Implementing language mandates: English as lingua franca in a Hungarian multinational company[*]

Katul Yousef[**]

Abstract

This article analyzes implementation of English as a lingua franca, and the way it induces the power relations within a company, through the example of a Hungarian multinational. Specifically, the article contributes to the field of cross-cultural management. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 company members, and grounded theory was used for data analyses. Findings show how a common language can be seen as source of power and raises challenges, especially when the chosen lingua franca is not the headquarters' language. The absence of initial support processes can cause the loss of shared values and common company goals.

Introduction

In this paper, the goal is to study the effect of English as a lingua franca (ELF) on the power relationships at a Hungarian multinational company. The language change process has been analyzed and highlights the unique challenge it raises in a Hungarian multinational. The common language is English, and since it is considered to be neutral – neither the headquarters' nor the subsidiaries' language – it brings a new perspective to language shifting in the studied company (Hun-Comp). A Hungarian, Central-Eastern European company has to face unique challenges regarding cross-cultural management (CCM), especially in the case of intercultural communication or language management (Stark/Bruszt, 2001; Meyer/Peng, 2005; Tenzer/Terjesen/Harzing, 2017; Karhunen, et al., 2018; Alt/Saplacan, 2019). The studied Hungarian multinational company creates many new challenges by choosing ELF. Becoming multinational, and supporting this with a well-known language serves the company's strategy, but in short term creates difficulties that the existing best practices could not address (Sanden/Lønsmann, 2018).

Hun-Comp (pseudonym) is a member of the oil and gas industry operating in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Due to its operations mobility is frequent, the inpatriates working on an international project are located at the headquarters for at least 8 months and up to 3 years, the engineers are working on 5-

---

** *Katul Yousef*, Assistant Lecturer, Corvinus University of Budapest, Institute of Management, Email: katul.yousef@uni-corvinus.com; yousefkatul@gmail.com. Main research interest: cross-cultural management, strategic management, international management

month rotations between one of the subsidiaries and the headquarters. Most of the employees based at the headquarters have been relocated for at least one short-term – 8-month – project. At Hun-Comp it was crucial to create a standard language that is not only used among the subsidiaries but also at the headquarters, so to facilitate employee collaboration across cultures, reduce linguistic boundaries, to help so meaningful communication occurs, and to ensure understanding and knowledge sharing (Marschan/Welch/Welch, 1997, Charles/Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Charles, 2007; Brannen/Doz, 2012; Éltető/Udvari, 2019; Kemppainen/Holden, 2020). In order to harmonize each type of communication, ELF seemed to be the best solution.

The headquarters' language, Hungarian, is not spoken broadly around the world; it seemed rather challenging for the subsidiaries to use it, and it is not efficient in daily communication between multiple parties with different national languages. The Hungarian language is spoken by a total of 14,5 million people, of which 4 million people speak it outside of Hungary, mostly in the surrounding countries (Fenyvesi 2005). In 2013, a new strategy was implemented and English had been chosen as the official organizational language. Despite the fact that English is one of the most widely taught foreign languages in Hungary, it creates many challenges. According to Eurostat 2019 statistics, in Hungary, more than 42 % of the population aged 25–64 speak at least one foreign language, mainly English. The English language is used at a higher level at multinational organizations, but employees feel less confident as it is challenging to use English in their professional life as their official working language. The language asymmetry between speakers of English at the subsidiaries and headquarters affects the power balance within Hun-Comp. The current paper focus on the dynamics of the lingua franca usage, the reason of these, and the way these change the power structure.

Literature review

Despite the obvious practical benefits, such as new opportunities for networking within the company or easing up communication, ELF has many disadvantages (Beeler/Lecomte 2017; Bousebaa/Tienari, 2019). Sanden (2020) highlights that ELF may have unforeseen implications and consequences, and it can bring a range of unanticipated problems. Excluding different ways of language-speaking can create conditions that can be used as a source of power. Based on Griffin and O'Leary-Kelly's definition, the "dark side of the organizational life" (2004) has been applied to the language issue as well. Most of the issues are invisible for managers and these can cause damage to cross-cultural collaboration (Neeley/Hinds/Cramton, 2012). On one hand, linguistic hegemony, a standard language, can be a chance to contribute in a discussion by empowering employees with a certain proficiency level in a certain language. Furthermore, it helps the employees to understand the shared values, and helps the management to have

'informal control' (Marschan/Welch/Welch, 1997:592) over the entire company, especially the subsidiaries. On the other hand, one standard language can silence the less proficient speakers (Vaara et al., 2005; Lauring/Klitmøller, 2015; Woo/Giles, 2017).

Beeler and Lecomte (2017) differentiate two main forms of the 'dark side of language' (2017:56): (1) linguistic hegemony and (2) in-group behavior based on language. The first is discussing linguistically skilled speakers' power and the disproportionate dominance of them on meeting agendas and decision-making processes (Andersen/Rasmussen, 2004). This effect decreases the influence of others and highlights the ones that have fluency in certain languages. In a group dynamic, it can activate dormant faultlines, and indirectly harm the effectiveness (Hinds/Neely/Cramton, 2014). The second form of language's dark side is highlighting the fact that people within a group will bond based on a common language. It can encourage the creation of informal relationships based on the members' common language, (Marschan/Welch/Welch, 1997), and indirectly exclude the ones with different language skills, or the ones speaking the official organizational language. This process can divide a group, effect trust formation, and cause marginalization (Tenzer/Pudelco/Harzing, 2014). Language choice is too complex and heavily based on the context, skill and willingness of the individual; therefore, it is more the result of an ad hoc situation than official language policies (Cordeiro, 2017; Komori-Glatz, 2018).

Bjørge and Whittaker (2014) highlight that choosing ELF creates a level of stress. The level of language knowledge will determine the access to information, consequently influencing the power of an employee within the organization. It might differ from their organizational power, and it might create even more stress, for example, in those, whose organizational power is devaluated due to his/her poor English language skills. Neeley (2012) highlights when some people cannot express themselves properly, they do not feel as intelligent, which may create an inconvenience when tasks should be given and feedback is needed. Also, there is a hidden cost: people with a lower level of language proficiency spend more time with the same task, e.g., producing a document in a language which they are not fluent in. The existence of differences in language skills creates language clusters, which means that some people will avoid communication with those whose language proficiency is far above theirs (Fredriksson/Barner-Rasmussen/Piekkari, 2006; Kankaanranta/Louhiala-Salminen, 2013; Ristino/Michalak/Małgorzata, 2018).

