paper and so on, and you do notice, hear, that the presence in the meeting isn't quite there (MM1, our translation).

It was thus found that employees tend to multitask while they are in TCs, which some respondents felt were not always disciplined. Furthermore, meeting participants sometimes felt that they had to be quick if they wanted to say something and for this reason people could end up speaking simultaneously, which caused a noisy and messy discussion. Another problem that was strongly emphasised was the fact that in TCs team members are unable to see each other, inhibiting them from judging and interpreting other's reactions through facial expressions and body language. One employee expressed this point in the following manner:

And these meeting environments, you know TCs they just aggravate the situation. When I ask a question and you answer to that I can't see from facial expressions if what I am saying makes sense or not (MM6).

In addition to this, email and chat functions were frequently used tools for communication. The importance of short and concise information was also stressed, which thereby implied often listing matters in bullet points. The aspect of time was found to be an important factor due to the immediate pressure of quick deliveries. One interviewee illustrated this during the interview, thereby once again highlighting the necessity of multitasking:

And as I am talking to you I am looking at three other emails right here. Not being disrespectful, but we still have to do it, there is no other option and if you don't keep up I will have thirty emails that no one responds to (TM10).

4.3 CHALLENGES

When asked what challenges are involved when working in a MNT, two of the aspects that emerged have already been touched upon in relation to teamwork in the company, namely time

and the global dispersion of team members. One employee expressed that obtaining information becomes more difficult as a result of this:

Of course I miss having a physical person whose office I can just go into and talk to (...) when it comes to knowledge transfer or everyday things that you just pick up, things that happen and so on, you miss that completely when you are dispersed like this (TM3, our translation).

In addition to this, culture was also found to be a challenge. It was stated that English and American co-workers communicated differently in terms of e.g. directness and politeness, despite sharing the same native language. Furthermore, employees did also in certain cases attach different meanings to words and behaved differently depending on what they considered respectful. A frequently highlighted example that can be related to culture was that of who is actually speaking during the meetings. Many of the interviewees agreed that Americans tended to speak more than team members with other nationalities, however how this is perceived, was as illustrated by an American in the quote below, differently.

I feel a very strong need to give confirmation to the person who is speaking that I have understood, that I have heard, if they ask a question I feel obliged out of respect for them to give them an answer or some sort of input and I feel that Swedes are more like 'If I don't say anything I agree' and they can be quiet throughout the entire meeting but still fully present (...) and you sometimes hear 'You take up too much space' [in meetings], and my view here is that it is not a question about taking up space, it is a question about showing that you are there and have understood what has been put forth (MM5, our translation).

Swedes tended to be annoyed with the fact that American spoke a great deal during meetings, whereas Americans saw it from another perspective. Therefore, occupying meeting space may not only be the result of mastery of a language, but that it is also related to the cultural background of the employee. Nevertheless, language was also emphasised as a challenge in terms of working in MNTs, however it was clear that the toughest challenges stemming from language differences were most felt when communicating with colleagues in Asia. This is shown by the statement by one employee:

...sometimes the translation is not really great so it's hard to understand the questions, what do they really want, and that's not cultural, that's more pure language. You have to keep asking for clarification. I remember once we were talking to South Korea and it was almost like we were shouting at each other 'This is what I mean', 'No, this is what I mean', but then someone else from the South Korean bit took over and they put the question in a different way and then I thought 'Ok, now I know what you mean' (TM1).

This thus shows that that language can create frustration in these meeting situations. Asian employees were referred to as those who most frequently lacked the necessary language skills and their accents were in many cases also considered difficult to understand. Moreover, it was found that misunderstandings do occur as a result of language barriers and one employee highlighted the importance of being equally proficient in that language in order for this not to transpire.

...everyone who is on a call needs to be at the same level of proficiency in that language. If I am speaking English and somebody else is not on that level there will be a lot of miscommunication that is going to affect the work (TM10).

As there is a great deal of emphasis on time whereby communication is often written very briefly, this was also stated as a source of miscommunication and misinterpretation. For instance, what may be seen as completely acceptable in spoken language was considered tricky in written communication as people sometimes were offended.

In addition to frustration and miscommunication, other challenges that were cited were related to the fact that language differences led to extra work and energy having to be devoted towards the completion of tasks. This is well illustrated by an employee who elaborated on language related challenges:

...more and more people are included and all of a sudden it is like an email avalanche because it wasn't understood in the original email what the question was about due to language confusion. (...) It is a tremendous frustration for the person that cannot express himself in order to be understood, but it also creates a great delay in the decision making processes, and frustration and extra work. It takes time and energy away from what could be put on actual deliveries (MM7, our translation).

As an illustration of how decision making processes may be delayed due to language challenges and poor communication, one employee shared his recent experience:

...we had a one hour meeting the other day and it took 50 minutes to understand what they were talking about and 5 min to come to a conclusion (TM10).

Further elaborating on language related challenges, another employee highlighted an additional complicating factor related to working in a multinational context:

...I daily hear and see email conversations from people that don't have English as their mother tongue but who live in the US and have lived here for several years, and that creates an additional layer of complexity because many people expect them to be experts since they live here, but that is not the case (MM7, our translation).

Expectations and a lack of awareness add to were thusly found to add to the difficulties faced when working in these multinational settings. Many did, however, also acknowledge that it is not only about being able to speak the English language flawlessly, but about being articulated, whereby good communication skills also come into play. Good language skills do not necessarily mean that a person is able to convey what they want to say. However, interviewees did stress that good language skills are a precondition in order to communicate well in the first place. One employee expressed that language functions as the most important part of communication and shed light on various challenges associated with language differences.

Ultimately your words will determine exactly what you want to say (...) I think language is the most important thing. If we don't speak the same language it is very difficult to get cause you can't communicate, you can't do what you need to do and most importantly you can't do it in the time you need to do it in. You will have spent 50, 100, 200 percent more time and it is not fun. And you get physically and mentally tired of trying to revert back. So yea, that is a major challenge, it affects productivity, it affects communication, it affects perceived value, and ultimately the entire project is a failure, because you could not deliver (TM10).

Many of the above mentioned challenges linked to language are thus illustrated in this quote. The employee further stressed that:

Your value perspective is directly proportioned to your communication skills. No communication, no perceived value (TM10).

4.4 STRATEGIES

The interviewees adopted a number of strategies in order to deal with language barriers. One common way of dealing with differences was adapting the language according to the receiver. When asked how language differences are dealt with, an English native speaker stated:

...I think you try and improve the way you pronounce things. I wouldn't say using simple language but being more clear, and not use expressions that wouldn't make much sense (TM1).

As illustrated by another employee, it is about finding other ways to around the issue and asking control questions to see that you as well as others have understood what is put forth.

So in order to be understood or in order to be clear you have to some times, repeat, re-ask, re-say, choose other constructions or use synonyms because the person whom you talk might not know these words (TM5).

The importance of asking control questions was further elaborated on by another employee:

If native speakers communicate so many things go non-verbal with body language or convention of how you say something that you get verbal and non-verbal feedback that what you are saying is really landing and is being understood you can't do that in a context like this so you have to build in in every 2nd or 3rd language something like 'Is this clear?' or 'Can we quickly summarise what we have said?' So you have to really check that what you think you said is really landing in exactly the same way and that is an important realisation that I also try to bring in my team (MM2).

The importance of clarity when dealing with language differences was thus greatly emphasised and awareness regarding the fact that everybody may not understand everything in the same way is an essential step in achieving clarity. Many interviewees also explained that in many cases it could help to put things in writing if, e.g. accents caused a problem, but it could also be a way of obtaining more time for consideration. One interviewee put it like this:

My strategy is that I put things in writing, it is easier to express what I want to say, because it gives me time to think a bit first. (...) I know that I am not as quick in discussions, because then you may be sitting there thinking 'Oh what is this called?' (TM3, our translation).

Another way of dealing with language differences was by asking for help from your team members. If, for instance, one could not remember a certain word a common strategy when another team member had the same mother tongue was to ask that person in that language 'What is this called in English?'. Whenever things appeared unclear, employees stated that they could speak to someone else on the site with the same mother tongue and ask that person for help. These strategies were especially applied by the Swedes in Sweden.

