

CZU: 81`276.6:004=111:005.57

[https://doi.org/10.59295/sum10\(180\)2023_18](https://doi.org/10.59295/sum10(180)2023_18)

LINGUISTIC IDENTITY AND THE IMPACT OF CORPORATE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

*Inga GALBEN, Viorica MOLEA,**Universitatea de Stat din Moldova*

The article analyses how language shifts within multinational organizations under foreign management influence, focusing on how communication styles are impacted depending on the social level within the company. Managers influence subordinates' linguistic behaviors and as a result their cultural positioning. It highlights language as a marker of status and authority, with managers' choices influencing subordinates' adoption of similar linguistic forms, including vocabulary, speech patterns, and specialized jargon. English emerges as a global language in business settings, streamlining communication but posing challenges such as employee proficiency disparities and limiting linguistic diversity. Case studies like Rakuten's English-only policy illustrate how language proficiency strategically affects multinational corporations, impacting cultural identity. Overall, the text explores the complexities of language in these environments, showcasing its evolution, challenges, and benefits in shaping organizational communication and cultural expression.

Keywords: *lingua franca, organizational communication, leadership influence, culture, linguistic identity.*

IDENTITATEA LINGVISTICĂ ȘI IMPACTUL CUTLURII ORGANIZAȚIONALE CORPORATIVE

Prin prezentarea unor studii de caz, articolul analizează schimbarea limbajului în cadrul organizațiilor multinaționale sub influența managementului străin, având în prim-plan stilurile de comunicare ale managerilor, care afectează comportamentul lingvistic al subordonaților și poziționarea culturală a acestora. Limbajul reprezintă un indicator al statutului și autorității în comunitățile profesionale din cadrul organizațiilor multiculturale. Alegerile lingvistice ale managerilor influențează adoptarea de către subordonați a unor forme lingvistice similare la nivel lexical, forme de exprimare și termeni de specialitate, care ulterior sunt adaptate limbii materne. Engleza este limba globală în mediul de afaceri, simplificând comunicarea, dar generând reacții de reticență din partea unor angajați, întrucât nivelul de calificare profesională este direct proporțional abilităților lingvistice, respectiv duce la limitarea diversității lingvistice. Studiile de caz, precum politica gigantului din domeniul tehnologiilor informaționale Rakuten privind comunicarea exclusivă în limba engleză, ilustrează cum competența lingvistică afectează strategic corporațiile multinaționale, influențând identitatea culturală. În ansamblu, textul explorează complexitatea limbii în mediul profesional, evidențiind evoluția sa și modelarea comunicării organizaționale cu utilizarea unui limbaj hibridizat.

Cuvinte-cheie: *lingua franca, comunicare organizațională, influență managerială, cultură, identitate lingvistică.*

Introduction

The given study addresses the topic of standard language change, specifically within multinational organizations under the influence of foreign management. The study's scope is limited to standard language, excluding professional and specialized terminology. However, we will refer to terms of English origin that have gained broader usage in the professional field due to their usage in written and verbal communication by non-native speakers. The study is interdisciplinary, as one of the sources for language modification involves the influence of a group of individuals in higher hierarchical positions within organizations over a larger group through representatives of immediately lower hierarchical levels. This process is rooted in social and cultural factors. It has been studied based on several cases from multinational organizations by professionals in behavioral and social fields of study.

The current paper is a part of the first chapter of the Ph.D. thesis about the sources of hybridization of the standard language. So, we will address the issues of language change, organizational communication, and language policies.