While in some countries most people learn a good level of English from an early age, they still fail to understand the nuances of the language. Bjørge and Whittaker (2014) insist that a good command of English does not solve all problems. Humor, symbolism, cultural connotations (e.g. cultural references, not so common sayings, hints from children's literature or internationally not well-known

local literature, slang, idioms and metaphors), abbreviations, persuasions, and negotiation might be a source of misunderstanding or a lack of full understanding (Hajro/Pudelko, 2010; Vigier/Spencer-Oatey, 2017). Still, inadequate language skills lead to a glass ceiling: a person with good professional knowledge might not be able to reach higher-level jobs, as his/her communication skills fail to meet expectations. Native speakers (with mysterious expressions) leas to unequal participation in meetings. Accent or education might make the whole communication even more difficult; some people that have a different native language, yet their education was pursued in the chosen lingua franca, will almost always have the same advantage as native speakers (Gaibrois, 2018).

Logemann and Piekkari (2015) find that shifting from one language to another within an organization also means the shift of power positions. Often, managers or employees in charge cannot make a big impact on a certain project because of the language barriers (Neeley, 2013; Bjørge/Whittaker, 2014). In other cases, some individuals can gain more power through their language skill than their formal position would indicate (Marschan-Piekkari/Welch/Welch.,1999). In Hun-Comp headquarters, there are more difficulties regarding ELF than in the subsidiaries, this fact effects the company member's impact. It can be challenging for many non-native English speaker professionals that are less fluent to perform at the same level using a second language as they did by using their mother tongue (Clément, 1980; Clément /Kruidenienr, 1885; Vaara, et al., 2005; Bouquet/Birkinshaw, 2008; Joyce, Vince/Marton, 2016). In the long term, ELF can give an equal chance to all members, and improve the organization's overall communication (Erjavec/Arsenijević/Starc, 2018; Dahms, 2019). However, in the short term, the limited language knowledge makes efficiency decrease. This fall in performance can be threatening to some company members (Selmer/Lauring, 2014; Sajfert, et. al, 2017; Smokrović et. al, 2019), especially at the manager level (Marschan-Piekkari/Welch/Welch.,1999; Beeler/Lecomte, 2017).

Methodology

Short introduction of the company

An overview of the company and local specialties had to be considered in order to understand the language changing process. In the research, the goal was to choose a non-Western, preferably Hungarian company that operates over a far distance and has subsidiaries on another continent, so that CCM would have an important role in their daily business life. Hun-Comp is considered one of the biggest multinational companies in the Central-Eastern European region. Through this company's headquarters – placed in Budapest, Hungary – and its subsidiaries, cross-cultural challenges have been analyzed. This firm includes all the criteria that is important from the point of my research: (1) the location is Hungary: it is a Central-Eastern European company; (2) from its size and coun-

tries of operation, it is considered a multinational enterprise; (3) for more than a decade, it has been operating in several countries all over Asia, Europe and North-Africa.

Hun-Comp operates in the oil and gas industry and is recognized as the leading regional company in Central-Eastern Europe. Hun-Comp deals with upstream (exploration and production), and downstream (refining and petrochemicals) gasoline production, and also business innovation and services (retail and mobility). Language policy is communicated by the headquarters to the subsidiaries, but in the case of Hun-Comp this process is much more challenging. Most of the barriers regarding the language changing process was at the headquarters. It seems difficult for Hungarian employees to use English in their daily working life, no matter whom they are talking with.

Research method

Semi-structured, face to face, in-depth interviews were conducted. The advantage of a semi-structured interview lies in its possibility for opening up for descriptive answers, and in the current research this was prioritized. These aspects enable researchers to better understand the cross-cultural challenge in communication, language and any other matter, which also allows for follow up on emerging topics given by the interviewees (Wilmot, 2017; Charmaz, 1996). Despite the questions that are raised by the interviewer, the interviewee has a chance to include other topics that are also considered important. This gives much more complete research, flexibility for modifications that was necessary in the current research. Also, it gives the chance to gain more information than would have been possible with the questions that had initially been planned ahead of time.

In the current paper, grounded theory has been used for data analysis, qualitative research strategy, and interviews as a source of data collection. Grounded theory is a research method that offers a comprehensive and systematic framework for inductively building a theory (Bryman, 2004:401). It is developed and verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data of a particular phenomenon (Strauss/Corbin, 1990; Douglas, 2003; Jones/Noble, 2007). The qualitative method provides flexibility to tailor the method to certain circumstances; also, its sensitivity helps to not ignore any crucial topic brought up by the interviewees, or feelings and reactions shown by them that might have important meaning regarding the research (Kuada, 2012:94). Furthermore, the qualitative method is reasonable, since it serves for a better understanding of unstructured data. This approach allows the researcher to peruse the most interesting and relevant material by shaping and altering the data collection, and aiming for further theory development (Charmaz, 1996). In the current research a sensitive topic as the role of the managers was highlighted by the interviewees. The fact managers
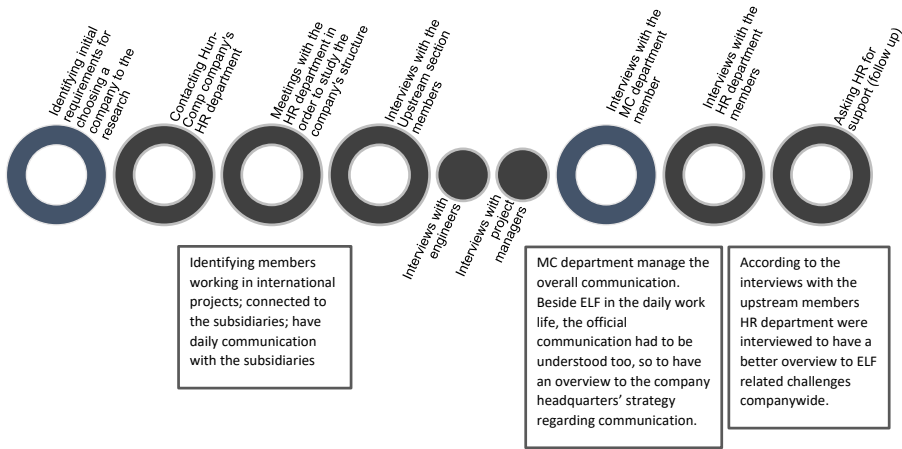
set a good or bad example and the way these effects the employees, were mentioned many times during the interviewees, therefore this factor was perused further.

