

**LANGUAGE AND GLOBALIZATION  
IN BELGIAN CORPORATE CONTEXTS**  
INSTITUTIONAL, INDIVIDUAL, AND  
INTERACTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Fien De Malsche



University of Antwerp  
| Faculty of Arts



Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte  
Department Taalkunde

# LANGUAGE AND GLOBALIZATION IN BELGIAN CORPORATE CONTEXTS

INSTITUTIONAL, INDIVIDUAL, AND  
INTERACTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de graad van  
Doctor in de Taalkunde  
aan de Universiteit Antwerpen

te verdedigen door  
**FIEN DE MALSCHE**

Promotoren: prof. dr. Mieke Vandenbroucke  
prof. dr. Els Tobback

Antwerpen, 2024



Language and globalization in Belgian corporate contexts: Institutional, individual, and interactional perspectives.

Nederlandse titel: Taal en globalisering in Belgische bedrijfscontexten: Institutionele, individuele, en interactionele perspectieven.

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*Voor mijn (ma)mama.*



*“Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt.”* (L. Wittgenstein)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From German: *“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”*





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I recently read a book by Angie Cruz in which the protagonist said she sometimes “needed help not to drown in a glass of water,” and this metaphor perfectly captures how I feel at the end of this PhD. Throughout the storms I have weathered over the past four years, I have a number of people to thank for keeping me from drowning.

I want to thank to the members of the jury, prof. Peter Petré, prof. Reinhild Vandekerckhove, prof. Geert Jacobs, and prof. Adam Wilson, for your invaluable feedback, eye-opening questions, and revelatory insights. Thank you to the members of the Grammar and Pragmatics research group, for providing such a warm and welcoming research environment. Thank you to everyone who participated and/or showed interest in this project, for reminding me that my research matters beyond the scope of obtaining a doctoral degree. Thank you to my family, for caring so deeply, even (or especially) when you barely had any idea of what I was talking about. Thank you to my friends, for providing me with much needed distractions over the years. Thank you to all the doctoral students of GaP, and particularly to Magda, Marie, and Anne-Sophie, for sharing the highs and lows of the PhD process with me, ready to commiserate or celebrate whenever necessary. Thank you to my cat, Tofu, for being the best possible co-worker during the countless home office days. And thank you to my running shoes, for getting me out of my own head when nothing else could.

Finally, I owe special gratitude to three people who kept me afloat more than once. Thank you to Wouter, for listening, for being there for me, and most of all, for loving me. You have pulled me through the most difficult moments of the past few years, and I am forever grateful to have you by my side. Thank you to Els, for your sincere support, your kindness, and your guidance during this project. And lastly, thank you to Mieke, for believing in me throughout this tumultuous process. Your advice and expertise laid the foundation of my academic journey, and I genuinely, truly, and unequivocally could not have done this without you.



## ENGLISH SUMMARY

Language and globalization are intricately intertwined in contemporary societies, including in corporate contexts where the interplay between the two plays a defining role in the general workings and overall efficiency of the corporate setting in question. However, there is little research to date which has examined the specificities of language as part of processes of globalization against the complex and localized sociolinguistic background of Belgium. In light of this, this dissertation offers novel insights on language and language use in different types of corporate contexts in Belgium from a sociolinguistic perspective, particularly in light of the increasing internationalization and globalization in and of these types of contexts.

More specifically, a qualitative case study approach is adopted to unravel the intricacies of the interplay between language and globalization from different institutional, individual, and interactional perspectives. To achieve this aim, the dissertation is structured into three empirical case studies on the basis of these three perspectives, and each case study is based on its own dataset collected within a specific corporate context, i.e. a multinational corporation in Brussels, a professional transnational workspace in Brussels in a general sense, and a small-sized yet globally active enterprise in Flanders.

The first case study examines the perspective of ‘globalized institutions’ in the corporate context of FinCorp (pseudonym), a Belgian multinational corporation which has its headquarters in Brussels. More specifically, a scaled socio-historical approach is adopted to reconstruct the development of FinCorp’s corporate language policy over the course of more than 20 years and to contextualize these perceived changes within the company’s socio-historical context, corporate structural changes, and complex functioning across regional, national, and international scales.

The second case study explores the perspective of ‘globalized individuals’ in the corporate context of a professional transnational workspace in Brussels, with a specific

focus on language as part of the lives of professional transnational migrants who cross international borders with the aim of advancing their careers. Overall, this case study aims to explore the importance and relevance of language as part of privileged migration, both in terms of linguistic repertoire and how language is used in interaction to construct migration-related and national identity categories.

Finally, the third case study examines the perspective of ‘globalized interactions’ in the corporate context of GlobalCorp (pseudonym), a small-sized enterprise in Flanders which operates globally. More specifically, this case study focuses the high-stakes and potentially sensitive interactional context of performance appraisals between managers in Flanders and sales agents who work for GlobalCorp from all across the world. Through research foci on the role of small talk, the use of different multilingual strategies, and the varied ways in which negative feedback is formulated through talk and text in these types of interactions, this case study aims to highlight the role, complexity, and importance of language in corporate performance appraisals at GlobalCorp.

The institutional, individual, and interactional perspectives which form the starting points of the three empirical case studies arguably cannot be separated from one another if the research aim is to achieve in-depth insights on the sociolinguistic topic at hand. Instead, I conclude that each perspective is inherently influenced by and simultaneously influences the others, and that this deeply contextualized approach results in novel sociolinguistic insights on the complex interplay between language and globalization in corporate contexts, particularly within the nation-state context of Belgium.

**Keywords:** language; globalization; sociolinguistics; Belgium; corporate contexts; language policy; institutional interaction; text and talk

## NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Taal en globalisering zijn complex met elkaar verweven in hedendaagse samenlevingen, alsook in bedrijfscontexten, waar de wisselwerking tussen beide een bepalende rol speelt in de algemene werking en efficiëntie van de bedrijfscontext in kwestie. Tot op heden is er echter weinig onderzoek gedaan naar de specifieke kenmerken van taal als deel van globaliseringsprocessen binnen de complexe en gelokaliseerde sociolinguïstische setting van België. Dit proefschrift biedt daarom nieuwe inzichten over taal en taalgebruik in verschillende soorten bedrijfscontexten in België vanuit een sociolinguïstisch perspectief, en met name binnen het kader van de toenemende internationalisering en globalisering in en van dit soort contexten.

Meer in het bijzonder wordt een kwalitatieve casestudie-aanpak gehanteerd om de complexiteit van de wisselwerking tussen taal en globalisering te ontrafelen vanuit een institutioneel, een individueel, en een interactioneel perspectief. Om dit doel te bereiken is het proefschrift gestructureerd in de vorm van drie empirische casestudies die deze drie perspectieven in kaart trachten te brengen, en elke casestudie is gebaseerd op een eigen dataset die verzameld werd binnen een specifieke bedrijfscontext, namelijk een multinational in Brussel, een professionele transnationale werkcontext in Brussel in een bredere zin, en een KMO in Vlaanderen die globaal actief is.

De eerste casestudie focust op het perspectief van ‘geglobaliseerde instellingen’ in de bedrijfscontext van FinCorp (pseudoniem), een Belgische multinational met hoofdkantoor in Brussel. Meer specifiek wordt een socio-historische aanpak gehanteerd om de ontwikkeling van het taalbeleid van FinCorp te reconstrueren over een periode van meer dan 20 jaar, en om de waargenomen veranderingen te contextualiseren binnen de socio-historische context van het bedrijf, de structurele veranderingen binnen het bedrijf, en de complexe werking op regionale, nationale, en internationale niveaus.

De tweede casestudie onderzoekt het perspectief van ‘geglobaliseerde individuen’ in de bedrijfscontext van een professioneel transnationale werkcontext in Brussel, met een specifieke focus op taal als deel van het leven van professionele transnationale migranten die over internationale grenzen heen verhuizen om hun carrière verder uit te bouwen. In het algemeen wil deze casestudie het belang en de relevantie van taal als onderdeel van geprivilegieerde migratie in Brussel in kaart brengen, zowel in de vorm van taalrepertoires als in de manieren waarop taal wordt gebruikt in interactie om migratie-gerelateerde en nationale identiteitscategorieën te gebruiken en definiëren.

Tot slot is de derde casestudie gericht op het perspectief van ‘geglobaliseerde interacties’ in de bedrijfscontext van GlobalCorp (pseudoniem), een KMO in Vlaanderen die wereldwijd actief is. Meer specifiek focust deze casestudie zich op de potentieel gevoelige interactionele context van personeelsevaluaties tussen managers in Vlaanderen en verkoopagenten die van over de hele wereld voor het bedrijf werken. Door middel van onderzoeksfocussen op de rol van ‘small talk’, het gebruik van verschillende meertalige strategieën, en de manieren waarop negatieve feedback wordt geformuleerd in gesproken en geschreven vorm in dit soort interacties bij GlobalCorp, wil deze casestudie de rol, de complexiteit, en het belang van taal in personeelsevaluaties in bedrijven benadrukken.

De institutionele, individuele, en interactionele perspectieven die de uitgangspunten vormen van de drie empirische casestudies kunnen aantoonbaar niet van elkaar worden gescheiden als het doel van het onderzoek is om diepgaande inzichten te verwerven in de sociolinguïstische context in kwestie. In plaats daarvan concludeer ik dat elk perspectief inherent beïnvloed wordt door en tegelijkertijd invloed uitoefent op de andere, en dat deze diep gecontextualiseerde benadering resulteert in nieuwe sociolinguïstische inzichten omtrent de complexe wisselwerking tussen taal en globalisering in bedrijfscontexten, in het bijzonder binnen de nationale context van België.

**Kernwoorden:** taal; globalisering; sociolinguïstiek; België; bedrijfscontexten; taalbeleid; institutionele interactie; geschreven en gesproken communicatie

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## ABBREVIATIONS

**BELF:** English as a business lingua franca

**CA:** conversation analysis

**ELF:** English as a lingua franca

**HQ:** headquarters

**LPP:** language policy and planning

**MNC:** multinational corporation

**PA:** performance appraisal

**PAI:** performance appraisal interview

**SME:** small to medium-sized enterprise

**TB:** taalbarometer (language barometer)



# 1 INTRODUCTION



## 1.1 RESEARCH MOTIVATION AND SCOPE OF THE DISSERTATION

Language and globalization are intricately and complexly intertwined in contemporary societies (Blommaert, 2010; Fairclough, 2006), including in corporate contexts where the interplay between the two plays a defining role in the general workings and overall efficiency of the corporate setting in question. Indeed, language can be considered “central to the understanding of organisational, social and global realities” (Sanden, 2016, p. 275), and as such, examining language in globalized corporate settings does not only provide insight into how the interplay between language and globalization can manifest itself in different ways across time and space, but also ultimately leads to a deeper understanding of the corporate setting itself. This dissertation aims to contribute to such a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between language and globalization in corporate settings from a sociolinguistic perspective, particularly within the nation-state context of Belgium.

To date, sociolinguistic research on language and language use in corporate contexts in Belgium is relatively scarce, despite the fact that “there is a long tradition in sociolinguistics of looking at Belgium as a special, rather problematic, case of societal multilingualism” (Blommaert, 2011, p. 241). Offering a macro-economic perspective on Belgian corporate contexts, the Federation of Belgian Enterprises stated in 2017 that the value of international trade had almost doubled over the course of the previous 15 years, arguing that “even for SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises], doing business internationally is an indispensable condition for growth today” (Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen, 2017, p. 8, my translation). Moreover, international export represents 85% of Belgium’s GDP compared to an average of 44% in other countries in the eurozone (Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen, 2017). As such, it is clear that Belgian companies have taken part in processes of globalization over the past few decades, but there is little research to date which has examined the specificities of language as part of such localized processes of globalization. This dissertation adopts

a globalized perspective on language and language use in Belgian corporate settings to contribute to filling this observed gap in the literature.

To achieve this aim, I adopt a qualitative case study approach (Priya, 2021). Although there are well-known limitations to qualitative research regarding generalization, representativeness, and reproducibility, I opt for this approach particularly because of its strengths, specifically in terms of the depth, complexity and detail which arguably cannot be yielded through quantitative approaches. Working with what Geertz (1973) defines as ‘thick descriptions’ of specific corporate contexts, I aim to focus on “the smallness of things and [...] to understand them in all their interpretive complexity”, taking into account “the overarching social order in which they interact” (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999, p. 1). In doing so, instead of achieving representative results for (parts of) a specific population, the case studies are “aimed at demonstrating complexity, and yielding hypotheses that can be replicated and tested in similar, not identical, circumstances” (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 17). Moreover, by situating the unique nature of each case study in its broader societal context, they “can and do indeed reveal a lot about the very big things in society” (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 13). As such, the aim of this dissertation is not to provide a generalizable overview of language and language use in Belgian corporate contexts, but rather to reach in-depth insights in specific contexts which allow for a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between language and globalization in different types of Belgian corporate contexts.

In this dissertation, language and globalization are studied from three separate yet intertwined perspectives, i.e. institutional, individual, and interactional perspectives, and each perspective functions as the starting point of one of the three case studies in this dissertation. To do so, I follow American sociologist Richard Jenkins’ conceptualization of the three ‘orders of society’:

“(…) taking some inspiration from Goffman and Giddens, it is possible to talk about ‘whatever-it-is-that-we-call-society’ as a set of relationships within and between three ‘orders’ of phenomena: the *individual* order, the world of embodied individuals and ‘what-goes-on-in-their-heads’; the *interaction* order,

the world of co-presence and relationships between embodied individuals, of ‘what-goes-on-between-people’; the *institutional* order, the world of patterned, organized and symbolically-templated ‘ways-of-doing-things’. However, although ‘society’ can be thought of as made up of individuals, of interaction between individuals, and of institutions, *it cannot be thought of as any one of these in isolation.*” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 10, emphasis added)

In other words, the three orders of society as defined by Jenkins (2000) are the three main perspectives from which I examine language in Belgian corporate settings. For the focus on what I call ‘globalized institutions’, the first case study examines the ‘ways-of-doing-things’ regarding language with the perspective of companies as a starting point; for the focus on what I call ‘globalized individuals’, the second case study examines ‘what-goes-on-in-their-heads’ regarding language with the perspective of individual people as a starting point; and finally, for the focus on what I call ‘globalized interactions’, the third case study focuses on ‘what-goes-on-between-people’ with the perspective of authentic encounters as a starting point. Each of these general perspectives functions as an individual starting point for one of the three case studies, but all orders of society are nevertheless present and intersect in different ways throughout the different case studies:

“The use of the word ‘order’ signifies both distinctive domains of activity, and the ordered and orderly nature of the social world (Goffman 1983: 5). However, there is no suggestion that there are, in some realist sense, three separate social domains. The orders overlap completely; each is implicated in each of the others; none make sense without the others.” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 10)

To conduct each of these qualitative case studies, I adopt a sociolinguistic approach, defined by Blommaert (2010) as:

“... an approach that looks at linguistic phenomena from within the social, cultural, political and historical context of which they are part; one that considers language as organized not just in a linguistic system but in a

sociolinguistic system, the rules and dynamics of which cannot be automatically derived from considering their linguistic features; and one that so examines language in an attempt to understand society.” (p. 3)

The sociolinguistic approach allows researchers to examine the seemingly small details of human interaction and communication and interpret them within a broader societal framework. For this dissertation, these frameworks encompass the broad socio-economic framework of globalization, the socio-political and cultural framework of the Belgian nation-state and its distinct regions, and the institutional frameworks of the three corporate settings in which the different case studies were conducted, all of which intersect with one another and change dynamically across space and time in their own ways. By focusing on language as part of these distinct yet overlapping frameworks, such embedded and deeply contextualized studies allow for in-depth analyses of specific instances of talk, text and other types of communication which can reveal new insights regarding the settings in which they occur. In other words, sociolinguistics “has the capacity to read the infinitely big features of the world from infinitely small details of human communicative behaviour” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 198).

An interdisciplinary embedding in the literature is necessary to contextualize such a sociolinguistic approach to language, as I take into account literature and findings from a number of fields related to language and globalization in corporate contexts, including but not limited to international business communication, pragmatics, applied linguistics, management studies, economics of language, anthropology, and sociology. As such, the sociolinguistic approach is one way in which this dissertation crosses boundaries, i.e. by rooting the findings in more discipline than one. In a more general sense, the crossing of boundaries can be considered central to the setup of this dissertation as a whole, doing so at different points between the different orders of society (Jenkins, 2000); between different types of corporate settings; between different types of institutional interactions; between national borders; between different regions in Belgium; between different qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. To provide further insight into the different ways in which such boundary-crossing occurs throughout the dissertation, the next section sets out the

general objectives of this dissertation as well as the individual aims of each research chapter.

## 1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This dissertation aims to offer novel insights on language and language use in different types of corporate contexts in Belgium from a sociolinguistic perspective, particularly against the background of the increasing internationalization and globalization in and of these types of contexts over the past few decades. Specifically, it aims to unravel the intricacies of language as part of these developments from different institutional, individual, and interactional perspectives (Jenkins, 2000). To do so, the dissertation is made up of three empirical case studies, each of which is based its own dataset collected within a specific type of corporate context, i.e. a multinational corporation, a small-sized enterprise, and a professional transnational workspace in a more general sense. To further clarify the terminology relating to these research contexts, the term ‘company’ is used as an overarching concept to refer to different types of for-profit businesses, whereas multinational corporations (MNCs) and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are defined as specific types of businesses based on their size. Seven individual research chapters were written on the basis of the three case studies, as visualized in Figure 1. In what follows, I will present the basic outline and research objectives of the three case studies and the seven research chapters which resulted from them.

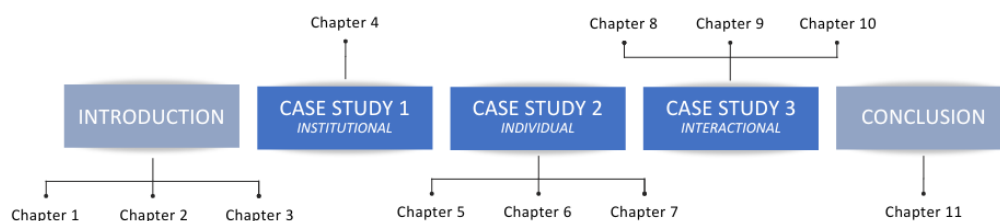


Figure 1. Structural overview of the dissertation

The first case study focuses on the perspective of ‘globalized institutions’ by topicalizing the ‘ways-of-doing-things’ (Jenkins, 2000) regarding language in a corporate setting with the perspective of the company as the starting point. The specific research context for this study is a Belgian MNC, pseudonymized as FinCorp, which has its headquarters in Brussels but is active in all Belgian regions as well as internationally. This case study resulted in one research chapter which was co-authored with Mieke Vandenbroucke and is included in this dissertation as Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, we adopt a scaled socio-historical approach to reconstruct the development of FinCorp’s corporate language policy (Spolsky, 2004) over the course of more than 20 years, and we contextualize the perceived changes within the company’s socio-historical context, corporate structural changes such as mergers and acquisitions, and complex functioning across regional, national, and international scales. The specific research objectives of this study are twofold, as we aim to uncover the impact that the structural changes within FinCorp had on their language practices and language management over time, and which underlying language ideological beliefs can be observed as part of these structural changes, specifically within the internationalized and language-sensitive context of Brussels and Belgium. To achieve these objectives, we draw on archival data, in-depth interviews with corporate management, and screenshots of the company website. We find that over time, FinCorp identifies a delicate balance between pride- and profit-based language ideologies (Duchêne & Heller, 2012) which incorporates influences from the increasingly globalized financial marketplace in which they operate, as well as from the localized sociolinguistic contexts of Belgium and its distinct regions, all of which influenced the historical development of their language practices and language management in different ways. In doing so, we topicalize the structural, ideological, and practical complexity of language in contemporary MNCs in a globalized Belgian context, thereby problematizing the notion of a static MNC in favor of a dynamic, scaled conceptualization of companies as constantly in motion (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018). In sum, the insights yielded in this specific globalized Belgian corporate setting contribute a scalar socio-historical approach to the literature on corporate language policies.

The second case study focuses on the perspective of ‘globalized individuals’ by topicalizing the ‘what-goes-on-in-their-heads’ (Jenkins, 2000) regarding language in a corporate setting with the perspective of a specific group of individual people as the starting point. More specifically, the focus lies on language as part of the lives of professional transnational migrants who cross international borders with the aim of advancing their careers. The data collection for this case study consists of 31 in-depth interviews with such ‘globalized individuals’ who are living in Brussels, who have moved across international borders in the past, and who plan to seek further professional mobility in the future. The research context for this study is on the one hand the general transnational workspace which they navigate to achieve their (professional) goals, and on the other hand the specific locality of Brussels where all the participants resided at the time of the interviews. Rather than focusing strictly on how these individuals deal with language in the workplace, the focus is on language as part of their globalized lives in a broader sense, taking into account the transnational workspace within which they function as an underlying factor which implicitly and explicitly influences how they deal with language on a quotidian basis. This case study resulted in three research chapters which are included in this dissertation as Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Chapters 5 and 6 are co-authored with Mieke Vandenbroucke.

In Chapter 5, we examine the experiences of professional transnational migrants living in Brussels to gain a deeper understanding of the role and value of language in their lives, particularly within the specific locality of Brussels. To do so, we make use of Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of the linguistic market, according to which all languages and language varieties essentially function as commodities and are attributed symbolic value depending on the context in which they are used. The specific research objectives of this chapter are threefold, as we examine how these individuals perceive the role and symbolic value of languages in their lives, how these perceptions influence and are shaped by their experiences in Brussels, and how their perceptions and experiences can be understood in light of the linguistic market in which they occur. We find that the expectations harbored by the professional transnational migrants regarding the symbolic value of specific languages and multilingual repertoires do not necessarily match the reality of the Brussels linguistic market, and that this is the case for non-

official languages such as English as well as for the official languages of Dutch and French. We argue that the results contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between language and migration within the specific and superdiverse sociolinguistic context of Brussels (Geldof, 2021), particularly as part of processes of privileged migration, and that the personal experiences of these individuals reflect the localized complexities of language and globalization, both in the professional sphere and beyond.

In Chapter 6, we zoom in on the discursive construction of social categories which are used to refer to different types of people who migrate from the emic perspectives of those who migrate with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). The specific research objective of this chapter is to examine how the participants discursively construct specific migration-related categories as part of the interactional context of a research interview, and how they position themselves in relation to these categories. To achieve these objectives, we draw specifically on a number of questions and answers discussed towards the end of each of the 31 semi-structured interviews, which topicalize three specific migration-related categories, i.e. ‘expat’, ‘migrant’, and ‘immigrant’. In doing so, this chapter sheds light on the discrepancies between how the different participants define and position themselves in relation to these specific migration-related categories, and emphasizes that these discursive processes of categorization are entrenched in the particular interactional context of the research interview in which they occur. On the basis of our analysis, we conclude that social migration-related categories can be considered ‘floating signifiers’ (Hall, 1996) or ‘elusive signifiers’ (Kunz, 2020), as the participants ascribe differing yet sometimes overlapping and intersecting meanings to them, thereby raising questions regarding the need for reflection and transparency in the use of social categories in academic research and beyond (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Jacobs, 2018). In sum, this chapter aims to contribute to our understanding of the complexity and sensitivity of discursive processes of social categorization as part of migration, particularly from the understudied perspective of privileged migration.



In Chapter 7, I examine one professional transnational migrant's national identity as it is constructed throughout the interactional context of a research interview. More specifically, I focus on an interview I conducted with Laura (pseudonym), a 'third culture individual' (Moore & Barker, 2012) who was born in China, grew up in Canada, and who has spent her adult life moving across the world in pursuit of her professional transnational career, living and working in Brussels at the time of the interview. The research objective of this chapter is to disentangle how Laura makes sense of and interactionally constructs her national identity within the discursive context of a research interview, thereby also shedding light on how vulnerability (Fineman, 2008; 2010) manifests itself as part of categorization in interaction. Using a micro-level discourse analytical approach, I draw on the interview I conducted with Laura to examine how and when she uses the national identity categories 'Chinese' and 'Canadian' during our encounter, which attributes she ascribes to them, and how she positions herself with regard to them throughout the interview. In doing so, this chapter provides in-depth insights into the specificities, complexities and vulnerability of constructing a sense of national identity for a third culture individual who is also a professional transnational migrant, thereby shedding new light on the different ways in which "globalization is not only a descriptor of an era, but also the dominant logic of many people's lives" (Moore & Barker, 2012, p. 553). As such, the chapter aims to contribute an individual perspective to the literature on the interplay between language and globalization as part of professional transnational migration.

The third case study focuses on the perspective of 'globalized interactions' by topicalizing the 'what-goes-on-between-people' (Jenkins, 2000) regarding language in a corporate setting with the perspective of authentic workplace interactions as the starting point. Specifically, I focus on language use in the high-stakes and potentially sensitive interactional context of performance appraisals. The data collection for this study consisted primarily of 16 video recordings of authentic performance appraisal interviews. Additionally, I collected the textual documentation surrounding the interviews, comprising the written preparations and written reports for each individual performance appraisal, as well as a few other relevant textual documents related to performance appraisals at the company. Finally, I also conducted two follow-up

interviews with the managers responsible for the performance appraisal processes to add their emic perspectives to the analysis. The research context for this study is a small-sized yet globally active company pseudonymized as GlobalCorp which functions within the tertiary sector by facilitating sales between individual buyers and sellers in 59 countries across the globe. Its headquarters are situated in Flanders, where approximately 25 employees work. Additionally, the company employs approximately 25 sales agents on commission who are located across the world and who each function as representatives for a specific geographical market. The performance appraisals under study were conducted through telecommunications software between two managers at HQ in Belgium and 16 individual agents who work for the company from abroad, thereby capturing the globalized workings of the company. This case study resulted in three research chapters which are co-authored with Els Tobbacq and Mieke Vandenbroucke and are included in this dissertation as Chapters 8, 9 and 10.

In Chapter 8, we examine the role and value of small talk as relational practice (Holmes & Marra, 2004; Holmes et al., 2011) during corporate performance appraisal interviews which occur in the globalized virtual workspace of GlobalCorp, i.e. in an online transnational working environment where colleagues do not share a physical workplace (Jacobs, 2004). The research objective of this chapter is to examine how small talk occurs, where it is located, and which interactional functions it fulfills. To do so, the analysis draws primarily on the authentic empirical data of the performance appraisal interviews, as well as on some of the written documents and the follow-up interviews with the managers to contextualize and triangulate the findings from the interactional analysis. Based on our analysis, we argue that small talk as relational practice is a crucial part of performance appraisal interviews at GlobalCorp, as it fulfills the goal of communicating some of the company's norms and values to the agents abroad, thereby enabling the managers to talk the company's corporate culture "into being" (Heritage, 1984, p. 290). In sum, this chapter aims to contribute to the literature on the different types talk which occur in the workplace (Holmes, 2000) through a specific focus on small talk as part of performance appraisal interactions at a small-sized yet globally active Belgian enterprise.

In Chapter 9, we focus on the multilingual nature of GlobalCorp, as we topicalize the different linguistic strategies that are used to bridge the lack of a shared first language during their performance appraisal processes. More specifically, we examine the use of English as a lingua franca, receptive multilingualism, and lay interpreting. The research objectives of this chapter are threefold, as we examine how the multilingual strategies used during the performance appraisal interviews fit into GlobalCorp's general language management strategy, how the managers perceive these different multilingual strategies, and how their language ideological beliefs shape the language practices during the performance appraisal interviews. To do so, we draw both on the authentic interactional data and the follow-up interviews with the managers. We find that the language beliefs of the managers shape the performance appraisal interviews in different ways, and that in some cases, this leads to clear efforts to signal and prevent miscommunication, whereas in other cases, there are discrepancies between their language ideological beliefs and their observable language practices, which lead to miscommunication during crucial moments of the performance appraisal. In sum, this chapter provides in-depth insights into the different ways in which a Belgian SME deals with multilingualism in the high-stakes interactional context of performance appraisal interviews, thereby contributing to the literature on performance appraisal interviews from an explicitly multilingual and globalized perspective.

In Chapter 10, we examine the discursive construction of negative feedback throughout the intertextual chain (Fairclough, 1993) that makes up the performance appraisal process. The specific research objectives of this chapter are twofold, as we aim to examine the importance and occurrence of negative feedback in GlobalCorp's performance appraisal process in comparison to other types of feedback, as well as how it is formulated and recontextualized throughout the different written and spoken phases of individual performance appraisals. To do so, we draw on the spoken performance appraisal interviews, on the written preparations and reports of each individual interview, and on the insights from the follow-up interviews with the managers. In doing so, we find that there is an institutional need to formulate negative feedback as clearly as possible, but that at the same time, the managers orient towards negative feedback as a socially problematic action in both written and spoken form,

despite its integral role in the appraisal process (Asmuß, 2008). Moreover, we argue that, as performance appraisals are discursive processes consisting of multiple modalities and phases, they should be researched as such. In sum, this chapter contributes to the literature on recontextualization and entextualization (Bauman & Briggs, 1990; Park & Bucholtz, 2009) of corporate performance appraisal processes through a case study at a globally active Belgian SME.

It is important to note that although the starting point of each case study is primarily based on the perspective of one ‘order’ of society (Jenkins, 2000), i.e. institutional, individual, or interactional (see Section 1.1), the three orders are present in and intersect in different ways in all of the different research chapters, thereby providing novel sociolinguistic insights into the different ways in which language manifests itself in corporate contexts, particularly against the broader background of globalization and within the nation-state context of Belgium. In the following chapter, I will elaborate further on the theoretical and societal background of this dissertation by presenting four aspects which contextualize the dissertation to different extents, namely globalization and corporate contexts, talk and text in institutional settings, (corporate) language policy, and the (socio)linguistic context of Belgium. Not all of these contextualizing concepts and frameworks are equally relevant to all of the case studies and research chapters in this dissertation; instead, the following chapter aims to provide a general overview of the broad concepts and frameworks which tie together this dissertation as a whole, and to contextualize how the different case studies and research chapters specifically contribute to ongoing research on these topics.

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# 2 THEORETICAL AND SOCIETAL BACKGROUND



## 2.1 GLOBALIZATION AND CORPORATE CONTEXTS

The primary framework in which this dissertation is situated is that of globalization. The aim of this section is not so much to provide a general theoretical overview of *all* aspects of globalization, as that is beyond the scope of this chapter, but rather to provide insight into the specific aspects of globalization that I have taken into account when conceptualizing the dissertation. Throughout the next sections, I will therefore introduce the framework of globalization itself, as well as a number of social and linguistic developments that are strongly intertwined with the globalization of modern societies, i.e. migration, linguistic diversity, and the global expansion of English. I will then introduce how this broad framework is relevant to corporate workplace settings. Finally, the last section will provide an overview of the ways in which these different aspects and manifestations of globalization are intertwined with and reflected in the research chapters of this dissertation.