An alternative approach that was highlighted was to speak to people on a similar proficiency level. One interviewee shared her experiences on this:

...when I worked in Hungary it was easier for them to understand what my Swedish colleagues and I were saying, in comparison with what my English colleagues were saying because they thought they spoke a posh English that was difficult to understand. We spoke more 'rough' English, quite similar to how they were speaking, so we understood each other perfectly. And we did not add a lot of words that didn't really make much of a difference, so it became very simple English, or direct English. So they thought it was easier to come to us and ask instead of going to those who you'd think know the language (MM1, our translation).

A way to cope with the challenges associated with working in MNTs was to try to establish good relationships with co-workers. One employee shared that:

I have a very proactive approach and build really, really good relationships with people I work with, not just on the call but outside it also. And I have frequent discussions and phone calls and I encourage calls and communication so that we understand each other

very well so even though we may not be in the same place we still subscribe to the same view, or similar views (TM10).

4.5 RELATIONSHIPS

Many agreed that it is easier to build close relationships when you are located in the same site and are able to conduct meetings face-to-face. In the light of this, one non-native English speaking employee stated that:

...face-to-face meetings at least help to establish a better relationship, to get to know each other a bit better, and then it becomes easier to speak (MM8, our translation).

Knowing people in your team was shown to better facilitate for easier communication and to a certain extent tear down barriers that inhibit some people from speaking up in a foreign language. Some of the interviewees noted that understanding each other well became even more crucial when there was no possibility to see each because of the meeting being conducted through TC.

Further elaborating on the challenges of language and building relationships one employee stated that:

That is how language comes in how you convey what you convey and how you speak what you speak. And also your tone and your body language, even though they cannot see you are smiling they can feel you smiling. (...) So it takes a lot of effort to build that relationship, which is why a background relationship is extremely important. Even though I have not been here very long but I have built pretty good relationships so far. (...) And once people see your value they will automatically want to include you (TM10).

When asked about English skills in the work place it was found that many non-natives feel that the social language is lacking, rather than the work-related language, whereby getting to know someone also comes into play as illustrated by the statement by Swedish employees:

It is rather in the private conversation where you may miss getting to know these people and getting the contact that you perhaps would have got otherwise (...) But if you are going to get to know a person and work together very well then you have to see the whole person, and not just the part that is work. Therefore it is good to have something on the side too, which then takes more time. It is easier with a Swedish colleague. (SM1, our translation)

...because we don't have the same language, well the aspect of getting to know one another, I mean, we know each other on one level, but you don't the same deep relation when you speak English (TM3, our translation).

When asked how different language skills can be used it was also found that language can serve as a unifying factor in terms of networking in the company. This aspect was shown by an employee who stated that:

I am meeting tomorrow with someone who is really high up in the company who is French, and I hope it is not the only reason, but one of the only reasons he agreed to mentor me, is we had exchanged a couple of emails in French (MM6).

Relationships can determine how you are treated in the work place as aspects of social inclusion and exclusion based on language were highlighted during the interview process. One employee not proficient in Swedish explained that:

If you have a good relationship with a person local people will talk English when you're sitting around the table. If you know these people less, they will talk Swedish. And then for me, it's quite embarrassing to say, just because of my presence making them speaking English. I don't know how comfortable I would be doing this. And yes, this happens almost every day, and I'm fine with it because I understand (TM5).

4.6 LANGUAGE AS POWER

Throughout the interviews, topics were brought up where language skills could be seen as a means to automatically obtain an upper hand in discussions or gain more influence, i.e. themes that were considered to be linked to power, which is also the focus of this thesis. These aspects were discussed to different extents with the interviewees, but nevertheless kept reappearing.

4.6.1 THE POWER OF REFINED LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES

First of all, being on a good level of English was stressed by many as extremely important, but also as a precondition for working in the company. In general, the interviewees believed the majority of their colleagues to be on a sufficiently good level but still emphasised how relatively worse language skills could distort one's perception of someone, and how important it was to be aware of this:

Because different languages may have some typical errors, which do not truly reflect his educational level, or his true skill (TM11).

If two persons even write me, and English is not my native tongue, and one is from Sweden it's a little broken, and the other one is in perfect tone in English, if nobody tell me anything, I'm gonna trust the one with perfect English more. Not discrimination, to me that's nature (TM11).

And as for my colleagues that are in China, one of them I feel is very easy to understand and one is difficult to understand. Their English skills are the same, it is just that accent, and one of them speaks clearer, more like an English person and the other, as I said their experiences and skills are absolutely equal, but in terms of how I hear what they say that is very different. And that is something that I really have to think about so I don't let that affect, so I don't lose what they say and what they present (MM5, our translation).

In several of the interviews, it was brought up that being able to communicate and having the necessary skills to discuss is important too, in addition to factual language skills. One employee clearly expressed this view:

And communication is the biggest way to go and language is number one. You might be fantastic at everything you know, you might be the brilliant person, you might have 15 degrees, if you can't communicate that's of no use. (...) Knowing a language is the most important thing but also knowing the language doesn't guarantee that you will be able to communicate, it ultimately comes to the user how they communicate what they want to say (TM10).

At the same time, it was also highlighted that for more rhetorically demanding aspects of work, language is vital:

If you can't talk your professional aspect of English you have a hard time selling, especially to a native speaking regulator at an agency for example trying to make your case, which is always some kind of negotiation (MM2).

The lack of these rhetorical skills and feeling of not being able to express oneself clearly was widely stated among the non-native interviewees, irrespective of their position or years with the company.

The struggle isn't that you can't say things, but that you perhaps can't express exactly what it is you want to convey. You don't have the same width or possibility to use nuances. So sometimes you get stuck because you can't express the exact thing you want to say (MM3, our translation).

For some, the language limitations were in particular felt when wanting to use different nuances in sensitive situations or expressing emotion, things that were considered important in, for example, one-to-one meetings with a manager and in discussions where it is important to motivate a point of view. Two interviewees put it this way:

Yeah but the problem is the nuances. If I am going to speak about something that strongly engages me or something I am very happy or angry with, in Swedish I can share my emotions in another way, it becomes a lot more...stripped when it is in English. The emotions are left out and it becomes very strict and correct. (...) And you have to think

about what it is you are going to say. It is not as spontaneous as it is in Swedish (MM1, our translation).

They [native English speakers] are very good at getting their message across but in a way that is embedded differently, which could be smooth in some sensitive situations, perhaps with your manager or in employee-manager feedback sessions, that they have an additional nuance and can get their message through in a more inviting and smooth manner (TM2, our translation).

Some managers acknowledged that the importance of refined language proficiency becomes more important the higher up in the hierarchy you are aiming to climb. One manager highlights the importance of these subtleties in the following manners:

There are, depending on what level meetings you are participating in, different expectations and different ways to communicate too. If you participate in a meeting where there are more seniors, they use another type of English and another type of argumentation technique, and a vocabulary that I personally don't feel confident with and then it is more difficult to be assertive in those discussions sometimes. (...) when you reach these academic, diplomatic, higher levels of communication then you can fall short (...) if I don't feel confident I may bring a person to support me, you will have to find other ways to come through then (MM7, our translation).

As a Swede, I generally believe that it is about both cultural and personal traits, you have difficulties to express yourself and bring out the best of you in an interview situation, but also that you may not have the ability to use the exact right language in these situations and then it can keep you back from advancing (MM7, our translation).

A number of non-natives employees stated that they were impressed by the native English speakers' use of language and a desire for the same level of English:

I am impressed when I am on the phone with someone from the UK how they use the words and all the nuances that I cannot use (MM6).

They are so good with their use of language, such elegant phrases that I wish I was capable of (MM4, our translation).

4.6.2 NATIVE SPEAKER ADVANTAGE

The native English speakers that were interviewed agreed on the fact that their native fluency of the language was beneficial, both to them personally and also because it could make them helpful to others. For example, they stated that they were frequently asked to review written material, something that was outside of their regular tasks.

