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Linguistic globalisation or localisation? The practice of intercultural communication in multilingual spaces

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Abstract

The paper represents a first attempt to apply Bourdieu's theory of linguistic markets to the practice of intercultural communication within multilingual organisations. The background to the discussion is the extensive internationalisation of business and higher education, which over the past ten years has established English as an official corporate and teaching medium in Denmark. This has inspired a lively debate amongst intellectuals and politicians, who are concerned about the future balance between the national language of Danish and English as the global lingua franca. Yet few have addressed the topic from the perspective of individual language users, which is the motivation behind the current inquiry.

Drawing on data collected within Danish business and education organisations, I compare the trends towards a normalisation of standard British and American within the areas of linguistics, language education and business studies to the communicative behaviours encountered among non-professional users of English. The three practices of language clustering, localisation and dilute communication reveal intercultural communication to be a heavily localised activity, which suggests that language producers are ultimately responsible for the evaluation of linguistic performances. This calls into question the normative principles of language management and policy-making, asking whether indeed there is such a thing as "global" English.

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Introduction

In my final year as an employee with the International Office, Odense University College of Engineering, I came across the expression "The Needle Eye Test" while proofreading the English webpage for one of our international study programmes. Although I was aware of the biblical connotations, I had never seen this wording in English before so I decided to check it with a colleague at Copenhagen Business School, who also happened to be a native speaker. As professional language users, we agreed that the phrase was unclear and ought to be replaced by something that was acceptable in standard British or American, which I conveyed to the course coordinator at OUC. Three months later, I overheard a group of Polish students referring to "The Needle Eye Test" in one of my English classes. I asked them to explain the meaning of this, and they offered me the definition I had first been given by the course coordinator. In spite of my best efforts, the Danish lecturers had continued to employ their original, non-standard terminology, but since the students were themselves non-native speakers of English, nobody seemed to mind. The communication had worked for all parties involved – with the possible exception of the two language professionals.

The story of the Needle Eye Test exemplifies the kind of idiosyncratic linguistic practices that have emerged over the past ten years as a result of the extensive internationalisation of higher education and business in Denmark. In the Danish media, this has fuelled a heated debate between politicians, academics, and language activists over the future balance between Danish and English, with language conservatives claiming that the ongoing linguistic globalisation undermines the strength and scope of the national language. So far, the discussion has been mainly ideological, which means that little evidence has been presented to substantiate or challenge the assertion that increased English usage in the public domain will inevitably result in the decline of Danish. Yet the engineers' language usage implies that non-native speakers are capable of adjusting the lingua franca to their immediate concerns and contexts, which shows that multilingualism is by no means a straightforward case of English hegemony. In consequence, I should like to shift the focus from macro-level policy to the individual experiences of language users, asking what effects the decision to adopt English as a corporate or teaching language has for agents' ability to negotiate social roles and relationships within the multilingual workplace. Through an analysis of agents' linguistic practice, the paper will address the following questions:

- Are language activists right to worry about a possible normalisation of English as the preferred medium for multicultural business, research and higher education in Denmark?
- Or does intercultural communication represent a localised activity, determined by the rules applying within specific linguistic markets?

The conceptual foundation is Bourdieu's theory of linguistic markets and capital, as developed in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991). Drawing on data collected in Danish education and business organisations, I shall examine the phenomenon of multilingualism from the contrasting perspectives of linguistic globalisation and localisation. Linguistic globalisation involves a process of normalisation (Bourdieu 1991), which places native variants of English at the top of the linguistic hierarchy in multilingual spaces. According to this approach, non-native speakers may be evaluated on the basis of their conformity to a native-speaker norm, which means that their communicative competence is closely related to

their English proficiency. In contrast, linguistic localisation recognises communication as a localised activity, which is bound to specific situations and contexts (Saville-Troike 2003). In each transmission, a range of different discourses are available to the interlocutors, and English, in spite of its "lingua franca functions" (Blommaert 2003), should be regarded as equivalent to any other social, regional, occupational, or gendered code enlisted by agents in their negotiation of social roles and relationships.

In terms of structure, the argument divides into a theoretical and an analytical part. Following an initial attempt to frame the issue of multilingualism within the broader context of socio-cultural change, I shall discuss the key elements of Bourdieu's theory, underlining how an understanding of language production, reception and reproduction within specific linguistic markets challenges our notion of legitimate national or corporate languages. However, since Bourdieu's primary frame of reference is national, this will be supplemented by sociolinguistic work on multilingualism and multiculturalism, taking into account the complex linguistic situations that arise in response to increased global interaction (e.g. Blommaert 2003, Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). The analytical part contains a section on linguistic normalisation, outlining trends that support a theory of English hegemony, and a section on linguistic negotiation, which examines the communicative practices that can be observed in English-speaking environments in Denmark. The conclusion revisits the themes of global vs. local and normalisation vs. negotiation, reflecting on the implications of the research for our understanding of intercultural communication in multilingual spaces.

Danish multilingualism as a symptom of change

The question of multilingualism arises from a series of recent developments in Danish business and higher education, which have placed English in the position of an official or semi-official medium in many multicultural organisations. Examples are the tendency among multinational companies to adopt English as their corporate language, encouraging employees to use this medium for formal and informal exchanges, as well as the current drive among the universities to establish English-language programmes in order to attract international students and researchers. The growth in English usage in countries that are traditionally non-English speaking (e.g. Denmark, Finland, and The Netherlands) may be regarded as a linguistic side effect to the more general socio-cultural transformation of the European nation states that has occurred over the past twenty-five years. Hence, the transition of Danish organisations from monolingual to multilingual spaces relates very closely to a change in language attitudes and practices within the three domains of cultural policy, knowledge production, and corporate governance and citizenship.