Profile of interview participants

Within Hun-Comp, one business unit and two departments were included: (1) the upstream sector (exploration and production business unit), (2) the media and communication (MC) department and (3) the human resources (HR) department. In these departments and this business unit, inpatriates and local staff were included too (Appendix I). Due to initial research these parts of the company were involved in the cross-cultural management challenges in a daily basis. (1) The upstream sector of Hun-comp is where they manage the core product. Within this business unit Hun-Comp has subsidiaries in 8 countries. Although the other business units are also international, this one includes the far distance subsidiaries; therefore, the cross-cultural challenges are the most evident here. Eleven interviewees were chosen all together. From the upstream sector six interviewees were included in the research, four engineers working at the headquarters and in the subsidiaries at the same time, in constant rotation every 5 months; and two inpatriates from the subsidiaries working as project managers. (2) The MC department was also important, one interviewee was asked from this department, since MC is dealing with all types of organization communication, including external and internal, for instance public relations and all sorts of media. (3) Four interviewees were from the HR department, since the organizational culture related challenges were addressed here; also, many language related complaints were managed here. The HR members were crucial to interview in order to gain a better understanding of the process the complaints are about. Collecting information from a member of this department helped to see the main borders and opportunities that the language may create in the culture (Figure 1.). Other departments and business pillars were not included in the current research since they were remotely related to the subsidiaries.

Research process

Figure 1. Research process

Identifying initial requirements for choosing a company to the research

Contacting Hun-Comp company's HR department

Meetings with the HR department in order to study the company's structure

Interviews with the Upstream section members

Interviews with engineers

Interviews with project managers

Interviews with the MC department member

Interviews with the HR department members

Asking HR for support (follow up)

Identifying members working in international projects; connected to the subsidiaries; have daily communication with the subsidiaries

MC department manage the overall communication. Beside ELF in the daily work life, the official communication had to be understood too, so to have an overview to the company headquarters' strategy regarding communication.

According to the interviews with the upstream members HR department were interviewed to have a better overview to ELF related challenges companywide.

Data analysis

In the current paper, focus coding and constant comparison techniques of data analysis have been applied as the model of grounded theory. Focus coding helps to capture data by creating active and brief codes. Having an active code makes it possible to reflect on what is happening and how people act, and keeping the codes brief makes it easy to review them (Charmaz, 1996:40–42). The concept of constant comparison refers to the process of maintaining connection between data and conceptualization, so that the correspondence between concepts and categories is not lost (Bryman, 2004:403). After conducting each interview, reading the interview transcript, the data has been divided to smaller parts in order to highlight the meaning of each part. Then the different parts have been labelled and coded. These codes were compared with each new part of the data with previous codes, so previous pieces have been labelled with the same title or code. After all the parts and all the interview transcripts were coded, the codes were grouped by similarities and themes. By the end of the coding, three groups were differentiated, and these are the concepts (Table 1.).

Table 1. Summary of Codes and Concepts

Code	Concept
alienated	
self-preservation	
no support	Being excluded

Code	Concept
language	
cultural awareness	
diversity	Awareness-raising is important
top-down action	
good examples	
clear strategy	Crucial role of managers

The three different groups give the whole research a structure, and highlight the main topics that can be linked directly to the ELF at Hun-Comp. This coding system gave the analytical base to understand and interpret the experiences of the company members regarding the language changing process. First, the 'Being excluded' concept includes all the codes that refer to the challenges and difficulties the employees face at Hun-Comp. Second, the 'Awareness-raising is important' concept that refers to the code that collects all the necessary topics that have to be highlighted and have to be addressed in the company's overall strategy, according to the interviewees. Third, the 'Crucial role of managers' concept refers to the role of leaders and managers. The interviewees mention good and bad example of the attitude and behavior managers have. The interviewees emphasized that more pragmatic rules are needed, according to them, at Hun-Comp; so far, only the top-down strict rules were successful. This is especially important since the managers will not be able to skip them, and they have to be in line with these rules.

Ethical issues

In order to achieve confidentiality, anonymity, honesty and respect for all participants, the rationale of the study was explained to the interviewees. Furthermore, participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. Written consents were sent to those who volunteered to participate in the study. Interview transcripts and documents were treated in a way that protected the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees.

Results

Table 2.   Text-Code-Concept

Text	Code	Concept
[...] and one of the Russian colleagues came to me and she broke this topic. She is a very talented, young engineer. She said sometimes her colleagues are all speaking only Hungarian [...] and then even in the email she was copied in, it was in Hungarian, she doesn't understand. She received an email in Hungarian. (No1)	alienated	Being excluded
[...] there is six people and one foreigner the six people are talking and laughing and the foreigner don't understand, even for five minutes, it seems a long time. It sets the mood to the meeting too since you already excluded me. (No10)		
I was here 6 months and nobody came and said hi to me. [...] All of these small things they kind of add up, the end you feel complete alien. (No10)		
I will not be part of the atmosphere, and I will not be part of the group. (No8)		
If you hear your name even in the innocent way it might make you feel bad. (No1)		
[...] This happened once, twice, the third time I told him privately, separately I don't want to stop you in front of a junior colleague but if you are talking about work even if it is his assignment you have to speak English since I don't understand. (No10)		
I don't mind the colleague who cannot speak but it is offensive that you can and you won't. (No8)		
Working is not only about working and meeting, but work is about if you meet someone in the corridor and they update you. I never have an update because you speak to him in Hungarian. [...] (No10)		
I am here alone I don't want to be miserable. (No3)	self-preservation	
You don't need to create problems for yourself. What is the word: self-preservation. (No8)		
They are not open to foreigners. They feel this because the political situation. They feel like you take their place. (No10)		
We are working with lots of unconscious distraining and unintentionally do mistakes. (No1)	no support	
As I see HR is not working properly, it struggles and not because of the communication. (No11)		
HR there does not have any clear strategy, that the company member can rely on. (No7)		
[...] it just happened that everything became international and everyone started to speak English, the mailing was in English and the meetings were all held in English. [...] it has been told that everything is in English from now on and it was English since then. (No11)		