In group settings throughout the years I have had many people asking me 'oh can you please have a quick look at this' just to check the English, and sure that is totally fine and

I can do that quickly and everybody will feel more secure about the material that will be presented. Not that I'm an English expert or anything, but still (MM5, our translation).

This was considered helpful by natives and non-natives, the reasons being:

It makes it easier to understand and allows the audience to not be bothered by little mistakes. Because it's easy for people to get distracted by all sorts of things, so basically try to avoid that (MM5, our translation).

I get documents and I think I can understand what they are trying to say but if it was just re-ordered or something like that, the message would come across better, so then I would just say 'well move this here' and it would be perceived a lot better. That sort of thing, because in this department you've got to be very clear in what you say, you don't want things to be misinterpreted (TM1).

One of the American people on the Swedish site also said that she was often used as a link between Sweden and the US and had at one time gained managerial responsibility over a group of Americans in the US that were going through a difficult time, because she too was American.

In any case they would have a manager that wasn't on site but they would find some comfort in the fact that 'at least she's American' (...) My manager asked 'Is it OK with you? We thought it would be a huge benefit' and I just agreed, and I thought it was great, it was a really good opportunity for me to network a bit in the US and with those groups, because I had never had managerial responsibility over there before (MM5, our translation).

All interviewees agreed on the fact that being a native speaker of English was an advantage in the workplace, where English is the corporate language. One senior manager stated:

You automatically get somewhat of the upper hand when you are a native, you don't have to think as much about how to express yourself or what to say (SM1, our translation).

This was illustrated from a different perspective when discussing if being a non-native could be positive in any way:

Certainly have some impacts, because your word you say, your letter you are emailing, if it contain imperfectness in tone, in spelling, in wording, certainly it's not...I can hardly believe it's to your advantage, right? I mean whether how bad, it depends, but I would say it's really hard to say 'Yeah I like that guy better, because his grammar in English is not perfect' (TM11).

Being a native speaker was considered by many to particularly be an advantage in meetings. For example in the sense that native speakers had a head start in discussions:

Yes that's what I see, they speak English, it's their language, they can angle things and they can speak around things, they can discuss better and more, and that does affect our discussions, it definitely does (...) and it's a plus because [as a native speaker] you can argue for your sake, you can communicate better, it [language] is a means to communicate, which is how we influence others (MM8, our translation).

If part of the meeting attendants are native speakers I think there is always at least a little elephant in the room that they get their way as they are more skilled with using their language. So they are more negotiation trained and know the subtleties of language that are missed by people who speak well English but are not really using it to the same depth as they use their mother tongue (MM2).

So I believe it's to our disadvantage that we aren't as good as speaking as they are. It's like they always get a head start in the discussion too, because you follow their train of thought instead of taking it [the discussion] back and re-discussing, saying 'no but this is what I think' (TM3, our translation).

I feel that you become more square and not as natural, you have one or perhaps two ways of saying something whereas an Englishman may have ten, so they can alter their level depending on how they want to come across (TM2, our translation).

Those who master the language do discuss more. That is the thing. If you don't know the language you say your point and those who can continue on discussing. Therefore it is most often their view, their say that comes through. It has an impact (MM8, our translation).

However, working with natives could also generate a personal feeling of inferiority or not feeling completely at ease around native speakers:

And it's disabling that we're not, that it's not as easy for us in Sweden to push certain things though, I think it's because we're not as good at English, unlike Americans and Britons who like, just have it (TM3, our translation).

...as I have experienced many times we get tongue-tied somehow when it comes to English speaking British people who speak well and a lot and the Swede may not really assert oneself and become inhibited (...) many times I have not found my place in discussions because I am Swedish and haven't been able to spar in the way that I would have liked, so to speak. You would have liked to say it but can't find the right words in the way that you want (TM6, our translation).

And my own experience is that when it comes to British colleagues the language is a factor of power in another way than what you experience with Americans for example. (...) they flaunt nice terminology and well, they can dribble away from you, because they speak the language very well and we are usually not on that level. (...) You easily feel inferior when it comes to the British. (TM6, our translation)

I can feel that in discussions and argumentations I am a bit inferior, because I don't have English as close to me as I would wish. (MM3, our translation)

4.6.3 KEEPING SILENT

Several of the non-natives acknowledged that during meetings, they or people around them might speak less than they usually would, had the meeting been held in their own native language. The common theme was that they would not keep silent if they believed what they had to say was of high importance, however, if they believed that what they had to say was not highly important they would refrain from saying it.

If it's something really important you can't just allow things to go wrong, you say what you think, but for less important matters it's like 'let them discuss and say that' you don't care to interrupt, and well, that's a limitation too (MM8, our translation).

You know that super smart people normally speak English very well get rather quiet in such meetings and communicate in short sentences and are not playing their talents to the best possible way. I have perceived language limitations that are in fact not really there (MM2).

And then I mean, all meetings are kept in English and that's not our mother tongue, and it's not like you can always say something quickly, I mean you have to think a bit, especially if it's regarding something complicated, then you may not blurt something out as you would in your own language. (...) At least I am that way, so sometimes I think 'never mind' and don't say anything. It can actually happen that you refrain from it (TM6, our translation).

This was also acknowledged by a manager regarding her previous team:

Well in my previous role I had 13 co-workers in Sweden and 13 in England, and when we had meetings with all these 26 people I often heard from the Swedish people that they had difficulties expressing themselves in those meetings because the English people were so good at conveying their thoughts, and that therefore they would take a step back and keep their views to themselves because they felt insecure in that environment (MM7, our translation).

Reactions to this refrain were stated by people in different ways:

...the other person may not understand that part [speaking less because of language limitations] their perception of you will be clouded as inefficient maybe you are not interested, maybe you don't have knowledge, major impact (TM10).

Personally, I don't always feel that I am perceived as good at what I do, I may not always be able to express what I want to say, in a discussion I cannot always easily say what I want to say (MM8, our translation)

And usually in the UK if you're in a meeting, you're sort of, I would expect you to say something, or else, why are you there? Particularly if it's a discussion meeting, but some meetings I go to you know if you've not said anything I wonder why are you there? You know, is it a good use of your time? (TM1).

In contrast, it was mentioned by several people in the teams that in general, it is important to show yourself and be heard during meetings and discussions.

Well, people... if you don't speak up, people don't know you. Yeah. So you want to influence more people, you need to speak up. So I am a quiet person. If people are not in my team, people don't not know me (TM12).

Because if you don't speak up, the other side, they don't even know I'm in the meeting (TM12).

Being seen is important. If you do a good job, a really good job, if you don't show yourself you won't develop or advance hierarchically, you will be left behind. You might be really good, but you don't have the qualities that are expected of you in order to advance (MM8, our translation).

One employee expressed their concern regarding this:

And it worries me a bit and I hope that the managers can see through somebody who only speaks well but is not able to put those words into action or maybe doesn't really contribute or add value to the organisation. I hope they can see through it, if not we'll end up with a company where we only have people who are really good talkers (...) there are so many qualities that are required in order to develop drugs; you can't just be good at speaking (TM3, our translation).

Among the Swedes, many mentioned that the reason they spoke less could be related to their culture, Swedes being more reserved in general, not feeling the need to repeat what has already been said by someone else. One of the managers at the Swedish stressed the importance of going away from this behaviour and speaking anyway:

Horrible to say but that actually what we're trying to encourage our employees to do, at least say something so that you can show that you have participated in the meeting. You can say, 'I thought that was really good what XX said' (...) and that's important so you can show that you're somebody to count on. Show your skills and your engagement (MM1, our translation).

4.6.4 PERSONALITY

This made some of the interviewees, come down to the question: How much is language and how much is personality? Many of the team members expressed that although language has an effect on behaviour, how opinions are put forward etc., it comes down to personality and confidence whether or not you let the language effect be a hinder. It is up to you to try to overcome the feeling.

Well sometimes I wonder if it is language or personality. Because in my case, I don't care if I make a mistake. Sometimes things come out a bit wrong but...I don't care (MM1, our translation).