Historically, the first theme of *cultural policy* has been linked to governmental efforts to preserve and possibly develop the language that the state apparatus defines as the most suitable medium for the national community (Wright 2004, Shohamy 2006). From the nineteenth century, most European states would pursue a policy of linguistic homogenisation, which meant that only those capable of speaking and understanding the official state language were recognised as full members of the nation (Wright 2004). Today, this type of argument features prominently in the discourse of anti-immigration campaigners, who will argue for the use of linguistic criteria to determine the rights and obligations of ethnic minorities within the national community. More recently, a different kind of language debate has emerged as a reaction to growing concerns over the future of small nations such as Denmark in the global market. On the one side, a very outspoken group of language conservatives such as members of the right-wing Danish People's Party and language activists argue in favour of legislation to protect the Danish language against the threat from English. On the other, an increasing number of politicians, academics, and business leaders support the cultivation of a more international outlook, which, among other things, involves the introduction of English into more sectors of public life. Most radical are the proposals by moderate liberals to adopt

English as the second official language in Denmark (Det Radikale Venstre 2007). However, reports reveal the government-sponsored Committee on Globalisation to be equally enthusiastic about internationalisation, calling for a global approach to education, business, and public life (Globaliseringsrådet 2006). Many Danes thus appear to be coming to terms with a future beyond the idea of a linguistically homogeneous nation state, suggesting a possible shift from a Danish-speaking to a Danish-and-English-speaking society.

The second theme of *knowledge production* refers to the transition from manufacturing and agricultural production in the immediate post-war period to an economy based on the acquisition, development and dissemination of specialised knowledge. Political theorists such as Held and McGrew (1998) would ascribe this to the macro-level process of economic globalisation, which has resulted in the outsourcing of labour-intensive production from Denmark to countries in Central Europe and South East Asia. Yet the knowledge economy also reflects a capacity to understand and develop new technologies, which the Scandinavian countries have managed successfully in areas such as telecommunications (Sony Ericsson, Bang & Olufsen), pharmaceuticals (NovoNordisk), software development (skype, Navision), and environmental technology (Grundfos, Vestas). The growing reliance on knowledge production has strengthened the position of English in a number of ways: First, the new industries require a highly-skilled, specialised workforce, which is not always available in Denmark. As a result, companies have to recruit internationally, which adds to their pool of Danish employees a group of foreign experts with no or very limited proficiency in Danish (Lauring 2005). Second, the knowledge producers operate in a global rather than a domestic market, which requires a language that can be used to address internal and external stakeholders across the world. Finally, sectors such as telecommunications and IT undertake activities such as the development and maintenance of information systems, which are language-intensive. It is important for them to choose the medium that offers the broadest possible access to new markets and domains, and in many cases, this is provided by English rather than Danish. In consequence, the contemporary focus on knowledge production has furthered the move towards multilingualism, inspiring an increasing number of international companies in Denmark to employ English rather than Danish as their main working language.

The last theme of *corporate governance and citizenship* reflects the way international business organisations (re-)imagine their place within a global setting. On the one hand, there has been a tendency among companies to move towards larger, super-national structures. Hannerz (1996) and Appadurai (1997) suggest that such trans-nationalism results in a weakening of the ties between corporations and their country of origin, which could encourage international managers to promote a sense of global identity and purpose across the organisation. Coinciding with this is the current trend among organisational theorists to support a devolved structure of organisation (e.g. Sydänmaanlakka 2002, Ghoshal and Bartlett 1998). This model favours localisation rather than globalisation, emphasising decentralisation, democratisation, and multilateralism as core management principles. The "global-local synergy" (Burawoy 2000: 346) fuels two contrary developments within the field of communications. At the global level, the decline in multinationals' national affiliation eases managers' strategic decision to replace the national language with the business lingua franca of English. Common arguments for this type of language management are that it strengthens internal knowledge sharing, multilateral networks, and the sense of global citizenship (Feely and Harzing 2003, Dhir and Goke-Pariola. 2002), which explains the Scandinavian eagerness to adopt English as a corporate language. At the same time, the concern with decentralisation and participation has meant that more employees become involved in communication activities. Non-professional language users such as engineers, marketers, and managers are expected to engage in international events such as negotiations, multicultural teamwork, and professional networks, and this requests a capacity to perform everyday routines and functions in English. Accordingly, the twin processes of globalisation and localisation encourage an idea of the organisation as a multilingual space, which could inspire managers to take for granted their Danish professionals' ability and willingness to cope in a foreign language.

The past section summarises the political, economic, and organisational trends that have influenced Danish educational institutions and multinational companies' decision to accept English as an official medium. Arguably, such tendencies may be read against the background of an overall socio-cultural development that seems to be pushing small European countries away from their traditional image of the nation as a homogeneous speech community towards the more contemporary idea of a multicultural and multilingual society. However, while an awareness of such macro-level changes is important to our reading of the political and academic discourse on multilingualism in Denmark, it adds little to our understanding of how individual agents cope with the request to use English as a working language. In consequence, the next chapters will focus more specifically on language users' communicative practice and strategies, relating Bourdieu's theory of the linguistic market to current sociolinguistic ideas of linguistic negotiation and localisation.