Sociolinguistic Impact of the Global Language

Linguistic studies, as an example in Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet's studies [1, p. 53] about gender and managerial styles of communication or in Lesley's Milroy and Matthew Gordon's book on Sociolinguistics [2, p. 96] about the language variation in different classes and many more, highlight that managerial styles of communication contribute to language variation. Managers often serve as linguistic models, and their language choices, including vocabulary, speech patterns, and discourse styles, influence the linguistic behavior of subordinates. This is deeply rooted in our nature according to the well-known Stanford professor Robert Sapolsky in his book „Behave” [3, p. 433], we are looking up to those who are more powerful and not only from the physical perspective. As in a study mentioned in the professor's book, children up to 2 years old were shown a movie with 2 squares, one bigger than the other. The smaller square in a fight won the bigger square and children retained their attention more on the result, as this one was not expected by them. In another study, analysis was made on the language used by parents to teach their children about class differences and how they position in society (example about the immigrant narrative to their children: „When your grandparents emigrated here, they couldn't even . . .”, setting this way expectations and the social positioning [3, p. 207] This way we learn from our early childhood to adapt and „stay in line”. From his point of view, the physical power of human beings shifted to social power. Those with a higher position in the hierarchy is the one who decides how others interact and communicate. By our language choice and language patterns we position ourselves in a certain cultural community and create our linguistic identity. It is determined by the frequency with which we use certain linguistic constructions and the variety of the vocabulary.

Language as a Maker of Status and Authority

Managers often hold positions of authority and act as linguistic role models within organizations. Studies in sociolinguistics, such as those by William Labov („Sociolinguistic Patterns”) [4, p. 37], demonstrate how language can serve as a marker of social status and identity. The examples given on the Portuguese and Indian ethnic groups from New York City during several generations conclude that the first and the second generations didn't speak too much as they were not confident about their speech and only the third generation of English speakers were more vocal and entered the social life not only as workers but also as merchants and municipal officers. This highlights the fact that the more confident their speech was, the more chances of a higher hierarchical position in the society they had. Therefore, the language used by managers might be perceived as prestigious or authoritative, influencing subordinates to adopt similar linguistic forms to align with the perceived status. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, uses the concept of the “linguistic market” to show that we as users are choosing what status to give to a certain language based on criteria that are related to the social and economic status of the country [5, p. 337].

Adaptation of Language Features

Managerial language preferences and communication styles may lead to the adaptation of specific language features among subordinates. For instance, certain lexical choices, speech registers, or even accents might become prevalent within certain organizational contexts due to the influence of managerial communication. Managers often introduce or popularize certain terminologies, phrases, or expressions within their communication. These lexical choices might reflect the organizational culture, values, or specific professional domains. Subordinates tend to mirror or adopt these lexical preferences, integrating them into their own communication within the workplace. Over time, these lexicons become part of the shared language repertoire among employees. They frequently set the tone and formality level of communication within an organization, in a verbal and written form. They might use particular speech registers or levels of formality depending on the context, audience, or purpose of communication. Subordinates, observing and adapting to managerial communication, might align their own speech registers and levels of formality to match those demonstrated by managers. This convergence leads to a consistent pattern of communication within the organizational context. This is especially noticed in a multinational environment. I've noticed in the example of Romanian speakers at the workplace, that if the manager uses more idioms in the speech, their subordinates will use the same form, though are more tempted to adapt to words that are of Latin origin.

1. The English native speaker will say: „He comes across as more aggressive in communication.”
2. The Romanian speaker will say: „He is perceived as more aggressive in communication.” (mental translation from the Romanian expression „a fi perceput”)
3. The English native speaker will say: „I got into the room.”
4. The Romanian speaker will say: „I entered the room.” (mental translation from „a intra”).

While less common, managerial accents or specific pronunciation patterns can also influence subordinates. Especially in multicultural settings, certain speech patterns or accents used by managers may be perceived as prestigious or authoritative. Subordinates might unconsciously or consciously adopt elements of these accents or pronunciation patterns to align themselves with the linguistic norms set by managerial communication.

In specialized fields, managers often use specialized jargon or technical language related to their industry or profession. This professional vocabulary becomes part of the organizational discourse and indicates a high level of professional experience and, thus higher social level within the professional community. Subordinates, seeking to communicate effectively and assimilate within the organizational environment, may incorporate and adapt this specialized language into their own communication, facilitating clearer and more efficient communication within the organization. Even if the communication involves speakers of two languages or more.

