Multilingualism at Work

From policies to practices in public, medical and business settings

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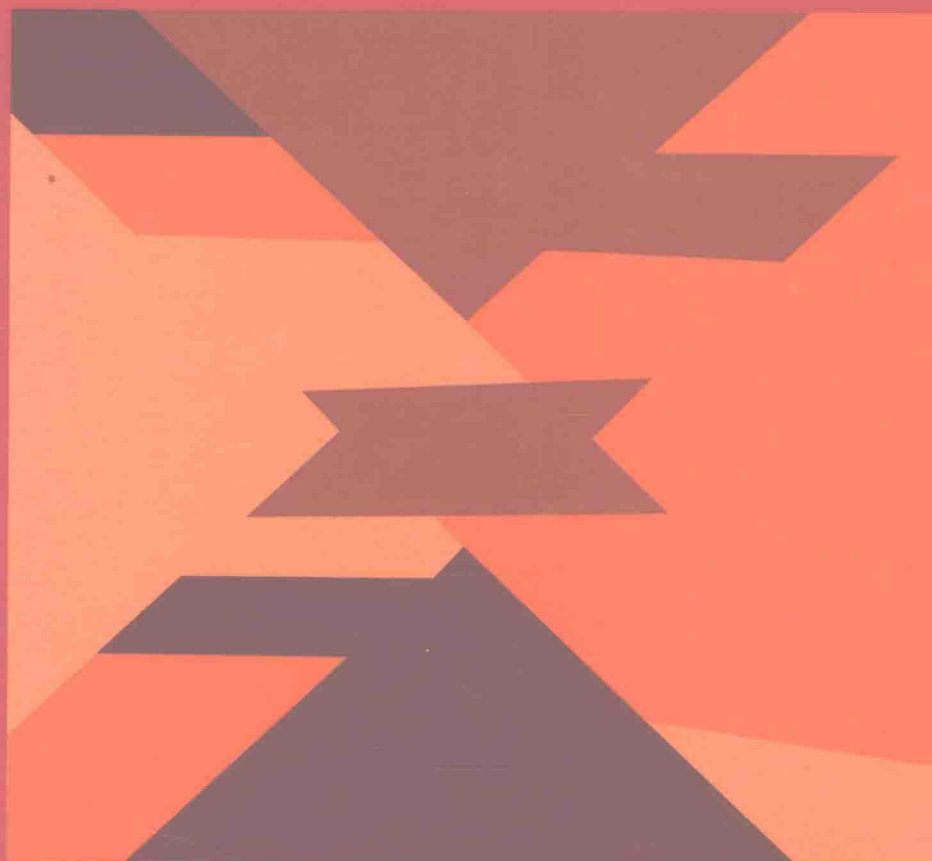
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A brief introduction

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Increasing linguistic and ethnic diversity is a given in many parts of the world. In the Northern hemisphere, especially Europe and North America, however, the necessity to move fluently between languages and to communicate with people from various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in everyday life seems to be a new, and sometimes irritating phenomenon. Here, the emergence of nation-states has fuelled the idea of one nation – one language and, as a consequence, the development of policies designed to impose linguistic homogeneity, or monolingualism (Ellis 2006). For a long period of time, this struggle for homogeneity concealed the continuing diversity of dialects and local languages, so that social cohesion and relatively stable national borders finally appeared as being inseparably bound to the existence of national languages. This concept of linguistically unified nation-states had many ardent advocates, and many ethnic conflicts have been intensified by language regimes which attempt to impose linguistic homogeneity on de facto heterogeneous societies.

Today, however, even in Europe or North America the originally strong ties between concepts such as "nation", "state", and "language" become fuzzy. Just to give two examples: Shop clerks in New York City accept Spanish as the language of interaction even if customers are obviously not native speakers of Spanish (Callahan 2006). While Spanish seems to spread in the US, migrant languages play a more vital role in the UK: migrant patients in Manchester make increasingly use of interpreting services although the majority of them comes from former British colonies, have been living in the UK for a long time, and presumably speak English reasonably well. Nevertheless, these patients call on interpreters for their community or family languages, such as Urdu (Khwaja, Scharma, Wong et al. 2006). It seems that increased mobility and the spread of communication technologies change the patterns of migration and mix up linguistic landscapes and linguistic regimes: "super-diversity" (Vertovec 2006) and "transnationalism" (Pries 2008) lead to greater variation in forms of linguistic integration, even

among individuals who otherwise share the same socio-demographic features (such as age, gender, or nationality).