Bourdieu's economic theory of language

The work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu rests on the notion of cultural production as a field of social tension between dominant and dominated groups (e.g. Bourdieu 1993, 2007). Bourdieu's approach may be characterised as an "economic" theory of culture because it emphasises the role of the market in determining the symbolic value of cultural goods and practices. Within the field of language, this motivates Bourdieu's departure from the cognitive models of Saussure and Chomsky, arguing instead for an "economy of symbolic exchanges":

> In order to break with this social philosophy one must show that, although it is legitimate to treat social relations – even relations of domination – as symbolic interactions, that is, as relations of communication implying cognition and recognition, one must not forget that the relations of communication *par excellence* – linguistic exchanges – are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualized. In short, one must move beyond the usual opposition between economism and culturalism, in order to develop an economy of symbolic exchanges. (1991: 37)

Bourdieu's economic perspective has several implications for the way he views language: First of all, he insists that language should be regarded as a socio-historical phenomenon that develops in response to specific times, places, and communication situations (1991: 4). Hence, Bourdieu challenges the cognitive understanding of language as a set of absolute structures, insisting, in his editor's words, that "the completely homogeneous language or speech community does not exist in reality: it is an idealization of a particular set of linguistic practices which have emerged historically and have certain social conditions of existence" (1991: 5). Related to this is the emphasis on linguistic relations rather than linguistic structures. Bourdieu is interested in the contribution of language to the establishment, consolidation, and maintenance of social roles and relationships, which motivates his change of focus from the types of functions contained within language to the question of how discourses perform and are performed within specific social contexts. A final issue is Bourdieu's exchange of linguistic correctness for linguistic capital, which influences the way he evaluates linguistic performances. Bourdieu criticises structuralist models of language for their reliance on absolute grammatical or morphological rules, stressing the irrelevance of such abstractions to actual language usage: "What circulates on the linguistic market is not 'language" as such, but rather discourses that are stylistically marked both in their production . . . and in their reception" (1991: 39). Bourdieu offers as his alternative to the cognitive linguistics of Chomsky and Saussure a practice-oriented approach that asks what socio-cultural conditions a linguistic utterance has to meet in order to succeed within a particular market. Central to his argument are the elements of language production, reception, and reproduction, which will be examined in more detail.

Like Fairclough (1989) and Hymes (1967, 1996), Bourdieu understands language as a series of co-existing discourses and speech registers. In relation to *language production*, this suggests that the language user could, in principle, choose freely from the range of available variants the medium that s/he believes to be the most efficient means of conveying the message intended. However, in practice, interlocutors' freedom is restrained by the social conditions of language production. In spite of their linguistic equivalence, some discourses carry more symbolic weight than others, and a mastery of these will allow language producers to assert or maintain a position of social power within the field of interaction (Bourdieu 1991: 41-42). Bourdieu ascribes the differential power of language to the socio-historical process of linguistic normalisation, which over a period of time has lead to the institutionalisation of particular discourses as accepted, linguistic standards (Bourdieu 1991: 48-49). Once a specific national or social register has become established as the dominant code, it becomes a benchmark, against which alternative language uses can be measured and evaluated. Language producers take this linguistic hierarchy into account when they select their medium for interaction, which suggests that agents' choice of words or phrases is anything but neutral (Bourdieu 1991: 54).

Bourdieu's second notion of *language reception* offers one explanation why some languages appear to be more equal than others. For even if processes of linguistic normalisation place a limited number of discourses in a position of social and symbolic power, the bargaining value of these in relation to actual communication situations will be determined by the rules applying within a specific market (Bourdieu 1991: 67). In consequence, language reception is presented as a heavily localised activity, which suggests that the criteria of language evaluation within a Danish-owned company in Copenhagen are not necessary equivalent to those operating at American multinationals in Silicon Valley. What will ultimately decide the symbolic power of a discourse is the social recognition that the language producer receives from his/her fellow-actors in response to the communication. Hence, Bourdieu would adhere to Blommaert's definition of languages as *placed resources*, defined as "resources that are functional in one particular place, but can become dysfunctional as soon as they are moved into other places" (2003: 619).

The final issue of *language reproduction* adds a temporal dimension to the market. Only discourses that continuously manage to recreate themselves, can retain their position of symbolic power, and language users will therefore request from an institutionalised national or social medium the capacity to expand in response to socio-cultural changes (Bourdieu 1991: 58). Bourdieu situates the process of language reproduction within the literary field, where it takes the form of a competition between the experimental behaviours of avant-garde artists and the legitimate discourse of the academic and intellectual elite (Bourdieu 1991, 1993). Arguably, similar struggles emerge within the fields of engineering, science, management, and IT, however, with agents constantly seeking to invent words and phrases that enable them to capture a new product or idea. Language receivers respond to linguistic innovation by pursuing a strategy of either assimilation (i.e. acceptance and imitation of the new practice) or dissimilation (i.e. resistance or outright rejection), and their reaction influences the balance between linguistic continuity and change within a specific domain (Bourdieu 1991: 63). The symbolic power of new terminology must be established in relation to the market, in other words, which suggests that language users, rather than linguists, are ultimately responsible for the recognition and evaluation of language.

To conclude, Bourdieu's economic theory offers three valuable lessons for the analysis of linguistic practice: First, he demonstrates that language usage is subjective rather than objective, which implies that the success of a communication relies on the conditions of reception as well as production. Second, the identification of dominant and dominated codes reveals the power of language to include and exclude, which challenges the idea of neutral communication media and practices. Third, Bourdieu highlights the influence of particular

markets or fields of interaction on agents' struggle for social recognition, which suggests that intercultural communication should be understood as a local rather than a global activity.