### 2.1.1 Defining globalization

In its contemporary definition, globalization can be defined as “the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterize modern social life” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 2). Given its broad character, the term has become a “catchword for a particular historical phase” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 1) which has been prone to criticism regarding its too general or universalized nature (Bourdieu, 2010). However, it could also be argued that “the concept of globalization is not so much vague as multifaceted” (Haberland, 2009, p. 17). In this sense, the interconnections and interdependencies that reflect globalization can be identified in a number of aspects of modern social life, including but not limited to:

“... flows of goods and money, and international financial and trading networks, in the economic field; intergovernmental networks, and interdependencies and interactions and interconnections between international agencies such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the

World Trade Organization and government agencies at national and regional levels; the mobility of people as migrants, tourists, or members of commercial or governmental organizations; flows of images and representations and interactions through contemporary media and communications technologies; and so forth.” (Fairclough, 2006, p. 2-3)

As such, globalization can be defined as a complex interplay between a number of societal developments and processes which are all connected through changes regarding their spatial and social organization, resulting in “ever more intensive, extensive, and rapid interconnections, interdependencies and flows on a global scale and between the global scale and other (macro-regional, national, local, etc.) scales” (Fairclough, 2006, p. 142). Indeed, scale is frequently used as a tool to grasp and interpret the complexity of such changes, as processes of globalization have not only resulted in the emergence of a global scale, but have also affected the flows, interdependencies, and relations *between* scales (Fairclough, 2006). One such process that affects scale in a multifaceted and dynamic way is that of glocalization, which can be defined as a “twin process” where the focus shifts “from the national scale both upwards to supra-national or global scales and downwards to the scale of the (...) local, urban, or regional configurations” (Swyngedouw, 2004, p. 25). A typical example of this in a corporate context is the marketing strategy of McDonald’s, a global fast-food chain which offers a standard menu across the world, as well as more localized menu items, such as a ‘Croque McDo’ in France and a ‘McArabia’ in Arab countries (Khan & Khan, 2013), thereby adopting an approach that is simultaneously globalized and localized, i.e. ‘glocalized’.

Although it is generally agreed upon that we currently live in an age or era of globalization, there is less agreement regarding when this specific era began (Haberland, 2009), as historians and sociologists “have long been aware that the world has been a congeries of large-scale interactions for many centuries” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 27). Despite any disagreements regarding the specific starting point of this new age, however, there is also an agreement that “today’s world involves interactions of a new order and intensity” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 27), and that the existing frameworks which

were used to grasp the dynamics of social life no longer suffice to grasp the complexity of what we are seeing in a contemporary globalized world since the 1990s:

“The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries). Nor is it susceptible to simple models of push and pull (in terms of migration theory), or of surpluses and deficits (as in traditional models of balance of trade), or of consumers and producers (as in most neo-Marxist theories of development).” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 32)

Globalization should thus not be seen as a new phenomenon that has emerged over the past few decades; instead, the current stage can be considered a specific era within a longer framework of globalization (Blommaert, 2010) which is associated in particular with developments in communication and information technology and the emergence of late capitalism (Del Percio et al., 2016; Fairclough, 2006). It is this current stage of late modern globalization that is meant when I refer to globalization in this dissertation.

In defining globalization, I also want to make a distinction between globalization and globalism. Whereas the former is conceptualized as a broad societal framework, the latter is a discourse or ideology related to and based on globalization “which represents it in reductive neo-liberal economic terms” (Fairclough, 2006, p. 34). In other words, globalism is a reductive representation of the complex and multifaceted nature of globalization processes and represents it “as purely economic, as a particular form of capitalism and a particular view of what capitalism should—must—be like” (Fairclough, 2006, p. 8). I choose to clarify this here so as to underline that although the discourse of globalism is certainly part of globalization, it is not what is meant when I refer to globalization or processes of globalization in this dissertation.

Differing from objectivist, rhetoricist, or ideologist perspectives on globalization, this dissertation adopts a social constructionist perspective to globalization which

“recognizes the socially constructed character of social life in general and forms of globalization in particular” (Fairclough, 2006, p. 12), and in doing so, follows Fairclough’s (2006) line of argumentation that “we cannot adequately understand or analyse globalization as a reality without taking language —discourse— into account” (p. 143), as “it is partly language that is globalizing and globalized” (p. 3). In this sense, the object of study of this dissertation can also be referred to as language *in* globalization rather than language *and* globalization, as language can be considered an integral part of what constitutes the dynamic processes of globalization (Blommaert, 2010).

In this section, I have contextualized the concept of globalization as a broad societal development which functions as the primary sociolinguistic framework of this dissertation. In doing so, I position this dissertation as part of what Blommaert (2010) refers to as ‘a sociolinguistics of globalization’, which “forces sociolinguistics to unthink its classic distinctions and biases and to rethink itself as a sociolinguistics of mobile resources, framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements” (p. 1). In the following section, I will discuss such trans-contextual networks, flows and movements in the form of migration.

### 2.1.2 Migration and globalization

Due to the crucial importance of mobility as part of processes of globalization, a ‘sociolinguistics of globalization’ is inherently a sociolinguistics of mobility which situates space and time at the center of sociolinguistic analysis and focuses on the temporary and unstable nature of language-in-motion (Blommaert, 2010). One way in which mobility manifests itself in current processes of social organization is through the migration of people.

Defining migration and particularly people who migrate is not an easy task, as “definitions of the migrant are themselves numerous and far from clear-cut” (Kunz, 2020, p. 2149). One broad definition for migration and migrants which is often used

both in lay contexts as well as in academic research is set forth by the United Nations Migration Agency (IOM), which defines the migrant as:

“... any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is.” (United Nations, n.d.)

The World Migration Report published by IOM in 2022 stated that in 2020, the number of international migrants was estimated to be 281 million globally, which is 60 million more than in 2010. In other words, 3,6% of the world population in 2020 was an international migrant, compared to 2,8% in 2000 and 2,3% in 1980 (International Organization for Migration, 2022). Despite this being a small minority of the global population, these numbers underline that there is a consistent increase in global migration which is not expected to stagnate soon.

Similar to the historical development of globalization, (mass) migration in itself is not a new phenomenon, but the scale and intensity at which it has occurred over the past few decades can be considered unprecedented as a result of a number of socio-political and geopolitical developments as well as the accessibility of telecommunications software and other technological developments (Appadurai, 1996; Arnaut et al., 2016; Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Cadier & Mar-Molinero, 2012; Vertovec, 2007). In light of this, migration and transnational mobility both cause and result in the increasing complexity of contemporary globalization.

Vertovec (2007) coined the term ‘superdiversity’ in light of migration patterns and diversity in the UK to grasp the complexity of migration as part of the globalization taking place in the 21st century. He defines superdiversity in the UK as “a notion intended to underline a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything the country has previously experienced” which is “distinguished by a dynamic interplay of variables among an increased number of new, small and scattered, multiple-origin,

transnationally connected, socio-economically differentiated and legally stratified immigrants who have arrived over the last decade.” (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1024). A number of other researchers have applied this notion to other nation-state and urban contexts outside of the UK. Elaborating further on the concept, Geldof adds:

“I distinguish the transition towards superdiversity as a qualitative transition, referring to the process of *diversification of diversity*, and as a process of normalisation of diversity. These transitions are taking place against the background of a quantitative, demographic transition of increasing ethnic diversity, including the evolution towards majority-minority cities (Geldof, 2016a).” (Geldof, 2021, p. 45, emphasis added)

This combination of the qualitative and quantitative complexification of migration as part of processes of globalization since the 1990s is what differentiates contemporary superdiversity from notions such as ‘multiculturalism’ or ‘diversity’ and from other types of migration that have occurred in the past (Blommaert, 2010; Geldof, 2021; Vertovec, 2007).

As part of the ‘diversification of diversity’ that Geldof (2021) refers to, the different types of migration that characterize superdiversity are numerous:

“Superdiversity is characterized by a tremendous increase in the categories of migrants, not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, but also in terms of motives, patterns and itineraries of migration, processes of insertion into the labour and housing markets of the host cities, and so on (cf. Vertovec 2010).” (Blommaert & Rampton, 2016, p. 22)

Existing research on migration in contemporary societies has focused in large part on migrants who are disadvantaged in light of their precarious social or legal situations, such as refugees or asylum seekers, and much less is known to date about the specificities of more privileged forms of migration (Kunz, 2016; Lan, 2011; Leinonen, 2012; Vailati & Rial, 2016), a research gap to which the second case study of this dissertation aims to contribute. Although privileged migrants cannot be considered a

homogeneous group as they “come from a multitude of backgrounds and experiences”, they can be grouped together in relation to less privileged kinds of migration through “the common denominator of [...] the availability of capital, both economic and symbolic” (Vailati & Rial, 2016, p. 3).

From a (socio)linguistic perspective, a number of studies have aimed to bridge this gap in the literature on privileged forms of migration through research foci in a myriad of locations across the world. Studies in this field have, for example, looked at Nordic expatriates in Japan (Peltokorpi, 2007; 2010), Japanese, Western, and Polish expatriates in China respectively (Kubota, 2013; Selmer, 2006; Wilczewski, 2019), South African expats in the Middle East (Parker, 2015), non-Arab expats in the Gulf (Calafato & Tang, 2019), expats in Qatar (Theodoropoulou, 2015), expatriate children as third culture kids in Singapore (Starr et al., 2017), Moroccan and Brazilian transmigrants in Belgium (Withaecx et al., 2015), African skilled migrants in Barcelona (Garrido & Codó, 2017), and the difference between organizational and self-initiated expatriates in the greater Tokyo area (Froese & Peltokorpi, 2013). These studies highlight both the similarities and discrepancies in the (linguistic) experiences of these migrants from different backgrounds who have moved to a specific location, and thereby underline the heterogeneity of privileged migration experiences. In doing so, they have significantly contributed to our understanding of a number of aspects of privileged migration, including (socio)linguistic ones.

In referring to these studies, I have used the terms that the researchers themselves use in their papers to refer to the migrants they studied, and the differences in terminology highlight that a number of different terms can be and are used to refer to (privileged) migrants, both in academic research and beyond. Such differences in terminology reflect differences in social categories, and the meanings of social categories such as ‘expatriate’ or ‘(im)migrant’ are not stable, but rather contestable, fluid, and dynamic, and as such, can change over time and in light of the context in which they are used (Flubacher & Yeung, 2016; Mäkitalo, 2003). Some sociolinguistic studies have topicalized this potential problematicity of social migration-related categorization as part of their own case studies on privileged migration, including reflections on

Americans as ‘immigrants’ in Finland (Leinonen, 2012), British expatriates as ‘good migrants’ in Singapore (Cranston, 2017), and the ‘migrant/expat dichotomy’ in Switzerland (Yeung, 2016).

A number of sociological as well as sociolinguistic studies have also focused on the potential problematicity of social migration-related categories as its main object of study, particularly problematizing the inherently simplifying nature of such social categories. For example, studies have topicalized the American transformation of the concept of the ‘expat(riate)’ (Green, 2009), the conceptualization of ‘expat’ in existing migration research (Kunz, 2016), the relationship between the social migration-related categories ‘expatriate’ and ‘migrant’ (Kunz, 2020), the categorization of migrants in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Sweden with a particular focus on ‘immigrants’ and ‘refugees’ (De Coninck, 2020), the construction of ‘asylum seekers’ in public domain media texts in the United Kingdom (Goodman & Speer, 2007), the politics of the ‘migrant/refugee binary’ (Abdelaaty & Hamlin, 2022), and from a more meta-academic perspective, the use of and problems related to the use of social (migration-related) categories for research purposes (Gillespie et al., 2012; Jacobs, 2018). In sum, all of these studies argue that because of the polysemic and perspectival nature of social migration-related categories, more time should be spent on “critically examining and dissecting existing [categories] and considering the systems and processes that create stratification in migration” (Kunz, 2016, p. 96), and that the meaning that is ascribed to social categories should always be interpreted from within the social and interactional context in which they are being used. In other words, the simplifying nature of social categories requires thorough reflection, particularly in light of the ‘diversification of diversity’ that characterizes contemporary superdiversity (Geldof, 2021).

In this section, I have provided a broad definition of migration and situated it as an integral aspect of globalization, particularly in the form of superdiversity. Additionally, I have introduced existing research on the understudied perspective of privileged migration and discussed the potential problematicity of using inherently simplifying social categories to refer to heterogenous groups of individuals, specifically migrants.



In the following section, I will focus on linguistic diversity as a key characteristic to further grasp the complexity of migration in a globalized context.

### 2.1.3 Linguistic diversity and globalization

Processes of globalization have given rise to different language needs and practices across all levels of society, ranging from the supranational to the individual (Duchêne, 2009). On a nation-state level, countries are now increasingly confronted with and open to multilingualism, “whether for ease of navigation across national boundaries in supranational politics and markets such as the European Union or simply to compete on global markets” (Heller, 2010, p. 107; see also Flubacher et al., 2016; Martín Rojo, 2018). On an individual level, increased mobility has also resulted in increased individual multilingualism, and linguistic repertoires in superdiverse societies can be considered “records of mobility: of movement of people, language resources, social arenas, technologies of learning and learning environments” (Blommaert & Backus, 2013, p. 28). In other words, mobility as a key characteristic of globalization “must be seen as fundamentally shaped and mediated through language” (Park, 2014, p. 84), and through the connections, flows, and interdependencies that make up globalizing processes, this language is often diverse.

At the same time, a number of researchers in (socio)linguistics have argued that the world’s linguistic diversity is decreasing as a result of globalization, a process that has been termed ‘linguicism’ or ‘linguicide’ as part of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The conceptualization of such a process assumes that the emergence and presence of certain powerful languages results in the decrease of smaller, less powerful languages; Skutnabb-Kangas’s (2007) most optimistic estimate of the development of the world’s language is that in less than 100 years, at least half of the 7000 existing spoken languages today may be extinct or seriously endangered. Some see this process of decreasing linguistic diversity as an inevitability as well as an opportunity to increase global communicative efficiency and integration, whereas others see it as a threat to linguistic diversity, which they argue should be preserved in

the same way that we aim to preserve biological diversity (Réaume & Pinto, 2012). Finally, Blommaert (2010) has criticized the occurrence of this process as a whole from the perspective of a sociolinguistics of globalization, as he argues that this type of theory disregards the mobility of people, language, and linguistic resources by assuming that there is only room for one language at a time in a given sociolinguistic space (Blommaert, 2010, p. 43).

No matter the perspective on global linguistic diversity, there is a general consensus that within processes of globalization, certain languages are attributed higher value or power than others. Within the context of late capitalism and the globalized new economy specifically, language in general but specific languages in particular have arguably acquired an economic role, “both as a means through which work is accomplished [...] and as a product of labor” (Heller, 2010, p. 104). This is what Heller (2003) has conceptualized as the ‘commodification of language’:

“... a shift from understanding language as being primarily a marker of ethnonational identity, to understanding language as being a marketable commodity on its own, distinct from identity” which “renders language amenable to redefinition as a measurable skill, as opposed to a talent, or an inalienable characteristic of group members.” (p. 474)

Although it is not uncontested in the literature that language can be commodified, there is agreement that “individuals’ relationships with languages are shaped by the complex ways in which language is politico-economically positioned and treated in the current late capitalist regime” (Petrovic & Yazan, 2021, p. 3). In this sense, the politico-economic position of language today has arguably resulted in its commodification as a result of the specific types of value that are ascribed to it. This conceptualization of language as commodity is often also associated with theories of neoliberalism, which “commodify’ human abilities [...] to make them more productive in the capitalist economy” (Holborow, 2015, p. 31).

It is important to note that “languages *as such* do not have power” (Haberland, 2009, p. 24, emphasis added), but rather that power or value can be ascribed to language on the basis of its role and function in a specific context. Such value can take different forms and can result in different types of capital in the Bourdieusian sense, i.e. economic capital in the sense of material wealth and/or symbolic capital in the form of cultural and/or social capital “that is recognized as linked with legitimacy, authority, and prestige” (Park & Wee, 2012, p. 28). To illustrate how this works, Park and Wee (2012) provide an example of the symbolic capital that is often associated with the use of standard varieties of a language:

“For instance, by speaking the standard variety of a language, instead of the vernacular, one may be seen as well-educated, good-mannered, and fit for a respected job—in this sense, the ability to command the standard accent can also be seen as symbolic capital, for the speaker comes to be recognized (or rather, *misrecognized*, as Bourdieu emphasizes) as carrying prestige due to that ability.” (Park & Wee, 2012, p. 28, emphasis in original)

In a globalized context, linguistic diversity and having a diverse linguistic repertoire can be argued to have undergone a similar process of commodification. In his study on the public opinion on useful languages in Europe, Pietiläinen (2011) notes that the majority of Europeans in 2005 agreed that “knowledge of foreign languages is very useful” (p. 4), and that the proportion of people who think this increased from 45% to 54% between 2000 and 2005. These findings are in line with the “economic capitalization of linguistic diversity” observed in Swiss multilingual business contexts, where linguistic diversity is seen as “an instrument of expansion” (Duchêne & Del Percio, 2014, p. 89) and multilingual individuals in particular are considered “a major factor in economic productivity” (Duchêne & Del Percio, 2014, p. 78). Similar to the idea that language can be ascribed value which can in turn result in different types of capital, so can multilingualism or having a multilingual repertoire be considered a measurable, marketable, and valuable commodity.

In this section, I have discussed an overview of different perspectives on the influences of and interplay between globalization on linguistic diversity. I then elaborated on one specific development, namely the commodification of language, and explained how different forms of language, including multilingualism, can be argued to have become valued and marketed as commodities as part of a global linguistic market. In the following section, I will focus on one specific language, the spread of which is often characterized as a key result of as well as a driving force behind globalization, namely English.

#### 2.1.4 English and globalization

In modern day globalized societies, there is one language that is argued to facilitate the interconnections, flows, and interdependencies of linguistically and culturally diverse groups and populations, and that is English (Haberland, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2011). Indeed, English is often described as the language of global communication, and some descriptions even go so far as to say that English is “so to speak at the centre of the twelve solar language systems, at the hub of the linguistic galaxy” (De Swaan, 2001, p. 6). The language, particularly when used as a lingua franca to connect people who do not share the same first language, can be considered “at once a *globalized* and *globalizing* phenomenon” as it is “simultaneously the consequence and the principal language medium of globalizing processes”, and as such, English as a lingua franca is argued to be “part of the texture and infrastructure of globalization” (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 303, emphasis in original). This has resulted in what can be considered a hegemony of English, as “speakers of languages choose English in a large number of situations, and consider this choice natural with respect to the existing linguistic world order” (Haberland, 2009, p. 25). In other words, the global spread of English is an integral part of how globalization in its current form came about, and at the same time facilitates further processes of globalization.

The historical timeline leading up to and the reasons behind this global spread of English are not entirely clear. Phillipson (2017) argues that the global spread of English

can be traced back to the linguistic imperialism of the British Empire and continued to be pushed in the inter-war period on the basis of a UK-US collaboration, until it eventually became “the dominant language of international relations, trade, banking, scientific scholarship, and popular culture, not by chance but through American leadership” (p. 319) in the post-war period after 1945. Such expansion efforts by the USA continued throughout the Cold War period through what is commonly referred to as ‘McDonaldization’, and finally, the position of English today as a perceived neutral lingua franca for all of humanity is argued to have resulted from the role of English as an international language of peacekeeping in light of a number of geopolitical conflicts (Phillipson, 2017). However, this timeline has been criticized, as it frames the spread of English as the result of explicit (language) policy decisions rather than “the spontaneous outcome of a huge set of decentralised decisions, mainly by non-Anglophones” (Van Parijs, 2004, p. 124). Indeed, although this grand narrative regarding the rise of English is a widely shared one, scholars have argued that there is not sufficient evidence to claim that the development of global English today is the result of successful language management (Spolsky, 2004). In spite of the unclear and complex origins of this arguably unprecedented rise of or ‘stampede’ towards English (De Swaan, 2001), the argument for its position as a global language today still stands.

The role that English plays on a global scale in today’s societies can be perceived from a number of perspectives. Whereas some conceptualize it primarily as a form of linguistic imperialism, as described above, others see it as a tool that can help improve social and economic mobility for many (Ricento, 2012). As part of this latter perspective, a number of ideologies and beliefs related to English circulate globally to different extents. Language ideology or language ideological beliefs can be defined as “any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein, 1979, p. 193). Many of the language ideological beliefs surrounding English have helped to increase its symbolic value, including the belief that English is a language that is *necessary* for everyone, that it is a *detrterritorialized* language, and that it is the *only* language necessary for communicating internationally (Phillipson, 2017). Within a European context specifically, the Eurobarometer, a public opinion survey commissioned by the

European Commission and other EU institutions, found in 2005 that 78% of those who do not speak English as their native language consider it the most useful foreign language (Pietiläinen, 2011). Park (2011) elaborates on such beliefs and their consequences as follows:

“English is often assumed to be a key to material success in the modern world. With English, it is believed, one can get a better job, absorb knowledge and information from sources all over the world, and ultimately, be recognized as a better person, someone who is respected and appreciated as well-rooted and competitive in the global market. In other words, English is considered to be a tool for social inclusion in a broad sense: a conduit for economic and social advancement. Such assumptions often shape the linguistic investment of individuals, motivating them to learn English and improve their skills so that they may access better opportunities in education and in the job market. They influence language policies of states, leading to the choice of English over other languages as medium of instruction or official language. They serve as a discourse of justification for the global spread of English, by promoting English as an emancipatory and liberating language, the essential language of social inclusion, that allows disadvantaged people to escape abject poverty, immigrants to English-speaking countries to find a home, and underdeveloped states to participate in the global economy and all its glory.” (Park, 2011, p. 443)

Following Heller’s (2003; 2010) conceptualization of the commodification of language, these language ideological beliefs have also resulted in the transformation of English into a marketable and measurable commodity (Holborow, 2015; Park & Wee, 2012; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007), as it seems to be “a global resource with an exchange value [...] and is widely promoted as such” (Holborow, 2015, p. 19). In sum, the language ideologies related to English help to raise its potential symbolic value in a number of contexts across the globe, resulting in changes on how, when, and why the language is used, spread, and managed in a number of settings, ranging from the individual micro-level to (inter)national macro-levels.

The commonsensical language ideological beliefs that are often associated with English are not uncontested. Haberland (2009), for example, argues that “English should be considered the language of *globalism* rather than the language of *globalization*” (p. 19, emphasis added; see Section 2.1.1 for the conceptual differences between globalism and globalization) and attributes the emergence of the abovementioned language ideological beliefs to hegemonic thinking patterns rather than linguistic reality. Similarly, the globality of the English language and all the language ideological beliefs associated with it have been described as myths (Park, 2011; Pennycook, 2007; Phillipson, 2017) which carry “false promises” for those who (want to) learn the language (Pennycook, 2007, p. 101). Such criticisms are rooted in the claim that the use and spread of English in different contexts is, in fact, not deterritorialized or neutral, but rather rooted in histories and relations of power and inequality (Blommaert, 2010; Park, 2011; Park & Wee, 2012; Pennycook, 2007), and that English should not be considered an immobile or bounded entity that can be used and managed, but rather a mobile and pluralistic language resource that emerges locally across different contexts (Blommaert, 2010; Park & Wee, 2012). In light of these debates, the role of English in the world is described by Blommaert (2010) as the “hottest topic” in sociolinguistics (p. 182).

In this section, I have discussed the emergence of English as a global language within the context of globalization, as well as its current role within this context and the values and beliefs that are commonly associated with it. Additionally, I have also presented some criticisms to the conceptualization of English as a global language. In the following section, I will focus on the different aspects of globalization as formulated in the previous subsections in light of the broad institutional setting this dissertation is situated in, namely corporate contexts.

### 2.1.5 Corporate globalization

Globalization is often used as an umbrella term for a number of processes or a “catchword for a particular historical phase” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 1), as explained in

Section 2.1.1, and the internationalization of the trade of goods and services specifically is “usually seen as one of its undisputed features” (Grin et al., 2010, p. 12). To put the intensification of this process in numbers, it is estimated that international trade multiplied by almost ninefold between 1983 and 2008, thereby growing significantly faster than the world economy itself, which multiplied by approximately fivefold in the same period of time (Grin et al., 2010). The role of multinational corporations or MNCs cannot be understated in this process, as it was estimated that this workforce represents 40% of global GDP and two thirds of global trade (Ricento, 2012). As a result, Grin et al. (2010) argue that:

“Although this connection has never been explicitly measured, it is very likely that such a massive rise in international trade increases the frequency of contact with people speaking other languages and therefore increases subjective diversity.” (p. 12)

In doing so, Grin et al. (2010) make an explicit distinction between objective and subjective diversity, with the former defined as the actual number of languages currently spoken in the world, and the latter defined as “the diversity that we are confronted with in our everyday lives” (p. 12). As such, the internationalization of trade has arguably resulted in the internationalization of workplaces around the world and therefore in the subjective diversity that people experience in their everyday lives. This is similar to the process of societal superdiversity in general (Vertovec, 2007), which comprises both quantitative (or objective) and qualitative (or subjective) transitions with regard to (linguistic) diversity (see Section 2.1.2).

The scale and development of the internationalization of corporate contexts can also be compared to the scale and development of globalization in general, as from a historical perspective, it can be summarized as follows:

“Although transnationally mobile staff, contractors and clientele have more recently come to characterize the locally constituted workplace communities, the phenomenon of such transient multilingual settings (Goebel, 2010) is far



from recent. Rather, [...] inter-lingua-cultural contact between traders, slave-keepers and the enslaved, families, localized ethnic sub-groups, soldiers, pilgrims and crusaders from multitudinous geographical, linguistic and cultural backgrounds and across, for example, the entire Mediterranean region, were commonplace a long time before linguists, social scientists and human resources managers started to take note (to say nothing of similar situations in other parts of the world). Turning to the contemporary, [...] the very scale of penetration into a wide range of social strata and spheres is unprecedented. This shift in gear is also reflected in the growing numbers of researchers from a range of academic disciplines, as well as such stakeholders as public and private sector organizations, paying increasing heed to the changing dynamics of the internationalized workplace.” (Hazel & Svennevig, 2018, p. 3)

In other words, similar to the development of globalization itself, the internationalization of corporate contexts in itself is not new, but the scale and intensity at which it is occurring is unprecedented.

From a migration perspective, this globalization of the labor market and the rapid growth of multinational corporations have resulted in an increased number of individuals who move across international borders to pursue their professional careers or ambitions. The immigration policies of a number of countries have changed significantly over the years to facilitate the immigration of so-called ‘highly skilled migrants’ in particular, such as senior managers and executives, engineers, technicians, scientists, entrepreneurs and students (Mahroum, 2001). A number of studies in the fields of business and corporate management have focused on how to manage the increased (linguistic) diversity in the workplace resulting from this transnational mobility. Examples include studies on the role of Chinese migrants in inter-firm knowledge transfer between Chinese and UK branches of a corporation (Liu et al., 2015), expatriate-local communication in MNCs in Taiwan (Du-Babcock & Babcock, 1996), the communication tactics of Nordic expatriates in Japan (Peltokorpi, 2007; 2010), the effects of cross-cultural training on expatriates’ adjustment and job performance in Vietnam (Wang & Tran, 2012), and the management of superdiversity

in MNCs with a specific focus on expatriates (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2021). Such studies often focus specifically on the role and value of ‘expats’ in relation to other types of employees, and how cultural and linguistic diversity in the workplace can be considered a barrier and/or a facilitator for a company’s general workings.

As part of this body of research, some researchers have also argued that focusing on people who migrate for professional purposes as homogenous groups can be considered problematic:

“Discourses about ‘global work’; ‘global workers’ and ‘global careers’ are articulated around ideas of a ‘borderless world’, which assume a significant degree of homogeneity in individuals as ‘global citizens’ (Vertovec and Cohen, 2002). This is problematic given that workers are not on a level playing field, and the homogenising representations of what it is and means to be global are contested at national and local levels with impositions and constructions that use nationality, citizenship and regulations to establish differences between individuals.” (Scurry et al., 2013, p. 3)

Given that professional transnational mobility is both a result of and a driving force behind the internationalization of (corporate) workplace contexts, a growing body of research has aimed to examine the specificities of the people who migrate for professional purposes, but similar to the use and construction of social categories in general and migration-related categories specifically (see Section 2.1.2), presenting people who migrate for professional purposes as a homogenous group would be a simplification of a much more complex and multifaceted reality.

The increased diversity that exists in most corporate contexts today has also resulted in increased linguistic diversity, to the extent that in globalized workplaces, it has been argued that “monolingual spaces are an exception rather than the rule in both large and small businesses” (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018, p. 19). To keep up with the globalization of international trade, companies are increasingly functioning in a multilingual way both on internal and external levels, but managing this linguistic

diversity can lead to new challenges for employees and management alike (Gunnarsson, 2014).

Because of this increasing importance of multilingualism for business purposes, it has also been studied extensively from an economic perspective as part of the field ‘language economics’ or the ‘economics of language’, which aims to offer a quantitative and generalizable approach to workplace multilingualism as part of theoretical economics (Grin et al., 2010). This approach focuses primarily on three issues: “the effect of language on economic variables such as earnings; the effect of economic variables on the dynamic development of languages; and the mutual interactions between language and economic variables” (Zhang & Grenier, 2013, p. 211), thereby aiming to identify guidelines towards a general analytical framework for assessing the relative efficiency and fairness of different ways of managing multilingual communication through a cost-effectiveness analysis (Gazzola & Grin, 2007). Although assessing the financial costs and benefits of language and multilingualism is difficult, research in this field has identified causal relationships between linguistic and economic variables, concluding that in the current multilingual world, learning and teaching foreign languages is economically beneficial, both for companies as well as for the individuals who work for them (Grin et al., 2010). These findings are echoed in a report commissioned by the European Commission in 2006, which found that 11% of exporting European small and medium-sized enterprises were potentially losing business as a result of language barriers, estimating a loss of €325,000 per business over a three-year period (CILT, 2006). In terms of the specific languages that can be useful to overcome such language barriers, both this report as well as the literature on language economics argue that although English is definitely important, it is not the only language worth learning; in fact, in large companies in Europe, demand for language skills other than English is higher than for English itself (CILT, 2006; Gazzola et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, English has been described as the “uncontested language of business in the context of a globalised workplace” (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014, p. 155), and its uncontested and naturalized nature are what has arguably made it a hegemonic

language in corporate contexts as well (Lønsmann & Kraft, 2018; Haberland, 2009). When referring to English in a business context, what is often referred to is English as a business lingua franca or BELF (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013) as a means to interact across linguistic and cultural boundaries rather than between L1 speakers of English (see Ehrenreich, 2016 for a literature review of ELF in international business contexts). Speaking to its relevance particularly in corporate contexts, in their study on language use in globally operating Finland-based companies, Kankaanranta & Planken (2010) found that:

“Competence in BELF, that is, expertise in the use of English in the business domain and knowledge of how it can serve business goals best, was compared to the ability to use the computer: you could not do your work without it in today’s international workplace.” (p. 399)

Indeed, when faced with the increasing linguistic diversity of internationalized corporate contexts, organizations and particularly multinational corporations will often implement English as a common corporate language, and individuals in interaction will often opt for BELF when confronted with a language barrier ad hoc (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014; Gunnarsson, 2014; Lønsmann, 2017). This development has been termed the ‘anglicization’, ‘Englishization’, ‘Englishnization’ and ‘corporate Englishization’ of corporate contexts (Brannen et al., 2014, p. 499). This rise of English as the lingua franca of international business does not necessarily replace the presence of other languages in corporate settings. Instead, in line with the findings from language economics, sociolinguists have argued that other languages often “interact with English in many ways”, and that “this interaction is played out on the individual, the social, as well as the organizational level” (Ehrenreich, 2010, p. 411), thus resulting in increasingly multilingual spaces rather than monolingual English ones.

Similar to the global spread of English on a societal level, the rise of English in corporate contexts is not always considered positive (see Section 2.1.4 for a general overview of criticisms on the conceptualization of English as a global language). Particularly the top-down language management tool of implementing English as a

common corporate language in previously non-English workplaces has been described as both a barrier and a facilitator (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999) and as an enabler and a disabler (Ehrenreich, 2016), and has been generally criticized as potentially magnifying inequality and power imbalances on all organizational levels (Kankaanranta et al., 2018; Ricento, 2012). However, despite such criticisms, the power and value of English in corporate contexts remains intact, in large part due to the same language ideological beliefs that are associated with English in a broader sense (see Section 2.1.4).