English as a Global Language, Rakuten Case Study

Most of the time in organizations the language choice is dictated by the managers based on business needs and economic reasons. If the investors are from an Italian-speaking country it is most probable that the recruitment will be focused on Italian-speaking candidates and the language of the internal policies and rules will be also Italian. Recently countries that hire on an international level or have a high level of workforce import will adopt English as a cross-cultural and official language despite the origin of the investors and founders.

The reasons are pretty well-known. English has emerged as the primary language for international communication in multinational corporations. It serves as a common ground for employees from diverse linguistic backgrounds to interact seamlessly, fostering smoother collaboration and eliminating linguistic barriers. It is easier to find a qualified employee who has a good command of English as a second language rather than Italian.

The adoption of English as a standard language within organizations streamlines processes and enhances operational efficiency. Standardizing communication in English simplifies documentation, instructions, and procedures, ensuring consistency across different branches and locations. It is time and money-consuming for an international organization to translate the documents. Even when we have all the high technological tools, the time of response and implication is lower than using specific tools and adaptations, such as Google translate, Online dictionaries, or generative AI tools.

English serves as the primary language for a vast amount of knowledge resources, academic literature, and business publications. Within organizations, using English as a medium of communication provides employees with access to a wide array of information, enabling them to stay updated with the latest industry trends and research. In the global business landscape, English proficiency is often considered a key asset. Companies that use English as their primary language have a competitive edge in reaching broader international markets, negotiating deals, and expanding their customer base. While English as a global language offers numerous advantages, its dominance also poses challenges. Language proficiency disparities among employees can lead to communication gaps and misunderstandings. Additionally, the imposition of English as the sole language may hinder the promotion of linguistic diversity within organizations.

To lower the risks and leverage the advantages Hiroshi Mikitani, CEO at Rakuten, a Japanese Technology company, [6] in 2010 issued an English first language-speaking policy across all locations where the company had offices. All employees had 2 years to study English and to pass a test so they could keep their working place. As their jobs were at risk all employees started to study and to increase their chances,

they were encouraged to use English even with those colleagues who were Japanese speakers. Their salaries were also linked to their English-speaking skills. [7, p. 18]. All employees didn't accept and found it difficult to talk in a foreign language to people who they knew were Japanese. They compared the emotional discomfort to the sense of „writing with the left hand when you are right-handed”. The case was studied by Tsedal Neeley, a professor at Harvard Business School, who focused her investigation on how language impacts multinational corporations and offers strategies for effective communication across linguistic and cultural barriers. Neeley emphasizes that language proficiency is not merely a communication tool but a strategic asset for multinational corporations. Language proficiency enables effective collaboration, negotiation, and understanding in diverse global settings. Her book delves into how language proficiency influences organizational performance. Effective communication in the native languages of various stakeholders enhances productivity, innovation, and relationship building. On the other hand, it impacted a lot the Japanese language spoken at the workplace. Mitikami hoped that Japanese employees will embrace a more Western European mindset and Western culture along with language skills [7, p. 33]

Local Flavour in the Global Context

According to some contemporary scholars like Lera Boroditski, Guy Deutscher, and Viorica Marian, language can shape the way we think and perceive the world. The concept is based on the Sapir-Worth language relativity idea, which suggests that the speaker sees the world based on the primary construction of his native language [8, pp. 144-145]. Guy Deutscher makes a deep analysis in his book „Through the Language Glass” of this concept. He brings examples from the ancient philosopher and writer, who mentioned the water to be dark and green, while we see the water being blue. Lera Boroditski writes about the sensitivity of Russian speakers when they distinguish between light blue - „goluboy” (голубой) and dark blue „siniy” (синий) [9]. More examples are given in Viorica Marian's book about the way people find associations and prioritize things while their eye movement is recorded [10, p. 37]. When the word in their native language is masculine or feminine people tend to have different adjectives attributed to the objects. We attribute more feminine adjectives to objects that in our native language are feminine. Based on the same association with our native language we will address animals he/she even when speaking in English, transferring the gender from our native language. A Romanian and a German speaker will call the dog he, as in native language it is „un câine” and „der Hund”, but a Russian speaker will address to the dog her as in Russian it is „odna sobaka” (одна собака).