Reframing Bourdieu within a multilingual space

Bourdieu's economic approach to language provides a useful starting point for sociolinguistic inquiries into areas such as language communities, education, and ideology, which involve questions of inequality and power (e.g. Fairclough 1989, Gal 1989, Heller 1995). Bourdieu's theory seems less adequate in relation to the present discussion since his primary frame of reference is national rather than global. In consequence, the next section will examine Bourdieu's argument in relation to a multicultural, multilingual context, addressing the three challenges of globalisation, localisation, and linguistic resistance.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the process of *globalisation* adds to the complexity of the contemporary linguistic situation. On the one hand, the recognition of English as the international lingua franca encourages multilingualism in the sense that non-native speakers now require a proficiency in English as well as their national language. On the other, growing participation in global networks and flows means that agents encounter more varieties of language, which increases the range of registers available for their own language production (Blommaert 2005). Accordingly, globalisation should be perceived as an expanding rather than a limiting force, as Blommaert observes:

> It is an important accomplishment if we manage to see sociolinguistic globalization in these terms: as a matter of particular language varieties entering the repertoires of particular groups, creating new semiotic opportunities and commodities for members of such groups and indeed constructing them as groups. We can now move on and focus on *mobility* as a key feature of sign complexes in globalization: the fact that language varieties, texts, images, travel across time and space, and that this is a journey across repertoires and sets of indexicalities attached to ingredients of repertoires. A sociolinguistics of globalization is necessarily a sociolinguistics of mobility. (2003: 611)

Blommaert's global reality of language mixtures and mobility has consequences for our understanding of the market. Unlike Bourdieu, who was able to concentrate on the domestic relationship between the institutionalised national norm and any alternative linguistic varieties, contemporary observers have to come to terms with a situation where the two competing discourses may both occupy positions of authority within their respective fields. Hence, the Danish debate is not concerned with the status ascribed to particular regional or social variants, but with the dramatic prospect of the national language's possible surrender to an English lingua franca.

The second question of *localisation* suggests that cultural production and consumption can only truly be appreciated with reference to a particular spatial, temporal, and social context. In *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (1994) Friedman notes how consumer goods and values travel across the world, but insists that they only become meaningful as cultural practices once they have been appropriated locally. In relation to language, this suggests that languages only become effective means of communication when they have been adjusted to local needs and preferences. Similar conclusions are reached by Jacquemet (2005) and Silverstein (1998), who claim that the manifestation of global influences in agents' speech is conditioned by local factors. Instead of accepting English as the global default option, we should therefore attend carefully to language users' "transidiomatic practices" (Jacquemet 2005) or plurilingualism (Silverstein 1998), highlighting the capacity of speech communities to negotiate a balance between global structures and local concerns. A localised approach supplements Bourdieu in the sense that it recognises the role of the market in language production and reception. At the

same time, it poses a challenge to Bourdieu, accepting all speech registers and codes as equal, which seems to undermine the principle of linguistic normalisation. In a multilingual situation where native speakers of Danish, Spanish, and Mandarin meet on the common linguistic platform of English, language users may thus find it difficult to establish a clear position of authority, which could encourage them to apply the evaluation criteria they have acquired in relation to their first languages.

The third theme of *linguistic resistance* involves the kind of communication behaviours that emerge within local markets in response to domination. Sociolinguistic researchers such as Heller (1992) and Woolard (1985) have criticised Bourdieu for his emphasis on hierarchical power relations, as this prompts him to underestimate individual agents' capacity to resist such hegemonies. In their view, one cannot assume that agents always prefer the legitimate language, for while the institutionalised medium represents a position of symbolic power, local varieties convey a sense of linguistic solidarity or indeed opposition. In consequence, actors' choice of language represents a conscious act expressing either a compliance with or rejection of the social order:

> [Speakers] opt for a language that would symbolize the rights and obligations they wish to enforce in the exchange in question and index the appropriate identities. In making the unmarked choice, the speakers recognise the status quo as the basis for the speech event. In contrast, making a marked choice indicates an attempt to negotiate a different balance of rights and obligations. (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004: 8)

Within Bourdieu's framework, linguistic resistance represents a strategy of dissimilation, aiming to increase the distance between the legitimate linguistic conventions and language producers' practice (Bourdieu 1991: 63-64). The story of "The Needle Eye Test" shows how Danish engineers manage to change the rules of the game, preferring their localised terminology to the authorised language of the experts, and over a period of time, such behaviours could destabilise existing linguistic hierarchies. Accordingly, linguistic resistance strategies point to the limitations of the dominant discourse, encouraging a shift of perspective from linguistic normalisation to negotiation.

To sum up, the past section has read Bourdieu in the light of contemporary sociolinguistic theories on linguistic globalisation, localisation, and resistance. This has demonstrated the relevance of the market metaphor to linguistic and communicative practice, emphasising to what extent agents' language usage reflects a local rather than a global context. At the same time, the discussion identifies some of the weaknesses in Bourdieu's work. By relying too strongly on the principle of linguistic norms, Bourdieu underestimates the ability of individual agents or groups to play the language game, using a condition of multilingualism to strengthen their own position vis-à-vis any national or global authority.

Linguistic normalisation and negotiation in multilingual spaces

The second half of the paper examines the types of language attitudes and practices that may be encountered in Danish multilingual environments such as higher education and multicultural business organisations. Among language producers, the tendency has been towards linguistic negotiation rather than normalisation, with Danish employees developing communicative strategies that enable them to localise or indeed resist the global medium of English. Yet the discourse in areas such as linguistics, language education, and business studies continues to rely on a notion of linguistic standards and hierarchies, which influences language receivers' evaluation of communicative performances. Prior to my analysis of linguistic practice, I shall therefore examine the question of linguistic normalisation, asking what factors that have contributed to the institutionalisation of British and American English as dominant discourses in Denmark.