It [language] is a tool but it also depends on how you want to use it, then again it depends on your personality, everybody is not going to talk that much and some people have to be dragged out and some people give it to you. So it depends on the individual, but it all matters big time to the outcome (TM10).

What I on the other hand have noticed in Sweden is that many people hide themselves behind the fact that English is not their first language. 'It is so difficult for me to be heard, English is not my first language and the dialogue is too quick, I don't have time to raise my opinion before the others have finished speaking about the subject and moved on to the next.' I have heard those comments from Swedes many times, then I try to push them and build their confidence. You don't have to express yourself perfectly, you have to interrupt them to give your opinion (MM7, our translation).

The latter quote illustrates that the manager believed that in some cases it was actually more a matter of confidence rather than language, and that this barrier could be overcome by the individuals who felt inferior. In addition to this, some of the employees also mentioned that not being good enough is often something that is felt on the inside and not perceived by others. Some of the native English speakers also admitted that they treated the non-natives as if they were natives, and it was brought to light that non-natives, Swedes in particular, were often assumed to understand more than they in fact did. A Swedish employee expressed that not being good enough is a feeling that resides within you:

Sometimes I have asked 'Do you think that my language skills are good enough?' Because sometimes I can feel that they are not good enough and then they [native English speakers] may look at me as if I came from another planet 'What do you mean? You speak English really well!' So I think that this is not perceived by someone but you, because you have performance anxiety and would love to be a bit better. You always wish that you were better, so I think this is something that lies within me (MM4, our translation).

However, despite the realisation that personalities may also have an effect on the ability to gain influence in the team, it was also stated as ultimately determined by language seeing as language enables people to say what they want, thus illustrating that the opinions regarding this matter differed.

Personalities are also different, but if you know English well you are still able to say what you want to say no matter if you are introvert or shy or so (MM8, our translation).

4.6.5 REVERSED POWER

Regarding the usage of their native language skills, some interviewees mentioned to have put them to practice when dealing with national governments when, for example, documents were poorly translated or there was a need to take over the communication channel with the counterpart. For the most time, this was not considered as particularly valuable for the work. However, when asked if there could ever be a benefit in the company to speak other languages than English, a recurring theme in the Swedish site was that the Swedish language had actually been used as a secret language during negotiations or discussions, a kind of reversed power play. One senior manager that has worked for many years in the company put it this way:

When we have been a few Swedish people and then some English and American people we have sat and spoken Swedish on the side to support each other a bit, so in the coffee break we have gone out and whispered a bit in Swedish because you know that nobody understands. That is an advantage that we have, if there is a specific issue we can have a separate discussion (SM1, our translation).

In meetings, being Swedish could further be used a strategy to be more frank and direct:

...sometimes we actually use the fact that we don't know English that well, because you can, if you want to ask a question because there can be something that doesn't seem right at all (...) and you say 'well this might sound a bit direct but' you know, you don't sugarcoat things but you just blame it a bit on not knowing the language and then you just say what you think (MM1, our translation).

Among the international employees in the Swedish site who did not speak Swedish, it was stated in several interviews and seen in the observations that the Swedish language still has a strong foothold in the company even though the corporate language is English. It was brought up that sometimes, important information affecting employees was only transferred in Swedish, internal education of e.g. computer programs are only offered in Swedish, and managerial communication in general could at times be transferred in Swedish. Thus illustrating that the home language, i.e. Swedish, still has as strong foothold in the company and that knowing it comes with benefits. One employee shared his experiences on this matter:

It is probably less than a month ago where an invitation went out about what is happening around the site here, for example what buildings are closed and how things are really changing so that really affects everyone. The invitation went out in English but the meeting was in Swedish, which blocked out about a third of the people who went there and you could see that went there they started in Swedish, they asked hello can't we have the meeting in English, 'No', they left (MM2).

Unfortunately you really see this on all levels and that is not only meetings that is also managerial communication going out by email into large teams with probably a third foreign people and pure Swedish only so people have to go back and ask and back whether things can be translated into English. It is sometimes a bit embarrassing (MM2).

One of the team members illustrates the importance of Swedish simply:

Being a native speaker [of Swedish] means getting more information (TM5).

When asked what the consequences of missing out on this information could be, he answered:

The one who possess information, possess the world (TM5).

The employees also put this in relation to the time aspect discussed above:

One of the survey after the training I opened, it was in Swedish. I don't understand what they asked. It doesn't really stop me, I have a vocabulary, I copied, put in the vocabulary, translated, filled in and press sent. 'Skicka'. But, what has happened? Maybe I learned a couple of words. And I lost more time than the Swedish person who did it (TM5).

Consequently, it was found that the inconsistent enforcement of English as the corporate language in Sweden sometimes led to the exclusion of non-Swedish speakers. Furthermore, time was lost and gaining access to information became more difficult for these employees. In relation to this, it was seen through the observations that many non-native Swedish people were speaking Swedish at the Swedish site. Also, some of the internationals expressed a wish for learning Swedish both for private use, but also to be able to engage in the 'fika conversation' at work. One of the non-native Swedish speakers that had learnt the language stated that:

I feel that I have a major advantage knowing Swedish as well, because it allows me to be a part of the everyday life here too (...) there is another form of social interaction if you know Swedish. Yea, that is what I think and I feel like I have something extra in the bag (MM5, our translation).

Some Swedes did express that they sometimes did not want to speak English. The most common reasons behind this were illustrated by one employee:

Sometimes you just want to be relaxed and be able to say things freely (TM6, our translation).

A noteworthy aspect that was observed throughout the interview process was that the Swedes often tended to refer to themselves as 'us Swedes', in particular when expressing some form of disadvantage, whereas other interviewees more often said 'I', illustrating that the Swedes in many cases saw themselves as a group.

5 ANALYSIS

This chapter analyses the most important findings presented in the previous chapter in relation to the literature review in chapter 2. The different empirical findings are further linked in order to discuss and provide a wider-spanning context of how language proficiency can be an empowering or disempowering tool for employees in MNTs.

5.1 TEAMWORK – GLOBAL DISPERSION EXACERBATES LANGUAGE ISSUES, INDUSTRY COUNTERBALANCES AND TIME IS TIGHT

The findings of this research show that virtual teams with global dispersion of team members have gained a larger and more important role in AstraZeneca over the past few years, a trend that has been observed in many other MNCs lately (Zander, Mockaitis & Butler, 2012). It also became clear that team members are part of many teams simultaneously, as also noted in the research on MNTs by Tenzer and Pudelko (2014).

What is more, the fact that some teams are temporary and globally dispersed and that not all interviewees were aware of the number of people in their team indicates that team members do not always know each other particularly well. These aspects can be related to that many found it easier to communicate face-to-face and that non-natives in general found it easier to speak English with people they knew. The manner of working, where team members are dispersed globally and meetings are being conducted primarily through TCs, therefore exacerbates the challenges associated with language differences, and can thus provide natives with an upper hand since they are less affected by these limitations.

In contrast, the degree to which attendants had to motivate, discuss or negotiate in team meetings differed. In many cases, interviewees highlighted the importance of building arguments with evidence in the form of statistics and scientific facts. Additionally, given the nature of the pharmaceutical industry, the use of specialised medical language and jargon is extensive and something that employees learn and need to have knowledge of in order to work in the company. The characteristics of the job within the field of research as well as the specialised language associated with the industry therefore decreases, or counterbalances, the possibility of obtaining influence through English language proficiency. It can consequently be assumed that other industries, not characterised by the same jargon or need for scientific evidence, may provide larger openings for acquiring language-based influence in MNTs.

The importance of being clear and expressing oneself in a short and concise manner were highlighted as essential when working in MNTs at AstraZeneca. This can be linked to the fact that time is scarce and considered very valuable, which is in line with DeVoe and Pfeffer's (2010) finding that the scarcity of time increases its value. Therefore, it is likely that a team member's performance, and consequently value, is considered higher if he or she is able to conduct quick and clear deliveries. This is a factor that was considered by the interviewees to be more important than perfect proficiency or 'impressive language'. However, the majority of employees did mention that a great deal of non-clarity, misinterpretation and misunderstandings in fact were caused by language mistakes; meaning that it might be easier for someone to be quick and clear the higher the level of proficiency that person has.