In the same way Russian speakers will mention the shade of blue color when speaking English, Japanese speakers after two years of English-only policy, started to adapt English to their cultural identity. Though more affected was their native language by loanwords and vocabulary expansion, there are English words but written with Japanese characters アイスクリーム (aisu kuriimu – ice cream), インフルエンサ (infuruensaa – influencer), リモートワーク (rimooto waaku – remote work) and オンライン (onrain – online). The influx of English terms has expanded Japanese vocabulary, particularly in technology, business, and popular culture. English influence has led to modifications in Japanese pronunciation, especially for borrowed words. The phonetic adaptation of English sounds into Japanese phonology has altered some native pronunciation patterns. English has influenced sentence structures and communication styles in Japanese. Direct translation of English sentences or thought patterns into Japanese can lead to changes in syntax and grammar. As the official correspondence was all accepted in English only even if both the sender and the receiver were speakers of Japanese. Moreover, the cultural behaviour of Japanese to add more people to emails has put pressure on the grammatical accuracy of the written language. This type of behavior was borrowed by other cultures as well. So, in the result, people of different cultures were in the same email and all were adopting the Japanese style of communication with applying the English syntax.

It is still being debated if the language that we learn is innate and if we acquire it from our parents the grammatical way of structuring the sentences. There are different examples of how children learn language, especially when we talk about grammar. Children tend to use simple grammar, without hearing it from their parents. No adult would say „More outside” when they want to be allowed to stay outside [11]. Without

specific training, children learn to speak using correct grammatical constructions in time and no formal education is given for the primary use of grammatical structures. Noam Chomsky believed that children are pre-wired to universal grammar. Based on this concept we might say that adults are pre-wired to learn a foreign language as we all have grammatical constructions already inherited from our parents

In her analysis, Tsedal Neeley highlighted that even though proficiency in English is often seen as a valuable skill for people from multinational organizations and it is studied and applied as a global language, Japanese distinct and resilient language. From the internal correspondence and documentation, there were certain patterns identified, Japanese style or writing with extra arguments when important decisions were to be made, cultural way of addressing, and in some cases Japanese words that were adapted to English.

The adoption of English elements has mostly occurred in specific domains, and Japanese speakers maintain a strong attachment to their native language and cultural identity. The adoption of these English loanwords into the Japanese lexicon reflects the influence of global trends, technological advancements, and shifts in lifestyle and work culture. The coexistence of English borrowings and the preservation of the Japanese language's core elements illustrate the complex and evolving linguistic landscape not only in Japan but also on a global scale.

The Language Policies in Tech Companies: Fostering Collaboration in Multilingual Environment

In the increasingly globalized landscape of tech corporations, language plays a pivotal role in enhancing collaboration and efficiency among employees. Language policies within these companies often aim to create a cohesive and inclusive work environment, and increase chances of expansion at the same time there are financial and economic interests. Examining the case studies of Rakuten expanding from Japan and Endava a British company, with 5000 employees and offices on three continents, that started their activity from the Republic of Moldova sheds light on the strategies and implications of such policies.

Rakuten's English-only policy in 2010, as stated by the company's CEO, Hiroshi Mikitani, aimed to create a common language for internal communication, even within Japan, breaking from traditional Japanese corporate culture. The move emphasized the use of English as the primary language for meetings, documentation, and interactions, aligning with the company's global expansion goals - this decision aimed to facilitate collaboration among diverse teams across various countries, streamlining communication within the organization and making sure the expats will bring with them the Western mindset, but after 2 years, the culture impacted the language, as Neeley concluded.