The data used to identify language users' practice primarily come from three sources: First, I draw on a series of interviews that Jakob Lauring and I have conducted with employees in fifteen multicultural corporations in Denmark. The principal purpose of this project was to collect information on how the introduction of English as a corporate medium affected cross cultural communication and knowledge sharing (Tange and Lauring 2006). Second, I refer to interviews and observations made in connection with an ongoing project on international education. This research investigates the social dynamics of the international classroom, asking what strategies Danish lecturers adopt in order to manage interaction with students who are non-native speakers of English. A third source of data, which I shall use mainly to illustrate language receivers' position is a web debate hosted by the Danish daily *Politiken* (2007). The theme of the discussion is the quality of English education in Denmark, and the responses provide an example of criteria used by students in their evaluation of Danish lecturers' performance. Some of the interviews or comments were originally in Danish and have been translated into English for the purpose of the present paper.

The normalisation of English in Denmark

Bourdieu (1991) characterises normalisation as a socio-historical process leading to the institutionalisation of one linguistic variant as the official, dominant discourse. A normalisation of English would therefore imply that one or very few variants of the language become widely accepted as a linguistic benchmark against which all alternative Englishes can be measured. Historically, there has been a tendency among Danes to favour British English because of trading connections between the two countries. Within the past fifty years, the growing American political, economic and cultural influence has provided an alternative medium, adding American English to the relatively narrow range of "legitimate" Englishes recognised by Danish institutions. Processes of normalisation are important to our understanding of multilingualism because they motivate actors to distinguish between "good" and "bad" English, which could be problematic in a situation where both language producer and receiver are non-native speakers. The next section explores the concept of linguistic norms further, examining how linguistics, education, and business studies have contributed to the institutionalisation of standard British and American in Denmark.

The academic discipline of linguistics has played a key role in the process of linguistic normalisation. Traditionally, the study of language relied on a Herderian rhetoric which "tied together national spirit, reason, and language spoken" (Foley 1997: 402), and this motivated scholars to promote standardised national languages. Hence, Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary would authorise as "Standard English" a discourse used primarily among the Southern English middle-class (Foley 1997: 402). More recently, the idea of linguistic standards has been developed by structural and cognitive linguistics, using grammatical and morphological structures to identify a system of clearly identifiable linguistic norms and rules. As a result, linguists are able to measure language usage, comparing individual performances with the legitimate national or universal norms. The legacy of such research shows in the work of Kachru (1990, 1992), who divides "World Englishes" into the circles of "Inner", "Outer", and "Expanding". At the centre, Kachru places British and American English, which suggests that these variants are somehow superior to the rest. Linguistic hierarchies such as Kachru's encourage actors to assess language production according to benchmarks developed within the national speech communities of Britain and the United States, which could lead to their dismissal of any alternative discourse as somehow inferior. As the following comment reveals, Danish students may thus view the disparity between their lecturers' language usage and a native variant of English in absolute terms, ignoring factors such as the speaker's communicative competence and intercultural awareness: "In general, the teachers and lecturers' English proficiency is poor. This may have a negative effect on the learning as supplementary details and examples are left out in favour of pre-rehearsed

textbook material. Of course, this is not the case for lecturers from the UK, US, etc." (Politiken 2007).

Equally important to the institutionalisation of American and British English is language education, which has centred on learners' ability to imitate a native-speaker norm. With reference to French, Bourdieu (1991: 49) observes how the educational system "helped to devalue popular modes of expression, dismissing them as 'slang' or 'gibberish' . . . and to impose recognition of the legitimate language", and, arguably, a similar policy of normalisation characterises the teaching of foreign languages (Risager 2006). Accordingly, Danish learners are introduced to English through texts about British and American culture, and from an early age this predisposes them towards a distinction between "good" and "bad" Englishes. "Good" English is a language usage that conforms to the linguistic ideal of standard British and American, which in primary and secondary education is often represented by the fairly bland and indiscriminate academic register employed by many Danish teachers of English. In comparison, "bad" English constitutes any type of deviation from this standard, which in addition to the learners' own "Danglish" includes Indian, South African, and Jamaican varieties. Educational researchers have emphasised the need in English teaching to change the emphasis from linguistic to communicative competence, which could destabilise the linguistic hierarchies that have evolved in the classroom (Lund 1996, Risager 2006). A change in language attitudes is a long-term prospect, however, and over the next couple of years, we may expect Danish language users to continue to refer to a British or American norm.

A final factor adding to the symbolic power of standard American and British English is the discipline of business studies, which has developed within a post-war condition of American political and economic supremacy. This has enabled researchers to take for granted the use of English as a business lingua franca, which strengthens the position of Standard English vis-à-vis any native discourses. One example is international management, which often comes across as a case of Americans abroad. This has implications for language usage, encouraging native-speakers to presuppose foreign partners and colleagues' ability to use English as a common medium (Park et al. 1996). Fixman (1990: 27) writes of her American respondents, "the less foreign language knowledge [they] had, the more they tended to view language usage as a mechanical skill, of only secondary value to cross-cultural understanding." Similarly, writers on intercultural communication have tended to leave aside problems of language choice and diversity. Even if many textbooks contain chapters on "Verbal Communication", the theme is rarely taken beyond variety within English to the complex situations emerging from interaction between non-native speakers (e.g. Gudykunst and Kim 2003, Ting-Toomey 1999). Indirectly, they thereby support a normative approach such as the one proposed by "DSL, Boston" in response to the Danish debate on English as a teaching medium: "Why is the academic world so hesitant in offering lectures in English. The business world requires adequate English in order to succeed. Why fight it?" (Politiken 2007)

