New Perspectives and Approaches to Language-based Research

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Language-based themes as a legitimate area of inquiry within international management research have been propelled forward by researchers interested in the use of languages in multilingual work contexts. By now, these themes have consolidated into a recognized research stream, which is developing its own networks and philosophies. Tietze and Piekkari (2020) put forward the notion that language-based research continues to develop as a field of inquiry and is currently characterised by 'increasing institutionalization of networks as well as by the beginnings of interdisciplinary work between international business, institutional scholarship, organisational studies, and translation studies (ibid, in press, p. 8). Thus language-based research has achieved a degree of maturity and such maturity is expressed, amongst others, by debates and questions about research philosophy, research methods and research designs. This compilation of four book chapters is, to the best of our knowledge, the first collection of academics' considerations of such questions. The intellectual stimulation offered by this part lies in its authors' competence in shedding light on a neglected method (experiments) (chapter 1); the role of translation as an integral and central act of data analysis and researcher sense making (chapter 2); the role of translation of Western research philosophies from a Chinese perspective (chapter 3) and a novel conceptualisation of the multilingual organization as a *translatory space* with translatorial linguistic ethnography offered as a methodological avenue to understand multilingual work places as spaces of translation (chapter 4).

Therefore, this part offers innovative insights into alternate research designs (experiments; translatorial linguistic ethnography); it demonstrates how interlingual translation is part of data analysis; how translation is an ongoing, multi-agentic act in the process of and it offers a conceptual take on multilingual work places which transcends current understanding of these workplaces being multilingual and predominantly located in Multinational Corporations (Frederiksson, Barner-Rasmussen and Piekkari, 2006).

Researching Multilingual Workplaces: Language Practices

Multilingual workplaces have been investigated for almost three decades (Tietze and Piekkari, 2020) and the early emphasis on the location of research within Multinational Enterprises and focusing on the role of the Common Corporate Language (frequently, but not always English) and its respective constellation with 'other languages' has yielded fruitful

knowledge about how and to which consequence languages are deployed in multilingual work organizations. This body of work has been analysed by two recent literature reviews Tenzer, Terjesen and Harzing (2017) reviewed 264 journal articles and showed that the conceptualization of language within business studies is divided as languages are either seen as 'static and discrete entities' or 'hybrid, fluid and situational codes' (p. **Check**). This divide is to an extent reflected in the four chapters as chapter one is showcasing experimental approaches, with a view to 'test whether theory ... is plausible' and to provide evidence of causality (p.1); whereas chapter 2 is based on a more interpretive approach, where meaning is seen as shifting, ambiguous and grounded in historical-political context. Perhaps, as Tenzer et al. propose, the requirement is to find complementarities between these different 'takes on language'; with experiments yielding clarity and in particular in-depth case studies or ethnographies yielding insights into complexities. Karhunen, Kankaanranta, Louhialo-Salminen and Piekkari (2018) have reviewed recent studies located in Multinational Corporation and for these authors, the most promising take on language-based research is informed by a social practice view of language. In general, this view is that meaning is created through taking actions in the world and analysis needs to focus on how such actions are enabled or constrained (in multilingual contexts) by using languages in particular ways, with particular groups and with particular intents.

The different philosophical approaches adopted in the four chapters reflect different understanding of languages either as language use in situated contexts – chapter 2 is perhaps the most prominent example of this approach or as language as being a code 'to be cracked' within more a more realist approach.. Whether or not the two can be aligned and be used in a complimentary fashion as envisage by Tenzer et al., will remain open for now. From the perspective of a committed interpretivist (i.e. the perspective of the author of this introduction, SusanneTietze), I find one study published in 2010 by Akkermans, Harzing and Witteloostuijn intriguing. Using a quasi-experiment the authors demonstrate that a foreign language is a strong primer for behaviour by a research design within which participating Dutch students play business game, and that when this game is played in English, their behaviour becomes less cooperative and more competitive. I do not know of a case study or interview-based study that has yielded such clear findings about the influence of language on behaviour (or practice) – a key argument in the debate why languages matter in understanding behaviour in multilingual contexts.

Researching Multilingual Workplaces: Translatorial Practices

It may well be a sign of a conceptual shift in language-based research communities that three chapters engage with translation as part of an multilingual research project, with translation as an integral and central aspect of research philosophies and with translation as a conceptual take on multilingual work places. The inherent logic of this translation perspective is: that if different languages co-exist in one form or other, there are two basic means to enable communication: the use of a bridge language like English or there has to be translation between languages (see Feeley and Harzing,a 2003 for an overview over how to manage language diversity). English as such a bridge language, and how it is used and to what consequence has been thoroughly investigated by 'language-sensitive international business research' (Piekkari andTiete, 2011) and the contemporary field is turning to translation to explore 'the other' means, i.e. translation.