A final aspect which has greatly impacted the workings of corporate contexts over the past few decades concerns the advancements made in communication and information technology, as these developments have facilitated and significantly improved international flows of communication in globalized (corporate) contexts (Argenti, 2006). Just in the last couple of years, telecommunications software in particular has expanded these developments even further in light of the Covid-19 pandemic (Canagarajah, 2020). Such technological developments have not only contributed to the rise of transnational work settings which “involve people, resources, and interactions that transcend nation-state borders and space/time boundaries” (Canagarajah, 2020, p. 559), but also to the rise of virtual work. This is broadly defined as work “whereby people work at a distance from an employer (or an instructing organisation) using ICT to overcome that distance” (Jacobs, 2004, p. 119) and includes telework, where employees work remotely from a location other than the physical premises of the organization, often in combination with non-remote work, as well as the emergence of completely virtual workspaces, where employees share a digital environment which functions in replacement of a shared physical workplace. In making this distinction, there is a crucial difference between *place* on the one hand, defined as “a primordial geographical construct, regulated by physical and political boundaries”, and *space* on the other hand, defined as “socially and affectively constructed” (Canagarajah, 2020, p. 559). This latter notion of space helps us to conceptualize virtual work as part of a virtual work*space*, underlining that work is not necessarily restricted to occur in a shared physical work*place*, but rather includes a range

of activities that can take place in a number of ways and through different communication channels (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999a).

Research on remote work has found that it includes advantages for the employee, such as more flexibility, more personal empowerment, and less inconvenience, as well as for the company, such as less costs related to real estate, gains in productivity, employee retention, and being able to make use of expertise across place and space (Jacobs, 2004). However, it also entails a number of challenges and potential disadvantages, including a weak sense of belonging and identification, less social interactions, email overload, potential feelings of isolation for the employee, and a decrease in management control and knowledge transfer for the company, as well as less opportunities to communicate the company's corporate culture and vision (Avery, 2012; Jacobs, 2004; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). Management should thus take into account the potential opportunities as well as the possible pitfalls of telework or a completely virtual workspace, particularly when it comes to communication.

In this section, I have discussed a number of key developments of globalization as part of the globalization of corporate contexts. Such developments include increased professional migration and workplace multilingualism, the rise of English as the *lingua franca* of international business communication, and the emergence of virtual workspaces. In the following section, I will situate the research chapters of this dissertation as part of these processes of (corporate) globalization.

### **2.1.6 Situating the dissertation as part of research on the globalization of corporate contexts**

This dissertation as a whole is situated as part of a sociolinguistics of globalization and aims to take part in “a shift away from a metropolitan perspective on globalization, stressing the uniformity of such processes, towards a perspective that does justice to ‘vernacular globalization’, to the myriad ways in which global processes enter local conditions and circumstances and become a localized reality” (Blommaert, 2010, p.

197). The research conducted as part of this dissertation assumes that the individuals, interactions, and institutions involved are globalized “without assuming that nation-state power has disappeared with globalization” (Garrido & Sabaté-Dalmau, 2020, p. 2), thus situating the research contexts as embedded in localized manifestations of globalized processes. It aims to do so through three cases studies in the form of seven empirical chapters, each of which engages with the interplay of the concepts and theories put forth in this section on globalization and corporate contexts in different ways.

Chapter 4, which is the chapter that resulted from the first case study, aims to provide insight into the institutional development of globalization and language at a Brussels-based multinational corporation. A socio-historical approach was adopted as we follow Blommaert’s (2010) argumentation that “understanding globalization is understanding a historical process, something that has considerable depth in time, and something in which we can discern different stages and moments of development” (p. 137), and that local manifestations of globalized processes are also historically embedded. To grasp the complexity of the company’s globalization processes, we use the concept of sociolinguistic scales to embed the developments of the company itself within interrelated developments on regional, national, and international scales, thereby also operationalizing the concept of ‘glocalization’ (see Section 2.1.1) to better grasp the intricate relations and jumps between these different scales (Swyngedouw, 2004). The analysis focuses in part on the increasing importance of English in light of the company’s transnational expansion over the years, thereby showcasing that the role and position of the language changed drastically over time and that the taken-for-granted idea of English as the lingua franca of international business that exists today was not always so dominant.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7, which resulted from the second case study, focus on individual experiences of professional transnational migration as part of the globalization of corporate contexts. Such individual experiences of temporary migration have been argued to be understudied as part of research on migration and superdiversity in favor of research on migrants who seek to stay in a new location for a more permanent

period of time (Geldof, 2021), and this is particularly the case for privileged forms of migration, which have received less attention overall in comparison to forms of migration which are disadvantaged in light of their precarious social or legal situations (Kunz, 2016; Lan, 2011; Leinonen, 2012; Vailati & Rial, 2016).

Chapter 5 focuses specifically on individual experiences of professional transnational migration from the perspective of language, and thereby aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of (privileged) migration as not only shaping language, but also as shaped by language (Itani et al., 2015; Park, 2014). The theoretical framework of this chapter is the economic metaphor of the linguistic market as proposed by Bourdieu (1991), which sees “language as a market of symbolic capital and power, with people juggling for profit and with some people structurally having less capital than others” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 28). More specifically, it focuses on the individuals’ language ideological beliefs and how such beliefs are part of the symbolic value that they attribute to language in light of the specific linguistic market of Brussels. Chapter 6 topicalizes the different ways in which the participants define particular social migration-related categories, as well as how they discursively position themselves in light of these categories as part of the interactional context of a research interview. Following the line of argumentation that (professional) migration-related categories should not be considered objective categories of analysis but that instead “scholarship needs to further turn the construction of the category itself into the object of analysis” (Kunz, 2016, p. 96), this study adds the emic perspectives of those who migrate with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital to the scholarly debate regarding the categorization of migration. Chapter 7 examines the discursive construction of national identity during one specific interview with a woman who was raised as a third culture kid (Moore & Barker, 2012) and who has continued crossing national borders throughout her adult life to advance her professional career. In doing so, it aims to contribute an individualized perspective to the literature on globalization and (privileged) migration, as it aims to underline that “globalization is not only a descriptor of an era, but also the dominant logic of many people’s lives” (Moore & Barker, 2012, p. 553).



Finally, Chapters 8, 9 and 10 resulted from the third case study and provide an interactional perspective on globalization at a globally active yet small-sized company located in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, with a particular focus on language in performance appraisal interviews. Chapter 8 discusses the role of small talk as relational practice in light of the broader aims of the performance appraisal process at this company, and contextualizes its importance as part of the globalized virtual workspace in which the managers at HQ and the agents abroad work together. Chapter 9 adopts a multilingual perspective on performance appraisal interviews as it deals with linguistic diversity and the different ways it is managed at this globally active company through a particular focus on three multilingual strategies as they are called upon during the performance appraisal interviews. Finally, although Chapter 10 focuses in a less explicit way on the societal context of globalization, the findings in this chapter underline the importance of textual documents and processes of entextualization as part of the complexity of a globalized virtual workspace. Overall, although there is no lack of sociolinguistic studies on workplace interaction, it has been argued that a majority of them focus on monolingual interactions within nation-state frameworks, resulting in a call for “more studies on multilingual interactions situated in transnational workspaces” (Canagarajah, 2020, p. 557), and Chapters 8, 9 and 10 each aim to contribute to filling this gap in the literature through distinct research foci.

## 2.2 TALK AND TEXT IN INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

Talk and text are of crucial importance to achieve the aims of institutional interactions, as well as to achieve the goals of institution itself. Throughout the next sections, I will introduce the role and relevance of interaction and talk-in-interaction in institutional settings in general, as well as in corporate institutional settings specifically. Additionally, I will elaborate on the importance of textual documents in (corporate) institutional settings, both on their own and in relation to spoken interactions. Finally, the last section will situate some of the research chapters of this dissertation against the backdrop of text and talk in institutional settings.

### 2.2.1 Defining talk-in-interaction in institutional settings

Institutional talk is most often defined in relation to its opposite, i.e. ordinary, everyday, non-institutional talk. Particularly within the research tradition of conversation analysis (CA), there is an explicit argument that institutional talk differs systematically from ordinary conversation in a number of ways:

“1 Institutional interaction involves an orientation by at least one of the participants to some core goal, task or identity (or set of them) conventionally associated with the institution in question. In short, institutional talk is normally informed by goal orientations of a relatively restricted conventional form.

2 Institutional interaction may often involve special and particular constraints on what one or both of the participants will treat as allowable contributions to the business at hand.

3 Institutional talk may be associated with inferential frameworks and procedures that are particular to specific institutional contexts.” (Drew & Heritage, 1992a, p. 22)

In summary, Drew and Heritage (1992a) argue that institutional talk is defined by its goal-oriented nature, the constraints on allowable contributions, and the specificities of the institutional context in which it occurs. In this sense, institutional talk is not defined by where it takes place, i.e. within an institution such as a school, a hospital, or a company, but rather it is viewed as interactions in which the institutional or professional identities of interlocutors are made relevant, no matter the physical location of the encounter (Drew & Heritage, 1992a). The specificities of the differences between institutional talk and everyday conversation have been studied in a detailed manner on the basis of a number of research foci, including differences in lexical or word choice, turn-taking organization, turn design, sequence organization, overall structural organization, and the social epistemology and social relations between interlocutors (Drew & Heritage, 1992a, p. 29-53; Heritage & Clayman, 2010).

Research on institutional interaction from a conversation analytical perspective has argued that talk-in-interaction forms the basis of how individuals achieve goals in institutional settings, as it forms “the central medium through which the daily working activities of many professionals and organizational representatives are conducted” (Drew & Heritage, 1992a, p. 3). Similarly, Taylor (2006) argues that:

“We can learn a good deal about how organization emerges out of conversation by concentrating first on the elementary communication event: a single moment in an ongoing flow of talk. It is here that reality gets established as a basis of a coordinated response; it is here that activity is understood and generated; it is here that the relationships organizational members have with each other are expressed, and sometimes get renegotiated.” (p. 148)

In line with the social constructionist perspective on globalization (see Section 2.1.1), this dissertation also adopts a social constructionist perspective on institutional

interaction, which positions talk-in-interaction as an important means through which the aims of an institution can be achieved. In light of this, the institution is manifested through talk as “sequences of talk [...] are aligned with, and embody, some of the basic imperatives of the institution in which they are found” (Heritage & Clayman, 2010, p. 32), and as such, “it is through interaction that institutions are brought to life and made actionable in the everyday world” (Heritage & Clayman, 2010, p. 7). In other words, a social constructionist perspective on institutional interaction argues that all types of institutions, ranging from economic to educational to governmental to healthcare and beyond, are partly “talked into being” (Heritage, 1984, p. 290).

Different types of talk can occur within an institutional setting as part of this broad conceptualization of institutional talk. Particularly in workplace settings, an important distinction in the existing linguistic literature is that between ‘small talk’ on the one hand, and talk that is considered “transactional”, “instrumental”, “goal oriented” or “means-end rational” on the other hand (Maynard & Hudak, 2008, p. 662). However, it has been argued that representing these two types of talk as a dichotomy can be an overly simplistic rendition of realistic workplace interactions (Köster, 2004). In line with this argument, Holmes (2000, p. 38) offers a continuum of talk in which “small talk” is located on one end and “on-topic business talk” is situated on the other hand, as visualized in Figure 1.

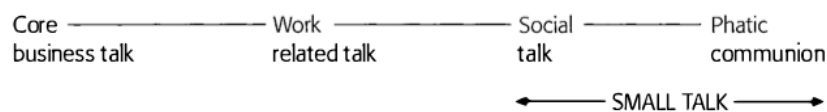


Figure 1. Continuum of workplace talk (reproduced here from Holmes, 2000, p. 38)

By representing the different types of talk as part of a continuum, talk is conceptualized as something that can “gradually shift or drift” (Holmes, 2000, p. 38), rather than as something that is inherently part of one or the other as part of a black-and-white dichotomy. Talk can be interpreted as belonging to these different types on the basis of its function within the interaction, as the extreme points of the continuum are aimed at “furthering the objectives of the organization” on the business end of the spectrum,

and “aimed at fostering collegial relationships” on the social end of the spectrum (Holmes, 2005, p. 671). Although small talk is often considered less important or less relevant to the institutional context than on-topic or core business talk, it has been argued that “what is core and what is marginal in communication is a matter of perspective” (Coupland, 2000, p. 4). Given that *all* types of talk are part of what talks an institution into being, small talk arguably should not and “cannot be dismissed as peripheral, marginal or minor” in workplace or other institutional setting (Holmes, 2000, p. 33). Instead, it fulfills a number of interactional and interpersonal functions in interaction (Archer et al., 2020; Holmes, 2000; Holmes & Schnurr, 2005; Köster, 2004) and should therefore be taken into account in complete conceptualizations and analyses of institutional talk and the different ways in which institutions are “talked into being” (Heritage, 1984, p. 290).

In this section, I have provided a definition of institutional talk from a social constructionist perspective, including an explanation of how institutional talk differs from everyday conversation and why talk should be considered an important aspect of institutional reality. Additionally, I have presented different types of institutional talk as part of a continuum rather than a dichotomy, and argued that a full conceptualization of institutional talk should focus on more than the business end of the spectrum alone. In the next section, I will zoom in on research that has been conducted on talk in corporate settings to further contextualize the importance of talk-in-interaction in this type of institutional setting.

### 2.2.2 Talk in corporate institutional settings

Workplaces in general are institutional settings which are made up of numerous communicative practices, of which talk-in-interaction forms a crucial aspect. It is relevant to note that ‘the workplace’ refers to “a cover term for any organizational setting where people define themselves to be at work” (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999a, p. 4-5), and Sarangi and Roberts (1999a) further argue that:

“Workplaces are held together by communicative practices. At the local level, such practices include talk (e.g., face-to-face encounters with colleagues and clients, telephone conversations), text (e.g. letter correspondence, circulars, case notes), the use of social space (e.g., placement of furniture and routine activities such as making a hospital bed), and other artefacts (e.g., use of laboratory technology, computers) in various configurations.” (p. 1)

A number of research traditions within linguistics have devoted studies to the specificities of institutional talk in professional workplace settings, including insights from conversation analysis, (critical) discourse analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and linguistic ethnography. Research in these different and sometimes overlapping fields has resulted in the publication of various and varied edited volumes and special issues of academic journals. Examples of edited volumes include the foundational work on *Talk at Work* in conversation analysis (Drew & Heritage, 1992b) and *Talk, Work and Institutional Order* in discourse analysis (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999b), as well as more recent edited volumes on *Politeness in Professional Contexts* (Archer, Grainger, & Jagodziński, 2020), *Negotiating Boundaries at Work* (Angouri et al., 2017), *Multilingualism at Work* in public, medical and business settings (Meyer & Apfelbaum, 2010), and *Identity Struggles* in workplaces across the globe (Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2017b), among others. Additionally, special issues have been published on *Multilingualism at work* (Angouri, 2014) and *Professional discourse in multilingual settings* (Decock et al., 2018) in *Multilingua*, on *Meeting Talk* in the *International Journal of Business Communication* (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009b), and on *High stakes gatekeeping encounters and their consequences* in intercultural institutional settings in *Journal of Pragmatics* (Kerekes, 2007b), although this latter special issue focused only partly on workplace interactions. Finally, a number of research projects around the world have been dedicated to studying the intricacies of language in the workplace, and in this category, the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project at the Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand deserves special mention due to its large scale and scope and the broad significance of the research that has resulted from it (see *Language in the Workplace*, 2020 for a full overview of the publications that are associated with and/or have resulted from this research project).

Zooming in specifically on research on the internal communication that occurs in corporate settings as a specific type of workplace (Marra et al., 2022), researchers from these different linguistic perspectives have focused on different types of corporate encounters. One such encounter is that of the corporate meeting, which is argued to differ from other types of workplace genres because of the presence and specific role of the meeting chair (Angouri & Marra, 2011). A literature review on linguistic research about corporate meetings conducted by Asmuß and Svennevig (2009a) provides an overview of existing research foci such as the situational characteristics of meetings, the role of the chair, openings and closings, turn taking, topic progression, and leadership in meeting talk. Since then, multiple studies have continued to focus in particular on the professional roles and identities that are enacted and negotiated in meetings by different interlocutors (Angouri & Marra, 2010; 2011; Chan, 2017; Kim & Angouri, 2019).

In addition to meetings, there has been a growing interest in linguistic research on workplace interaction in the form of intra- and extra-organizational workplace interviews. Interviews can be considered “an essential part of an individual’s interaction with bureaucratic control” (Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 2002, p. 25), particularly in the form of gatekeeping interviews where one person has a position of authority that allows them to make decisions regarding the other interlocutor’s future, in this case their employment specifically (Holmes, 2007). The most common type of extra-organizational gatekeeping interview in a workplace context is that of the job interview, and the specificities of this type of interaction have been researched extensively, with a large number of the studies focusing on such encounters in intercultural settings (Akinaso & Ajitutu, 1983; Button, 1992; Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 2002; Kerekes, 2006; 2007a; Kirilova, 2017; Kusmierczyk-O’Connor, 2017; Lipovsky, 2006; Reissner-Roubicek, 2017; Scheuer, 2001; Sniad, 2007; Van De Mierop & De Dijn, 2021; Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2018). Less is known to date about the intra-organizational gatekeeping interaction of the performance appraisal interview, which the third case study of this dissertation focuses on. However, the body of research on its interactional specificities is growing at a considerable rate (Adams, 1981; Asmuß, 2008; 2013; Bowden & Sandlund, 2019; Clifton, 2012; Holmes,

2007; Meinecke & Kauffeld, 2018; Sandlund et al., 2011; Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2017a). Finally, in comparison to meetings and workplace interviews, relatively little research has been conducted on informal workplace encounters. This lack of insights could potentially be ascribed to the difficulty of recording such interactions in a naturally occurring environment, as they most often occur unplanned, but it might also be related to the idea that off-topic forms of ‘small talk’ and other types of informal talk are often considered marginal or relatively unimportant in an institutional context (Holmes & Marra, 2004; see Section 2.2.1).

In this section, I have elaborated on talk in a specific type of institutional setting, namely that of the professional workplace, and I have listed some influential studies, edited volumes and special issues on language in the workplace to highlight the scale and scope of the existing research across different research traditions within linguistics. Additionally, I have zoomed in on linguistic research that has been conducted on interactions in corporate workplace settings, with a particular focus on three crucial types of corporate encounters, namely meetings, job interviews, and performance appraisal interviews. In the next section, I will discuss another aspect of communicative practice which Sarangi and Roberts (1999a) claim ‘holds together’ a workplace, namely text and textual documents in particular.

### 2.2.3 Text and textual documents in (corporate) institutional settings

Documents are omnipresent and play an important role in virtually all aspects of late modern life, ranging from “bus tickets to courtroom transcripts”, from “employments application to temple donation records”, and from “election ballots to archived letters” (Riles, 2006, p. 5). This includes institutional life in particular, as textual documentation can be considered crucial to creating and maintaining institutional order. Particularly as part of bureaucracy, it is exactly “the exchange, processing, and interpretation of information in a context of formal submission, annotated files, written reports, and follow-up correspondence which have been identified as bureaucracy’s heartbeat”



(Slembrouck, 2020, p. 1). As such, textual documents in modern institutional and bureaucratic contexts function as artifacts of modern knowledge, as achievements of authority, and ultimately, as instantiations of the institution itself (Riles, 2006; Taylor, 2011; Park & Bucholtz, 2009; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2014).

Textual documents also often function as a means to reconstruct or recapitulate spoken interactions. The importance of textual documents in institutional contexts thus does not exist in a vacuum, but rather in relation to talk-in-interaction, as “talking about writing and writing down talk” are crucial aspects and practices of institutional life (Anderson, 2004, p. 143; see also Park & Bucholtz, 2009). Taking the example of the meeting as encounters which characterize most modern workplaces, Cook-Gumperz and Messerman (1999) explain that “the record of the activities resulting from a meeting is all that ultimately exists; without it neither the work of the meeting nor the outcome of decision making process would remain” (p. 150). The same goes for most institutional encounters, where textual documents surround and interact with spoken interactions in an intricate way, each building up the other in their efforts to create and maintain institutional realities. However, a crucial functional difference between talk and text in institutional settings is that textual documentation, as opposed to the inherently fleeting or ephemeral nature of spoken interaction, has a potential permanence that talk does not. It is exactly this fixity or “restance” (Cooren, 2000) of text that imbues it with institutional value and power, more so than the spoken interactions they are often based on (Anderson, 2004; Park & Bucholtz, 2009; Van De Mieroop & Carranza, 2018; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2014).

The processes of textual travel that occur when talk is put into writing or when textual documents are discussed in spoken interactions have been conceptualized and referred to in a number of ways in the fields of linguistics, anthropology, and sociology, including but not limited to:

“... such terms as *delocation* and *relocation* (Bernstein 1990); *centering*, *decentering*, and *recentering* (Hanks 1989); *entextualization*, *decontextualization*, and *recontextualization* (Bauman and Briggs 1990); *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity*

(Kristeva 1980; Fairclough 1992, 2001; Candlin and Maley 1997); *recontextualization* and *text trajectories* (Blommaert 2005).” (Rock et al., 2013, p. 4, emphasis in original)

All of these terms conceptualize the ways in which different modalities, channels and discourses interact with one another. For the purposes of this dissertation, I make use of the terminology of *decontextualization* and *recontextualization* as proposed by Bauman and Briggs (1990) to grasp such intertextual processes. Specifically, what is meant by those terms is:

“... we consider the decontextualization and recontextualization of texts to be two aspects of the same process, though time and other factors may mediate between the two phases.” (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 75)

In other words, once information is decontextualized from one discourse or discursive context, it necessarily becomes recontextualized into another, and this can occur a number of times, resulting in chains of recontextualizations (Linell, 1998; Rock et al., 2013). Such processes inherently involve changes, such as simplification, deletion, elaboration, condensation, or refocusing (Linell, 1998), and because of these changes, recontextualization is never a simple or neutral process in which meaning is transferred in a fixed way. Instead, it always involves choices and variations which can implicitly reveal the positioning, point of view, or intentions of those who are involved in the recontextualizing action. Particularly in institutional contexts, where often not all parties or interlocutors are equally involved in what is fixed in the authoritative written version of events, such processes of de- and recontextualization can reveal and reinforce particular power dynamics (Park & Bucholtz, 2009; Taylor, 2011; Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2014). For this reason, researchers have argued that discourse should not only be studied in terms of individual situated events, but rather as a series of intertextually linked processes that go “beyond the speech event” in the form of “pathways of linked events” (Wortham & Reyes, 2015), or what Fairclough (1993) refers to as “intertextual chains” (p. 130).

The intricate interplay between text and talk has been studied from a number of different institutional workplace perspectives. Examples include journalist interactions (Weilenmann & Lymer, 2014), news production (Van Hout & Jacobs, 2008), police interrogations (Defrancq & Verliefe, 2018; Jönsson & Linell, 1991; Komter, 2006; Van Charldorp, 2014), marriage migration investigations (Vandenbroucke & Wilson, 2022), meetings in the municipality service sector (Nissi, 2015), social work interactions (Hall, 1997), academic thesis supervision meetings (Svinhufvud & Vehviläinen, 2013), medical meetings (Cook-Gumperz & Messerman, 1999), service encounters at a copyshop (Moore et al., 2010), legal consultations (Jacobs, 2023), and courtroom interactions (Carranza, 2010; Van De Mieroop & Carranza, 2018). Specifically in corporate workplaces, studies have examined the textualization of project meetings to achieve organizational change (Anderson, 2004), the role of the agenda in meetings to structure the interaction (Svennevig, 2012), the role and materialization of sticky notes in a risk analysis meeting (Karlsson, 2009), and the role of glancing at, pointing to, and touching documents during job interviews to negotiate and display epistemic authority (Glenn & LeBaron, 2011). Within the interactional context of corporate performance appraisal interviews, which the third case study of this dissertation focuses on, studies have also been conducted on the role and agency of the appraisal form as an active ‘participant’ (Lehtinen & Pälli, 2021), the interactionalization of a written standardized question (Nyroos & Sandlund, 2014), the function of ventriloquism, i.e. voicing someone else’s words (Sorsa et al., 2014; Van De Mieroop & Carranza, 2018), the professionalization of the performance appraisal process through the increased use of institutional documents (Van De Mieroop & Vrolix, 2014), the co-construction of the written report in interaction (Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2014), the practice of goal-setting through writing (Pälli & Lehtinen, 2014), and the use of appraisal forms as a means to initiate activity shifts (Mikkola & Lehtinen, 2014). This non-exhaustive overview of existing literature aims to showcase the scope and breadth of research that has been conducted on the relation and interplay between talk and text in institutional settings, both in corporate workplaces and beyond, and the findings from all of the studies cited here underline that text, particularly in combination with talk, forms one of the foundations of modern-day institutional workplace settings, both to maintain them and to create them.

In this section, I have discussed the role and importance of textual documents in institutional settings, not only on their own, but also (and particularly) in relation to spoken interactions. I then elaborated on the conceptualization of this relation between talk and text as a process of recontextualization, which is never neutral, and thus always indicative of the positioning of those who are involved in the changes that are made. Finally, I provided a non-exhaustive literature overview of previous research that has been conducted on the interplay between talk and text in a number of institutional settings, as well as in corporate settings and performance appraisal interviews specifically, so as to further underline the importance of such processes of recontextualization both from academic and practical perspectives. In the following section, I will situate some of the research chapters of this dissertation as part of research on institutional corporate workplace settings and illustrate how the broader relevance of talk and text in institutional settings was specifically interpreted in light of this dissertation, thereby also zooming in on existing research on the interactional context of corporate performance appraisals in light of the third case study.

#### **2.2.4 Situating the dissertation as part of research on text and talk in institutional settings**

This dissertation adopts a social constructionist perspective on the role and importance of talk and text in institutional settings, thus conceptualizing talk and text individually as well as in relation to one another as crucial to how institutions are created and maintained on a daily basis. This includes more formal manifestations of talk and text, such as meetings and job interviews in spoken form or reports and protocols in written form, as well as more informal ones, such as small talk, chats during lunch breaks, or post-it notes.

The first case study of this dissertation, as represented in Chapter 4, engages primarily with an institutional perspective on language and globalization in corporate institutional settings, and as such, is not explicitly positioned as empirical research on talk and text as part of the daily workings of the institutional settings they are situated

in. However, the dataset of this case study is made up in large part of textual documentation retrieved from the company's archive to trace back the institutional perspective of the company's (linguistic) globalization process. As such, textual documents were used to reconstruct the company's institutional development over the years, thereby underlining in a more implicit way the crucial importance of textual documentation in (re)creating and maintaining corporate institutions.

The third case study, which makes up Chapters 8, 9 and 10 of the dissertation, is firmly anchored as research on the intricacies of and interplay between talk and text in corporate institutional settings. More specifically, it focuses on corporate performance appraisal interviews, an interactional context that can be defined as "recurrent strategic interviews between a superior in an organization and an employee that focus on employee performance and development" (Asmuß, 2008, p. 409). Performance appraisal interviews are considered crucial corporate workplaces encounters for both the employer and the employee, as the aim of the encounter is to assess an employee's performance so that they can improve their performance, which in turn aims to contribute to the positive development of the employee and, by extension, the organization as a whole (Clifton, 2012; Fletcher, 2001; Sandlund et al., 2011). Such encounters have been argued to "constitute important sites for the reinforcement of organizational norms" (Sandlund et al., 2011, p. 60) and thus represent an interactional context where the institution is "talked into being" (Heritage, 1984, p. 290) between employers and employees. Additionally, performance appraisal processes as a whole are typically made up of multiple interdiscursive and multimodal phases that include written preparations and reports in addition to the spoken interview (Fairclough, 2006; Scheuer, 2014), and can therefore be considered a particularly relevant object of study to examine the interplay between talk and text in corporate institutional settings.

Despite their corporate relevance, relatively little is known to date about how performance appraisal interviews or PAIs take place on the basis of authentic empirical data (Asmuß, 2008; Clifton, 2012; Fletcher, 2001; Sandlund et al., 2011). A number of (case) studies have aimed to contribute to opening up what has earlier been referred to as the 'black box' (Clifton, 2012) that is talk-in-interaction during performance

appraisal interviews. One of the earliest studies to do so was conducted by Adams (1981), who uses a conversation analytical (CA) approach to focus on the sequential nature of question-answer adjacency pairs in PAIs and found that PAIs are not just a series of question-answer sequences, but rather that the interactional dynamic between the interlocutors is more complex, and argues that because of this, PAIs should not only be studied from a managerial perspective, but should be studied as multiparty interactions. Also from a CA perspective, Asmuß (2008) focuses specifically on the formulation of negative feedback in PAIs and finds that interlocutors orient to negative feedback as socially problematic actions, despite the fact that giving (negative) feedback is an inherent part of the performance appraisal process. In a later study (Asmuß, 2013), she uses a similar approach to examine the interactional emergence of (a)symmetries between the interlocutors, arguing that a micro-analysis of PAIs is necessary to grasp the complexity of these types of interactions. Sandlund et al. (2011) examined the manifestation of norms and ideals during PAIs in a medium-sized financial organization in Sweden, particularly in relation to the topic of stress, and found that 'ideal employees' are conceptualized as those who can deal with stress, and that the inability to deal with stress is thus implicitly treated as a norm violation. Clifton (2012) also makes use of the CA approach to examine facework in PAIs, and argues that both the appraiser and appraisee collaborate to achieve facework so as to maintain a good working relationship. More recently, Bowden and Sandlund (2019) combined tools from ethnomethodology and CA to focus on the co-construction of knowledge between managers and employees at a Swedish bank, and found that PAIs are sites of situated practice where organizational knowledge management is negotiated. Outside of the tradition of CA, Van De Microop and Schnurr (2017a) make use of tools from ethnography and discourse analysis to examine how the identity of 'model employee' is (co-)constructed through facework in PAIs at a Dutch company, and how the institutional roles and professional identities of the interviewee and interviewer influence the interaction. Using a similar methodology, Holmes (2007) provides an analysis of intra-organizational gatekeeping interactions in white collar professional contexts in New Zealand and argues that power can manifest itself in different ways in the workplace, including during performance appraisal interviews. Finally, adopting an entirely different methodological approach, Meinecke and Kauffeld (2018) use

quantitative computational linguistic methods to explore the role of leaders' emphatic communication style in PAIs and find that verbal mimicry is positively related to the supervisors' emphatic leadership style.

In addition to these studies on talk-in-interaction in performance appraisal contexts, a growing amount of research has also aimed to explore the intricate interplay between talk and text in these types of interactions. From a conversation analytical perspective, Nyroos and Sandlund (2014) examine how a specific question as stated on an appraisal form is delivered and answered in PAIs, concluding that written questions are not interactionalized verbatim and that the specific delivery of the question influences the answer that is provided. Scheuer (2014) also uses a CA approach to examine turn-taking sequences where the employee topicalizes problems they are experiencing at work as part of their PAI at Danish businesses, and argues that because the main aim of the interaction is to go through the appraisal form, additional topics which are brought up by the employee, such as problems they are experiencing, are treated as a challenge to this aim. Using this same analytical lens, Pälli and Lehtinen (2014) focus on the action of writing during PAIs at Finnish public sector organization, and conclude not only that writing during talk is important to decide on goals for the future, but that what is written down is co-constructed by the interlocutors in interaction. In a similar research context, Sorsa et al. (2014) focus on strategy as a performative discourse in Finnish public organizations and argue that words of strategy are appropriated through ventriloquization during PAIs. Continuing in this context of Finnish public organizations, Mikkola and Lehtinen (2014) use a multimodal CA approach to focus on the use of appraisal forms in initiating activity shifts during PAIs, and find that embodied interaction with the textual document is used to initiate an activity shift before it is initiated verbally. Most recently, Lehtinen and Pälli (2021) combined sequential analysis and ethnographic knowledge to examine the role of the appraisal form in PAIs in a Finnish city organization, particularly in the beginning stages of the interview when the interlocutors go through last year's appraisal form to assess the employee's development, and argue that the appraisal form as an authoritative text has agency and a participatory status in the PAI. Using a discourse analytical approach in a different nation-state setting, Van De Mierop and Vrolix

(2014) examine PAIs at a Dutch medical lab to focus on how the preparations of the PAI emerge during the interaction itself, and find that the interplay between talk and text results in a highly professionalized performance appraisal process at this organization, but that the company's professionalized approach has both advantages and disadvantages. Relating to the same dataset, Van De Mieroop and Schnurr (2014) examine how selecting and writing down specific information for the report is decided upon during PAIs at a Dutch medical lab, and similar to Pälli and Lehtinen (2014), argue that what ends up in the report is collaboratively negotiated and co-constructed between the interlocutors. This same dataset is also compared to examinations of witnesses in criminal trials in Van De Mieroop and Carranza (2018) with a focus on how interlocutors draw on written documents to achieve authority in institutional interactions, and it is argued that in both types of interactions, the written documents are always treated as more important than oral words, and that this authority of written documents can seemingly only be refuted by other written documents.