5.2 CHALLENGES – TIME IS VALUABLE AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS SLOW YOU DOWN

As highlighted by the employees at AstraZeneca, language is not considered the sole challenge to smooth communication with team members from other countries. In line with findings by Kassis Henderson (2005) regarding the impact of people's cultural backgrounds on their interpretation of words and expressions, a share of interviewees mentioned cultural differences as playing an important role in communication. For example, it became clear that English and American co-workers communicated differently in terms of directness, politeness, and amount of space taken in meetings, despite sharing the same native language. Thus, cultural backgrounds added another complicated layer to language-related problems for work in MNTs.

It was also highlighted that the employees found it more difficult to work in MNTs when meetings were not conducted face-to-face and the primary mode of meeting was via TCs. In addition to the inability to see the other team members' reactions through body language and facial expressions, many felt that they had to be quick if they were to say something during those meetings. This can consequently be linked to the finding that non-natives feel that it takes a greater amount of time to conduct work in English and that they cannot always vocalise opinions as fast as they can in their first language.

Our findings correlated with the findings of a study by Harzing, Köster and Magner (2011), where the researchers found that where language barriers were present, tasks tend to consume more time, which then led to inefficient decision making processes. This was frequently mentioned during the interviews conducted for this study as well, and many interviewees felt that time that could have been spent on actual tasks had to be spent on issues that were language related. It also became evident that the strategies used for dealing with language based

challenges, such as asking for clarification, putting things in writing, asking colleagues for help etc. take time. Language was found to be frequently adjusted to the receiver and it becomes clear that more time and effort has to be devoted if team members are not on a similar English proficiency level. Language has to be either broken down or clarified by one person, or extra time has to be spent on interpretation and translation by the person that struggles to understand. However, even though this is a challenge that affects both parts, it somehow seems to become mainly an issue related to the non-natives.

Seeing as native English speakers have a natural command of English, as it is ‘their’ language in addition to the corporate language, their level of fluency somehow becomes the ultimate goal, as indicated by some of the non-natives’ wish for speaking like the natives. Since this is the goal it is also the non-natives that can feel that they are not sufficiently good at English, which can be connected to why many of them tend to see it as their challenge to overcome. This is in line with the findings by Dick and Tietze (2013) that non-native status is seen as an obstacle to conquer.

5.3 STRATEGIES – WRITTEN COMMUNICATION MINIMISES THE LANGUAGE GAP

The extent to which language skills had an impact on the ease of communication was stated among team members to different degrees depending on the communication mode that was used, a finding that correlated with those of earlier research by Shachaf (2008) and Harzing et al. (2011). Although challenges in terms of written communication were emphasised, the non-natives at AstraZeneca perceived language as a challenge mostly when it concerned oral communication, which meant that they often fell back on communication through writing. This is in accordance with findings by Harzing and Pudelko (2014) and can be linked to the fact that employees often highlighted a difficulty to understand certain accents and the inability to respond quickly as complicating factors in oral communication. A written communication method would thus grant employees more time to better express themselves, understand and be understood, which decreased possible language gaps and risks of shortcomings due to spoken language proficiency. Written communication was found to be more egalitarian, where in written form, language had the ability to decrease the possibility of being empowered or disempowered by the user’s proficiency.

5.4 RELATIONSHIPS – THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE FOR SOCIAL NETWORKS AND COLLABORATION

Language has been highlighted as central as regards to social life and the creation of social

networks (Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari & Sääntti, 2005). At AstraZeneca, language was also stressed as important in terms of social life, and some employees expressed that sharing the same language could serve as a facilitator for closer relationships and networking. It was many times stated by the non-natives that they lacked the social language. Respondents felt that it was more difficult to find the right words or feel secure in their speech when it came to, for instance, talking to people outside a work-related context. This applied to both non-native English speakers in Sweden and the US as well as the non-Swedish speaking personnel in Sweden. It was even mentioned by those who believed that their language skills did not affect them in their work whatsoever, thus proving that the language ‘barriers’ are in general higher for the employees in social settings. This shows how language can aggravate building social relationships and networks, which is an important finding due to the importance of networking and personal relationships for knowledge transfers and advancement in MNCs (Marschan, Welch & Welch, 1996; Welch & Welch, 2008). Relating this to the fact that many interviewees believe that good relationships with co-workers facilitated collaboration and that ‘showing’ oneself and being heard is of the essence, this could mean that people that feel inhibited by this lack of social language face a bigger obstacle in terms of building a network and receiving the support necessary in order to advance in the company.

Björkman (2007) found that language proficiency contributes to a shared vision and trustworthiness in the MNC, and that socialisation mechanisms further help the creation of a shared vision. As presented in the findings, it was stated that closer relationships meant that team members could subscribe to the same view and that it was easier to collaborate in teams where the team members knew each other. Thereby, as presented above, it seems clear that language is central in terms of socialisation and thus also for how well team members are able to collaborate.

5.5 LANGUAGE AS POWER

5.5.1 THE POWER OF REFINED LANGUAGE CAPABILITIES – NUANCES AND LANGUAGE BLINDSPOT

The non-native employees all considered themselves to be on a relatively good level of English proficiency compared to other non-natives. Nevertheless, they did stress that they are not native English speakers and are not on a native-speaker’s level. Therefore, how the non-natives perceived their language proficiency depended on whom they benchmarked themselves against.

It was found that mastering the language very well was particularly important in higher-level positions within the organisation, where more diplomatic and ‘embedded’ language is needed. Small differences in language skills or ability to use nuances were stated to be more significant in these contexts. Many of the non-native interviewees expressed that rhetorical skills were lost when unable to communicate in one’s mother tongue, especially regarding the use of nuances or sensitive language. This is in line with the findings by Harzing and Feely (2008), who for example discuss that sensitivity, negotiation or persuasion are some of the rhetorical skills demanding a very high level of language proficiency. Therefore, it is possible that native English speakers, who naturally have a higher level of proficiency in the language, find it easier to use their language in a multifaceted way and consequently more easily become equipped for those higher positions where the ability to use nuances are important.

Non-natives’ feeling of not always being sufficiently proficient in English seemed to be mostly inherent and was not noticed by other team members to a significant extent, unless there were obvious, apparent problems with language. This was evident seeing as team members did not seem to believe that people in their teams were incompetent in the English language. What was emphasised as a difficult working aspect in English, was nuances in meaning that could not come across as clearly as one had hoped when speaking across different languages. When the level of English proficiency is high, as was found to be the case at AstraZeneca overall, a language blindspot might occur in which everyone bears the assumption that all are proficient in expressing themselves exactly as they intend, which is not always the case. This language blindspot could be explained by the fact that many respondents stated that Swedes are often perceived of by colleagues as better than they actually are. Therefore, Swedes have often been approached by natives as if they were native English speakers too. A similar assumption regarded the non-native English speakers residing in English speaking countries, who at times, were also assumed to master the language perfectly, which was not necessarily the case. Therefore, this is an important realisation and an aspect of which awareness is needed.

5.5.2 KEEPING SILENT – LANGUAGE AS DISEMPOWERING

A poignant finding was how language was a self-silencing element for certain individuals that could potentially lead to disempowerment due to lack of individual voice. This was found when several interviewees mentioned that a result of conducting meetings in English was that many participants would speak less. Even though the interviewees mentioned that they would only refrain from speaking if they considered their thoughts to be of minor importance, an issue that is considered to be less important by one person might have a greater meaning to another. Our

findings correlated to a similar pattern referred to as the ‘silencing effect’, which was noticed in the research by Piekkari, Oxelheim and Randøy (2015), who concluded that contribution to board meetings diminished when the meetings were switched to English, stressing that important information could be missed due to language impacts.