Text	Code	Concept
Healthy relationship that is the language. (No1)	language	Awareness-raising is important
What my colleagues are experiencing here – that it is worth mentioning – is that English is the official language. (No7).		
Well language. [...] It is not important enough I realized. Which also creates troubles and barriers. (No1)		
Inclusion is important (No4)	cultural awareness	
They accept me with my culture, they don't try to change me or push something on me. (No3)		
Cultural inclusion and cultural diversity. (No4)		
Inclusion as a culture. (No1)		
I have lived in Canada before so it was not about I was not lived abroad. (No10)		
There are Europeans and non-Europeans also, especially in the upstream. (No11)	diversity	
With your colleagues you are not looking to be friends but you are looking to have a healthy relationship. (No10)		
Ability is about how much they want to come and how much they want to help you, and not looking up or down at you. (No9)		
There is a common ground in cultures. (No5)		

Text	Code	Concept
[...] English is the official language. I am a foreigner, and I am in a department where everybody speaks English because the boss is kind of speaking English, but in other departments, where the colleagues are Hungarian, some experts are foreigners, so it is not always respected and they feel a bit excluded. (No1)	top-down action	Crucial role of managers
The most important is the understanding, but you know when it is going down it is harder. (No4)		
Exposure, it needs to come now and it is top-down thing. (No3)		
This is cultural something which comes from the management. Inclusion need to come from the top. (No2)		
The Hungarian speakers are sitting in the same room and speaking Hungarian with each other, and the others, Croatians and Romanians, can only wonder. This should change. (No3)		
In 2013 at Hun-Comp there was a program, it said the official language is English, so everything became English (No11)		
As a senior colleague we need to show example, especially in the international environment. (No9)	managers set examples	
The managers they were smart enough they integrated themselves. (No5)		
I don't ask the others what my manager said after the meeting. He knew I don't speak English. (No8)		
The Hungarian come to Pakistan the managing director, the CFOs they integrated [...]. In all my carrier in Pakistan we were pretty isolated. (No10)		
I would suggest diversity to begin with. If there is no diversity it is a job of the bosses to ask the people to speak in English. I know it sounds regimented but you need to be reminded. (No1)	clear strategy	
If you get used to you will get comfortable, but also the unknown kills you, and you are afraid of; the known is ok. (No7)		
Let them know that the pool will include foreigners. In my experience we are better if we know what will come. (No1)		

Discussion

Being excluded

At Hun-Comp the interviewed employees do not feel that they can communicate with everyone freely. They feel alienated and disempowered since they feel that they do not have all the necessary information in time or at all. In order to be part of the community and perform well fluent communication is crucial. Local staff have an advantage since the majority is Hungarian at the headquarters, and they speak Hungarian among each other. According to the Hungarian interviewees, it is strange to use English in the communication, and therefore, the Hungarian language is preferred. The non-Hungarian project manager (No10) see this matter quite differently:

> "Working is not only about working and meeting, but work is about if you meet someone in the corridor and they update you. I never have an update because you speak to him in Hungarian.

And I refuse to ask him what did you say after you left. It's bringing me down to a position I am not ok with. I asked him this 3 times and he still wouldn't".

The project manager (No10) gives example of non-work situations, which supports work. So, when communication is in Hungarian and it is not directly connected to work, it still has an effect on the job, and in some cases, it also means that work cannot be done effectively (Selmer/Lauring, 2014; Ahmed/Widén, 2018). Minor issues supporting work are communicated in small talk during work, not directly as orders.

A crucial part of professional discussions happen in informal settings. Information regarding a certain project are communicated and discussions during the lunches or coffee breaks, or in the corridor while passing by each others' offices. The interviewees mentioned situations where they tried to discuss this matter with Hungarian colleagues about using English in all communication. Despite asking, no change appeared in their behavior, and there are situations where a Hungarian-speaking colleague does not use English, not even in official settings like meetings or interviews. These actions and negative experiences have led Hungarian employees to develop coping strategies such as avoiding situations where English as a corporate language has to be used (Marschan/Welch/Welch, 1997). The non-Hungarian colleagues' initiation is not successful. Verbal professional relationships are affected by this attitude (Zhang, 2018). During the meetings, a feeling of exclusion and a negative atmosphere is created due to the initial small talk happening right before the actual meeting (as reported by one of the non-Hungarian project managers, No10):

"It is a small thing, but still. The meeting is beginning and it is an off time and you can talk about whatever you talk about and there is six people and one foreigner the six people are talking and laughing and the foreigner don't understand, even for five minutes, it seems a long time. It sets the mood to the meeting too since you already excluded me".

The company is divided up into two groups – Hungarians and non-Hungarians – and these are separated from each other. The employees contact others that they see facing the same challenges. In the context of language, the individual socializing within a workplace has been created through the linguistic background (Hinds/Neely/Cramton, 2014). In the case of Hun-Comp, there are many nationalities, but not in big groups. However, the gap between Hungarian as a national language and non-Hungarian languages as a whole still exists. In official settings, these challenges are part of the daily work, and cause a negative atmosphere, a sense of exclusion, which can polarize the group. One example from a non-Hungarian manager (No1) demonstrates this gap very well:

"[…] and one of the Russian colleagues came to me and she broke this topic. She is a very talented, young engineer. She said sometimes her colleagues are all speaking only Hungarian […] and then even in the email she was copied in, it was in Hungarian, she doesn't understand. She received an email in Hungarian".