Trends within the areas of linguistics, language education, and business studies have worked in favour of linguistic normalisation, encouraging Danish language receivers to evaluate English usage according to the benchmarks of standard British and American. Arguably, this supports the thesis that the current wave of internationalisation has successfully established such linguistic norms in a position of symbolic power within Danish higher education and business. Yet, the discussion has been rather one-sided, focusing mainly on the areas of language reception and reproduction. Instead of identifying the linguistic norms employed by Danish students in their assessment of lecturers' proficiency, one might look at communication from the language producer's point of view, asking what practices Danish lecturers have developed in response to the request that they perform their professional duties in English. In consequence, I shall now move from the theory of linguistic normalisation to the practice of negotiation.

Managing English in the multicultural workplace

Summarising the argument of Grin (1999), Wright closes her discussion of "Language in a Postnational Era" with the following picture of linguistic globalisation:

> [Grin] argues that competence in English is no longer exclusive cultural capital since so many now have it. He reports a kind of democratisation in the European context whereby English language competence has become "necessary but not sufficient, a basic requirement for a whole raft of professions, activities and memberships". It cannot be a tool for social closure since it is so widespread, but it does provide a medium for the common ground that humanity must develop in so interconnected a world. And its very banality and generalisation must suggest a shift in power balance as monoglot English native speakers become a minority group in a community of communication where the vast majority is using English as a lingua franca. (2004: 178)

Wright's final sentence is interesting in relation to the current discussion, because it suggests that the adoption of English as the common language within Danish multilingual environments does not necessarily lead to language users' unconditional surrender to a standard British or American norm. On the contrary, non-native speakers develop new communicative strategies that enable them to maintain or indeed strengthen a position of cultural and/or linguistic power within the local linguistic market. Using respondents' descriptions of their own and fellow-actors' practice as the primary source, the next sections will examine such linguistic negotiations more closely, classifying agents' linguistic behaviours under the three headings of language clusters, linguistic localisation, and dilute communication.

Language clusters

The first practice of *language clustering* was originally observed with reference to the global organisation by Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch (1999, Welch et al. 2005). In their analysis of the Finnish multinational Kone, they demonstrated how actors would orientate social interaction towards the members of their own speech community, imagining the corporation in terms of language clusters composed of foreign subsidiaries from similar linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds. On their linguistic map of Kone (1999: 434), Marschan-Piekkari et al. divided the corporation into the clusters of "Finnish" (Finland and Finnish expatriates), "Scandinaviska" (Denmark, Norway, Sweden), "English" (USA, UK, Australia), South East Asia), "German" (Germany and Austria), and "Spanish" (Spain, Mexico, Italy), underlining the influence of such groupings for trans-organisational knowledge sharing and networks. In a recent project (Lauring and Tange 2006), we have applied the idea of language clusters to communication within English-speaking environments in Denmark, which has confirmed the thesis of Marschan-Piekkari et al. Even when they describe their proficiency in English as sufficient, non-native speakers prefer to approach colleagues from a similar linguistic background when encountering a social or work-related problem, which means that knowledge is contained within particular speech communities. Using Brown and Duguid's terminology (2001), one might characterise information flows within speech communities as "leaky" (i.e. relatively transparent and swift), whereas knowledge becomes "sticky" once it has to cross linguistic boundaries.

The data suggest that language clustering is a common social behaviour within English-speaking organisations in Denmark. Many respondents mention the informal gatherings taking place between the speakers of the same national language, and although they commonly rely on nationality as the principal criterion for group identification, their observations reflect a classification based on linguistic differences and similarities. As we saw in the case of Kone, this means that the "Spanish" cluster typically incorporates Latin

American nationals as well as Spaniards, whereas the "French" cluster might include Swiss and Belgian citizens. What is equally clear from the interviews is that respondents associate language clustering with their out-groups rather than their in-groups. As the following example reveals, a Danish manager is therefore more likely to notice such informal groups among the international staff than among his/her fellow-nationals:

> When you hire foreign employees, it all appears to be very open. But when they arrive here to work, they will experience how Danes – roughly speaking –arrive at eight a. m. and return to their children at four p. m. And then the foreigners will probably think – what exactly am I supposed to be doing here? Then they will discover, and this is probably true, that this country is somewhat cold. This may encourage people from Canada and North American to form their groups, and the Japanese to form other groups.

In comparison, non-native respondents perceive linguistic clustering to be a behaviour that is mainly practiced by the Danish employees. Their accounts underline how the Danes will seek out the company of other Danish-speakers during lunch and coffee breaks, which indirectly cuts the international staff off from organisational networks and information flows. For as one Canadian respondent observes:

> It is not just personal stuff you miss out on but business relations too. If something is going on, if nobody directly tells you, you are not going to know. I would say yes, you can work here without speaking any Danish. You can do your job. But all the learning and what is going on around you, you would miss.

This sense of isolation increases when the international employees belong to a linguistic minority within the international organisation and have no access to alternative language clusters that could meet their needs for social interaction and relationships. In this situation, actors may end up in the unfortunate position of a linguistic outsider, whose language skills carry no or very little symbolic power within the workplace.