Overall, all of these studies have contributed significantly to our understanding of what actually happens during performance appraisal interviews, and the three empirical chapters that form the third case study of this dissertation aim to further contribute to our understanding of the complexity of talk and text as part of this institutional interaction in three different ways. Chapter 8 examines the role and value of small talk as relational practice in performance appraisal interviews in light of the continuum of different types of workplace talk as presented by Holmes (2000, see Section 2.2.1). In doing so, the analysis echoes the argument that “small talk can serve a specific instrumental (or transactional) function in its own right” (Archer et al., 2020, p. 291) and underlines the importance of small talk as relational practice (Holmes & Marra, 2004; Holmes et al., 2011) to talk the institution of the company ‘into being’ in a virtual workspace. Chapter 9 focuses on performance appraisal interviews from a multilingual perspective, examining how the implicit multilingual language policy at the company manifests itself in interaction in the form of English as a lingua franca, receptive multilingualism, and lay interpreting. Finally, Chapter 10 aims to better understand the appraisal process as an “intertextual chain” (Fairclough, 1993) of documents and interactions by focusing on the recontextualization of talk and text throughout the



performance appraisal process, specifically with regards to negative feedback. On the basis of these distinct research foci, each of these chapters aims to contribute to a call from within the research community “to develop studies that open the lid on the black box of AIs [appraisal interviews] and to study what actually goes on from a communicative perspective” (Clifton, 2012, p. 284) by presenting empirical research on what actually happens with talk and text in the institutional context of corporate performance appraisals.

## 2.3 LANGUAGE POLICY

In (corporate) workplace settings, interlocutors interact as part of an institutional framework which defines certain affordances and constraints regarding the language they use, and language policies can function as a helpful tool to guide interlocutors in understanding them. Throughout the next sections, I will explain what is meant when referring to language policy and how this general definition can be understood in light of corporate workplace settings more specifically. Additionally, I provide an overview of existing research on language policy in corporate workplace settings to highlight the different ways language can be used and managed within these contexts. Finally, the last section will provide insight into the different ways in which some of the research chapters of this dissertation are connected to and intertwined with the concept of corporate language policy.

### 2.3.1 Defining (corporate) language policy

The contemporary conceptualization of language policy that is adopted in this dissertation is part of the research tradition on language policy and planning, or LPP. The field of LPP came into existence in the early 1960s when “linguists were invited to help solve the ‘problems’ of new, developing, and post-colonial nations” (Johnson, 2011, p. 268; McCarty, 2011). However, most research in LPP has since then diverted from this aim to help nation-states devise top-down macro-level language planning initiatives to more nuanced and complex conceptualizations of language planning and language policy in a broader sense. Johnson (2011) summarizes the field today as follows:

*“Language planning and policy has come to be known as activities that influence the structure, function, use, or acquisition of language; are intentional and unintentional, overt and covert, de jure and de facto; and are engaged in by agents across multiple levels of language policy creation, interpretation, and*

appropriation, from the macro-levels of national planning and policy to the micro-level of language use.” (p. 268)

Although I consider it beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into this shift in perspective within the field, a number of publications provide overviews of the developments within LPP research over the years (Barakos & Unger, 2016; Jernudd & Nekvapil, 2012; Johnson & Ricento, 2013). It is this latter contemporary conceptualization of the field that is adopted as part of this dissertation.

More specifically, I follow the conceptualization of language policy as proposed by Spolsky (2004; 2009; 2019). This definition comprises three components, namely language practices, language beliefs, and language management, and the relation between these components is visually represented in Figure 2.

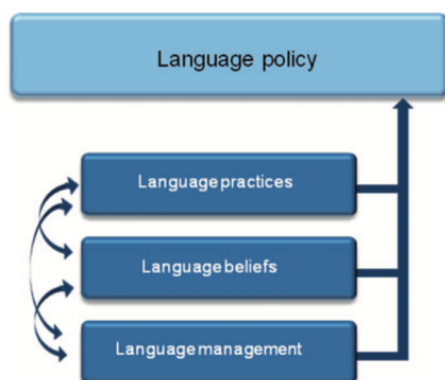


Figure 2. Spolsky's (2004) conceptualization of language policy (reproduced here from Sanden, 2016a, p. 524)

Spolsky (2019) argues that the existing distinction between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ language policies was too simplistic, and that instead, language policy should be viewed as a “complex and chaotic non-hierarchical system” (p. 326) comprising of three separate yet intertwined components which can be interpreted from multiple perspectives. The first component, i.e. language practices, is defined as “the observable behaviors and choices – what people actually do” (Spolsky, 2009, p. 4) with regards to sound, lexical items, expressions, grammar, mode, channel, and other aspects of language. ‘Choice’ is a key term here, as Spolsky (2004) argues that language choices,

either conscious or not, are exactly what reflects language policy in practice. Secondly, language beliefs, which are “sometimes called an ideology”, are defined as “the values or statuses assigned to named languages, varieties and features” (Spolsky, 2009, p. 4). This definition ties in with earlier definitions of linguistic ideology which define it as “any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein, 1979, p. 193; see also Section 2.1.4). Such beliefs or ideologies are considered taken-for-granted and commonsensical and are typically implicit but can also be made explicit, and in both types of manifestations, they can reveal much how people make sense of language in the world (Lønsmann, 2015; McCarty, 2011, Ricento, 2016). Finally, the third aspect of language management is defined as “the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs” (Spolsky, 2009, p. 4). In institutional settings, language management is used to modify the two other components of language policy, i.e. practices and beliefs, so as to solve any (potential) communicative problems that (might) occur. This interplay between the three components captures language policy as “primarily a social construct” (Schiffman, 1996, p. 276) that is “processual, dynamic, and in motion” (McCarty, 2011, p. 2).

Following this definition, it is clear that language policy does not only manifest itself in institutional contexts in the form of policy documents, but that it should be viewed as a “complex sociocultural process” (McCarty, 2011, p. 8) that can be made up of different types of communicative processes in both spoken and written forms. In this sense, Spolsky (2004) argues that “language policy exists even where it has not been made explicit or established by authority” (p. 8). Elaborating on this distinction between implicit and explicit types of language policy, Shohamy (2006) explains that:

“In some contexts, language policy is stated *explicitly* through official documents, such as national laws, declaration of certain languages as “official” or “national”, language standards, curricula, tests, and other types of documents. In other contexts, language policy is not stated explicitly, but can be derived *implicitly* from examining a variety of de facto practices. In these

situations language policy is more difficult to detect as it is subtle and more hidden from the public eye.” (Shohamy, 2006, p. 50, emphasis in original)

In sum, the conceptualization of language policy adopted in this dissertation includes both overt (or “explicit, formalized, *de jure*, codified, manifest”) forms of policy, as well as more covert (or “implicit, informal, unstated, *de facto*, grass-roots, latent) forms (Schiffman, 1996, p. 13), thus allowing for broad interpretations of language as part of institutional policy. Although it has been argued that no single theory of language policy can fully capture the true complexity of institutional (workplace) language (Kingsley, 2013; Sanden, 2016a), I would argue that this broad social constructionist conceptualization of language policy allows for a holistic overview of the multifaceted and multilayered nature of institutional communication, and that it can thus function as a useful guiding tool to produce deeply contextualized analyses of language in institutional settings.

Zooming in on corporate institutional settings, corporate language policies can be defined as language policies that are part of a specific corporate context (Sanden, 2015). In other words, corporate settings are just one type of institutional context in which the broad framework of language policy can be applied, and language policies in general are always only part of a larger set of (institutional) policies, as visualized in Figure 3.

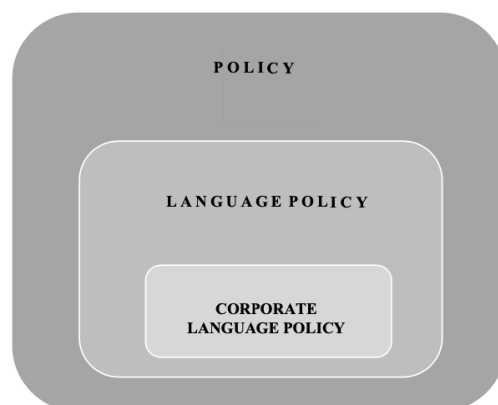


Figure 3. Corporate language policy as a subtype of (language) policy (reproduced here from Sanden, 2015, p. 1099)

In corporate contexts, different parties are involved in the creation, maintenance, and delivery of language policy, including but not limited to “various levels of ownership and management”, “various kinds of employees”, and “actual and potential clientele” (Spolsky, 2008, p. 4). However, there are differences in power at play when it comes to the parties involved in corporate language *management*, a key aspect of language policy in business settings which is primarily decided upon by higher levels of management.

Language management in particular has been studied by international management scholars since the 1990s (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011), primarily in light of the increasing globalization of corporate settings, the emergence of large multinational corporations, and the growing diversity of contemporary workplaces (see Section 2.1.5). Corporate language management decisions are often made as a reaction to such developments and “are intended to modify practices and beliefs in the workplace, solving what appear to the participants to be communication problems” (Spolsky, 2009, p. 53-54). Although a number of potential management solutions exist, it is not always straightforward to know or decide on the tools that are most appropriate within a specific context, and as a result, “many companies with potential international business have been slow to develop appropriate methods” (Spolsky, 2009, p. 57), particularly when it comes to dealing with linguistic diversity (Welch et al., 2005).

In order to fully grasp the complexity of language in corporate settings, however, all aspects of language policy should be taken into account, rather than focusing only or primarily on top-down language management (Spolsky, 2009; Cadier & Mar-Molinero, 2012). This is particularly the case for companies where there are no language policy documents or other explicit language management tools in place. Indeed, all corporate language policies can be positioned as part of a continuum between the extreme points of fully formalized to entirely non-formalized language policies, which include differences in the policy format, focus, formation, agency, and management style (Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). For example, in their study on plurilingual practices in a multilingual MNC with HQ in Basel, Lüdi, Höchle and Yanaprasart (2010) found that “the interventions of the companies are not, and to a considerable degree, always explicit. Sometimes they seem to reveal a shared knowledge: everyone “knows” that a

measure exists even if it is not written down anywhere” (p. 232). In other words, the absence of a formalized language policy does not entail the non-existence of a language policy, and as such, it can be argued that all companies have a language policy, whether they are aware of it or not (Sanden, 2016b).

In this section, I have introduced the research tradition of LPP or language policy and planning and provided a broad definition of language policy (Spolsky, 2004; 2009; 2019). Additionally, I have discussed how this general framework can be applied specifically within corporate institutional contexts, underlining that all companies have a language policy, be it either implicit or explicit. In the following section, I will provide a non-exhaustive overview of existing research on language policy and particularly language management in corporate workplaces so as to showcase the different possibilities and the ways in which they can manifest themselves depending on the corporate context under study.

### 2.3.2 Corporate language management

Although language management is only one component of language policy, it can be considered particularly important in corporate institutional settings, as the implementation of well-suited top-down language management tools can have beneficial results for the language practices and general efficacy of the company as a whole (Sanden, 2016b). Moreover, the way in which language management is decided upon is strongly influenced by language ideology. A broad framework within which such decision-making occurs, is related to how language and linguistic diversity are perceived. In a general sense, Ruiz (1984) puts forth an influential distinction which argues that language is perceived by policy makers as either a ‘problem’, a ‘right’, or a ‘resource’, and that each of these perspectives will influence the way policy decisions are made in different ways. Specifically in corporate settings, it has been argued that linguistic diversity *should* be perceived as a strength, thus advocating for the ‘language-as-resource’ perspective (Kankaanranta et al., 2018; Sanden, 2016b; Yanaprasart, 2016). Such a perspective is increasingly being adopted in a number of companies,

particularly as part of the “economic capitalization of linguistic diversity” (Duchêne & Del Percio, 2014, p. 89; see Section 2.1.3) as multilingualism is considered a resource due to its marketability and economic potential (Duchêne, 2009). However, in most businesses, linguistic diversity is perceived as a problem that requires management in order to solve it, especially when it comes to internal communication.

In light of the developments of corporate globalization (see Section 2.1.5), workplaces have become increasingly diverse in a number of ways, including linguistically, thus resulting in an increased perception of ‘language-as-problem’ (Ruiz, 1984). From a management perspective, a number of tools can be implemented to deal with this linguistic diversity in the workplace. Feely and Harzing (2003) list a number of such top-down language management tools, including the implementation of a common corporate language, functional multilingualism, outsourcing translators and interpreters, offering language training for staff, selecting language nodes, selective recruitment, and the use of machine translation and interpretation. All of these tools have distinct strengths, but each of them also has their weaknesses (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Peltokorpi & Vaara, 2014; Vermandere et al., 2019). For example, offering language training for staff can be a beneficial language strategy in the long run, but the potential downside for both the employee and the employer is that language learning is a laborious process that can take years, and additionally, it is costly, particularly if employees are encouraged to follow courses during their working hours. Decisions regarding top-down language management tools should therefore always be based on the specificities of the corporate context in which they are being implemented and should include assessments that consider aspects such as budget restrictions as well as the existing language resources and language needs of the company and its employees.

In corporate interactions where a shared language cannot easily be identified between all interlocutors, spoken and written solutions to bridge the language gap can also be sought out in a more ad hoc way. Examples of potential ways to bridge the lack of a shared (first) language in multilingual interactions include:



“... using a lingua franca (often English), [...] choosing the language of one of the interlocutors known (partially) by the others (namely in the case of immigrants), using various forms of mixed speech, offering interpretation and translation facilities and, of course, insisting on receptive competences or lingua receptiva (everybody uses his or her own language, e.g. in institutions which are officially multilingual).” (Lüdi, 2013, p. 141)

One or more of these solutions can be used depending on the specificities of the language gap(s) at hand, and ad hoc solutions to bridge a language gap can also include the use of top-down management tools, for example when translation or interpreting services are offered by the company.

One particular language management tool that is often implemented in the pursuit of an effective and efficient way to deal with linguistic diversity in the workplace is that of a common corporate language (Gunnarsson, 2014). The aim of this type of strategy is primarily to “increase efficiency by overcoming misunderstandings, reducing costs, avoiding time-consuming translations and creating a sense of belonging and cohesion within the firm” (Fredriksson et al., 2006, p. 409). In addition to practical ones, this latter aim is more ideological, as a common language can also function as “a symbolic expression of an organizational unit” (Gunnarsson, 2014, p. 14) as part of a language ideology that can be compared to the ‘one nation, one people, one language’ ideology commonly observed in nation-state frameworks (Heller, 2010).

In the majority of increasingly globalized and thus multilingual companies, English is often chosen to fulfill the need for a common language (Gunnarsson, 2014; see also Section 2.1.5). As a result, the majority of the existing literature on corporate language policies focuses on English as a lingua franca and/or the increasing importance and role of English and BELF in corporations located in countries where English is not an official language (Sanden, 2020). Nissi, Blåsjö and Jonsson (2021) argue that “English as a lingua franca has a central position when studying professional communication” (p. 7), and my own literature review on language policy in European companies confirms this, including analyses that center around English as a lingua franca in

workplaces in Croatia, Greece, Italy, Serbia, the UK, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Luxembourg, Denmark, and Austria (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014; Angouri, 2013; Cogo, 2012; Ehrenreich, 2010; Fredriksson et al., 2006; Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013; Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Kankaanranta et al., 2018; Kingsley, 2013; Lønsmann & Kraft, 2018; Lønsmann, 2011; 2014; 2015; 2017; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Pitzl, 2005; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018; Sanden & Lønsmann, 2018).

The implementation of English as a common corporate language to solve any potential communicative issues has also been problematized in this body of literature, as researchers have repeatedly argued that the solution to any problems that might result from increasing multilingualism can never be to enforce monolingualism (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014; Feely & Harzing, 2003; Lønsmann, 2015; Sanden & Lønsmann, 2018). In spite of its perceived efficiency, there are no “one-size-fits-all” solutions to resolving issues regarding language and multilingualism in the workplace (Sanden, 2016b), and the choice for English as a common corporate language is often ill-fitted for the corporate context in which it is being implemented.

Such language policies where there is an identifiable discrepancy between the language management tools implemented by higher management and the language practices and needs of the company have repeatedly been shown to result in problems for both the employees and their employers (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011; Fredriksson et al., 2006; Lønsmann & Kraft, 2018; Sanden & Lønsmann, 2018). Some of the problems associated with maladapted language policies include miscommunication, ineffective interunit communication, misunderstandings, silencing effect, loss of rhetorical skills, disempowerment, status and power loss, employee dissatisfaction, withdrawal, avoidance, discrimination, shadow structures, gatekeeping, glass ceilings, social exclusion and isolation, and resistance and ignorance of the company’s language policy (Lønsmann, 2014; Sanden, 2020; Sanden & Lønsmann, 2018; Welch et al., 2005). As such, neither the absence of a formalized language policy, nor ‘quick fixes’ such as implementing English as a common corporate language, suffice when attempting to deal with the increased linguistic complexity of contemporary workplaces. Instead,

language management should be considered an inevitable aspect of any company's internationalization process, and management needs to understand their language resources and language needs in order to devise an efficient and effective language policy that is adapted to their specific corporate setting (Sanden, 2016b; 2020; Spolsky, 2009; Welch et al., 2005).

In this section, I have positioned language management as a crucial aspect of corporate language policy, and I have listed a number of ways in which language can be managed in the workplace, both structurally and in more ad hoc ways. I then zoomed in on one particular language management strategy, namely that of implementing a common corporate language, which is often English in internationalized business settings. Finally, I elaborated on the potential problems that might result from ill-fitting language policies and argued that any corporate language policy should be adapted to a company's specific language needs. In the following section, I will situate some of the research chapters of this dissertation as part of research on corporate language policies, and illustrate how the components of language beliefs, language practices, and language management intersect throughout these research chapters.

### **2.3.3 Situating the dissertation as part of research on corporate language policy**

Despite the corporate importance and relevance of language policy in increasingly multilingual workplaces, it has been argued that “research on language policy in complex workplace systems such as multinational companies or consortia of multinational companies is still relatively scarce” (Angouri, 2013, p. 578). Since 2013, the field has grown considerably, but most studies focus primarily on language policy from a language management perspective (see Section 2.3.2). Chapters 4 and 9 in this dissertation aim to further contribute to this observed gap in the literature by offering in-depth analyses of language policy in two different types of corporate settings, taking into account the complex interplay between language management, language practice, and language beliefs so as to underline and showcase the multifaceted and multilayered

nature of the observed phenomenon. In Chapter 4, language policy is used as the crux of the theoretical framework to better understand how socio-historical processes of globalization are reflected and result in changes regarding language beliefs, language management, and language practices at a multinational corporation in Brussels. This chapter does not include interactional workplace data, but reconstructs the company's dynamic language policy over time primarily on the basis of archival documents and in-depth interviews with higher management, thus reflecting an institutional perspective on language and language policy at this corporation. In Chapter 9, we examine language policy at a small-sized enterprise from an interactional perspective, with a particular focus on how different multilingual strategies are used during the performance appraisal interviews at the company (i.e. language practices). These insights are then triangulated with findings from the follow-up interviews with the two responsible managers to investigate how their use is decided upon by the managers (i.e. language management), and which perceptions and beliefs the managers adhere to with regard to these different strategies (i.e. language beliefs).

To further underline the complexity of language policy in any given corporate setting, it is also crucial to showcase the complexity of the organization itself, and as such, this dissertation also aims to move away from static interpretations of companies as stable legal and material entities (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018). Particularly in the first and the third case studies, i.e. Chapters 4, 8, 9 and 10, it becomes clear that traditional distinctions between multilingual, global MNCs on the one hand versus monolingual, local SMEs on the other hand do not hold in contemporary corporate settings. Instead, all workplaces in globalized societies are increasingly and at least somewhat globalized and multilingual, as well as constantly evolving, and it is argued that they should therefore also be researched as such (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018).

## 2.4 THE (SOCIO)LINGUISTIC CONTEXT OF BELGIUM

As part of a sociolinguistics of globalization, this dissertation is situated within a broader framework of societal globalization which manifests itself in different localized ways across the world (Blommaert, 2010; Fairclough, 2006). For all of the research chapters, that locality comprises Belgium on a nation-state level, a country in Western Europe with a particular and complex socio-political relation to language. Throughout the next sections, I will introduce the political setup of Belgium as a federal state as well as the historical development of the role of language in the country, including an overview of its language laws. I will then zoom in on Brussels, the nation's capital, and frame it as a particularly rich setting for sociolinguistic enquiries related to language in processes of globalization. Then, I will elaborate on previous research that has been done on language in Belgian corporate contexts, and finally, explain how the different case studies of this dissertation are situated within the nation-state framework of Belgium.

### 2.4.1 Language in the federal state of Belgium

Belgium is a federal state which comprises three geographical Regions, namely the Flemish Region or Flanders, the Walloon Region or Wallonia, and the Brussels Capital Region. Additionally, it harbors three language-based Communities, namely the Dutch-speaking Community, the French-speaking Community, and the German-speaking Community. The relation between the geographical Regions and the language-based Communities in Belgium is depicted in Figure 4. As can be seen on the map, the Flemish Region overlaps almost entirely with the Dutch-speaking Community, the Walloon Region hosts both the French-speaking and the German-speaking Communities, and Brussels is the only officially bilingual region in Belgium. As a result, Belgium has three official languages, but none of these languages have

official status in the entire territory of the nation-state, a principle referred to as 'linguistic territoriality'.

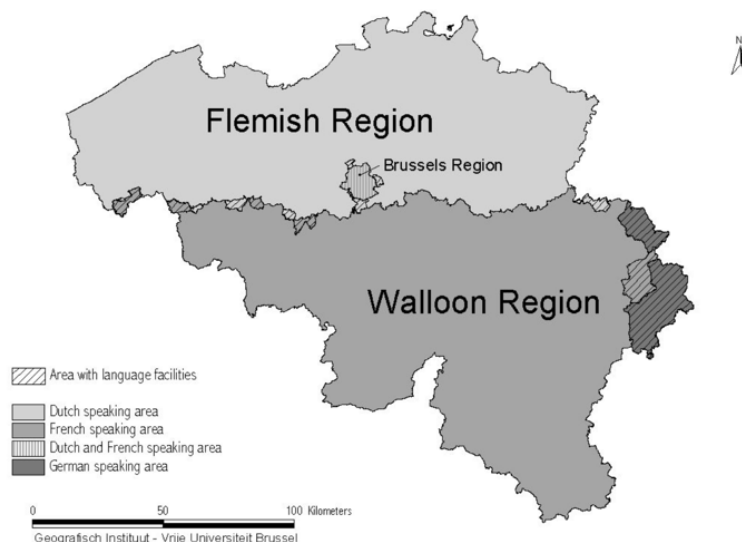


Figure 4. Map of Belgium

The differences between the Communities and the Regions can be defined as follows:

“Communities are defined on the basis of language. Their institutions are competent for cultural matters, education, health care, family policy, welfare policy, etc. (...) Regions, on the other hand, are geographic entities with socio-economic competences.” (Deprez, 2000, p. 24-25)

Regions and Communities each have their own government, with the exception of the Flemish Government, which functions as the government for both the Flemish Region and the Dutch-speaking Community. This means that Belgium has 6 governments in total: the Federal Government, the Flemish Government, the Walloon Government, the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region, the Government of the French-speaking Community, and the Government of the German-speaking Community. This arguably quite complex structure of the Kingdom of Belgium is the result of 6 state reforms which took place over the course of 5 decades, with the first one in 1970 and the last one in 2012. Although the exact reasoning behind these state reforms is

considered beyond the scope of this chapter, each of them was the result of socio-political struggle to which an adjustment of the state structure was considered the only possible solution (Deprez, 2000).

These socio-political struggles were often related to or even entirely about language, as the history of the Belgian nation-state has been summarized as “riddled by linguistic difference, conflict and compromise” (Vandenbroucke, 2016, p. 7). Indeed, language has played a defining role in the development of Belgium, to the extent that “language and language alone” can be considered “the engine behind the political history of the country” (Blommaert, 2011, p. 243). In light of the sensitive position of language in Belgium, it has been argued that uncontroversial statements on the topic are impossible (Blommaert, 2011). The lack of linguistic census data in Belgium since 1947 exemplifies this statement, as the continuation of conducting a language census was at that time considered “too divisive and too controversial” in the Belgian sociolinguistic context (O’Donnell & Toebosch, 2008, p. 161). In what follows, I will provide a short overview of the history of language and language laws in Belgium to broadly contextualize this complexity and sensitivity surrounding language.

The Kingdom of Belgium was established in 1830 as a *de facto* monolingual Francophone state, as French was the official language at the national, provincial, and municipal levels of government (Van Velthoven, 1987), and the elite identified solely with French, making it the only language that was used in the higher echelons of society (Deprez, 2000). However, language census data from 1846 indicate that the majority of Belgians already spoke a form of Flemish dialect during this period, in comparison to a minority who spoke French (Van Herck & Vermandere, 2016). As such, there was a wide discrepancy between the language of the people and the language of government, resulting in a lack of judicial and government access for the majority of Belgians (Deprez, 2000; Van Herck & Vermandere, 2016). At the time, this was not considered a problem from the parliament’s perspective, as only 2% of the Belgians had the right to vote (Deprez, 2000) and parliament “was not primarily interested in the social or linguistic condition of the masses” (Van Velthoven, 1987, p. 16). However, from the people’s perspective, this discrepancy between the language of the

people and the language of government went hand in hand with “symptoms characteristic of linguistic oppression” of the Flemish-speaking population (Van Velthoven, 1987, p. 16). This repression ultimately resulted in the rise of the Flemish Movement against the French-speaking elite, which extended the struggle for linguistic rights to a socio-political movement as part of which the Dutch language became a symbol for the emancipation of the Flemish people as a whole (Deprez, 2000; Vandembroucke, 2017; Van Velthoven, 1987). It is exactly this language struggle in the form of “a continued effort of Flemish leaders to have the Dutch language accepted as equal to French in Belgium” (Blommaert, 2011, p. 243) which gradually transformed Belgium from a *de facto* monolingual Francophone country into the *de jure* trilingual federal state that it is today. Moreover, as a result of the historical repression of Dutch, we can still observe “lingering sensitivities, animosities, and communal division in Belgian society and politics today” (Vandembroucke, 2017, p. 412), particularly as part of the contemporary Flemish nationalist movement.

In judicial terms, the historical language struggle has also impacted Belgian laws in a number of ways. The original Belgian Constitution as created in 1831 stipulated linguistic freedom in Article 23, which still exists as Article 30 in the current coordinated Constitution of Belgium:

“The use of the languages spoken in Belgium is free. It can only be regulated by law, and solely in the acts of public authority and in judicial matters.”  
(Gecoördineerde Grondwet, 1994; translation to English from Wynants, 2000, p. 31)

This article of the Constitution of Belgium functions as the starting point for any language law that exists today or has existed over the course of the history of Belgium (De Pelsmaeker et al., 2004). When the constitution was established, this theoretical equality of language in Belgium played in favor of the French-speaking elite, as it allowed them to reinforce the predominance of French in all aspects of public life without taking into account the majority of Belgians who did not speak French (Van Herck & Vermandere, 2016; Wynants, 2000). As such, the main aim of the Flemish



Movement since then has been to battle this linguistic oppression by imposing legal constraints on the linguistic freedom that the Belgian Constitution stipulates (Wynants, 2000).

An important victory for the Flemish Movement took place in 1932 with the introduction of the law on language in administrative matters (in Dutch: ‘Taalwet Bestuurszaken’), which established the concept of linguistic territoriality in certain aspects of public life. Later in 1932, and then in 1935 and 1938, three more language laws were passed, relating to language use in education, the judiciary, and the army respectively (Wynants, 2000). The reason why it took more than 100 years after the introduction of the Belgian Constitution for new language laws to be passed, can be explained as follows:

“Why were these laws passed as late as the 1930s, whereas the Flemish Movement had been asking for language rights since the middle of the 19th century? The answer is quite obvious: since a law needs a majority in parliament, the acceptance of laws regulating language use only became possible when the ethnolinguistic group requesting such laws obtained sufficient parliamentary representation. Although the Flemings have always constituted the numerical majority in Belgium, their demands for a legal protection of their language remained unproductive as long a parliament was not elected by universal suffrage. This was one acquired in 1919, immediately after World War I. As early as 1921, a law on language use in the administration was passed, but it went unheeded, for lack of sufficient control and sanction provisions. In the following years and decades, even up to the present day, the Flemish Movement has continuously striven for a more restrictive and constraining wording and/or implementation of the law (see generally Mc Rae, 1986; Murphy, 1988).” (Wynants, 2000, p. 31)

Although the introduction of the law on language in administrative matters in 1932 and the subsequent laws on language use in education, the judiciary, and the army were considered a win for the Flemish Movement, they still caused frustration, because the

laws did not include sanctions for breaches, resulting in the continued hegemony of French in most aspects of public life.

The law on language use in administrative affairs or ‘Taalwet Bestuurszaken’ was revised in 1963 and the two were coordinated in 1966 (Wynants, 2000). The revision in 1963 was the result of political tension in 1961-1962, when the Flemish Movement marched to make demands for a linguistic border to be defined definitively and for the bilingual Brussels-Capital Region to remain limited to 19 municipalities (see Section 2.4.2), thus marching against “Frenchification and territorial annexation” (Witte, 1987, p. 53). These demands were met, and in addition to the linguistic territoriality which had been established in 1932, the revision of the law on language use in administrative affairs of 1963 officially established the linguistic border between Flanders and Wallonia, as a result of which the country was officially and administratively split up in areas on the basis of majority language use. This resulted in three officially monolingual areas, i.e. Dutch-speaking Flanders, French-speaking Wallonia, and a German-speaking minority area within Wallonia. Two exceptions were made to this principle of monolingual territoriality, namely the officially bilingual Brussels-Capital Region, and the municipalities with language facilities (Wynants, 2000); I will zoom in on the former in Section 2.4.2, and the latter exception is considered beyond the scope of this dissertation (see Wynants, 2000 for more information on municipalities with language facilities). Additionally, to include sanctions for breaches on this law, two supervisory bodies were set up. First, the Committee for Language Supervision was established in 1964 to “examine all breaches of the language laws, whether these breaches concerned the letter or the spirit of the law” (Witte, 1987, p. 56). Second, a government commissioner was assigned specifically for Brussels and the municipalities with language facilities “to supervise strict enforcement of the language legislation and to promote the harmonious development of both language communities in the capital” (Witte, 1987, p. 57). Both bodies are able to take disciplinary measures or impose sanctions when language laws are not being respected across the country.