Certain attitudes to language use and identity issues have an impact on personal relationships, creates a negative atmosphere which can also lead to negative categorization, and results even passive behavior such as communication avoidance (Marschan/Welch/Welch, 1997; Rogerson Revell, 2007; Gaibrois, 2018). These attitudes cause the opposite of the initiation of the common language; these can divide the company members into groups of similar-minded people (Cohen/Kassis-Henderson, 2017).

When English was introduced as a lingua franca at Hun-Comp, supportive processes were not built into their practices. Linguistic issues change organizational culture, not only the social or professional interactions (Tange/Lauring, 2009, Sanden, 2020). According to the interviewees, it did not seem necessary to support the change process. The communication with the subsidiaries had been in English before the official language changes, therefore it made the existing process official. The realization of necessary support happened after the process of change. It became clear that communication was indeed in English between the headquarters and subsidiaries, but not within the headquarters. Without assistance, it could be more difficult to adopt the new situation. The lack of a common language could mean a barrier to information transmission, but a preparation period and support through the changing period can help the organization to adopt and maintain the new culture. One of the Hungarian managers (No11), referred to the 2013 Hun-Comp strategy as a big shift from being local to going global:

> *"[…] it just happened that everything became international and everyone started to speak English, the mailing was in English and the meetings were all held in English. […] it has been told that everything is in English from now on and it was English since then".*

While the Hungarian managers reported that everything is done in English, in reality those employees who cannot speak Hungarian, could eventually point out many instances when English was not used.

Awareness-raising is important

The marginalization of people and polarizations of work teams have a negative impact on knowledge sharing. The fear to contribute in a certain meeting or project comes from the fear of losing face due to pronunciation errors or lack of vocabulary. Every non-native English speaker has a certain level of insecurity. Simultaneously, the actual importance of the person's level of proficiency is vastly overestimated (Charles, 2007; Lauring/Selmer, 2010; Bjørge/Whittaker, 2014). According to Cohen and Kassis-Herderson's (2017) study, excellent proficiency in a language is less important than wider metacognitive skills. These abilities can be developed by multicultural experiences, "particularly experiences that disconfirms expectations" (2017:14; Rosenblatt/Worthley/MacNab, 2013:374). It would be reasonable to assume that communication in one's every-

day work life with colleagues should be possible and easy for every individual in a multinational company operating at a far distance. This way the atmosphere can be positive and understanding, so within the company every member can contribute, regardless to the level of his or her English knowledge (Kankaanranta/Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). Everyone can be included, and it would be possible to overcome the silence caused by insecurity of language use, or fear of change.

Intergroup tension rises because of differencing members' influence, or by their knowledge of the language used by the manager or majority of the group members. As a result, this can cause marginalization, and therefore, can make members not feel that they have equal status within a group. A Hungarian senior member (No9) highlighted that diversity has to be supported and promoted at every level: "Ability is about how much they want to come and how much they want to help you, and not looking up or down at you". Inequality can put the collaboration at risk, which is needed to achieve shared goals, and knowledge sharing (Lønsmann, 2017). Soft aspects of social processes, such as respect and personal relations, have a crucial role in the successful implementation of a project. Positive interpersonal relationships and networking optimize work conditions by creating a respectful, understanding atmosphere for all the members, and supports team members in achieving goals. Socializing is an important part of company culture, since it effects corporate professional relationships (Lauring/Klitmøller, 2015; Ristino/Michalak/Małgorzata, 2018).

Changing to ELF is challenging since it needs more effort to manage the same task, while still trying to meet the same deadlines and manage the same projects. These facts can lead to incorrect interpretations and cause stress within a company, which makes it challenging to serve the long-term strategy. Hajro and Pudelko (2010) highlight the importance of cross-cultural awareness, motivation and knowledge of a foreign language, which can support the shifting process. "There is a common ground in cultures" one of the Hungarian engineers (No5) opined. Another Hungarian engineer mentioned that some of the members at the headquarters needed to be reminded frequently that English is the official language: "What my colleagues are experiencing here – that it is worth mentioning – is that English is the official language" (No7). Company members consider it challenging to adapt ELF from one day to the next. It slows down the processes, and needs more time and consideration from them in each task they are responsible for. Language policy created by the company and communicated by the HR within the company at Hun-Comp supports long-term strategic goals and does not necessarily make the daily working life immediately easier (Sanden/Lønsmann, 2018). It is challenging for its members to evolve and to accept this language policy, supporting processes and rising awareness should be part of the strategy. ELF has to be part of the organizational culture, in order to adapt its

needs to everyday working life by its rules, and have to be mentioned frequently so as to raise awareness.

Crucial role of managers

Shifting from one language to another is a top-down strategy and therefore the challenges regarding this project have to be addressed by the managers (Vigier/ Spencer-Oatey, 2017). Each manager values this responsibility at Hun-Comp differently.

> "[...] English is the official language. I am a foreigner, and I am in a department where every-body speaks English because the boss is kind of speaking English, but in other departments, where the colleagues are Hungarian, some experts are foreigners, so it is not always respected and they feel a bit excluded".

The non-Hungarian manager (No1) highlights the situation of the department, which is led by an international manager who does not speak Hungarian, where the atmosphere has been changed. More English is spoken. In contrast with the other departments, where the manager is Hungarian, and a few non-Hungarian experts work in different positions. English in the daily business life is not usual there. "The Hungarian speakers are sitting in the same room and speaking Hungarian with each other, and the others, Croatians and Romanians, can only wonder. This should change." added by the non-Hungarian manager (No3). Use of the official language widens the gap between the Hungarian and non-Hungarian employees. While the inpatriates have a positive attitude towards the changing process, the Hungarian speaking local employees are not as open to it, at the same level. This different attitude creates a barrier at the management level as well as the lower level of the company.