Within the specific political context of the European Union (EU), one of the crucial questions the 27 member states want to see addressed is how a knowledge-based society designed to ensure economic competitiveness and social cohesion can be created despite the fact that, following enlargement, the EU is with 23 official languages linguistically more diverse than ever before. Correspondingly, integrated research projects on societal multilingualism and linguistic diversity management are funded, such as "DYLAN" (www.dylan-project.org). According to the project description, DYLAN primarily "aims to provide scientific backing to the concept of multilingual repertoires as resources that can be put to use in a variety of professional, political and educational contexts" (ibid.). Conclusive results of the DYLAN project are not yet available. However, it also needs to be pointed out that comparable research issues are being explored at the national level in other EU-countries.

At any rate, the need or desire for communication in non-national languages is no longer confined to new arrivals or first generation immigrants. As Coulmas (2005: 12) puts it: "it has become increasingly difficult to restrict the use of community languages, including the languages of autochthonous minorities which were formerly a target of strong discrimination." However, while the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages has led to a revitalization of formerly discriminated autochthonous languages in many European countries, attempts to regulate and constrain the use of immigrant languages continue (Gorter & Extra 2004).

The difficulty to regulate and prescribe language use under the condition of societal multilingualism correlates with changing scientific perspectives on multilingual communication. While in the past linguistic research was focussing mainly on grammatical aspects of phenomena of bi- and multilingualism, such as code-switching (cf. the review in Gafaranga 2007), mixed languages (Matras 2000), or, more generally, on the variation of linguistic systems in the context of language contact (Thomason 1997), approaches inspired by Conversation Analysis and ethnomethodology perceive bilingual repertoires as communicative resources. These resources are "locally selected" to establish a bilingual interactional order (Mondada 2004: 19; Mondada 2007). Mondada discusses phenomena of language choice and switch in the context of multilingual teams and shows that participants make use of their repertoires in a flexible way to achieve general communicative goals, such as the selection of addressees, repair, and recipient design. Similarly, Lüdi & Heiniger (2007) highlight the mismatch between official language policies of a bilingual bank in Switzerland and the actual linguistic performance of bank employees in their work meetings. This performance is

characterized by a high degree of flexibility and adaptation; and the most important factor seems to be the achievement of work-related goals. Ideologies of language and ethnic identity, individual preferences, and even linguistic competencies are secondary in this case. Thus, shifting between different linguistic repertoires is neither necessarily an attempt to compensate the lack of proficiency in another language, nor is it always linked with ethnicity. In an interview on conversations with Turkish-speaking clients, a bank clerk in Hamburg (Germany) reports: "I wouldn't say that they all speak Turkish with me. It depends on the situation. If someone addresses me in Turkish, I speak Turkish to that person. But if the client wants to switch to German, I continue in German" (Meyer 2009: 43, our translation). In the perception of this clerk, the choice between Turkish and German is simply situational, oriented towards the clients' preferences, and not strictly related to group identities. He does not speak Turkish to express his "Turkishness", but to accommodate to the wishes of his clients. Such a purely instrumental way of handling multilingual constellations is of course not the only possibility; language as such is tailor-made for ethnic projections (Jaffe 2007) and the construction of national identities (Wodak et al. 1998).

The flexible use of linguistic resources in the context of multilingual interaction has been analysed first by Müller (1989) with reference to Goffman's (1981) concept of "footing". In his analysis of ethnographic interviews with Italian migrants in Germany, he highlights that switching between direct and mediated interaction, i.e. between different modes of interaction, seems to be an adequate solution to the challenges of the specific linguistic constellation between the German interviewer and the Italian interviewees: "It leaves the active competences of all participants in the constellation fairly unrestricted and all participants can express themselves in the language they have best command of" (ibid.). Referring to Müller's work, Apfelbaum (2004: 119ff.) shows that this way of dealing with available linguistic resources is not restricted to ad-hoc-interpreting, but also occurs in formal settings with trained interpreters.