In the coordinated version which was created in 1966 and still used as such today, Article 12 of the law on language in administrative matters or ‘Taalwet Bestuurszaken’ stipulates that:

“Every local service, which is located in the Dutch, the French or the German language region, uses the language of its region exclusively for its affairs with private citizens, without prejudice to the possibility to communicate with certain private citizens, who are located in another language region, in the language chosen by those private citizens.” (Wetten op het gebruik van de talen in bestuurszaken, 1966; translation to English from Van Herck & Vermandere, 2016, p. 193)

Specifically for the Brussels-Capital Region, Article 19 states:

“Every local service, which is located in Brussels, communicates in the language which is used by the private citizen, insofar that language is Dutch or French.” (Wetten op het gebruik van de talen in bestuurszaken, 1966; translation to English from Van Herck & Vermandere, 2016, p. 193)

These judicial changes, which relate primarily to language use in administrative affairs and public life, also form the backdrop of the language laws regarding language use in business affairs. The coordinated law on language use in administrative affairs from 1966 also includes regulations regarding language use in workplace contexts, as stipulated in Article 52:

“§ 1. For the deeds and documents prescribed by the laws and regulations and for those intended for their personnel, the private industrial, commercial or financial companies use the language of the area where their operating office or various operating offices are located. In Brussels-Capital, the companies draw up these documents in Dutch when they are intended for Dutch-speaking personnel and in French when they are intended for French-speaking personnel.

§ 2. Without prejudice to the obligations imposed on them by § 1, the same companies may attach to the notices, communications, documents, certificates and forms intended for the personnel a translation into one or more languages, if the composition of that personnel so warrants.” (Wetten op het gebruik van de talen in bestuurszaken, 1966; my translation)

Article 52 thus stipulates that all official written communication between employers and employees should be in the official language of the region in which it occurs. If the region is bilingual, as is the case in Brussels, the language choice of the employee decides in which language the documents should be set up. Translations can be added to this written communication, but it is always the original version as set up in one of the official languages that is legally binding.

In addition to the law on language in administrative matters, Article 129 of the current Constitution of Belgium also states that the language-based Communities have the right to stipulate further language laws pertaining to the language use between employers and employees in the workplace (Gecoördineerde Grondwet, 1994).

For the Dutch-speaking Community, the so-called ‘Septemberdecreet’ of 1973 partly replaces the regulations of Article 52 of the law on language in administrative matters for companies who have their place of business in the officially monolingual territory of the Flemish Region. Article 5 of this decree stipulates that:

“§ 1. The language to be used for social relations between employers and employees, as well as for the legally prescribed deeds and documents of the companies and for all documents intended for the personnel, is Dutch.” (Decreet tot regeling van het gebruik van de talen voor de sociale betrekkingen tussen de werkgevers en de werknemers, alsmede van de voor de wet en de verordeningen voorgeschreven akten en bescheiden van de ondernemingen, 1973; my translation)

Article 5 thus states regulations for companies and employers which differ from those set forth in Article 52 of the law on language in administrative matters, as it ‘includes

*all* social relations, both in spoken and written form, rather than only written documentation. Additionally, it includes *all* documents intended for personnel, rather than only *official* documents.

A similar law was introduced by the French-speaking Community in 1982. In the officially monolingual territory of the Walloon Region, Article 2 of this decree stipulates that:

“The language to be used for the social relations between employers and employees, as well as for the deeds and documents of the companies required by law and regulations, is French, without prejudice to the additional use of the language chosen by the parties.” (Décret relatif à la protection de la liberté de l'emploi des langues et de l'usage de la langue française en matière de relations sociales entre les employeurs et leur personnel ainsi que d'actes et documents des entreprises imposés par la loi et les règlements, 1982; my translation)

Similar to the ‘Septemberdecreet’ in Flanders, Article 2 of this decree thus also states that *all* social relations between employers and employees must be conducted in French, both in spoken and written form. Similar to Article 52 of the law on language in administrative matters (and in contrast to the ‘Septemberdecreet’ in Flanders), explicit regulations regarding the written documentation are limited to *official* documents.

In sum, both the Flemish-speaking and the French-speaking Communities have separate regional decrees which stipulate the language laws regarding the language use between employers and employees in Flanders and Wallonia, respectively. For the non-monolingually French- or Dutch-speaking territories, i.e. the Brussels-Capital Region, municipalities with language facilities, and the German-speaking minority area within Wallonia, Article 52 of the law on language in administrative matters applies.

The aim of this dissertation is not to showcase the relation to or potential discrepancies between the macro-level language planning of the Belgian nation-state on the one hand

and the actual language practices of companies on the other hand, as done for example by Saulière (2014) in his study on the Loi Toubon in France, or by Van Herck and Vermandere (2016) in their study on the language bonus in Belgium (see Section 2.4.3). Instead, I would argue that the broad context of language in Belgium, including its language laws, is relevant to any sociolinguistic study set in Belgium, albeit in different ways depending on the specific research focus. The complexity of the country's language laws in particular highlights the importance of and sensitivity surrounding language as part and parcel of the socio-political history of the Belgian nation-state (Blommaert, 2011; Vandebroucke, 2017). As such, the sociolinguistic context of Belgium is presented here to function as a broad framework within which the three different case studies are situated in different ways (see Section 2.4.4).

In this section, I have aimed to offer a short overview of the role and development of language as part of the history of the Belgian nation-state as a broad framework to better understand why Belgium is a particularly rich and fruitful backdrop for any sociolinguistic enquiry (Blommaert, 2011). This overview started with the introduction of Belgium as a federal state, then shed light on the historical language struggle to clarify how language was and still is a key aspect in defining the socio-political structure of the country, and finally provided a historical overview of language laws in Belgium in relation to public life and business affairs more specifically. In the following section, I will zoom in on Brussels as the capital of Belgium, a city which has been described as an “unsolvable problem” in light of the territorial monolingualism that characterizes the political structure of the country as a whole (Blommaert, 2011, p. 249).

### 2.4.2 Language in Brussels, the capital of Belgium

When referring to the capital of Belgium, it is important to distinguish between Brussels-City and the Brussels-Capital Region. The former is the capital city of the country as well as of the Flemish Region, and forms one of the 19 municipalities which constitute the Brussels-Capital Region. As such, Brussels-City, not Brussels-Capital

Region, is the capital of Belgium. However, throughout this dissertation, any references to Brussels should be interpreted as referring to the Brussels-Capital Region, an agglomeration of 19 municipalities which make up a broader and more inclusive interpretation of the city, as depicted in Figure 5.

The socio-political history, structure, and organization of the Brussels-Capital Region has been described as “a Belgian compromise *sui generis*” (Buyle, 2000, p. 50) because of its inherent complexity. Although the details of its historical development are considered beyond the scope of this dissertation, Vandenbroucke (2016; 2017), Van Velthoven (1987) and Witte (1987) offer comprehensive overviews of the historical specificities of language in the Brussels-Capital Region.



Figure 5. Map of Brussels-Capital Region, including Brussels-City (Bruxelles-Ville/Brussel-Stad)

In its contemporary setup, Brussels is commonly described as an international city, primarily in light of the presence of a number of large political institutions in the city since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the European Parliament and the HQ of NATO. As a result, it can be considered a “world city on a European level” (Elmhorn, 1998, p. 96) or a “second-tier global city” (Kesteloot, 2000, p. 207). Another

reason why it can be considered a global(ized) city is because of its migration, which has taken place in a number of ways over the course of multiple decades and can be summarized as follows:

“The labor migration that began after World War II from the Mediterranean region, followed by a period of family reunification and ‘imported’ partners, left its mark on Brussels, as did Congo's independence in 1960. In addition to labor migration of low-skilled people, Brussels, as the European capital and NATO headquarters, also had to deal with an influx of higher-skilled migrants who came to live in the city as part of these institutions, and the international organizations and representations that settled in Brussels in their wake. An important turning point was the fall of the Berlin Wall with the inherent expansion of the European Union and the further diversification of the population because of the free movement of people within the borders of the Union. The war situations and poverty problems in other parts of the world also brought a number of refugees to Brussels.” (Janssens, 2018, p. 13, my translation)

This qualitative and quantitative complexification of migration has led to a diversification of the Brussels population which can best be described as superdiversity (Blommaert, 2010; Geldof, 2021; Vertovec, 2007; see Section 2.1.2). Numbers from StatBel, the Belgian statistical agency, indicate that the Brussels population comprised 183 different nationalities in 2022, and that out of the 1.222.637 registered residents, 35,9% had non-Belgian citizenship, the majority of which from other countries in the European Union (BISA, 2022; StatBel, 2022). In light of these developments, Brussels has been referred to as a “majority-minority city” where “people with a migration background gradually form the majority of the population, or cities where the majority is made up from a varied range of different minority groups.” This development has been argued to be typical of superdiverse cities (Geldof, 2021, p. 45). Although Brussels is not unique in its superdiversity, specifically the number of so-called ‘highly skilled migrants’ is considerably higher in Brussels than in other capital cities in Europe, in part because of the presence of large international institutions and other



organizations which brought along an increased number of this type of migrants from within the EU and beyond (Mahroum, 2001).

The superdiversification of Brussels over the years has also led to increased multilingualism, both on individual and societal levels, to the extent that linguistic diversity has been argued to form the “cement of the city’s social fabric” (Janssens, 2018, p. 12, my translation). The linguistic development of the city has been summarized as follows:

“... for the context of Brussels, the capital of Belgium, one can note both how its more recent, rapidly expanding and evolving multilingualism (which is characterised by a transnational distribution across European urban contexts) intersects with an antagonistic *longue durée* of historical bilingualism which is to be understood both locally (the capital region) and nationally (Belgium's two major language communities), and how the two are implicated in an altogether different temporal dynamics (Collins & Slembrouck, 2009, p. 37; Vandembroucke, 2015.” (Slembrouck & Vandembroucke, 2020, p. 74)

As such, Brussels is an inherently multilingual city, both *de jure* as a bilingual capital within the complex Belgian nation-state framework, as well as *de facto* as a linguistically diverse global(ized) city within the international framework of international migration and superdiversity. As a result of the lack of language census data in Belgium (see Section 2.4.1), the most detailed source on language in Brussels is the Taalbarometer (TB) or ‘language barometer’ conducted by BRIO, the Centre for Information, Documentation and Research on Brussels. This barometer is a scientific study which has been conducted four times over the course of 20 years and aims to present an overview of the development of the linguistic situation of Brussels (Janssens 2001; 2007; 2013; 2018). To do so, approximately 2500 participants who make up a representative sample of the inhabitants of the Brussels-Capital Region are asked to fill out a survey about their language proficiency, language use, and language attitudes. When discussing the methodology of the project, Janssens adds that when recruiting participants, some would deny the invitation because they found the topic “too

personal or too political” (Janssens, 2018, p. 18, my translation), underlining the sensitive nature of language in the socio-political context of Belgium and Brussels specifically.

In terms of multilingualism on an individual level, Table 1 shows how the participants would categorize themselves in terms of how multilingual they are, i.e. if they know one language (monolingual), two languages (bilingual), or more than two languages (multilingual).

	TB1 (2001)	TB2 (2007)	TB3 (2013)	TB4 (2018)
<b>Monolingual</b>	36,7%	33,2%	35,3%	25,7%
<b>Bilingual</b>	39,1%	34,8%	40,5%	36,9%
<i>Bilingual: Dutch-French</i>			18,3%	9,0%
<i>Bilingual: other</i>			22,2%	27,9%
<b>Multilingual</b>	24,3%	32,0%	24,2%	37,4%

Table 1. Individual mono-, bi- or multilingualism (Janssens, 2018, p. 33)

These results show that the number of people who would categorize themselves as monolingual has decreased significantly over the studied timespan in favor of people who consider themselves multilingual, i.e. knowing more than two languages. Additionally, of those who do consider themselves to be monolingual, a large majority (90%) comes from monolingual French-speaking families (Janssens, 2018). Finally, it is remarkable that in 2018, only 9% of the participants considered themselves French-Dutch bilingual as residents of a city that is officially French-Dutch bilingual.

On a societal level, Table 1 shows the insights from each Taalbarometer (TB) or language barometer regarding the most well-known languages in the city on the basis of the participants’ own reported proficiency.

TB1 (2001)		TB2 (2007)		TB3 (2013)		TB4 (2018)	
<b>French</b>	95,5%	<b>French</b>	95,6%	<b>French</b>	88,5%	<b>French</b>	87,1%
<b>Dutch</b>	33,3%	<b>English</b>	35,4%	<b>English</b>	29,7%	<b>English</b>	34,4%
<b>English</b>	33,3%	<b>Dutch</b>	28,3%	<b>Dutch</b>	23,1%	<b>Dutch</b>	16,3%
<b>Arabic</b>	10,1%	<b>Spanish</b>	7,4%	<b>Arabic</b>	17,9%	<b>Arabic</b>	9,1%
<b>German</b>	7,1%	<b>Arabic</b>	6,6%	<b>Spanish</b>	8,9%	<b>Spanish</b>	4,9%
<b>Spanish</b>	6,9%	<b>Italian</b>	5,7%	<b>German</b>	7,0%	<b>Italian</b>	3,5%
<b>Italian</b>	4,7%	<b>German</b>	5,6%	<b>Italian</b>	5,2%	<b>German</b>	3,2%
<b>Turkish</b>	3,3%	<b>Portuguese</b>	1,7%	<b>Turkish</b>	4,5%	<b>Portuguese</b>	2,1%
<b>Berber</b>	3,1%	<b>Turkish</b>	1,4%	<b>Portuguese</b>	2,5%	<b>Lingala</b>	1,6%
<b>Portuguese</b>	1,4%	<b>Lingala</b>	1,0%	<b>Berber</b>	2,2%	<b>Romanian</b>	1,5%

*Table 2. Top 10 most known languages in Brussels (Janssens, 2018, p. 22)*

It is clear that although French remains the most well-known language in Brussels, knowledge of the language has decreased from 95,5% to 87,1% over the course of the research period. Additionally, Dutch is also systematically decreasing and has halved over the studied timespan, with English taking its second place from TB2 onwards. These findings are in line with the results from research on the city's linguistic landscape, which found that French is the most visible language in the streets of Brussels, and that Dutch overwhelmingly occurs in combination with French (Vandenbroucke, 2015). This study on the linguistic landscape of Brussels also zoomed in on the role and value of English, and found that the visual presence of the language fulfills multiple functions. Arguably similar to other locations, it has an instrumental use as an international lingua franca or tourist language, and it carries a symbolic value which “invoke[s] international allure and prominence” (Vandenbroucke, 2015, p. 174). Additionally, within the specific socio-political context of Belgium, English is also argued to function “as a stand-off compromise” which offers an alternative and perceived ‘neutral’ solution to the political connotations that are associated with both

French and Dutch in light of the country's historical language struggle (Vandenbroucke, 2015, p. 175). Beyond the linguistic landscape, speakers of Dutch and of French have been found to prefer speaking English to the other official language, with an overwhelming 90% of Dutch-speakers who prefer to speak English rather than French (O'Donnell & Toebosch, 2008). In light of such findings, Blommaert (2011) has argued that "the hegemony of monolingual territoriality does not apply to the presence of English" (p. 251), as the language ideological debate in Belgium is primarily focused on the historical language struggle between French and Dutch. These intricacies regarding the role and position of different languages within a globalized and superdiverse city arguably make Brussels a highly interesting research site for any sociolinguistic enquiry, or as Favell (2001) put it: "Brussels is unique as a multileveled, multinational and multicultural city, and a research site of extraordinary richness" (p. 9).

In this section, I have presented the city of Brussels as a multifaceted urban locality by focusing on its socio-political structure, its status as an international and superdiverse city, and on individual and societal multilingualism in the city. In doing so, I have aimed to argue that as part of the broader sociolinguistic backdrop of language in Belgium, Brussels forms a particularly unique research focus which combines localized socio-ideological complexity with globalized superdiversity. In the following section, I will zoom in on Belgian workplaces by providing an overview of previous research on language in the workplace within the broader nation-state framework of Belgium as well as in the specific urban locality of Brussels.

### 2.4.3 Language in Belgian workplaces

To gain insights on the role and specificities of language in Belgian workplaces, one type of source that can be useful for general information are public service reports. These reports are provided by public employment services and focus primarily on supply and demand in the current labor market. In terms of language, this means that they provide information about language requirements in job vacancies as well as on

language skills of job seekers so as to identify potential (mis)matches between linguistic supply and demand. In light of the federal structure of the country (see Section 2.4.1), Belgium houses three public employment services, i.e. VDAB for Flanders, Actiris for Brussels, and FOREM for Wallonia. Each of these public employment services functions independently from one another and thus produces separate reports on the labor market situation in their region. In what follows, I aim to provide an overview of each institution's most recent findings about language as part of the labor market in their respective regions.

In Flanders, VDAB published a report in 2020 on the basis of data from 2018 which focused specifically on language on the Flemish labor market, particularly in the form of language requirements in job vacancies and how they can be compared to the language skills of job seekers (VDAB, 2020). In terms of job vacancies, they found that 89,1% of job vacancies in 2018 required knowledge of Dutch, of which 96% demanded (very) good knowledge. Additionally, they reported that there is a higher demand for French and/or English in highly educated positions, and that proficiency in languages other than Dutch, French or English is required for less than 1% of the analyzed vacancies. The findings for the job seekers indicate that 96,5% have proficiency in Dutch. Additionally, they report that the supply of English and French speakers is higher for highly educated job seekers, and that proficiency in languages other than Dutch, French or English is listed by less than 10% of job seekers. Thus, focusing only on language, the findings from this report seemingly indicate that the supply of language skills and the demand for language requirements are relatively balanced in the Flemish labor market.

A report published by Actiris in 2020 on the basis of data from 2019 has a similar focus, as it provides an overview of the language requirements and language skills on the Brussels labor market (Actiris, 2020). In their overview of analyzed job vacancies, they make a distinction between job vacancies with explicit language requirements and those without, and report that 51,5% of the analyzed vacancies explicitly list specific language skills as a requirement for the job. Of these job vacancies which have explicit language requirements, 81,5% ask for knowledge of both Dutch and French, and

40,1% list English as necessary, most often in combination with (one of) the official languages. Similar to findings on the Flemish labor market, Actiris also finds that the language requirements are higher for higher levels of education and lower for lower levels of education. For the job vacancies without specific language requirements, it can be assumed that the language in which the vacancy is listed is required to perform the job, but the numbers on the languages in which the vacancies are set up are not reported on. As such, the more implicit language requirements in 49,5% of the analyzed vacancies remain unclear.

The results for the findings on the language skills of job seekers are also difficult to interpret, as the report only lists the job seekers' knowledge of the *other* official language without reporting on their first language. In doing so, they implicitly assume that all job seekers have proficiency in at least one of the official languages of Brussels. They found that in 2020, 21,5% of job seekers reported intermediate knowledge in the other official language, and only 6,5% reported good knowledge in the other official language. Given the general language proficiency of the Brussels population (see Section 2.4.2), it could be assumed that Dutch is more likely to be the other language than French, but without further insight in the data, this cannot be said with certainty. Either way, these results do show that there is a discrepancy between the linguistic supply and demand of proficiency in the two official languages. Additionally, 21,5% of job seekers reported intermediate knowledge of English, and 18,4% reported good knowledge of English.

There are arguably a few limitations to the way in which the data in this report are analyzed and reported on, which makes it difficult to fully grasp the language requirements in job vacancies and language proficiency of job seekers in the Brussels-Capital Region. Additionally, the report argues that a number of factors are relevant to the supply and demand of language skills in Brussels workplaces, including sector, professional domain, educational level, company size, and exact location. As such, in spite of these insights, it remains difficult to assess whether the supply of language skills meets the linguistic demands of the Brussels labor market.

Finally, in Wallonia, none of the studies conducted by FOREM since 2017 have explicitly topicalized language as their main focus. In their reports, they focus on a number of aspects and potential difficulties of the labor market, but not language (FOREM, 2021). Although an increase in courses in French is encouraged as part of their report on the needs of job seekers for integration into employment (FOREM, 2021), further information regarding who would need such courses or specific numbers regarding the differences between supply and demand of French proficiency are not provided. As such, little is known to date regarding language requirements in job vacancies and the language skills of job seekers in the Walloon Region.

Although public service reports are valuable to interpret the Belgian labor market in a broad sense, they remain limited to quantitative analyses of the current labor market with a focus on job vacancies and job seekers, and thus do not provide insight into language in Belgian workplaces in terms of language practices, language management, or language beliefs. In addition to public service reports, what follows will therefore provide an overview of a number of academic studies which have focused on language in different types of workplace contexts in Belgium to further contextualize what is known about language in Belgian corporate contexts.

In Flanders, three case studies have focused specifically on migrants in Flemish workplaces. The first study was conducted by Van Hoof, Nyssen and Kanobana (2020) and examined the ‘integration through work’ policy which was implemented in Flanders in response to the increasing diversity in the workplace. The policy aimed for migrants to learn Dutch on the job “by providing integrated language-in-the-workplace training, and by developing short and intensive crash courses in Dutch” (p. 78) so as to reduce the time migrant job seekers would otherwise spend learning Dutch *before* integrating in the job market. In conclusion, they argued that the neoliberal policy “prioritises obligatory, efficient, short-term and intensive language learning as the key to migrants’ integration in the labour market” and that it probably has “little potential to challenge existing inequalities on the labor market” (p. 89). In Goffmanian terms (1959), although this study does not provide insights on language practices on the ‘frontstage’ of Belgian workplaces, it contextualizes the ‘backstage’ of the language

management and language beliefs of the Flemish Government before and while migrants enter the Flemish workforce.

The second study on migrants in the Flemish labor market was conducted by Theunissen and Van Laer (2023) and examined how language requirements and expectations are constructed for jobs which were conducted by native speakers of Dutch in the past but are now being filled by migrants. The research context is an organization in the domestic care sector which mostly caters to a Dutch-speaking clientele and previously had a linguistically homogenous Dutch-speaking group of employees, but who recently started recruiting migrants “for low-paid, low-status and low-skilled cleaning jobs” (p. 212). Although the company also offers its services in Brussels, its language policy is explicitly defined as Flemish, in part because the company receives subsidies from the Flemish government. On the basis of interviews with customers, cleaning and non-cleaning staff, institutional documents, and a number of observations, they identified different aspects which might influence how language requirements are constructed by different parties, and found that “migrants who were seen as committed to become compliant with organizational Dutch language requirements were constructed as better workers than those who were seen as lacking the right attitude towards acquiring the language competences that were deemed required” (p. 215). Although such findings are not surprising, they do further echo the findings from VDAB (2020) and Van Hoof et al. (2020) regarding the perceived importance of Dutch proficiency in Flemish workplaces, which are arguably magnified for migrants specifically.

The third case study on migrants in Flanders was conducted by Van De Mierop and De Dijn (2021) and adopts an interactional approach to the recruitment process, as they examine the construction of foreign national origin membership categories of first generation immigrants during job interviews for blue collar positions specifically. On the basis of four video-recorded authentic interactions, they examine how foreign national identity origins are topicalized and made relevant in the job interviews, and how they affect the construction of co-membership between the interviewer and the interviewee. As part of their multimodal micro-level analysis, they find that the



discussion of national origins is considered a crucial aspect of the job interview process, and that a candidate's specific national origin membership can be tied to specific types of linguistic and cultural capital. Moreover, they find that a difference in national origin categories between the interviewer and the interviewee can hinder the construction of co-membership, which can be harmful for the interviewee's general assessment as a potential candidate for the job. Finally, they explicitly problematize the implicit biases they observed as part of these recruitment processes. Against the background of the existing difficulties regarding labor market integration in Belgium and Flanders specifically, this case study thus provides empirical insights into arguably problematic hiring practices of migrants in Flanders, and also offers potential solutions for how companies and recruiters can work on solving these issues in the future.

Focusing on an entirely different workplace context, Van Hoof (2018) examined the language policy of the Flemish public service broadcaster VRT, examining in particular the sociolinguistic impact of the deregulation of the Flemish TV market on the public broadcaster's language policy. More specifically, she adopts a historical perspective on the development of the public broadcaster's language policy to provide insight into the language ideologies that have influenced their language policy over the years, arguing that VRT's decision-making processes around language involve an intricate balancing act between corporate and state-based considerations. In doing so, she underlines that profit-based considerations regarding language policy are not limited to corporate contexts, but rather extend beyond business affairs into public life, thus topicalizing potential similarities between corporate language policies and language policies in non-profit workplaces.

In the Brussels context, the language barometers conducted by Janssens (2001; 2007; 2013; 2018) also include self-reported data on language use in Brussels workplaces. Table 3 provides an overview of the languages and language combinations that the participants reportedly use in their workplace for internal communication.

	<b>TB1 (2001)</b>	<b>TB2 (2007)</b>	<b>TB3 (2013)</b>	<b>TB4 (2018)</b>
<b>French</b>	73,3%	40,7%	32,2%	33,9%

## 2.4 | THE (SOCIO)LINGUISTIC CONTEXT OF BELGIUM

<b>Dutch</b>	4,3%	0,6%	1,7%	0,0%
<b>English</b>	4,8%	2,3%	1,7%	0,2%
<b>Dutch/French</b>	10,6%	25,0%	16,7%	18,1%
<b>French/English</b>	2,4%	10,3%	17,0%	20,1%
<b>Dutch/English</b>	0,3%	0,3%	0,0%	0,0%
<b>Dutch/French/English</b>	3,5%	20,3%	30,7%	28,1%

*Table 3. Internal language use in Brussels workplaces (Janssens, 2018, p. 79)*

Other languages that are reportedly used are Arabic (2,5%), Spanish (1,3%), Italian (0,8%), Portuguese (0,7%), and German (0,6%) (Janssens, 2018). These results showcase a clear decrease of the monolingual workplace in favor of multilingual workplaces, and where monolingual workplaces still exist, this is almost exclusively in French. Finally, there is a significant increase of the use of English in 2018 in comparison to the findings from 2013, albeit primarily in combination with other languages rather than on its own.

The findings differ for external communication in Brussels workplaces, as shown in Table 4.

	<b>TB1 (2001)</b>	<b>TB2 (2007)</b>	<b>TB3 (2013)</b>	<b>TB4 (2018)</b>
<b>French</b>	53,5%	51,9%	49,3%	54,7%
<b>Dutch</b>	2,3%	2,3%	2,6%	0,6%
<b>English</b>	3,0%	5,9%	2,1%	2,3%
<b>Dutch/French</b>	32,5%	27,2%	16,9%	23,6%
<b>French/English</b>	3,2%	7,0%	11,3%	8,6%
<b>Dutch/English</b>	0,1%	0,1%	0,8%	0,2%
<b>Dutch/French/English</b>	4,7%	5,1%	16,7%	7,8%
<b>Other languages</b>	0,7%	0,6%	0,3%	0,1%

*Table 4. External language use in Brussels workplaces (Janssens, 2018, p. 80)*

Overall, although the majority of workplaces in Brussels reportedly function multilingually on an internal level, the findings for external communication paint a different picture, with a majority still functioning monolingually in French in 2018. Although Janssens (2018) does not elaborate on potential reasons for this, the differences between internal and external communication could be cost-related, as printing and providing high-quality translations for all external communication can be costly as well as complicated (Berezkina, 2018). In sum, the language barometers provide insightful results on the development of language use in Brussels workplaces and how these developments relate to broader developments regarding language in Brussels. However, the individual self-reported nature of the data poses a potential risk regarding their reliability.

Continuing the focus on Brussels, Mettewie and Van Mensel (2006; 2009) conducted a mixed-method study on the language use and language needs of businesses in Brussels on the basis of 357 surveys as well as 44 interviews. In total, the participants reported the use of 22 different languages, and the internal and external use of the most common languages are visualized in Figure 6.

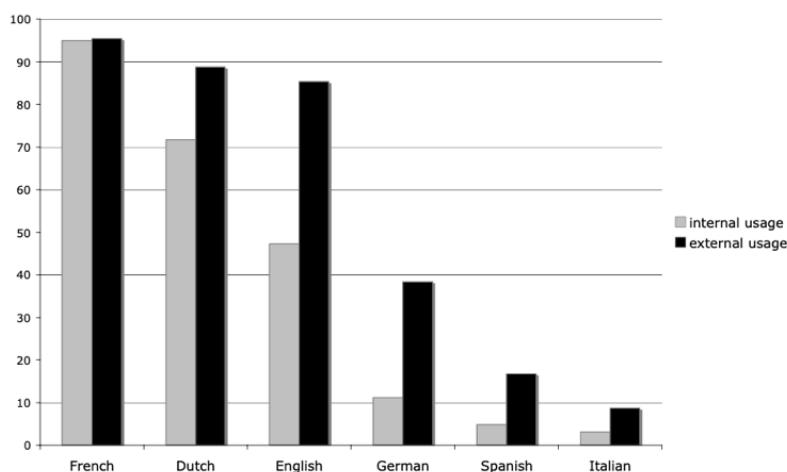


Figure 6. Languages used in Brussels workplaces (reproduced here from Mettewie & Van Mensel, 2009, p. 137)

In terms of language combinations, they also surveyed the mono-, bi-, or multilingual nature of internal and external communication in these companies, as represented in Figure 7.

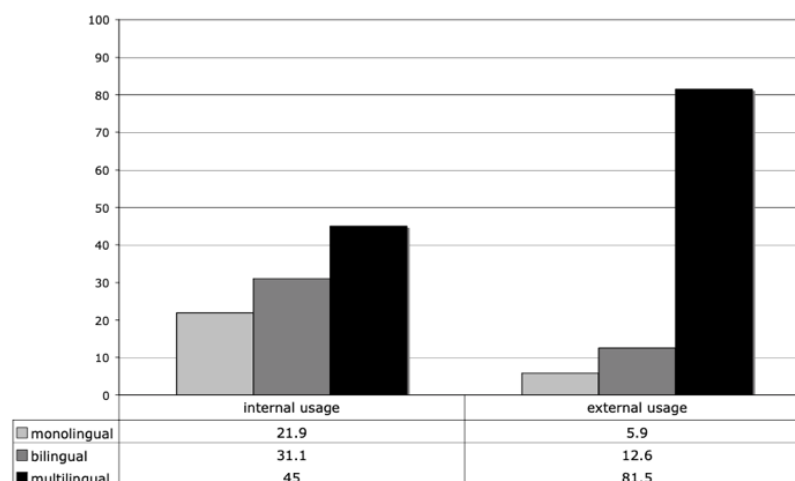


Figure 7. Mono-, bi- or multilingual nature of communication in Brussels workplaces (reproduced here from Mettewie & Van Mensel, 2009, p. 138)

The results show that a minority of the Brussels workplaces functions in a monolingual manner. Additionally, the increasing importance of English is emphasized, but similar to the findings of the language barometer (Janssens, 2018), it also underlined that it is primarily used in combination with Dutch and/or French, rather than on its own.

As part of their qualitative analysis, Mettewie and Van Mensel (2009) found that multilingualism is considered a sensitive topic in Brussels workplaces, despite the fact that businesses are aware that a lack of (multilingual) language skills can result in missed business opportunities. To solve potential problems related to multilingualism, over 40% of businesses report to have invested in language courses for their employees, with estimated costs ranging between €300 and €2000 per person per year and up to €400.000 per year in total for large companies. Of course, the costs and gains of respectively lacking or investing in language proficiency are more difficult to calculate, as language proficiency is complexly interrelated with the general working of the company as a whole (Grin et al. 2010). Finally, Mettewie and Van Mensel (2006) find

that in Brussels workplace contexts, multilingualism is explicitly associated with experience, flexibility, an entrepreneurial mindset, and an open mind, all of which are signs of a language ideological belief that can be tied to the “economic capitalization of linguistic diversity” (Duchêne & Del Percio, 2014, p. 89; see Section 2.1.3).