The lack of communication and sociolinguistic competence that comes from the level of a certain language knowledge means risk to the manager of losing face and creates a challenging situation for them. This leads to negative attitudes from both sides, manager and employee, and makes gaining trust even more difficult (Tenzer/Pudelco/Harzing, 2014; Woo/Giles, 2017). Adopting a new language, changing the existing routines and creating new standards in the every-day work places a new responsibility onto managers (Logemann/Piekkari, 2015). Despite the new strategy in 2013, there are still managers finding it challenging to use English language:

> "It even happened with my bosses, my previous boss. I was sitting with a colleague and he was young, maybe fresh graduate. He was very open, and spoke in English; the young generation is very open. So, my boss came and he started to talk to him in Hungarian. This happened once, twice, the third time I told him privately, separately I don't want to stop you in front of a junior colleague but if you are talking about work even if it is his assignment you have to speak English since I don't understand".

The above is a non-Hungarian project manager (No10) expressing their dissatisfaction with the boss, whom the interviewee later told that in order to work effectively, more communication in English is needed. This example highlights that language is connected to power and avoiding communication simply shows the existence of shadow hierarchies along language lines (Marschan-Piekkari/Welch/Welch.,1999; Lønsmann, 2017; Sajfert, et. al, 2017; Erjavec/Arsenijević/Starc, 2018).

The interviewee mentioned a situation that's not only excluding, but also creates a negative example in front of the newcomer. This way not only vertical but horizontal communication is jeopardized, since the manager behaved in a certain way and the employees was following that (Marschan-Piekkari/Welch/Welch, 1999). The interviewee pointed out that the lack of language skills of the manager might be because of speaking only Hungarian, even if the newcomer in this case was fluent in English. In order to not be evaluated negatively based on their lack of ability in English, the manager avoided using the common language, so for the interviewee it became clear that the manager was not fluent in English, and there was a lack of trying to include the interviewee. In maintaining not only a certain negative attitude, but also in strengthening it, such behavior can cause the failure of the shifting process (Neeley/Hinds/Cramton, 2012; Neeley 2012).

A certain language within the organization, and the managers' attitude about this, can most definitely influence the dynamics of the manager-employee relationship (Woo/Giles, 2017). Using a language has an impact on the relationships between group members and their relationship with the manager, and can affect their acceptance by the group (Zhang, 2018). Managers are not only responsible for setting directions and goals at the workplace, but also in the phase of implementation of any teamwork. A non-Hungarian project manager (No8) said: "I don't ask the others what my manager said after the meeting. He knew I don't speak English". This project manager (No8) also emphasized that the manager's behavior makes him/her lose power. Having to ask everyone for of all the necessary information again after a meeting or discussion seems to condone this behavior. The domination of this attitude and behavior jeopardizes team cohesion (Marschan/Welch/Welch, 1997). Managers not only lead, but are also a part of a team, and their behavior as a team member undeniably expresses a certain type of attitude. If the managers discuss certain details with the Hungarian employees and then only share a part of it with the non-Hungarian employees, it then conveys a special bond, creates an inner-circle, and makes others feel as out-group members.

The three concepts together (Table 2.) show that power and position at Hun-Comp are not in line with their language skills, and it makes the adaptation challenging (Beeler/Lecomte, 2017). At Hun-Comp, as a Hungarian multinational company, ELF is not only a change for the subsidiaries, but it is a great shift for

the headquarters. English is not the headquarters' language, and is not spoken fluently by all of the members. The reason for avoiding the use of English, and excluding the co-workers fluent in the official language, is not just a matter of language proficiency, but more of the control and power structure changes (Marschan-Piekkari/Welch/Welch.,1999). The local Hun-Comp members assume they have to give up control over their projects by not using their own native language, but a secondary language; it causes a 'reallocation of power' (Sanden, 2020). Fluency in English is a marginal point, since with more confident language skills, the management of projects would be easier, but the hidden reason of losing control and power seems stronger. The subsidiary members who speak English fluently may gain more influence than they would have had under normal circumstances (Vaara, et al., 2005).

Language barriers have been seen as a risk that can jeopardize one's position or influence (Woo/Giles, 2017). In the subsidiaries, English is more common and well-spoken than it is in the headquarters. In the biggest subsidiary, which is in Pakistan, English is one of the languages they learn in addition to their mother tongue. According to their history, English has been dominant in higher education for decades. Being a colony of the British Empire, the English language became the second most spoken language within the country. Most professionals speak English fluently. These differences can also create a negative attitude in the headquarters, since the power-structure and the language fluency are not in balance. Most projects are managed in the headquarters, and the subsidiaries are mostly responsible for delivering sub-tasks; with ELF, these dynamics are not the same. It is not only the language challenge, but the fact that subsidiary members are more fluent English speakers than the Hun-Comp members at the headquarters. The subsidiary members can have more affect on each project, they may perform better due to their language skill and the headquarters members are finding this difficult. They feel left behind, with less fluent English language losing face and perform worse or need more time and support than they would using their mother tongue (Vaara, et al., 2005; Neeley/Hinds/Cramton, 2012; Kankaanranta/Louhiala-Salminen, 2013; Lønsmann, 2017).

The interviewees highlighted that supporting processes such as raising cultural awareness, and having diversity within project teams, is needed for ELF project implementation (Karhunen et al., 2018). Understanding the cultural differences and accepting them can create inclusion, and this can give a foundation for a successful ELF project. Also, the importance of rules were mentioned several times during the interviews. According to the Hun-Comp members, only pragmatic, top-down actions are successful at the company. Rules regarding diversity and inclusion can create transparency, support common goals and give equal rights to all the members. The managers and employees, regardless of their position, have to be in line with the rules within the company; this is why it is necessary, according to the interviewees. Then attitude of the managers shows an

example, and either helps the adaptation, or creates gaps between the employees. Initially, long-term strategy of ELF has to be more explicit and putted in action in order to remind the members of the common goals and the fact that ELF can support reaching them.

Conclusion

In this article the focus was on Hun-Comp, a Hungarian multinational company using English as the official organizational language. The Hungarian language is little used in the international arena, therefore a common language, mainly ELF supposed to help the members with the different communication processes, shape their behavior and share knowledge and ideas. Despite the initial goals of the ELF project, at the headquarters due to the new organizational language a loss of some control over the subsidiaries seems to occur. Since 2013 the ELF project implementation is struggling, not just because of the lack of the members' English language knowledge, but because of the power restructuring it is causing. In the Hun-Comp case, it is not the headquarters' language that has been spread to the subsidiary, but another, outside language that is used as the official organizational language, and it is spoken more fluently by the subsidiary members. Therefore, ELF is identified as a risk that can break the dynamic of the existing power-structure. At Hun-Comp, cultural awareness and diversity within teams is needed; first, in order to understand differences between the cultures and languages, and secondly, to see these differences as a neutral fact, and not as a source of power or as a risk of losing control. This can give a foundation for using ELF without causing a gap because of the feeling of positions being jeopardized.