A dialogical perspective on interpreter-mediated interaction has been put forward more systematically by Wadensjö in her dissertation based on audio-recorded medical encounters and immigrant hearings in Sweden with immigrants of Russian origin (1992, 1998). When exploring utterances of interpreters as mainly consisting of two functions, namely *translation* and *coordination* of the others' talk, Wadensjö takes into consideration not only everyday-life ideas of treating utterances as (chunks) of meaningful text we can refer to in terms of "originals" and "renditions" or "source texts" and "target texts", but also the fact that participants are understood and make sense only on the basis of larger sequential units of talk or text, the constellation of people present in a given setting, etc.

The phenomenon of not being able to make sense of utterances in a given setting without prior communicative knowledge at a more general level of interaction has been drawn attention to earlier by Rehbein (1985) in regard to interpreter-mediated doctor-patient communication. He analysed how a bilingual mediator turned suggestions of a physician ("you can do X") into orders in the target language ("you must do X") and points out that the shift of modality is accompanied by a shift in the type of speech action performed: While the physician follows a patient-oriented approach, namely giving advice, the mediator presupposes an hierarchic relationship in which the job of the physician is to impose a treatment on the patient – and thus the advice is transformed into an order.

Following a dialogical approach, Wadensjö (2004: 107) argues that communicative activities (or *genres*) carried out in all sort of sociocultural and/or institutional settings are subject to more or less ritualised norms and rules, historically formed in these situations. She therefore suggests to take these norms into consideration also when describing (and evaluating) naturally occurring translation and interpreting activities, bearing in mind that the interpreter "willingly or unwillingly – ends up taking a certain responsibility for the substance and the progression of talk." Similarly, Bührig (2005) argues for a discourse-oriented approach in the analysis of interpreter-mediated doctor-patient communication, taking into account "speech action patterns" and their communicative purposes as a tertium comparationis.[1]

Forms of multilingual communication differ with regard to "language constellations" (House & Rehbein 2004: 2). Language constellations are characterized by different parameters such as nativeness or non-nativeness, the number of languages used (one, or more than one), and the interaction mode (mediated or not), see Table 1. Furthermore, cognitive, social and historical aspects may play an important role in multilingual communication, such as the level of linguistic competence of participants, and the degree of linguistic regulation of interaction spaces. Thus, multilingual communication is not bound to constellations in which participants with different native languages interact. Rather, it might occur in varying settings, giving participants more or less options to interact and to achieve communicative purposes. Therefore, it is important to note that multilingual communication is not limited to constellations involving speakers of different languages: other languages might be used even among people who otherwise share the same native language, amending or replacing them locally or for specific purposes. Furthermore, notions such as "majority language" or "lingua franca" are inherently pointing towards issues of power and status attached to language

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1. Recently, Martini (2008) presents a similar approach analysing multilingual discourse in academic settings with reference to the concept of "communicative *genre*" (Günthner 2007).

Table 1. A tentative typology of language constellations

	Native – non-native	Non-native – non-native	Native – native
Use of majority language	x	x	x
Lingua Franca	x	x	x
Interpreting and Translation	x	x	Does not apply
Receptive Multilingualism	x	x	Does not apply
Code-Switching	x	x	x

use: the use of a majority language or a lingua franca may constrain or facilitate communication in different ways, depending on whether participants are native or non-native speakers of that language. In this context, receptive multilingualism (ten Thije & Zeevaert 2007) may be regarded as a relatively balanced constellation because everybody speaks his or her own native language.

