

## **The Use and Implications of Multilingual Strategies During Performance Appraisal Interviews**

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Processes of late modern globalization have drastically altered the transnational flows of people, capital, and communication for corporations (Appadurai, 1996), and as a result, they have also altered the ways in which companies and employees make use of language. This presentation examines such globalized forms of language use at a small-sized service-oriented Belgian company that is active in 59 countries across the world. More specifically, we focus on how performance appraisal interviews are conducted between managers who work at the company's headquarters in Belgium (L1: Dutch) and sales agents who work for the company from these different places all around the world (L1: not Dutch). Due to the physical and linguistic distance between the interlocutors, this presentation thus examines the specificities of a multilingual and virtual workspace (Jacobs, 2004) where communication between the managers and the sales agents solely occurs remotely and always requires a strategy to bridge the lack of a shared L1.

Although there is no shortage of research on performance appraisal interviews, many studies have focused on post-hoc recollections, observations based on simulations, or secondhand accounts of interviews, rather than on authentic empirical data. As a result, performance appraisal interviews have been described as a 'black box' (Clifton, 2012), particularly in multilingual contexts (Fletcher, 2001). Our analysis is based on a dataset consisting of 16 authentic video-recorded appraisal interviews, and we aim to focus specifically on the multilingual nature of the company by examining the use and implications of different multilingual strategies during their performance appraisal process. Additionally, we conducted two follow-up interviews with the managers responsible for the performance appraisal process to dive deeper into the company's rationale behind their multilingual approach to language policy and explore how the managers perceive the effects of multilingualism on the company's daily workings.

In our analysis, we focus on three different strategies which are used to bridge the lack of a common L1 between the interlocutors in three different interviews. The first is the use of English as a business lingua franca (BELF; Louhiala-Salminen & Charles 2006), which is often used as a communicative solution to the lack of a shared L1 in an international business context (Gunnarsson, 2014). The second strategy is the use of a lay interpreter when no shared language could be identified between the interlocutors. More specifically, the sales agent's wife functions as the mediator between English on the one hand and Arabic and French on the other hand. Finally, one performance appraisal interview is conducted through receptive multilingualism (Lüdi, 2013), where the managers speak English, and the sales agent speaks German to achieve mutual understanding. In all three interactions, BELF is thus present, but not always used as a standalone strategy.

We adopt a discourse analytical perspective (following Van De Mierop & Vrolix, 2014; Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2017; Holmes et al., 2011) through which we analyze the occurrence of miscommunication in these three interactions. More specifically, we set up an analytical framework on the basis of previous research on miscommunication in multilingual spoken interactions to identify preemptive strategies to prevent miscommunication, signaling strategies to indicate miscommunication, and repair strategies to solve miscommunication (Mauranen, 2006; Vasseur et al., 1996; Linell, 1995; Schegloff et al., 1977). In doing so, we present the opportunities and pitfalls of each strategy in light of the multilingual repertoires of each interlocutor with a focus on how meaning and information exchange are negotiated, mitigated and achieved. This analysis is enriched by insights from the follow-up interviews with the managers, which allow us to explore their attitudes towards these different multilingual strategies and their respective successfulness to mediate the flow and exchange of information, as well as the general multilingual workings of the company.

Similar to findings from previous research on BELF, we observe a preference from the managers to use English as a common corporate language (Fredriksson et al., 2006), as well as relatively few communicative problems in the interviews conducted in English (Cogo, 2009). However, we do find that there is room for improvement in pre-emptively confirming whether the other interlocutors have understood crucial information, as we argue that preventing rather than repairing potential communicative problems can be especially relevant during sensitive interactions such as performance appraisal interviews, in particular during or after lengthy explanations made by the managers. Secondly, we find that the use of receptive multilingualism is a highly cooperative strategy, as we observe that the interlocutors make a high communicative effort to prevent, signal and repair miscommunication, successfully resulting in few instances of miscommunication. Finally, we consider the use of a lay interpreter the most problematic strategy, as we observe a high number of instances of signaling and repairing miscommunication, yet we also find that this communicative effort cannot prevent miscommunication from occurring, sometimes even during crucial moments such as when feedback is being provided to the agent. During the follow-up interviews, it was revealed that the managers were not aware of these communicative problems, thereby highlighting the need for an alternative solution to the lack of a shared first language in these interactions.

In sum, this presentation provides deeper insight into the lived linguistic reality of a small-sized yet globalized and multilingual company from a discourse analytical perspective, and more specifically details the (perceived) strengths and weaknesses of the different multilingual strategies they use in the sensitive and high-stakes context of a performance appraisal interview. As such, this research can provide new insights for both researchers examining multilingualism in the workplace, as well as practitioners who want to learn more about the possibilities and implications of different multilingual strategies at work.

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