It is important to note here that there are remarkable differences between the findings from the second language barometer (Janssens, 2007) and the findings from Mettwie and Van Mensel (2006; 2009), even though the data collections for both studies were conducted around the same time. In terms of the languages used in Brussels workplaces, the overall findings for the use of Dutch, as well as the findings for external communication in English, German, Spanish and Italian, differ strongly in both studies. Another difference is the mono-, bi-, or multilingual nature of external communication, which Janssens (2007) describes as primarily monolingual, whereas Mettwie and Van Mensel (2009) report overwhelmingly multilingual external language practices. Without any intent to criticize either studies, such differences in findings function as a reminder of the potential pitfalls of self-reported data, as well as the difficulties of identifying a representative sample in a dynamic and heterogeneous city such as Brussels.

As a last paper to be included in this overview, Van Herck and Vermandere (2016) conducted a study on the so-called ‘language bonus’ at a Belgian state-owned company. The language bonus is a financial bonus that can be given to employees at Belgian government departments if they are bilingual in French and Dutch. Employees can be eligible for this bonus if they meet three criteria; (i) the government department they work for needs to be either in a bilingual area or be in service of the entire nation (i.e. federal organizations), (ii) employees must prove their proficiency in the other official language with a certificate, and (iii) the use of the other official language needs to be necessary for conducting their job. On the basis of their analysis, they argue that the first criterion, i.e. to only offer the bonus to employees in Brussels or in federal government organizations, is not in line with the everyday multilingual practices of employees in officially monolingual territories, who are not financially compensated for their multilingual repertoires. As such, they conclude that this exclusivity of the

first criterion is “debatable”, and offer alternative solutions to bridge this observed gap between practice and policy. As such, this study zooms in on one specific language law, i.e. the law on the language bonus from 2010, and examines how its implementation affects a state-owned company’s language policy, both in theory and in practice.

Finally, similar to the lack of information on language in public service reports for Wallonia, I have not been able to identify any academic studies on language in Walloon workplaces.

In this section, I have presented existing research on language in Belgian workplaces. Due to the political structure of the country and the (socio)linguistic specificity of each region, the insights from the public service reports and from relevant academic studies were presented separately for Flanders and for the Brussels-Capital Region. Additionally, I found that little to no information is available about language in Walloon workplaces. In the following section, I will elaborate on the different ways in which the research chapters of this dissertation can be situated in the Belgian (socio)linguistic context, and illustrate how the three case studies each aim to provide novel insights on language in different types of Belgian corporate settings.

### 2.4.4 Situating the dissertation as part of research on the (socio)linguistic context of Belgium

Even though there is “a long tradition in sociolinguistics of looking at Belgium as a special, rather problematic, case of societal multilingualism” (Blommaert, 2011, p. 241), relatively little of these studies have focused specifically on language in Belgian corporate contexts (see Section 2.4.3). This dissertation therefore aims to contribute to the existing body of sociolinguistic research on language and multilingualism in Belgium through three in-depth case studies, each of which are set in a distinct type of Belgian corporate context.

In light of the qualitative case study approach (see Section 1.1), it is important to note that although all of the research chapters are situated within the sociolinguistic context of Belgium, the dissertation as a whole does not aim to provide a representative overview of language in Belgian corporate settings. Instead, the first case study is situated in a particular corporate setting in Flanders and Brussels, the second in Brussels, and the third in Flanders, and none of the three case studies aim to provide a generalizable overview of corporate settings in the region in which they are located. Finally, due to the specific types of corporate settings I chose to focus on, the Walloon Region as well as the German-speaking Community are not topicalized in this dissertation (see Henkes, 2000 for more information about the status and development of the German-speaking community in Belgium). I am aware that this is a potential limitation to the scope of the dissertation, which I discuss further in the concluding remarks (Section 11.3).

The research context of the first case study is a Belgian multinational corporation with its headquarters in Brussels which has existed since the 1990s and has internationalized extensively since then. The corporation is structured in such a way that it is currently active under three different brand names in Belgium, one for each federal region. Our analysis focuses primarily on the Flemish parent company, as well as on the development of the Brussels subsidiary from 2015 onwards. The developments and changes regarding the language practices, management, and ideologies observed at this company are all embedded in and analyzed as part of the regional contexts of Flanders and Brussels, as well as the national context of Belgium, as they reflect certain aspects of the broader sociolinguistic development and nature of Belgium and Brussels, in particular the federal structure of Belgium, its historical language struggle, and the increasing superdiversity of Brussels. In doing so, this case study contributes a deeply contextualized understanding to the development of corporate language policies in the complex sociolinguistic contexts of Flanders, Brussels, and Belgium.

The second case study focuses on migration in Brussels, particularly on professional transnational migrants who move across national borders and who are living in Brussels temporarily in pursuit of the advancement of their professional careers. The

focus on this specific type of migrant was decided upon in light of the general lack of research on privileged migration in comparison to less privileged types of migration (see Section 2.1.2), and in light of the fact that in comparison to other European cities, Brussels houses a particularly high number of such privileged migrants (Mahroum, 2001). As part of a sociolinguistics of globalization (Blommaert, 2010), the analysis comprises both a focus on language as part of their globalized transnational trajectories, as well as in Brussels specifically, as the city functions as a structuring framework to contextualize the experiences they share and the meanings they ascribe to them in a localized setting. The urban context of Brussels is foregrounded particularly in Chapter 5, as the experiences shared by the professional transnational migrants and the symbolic value they associate with specific languages are analyzed in light of the linguistic market of Brussels (Bourdieu, 1991). In doing so, we follow the argument put forth by Lan (2011) that “instead of treating skills as given human capital, we should examine how the value of specific knowledge and experience is appreciated or deflated in particular social contexts” (p. 1671). In its totality, this case study thus contributes to our understanding of language and professional migration as part of globalization within the specific and superdiverse locality of the Brussels-Capital Region from the understudied perspective of privileged migration.

Finally, the research context of the third case study is a small-sized yet globally active company which has its headquarters in Flanders, and all chapters focus specifically on performance appraisal interviews between the managers at HQ in Belgium and sales agents who work for the company from all across the world. Due to the virtual and globalized nature of the communication between the interlocutors and of the workspace in general, the locality of Flanders is not topicalized extensively in any of the research chapters, as the sales agents do not actually work in Belgium. However, the company itself is of course situated within the Flemish and broader Belgian context, thus impacting the language of communication at HQ, an aspect which is discussed as part of the analysis of the company’s general language policy in Chapter 9. In sum, the third case study is less explicitly embedded in the sociolinguistic context of Belgium than the first two case studies as the research context is primarily characterized as an international and virtual workspace, yet despite this lack of explicit



focus on the locality of Belgium, all three of the research chapters do offer novel contributions to our understanding of language in Belgian corporate contexts.

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# 3

## METHODOLOGY

Throughout the different case studies and research chapters of this dissertation, several tools from different methodological approaches are adopted. In Section 3.1, I first introduce the overarching framework of discourse analysis to contextualize the methodological approach of this dissertation in a broad sense. In the subsequent sections, I then detail the specific processes and conceptual taxonomies used as part of the data collection and analysis processes of each separate case study and research chapter. In doing so, I should note that the information provided in this chapter is a broader discussion of the methodological sections as presented in each of the the research chapters, and that therefore, there might be substantial overlap between the two. However, the sections within the research chapters are usually more succinct due to the formal limitations and word limits of journal articles or book chapters, and the overviews provided in this chapter thus allow me to expand on these methodological processes more in a more elaborate manner. Finally, I provide an overview of how the rest of the dissertation is structured in Section 3.5.

### 3.1 OVERARCHING ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The overarching analytical framework adopted in this dissertation is that of discourse analysis. To define this approach, it is necessary to first define what discourse is, a notion which has been described as “famously slippery” (Barakos & Unger, 2016, p. 2) as well as “a difficult and fuzzy concept” (Mayr, 2008, p. 7) due to the abundance of existing definitions. Indeed, “so abundant are definitions of discourse that many linguistics books on the subject now open with a survey of definitions” (Schiffrin et al., 2001, p. 1). In a general sense, most definitions of discourse can be categorized as part of two general perspectives:

“Discourse is often defined in two different ways: according to the formalist or structuralist paradigm, discourse is 'language above the clause' (Stubbs, 1983: 1). This approach to discourse focuses on the form which 'language above the sentence' takes, looking at structural properties such as organization and cohesion, but paying little attention to the social ideas that inform the way

people use and interpret language. This social aspect of language is emphasized by the second, so-called functionalist paradigm, which states that discourse is 'language in use' (Brown and Yule, 1983: 1) and should be studied as such. Brown and Yule state that '[. . .] the analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs.' According to the functionalist paradigm, the analysis of language cannot be divorced from the analysis of the purpose and functions of language in human life. Discourse is therefore seen as a culturally and socially organized way of speaking. As Richardson (2007: 24; emphasis in original) notes, researchers who adopt this definition of discourse 'assume that language is used to *mean* something and to *do* something' and that this 'meaning and doing' is linked to the context of its usage. If we want to interpret a text properly, 'we need to work out what the speaker or writer is *doing* through discourse, and how this "doing" is linked to wider interpersonal, institutional, socio-cultural and material contexts.'" (Mayr, 2008, p. 7)

It is this second, functionalist approach to discourse which I adopt throughout this dissertation as I examine language as part and parcel of the social contexts in which it is used. Following this definition of discourse, *discourse analysis* can be defined as "a research method that provides systematic evidence about social processes through the detailed examination of speech, writing and other signs" (Wortham & Reyes, 2015, p. 1). It is this overarching approach to language in use which is adopted throughout the different research chapters of this dissertation, as I aim to examine language and language use in its relation to globalization as part of corporate contexts in Belgium from different institutional, interactional, and individual perspectives.

This broad discourse analytical approach encompasses a number of more specific analytical approaches, conceptual taxonomies, and methodologies, some of which I adopted for the different case studies and research chapters of this dissertation. In what follows, I will provide a detailed overview of the methodology of each of the

three case studies in terms of gaining access and data collection, and subsequently elaborate on the data analytical process for each individual research chapter.

## 3.2 CASE STUDY 1 (CHAPTER 4)

In Section 3.2.1, I will provide an overview of how I negotiated and gained access to the research site of FinCorp, which data I collected, and how I processed the data. In Section 3.2.2, I will then expand on how I analyzed these data for the study presented in Chapter 4.

### 3.2.1 Data collection

The research context of the first case study is pseudonymized as FinCorp, a Belgian multinational corporation which has its headquarters in Brussels and was founded in 1998 after a merger between three Belgian financial institutions. This specific corporation was chosen for three reasons; (i) I wanted to examine the linguistic specificities and complexities of a Belgian multinational corporation which has its headquarters in the Brussels-Capital Region, (ii) I wanted to conduct a socio-historical study of the development of language and language policy within this corporation, and as such, I was looking for a corporation with its own historical archive, and (iii) I had to find a corporation which was willing to provide access. FinCorp was chosen because it fulfilled all three requirements.

Overall, I collected three types of data at FinCorp, i.e. archival data, online data, and interviews with higher management. In terms of timing and access negotiation, the data collection went as follows:

- First contact (February 2020): I contacted the archivist of FinCorp's archive via email to explain that I would like to do a study on the development of language policy at FinCorp and that I would like to gain access to the archive

to do so. In reply, she offered to have a meeting with me and her supervisor, who is part of higher management at FinCorp, so that I could explain the setup of the research and what I would need from them to conduct the study. We had a meeting with the three of us soon thereafter, during which the archivist and her supervisor (also referred to as ‘contact person’) verbally granted me access to start collecting data in the archives. Additionally, I asked permission to conduct interviews with some of the members of higher management who had been at the company for a long time, so as to contextualize and explain some of the things I might find in the archives. The contact person advised me to submit a request for permission to do this with FinCorp’s Board of Directors, as they would need to approve of the study prior before I would be allowed to speak with anyone from higher management on the record.

- Archival data collection (February – March 2020): I collected data at FinCorp’s archive over the course of a number of visits. As I was allowed to take photographs of everything, I primarily spent my time photographing, organizing, and taking notes to contextualize what I found. Due to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, my data collection was halted mid-March. At this time, I had luckily already gone through and collected everything I needed from the physical archives. I went back in the summer of 2020 one final time to go through their digital archives and thereby finalized the archival data collection.
- Online data collection (February – September 2020): Over the course of approximately 6 months, I collected data about FinCorp online, primarily on their own websites. This data consisted of overviews of their website at the time, as well as job vacancies they posted regularly. Additionally, I used the Internet Archive’s *Wayback Machine* to access earlier versions of the company website.
- Interviews with higher management (July – August 2020): After an initial analysis of the online and archival data and after receiving approval from FinCorp’s Board of Directors, I conducted in-depth interviews with higher



management to further contextualize and explain my findings. I was put in contact with members of higher management through my contact person. The specific individuals had been involved with language and/or language policy over the course of their careers at FinCorp and had been working at FinCorp since its foundation in 1998. These interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in Dutch, as this was our shared first language.

This entire process of data collection resulted in a relatively large dataset. First, for the archival data, I took 350+ photos of relevant documents related to external communication, and 400+ photos of documents related to internal communication. Additionally, I collected overviews in the form of Excel sheets which listed the different types of internal and external communication FinCorp had published over the years, categorized on the basis of the different languages in which they were made available. For the online data, the dataset consists of 39 job vacancies as well as complete overviews of 9 of the company's web pages in all available languages, which provide insight into the virtual linguistic landscape of FinCorp (Berezkina, 2018). Finally, I conducted three in-depth semi-structured interviews with individuals in higher management. These interviews can be considered 'elite interviews' due to the high professional position of the interviewees as board members of a large multinational corporation, and thus required specific preparation, including reflections on how to present myself as a researcher, how to gain the interviewees' trust, what types of questions to ask and how to formulate them, how to deal with questions they might not be at ease answering, and how to deal with time constraints (Harvey, 2011). This final aspect was crucial, as I had scheduled a timeslot of one hour with each interviewee, and I was informed by their individual personal assistants that this time limit would be strictly enforced in light of their busy schedules. As such, the interview guide was carefully prepared to take into account all of these limitations and reflections. The complete semi-structured interview guide can be found in the Appendix (Section 12.1.1). After this final phase of data collection was completed, I transcribed and pseudonymized the interviews. Data collection and processing was finalized in September 2020.

Data collection for the research activities outlined above took place following ethical permission from the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Antwerp. In line with their ethical guidelines and in line with the agreement with FinCorp, the company's name and the personal details of the individual interviewees were pseudonymized. The three interviewees personally gave written informed consent prior to participating in the study.

### 3.2.2 Data analysis

The first case study is made up of one research chapter (Chapter 4), which aims to uncover the impact that the structural changes within FinCorp had on their language practices and language management over time, and which underlying language ideological beliefs can be observed as part of these structural changes, specifically within the internationalized and language-sensitive context of Belgium.

To achieve these research aims, we adopted a methodological approach inspired by linguistic ethnography. This approach to language in use is grounded in Dell Hymes's seminal work on the Ethnography of Speaking, later the Ethnography of Communication (Hymes, 1972), and can be defined as follows:

“Linguistic ethnography views language as communicative action functioning in social contexts in ongoing routines of peoples' daily lives. It looks at how language is used by people and what this can tell us about wider social constraints, structures and ideologies. It achieves this by investigating the linguistic sign as a social phenomenon open to interpretation and translation but also predicated on convention, presupposition and previous patterns of social use. Because the sign is the basic unit of meaning, linguistic ethnographers are keen to understand how it is interpreted within its social context.” (Copland & Creese, 2015, p. 27)

Analytically, linguistic ethnographers achieve this research objective of interpreting specific signs within and as part of the social context in which they occur by collecting

different types of data during what is called field work. This includes making rich descriptions on the basis of (participant) observation in the form of field notes, collecting (transcriptions of) audio and video recordings of naturally occurring interactions, conducting different types of interviews, making photographs, and collecting textual documents (Blommaert & Jie, 2010; Copland & Creese, 2015).

Although I was able to conduct some participant observations at HQ as part of my visits to the archive and there had been talk about the possibility for more extended forms field work, all in-person access to the FinCorp premises was halted abruptly and indefinitely as a result of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. Due to the resulting lack of immersive field work and (participant) observations, this study cannot be fully positioned as linguistic ethnography (Copland & Creese, 2015). However, the influences of this methodological approach remain clear in the study, particularly in the form of data triangulation, a bottom-up approach to data analysis, and a highly contextualized and historically situated approach to language and discourse.

Throughout the data collection process, I adopted a linguistic ethnographic approach as part of which I collected “everything that closely or remotely looks of interest” (Blommaert, 2005, p. 53), and this rich dataset then allowed for the triangulation of insights from different sources to ensure their validity during the analysis. Particularly the interviews, which were conducted after an initial analysis of the archival and online data, were crucial, as they allowed for a triangulation of my own etic perspective as an outsider to FinCorp with emic insider perspectives of those who had lived through and been actively involved in the historical development of language and language policy in this MNC.

The analytical process was done using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. Throughout the analysis, we adopted an open coding approach, which can be defined as an “analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). This allowed for a bottom-up emergent thematic analysis of the different datasets

throughout the coding process. First, the data were categorized on the basis of three historical periods in line with the main corporate structural developments that took place over the observed 20+ years. The merger into an international grouping in 2005 and the launch of FinCorp Brussels in 2015 were identified as crucially important events in the historical development of FinCorp, including its language policy. Per period, the data were then separated into information regarding internal communication and external communication. Subsequently, the datasets were iteratively examined for recurring themes and topics, on the basis of which the following nodes emerged inductively: digitalization, internationalization, Brussels, multilingualism, Dutch, English, and linguistic problems. Finally, these themes and topics enabled an analysis of two types of communication (internal and external) functioning on three separate levels (international, national, Brussels) across three different periods of time (1998–2005, 2005–2015, 2015–2020). In doing so, this study offers a grounded type of research, where theory is “derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12).

### **3.3 CASE STUDY 2 (CHAPTERS 5, 6, 7)**

In Section 3.3.1, I will provide an overview of how I recruited participants, how I prepared for and conducted the interviews, and how I processed the data for the second case study. In Section 3.3.2, I will then detail how I analyzed the data for the studies presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

#### **3.3.1 Data collection**

The primary aim of the second case study is to examine the importance and relevance of language for professional transnational migrants in Brussels, both in terms of their linguistic repertoire and in terms of how they use language in interaction to discursively construct different types of social categories. In light of this, the research context can be defined as a broad transnational workspace as part of which individual people move

across international borders to pursue their (professional) career on the one hand, and on the other hand the specific transnational workspace of Brussels.

To achieve the research aims, I set out to conduct in-depth interviews with professional transnational migrants who were living and/or working in Brussels at the time of the interviews. Specifically, I used three criteria to select participants:

1. They had to have been living and/or working in the Brussels-Capital Region at the time of the interview and had to have done so for at least 6 months already;
2. They were not Belgian citizens, did not (yet) plan on staying in Belgium indefinitely, and had moved between countries at least once in the past;
3. Their career or other professional motivations was one of the key motivations for their transnational mobility.

Additionally, I did not select anyone who I knew personally, so as to maintain clear boundaries as part of the relationship between myself and the interviewee as researcher and research participant, respectively.

To gain access to the research context, I used two different social media channels, namely InterNations and Facebook. InterNations is a social media platform which defines itself as a community for ‘expats’ and ‘global minds’ (InterNations, n.d.), and is aimed at people who are new to a city or who would like to meet new people in general. On someone’s profile, you can see, among other things, where they were born, where they currently live, where they have lived in the past, an overview of their work experiences, and which language(s) they speak. Taking these overviews into account, I sent out messages to numerous individuals who (seemed to) fit the criteria listed above to ask if they would be interested in participating in the study. My own bio included some information about me and about the study.

My approach on Facebook was slightly different due to the specificities of the social media platform. There, I joined a number of Facebook groups related to being an ‘expatriate’ in Brussels, as I believed that my target group could be active in such groups. To do so, I used my own existing Facebook profile, as making an entirely new account without any friends or previous posts might come across as suspicious. Once I was approved to join a group, I posted a digital flyer which contained information about me, the research project, the selection criteria, and what would be expected of the research participants. If people liked or replied to the post, I would send them a private message. In some cases, individuals took initiative themselves and messaged me first.

Once I was in contact with potential research participants either via Facebook or InterNations, I would provide them with more detailed information about the selection criteria as well as what would and would not be expected from the research participants. I also clarified that I could not offer anything in return for participating in the study. If they were still interested after receiving this information, I would continue contact via email to set up the specific date and time of the interview. Prior to conducting the interview, each participant signed an informed consent form using the online document signing services DocuSign and Eversign.

In addition to using social media platforms to recruit research participants, I also made use of snowball or chain sampling to find new participants (Dörnyei, 2007). This entails that at the end of each interview, I would ask participants if they knew anyone else who met the selection criteria and who would be willing to participate in the study. Although not ideal in terms of representative sampling, this method of participant recruitment is relatively common in qualitative research on privileged types of migration (see for example Cranston, 2017; Leinonen, 2012) due to the general difficulty of gaining research access to such individuals.

I started recruiting participants in May 2020 and started conducting interviews in June 2020. To grasp the intricacies of the relationship between language and globalization as part of the participants’ lives, I set up a semi-structured interview guide. This entails

that I had a fixed list of questions which I asked during each interview, but that there was also room for deviations from the interview guide if necessary, depending on the specific experiences, trajectory, or opinions of the participant (Dörnyei, 2007).

To make sure that my questions and the general setup of the interview were clear and that there were no crucial aspects of professional transnational migrants' experiences with language that I was missing, I conducted a pilot interview in May 2020 with a friend of mine who meets all of the research criteria but who could not participate in the study in light of her personal relationship with me. I had not told her about the specific research objectives of this study prior to our interview, nor had I sent her any questions from the interview guide in advance. After the interview, we then had a follow-up discussion about the setup of the interview in light of my research purposes, which allowed us to reflect on the interviewing process as a whole. As part of this discussion, she underlined that I should clarify explicitly that I was looking for stories and personal experiences, as this would encourage participants to speak more freely. I then added this to the introductory explanation I gave each participant prior to starting the recording. We also spoke extensively about how to phrase a few specific questions regarding migration-related categories, discussing how different formulations might come across and which order to ask this set of questions in. Finally, the second selection criterion was initially phrased as: "You are not a Belgian citizen, do not (yet) plan on seeking Belgian citizenship or permanent residence, and have moved between countries at least once in the past." She argued that I should consider rephrasing this, as professional transnational migrants like herself often do apply for permanent residence once they are eligible for it, even if they do not necessarily plan on staying somewhere indefinitely, because it makes their lives easier from an administrative and bureaucratic perspective. I therefore changed this selection criterion on Belgian citizenship or permanent residence to: "you do not (yet) plan on staying in Belgium indefinitely", thereby doing away with the reference to the legal status of their stay. After our interview and follow-up discussion, I finalized the interview guide in line with these reflections and started recruiting participants.

In contrast to the pilot interview, I did not know any of the participants of the study in advance, and for this reason, I chose to start each interview with a bit of small talk, after which I repeated the aims of the study and asked for permission to start audio-recording the interaction. After pressing start on the recording, I asked a few questions about their personal background, including their international trajectories, and about language as part of their international lives. After these more general questions, I zoomed in on their experiences in Brussels. In the final part of the interview, I asked questions specifically related to social migration-related categories. Finally, I ended each interview with some more small talk and expressed gratitude for their participation after I had stopped the recording. The full interview guide used for these semi-structured interviews can be found in the Appendix (Section 12.1.2).

I did not have a set number of participants in mind prior to collecting data; instead, I conducted and transcribed interviews until I believed I had reached a point of data saturation. In sociology, saturation is defined as the moment when:

“... no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated.”  
(Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61)

Although much has been said about sample size and data saturation in qualitative research, I decided to stop data collection when I was able to clearly identify recurring themes and patterns throughout the dataset. Although this does not mean that there was no longer variability in the findings, nor that no new findings could have been generated by conducting additional interviews, the aim of this case study was not to identify generalizable patterns for all transnational professional migrants in Brussels, but rather to explore initial insights regarding the specific complexities and dynamics of this understudied group from a sociolinguistic perspective. As such, I decided to stop data collection at a point where I felt that I had achieved saturation in terms of participant responses and experiences in light of the specific scope and purposes of the case study. The data collection was finalized in September 2020.



In total, I conducted, transcribed, and pseudonymized 31 interviews, all of which took place via Skype. Although there are both constraints and affordances to conducting interviews through telecommunications software (Salmons, 2014), I had no choice but to interview the participants online in light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic at the time of data collection. All of the interviews were conducted in English. The complete dataset comprises 31 hours and 2 minutes of audio recordings, with an average duration of 60 minutes for each interview. The shortest interview was 38 minutes, whereas the longest lasted for 121 minutes, i.e. just over two hours. The participants are 23 women and 8 men whose nationalities span 4 different continents. Although it was not a selection criterion, all interviewees had obtained at least one degree from a higher education institution, with the exception of one participant. 14 of the participants worked for (large) corporations, 10 worked for political or governmental institutions, 4 were self-employed, 2 worked for an NGO, and 1 was a teacher.

Data collection for the research activities outlined above took place following ethical permission from the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Antwerp. In line with their ethical guidelines, all names of individuals, corporations and institutions were pseudonymized. The informed consent form also included certain aspects of the participants' personal information which would not be deleted from the data, as they were considered relevant to the study and the analysis of the data. These personal data include the participants' gender, nationality, family situation, age category, the sector in which they are active, and the urban location of where they work and have worked in the past.

### 3.3.2 Data analysis

The second case study is made up of three research chapters (Chapter 5, 6, and 7), each of which has different research objectives. Throughout this case study, different analytical approaches are therefore adopted to achieve these different research objectives. However, one constant is that throughout the three chapters, researcher reflexivity is considered central to the analysis, as conducting interviews crucially

includes reflection on the interviewing process because “the meaning of responses is contingent on the questions that precede them, previous question-answer pairs, the social situation, the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and a host of other factors” (Briggs, 1986, p. 42). As such, the research interview is not considered a device for extracting information from participants in an interactional vacuum, but rather what participants do (and do not) say is dependent on a number of factors (Laihonen, 2008; Briggs, 1986) which were taken into account in the preparation of the interviews beforehand as well as, crucially, during the analysis of what was said afterwards.

In Chapter 5, we examine how the professional transnational migrants participating in the study perceive the role and symbolic value of languages in their personal and professional lives, how these perceptions influence and are shaped by their experiences in Brussels, and how their perceptions and experiences can be understood in light of the linguistic market in which they occur. Similar to the analytical approach adopted in the analysis of Chapter 4 (see Section 3.2.2), we adopted an open coding approach to the 31 semi-structured interviews using the software NVivo, thereby doing a grounded type of theory which emerged throughout the coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The dataset was iteratively examined for recurring topics, on the basis of which a number of themes emerged, including but not limited to different named languages (i.e. English, Dutch, French, Spanish, etc.), professional life, personal life, Brussels, children, multilingualism, linguistic integration, and motivations for language learning. These themes and topics then enabled an analysis of language in Brussels in two ways. First, we zoomed in on the symbolic value of non-official languages in Brussels, examining the value and role of English and different types of multilingualism as part of the participants’ professional and personal lives. Second, we zoomed in on the value and role of the official languages of Brussels, i.e. Dutch and French, including the relevance of linguistic integration and the participants’ motivation for language learning as part of their professional and personal lives. These insights were then tied to the conceptualization of the linguistic market as proposed by Bourdieu (1991) in the specific locality of Brussels.

In Chapter 6, we examine how participants of the study discursively construct specific migration-related categories as part of the interactional context of the research interview, as well as how they position themselves in relation to these categories. More specifically, we zoom in on the migration-related categories ‘expat’, ‘migrant’, and ‘immigrant’. To do so, we first used NVivo to code any sequences mentioning the words ‘migrant’, ‘immigrant’, and ‘expat(riate)’ throughout the 31 interviews, and particularly as part of the participants’ replies to the final set of questions on migration-related categories (see the Appendix, Section 12.1.2). We then used Excel to create an overview of the different attributes each participant ascribed to the three migration-related categories under study, how they formulated them, and whether or not they would reportedly self-identify with them. This combination of coding in NVivo and the subsequent overview in Excel allowed us to provide a general overview of the data, as well as a detailed micro-level discourse analysis of how each participant discursively constructed these different migration-related categories and how they positioned themselves in relation to them during their individual interviews.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I focus on one interview in particular with a participant pseudonymized as Laura, a ‘third culture individual’ (Moore & Barker, 2012) who was born in China and grew up in Canada. The research objective of this chapter is to disentangle how Laura makes sense of and interactionally constructs her national identity within the discursive context of the research interview, thereby also shedding light on how vulnerability manifests itself as part of categorization in interaction (Fineman, 2008; 2010). To do so, I first used NVivo to code any references to her own national identity, particularly in the form of mentions of the national identity categories ‘Chinese’, ‘Canadian’, and combinations of the two. I then zoomed in on the different characteristics and attributes that she ascribed to and associated with these national identity categories throughout our interaction, so as to understand how she makes sense of them and ascribes meaning to them as part of the research interview.

## 3.4 CASE STUDY 3 (CHAPTERS 8, 9, 10)

In Section 3.4.1, I will provide an overview of how I gained access to the research context of GlobalCorp and how I then collected and processed the data. In Section 3.4.2, I will then elaborate on how I analyzed the data for the studies presented in Chapters 8, 9, and 10.

### 3.4.1 Data collection

The research context for the third case study is pseudonymized as GlobalCorp, a Belgian SME which has its headquarters in Flanders and is globally active in the tertiary sector by facilitating sales between individual buyers and sellers in 59 countries across the world. In contrast with the first case study, where the corporate context was primarily chosen on the basis of the specific corporate characteristics and urban location of the company and where we did not collect data in the form of naturally occurring interactions, the aim of this case study was to analyze the specific corporate interaction of the performance appraisal interview in a globalized Belgian corporate setting. As such, the focus was primarily to find a globally active company in Belgium willing to share such data, an aim which required thoughtful preparation, negotiation, and compromise given the high-stakes sensitive nature of corporate performance appraisals.

Overall, gaining access to collect naturally occurring data in a corporate setting has been described as “extremely difficult”, as most companies fear that corporate intel might be leaked on the basis of audio or video recordings (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2009, p. 185), and this is particularly the case for sensitive interactions such as performance appraisals. An added difficulty for linguists or discourse analysts to gain access to such data is that “most workplaces will find a constructivist, ethnographic, interactional approach either irrelevant, trivial or threatening” (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999, p. 42). In other words, it is crucial for the researcher to position themselves as trustworthy and reliable, as well as to anticipate questions regarding why a linguistic or discourse

analytical perspective on language in the workplace might be important or relevant for them. To present the research project as trustworthy, worthwhile, and reliable, our initial contacts with GlobalCorp and request to collect data in the Fall of 2020 included information about the ethical approval process with the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities, an overview of the data which we would like to collect and how we would process and store these data in compliance with GDPR regulations, and an explicit mention of the fact that the data collection process could be further negotiated if necessary. Additionally, we included information on the potential benefits GlobalCorp might gain from insights into their linguistic workings so as to anticipate any questions regarding the relevance of a discourse analytical approach to language in the workplace, thereby promising to write a report on our findings once the study had been completed. After further negotiation, a formal request for data access including information on the details, practicalities, and timeline of the data collection process was approved by GlobalCorp.