The importance of ‘showing yourself’ was clearly emphasised by the employees, which can also be linked to the context in which the team members are working. Seeing as in many cases team members cannot be seen, they have to be heard instead, as otherwise other team members may not even be aware of their participation in the meeting. Furthermore, if team members are not contributing much to meetings it is likely that they will have little impact on the outcome of the meeting. This implies that people that feel inhibited by their language and thus speak less are disadvantaged because they do not convey their true potential, or as one manager put it, show that they are ‘somebody to count on’. As shown in the findings, as well as discussed above, this is an aspect that other team members may not be aware of, i.e. that it could be a result of language, especially if people do not know each other in the teams, which is many times the case. An apparent consequence of this is that the value and knowledge of these team members may be perceived as lower.

5.5.3 NATIVE SPEAKER ADVANTAGE – AN EMPOWERING EDGE

That language could be used as an empowering mechanism was not brought up by English native employees, even though they considered it to be a benefit and provided anecdotes of how their language skills were helpful for them and others in their every day job. This is similar to a finding in the study by Harzing and Pudenko (2012) in which few English native managers mentioned that their English was a source of power and social advantage in the corporate setting.

In this study, it was perceived among the non-native English speakers that native English speakers had a clear advantage in meetings seeing as they could better and quicker express themselves. Several people mentioned that they believed that natives obtained concession in meetings because of their rhetorical skills, indicating a strong source of power in this respect. In accordance with Neely (2012), a feeling of inferiority towards the English native speakers was illustrated by some interviewees, thus indicating a loss of status. Important to note, however, is that these kinds of views were mostly ascribed to the people at the Swedish site.

In spite of this, the non-native English speaking employees agreed that their work was not affected to a great extent by the fact that they had to work in English, presumably because they

believed they had the necessary skills to work and because of the high amount of medical language that was required in their work. Nevertheless, they all expressed that it would be a benefit to be a native and that it consumes more time and effort having to perform tasks in English. This therefore implies that the final outcome of the work may not be affected, however the way to reach it may vary quite extensively. This once again ties back to the time aspect; English proficiency can impact the amount of work one is able to conduct during a given period of time, it is therefore likely to impact one's perceived value when, all else equal, unable due to language to work as quickly.

A few employees admitted to having more faith in someone's competence if the individual was highly proficient in English. Along the same line, Vaara et al. (2005) found that natives are unintentionally seen as more knowledgeable in terms of their competence in comparison to non-natives. In terms of who is ascribed validity it seems clear that being a non-native English speaker is not necessarily a disadvantage, but at the same time being a native speaker is never a disadvantage.

The fact that both non-natives and natives stated that the native speakers were frequently asked to review other people's written material is undoubtedly an evidence of how their language skills put them in a more central position in the teams. This is a sort of informal power gained by having skills in the relevant language (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004; van den Born & Peltokorpi, 2010). Seeing as one of the native speakers said that their reviews actually 'helps other people being more clear' and that it was mentioned by several interviewees that clarity is of utmost importance for the work they do, this ability to review and clarify is seemingly very valuable. The reviewing mechanism allows these people to take part of more information on the work that is being done, and it also gives them the opportunity to shape the material through the corrections, which, as shown by Welch et al. (2005), is a substantial source of power. The influence they are able to have (in this case, language skills) is based on something other than their formal status.

A clear example of a 'boundary spanner' (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014) was seen in our case with one of the American interviewees in Sweden who had been given managerial responsibility over a group of Americans in the US because of her mastery of the language as well as the culture. This stresses that it was not just the language skills but the cultural skills as well that were empowering. Nevertheless, some individuals from other nationalities also mentioned to occasionally having used their native language skills, for example when dealing with national governments, acting as translators of documents or taking over the communication channel with the counterpart. Thus, the prevalence of so called 'language nodes' (Marschan-Piekkari et al.,

1999) could be seen at AstraZeneca as well. However, this was not considered by the language nodes as something that was as beneficial or useful for the everyday work as being a native English speaker. Thus, both native and non-native English speakers perceived that the benefit gained from being able to use one's mother tongue was strong for the native English speakers, i.e. for those who are completely fluent in the corporate language.

In terms of power dispersion as a result of language proficiency opinions differed as to whether this was fair or not, however, overall it did not appear to be a major concern that created tensions in the teams. In line with Halevy, Chou & Galinsky (2011), seeing as there was a great deal of emphasis on interdependence in the teams, it is also likely that the tolerance for the existing power dispersion was higher. The occurrence of perceived unfair power dispersion and unequal opportunities to influence was, when mentioned, mainly discussed by the non-natives in relation to when native speakers were involved in meetings, as also supported by Harzing and Pudelko (2012). The tussle of power can thusly be said to be low in terms of non-native English speakers and somewhat higher when native English speakers participated (even if it was stressed that most native speakers were very understanding and humble). This is in line with the study by Tenzer and Pudelko (2014), which showed that language disparity, or when the level of language proficiency is perceived by team members as similar, leads to less language-based power in MNTs, whereas if it is higher, there will be more. It can also be linked to the finding of Welch, Welch and Piekkari (2005) that the ability to use language as a power instrument will diminish when the corporate language proficiency is high among all employees. The people that were interviewed all had a long background of working in English, the people in the US lived in an English-speaking environment; and Sweden, where over half of the interviews were held, is a country with one of the best English work forces in the world (EF, 2014). These factors can serve as explanations to why language disparity in general was low and level of speech more equal.

5.5.4 PERSONALITY – A DETERMINING FACTOR FOR THE EFFECT OF LANGUAGE?

What came through during the interviews, both as stated directly and underlying in people's answers, was that personality also came into play in how much language barriers affected someone's behaviour. For example, in accordance with findings by Schneider and Barsoux (1997) regarding the projected confidence being higher when communicating in one's mother tongue, a lack of confidence was expressed by some interviewees when having to speak in English. This was as stated by those who did not feel this lack of confidence to be related to personality. Managers stressed that employees cannot let language be an obstacle; they have to be

tough, confident and not care if ideas or opinions are expressed in imperfect English. In line with Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch, (1999a) some people said that attaining the necessary language proficiency takes time and they did not care about language shortcomings anymore as working in English had become a matter of habit.

The silencing effect and feeling of inferiority as mentioned above could be seen too, implying that different personalities allowed the language barrier to affect to different extents. Although communication skills and language skills were highlighted as important, some employees argued that personality serves as somewhat of the last determining factor of how team members act during meetings. As illustrated through the findings, in order to be able to contribute and influence the outcome of a meeting, a certain level of language proficiency deems necessary, as otherwise an important tool for communication is lacking, which is a view shared by all employees. On top of that good communication skills also seemed crucial as without them points may not be clearly expressed even if one is highly proficient in English. As a third layer, the aspect of personality was then brought up as a final determining factor of how team members chose to participate in meetings. These three factors can therefore be seen to constitute a 'staircase', with personality at the top and language at the bottom. Ultimately, in order to influence meetings high language proficiency, good communication skills and perhaps a more confident and outgoing personality is ideal.

Hence, the findings indicate that language is affected by other factors such as personality and individual charisma, so in certain cases, a lack of corporate language proficiency is not linked to a disadvantaged social or corporate position.

5.5.5 REVERSED POWER – LANGUAGE AS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

Although being a native English speaker was considered a benefit when working in MNTs, there were occasions where not being a native could be used as an advantage or power-yielding tool as well. For example, questioning somebody in a way that would otherwise not be done could be blamed on not properly understanding what was said. Furthermore, the use of a mother tongue (that differs from the corporate language) as a 'secret language' was shown in the study by Vaara et al. (2005), where Finnish speaking personnel in a company where Swedish was adopted as the corporate language stated that they were able to use their Finnish skills to discuss things 'on the side'. At AstraZeneca, it was mentioned by managers that Swedish had occasionally been used in the same manner around English-speakers. This had been the case during important negotiations with people who worked at other sites, where it had been convenient to be able to speak

Swedish during the breaks in between meetings. This empowered the Swedish people, as it was a means to unify them and pass around information in the presence of the English speakers in important situations.

Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch (1999a) found that the home country language, in addition to the corporate language, came with a high status. As shown in the findings, this was also the case for Swedish in Sweden. Hinds, Neely and Cramton (2014) found that language can cause tensions and emotions around power, creating subgroups with a dichotomic ‘us vs. them’ attitude, a perspective that will not in the long term promote organisational harmony or encourage teamwork in general. On this line, it was found that it was common among the Swedes to refer to Swedish people in the organisation as ‘us Swedes’. This was especially the case when some kind of disadvantage was perceived vis-à-vis the native English speakers. Relating this back to the finding that some non-native Swedish speakers in certain cases were excluded since not all materials and meetings were provided and conducted in English, this can be seen as a form of power contest, as seen by Hinds et al. (2014), and can be argued to be brought about partly because of language. Welch, Welch and Piekkari (2005) found that even if individuals are very proficient in a language they may still be reluctant to interact in that language, which was also found in some cases in Sweden. A possible explanation may be that the globalisation that has taken place has been more felt on the Swedish site. Teams are becoming more global and internationals joining the company in Mölndal are not expected to learn Swedish to the same extent as they used to. Therefore, trying to keep the ‘Swedishness’ may be an underlying factor behind the exclusion and power contests, in addition to the fact that communication in another language requires more effort and concentration.

As has been illustrated in this chapter, language can and is used as a subversive means, to disempower or silence individuals, to exclude individuals from in-group discussions and to generally alienate. But having said that, those who refuse to speak English as corporate language, can be said to be doing the exact same thing, but using another language to subvert the English status quo. Therefore, language can from this perspective be seen as a double-edged sword.

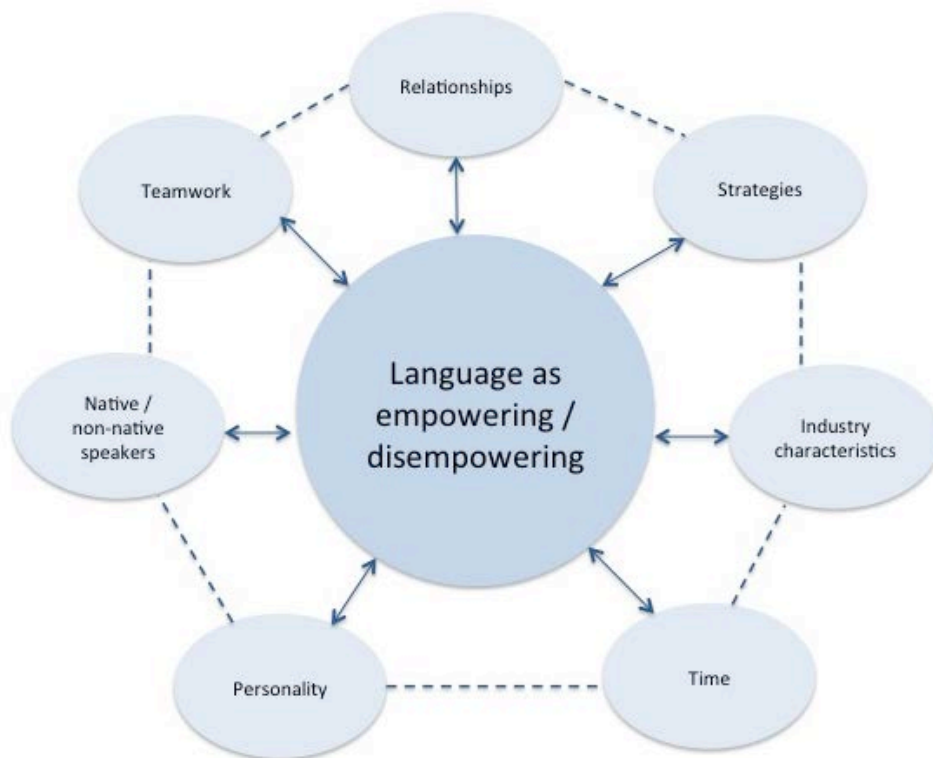
5.6 THE MULTIFACETED ROLE OF LANGUAGE

Language in a corporate setting is indeed multifaceted. It is both seen as an empowering or disempowering object in discussions and meetings as well as a process of change that reflects the dynamics of relationships and organisational structure transformation. While it is not easy to confine the study of language to one particular facet or feature, the findings point towards that

corporate power structures and power play are an integral part of language at work, due to that language is inherently embedded in all work activities. Language is itself, an evolving concept, and in effect, can be used as an effective tool and means to an end.

This chapter has illustrated that language proficiency is used as an empowering and disempowering tool in MNTs. Similar findings to those of earlier research on language proficiency as a source of power in MNCs are evident in this MNT setting as well, thus strengthening the argument that language proficiency is, in fact, a source of power. In addition, this analysis offers insights on various elements that impact the ability to use language proficiency as power in MNTs. These findings have been summarised and compiled in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Elements impacting the ability to use language as power



Source: Figure compiled by authors.

The figure shows that these elements are not isolated elements but form a semantic web that contributes to whether language is empowering or disempowering, and it is also a matter of different individual perspectives which effect is manifested.

6 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the answers to the stated research question and conclusions drawn based on the empirical findings and analysis. Firstly, contributions of this study and the answer to the research question will be given; secondly, managerial implications of the study will be discussed and lastly, recommendations for future research will be provided.

6.1 FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

In this paper, the relationship between language proficiency of the corporate language and power has been investigated in an MNT setting, thus connecting studies of the role of language in IB, power in organisations and research on MNTs.

Previous studies have found that the bundling of language and culture has masked the influential role of language on IB operations and that language needs to be studied separately in order for its unique effects to be captured. It has been established that language can serve as a means for empowerment and disempowerment in MNCs; nevertheless, the field of language in IB is yet at an early stage, and theory formation is insufficient. The present thesis, based on a comprehensive literature review and findings from a qualitative case study conducted at AstraZeneca, therefore contributes to this growing discipline by examining power implications of language in MNTs, a setting that has not yet received much attention in this regard. Furthermore, by conducting the study in the pharmaceutical industry, it widens the perspective of the effects of language in different industries. This study also adds the additional aspect of how the external environment may impact MNT dynamics seeing as data were collected in two different countries, one where English is the national language and one where it is not. The findings of this study has helped fill important gaps in the academic literature by contributing with new insights of how language can become an empowering or disempowering object for employees in MNTs. This impacts the dynamics and consequently the well-functioning of teams in terms of communication and collaboration, which is significant given the fact that MNTs are becoming an increasingly common form of work in MNCs

The research question that was constructed in order to examine the role of language proficiency on power in MNTs was: *How can language proficiency empower or disempower people in multinational teams and what are the possible implications of this?* Aspects of empowerment and disempowerment as a result of language proficiency have been found in this study, which verifies results from previous

research in the field. Since language is embedded in all work activities it affects corporate power structures in various ways, both directly and indirectly.

Language as a power tool is in this research mostly observed in terms of native-speakers vis-à-vis non-native speakers. This can be explained by the high level of proficiency in English among the majority of the interviewees and by the perceived equality of language skills throughout the teams. Previous research has shown that when language disparity in the corporate language is low, power dispersion in teams is reduced. This study shows that this is partly true, as power-yielding effects can still be seen, even if the general level of language proficiency is low in disparity, when many of the team members are native speakers.

In terms of empowering effects, various advantages associated with being a native speaker of English in MNTs emerged in the findings. Native speakers are often asked to review and clarify written material of team members, which is a significant ability in an industry where clarity is of key essence. Consequently, this positions them in more central roles in the teams, which is proven to be power yielding. Native speakers possess rhetorical skills and the capacity to use nuances when speaking about sensitive issues that are difficult for a non-native to attain. This is considered to be an advantage in, for example, discussions and meetings, as well as a requirement when possessing very high positions in the company. Being native can further serve as an important key to socialising and building a network, an advantage considering the various benefits concerned with networks in organisations, such as knowledge transfers and internal recruitment. The use of Swedish as a secret language when facing native English speakers can be seen, illustrating the existence of reversed language-based power play.

Apart from the empowering effects that, if reversed, can be considered as disempowering for non-natives, there are other clear signs in this study of how language can be a disempowering factor. Among non-natives, a silencing effect could be noticed as it became clear that people would, in general, speak less during meetings when those were conducted in English. Space is thus given away, and the ability to influence and contribute to meetings is reduced. If the counterpart does not understand that reduced contribution is due to language, it can have a negative effect on the perceived knowledge and reliability of that individual. Further, a language blindspot in which everyone bears the assumption that all are proficient in expressing themselves exactly as they intend was found, which is not always the case for non-natives and may result in miscommunication. An exclusion, although not necessarily deliberate, of non-Swedish speakers was seen when some information was only communicated in Swedish, thus disempowering employees that did not master the Swedish language.