Endava's English-only policy emphasizes standardization for streamlined communication. Employees are recommended to use English in all correspondence and internal procedures. Even when addressing team members whose native language is the same and other than English, it is recommended to write in English. The purpose is to have a common understanding in case there is a need to add other people from different locations to the correspondence. One of the objectives is to help employees practice English and improve their communication skills. As a result, the language is spoken in cross-located teams by people of different generations and different backgrounds. There is just one small step from transferring the communication patterns from the professional environment to the social life.

In her book „The Rise of English” Rosemary Salomone analyzes the path that the English language had during the last decades how it reached a high level of usage on a global scale and how it became the lingua franca in education, science and how it significantly contributes to the shape of the cultural and social identity, suggesting based on years of research that this prestige is given by people when choosing to use it in culture, business, education and science. But it is also a source of inequity and conflict across continents [12, p. 166]. As a conclusion the author argues that some of the factors that have contributed to the spread and popularity of English, such as colonialism, globalization, internationalization, technology, and American soft power. It's also debated whether English can meet the diverse needs and interests of the world population, and warns that monolingual anglophones are at a disadvantage and at risk of isolation in a multilingual world. Populations are also concerned about preserving their culture and linguistic identity.

Conclusion

While investigating the subject in the international resources and other tech companies, comparing to the cases of Endava from the Chisinau office (this was observed while serving as a full-time employee), we came to several conclusions:

1. The evolution of the Romanian language used in multinational corporations is mostly attributed to the dominance of the English language as a lingua franca. This linguistic shift is a consequence of adopting the English-only policy and impacted linguistic behaviors and cultural values of the employees.

2. The managerial communication in shaping linguistic norms within these corporations. The adoption of English as a primary language impacts communication dynamics among employees on all hierarchical levels and influences the organizational culture not only across locations but also across generations.

3. Beyond examining the changes in linguistic behavior, our research delves into the complexities of the challenges and benefits of using English as the primary language in a diverse, multilingual, and multicultural corporate environment. There are also obstacles faced by people of different generations when using a foreign language at the workplace, and advantages gained from the standardization of English in such contexts, there are both drawbacks and potential benefits.

Managerial communication styles and language policies, on a smaller scale, influence the adaptation and hybridization of language features among employees, as well as the preservation and expression of cultural identity, as social stratification on a larger scale.

References:

1. P. Eckert and S. McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
2. Milroy and M. Gordon, *Sociolinguistics. Methods and Interpretation*. England: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
3. R. M. Sapolsky, *Behave. The Ultimate Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*, New York: Penguin Press, 2017.
4. W. Labov, *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978.
5. R. Salomone, *Rise of English. Global Politics and the Power of Language*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.
6. *Wikipedia*. Available: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rakuten>.
7. T. Neeley, *The Language of Global Success*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017.
8. G. Deutscher, *Through the Language Glass. Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages*. London: Penguin Random House, 2010.
9. L. Boroditsky, „*Edge.org HOW DOES OUR LANGUAGE SHAPE THE WAY WE THINK?*”, 06.11.2009. Available: https://www.edge.org/conversation/lera_boroditsky-how-does-our-language-shape-the-way-we-think. [Accessed on 2021].
10. V. Marian, *The Power of Language, how the codes we used to think transform our mind*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2023.
11. S. Pinker, „*Youtube, ”Linguistics as a Window to Understanding the Brain | Big Think*. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-B_ONJIEcE&t=341s.
12. R. Solomone, *The Rise of English, Global Politics and the Power of Language*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Date despre autor:

Inga GALBEN, doctorandă, Școala Doctorală de Studii Umanistice, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova.

E-mail: inga.crina@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-6162-9545

Viorica MOLEA, conferențiar universitar, doctor habilitat în filologie, Universitatea de Stat din Moldova.

E-mail: molea_viorica@yahoo.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-5048-0856