The emergence of societal multilingualism brings along new challenges to service providers. At first glance, multilingualism at work takes place mainly in interactions between "bilingual professionals" (Day & Wagner 2007: 392) in the context of international trade and commerce. However, data from German nursery schools indicate that languages other than German are also widely used in the public sector. In a survey on the languages used in German nursery schools, 39% of the participating institutions (n = 142) reported that languages other than German are used "every day" or "every week", and in 18% of the institutions interpreters are used "often" or at least "from time to time" (Meyer 2009: 38; see also Roberts 2007 on other workplaces). Interpreters are usually educators or kitchen staff, and they are mainly used to communicate with parents, not with children. Thus, ad-hoc interpreting in German nursery schools or hospitals (Bührig & Meyer 2004) is an example for the unregulated emergence of multilingual practices due to the immediate need to improve communication with migrant clients. Although employers and employees in these settings treat bilingualism as a resource for communication, bilingual competencies are not necessarily becoming commodities in the sense of Budach et al. (2003). Rather, these resources are used informally and without regulation, i.e. as an extra service that is provided voluntarily, though the employee can hardly refuse to do this. The specific demands of the setting, the additional workload, as well as the quality of communication are not considered to be of major importance, and the satisfaction and gratitude of clients and colleagues is the only compensation for the ad-hoc interpreters, if any.

The following chapters focus on work situations in Europe, North America and South-Africa, such as academic, medical and public sector, or business settings, in which participants have to make constant use of more than one language to cooperate with partners, clients, or colleagues. Our common research

interests are centred on questions such as how the social and linguistic organization of work is adapted to the necessity of using different languages and how multilingualism impinges on the communicative outcome of different types of discourse or genres. The research focus, however, is not restricted to translation/interpreting or lingua-franca-communication as such. Rather, the authors representing different scientific approaches are all interested in multilingual practices "at work", which is to say how different forms of multilingual communication are managed, flexibly adjusted to, acquired, and/or improved in a given workplace setting that often calls for particular implicit or explicit language policies. Thus, this volume contributes to the study of workplace communication in a globalized world by drawing on different types of authentic data with the aim to further refine research methods.

To address the above issues, the majority of the contributors opt for an ethnographic approach, i.e. qualitative analyses of authentic audio or video data combined with other methods such as participant observation, follow-up interviews with key informants, and/or document analyses.

Juliane House and *Magdalène Lévy-Tödter* (Hamburg, Germany) examine challenges of English medium instruction in German universities in the field of engineering, which in turn is part of the broader internationalization process of German academia. The discourse analysis of audio recorded office hours involving German professors, their German research assistants and international graduate students shows how German professors cope given their relatively low proficiency level of English. Results, however, from follow-up interviews with two professors do not confirm any face-threatening effect of the use of English as a lingua franca in terms of their professional identity.

Exploring the multilingual organization of remembrance activities offered by a German Nazi camp memorial, *Birgit Apfelbaum* (Halberstadt, Germany) combines the analysis of interactional data with long term participant observation as a volunteer and with ethnographic interviews with key informants. The analysis of core activities hosted and coordinated by representatives of the state organization reveals principles of more formalized translation and interpreting services provided by experienced and amateur translators/interpreters for Italian, Russian, French, Polish and Dutch as well as more spontaneous forms of direct multilingual communication and code-switching that coincide with switches to less standardized contributions of volunteers also engaged in the work of the memorial. Training issues are addressed as an outgrowth of the analysis in terms of raising the awareness of role profiles and potential role conflicts in this emotionally and politically challenging workplace with an international outreach.

Based on Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital, *Guillaume Gentil* and colleagues (Ottawa, Canada) investigate in their case study the effect of in-house

language training programs for French as the minority language for Anglophones working in the de jure bilingual Canadian public service. Within a broader ethnographic approach consisting of a triangulation of interviews with language learners, an observation of language practices in school and work settings as well as document analyses of syllabi, Intranet sites and teaching material, the authors show that in Canadian Anglophone majority contexts de facto equality of English and French does not exist and that workplace training of French as the minority language can have an impact only when it is supported by management and a corresponding institutional language policy framework.

Match or mismatch between language policy and language practice serves also as societal background for *Christine Anthonissen* (Stellenbosch, South-Africa) who looks at multilingual practices in the South-African health care sector, more specifically in a HIV day clinic in the semi-urban Cape area. While language policy directives specified in the South-African Constitution from 1996 stipulate that citizens should be given access to health care in the eleven official languages "where practicable", the analysis of seven recorded doctor-patient encounters in combination with results from observation and conversations with medical staff brings to light that a lingua franca is negotiated only between English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa. Taking into account that interpreting services are not systematically available mainly for economic reasons, the author suggests the implementation of a more realistic language policy that would take into account local needs and available resources.