Acknowledgments

References

Ahmed, F./Widén, G. (2018) Knowledge sharing and language diversity in organizations: influence of code switching and convergence, European Journal of International Management, Vol.12 No.4, 351–373

Alt, M. A./Saplacan. Zs. (2019) Are bank advertisement appeals adapted to local culture? Lessons from multinational banks present in Romania and Hungary, European Journal of International Management, Vo13. No4. 533–552

Andersen H,/Rasmussen E. S. (2004) The role of language skills in corporate communication. Corporate Communications: An International Journal 9(3), 231–42.

Beeler, B./ Lecomte, P. (2017) Shedding light on the darker side of language: A dialogical approach to cross-cultural collaboration, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, Vol. 17(1) 53–67

Bjørge, A.K./Whittaker, S. (2014) Cross-cultural communication: Language Management, Chapter 2 in: Behrke, B., Claes, M-T., Global Leadership Practices, 51–67

Bousebaa, M./Tienari, J. (2019) Englishization and the Politics of Knowledge Production in Management Studies, Journal of Management Inquiry, 1–9

Bouquet, C./Birkinshaw, J., (2008) Weight Versus Voice: How Foreign Subsidiaries Gain Attention from Corporate Headquarters. Academy of Management Journal 51, 577–601.

Brannen, M.Y./Doz, Y. (2012) Corporate languages and strategic agility: trapped in your jargon or lost in translation?, California Management Review, Vol.54. No.3, 77–97.

Bryman, A., (2004) Social research methods. Oxford, New York.

Clément, R., (1980) Ethnicity, Contact, and Communicative Competence in Second Language. Language: Social Psychological Perspectives,147–154.

Clément, R./Kruidenier, B., (1985) Aptitude, Attitude and Motivation in Second Language Proficiency: A test of Clement's Model. Journal of Language and Social Psychology 21–37.

Charles, M. (2007) Language Matters in Global Communication, Journal of Business Communication, 44. (3) 260–82.

Charles M./Marschan-Piekkari R (2002) Language training for enhanced horizontal communication – a challenge for MNCs. Business Communication Quarterly 65(2), 9–29.

Charmaz, K. (1996) The Research for Meaning – Grounded Theory, in J. A. Smith, R. Harré, L Van Langenhove, (Eds.) Rethinking Methods in Psychology, London, Sage Publications, 27–49

Cohen, L./Kassis-Henderson, J. (2017) Revisiting culture and language in global management teams: Toward a multilingual turn, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management Vol.17(1) 7–22.

Cordeiro, C.M. (2017) Using systemic functional linguistic metafunction as a tool in identifying Agency in organizational change in cross-cultural management contexts International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, Vol. 17(1) 125–135

Dahms, S. (2019) The influence of competences and institutions on the international market orientation in foreign-owned subsidiaries, European Journal of International Management, Vol 13. No3. 354–380.

Douglas, D., (2003) Grounded theories of management: A methodological review. Management Research News 44–52.

Éltető, A./Udvari, B., (2019) Export of Hungarian SMEs – testing network internationalization, Journal of East European Management Studies, Vol.24(4) pp. 614–635.

Erjavec, K./Arsenijević, O./Starc, J., (2018) Satisfaction with managers' use of communication channels and its effect on employee-organisation relationships, Journal of East European Management Studies, Vol. 23(4), 559–578

Fenyvesi, A. (2005) Hungarian language contact outside Hungary: Studies on Hungarian as a minority language, John Benjamins Publishing company

Fredriksson, R./Barner-Rasmussen, W./Piekkari, R. (2006) the multinational corporation as a multilingual organization the notion of common corporate language, Corporate Communications: An International Journal, 11(4), 406–23

Gaibrois, C. (2018) It crosses all the boundaries': hybrid language use as empowering resource, European Journal of International Management, Vol.12 No.1/2, 82 – 110

Griffin, R.W./O'Leary-Kelly (2004) An introduction to the dark side. In: Griffin, RW, O'Leary-Kelly (eds), The Dark Side of Organizational Behavior. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1–19

Hajro, A./Pudelko, M. (2010) An analysis of core-competences of successful multinational team leaders, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management 10(2) 175–194

Hinds, J.P./Neely, T.B./Cramton D.C. (2014) Language as a lightning rod: Power contests, emotion regulation, and subgroup dynamics in global teams, Journal of International Business Studies 45, 536–561

Jones, R./Noble, G., (2007) Grounded theory and management research: a lack of integrity? Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal Vol2.No2., 84–103

Joyce, N./Vincze, L./Marton, E.J., (2016) Crossing the communication divide: Intergroup contact and the desire to learn the outgroup's language. Journal of International and Intercultural Communication 9, 295–311

Kankaanranta, A./Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2013) "What language does global business speak?" – The concept and development of BELF Ibérica, núm. 26, 17–34

Karhunen, P./Kankaanranta, A./Louhiala-Salminen, L./Piekkar, R. (2018) Let's Talk about Language: A Review of Language-Sensitive Research in International Management, Journal of Management Studies 55:6, 980–1013

Kemppainen, R.P., Holden, N.J., (2020) Intertwining the individual and organizational experience: asymmetries of cross-cultural knowledge sharing, networking and learning, European Journal of International Management, Vol.14 No.1, 92 – 117

Komori-Glatz, M., (2018) Conceptualizing English as a business lingua franca, European Journal of International Management, Vol.12 No.1/2, 46 – 61

Kuada, J., (2012) Research methodology: A project guide for university students. Samfunds Litteratur.

Lauring J./Klitmøller A. (2015) Corporate language-based communication avoidance in MNCs: a multisited ethnography approach. Journal of World Business 50(1), 46–55.