When asked to reflect on language clustering, respondents disagree whether this communicative practice should be encouraged or discouraged. One respondent stresses that such behaviour is perfectly natural in international settings, as non-speakers require an occasional break from English, "relaxing through conversations in their mother tongue" (Danish lecturer). In comparison, other interviewees see language clusters as potentially damaging to cross cultural interaction and learning, keeping actors from developing proficiency in the language(s) required for professional purposes. To illustrate this, a lecturer offers the example of an Icelandic student, who has repeatedly failed his exams because he only interacts with his compatriots, which prevents him from acquiring the necessary communicative skills in Danish. Similarly, Danish employees who practice language clustering, will not extend their English repertoire beyond the relatively limited, scientific terminology requested for professional exchanges, and, in the long run, this could block the transformation of the multicultural workplace into a truly English-speaking environment.

Linguistic localisation

For the purpose of the present analysis, linguistic localisation can be defined as the use of either the native language (Danish) or a heavily nativised variant of English (Danglish). This behaviour will often arise from a situation of linguistic clustering, but unlike the former, which may reflect a social need to "relax" among one's linguistic peers, the latter represents a clear example of Bourdieu's dissimilation strategy. For within a Danish context, internationalisation inevitably involves an attempt by corporate or educational managers to impose the lingua franca of English on organisations that are traditionally Danish-speaking, and which have already established the national language in a position of symbolic power. When they pursue a strategy of linguistic resistance, Danish staff and students can therefore

refer to their first language as the dominant discourse, claiming that the rules applying within the local market should guarantee their right to use Danish as the principal teaching or communication medium. As one student puts it: "Many students prefer tuition in Danish. As I see it, you gain a deeper knowledge about the topic because Danish is our mother tongue" (Politiken 2007).

The battle between English and Danish in higher education has been intensified in recent years in response to the rapid increase in the number of English-language programs in Denmark. At the forefront are the two business schools in Aarhus and Copenhagen, which now offer more MSc. and MBA courses in English than in Danish, but also engineering, natural, life and social sciences have been affected by this development. So far, Danish teachers have been quiet about this, fearing perhaps that speaking out against the adoption of English as a teaching medium will reflect badly on their professional competence (Park et al. 1996). In comparison, students have been more outspoken, responding either with great enthusiasm about or strong resistance to internationalisation. Judging from the interviews, many lecturers have personal experiences with opposition to English-language classes from the Danish students, and this often comes across as a defence of the national language. One respondent describes how his students complained about his usage of an English terminology in Danish-language classes:

> I soon realised that, even when I taught Danish classes, I would refer to the English terminology more frequently than before, when I might use Danish terms throughout a course. But it became a habit for me when requiring a scientific vocabulary. And this provoked many responses from the Danish classes that I taught. Funny comments inquiring whether Danish was no longer good enough.

Staff and students' disposition towards their first language inspires communication behaviours that consolidate the symbolic power of Danish vis-à-vis the lingua franca of English. In the classroom, the lecturer will revert into Danish when there are no international students present, while most natives employ Danish as the primary medium for social exchanges. Regardless of an official commitment to international learning environments and team-working, this means that language clusters emerge outside class hours, leaving limited scope for interaction between speech communities.

Within multicultural corporations, linguistic localisation is particularly relevant with reference to informal meetings and networking, where Danish appears to occupy the position of an alternative, dominant discourse. Often social activities are planned and communicated in Danish, which means that actors' ability to participate in such events depends on their access to this unofficial, corporate medium. The practice of localisation poses a problem to foreign members of staff, who find that they are excluded from social networks and relationships. One Dutch respondent describes how, initially, the Danes will make allowances for the non-natives, but after a period of adjustment, they expect colleagues wanting to participate in social events to make the effort to learn Danish. Similarly, one Polish respondent observes in relation to his own situation:

> Like at lunch, if you sit there alone, then the Danes will speak in Danish. They don't sit together with the foreigners. But in general we work fine together. The small talk is just in Danish. And sometimes the small talk gives a lot of information. It gives you an idea of what is really happening. It is something I really miss, to be able to really feel part of the conversation. I don't think my knowledge is used properly because I don't know the small talk. Before I was fighting it, but now I just do my work. In this way, I am missing the talk with colleagues.

Given the Danish exposure to British and American English, one might expect native-speakers of English to fare somewhat better within this linguistic hierarchy since their

medium carries the symbolic authority of a global lingua franca. However, a Canadian respondent identifies communication problems reminiscent of those encountered by the Southern and Central European staff, stressing the importance of Danish language skills to actors seeking to become fully integrated into the multicultural workplace.

Dilute communication

Dilute communication describes the disposition of non-native speakers to avoid conversations in English (Lauring and Tange 2006). In his fieldwork with the Danish multinational NovoNordisk, Lauring encounters what he characterises as a "silent" organisation, which he partly ascribes to the fact that the company requests its employees to use English as the corporate medium during working hours (Lauring 2005). Even when English has become accepted as the common vehicle during department meetings and negotiations, non-native speakers withdraw from social interaction in this language, fearing perhaps that any linguistic blunders undermine their professional authority. In previous work (Lauring and Tange 2006), we have examined the effects of such behaviour, emphasising what implications the disappearance of organisational small talk and gossiping sessions has for knowledge sharing and information flows. With reference to the present discussion, I should like to add that a dilution of communication undermines the symbolic power of English, restricting the number of social domains that the language caters for. Indirectly, this could strengthen the position of Danish as the preferred local alternative, consolidating its status as the (unofficial) language for social networks and relationships.