In addition to the ways in which language skills can be empowering or disempowering, an important contribution of this thesis is the finding that there are various elements that affect the ability to use language proficiency as a source of power. The mode of working is one of these elements where the global dispersion of teams is found to exacerbate the language-related problems, thus making it disempowering for those less proficient in the language. We also find a significant connection between time, language and power. Time is of high importance and it is found that non-native English speakers are in many cases slowed down in their everyday work, an ultimate disadvantage caused by language proficiency.

Team dynamics are important for the well-functioning of a team, and language plays a significant role in this game. In this study, team dynamics has shown to be affected in several senses. Natives were in some cases attributed a more central role in the team because of their language proficiency. A lack of confidence and feeling of inferiority was seen among non-natives. Overall, the ability to socialise and get to know one another was more difficult because of language barriers in combination with the dispersion of teams, which is unfortunate due to the role of socialising mechanisms to team functioning.

Some discontent due to power dispersion as a result of language skills could be seen among team members, for example among those who stated that natives better steer discussions and natives have the upper hand in meetings. All in all, the prevailing perception among the majority of the interviewees was, however, that 'it is what it is' and it is up to the individual to adhere to the fact that English is the corporate language. Thus, the dynamics are affected to different extents but are not alarming in regards to discontent among employees. It is likely that this discontent is less prevailing in this study in comparison to previous studies due to the global, scientific character of the industry, the high amount of specialised language that is used as well as the relatively high and even level of English among team members that were interviewed.

6.2 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has shown that language is itself an evolving concept, and in effect can be used as an effective tool and means to an end. So if harmony, work progress, a good working environment, an innovative atmosphere is what is desired in a corporation or work setting, then focusing on fostering an organisation culture beginning with what language/s are used as corporate language would be one of the most concrete and effective means to organisation transformation.

For companies whose businesses are built on knowledge, it is necessary that the competence, knowledge and ideas of employees reach the surface, whereby language is an important tool to

formulate and convey this information. Seeing as MNTs are becoming a more common way of organising work in MNCs, managers need to be aware of the language related power implications brought about by a common corporate language, and these implications should be taken seriously. This, so that better management strategies can be crafted and so that managers are better able to actively address this in their leadership. An awareness of language-related differences is likely to lead to increased tolerance and understanding, and a reduction of language related problems. Cross-cultural training in order to improve communication is today a standard training for staff and employees in many MNCs. We suggest that language awareness training is incorporated into this in order to create an understanding of the impact of different native languages on the way an individual speaks and communicates in a second or third language. In cases where there are great disparities in language proficiency managers should offer language training in the corporate language. This study further suggests that if there is a great deal of power implications as a result of language, companies should reconsider the organisational mode of working in dispersed global teams.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Seeing as the field is still relatively new and unexplored, a general recommendation is to conduct more studies on how language policies can impact collaboration in MNTs. This study was conducted in Sweden, which has one of the best work forces in the world as well as in the US where English is the official language. This is likely to have affected the high level of English in the teams, which we believe affects the level of power dispersion and team dynamics. Therefore, a similar study that takes place in countries where the English language skills among the population in general is lower, would be fruitful in order to uncover potentially more detrimental effects of language skill disparity on power in teams.

It emerged from this study that members of MNTs were often dispersed globally, which we see as a way through which the challenges associated with language barriers are aggravated and consequently increases the possibility of power implications. Therefore, a more focused study on the effects of language on globally dispersed teams would better complete this picture. Furthermore, the importance of time and the fact that not working in one's mother tongue demands more time emerged as a strong point that can affect the perceived value of an individual, and therefore consequently that person's ability to influence the team. Thus, it would be of interest to further investigate this issue by e.g. looking into how much extra time has to be

devoted to tasks by non-natives due to language, and to study what this entails for MNT dynamics.

This thesis sheds light on how language proficiency can be empowering or disempowering but it does not measure to what extent. Comparative studies with a more quantitative approach would also be of great interest in order to test the results of this thesis and to achieve methodological diversification.

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APPENDIX

1. OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS AND INTERVIEWS

1.1 SWEDEN

Respondent	Position	Nationality	Interview method	Location	Duration	Date
MM1	Middle Manager	Swedish	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	50 min	02/03/2015
TM1	Team member	British	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	40 min	02/03/2015
SM1	Senior Manager	Swedish	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	55 min	02/03/2015
MM2	Middle Manager	German	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	50 min	02/03/2015
TM2	Team member	Swedish	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	40 min	03/03/2015
TM3	Team member	Swedish	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	60 min	03/03/2015
MM3	Middle Manager	Swedish	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	40 min	04/03/2015
TM4	Team member	Georgian	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	40 min	04/03/2015
MM4	Middle Manager	Swedish	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	40 min	05/03/2015
TM5	Team member	Ukrainian	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	60 min	05/03/2015
TM6	Team member	Swedish	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	55 min	05/03/2015
TM7	Team member	Ukrainian	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	40 min	05/03/2015
TM8	Team member	Russian	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	40 min	05/03/2015
MM5	Middle Manager	American	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Mölndal, Sweden	45 min	08/03/2015

1.2 USA

Respondent	Position	Nationality	Interview method	Location	Duration	Date
TM9	Team member	American	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Gaithersburg, USA	50 min	16/03/2015
TM10	Team member	Indian	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Gaithersburg, USA	50 min	16/03/2015
TM11	Team member	Chinese	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Gaithersburg, USA	60 min	16/03/2015
MM6	Middle Manager	French	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Gaithersburg, USA	50 min	16/03/2015
TM12	Team member	Chinese	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Gaithersburg, USA	40 min	17/03/2015
MM7	Middle Manager	Swedish	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Gaithersburg, USA	55 min	18/03/2015
TM13	Team member	American	Face-to-face English Recorder used	Gaithersburg, USA	40 min	18/03/2015
MM8	Middle Manager	Iranian	Face-to-face Swedish Recorder used	Gaithersburg, USA	60 min	20/03/2015

2. INTERVIEW GUIDE

BACKGROUND

- What is your role in the company?
- Where are you originally from and what is your mother tongue?
- Which languages do you speak? (and what is your level of fluency? i.e. proficient-fluent/working capacity)
- For how long have you worked in a multinational environment?
- For how long have you worked in an English speaking environment?

TEAMWORK

- Can you describe the team(s) that you are part of? E.g. the number of people, nationalities, roles etc. Virtual/non-virtual? Is there a team leader?
- How are you affected by working in virtual teams?
- How often do you meet? How do you meet? Why do you meet? Who usually initiates a meeting?
- Can you tell us about a typical meeting? (who is speaking, what is happening etc.)
- How dependent are you on each other's work in the team?
- How often do you have to motivate, discuss or argue for something in your job?
- How do you usually get your ideas across during meetings?
- Does the ability to influence vary in different situations? Examples
- Do you believe that your/others' ability to influence the team is fair and justified? Motivate.
- Have you experienced any challenges when working in a multinational context? Please give examples. And if yes, how are those dealt with?

LANGUAGE

- Can you describe what it is like to work in English speaking environment?
- Have you ever worked in a context where your mother tongue was the working language? If yes, what is the biggest difference?
- How do you rate your English proficiency in comparison with the other team members? (below average/average/above average?)
- Do you think that your language proficiency affects your work in any way? Motivate.

- How do you usually deal with language barriers?
- Do you use language differently in different situations? Examples.
- How do you think that English capabilities affect you, the team or the organisation?
- Does the company offer you language training?
- Is there any language other than English that you consider beneficial to know in this team? Motivate.
- In what way is communication in meetings different when it is face-to-face as compared to teleconferences? What role does your language skills play in this?
- Do you ever think that it is an advantage to be a non-native English speaker in your job? If yes, when?