In line with this agreement, I collected three types of data, i.e. recordings of performance appraisal interviews, textual documents, and follow-up playback interviews with management. In terms of timing and other practicalities, the data collection went as follows:

- Performance appraisal interviews (May-August 2021): The performance appraisal process at GlobalCorp took place during the spring and summer of 2021, and all collected performance appraisal interviews occurred online through the use of the telecommunications software Zoom. As part of our negotiation, it was decided that we would not be put in contact with any of the individual employees being evaluated as part of their performance appraisals, and this also entailed that I was not allowed to be present during the online performance appraisal interviews. Instead, the managers responsible for the performance appraisal process informed the appraisees about the study via email in advance, and asked each appraisee to read the informational leaflet about the study prior to providing informed consent to participate in the study. The email also included a link to the informed consent form, which they could

sign online. Prior to the start of the video recording, the managers confirmed informed consent orally and would then video-record the performance appraisal interview if they had obtained written and oral informed consent from the appraisee. It was emphasized both in the informational leaflet about the study as well as by the managers that the appraisee's willingness or refusal to participate in the study would not affect their performance appraisal in any way. While the majority of the appraisees gave consent, several appraisees did not consent to participate in the study and have their appraisal processes collected as part of the data. After having obtained informed consent from each interlocutor present and the subsequent video recording of the performance appraisal interview, the video recording was shared with us through an online secure data transferring tool. As part of our negotiation, management was allowed to delete parts of the performance appraisal interview before sharing it with us so as to exclude information that was deemed too proprietary or confidential.

- Textual documentation (May-August 2021): In addition to the interactional data, GlobalCorp also shared the textual documentation surrounding the performance appraisal process. Specifically, this comprised the written preparation of each individual performance appraisal interview and the written report set up on the basis what was said during the performance appraisal interview. The collection of the written documents was included in the informational leaflet about the study, and each participant who provided informed consent thus also provided explicit consent for their written documents to be included as part of the data collection. The individual textual documentation was shared with us at the same time as the video recording for each appraisee. Additionally, GlobalCorp also sent copies of a number of relevant documents related to the general workings of the company and their performance appraisal process.
- Follow-up playback interviews with management (January/April 2022): After transcribing the interactional data and going through the textual

documentation, I interviewed the managers responsible for the performance appraisal processes at GlobalCorp separately. These interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in Dutch, as this was our shared first language. After the interviews, I contacted the managers a handful of times via email to ask additional questions as they emerged during the analysis, and our email correspondence was also included as part of the follow-up dataset.

Overall, this process of data collection resulted in a relatively large multimodal dataset, which primarily consists of 16 video recordings of authentic performance appraisal interviews as well as the written preparations and written reports related to each of these performance appraisals. The interactions comprise 13 hours and 45 minutes, with an average duration of 51 minutes. The shortest interview was 30 minutes, whereas the longest lasted for 91 minutes, i.e. just over an hour and a half. Because I was not present during the recordings, I transcribed all of the interactional data myself, as this allowed me to get to know and understand the interactional context of each interview on a detailed level. Other textual documents part of the data collection included blank versions of the appraisal forms, documents outlining the GlobalCorp's expectations of their sales and supply agents, and PowerPoint presentations related to the general functioning of the company.

The two follow-up interviews with the two managers responsible for the performance appraisals at GlobalCorp focused on the aims and goals of the performance appraisal process, the role of the written documentation in the appraisal process, and the multilingual nature of the performance appraisals. Additionally, we discussed specific data fragments from the interactional data. Finally, in a broader sense, I also enquired about the general workings of GlobalCorp, including their corporate culture and the influence of the global spread of its employees on the company's functioning. The interview guide for these semi-structured interviews can be found in the Appendix (Section 12.4.1). These follow-up interviews aimed to grasp the emic perspectives of the managers, as they "help to elucidate the ways in which the 'insiders-as-experts' themselves perceive and interpret certain phenomena" (Ehrenreich, 2016, p. 143). In light of the data collection process of this study, conducting these additional interviews

was considered particularly crucial, as I was not allowed to be present during the performance appraisal interviews themselves and thus wanted to gain additional insights into the lived experience of the interactions (Wilson, 2017). This combination of authentic data and follow-up interviews has been argued to have substantial “interpretative and explanatory value” (Slembrouck & Hall, 2019, p. 18) which can “generate new analytical angles and findings” (Copland & Creese, 2015, p. 30) in comparison to research focused on only one of the two data types.

Data collection for the research activities outlined above took place following ethical permission from the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Antwerp. In line with their ethical guidelines and in line with the agreement with GlobalCorp, all information which could lead to the identification of the company or its employees was pseudonymized. This includes all names of individuals, companies and institutions, as well as jargon and terminology related to the specific sector in which the company is active. As some of the interactional data included spoken language use in languages that I am not proficient in, the incomplete transcriptions and audio recordings of two of the performance appraisal interviews were sent to the university’s translation office Linguapolis for translation into English. Each translator signed a confidentiality agreement prior to translating the data.

### 3.4.2 Data analysis

The third case study is made up of three research chapters (Chapter 8, 9, and 10), each of which has different research objectives and distinct analytical approaches. Throughout the case study, the overarching analytical approach is that of interactional sociolinguistics. This approach is rooted in the work of linguistic anthropologist John Gumperz and aims to examine “communicative practice as the everyday-world site where societal and interactive forces merge” (Gumperz, 2015, p. 312). The focus of interactional sociolinguistics is thus to understand how meaning is created in interaction as part of a specific social context (Gumperz, 1982), or in other words, to understand “the way localised interactive processes work” (Gumperz, 2015, p. 312).



In doing so, it foregrounds the relation between “what people do versus what they say they do [...] and then draws connections to any contextual information that is brought to bear on the interaction” (Marra et al., 2022), topicalizing “what is communicatively intended and understood at any one point in the interaction” (Gumperz, 2015, p. 313). To do so, the interactional sociolinguistic approach makes use of transcriptions of naturally occurring interactions in the form of audio or video recordings, which are further contextualized by interviews, textual documents, or other types of data. In the third case study, this entails the triangulation of the authentic performance appraisal interviews with the textual documents and the follow-up interviews with management. In all three analyses, one source of data that could have arguably further strengthened the triangulation process are the emic perspectives of the individual sales agents. However, access to speak with them in the form of follow-up interviews was denied by management during the negotiation phase with GlobalCorp (see access negotiations in Section 3.4.1).

In Chapter 8, we aim to examine how small talk occurs, where it is located, and which interactional functions it fulfills during the performance appraisal interviews at GlobalCorp. To do so, we focus specifically on 14 of the 16 interviews in the dataset, excluding the ones which did not take place in English so as to ensure the uniformity of the analyzed dataset. For the sake of clarity, I should add that although we consistently refer to the evaluated employees at GlobalCorp as sales agents, one of these 14 agents is, in fact, a supply agent. Because the interaction with the supply agent is structured similarly to the evaluations of the sales agents, with the main difference being the discussion of different evaluation topics, we do not elaborate on this in the paper specifically, as we believe that his status as supply agent does not affect the occurrence and role of small talk in this interaction.

We used NVivo to conduct the analysis of this chapter. First, we did a turn-by-turn content analysis to identify different types of workplace talk in the performance appraisal interviews. To do so, we based our analysis on the classification model of different types of workplace talk as proposed by Holmes (2000), which distinguishes between core business talk, work-related talk, and small talk (see Section 2.2.1), and we

made use of the topics listed in the standardized appraisal form to identify what could be considered core business talk. Although most of the talk in the performance appraisal interviews was related to the evaluation of the agent and could therefore be interpreted as core business talk, everything that could not explicitly be tied to the evaluation topics was more difficult to categorize. When in doubt, the three authors of the paper discussed ambiguous cases together. Additionally, to further contextualize these more ambiguous sequences of talk and understand why they occurred, multiple excerpts of what we had identified as small talk were also discussed with the managers during the follow-up interviews. Finally, the findings from the first phase of interactional analysis were then triangulated with the insights from the follow-up interviews so as to gain a deeper understanding of the functions of small talk from the emic perspectives of the managers themselves.

In Chapter 9, we focus on three multilingual strategies as they are used during the performance appraisal interviews at GlobalCorp, i.e. English as a business lingua franca or BELF, receptive multilingualism, and a lay interpreter. More specifically, we examine how the use of these multilingual strategies fits into GlobalCorp's general language management strategy, how the managers perceive these different multilingual strategies, and how their language ideological beliefs shape the language practices during the performance appraisal interviews, particularly in the form of (potential) miscommunication. To do so, we analyzed five interviews conducted in BELF, one interview conducted in receptive multilingualism, and one interview conducted with a lay interpreter. As such, several interviews conducted in BELF were excluded from this analysis. This is because we chose to focus only on interviews that are considered core markets for GlobalCorp, as the managers reported during the follow-up interviews that achieving mutual intelligibility was considered most important with agents responsible for important markets, thereby possibly affecting how they would deal with (potential) miscommunication in interactions with agents responsible for less important markets. Additionally, we only included BELF interviews where none of interlocutors were L1 speakers of English (Ehrenreich, 2016).

To achieve our research objectives, the analysis for this chapter was conducted in NVivo in three phases. First, I conducted an in-depth turn-by-turn analysis of each of the 7 performance appraisal interviews under study to identify instances of preventing, signaling, and/or repairing (potential) miscommunication. The identification of prevention and signaling strategies was done on the basis of categorizations of (potential) miscommunication from previous research on multilingual spoken interactions (Mauranen, 2006; Vasseur et al., 1996; Linell, 1995). Instances of repair were identified on the basis of the classification proposed by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977). In the second phase, we then analyzed and coded the follow-up interviews with the managers on the basis of a topic-based categorization, where all sequences relating to language, multilingualism, language management, language policy, the use of English/BELF, receptive multilingualism, or lay interpreting were considered relevant to and included in the analysis. The findings from these two phases were then finally triangulated so as to understand the language practices observed during the performance appraisal interviews in light of the managers' language ideological beliefs and GlobalCorp's broader language management strategy in general, thereby topicalizing "what people do versus what they say they do" (Marra et al., 2022).

In Chapter 10, we aim to examine the importance and occurrence of negative feedback in GlobalCorp's performance appraisal processes in comparison to other types of feedback, as well as how negative feedback is formulated and recontextualized throughout the different written and spoken phases of individual performance appraisals. To do so, we analyze the preparation of the written appraisal form, the spoken performance appraisal interviews, and the finalized version of the written appraisal form of 15 individual appraisees. The reason why we focus on 15 individual appraisal processes rather than all 16 we collected in the dataset, is because one of the agents is a supply agent, and because of this, the managers make use of a different standardized appraisal form to evaluate him. As the topics listed in the standardized appraisal form for the sales agents were used as the baseline of the coding process, we could thus not include his performance appraisal in the analysis.

Due to the intertextual nature of the dataset, the coding process used to achieve our research objectives was fairly complex and made up of multiple steps. First, we used NVivo to structure the data by identifying the one-on-one relation between information included in the data of each distinct spoken and written phase. To do so, the content from each of the three discursive phases (i.e. preparation; interview; report) for each agent's appraisal process was grouped as relating to one of the 40 different evaluation subtopics as outlined in the appraisal form (see Appendix, Section 12.5.2). For the documents, marked assessment boxes were coded as part of the subtopics they were marked for, and additional written information in the comments sections was coded under specific subtopics on the basis of what it was considered most closely related to. After coding the documents, sequences from the spoken phase were also linked to these different subtopics on the basis of the content of what was said.

Second, for each agent's performance appraisal, the occurrence of each of the 40 subtopics was identified per discursive phase, i.e. whether it was '*prepared*' by the managers, '*discussed*' in the interaction, and/or '*reported*' on in the finalized report. For example, when information relating to a specific subtopic occurred in all three phases, this subtopic was coded as '*prepared-discussed-reported*'; if information was only discussed in the interaction and not present in any of the written texts, a subtopic would be coded as '*unprepared-discussed-unreported*'.

Third, each subtopic that was topicalized in each agents' appraisal process was coded in terms of the type of feedback that was given, where a distinction was made between positive feedback, negative feedback, and descriptive or neutral content. An example of such descriptive, neutral content is: "There were no events last year due to Covid situation", a statement which we argue does not carry any evaluative meaning. This coding was not only determined based on what was said and/or written, but also on the scoring of the assessment boxes for each subtopic on the appraisal form; an assessment box marked '*Sufficient*' or '*Good* ( $\geq$  *expectations*)' was coded as positive, whereas a box marked '*Insufficient*' was coded as negative. The distinctions between these categories were not mutually exclusive, as one topic could contain multiple types of feedback. For example, when an assessment box in the report was marked as '*Good*

( $\geq$  *expectations*)’ but additional negative feedback or descriptive information were written in the comments, this could result in a final categorization of the topic as ‘*positive+negative*’, ‘*positive+descriptive*’, or ‘*positive+negative+descriptive*’. Instances where negative and positive feedback are combined are included as part of the analysis of negative feedback, as in this case negative feedback, however partial, was formulated about the agent’s performance and thus considered relevant to our analysis.

Fourth, the frequencies of each type of feedback were calculated, and chi-square tests were used to test the statistical significance of a number of observed oppositions in the occurrence of positive and negative feedback. The final step then consisted of the qualitative analysis of all topics that were coded as (partially) negative throughout the different phases of the performance appraisals. Both for the documents and the spoken interactions, this consisted of identifying different types of negative feedback strategies (Nguyen, 2005) as well as any markers of dispreference (Asmuß, 2008) in the formulation and recontextualization of negative feedback. The qualitative analysis was then concluded by comparing these findings for the different phases of each topic. For this chapter, specific excerpts were selected to illustrate the diverse ways in which negative feedback was constructed throughout the PAs, and these excerpts were analyzed in depth by all three authors. In sum, we argue that the quantitative and statistically supported approach consolidates the findings from the in-depth qualitative analysis, thus strengthening the methodological process as a whole.

This coding process was not unambiguous, particularly in the first and the third step, as the identification of the one-on-one relation between what was written down in the documents and what was discussed in the interviews as well as the identification of feedback as either positive, negative, or neutral were open to interpretation on a number of occasions. Similar to the analytical process in Chapter 8, one way to ensure validity of the analysis was to discuss unclear or ambiguous data amongst the three authors of the paper. However, from our etic perspective as researchers, these discussions sometimes still proved insufficient to reach a conclusive interpretation of certain excerpts of the data. For this reason, we also triangulated our interpretations of the authentic data with input from the follow-up interviews and additional emails

with the managers about specific data excerpts, so as to validate our findings with their emic understandings of the interactions.

### 3.5 NOTE ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH CHAPTERS

In total, this dissertation is made up of seven research chapters which were written based on the data collection of three case studies, as visualized in Figure 1. The first case study comprises Chapter 4, the second case study comprises Chapters 5, 6 and 7, and the third case study comprises Chapters 8, 9 and 10. The three case studies are structured in chronological order on the basis of when the data was collected, as is clear from the timelines regarding data collections as presented in Sections 3.2.1, 3.3.1, and 3.4.1. For each case study, the different research chapters are also structured in chronological order on the basis of when they were conceptualized.

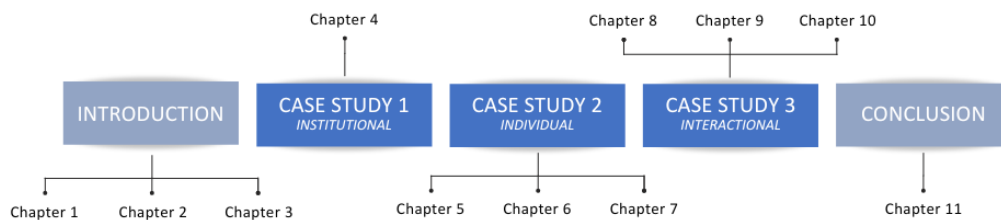


Figure 1. Structural overview of the dissertation

In terms of the reading process, the reader should keep in mind that the research chapters of each case study are based on the same dataset and contextualized within the same research context, and that therefore, research chapters relating to the same case study should ideally be read together. However, it does not matter in which order you read the different case studies, nor does it matter in which order you read the different research chapters as part of a case study.

Finally, it is relevant to note that throughout the research chapters, all cross-references to sections have been adapted in accordance with the table of contents, and all references to the literature have been adapted in line with APA citation style (American Psychological Association, 2020).

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# 4 RECONSTRUCTING OVER 20 YEARS OF LANGUAGE PRACTICE, MANAGEMENT AND IDEOLOGY AT A MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION IN BRUSSELS

De Malsche, F., & Vandenbroucke, M. (2022). Reconstructing over 20 years of language practice, management and ideology at a multinational corporation in Brussels: A scaled socio-historical approach to language policy. *Language Policy*, 21, 235-259.

## 4.0 ABSTRACT

Research that considers the relevant temporal, spatial, and societal contexts of a corporate language policy remains scarce to date within the field of sociolinguistics. In contrast to approaches that take companies as static entities, this article focuses on a Belgian multinational corporation over the course of over 20 years and contextualizes the perceived changes and developments within the company's socio-historical context, corporate structural changes and complex functioning across regional, national, and international spatiotemporal scales. On the basis of archival data, in-depth interviews with corporate managers, and screenshots of the company website over time, our case study uncovers the complexities of linguistically navigating different scalar levels of embeddedness in a globalized marketplace, taking into account both pride- and profit-based language ideological convictions. The discursive approach we adopt provides detailed insight into the development of corporate language practice, management and ideology, and we argue that companies function as multiscale entities and should therefore be researched as such.

**Keywords:** Brussels; corporate language policy; language ideology; socio-historical development; sociolinguistics; globalization

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Multinational corporations (MNCs) are a driving force behind processes of late modern globalization, which have in turn drastically increased their transnational flows of people, capital, and communication over the past four decades (Appadurai, 1996). As a result, MNCs' linguistic practices are often considered a complex issue, as an internationalized, multilingual workplace where a number of languages are used requires an adequate and adapted language policy. In previous research, corporate language policies have therefore mainly been examined from the perspective of the general problems which can occur and the possible solutions which can be ratified in response (e.g. Feely & Harzing, 2003; Lønsmann, 2014; Sanden, 2020; Welch et al., 2005). However, qualitative research from a holistic integrated perspective, i.e. which considers the temporal, spatial, and societal context of language policies (Bastardas-Boada, 2013) and does not consider companies as static entities remains comparatively scarcer, especially in the context of service firms (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018).

This sociolinguistic study takes on a discursive approach to language policy (Barakos & Unger, 2016) and focuses on the development of a corporate language policy at a Belgian MNC over the course of over 20 years and contextualizes the changes and developments in the MNC's language policy within the company's socio-historical context, corporate structural changes and multiscalar functioning, i.e. their functioning on intersecting regional, national, and international scales. In doing so, the aim is to uncover the complexities of linguistically navigating these scalar levels of embeddedness in a globalized marketplace, taking into account both profit- and pride-based language ideologies (Duchêne & Heller, 2012). This socio-historical approach is based on a perceived need to “move away from a static understanding of the organization as an entity that is made up of its material and legal structure and that is fixed in time and space, to one that is fluid and continuously evolving” (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018, p. 18). Indeed, we should contextualize and understand corporate language policy development in a way that transcends the gap between practice and research, as practice is always socio-historically embedded, but most current research does not yet comprehensively acknowledge this socio-historical embeddedness in its

analyses of language policy (with notable exceptions of Barakos, 2020; Duchêne, 2008; Garrido, 2021; Sokolovska, 2016). The headquarters of the MNC central in this case study are located in the superdiverse and highly multilingual Belgian capital Brussels, which offers a specific and complex background for this case study. The analysis is based on a dataset consisting of archival documents, in-depth interviews with corporate managers, and screenshots of the company website over time and is used to examine how the structural changes at the company have affected language practice, language management and language ideologies over time.

In the next section, we reflect on the importance of language policies for MNCs, the different ways in which they can be formulated, and the potential consequences of an ill-suited policy. In Section 4.3, we then elaborate on the multiscale embeddedness in which this specific MNC operates to account for the complexities of language use in its functioning. We then present our methodology and research questions in Section 4.4, followed by our analysis in Section 4.5, which is structured into three consecutive periods of time on the basis of relevant changes in the company's corporate structure. Based on our analysis from a socio-historical perspective, we then argue that such a holistic approach to corporate language policy allows for a deeper qualitative understanding of how language policy in the form of practice, management and ideologies (Spolsky, 2009) develop over time in an increasingly globalized marketplace which manifests itself on intersecting spatiotemporal scales.

## 4.2 UNDERSTANDING CORPORATE LANGUAGE POLICIES

Language management is a “costly and complicating factor” for most businesses and service providers (Berezkina, 2018), especially for MNCs which often function multilingually. Although research interest in this area has grown over time, it is still relatively modest in size, and most language policy or management research has focused on countries or governmental bodies rather than on meso-or micro-contexts

such as specific MNCs or companies (Angouri, 2013). In order to close this knowledge gap, sociolinguistic research can offer a particularly apt framework in which a specific company is examined in light of a broader societal context, thereby taking into account the multiple scales on which companies simultaneously operate linguistically to better understand how they function as flexible and continuously evolving organizations (Angouri, 2013). To do so, we adopt a discursive approach to language policy, as we believe that “language policy is a multilayered phenomenon that is constituted and enacted in and through discourse” (Barakos & Unger, 2016, p. 1).

All companies ranging from SMEs to MNCs have a corporate language policy, which can be either formalized, non-formalized, or operate somewhere in between. On the one end of this spectrum, highly formalized explicit language policies exist where one or multiple documents are available to inform employees about the expectations regarding their language proficiency and language use on the workforce. These documents usually predefine the consequences of non-compliance and thus generally do not allow for personal interpretations of language use on the work floor, which can potentially result in bottom-up negotiation, ignoring or resistance to said policies by employees (Lønsmann 2017; Sanden, 2020; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). On the other end, implicit non-formalized language policies are not based on any official documentation, but rather emerge in the everyday practicalities of the workplace (Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). This lack of a common, known and explicit frame of reference frequently leads to employees’ subjective interpretations of what is deemed linguistically acceptable in their workplace. In reality, neither of these approaches are inherently better or worse than the other, as no ‘one-size-fits-all’ solution exists for communicative flow issues (Sanden, 2016). As a result, companies should invest in tailor-made language policies that are adapted to their specific needs in terms of the degree of formalization and the management strategies that are put in place. However, many companies choose to refrain from investing in the development of an adequate language policy that is tailored to their own needs because of the time, effort, and financial costs that are required to do so. Such lack of a company-tailored solution can have detrimental effects on the workings of a company and its employees with potential consequences such as miscommunication, disempowerment, status loss,

employee dissatisfaction, loss of productivity, decrease in knowledge transfer and ineffective interunit communication, (linguistic) discrimination, gatekeeping, social exclusion, and foreign market expansion hindrance (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Lønsmann, 2014; Sanden, 2020; Welch et al., 2005).

One aspect of language management that is often observed specifically in MNCs is the use of English as a ‘common corporate language’ (Fredriksson et al., 2006). The ubiquity of English in corporate communication is shaped by a language ideological belief that multilingualism is unavoidably ‘messy’ and that English as a deterritorialized language can function as the easiest, most cost-efficient solution, and that it is therefore the only language conducive to and necessary for international communication (Phillipson, 2017). These beliefs have contributed to the conceptualization of English as the international language of business and the highly commodified status it is accredited across the globe today (Holborow, 2015), ultimately resulting in too simplistic common corporate language policies that do not reflect a company’s linguistic reality or needs (Fredriksson et al., 2006).

In this study, we report on a case study of the socio-historical development of one MNC’s corporate language policy in order to gain a holistic insight into what has caused a company to linguistically function the way it does today. Similar socio-historical approaches to language policy have also been adopted to study international political institutions such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe (Duchêne, 2008; Sokolovska, 2016) and in the humanitarian context of the International Committee of the Red Cross (Garrido, 2021), but we argue that the for-profit incentives of an MNC under neoliberalism and late capitalism provide a different perspective to the multiscalar sociolinguistic context of FinCorp. Additionally, Barakos (2020) has critically examined language policy at a Welch business from a historical perspective, but focuses primarily on bilingualism and the role of minority languages. Finally, a rapidly growing body of research has explored the linguistic workings and corporate language policies of multilingual companies in light of globalization (e.g. Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Lønsmann, 2017; Sanden, 2020; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018; Sanden & Lønsmann, 2018; for a more exhaustive overview of research on

#### 4.3 | SITUATING FINCORP AS A MULTISCALAR CORPORATION IN BRUSSELS (BELGIUM)

multilingualism in European workplaces, see Gunnarsson, 2014), but none of these studies combine a socio-historical with a scalar approach to examine a company's language policy as it develops dynamically or reflexively over time.

Our research applies this socio-historical approach to the corporate context and aims to bring forth a contextualized understanding of how a company has navigated and assessed linguistic challenges in the past, and how processes of late modern globalization have increasingly infiltrated and re-shaped the corporate multinational workplace linguistically over time. In order to do so, we argue that a scalar approach is most apt to understand the company's linguistic history and present-day functioning. In the next section, we therefore elaborate on the different, intertwined scales in which FinCorp, the MNC central in this case study, operates within Brussels.

### 4.3 SITUATING FINCORP AS A MULTISCALAR CORPORATION IN BRUSSELS (BELGIUM)

FinCorp (pseudonym for the Dutch abbreviated name of the company) is an internationally oriented Belgian company headquartered in Brussels, and as a result of this, several scalar levels of embeddedness inform its political, economic and sociolinguistic functioning. Therefore, scale and scaling processes are taken as a starting point to understand the sociolinguistic context of FinCorp.

As argued by Fairclough (2006, p. 64), globalization is:

“not just a matter of the construction of a global scale, it is also a matter of new relations between the global scale and other scales, and wider changes in the sets of scales and relations between them caused by the construction of a global scale.”

As such, if we aim to grasp the linguistic developments of FinCorp in light of globalization, we must also aim to understand the different scales that interact with



and are influenced by the construction of this global scale, as well as how language policy and the meaning of language choices are shaped by this. To do so, we adopt a Wallersteinian understanding of scale that is not only considered geographical or spatial, but rather includes a temporal dimension, as all social acts “develop simultaneously in space and time” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 34). This spatiotemporal approach allows us to consider how social and linguistic acts develop throughout and across scales cached within specific histories and can help us gain a better understanding of both the company at hand and the societal context in which it functions (Blommaert, 2007). Previous studies in Belgium and Brussels have demonstrated that this theoretical concept is particularly useful to study the sociolinguistic complexity of the context in which FinCorp is situated (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck, 2005; Slembrouck & Vandenbroucke, 2020; Vandenbroucke, 2015).

Following Fairclough (2006), Giddens (1990) and Appadurai (1996), globalization is considered to be a societal process which affects existing relations between different scales and simultaneously creates new ones. As part of these scalar shifts, the globalized new economy has emerged, with the rise of the tertiary or service sector as one of its defining elements (Duchêne & Heller, 2012). With regard to language and culture specifically, the rise of the new service economy has also rendered language a “raw material” rather than a secondary tool (Duchêne, 2011, p. 4), resulting in the assessment of language skills in terms of ‘return potential’ and other economic terms (Holborow, 2015). In this sense, language is no longer solely associated with pride-based ideologies that are primarily linked to the scale of modern nation-states, but has also become part of profit-based ideologies where language is considered capital on economic markets across the globe (Duchêne & Heller, 2012), thereby also highlighting that languages can be mobilized for divergent ideological reasons within and between scales as part of the workings of the late modern service economy. As FinCorp is a service firm, the linguistic developments of the company should thus be understood in light of this broader framework of globalization, in which neoliberalism, late capitalism and the commodification of language are all contributing factors to what defines the language practices and ideologies at this company (Duchêne, 2011;

Duchêne & Heller, 2012). Additionally, for many service companies, globalization has also generated an increased focus on internationalization efforts with the profit-based aim of targeting and tapping new market potential and thereby expanding their services across the globe, further complexifying the meaning and role of language as part of globalization.

On a national scale, the current federal state of Belgium has three official languages and elaborate language policies and laws which are based on a territoriality principle that enforces language borders and official regional monolingualism. In this structure, the Region Flanders is officially Dutch-speaking, the Region Wallonia is officially French-speaking, and the Brussels Capital Region is officially bilingual in French and Dutch. Additionally, German is the official language of the German-speaking eastern part of Wallonia, where language facilities exist for French-speaking inhabitants. This highly federalized structure of the country is the historical outcome of decades of complex socio-political development and negotiation, also referred to as the language struggle (Blommaert, 2011). At the time of Belgium's independence in 1830, French was the dominant official language of the political elites, whereas Flemish culture and language were not given official recognition and suppressed. This changed during the twentieth century, when Flemish nationalist striving led to the gradual emancipation of Dutch as an official language in Flanders and Belgium at large (Van Velthoven, 1987). As part of this historical and protracted language struggle, language remains a controversial topic and source of conflict in Belgian politics and society up to this day (Vandenbroucke, 2017).

The complexity of Belgium's federal structure and its history of language sensitivities culminates in the status of the Brussels Capital Region. While Brussels is the official capital of the Region of Flanders as well as Belgium at large, it is in reality predominantly French-speaking as a result of a historical language shift to French during the nineteenth century (Van Velthoven, 1987). Recent demographic and language proficiency data state that 95% of Brussels residents self-reportedly know French, but less than 35% know Dutch (Janssens, 2018). This discrepancy also manifests itself in Brussels' workplace, where almost 35% of businesses reportedly

only use French for all business communication, in contrast to 0% of businesses reporting to use solely Dutch (Janssens, 2018). However, French monolingualism in Brussels' workplaces has strongly decreased from over 70% in 2001 in favor of more multilingual practice combining French with English and/or Dutch in recent years (Janssens, 2018). In terms of legislature, the Belgian law 'Taalwet Bestuurszaken' states that all companies who undertake any commercial activity within the Brussels Capital Region have to provide their employees who work in Brussels with written communication in their own language, i.e. either French or Dutch, but written official communication that is not directly meant for employees can be in any language, and there are no rules for oral communication.

During the second half of the twentieth century, Brussels also became a center of international political power as the current *de facto* capital of the European Union and the HQ of NATO, making it a political "world city on a European level" (Elmhorn, 1998, p. 96) with national and international standing as a second-tier global city (Derudder & Taylor, 2003). Additionally, Brussels is also a superdiverse city (Vertovec, 2007) with extensive demographic diversity "brought by large scale immigration in the last few decades, that covers the full range from colonial migrants and guest workers, through refugees, to highly skilled professionals of all nationalities" (Favell, 2001, p. 11), resulting in a *de jure* bilingual French-Dutch, yet *de facto* highly multilingual city. In spite of the official status of Dutch in the city, the city's international standing has thus contributed to the importance English over the course of the past 20 years, replacing Dutch as the second most widely known language in the city (Janssens, 2018) and becoming increasingly predominant in the city's public linguistic landscape as well (Vandenbroucke, 2016). The importance of English is also reflected in the hiring practices in the city, with English proficiency listed as a requirement in over 50% of job advertisements in Brussels (Mettewie & Van Mensel, 2009). Next to its status as the international lingua franca par excellence, English in Brussels is also frequently seen as a "neutral" option for communication in light of the historical language struggle (Vandenbroucke, 2016). This complex linguistic situation in the city directly affects the lives of Brussels-based professionals in a variety of ways on a daily basis, ranging from differences in salary as a result of a 'language bonus' for bilingual

competency (Van Herck & Vermandere, 2016), to difficult decisions regarding strictly monolingual educational options for children of multilingual parents (Van Mensel, 2016). In sum, Brussels is a regional, a national and an international capital which is linguistically characterized by its history of language conflict, its official bilingual status in French and Dutch, and its multilingual reality in which both French and English function as dominant languages to different extents.