The data identify silence as a recurrent phenomenon within English-speaking environments in Denmark. In relation to the multicultural companies, employees note the absence of informal gatherings in the kitchen or around the photocopier, and even if this makes for a more efficient workplace, they find something very essential to be missing. One Danish manager explains how the adoption of English as a common language has changed the character of his workplace:

> There are a number of Danes who have actually left the organisation because they find it is no longer the same place to work. There is no longer the same consensus. The culture has been shaken. I don't know if this is because of the market or because the company has grown or because of the foreigners. It may have something to do with the joking and the way we communicate - like if you do it like this, then it means that. Like when I don't say hi to anyone one morning, this means that I need to be let alone the first couple of hours. The foreigners don't get that.

Several Danes agree that the request to use English has affected the organisational culture very deeply, leading to a decline in informal talk, humour, and story-telling. As one respondent puts it: "The meetings become more formal when conducted in English rather than Danish. There is less ping-pong across the table." This impression is confirmed by the international staff who note a similar formalisation of social interaction. Accordingly, non-natives characterise conversations as "less thick" or detailed, with one Canadian respondent stressing that you get "a too neat version".

In international teaching, dilute communication manifests itself in the form of "the Polish wall" – that is, a complete lack of interaction between the lecturer and the students. The term derives from my first year as an English-language teacher and refers to the encounter with a class of some 30+ Polish engineering students, who chose to remain silent throughout most of our early sessions. Many lecturers recognise this phenomenon, commenting on the absence of communication in the international classroom. One respondent reflects on this behaviour:

> There is not doubt that the students sometimes feel – which they express very clearly to me as the course coordinator – that they are afraid that some parts of the message are lost. That they are missing linguistic details that would be available in Danish. If

> you just look at the nonverbal communication . . . we are contained within a language that we would not normally use. In addition, the international students do not have English as their first language either, which means we have two poles that will have to meet on a common linguistic platform that is unnatural to both.

The lecturer presents an accurate account of the complex multilingual situation that fuels the practice of dilute communication within the multicultural organisation. For even if they have some proficiency in English, many non-native speakers feel uncertain about the adequacy of their skills and may prefer to avoid exchanges in the second language whenever this is possible. As a result, we see the emergence of the silent organisation where social interaction and networking mainly occur within the contained and localised space of a language cluster.

Respondents' practice – a case of normalisation or negotiation?

In conclusion, I should like to return to Bourdieu's metaphor of the linguistic market. For if we accept the assertion that linguistic performances should be read in relation to specific fields of interaction, we will also have to recognise that Danish professionals' language usage can only be understood within the context of their immediate working or teaching environments. Accordingly, we need to apply to respondents' practice their own standards for "good" and "bad" communication, and in the kind of multilingual spaces evoked in the present inquiry, this represents a serious challenge to the idea of linguistic normalisation.

In spite of the macro-level factors working for the adoption of American and British English as dominant discourses in Denmark, the practices of language clustering, linguistic localisation, and dilute communication have revealed linguistic exchanges to be a heavily localised activity. The rules of the language game are those agreed on by the linguistic majority within the specific field of interaction, and in Danish organisations, this places Danish in a powerful position vis-à-vis Standard English. As long as they continue to use Danish as their unofficial language of authority, the Danes are able to strengthen their own bargaining position within the workplace, enabling them to control informal networks and knowledge sharing. One might thus argue that the Danes have no interest in adopting a standardised corporate norm, which would inevitably place them on an equal footing with any other non-native speaker of English. In consequence, the situation in Danish multicultural workplaces confirms the thesis that global English could be losing its symbolic power (Wright 2004: 178), leaving scope for alternative linguistic markets to emerge within English-speaking organisations.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I asked whether Danish language activists were right to worry about a possible normalisation of English as a linguistic standard for multicultural business, research activities, and higher education in Denmark. At this stage, I should like to dismiss such a claim, underlining how actors' linguistic practice consolidates the symbolic position of Danish within the so-called English-speaking environments in Denmark. Hence, I would like to argue for multilingualism as a situation of linguistic negotiation rather than normalisation, which implies that the power balance between the two alternative discourses of Danish and English will have to be determined within the local linguistic market.

In the analysis, I chose to examine the nature of actual linguistic behaviours because I believe that the current debate on English usage in Denmark underestimates the capacity of individual actors to shape language according to their specific needs and purposes. In other words, I do not comply with the strategic argument that a management decision to change the corporate language from Danish into English necessarily leads to any major transformations of employees' language usage and communicative practice. This is confirmed by my

observations of multilingual spaces, which show the ability of actors to resist standardisation and to pursue individual strategies of localisation. However, at the same time, I think it is important to read such micro-level activities against the background of a macro-level development working towards the institutionalisation of English as a dominant discourse in Danish public life. For even when they successfully manage to negotiate a position of linguistic resistance, actors' responses ultimately derive from the global request to perform an increasing number of work routines and functions in English. In other words, most language producers and receivers only become involved in the process of internationalisation, once the decision to introduce English as a teaching or corporate medium has already been made.

In conclusion, I should like to reflect briefly on the implications of the current research for our understanding of intercultural communication in multilingual environments. First, it is important to question the notion of linguistic norms or standards. Bourdieu's theory of linguistic normalisation shows how a few, "standard" languages are promoted at the expense of alternative varieties, and this may inspire researchers to take for granted an asymmetrical relationship between global, national, and local discourses. Yet the practices of language clustering and localisation show that we cannot presuppose language producers' willingness to recognise the symbolic power of such linguistic standards. This leads on to my second point, which is the need to study intercultural communication in context. In order to understand what takes place when agents communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, we need to explore the relationship between actors' linguistic competence and their social and/or symbolic power, which is only possible with reference to a particular field of interaction.

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