Lauring J./Selmer J. (2010) Multicultural organizations: Common language and group cohensiveness, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, 10(3), 267–284.

Logemann M./Piekkari R (2015) Localize or local lies? The power of language and translation in the multinational corporation. Critical Perspectives on International Business 11(1), 30–53

Lønsmann, D. (2017) Embrace it or resist it? Employees' reception of corporate language policies, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, Vol. 17(1), 101–123

Marschan R./Welch D./Welch L (1997) Language: The forgotten factor in international management, European Management Journal, Vol.15, No5, 591–598

Marschan-Piekkari R./Welch D./Welch L (1999) In the shadow: the impact of language on structure, power and communication in the multinational. International Business Review 8: 421–40

Meyer, K. E./Peng, M. W. (2005) Probing theoretically into Central and Eastern Europe: Transactions, resources, and institutions. Journal of International Business Studies, 36(6), 600–621

Neeley, T. B./Hinds, P. M./Cramton, C. D. (2012) The (un)hidden turmoil of language in global collaboration. Organizational Dynamics, 41(3), 236–244.

Neeley T (2013) Language matters: status loss and achieved status distinctions in global organizations. Organization Science 24(2), 476–97

Ristino, R.J./Michalak, J./Małgorzata, (2018) Employee Perceptions of Organizational Culture's influence on their Attitudes and Behaviour, Journal of East European Management Studies, Vol. 23(2), 295–322.

Rogerson-Revell, P (2007) Using English for international business: a European case-study, English for Specific Purposes 26, 103–12

Rosenblatt V./Worthley R./MacNab B (2013) From contact to development in experiential cultural intelligence education: the mediating influence of expectancy disconfirmation. Academy of Management: Learning & Education 12(3), 356–379.

Sajfert, D./Nikolić, M./Vukonjanski, J./Terek, E./Vulović, M (2017) The impact of leaders' ethical behavior on certain individual and organizational effects: the Serbian case, Journal of East European Management Studies, Vol. 22(4), 444–483.

Sanden, G. R. (2020). Ten reasons why corporate language policies can create more problems than they solve. Current Issues in Language Planning, 21(1), 22–44.

Sanden, G. R./Lønsmann, D. (2018). Discretionary Power on the Front Line: A Bottom-up Perspective on Corporate Language Management. European Journal of International Management, 12(1–2), 111–137

Selmer, J./Lauring, J. (2014) Unhappy expatriates at work: subjective ill-being and work outcomes, European J. of International Management , Vol. 8, No. 6, 579–599

Smokrović, E../Žvanut, M F./Bajan, A./Radić, R./Žvanut, B., (2019) The effect of job satisfaction, absenteeism, and personal motivation on job quitting: A survey of Croatian nurses, Journal of East European Management Studies, Vol. 24(3), 398–422.

Stark, D./Bruszt, L. (2001) One way or multiple paths: For a comparative sociology of East European capitalism, American Journal of Sociology, 106(4), 1129–1137

Strauss, A./Corbin, J. (1990) Grounded theory research, procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria, Qualitative Sociology, Vol 13. No.1., 3–21.

Tange, H./Lauring, J. (2009) Language Management and Social Interaction within the Multilingual Workplace. Journal of Communication Management, 13, 218–232

Tenzer, H./Pudelco, M./Harzing A, (2014) The impact of language barriers on trust formation in multinational teams, Journal of International Business Studies (2014) 45, 508–535

Tenzer, H./Terjesen, S./Harzing, A.-W., (2017) Language in International Business: A Review and Agenda for Future Research. Management International Review, Vol 57., No.6. 815–854

Vaara E./Tienari J./Piekkari R, et al. (2005) Language and the circuits of power in a merging multinational corporation. Journal of Management Studies 42(3), 595–623.

Varela, O.E., (2019) Multicultural competence: an empirical comparison of intercultural sensitivity and cultural intelligence, European Journal of International Management, Vol.13 No.2, 177–197

Vigier, M./Spencer- Oatey, H. (2017) Code-switching in newly formed multinational project teams: Challenges, strategies and effects, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, Vol 17(1), 23–37.

Wilmot, N.V. 2017. Language and the faces of power: A theoretical approach, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, Vol. 17(1), 85–100

Woo D./Giles, H., (2017) Language attitudes and intergroup dynamics in multilingual organizations, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, Vol. 17(1), 39–52

Zhang, L.E. (2018) Gaining acceptance from local colleagues: Evidence from Indian colleagues in China, Chapter 5 in: Zhang, L.E., Harzing A-W., Fan, S.X., 2018 Managing Expatriates in China, A Language and Identity Perspective, Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 121–151

Appendix I. Profile of the interviewees

Department	Job Role	Experience at Hun-Comp	Nationality (Hungarian; Foreigner)	Daily job-language[4] (Hungarian; English)
HR	Team Leader (No1)	2003-present	Foreigner	English
	HR Advisor (No2)	2013-present	Hungarian	Both
	Team Leader (No3)	2013-present	Foreigner	English
	HR Partner (No4)	2017-present	Hungarian	Both
Upstream	Senior Drilling Engineer (No5)	1995–2001; 2001-present[1]	Hungarian	Both (mostly English)[2]
	Construction Manager (No6)	1988-present	Hungarian	Both (mostly English)[2]
	Engineer (No7)	2005–2006; 2006-present[1]	Hungarian	Both (mostly English)[2]
	Project Manager (No8)	1985 – present (at headquarters: 2016–2019)	Foreigner	English
	Senior expert group business development (No9)	2016-present	Hungarian	Both (mostly English)[2]
	Project Manager (No10)	2016–2019; 2019-present[1] (at headquarters: 2016-present)	Foreigner	English
Media and Com.	Communication and Media Team Leader (No11)	2011 – present	Hungarian	Both (mostly Hungarian)[3]

[1]*changed their position within the company
[2]*working language is English but they have to report in Hungarian towards the headquarters

[3]*every kind of communication is in Hungarian the global communication is translated in English; the leader supervises the translated ones – that are based on the Hungarian content – but not directly creating them;
[4]*the language they use most frequently during their everyday tasks