Adopting a classical conversationalist approach, *Claudio Baraldi* and *Laura Gavioli* (Modena, Italy) highlight the interactive dynamics of interpreter-mediated interaction in Italian hospitals in terms of promoting multilingualism at an individual as well as at a societal level. Looking in detail at the sequential organization of 150 audio-recorded interactions involving bilingual mediators for English-Italian, Arabic-Italian and Chinese-Italian, they observe and analyse exchanges in which the mediators do not follow a standardized translational mode but give voice to the patients' emotions and narratives and/or encourage direct exchanges between the primary parties by negotiating locally issues of translational relevance.

Recommendations for interpreter training for bilingual medical staff in German hospitals are discussed in the contribution of *Bernd Meyer* and colleagues (Hamburg, Germany). In light of the fact that professional interpreting services are difficult to implement in Germany for political, financial, and organizational reasons, the authors suggest the development of training modules for health care interpreters based on evidence from the analysis of authentic interpreter-mediated communication in hospitals. In accordance with additional findings from interviews with future bilingual nursing staff trainees, they recommend to put

particular emphasis on enabling trainees to better reflect institutional linguistic knowledge, to reflect on the roles of interpreters and to coordinate discourse across language barriers.

Elise DuBord (Madison, NJ, USA) focuses on the multilingual dynamics in face-to-face negotiations with immigrant workers at informal day labor centers in the southwestern United States. Due to the sensitive legal status of many of the participants the author decides in consultation with the local staff of the center not to make recordings of the employment transactions, providing a semi-institutional framework for both workers from Mexican and Central American origin and employers involved in the process of employment matching. Her analysis based on long term participant observation as a volunteer and as a language broker shows how rapport and co-membership are discursively constructed, how employers maintain and emphasize a power differential over day laborers and how language brokers mediating in the negotiations cope with potentially face-threatening acts for employers.

Issues of explicit vs. implicit language policies of multinational European companies in a multilingual context are explored by *Georges Lüdi* and colleagues (Basle, Switzerland). Adopting a mixed methods approach, the authors combine in their case study involving a pharmaceutical company based in Switzerland the analysis of texts documenting the company's language strategy with information gained from interviews with executives as well as the conversational analysis of tape-recorded interactions at work. As far as the interplay between management strategies promoting multilingualism, the actual language behaviour and the shared cognitive representations of mutilingualism and linguistic diversity is concerned, language management measures and various forms of intervention seem to confirm a general tendency toward English as the corporate language. Multilingual practices that also include German and French not only at the individual level but also at the level of internal communication attest to the fact that the company allows for heterogeneity as far as preferences and/or competences of the personnel are concerned.

Maria Amelina (Frankfurt/Main, Germany) explores the dynamic nature that characterizes the individual multilingual repertoire of highly qualified transmigrants in their process of international career construction. The author triangulates in her ethnographic approach data obtained during a 4 year period of participant observation, ethnographic interviews and written document analyses. The study focuses on 18 Russian-speaking professionals with a background in mathematics, IT and natural sciences during their stay in Germany and shows that the use of English tends to be restricted to a special purpose register which is in turn limited to professional subjects, whereas the (acquisition of) the language of the host country and the mother tongue are important for relationship

and network building, including services as cultural mediators in relations with business partners from Russian speaking countries.

Kristin Bührig and *Claudia Böttger* examine how one-voice-policies are put into practice in multilingual constellations. They present a case study of a German bank that informs stakeholders about the impacts and consequences of the financial crisis. As the genre analysis shows, the bank does not follow a one-voice-policy to communicate the crisis.

Most of the chapters are contributed by members of the international Research Network "Multilingualism at the Workplace", hosted from 2006–2009 by the international organization of applied linguistics (AILA). Preliminary versions of some of the contributions have been discussed in Essen/ Germany, 24th–29th August, 2008 at a symposium held at the 15th AILA World Congress. We would like to express our gratitude to all the colleagues for their comments on earlier versions, including the anonymous reviewers for this publication. Furthermore, we wish to thank the Research Centre on Multilingualism and the editors of the series Hamburg Studies on Multilingualism for supporting this publication.

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Public sector