The turn to translation is currently gaining momentum based on the notion that there is no absolute equivalence of meaning between languages and this provides indeed opportunities for research designs and execution. Chapter 2 is a case in point as its focal concept, empowerment, did not exist at all on the level of the word/concept or on the level of experience in the researched setting. This raises the question of how one does research something that does not exist neither conceptually or experientially? The research team turns to the use of proverbs as a means to explore empowerment at the Russia subsidiary and also details the translation process that occurred during data analysis. It is shown, how meaning emerged, was changed and rethought during the interlingual translation process and that 'translators' included agents outside the research project itself, in this case an editor. Thus, data analysis is multi-agentic and unfolds from the interlingual act of translation (see also Xian, 2008). In a similar vein, chapter 3 states that reflexivity of researchers in multilingual research relates to their 'own role in the translation process' (chapter 3, p. XXX) and their potential influence on the outcomes. Providing an insider account of the author's experience of translating Western research methodologies into Chinese, it is shown that translation is cultural practice and that it involves the 'recreation of meaning and knowledge that make sense to the target audience' (chapter 3, p. XXX). Xian uses her own past confusion when as a doctoral student she was being confronted with terms such as 'grounded theory' or 'critical realism' and how difficult it was for her to make sense of these terms – despite being a competent user of English in oral and written forms. From my own experience, the providers of research methods training in the UK (and in some European universities) I am

familiar with) care little about whether these traditions and philosophies make sense to 'other' audiences. Efforts are only expended to make such training more sophisticated and effective, instead of questioning the taken-for-granted use of Western philosophical paradigms.

Chapter 4 by Koskinen offers a conceptual innovation by framing multilingual workplaces as translatorial spaces: as spaces of translation where translation needs to happen for mutual comprehensibility and where multilingual repertories meet and mix. Additionally, she proposes that such workplaces feature on-going translator activity that transgresses the boundaries of equivalence based research. This chapter therefore offers language-based research communities a different way of framing future research, perhaps offering a way away from the identifying language practices or barriers to identifying translatory practices. The empirical example in this chapter is based on a translatorial linguistic ethnography – and provides a detailed description of what is entailed in this approach in terms of layers of contextualisation and translator agency (with translators being either professional translators or other organizational agents also). To the best of our knowledge, language-sensitive research in (international) management is yet to produce such ethnographic studies that documents how organizations are translated into being.

WHAT NEXT?

Tietze and Piekkari (2020) purport that language sensitive research has got a bright future, that it will feature more interdisciplinary approaches and research located in other localities than the MNC. Similar 'predictions' are made by Tenzer et al. (2017) and Karhunen et al. (2018). Taken together, the four contributions of this part may herald more variety in the use of research designs, more interdisciplinary projects in terms of employing methods from the social sciences, but also the arts and the humanities and last not least in engaging with translation as expressive and constitutive of multilingual workplaces and research practices.

In terms of advancing the research practices and approaches within language-based management research, I propose that useful starting points are

a) to develop protocols for reporting the translation process in written research accounts, which transcend the back translation approach favoured by international business

research (Chidlow et al., 2014) – chapter 2 provides some ideas of how this could be achieved;

b) to deepen and broaden the use of methodologies and research designs by expanding the methodological reach of research designs and advocate and use methods less frequently employed – chapters 1 and 4 provide detailed accounts of available designs; by combining multiple methods to assess their potential to yield innovative findings and theorizations; by starting a tradition in which reflexivity plays a more prominent role;

c) to leave 'other' language data visible, i.e. to foreignize writing strategies in order to disrupt the palatable presentation of one's finding and to acknowledge the existence of other languages, concepts and perspectives – chapters 2, 3 and 4 have such inbuilt reminders of 'other languages', while remaining intelligible to an English speaking international readership;

Language-based research has been, sometimes inadvertently, quite 'radical' in challenging the notion that English is a universal language of all (management) knowledge and that its use is unproblematic. Some accounts point directly to the hegemonic assumptions which underpin the monolingual worldview of much of the management academy (Steyaert and Janssens, 2013; Tietze, 2018). Engaging in language-based research is inevitably asking questions about 'the other' - whether it is the other language or the other language user or other meanings. The research methods and concepts offered in the four chapters of this part provide techniques and concepts how to engage in language-based research. All of these techniques, their applications, their underpinning episteme are offering the field something new, innovative and challenging. More importantly, they offer food for thought how to engage with 'the other' which language-sensitive researchers invariably meet in research encounters, whether in the field or in the laboratory or while sitting at the desk.

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