FinCorp, the company we focus on in this paper, is a Belgian internationalized financial institution with its headquarters in Brussels. As such, FinCorp navigates the complex sociolinguistic context of both Brussels and Belgium at large on a daily basis. The company's socio-historical development can be divided into three periods on the basis of major structural changes over the years. In the first period, the company came into existence after a national merger in the late 1990s in which three separate Belgian financial institutions joined forces. This was followed by a process of international expansion through different mergers and acquisitions in the early 2000s, during which the company extended its services globally, with a specific focus on Eastern Europe. Finally, their most recent structural development was characterized by a highly localized urban focus with the creation of FinCorp Brussels in 2015, a new brand that was specifically aimed at the city's multicultural and multilingual clientele. As a result of these developments, the parent company currently has three separate brands in Belgium that are organized similarly to Belgium's federal structure: one for its Flemish and German-speaking customers that operates in Flanders and the Eastern part of Belgium, one for its French-speaking customers that operates solely in Wallonia, and a separate brand for its Brussels customers since 2015. To make matters more complex, FinCorp in Flanders and the recently established brand FinCorp Brussels both function as part of FinCorp, whereas FinCorp Wallonia is a separate subsidiary that currently no longer has presence in the capital. As a result of this, this research focuses solely on FinCorp and FinCorp Brussels and how they function(ed) within the sociolinguistic context of Brussels.

In sum, the quotidian linguistic working of FinCorp can situate itself on multiple scales, including the international, national and regional scales of company activity described

above, all of which are intertwined with and function in relation to globalization. In light of this, the use of Dutch and French can be situated on and jump between the different regional scales of Flanders, Brussels, and Wallonia as well as the national Belgian scale, whereas English can simultaneously be mobilized on multiple scales, ranging from an international orientation to markets and clients outside of Belgium, to more localized mobilization connected to Brussels' history of language conflict and its superdiverse population. Combining this complex sociolinguistic context with the knowledge gained from previous research on language strategies in corporate MNCs and workplaces, the next section sets out the research questions and methodology of this case study.

#### 4.4 OUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

Two main research questions are defined on the basis of a holistic approach in which the temporal, spatial, and societal contexts are all taken into account (Bastardas-Boada, 2013). The questions are set up in accordance with Spolsky's (2009, 2019) theoretical model for language policy, which conceptualizes language policy as "comprising three independent but interconnected components" (Spolsky, 2019, p. 326), namely language practice, language management, and language ideology. Taking these three components into account in our analysis of language policy, the research questions are formulated as follows:

- I. Which impact have the scalar structural changes within FinCorp had on the language *practices* and language *management* at the company over time?
- II. Which underlying scalar (linguistic) *ideologies* can be observed over time as

part of the structural changes at FinCorp, specifically within the internationalized and language-sensitive context of Brussels?

Given that language policy questions in the Brussels corporate context have previously only been explored from a quantitative perspective (Janssens, 2018; Mettwie & Van Mensel, 2009), this study wants to add a qualitative perspective to the existing literature. The data were therefore gathered using a linguistic ethnographic approach, providing a detailed description of the corporation and its historical development of language (Copland & Creese, 2015). The dataset was collected in two separate phases by the first author via a data triangulation approach, thereby reducing the weaknesses of separate data collection methods (Dörnyei, 2007).

During the first phase of the data collection process, the aim was to better understand FinCorp and its domestic (linguistic) history on the basis of two different types of data. Firstly, archival documents from the public FinCorp archive were collected. This corporate archive contains internal and external documents concerning the development of the company in Belgium since the late 1990s until 2020, and access was gained directly through the corporate archivist. Following Blommaert's (2005) advice, "everything that closely or remotely looks of interest" (p. 53) was photographed and collected as data, resulting in a dataset consisting of hundreds of internal and external documents that were stored in paper and digitally. Additionally, screenshots of the company's current and past Belgian websites<sup>1</sup> were gathered, as they can be considered a form of self-representation of a company (Hine, 2000).

In the second phase, three semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in Dutch with 'language managers' (Spolsky, 2019), i.e. employees of FinCorp who are involved in decision-making processes regarding language or language use at FinCorp or FinCorp Brussels.<sup>2</sup> Given that the first phase of data collection mainly focused on top-down documentation and information, language managers were chosen for the interviews because their positions allow them to reflect on how and why these top-down policies came into existence. The questions of these interviews were thus

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<sup>1</sup> Past versions of websites were accessed via The Internet Archive's *Wayback Machine*.

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of the privacy of the participants and in line with both the company's wishes and the ethical clearance obtained for this study, their specific roles at the company are not disclosed. However, all of them operate at a managerial level within FinCorp or FinCorp Brussels overseeing the departments that play a deciding role in the language practices of the company.

formulated on the basis of insights that were gained from the first phase of data collection, and the participants were asked about general language-related experiences and insights at the company from over the years, as well as specific documents that had been retrieved in the archive and warranted further discussion.

After data collection was completed, the interview data were transcribed and all data were pseudonymized and subsequently analyzed using the data analysis software NVivo through an open coding approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), which allowed for an emergent thematic analysis of the different datasets throughout the coding process. First, the data were categorized on the basis of three historical periods in line with the main corporate structural developments that took place over the observed 20+ years. Per period, the data were separated into information regarding internal communication and external communication. Subsequently, the datasets were iteratively examined for recurring themes and topics, on the basis of which the following nodes emerged inductively: digitalization, internationalization, Brussels, multilingualism, Dutch, English, and linguistic problems. Finally, these themes and topics enabled an analysis of two types of communication (internal and external) functioning on three separate levels (international, national, Brussels) across three different periods of time (1998–2005, 2005–2015, 2015–2020).

## 4.5 RECONSTRUCTING OVER 20 YEARS OF CORPORATE LANGUAGE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

In this section, the findings are grouped in three consecutive time periods from the late 1990s until 2020, based on defining changes in FinCorp's corporate structure in Belgium and Brussels specifically. For each of these phases, the analysis focuses on the respective language practices, management and ideology in the company's internal and external communication. Given that FinCorp Brussels was only established in 2015 and that no specific strategy for Brussels existed before the establishment of this new

brand, the first two periods focus on FinCorp alone and how the company functioned in Brussels and in Flanders. Until the establishment of FinCorp Brussels and its own explicit language policy in 2018, FinCorp also had no explicit language policy documentation available. As a result of this, the analysis mainly offers an in-depth discursive reconstruction and analysis of the company's implicit, non-formalized and dynamic language policy.

#### 4.5.1 A period of regional positioning (1998-2005)

In 1998, FinCorp was founded as the result of a merger between three Belgian financial institutions. The foundation of this new company required a clear focus on establishing a new brand on the Belgian national financial market. Because a separate subsidiary under the name of FinCorp Wallonia was created to tend to the French-speaking Belgian market, FinCorp itself mainly focused on the Dutch-speaking population of Belgium, and both brands were present in the bilingual city of Brussels. Additionally, the company started expanding internationally quickly after its foundation. Therefore, the company was establishing itself as a Belgian and mainly Dutch-speaking company within the regional and national markets, while at the same time embracing the increasing pressure to engage in the globalizing tendencies of the international financial markets.

In their external communication, the documentation retrieved from FinCorp's archive such as folders, posters, and advertisement campaigns show that this first period was characterized by trilingualism in the form of a combination of Dutch, French and German, despite the Dutch-speaking main target audience of the company. In some cases, English was added to this list, mainly when the communication was addressed to corporate or international clients, i.e. clients who likely did not master any of the three national languages, but a language manager explained that the extent of English in external communication remained limited to contexts where it was deemed necessary. These tendencies also apply to the earliest versions of the company website,



which was set up in 2000 and immediately offered information in Dutch, French, German and English.

A language manager explained that this strategy was rather costly, as everything was translated into at least three and sometimes four languages. In Figure 1, we see that these translations also included the editing of images, in this case the cover of the book, underlining the lengths to which FinCorp went to ensure that all information was available in the three national languages. Although FinCorp's main target was Dutch-speaking Belgians, they thus wanted to ensure that they did not miss out on the French and German-speaking population who lived in predominantly Dutch-speaking areas or in Brussels, assessing that this potential profit exceeded the translation costs.



Figure 1. Example of trilingual advertising, 2005

This strategy differed strongly from their internal communication, as a majority of the internal documents from this period were available in Dutch only. In 2000, the FinCorp communication department launched HelloMagazine (pseudonym), a monthly magazine for all of its employees published solely in Dutch. This was tailored to their workforce, as a language manager explained that the large majority of FinCorp's employees at the Brussels HQ offices were (and still are) Dutch-speaking, which stands in strong contrast to the population of the city who were (and still are) predominantly French-speaking. In addition to the monolingual distribution of this company-wide publication, multiple articles in HelloMagazine during this first period

discussed the use of Dutch at the company explicitly on a meta-level. In 2001, for example, a ‘language tip’ for the employees was published titled “The unnecessary English madness” (original: “De ‘onnodig Engels’-gekte”), in which they referred to the use of English terminology in Dutch language use as a “neurological illness” and provided Dutch alternatives for a number of often-used English words such as ‘manager’, ‘desktop’, and ‘business’.



Figure 2. Internal campaign against English in the workplace, 2005

This top-down rather negative stance towards the usage of languages other than Dutch culminated in 2005, around the same time that the internationalized FinCorp brand was founded, when an internal poster campaign was launched which advocated for clear and correct use of Dutch. This campaign was spread throughout FinCorp offices and aimed to convey two messages: both written and spoken Dutch should be (grammatically) correct and appropriate for the workplace, and English words should

not be used when a Dutch alternative is readily available. To convey this second message, the poster in Figure 2 was disseminated, which reads “Here we speak Dutch...” (original: “Hier spreekt men Nederlands...”) at the top and “Don’t speak English when you’re speaking Dutch” (original: “Spreek geen Engels als je Nederlands praat”) at the bottom, with a dog in the middle adding “Who cares?” in English. The woman and the dog in the poster are iconized references to a television show called ‘Hier spreekt men Nederlands’, which was broadcast from 1962 until 1972 on the Belgian Dutch-speaking public service broadcaster and had the prescriptive aim of teaching the Flemish Belgian public how to speak and write (standardized) Dutch correctly and solving the perceived problem of ‘impure’ Dutch. By directly referencing this show and two of its main characters, this internal campaign indexed the same prescriptivist stance in an albeit humorous way with the intent to make employees aware of the importance of correct Dutch language use in the workplace.

A language manager explained this top-down language management strategy as follows:

“You shouldn’t forget, FinCorp is Flemish, it’s not Belgian, it’s Flemish. So also from the underlying shareholder structure in the past, it was outspokenly Flemish. And that’s how this can be explained, I think. On the one hand, it’s this confrontation of ‘oh really, but we’ve always worked in Dutch and now we have to start learning English? I don’t want to do that, I’m not going to do that, I don’t know that, and oh, what should I- they should learn Dutch instead.’ That’s the initial reaction. (...) Secondly, ‘I wanted to make a career, but my colleague next to me wants to pursue that same career, they know English and I don’t, so I might have a possible disadvantage here.’” (Participant 1, 9/7/2020)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Translated from Dutch original: “Je moet niet vergeten, FinCorp is Vlaams he, is niet Belgisch he, dat is Vlaams. Dus ook vanuit de achterliggende aandeelhouderstructuren in het verleden was dat uitgesproken Vlaams. En vandaar is dat volgens mij te kaderen. Dat is enerzijds plotseling die confrontatie van ‘oei, allez, wij hebben altijd hier in het Nederlands gewerkt en nu moeten wij ook in het Engels beginnen? Maar daar heb ik geen goesting voor hoor, dat ga ik niet doen, ik ken dat ook niet, en oh, wat moet ik- dat die een keer Nederlands leren.’ Dat is de eerste reactie. (...) Twee, ‘ik wou carrière

He thus rationalized these campaigns in light of a perceived threat of English as a common corporate language for MNCs which could potentially result in the loss of jobs for those who did not speak it, which was magnified by pride-based language ideological beliefs in the importance of Dutch for the outspokenly Flemish corporate culture of the company. Another language manager used the word “flamingantism”, i.e. the Flemish nationalist movement that positions itself against French in order to emancipate the role of (Flemish) Dutch in Belgium, to explain why certain people or departments were not eager to welcome languages other than Dutch into the internal workings of the company.

In this first period of regional positioning, we thus see that FinCorp struggled to reconcile their internal and external language strategies, as the external communication aimed to position the company on a regional Flemish level with a profit-based consideration for non-Dutch speaking potential clients, whereas the internal strategy reflected a pride-based Dutch-only language policy which resulted in mostly monolingual Dutch language use within FinCorp. These struggles to reconcile pride and profit (Duchêne & Heller, 2012) were highlighted by the company’s increasing drive for internationalization, and English in particular was increasingly perceived as a threat to those who wanted to remain true to the outspokenly Flemish character of the company. As such, this framing of the use of English as a threat should arguably be understood locally in light of the language history of the Flemish struggle in Belgium, resulting in a pride-based resistance to the use of English in spite of the increasing internationalization of company activity.

#### 4.5.2 A decade of globalized influences (2005-2015)

In 2005, FinCorp merged in an international grouping, and as a result of this new overarching transnationally networked organization, globalization became embedded

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maken, maar mijn collega naast mij wou ook diezelfde carrière maken, die kent Engels en ik niet, dus ik heb hier mogelijk een nadeel.”

into the company's core structure and activities. In the years following this merger, digitalization also became increasingly important for interactions with clients and for the internal workings of the company as a new mode of communication and collaboration. Relatedly, the development of Web 2.0 allowed for dialogic online communication (Hine, 2000), creating new ways for the company, its employees and its clients to communicate.

During the first part of this era, the external communication strategy of the MNC remained similar to the one observed in the period of regional positioning. One of the observed changes in light of digitalization was that paper folders and flyers increasingly included references to the company website, and the data show that the links to these websites lay bare a linguistic hierarchy vis-à-vis what was made available in which languages. For example, a poster on tax advantages shows a link to the company website ending in */fiscaalvoordeel* on the Dutch version and */avantagefiscal* on the French print, but the link on the German version is simply *www.FinCorp.be*. Examples such as this indicate that although print media were still being translated in full, online information was no longer being offered equally in all languages, suggesting that the availability of external communication in all three official Belgian languages was decreasing.

The availability of trilingual information further decreased around 2010, as a language manager explained that the market share of French- and German-speaking clients was not deemed significant and viable anymore, and therefore translations were no longer considered cost-efficient. As a result, all external print media from then onwards were primarily published solely in Dutch. Around the same time, the data also show that English words or slogans were increasingly being used in the company's external communication. An example of this is shown in Figure 3, which depicts a promotional campaign for the FinCorp booth at Belgian music festivals where festivalgoers could have their picture taken. This type of emblematic English usage was mostly present in campaigns targeted at youth or regarding digitalization or technology, in which the informative content remained Dutch. When asking one of the language managers about this increasing tendency to include English terminology in FinCorp campaigns,

he explained that there was no active strategy behind this development, but that it is rather a way to sound ‘hip’, as he jokingly added: “Try thinking of sexy Dutch terms, I wish you good luck.” In light of the “global fetish of visual English” (Kelly-Holmes, 2014) in which the connotational values of English are commodified, FinCorp thus tried to convey their ‘coolness’ through the use of global English. In this ‘scale-jump’ (Pan, 2010) in which the importance of the regional and national scales decreased and made room for an increased focus on the international scale, English was no longer perceived as a threat to Dutch, but rather considered a for-profit selling strategy to appeal to a younger audience. This drastic language ideological shift from resisting to embracing English can be understood as a rescaled interpretation of the role of English vis-à-vis Dutch at the company, and underlines the fluidity and rapid change in the scaled corporate use of both languages.



Figure 3. 'Lazy Summer' festival campaign, 2010

This shift to a more accepting stance towards the usage of English words was reflected in the internal language practices of FinCorp as well, albeit more slowly. In 2008,

HelloMagazine published an article with a meta-reflection on their implicit language policy that explained that they would be allowing the use of English in their Dutch-language articles from now on, but that English words would be indicated in italics. In the following years, this use of italics slowly faded and English words such as ‘manager’, ‘desktop’ and ‘business’, for which they had previously provided Dutch alternatives, became normalized in the company’s use of Dutch. This use of English progressively expanded even further when FinCorp launched their new international perspective on corporate culture in 2012, which was ratified for all Belgian branches of the company. As seen in Figure 4, the introductory “We staan voor...” (translation: “We stand for...”) and “We ademen...” (translation: “We breathe...”) are in Dutch, but the key words for this new point of view are purely English. By launching this new take on corporate culture and explicitly defining it with English words, FinCorp essentially started doing away with the nationally and regionally scaled Dutch purism of the previous period and embraced English and its indexical ties with globalization as part of their internal image and communication strategy.

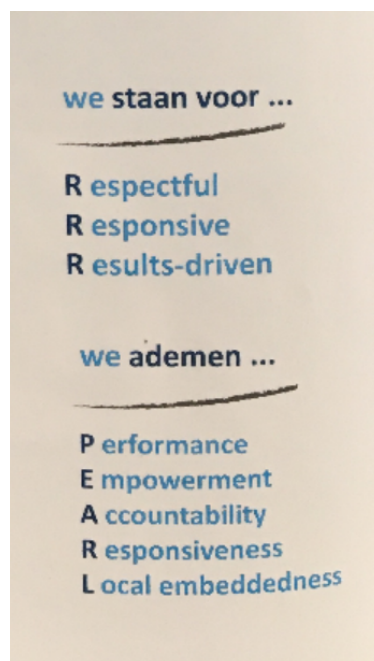


Figure 4. Launch of new corporate culture, 2012

Less discrepancies were observed between external and internal communication during this period of globalized influences, as all communication was to a large extent conducted in Dutch on the basis of profit- as well as pride-related language ideologies. Additionally, the influences of globalization seemingly seeped through in all language practices at the company, resulting in a differently scaled language ideology that was less hostile towards the use of English as it slowly started embracing its commodifiable value (Heller, 2010). However, a language manager underlined that this evolution was “very slow” and that FinCorp always persisted in the use of Dutch as the common corporate language despite the company’s internationalization efforts, making it clear that the observed changes in language practices and ideologies merely represent a gradual transition towards English on the basis of a profit-based ideology, rather than the development of a new ideology that fully embraces other languages. Additionally, Brussels-specific language considerations were not explicitly taken into account during this second period as the focus on Dutch largely ignored the predominantly French-speaking nature of the city.

### 4.5.3 A closer look at Brussels (2015-2020)

Given the structural split between FinCorp and FinCorp Wallonia, each of the brands was able to grow regionally in Flanders and Wallonia, respectively, during the first and second period, but both of them were active within the bilingual area of Brussels, resulting in a low market share for each brand in the city. To solve this problem, FinCorp launched ‘FinCorp Brussels’ in 2015 which replaced all FinCorp and FinCorp Wallonia branches in the capital and thus resolved the internal competition by introducing a new, united, locally anchored brand.

As a result of the introduction of FinCorp Brussels, FinCorp itself no longer had its own retail branches in the bilingual city of Brussels, which finally led to the development and consolidation of their external image as an outspokenly Flemish bank. One of their more recent initiatives to do so was launched in 2020 by offering their mobile app in Flemish dialects in addition to standard Dutch, as can be seen in



Figure 5. In doing so, one of the language managers explained that FinCorp aimed to differentiate itself from other multinational financial institutions by making it clear to their clients that FinCorp has remained true to their “Flemish DNA”, despite the internationalization and digitalization of the past two decades. Similarly, their customer service agents were subdivided per Flemish province so that clients always end up speaking with someone who speaks a dialectal variety of Dutch that is similar to their own. This shows that FinCorp acknowledged the changes that had occurred in the previous periods while also making use of them to present itself as an international company that remains regionally anchored and locally embedded in Flanders. This strategy is characterized by a dynamic process of entwined scale-jumps defined as glocalization, a “twin process” where the focus shifts “from the national scale both upwards to supra-national or global scales and downwards to the scale of the (...) local, urban, or regional configurations” (Swyngedouw, 2004, p. 25). In the case of Flanders, this entails that FinCorp’s focus shifted from the national scale of Belgium simultaneously upward to the international scale, whilst also embracing the linguistic idiosyncrasies of regional Flanders.

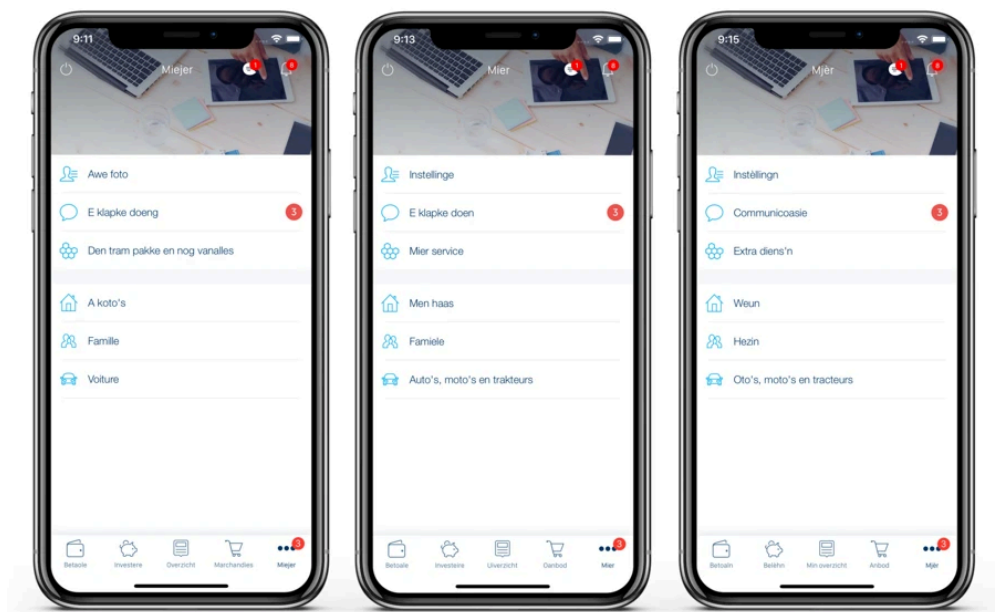


Figure 5. FinCorp's app in three different Flemish dialects, 2020

In this period, a new, redefined role for English also emerged for internal work floor communication. A language manager explained that the only exceptions to their existing monolingually Dutch language strategy were situations in which speaking Dutch was not possible and English had to be used as a lingua franca. He added that 90% of his own workplace interactions still occurred in Dutch, and that these language practices trickled down in the form of an implicit language policy for all employees. For example, a non-Belgian so-called “expat” who is now living in Brussels was interviewed for HelloMagazine in 2015 and shared that although she was able to do her job in English, she only really got to know her colleagues once she learned Dutch (cf. Lønsmann, 2014 who reports similar experiences of foreign employees working for an international company in Denmark). The company thereby maintained its strongly pride-based Dutch-oriented corporate culture with little leeway for languages other than Dutch, despite its internationalized structural changes of the past and the fact that their HQ offices are located in an officially bilingual yet French-dominated city. Because of this, an employee jokingly described FinCorp as “a Flemish island in a French-speaking city”.

FinCorp Brussels adopted an entirely different approach to language that played into the superdiverse and multilingual context of Brussels. Its name alone, which refers to the English name for the city rather than the French (‘Bruxelles’) or the Dutch (‘Brussel’), was chosen for the following reasons:

“One, it’s a Belgian compromise. It means you don’t have to choose between FinCorp or FinCorp Wallonia, which is particularly sensitive in Brussels. So and FinCorp Brussels actually does reflect, yes, a kind of feeling about Brussels, because Brussels is an international city, Brussels is a metropole, Brussels is the capital of Europe. So in fact actually two factors were at play: not having to choose and lay our cards on the table with regard to language and culture, and

underlining the international context of Brussels on the other hand.”  
(Participant 1, 9/7/2020)<sup>4</sup>

By creating FinCorp Brussels, FinCorp acknowledged the importance of presenting a unified front in a large, international city where the separate approaches of FinCorp and FinCorp Wallonia had not been not fruitful. By choosing ‘Brussels’ rather than ‘Brussel’ or ‘Bruxelles’, they refrained from having to choose between two communities in Belgium as well as from having to choose between the two official languages of the capital region. Additionally, this new name catered to the growing number of (international) English speakers in Brussels, further underlining the complex scaled mobilization of the new brand name. In sum, choosing an English name for this new brand emblematically highlighted the superdiverse nature of the city and presented English as both a neutral option amidst Dutch-French animosity and as a lingua franca that connects everyone in the city.

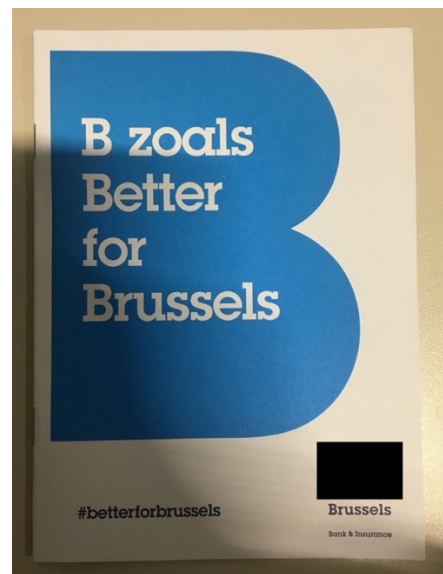
This approach is also reflected in the brand’s general advertising, as can be seen in Figure 6, where English is mixed with Dutch in a new slogan: “B zoals Better for Brussels” (translation: “B as in Better for Brussels”). Similar posters and advertising were also published with French–English slogans and fully in English.

This reflexively scaled brand strategy which acknowledged the local bilingual Brussels context as well as the international nature of the city reached beyond the more emblematic use of English in the brand name and slogan and was also reflected in all external communication of FinCorp Brussels. In addition to the availability of all communication in both Dutch and French, a language manager shared that employees in the FinCorp Brussels offices are proficient in a total of 29 different languages and that written communication is published to different extents in 11 different languages, because this allows the brand to connect with (potential) clients in a more personalized

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from Dutch original: “Eén, dat is een compromis belge. Daarmee moet je niet kiezen voor FinCorp of FinCorp Wallonië, wat in Brussel bijzonder gevoelig ligt. Dus en FinCorp Brussels geeft eigenlijk ook wel een soort, ja, gevoel over Brussel weer, want Brussel is een internationale stad, Brussel is een metropool, Brussel is de hoofdstad van Europa. Dus op zich waren dat eigenlijk twee elementen die meegespeeld hebben: niet moeten kiezen en kleur bekennen op vlak van taal en cultuur, en anderzijds de internationale context van Brussel onderstrepen.”

way, specifically with so-called “expats”. He provided an example of a webinar that was at the time being prepared in Spanish, in order to inform Spanish “expats” about FinCorp Brussels’ services. Given that this multilingualism was not observed in any of the other datasets or mentioned by any of the other language managers, it became clear that these multilingual efforts occur on a localized scale in order to tap into a relatively small globalized market of “expat” clients with presumed high capital in certain high-end areas of the city, for profit purposes.



*Figure 6. Dutch-English advertisement for the launch of FinCorp Brussels, 2015*

Additionally, all FinCorp Brussels information on the website is made available in Dutch, French, and English. According to a language manager, this explicitly multilingual approach does not only differ from the FinCorp approach, but also from competing financial institutions in the city, which often mainly use French. Such a strategic glocalised approach, which combines a more international multilingual mindset with both acute attention to the deterritorialized use of English and the local officially bilingual intricacies of the city of Brussels, has led the new brand to prosper and expand at a rapid pace over the past five years, underlining the importance of an external communication strategy that is in line with the city’s linguistic reality in order to thrive as a company.

A language manager explained that this multilingual shift proved to be more complex on an internal level, as all of the existing personnel that had previously worked for either FinCorp or FinCorp Wallonia in Brussels had previously only been required to have proficiency in one of the two official languages, let alone in languages other than French or Dutch, and were now suddenly required to work together. To solve this problem, the CEO for FinCorp Brussels implemented an explicit and formalized language policy for the new brand in 2018. This entailed that all FinCorp Brussels employees are expected to reach a minimum level of B1 on the CEFR scale in both French and Dutch, which is increased to B2 for managerial positions. This threshold needs to be reached either when new personnel is recruited or maximum three years after their start date. If an employee fails to meet the language requirements, FinCorp Brussels pays for their language courses and the employee is required to retake the test after three years. If they fail to meet the requirement once more, it is contractual grounds for termination of employment.

After two decades of monolingualism in both FinCorp and FinCorp Wallonia, these language requirements caused opposition by long-term local employees who did not agree with the new measures; a language manager reported that in 2019 alone, 60 employees terminated their employment at FinCorp Brussels, from which approximately 20 did so as a direct result of the implementation of the new language policy. In addition to this strict bilingual language policy, the language management strategy at FinCorp Brussels also took into account the increasing presence of English in specific internationalized neighborhoods of the city, particularly around the EU institutions and in the residential areas of so-called “expats”. This entailed that they expect employees working in the 11 branches located in these quarters to be able to speak English in addition to French and Dutch. English at FinCorp Brussels is thus more than a neutral option amidst Dutch-French friction and forms an integral part of its quotidian local business.

Before 2015, internal communication at FinCorp had been relatively straightforward because of their implicit monolingual language policy. However, it was difficult for clients to navigate the brand in Brussels, as both FinCorp and FinCorp Wallonia

offices were present in one city. After 2015, the establishment of FinCorp Brussels represented a shift in priorities by making it easier for clients to navigate the brand under one new name, but it also put employees who had gotten accustomed to the ease of monolingualism in a difficult position. As such, multilingualism is now considered to be a commodifiable resource and has therefore become a priority on the basis of profit-based ideologies, but it does arguably remain an internal barrier as a result of a pride-based monolingual language ideology that the employees internalized from their previous workplaces.

Differing language ideologies characterized the internal and external communication strategies at FinCorp and FinCorp Brussels during this third period. For FinCorp, the Dutch-only language practices remained fueled by an ideological conviction that underlines the importance of Dutch and the position of Flanders in Belgium (against the background of the historical language conflict and Flemish national sensitivities), while it also increasingly recognized the profit-based potential value of English to generate profit and facilitate market expansion. Dutch therefore not only had a practical use, but also a pride-based affiliative function, as it was used to maintain the company's so-called "Flemish DNA". English, however, was used in a more symbolic manner (Kelly-Holmes, 2014) as it carried indexical ties to globalization, digitalization and a modern company image. Such (symbolic) use of English was also present at FinCorp Brussels, yet tied to a different language ideology, as the new brand put forward a language ideological stance which embraced the city's superdiversity and multilingualism, including the use of English as well as other languages. As part of this new brand and ideological stance, Dutch also lost its affiliative function tied to the company's "Flemish DNA", as FinCorp Brussels presented itself as a bilingual Dutch-French company. FinCorp and FinCorp Brussels were thus characterized by strongly differing language practices (monolingual versus multilingual), management (implicit versus explicit language policies) and ideologies (Flemish pride-based nationalist ideology versus profit-based urban superdiversity). At the same time, however, both approaches were fueled by a desire to be embedded in the local scales of their respective contexts, as well as to be considered relevant and attractive in international

financial markets, which ultimately reflects itself in differing yet strongly glocalised language strategies.

## 4.6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article, we have reconstructed over 20 years of top-down language policy in the form of practice, management and ideology from a socio-historical perspective at a Belgian financial institution. This was done on the basis of archival data, interviews with language managers, and insights into the company's website with the aim of laying bare (i) what sociolinguistic impact the structural changes within FinCorp had on language *practice* and language *management* at the company in Brussels, and (ii) which underlying linguistic *ideologies* can be observed as part of the structural changes at FinCorp, specifically within the Brussels language-sensitive context. In doing so, we adopted a discursive approach to language policy (Barakos & Unger, 2016) and have strengthened Angouri's (2013) claim that sociolinguistics can offer a fruitful framework for grasping the linguistic workings of a specific company which continuously evolves as part of a scaled societal context.

The analysis has provided insight into the different scalar levels of embeddedness which inform FinCorp's political economy and sociolinguistic functioning. The company's development itself was divided into three periods of time on the basis of key structural changes in the form of mergers and the establishment of new brands. Each of the periods was characterized by differing language policies which developed from an implicit monolingual Dutch language policy in the early stages of FinCorp to a formalized Dutch-French language policy at FinCorp Brussels in 2020. This development was then contextualized in light of the company's regional scale, as FinCorp's initial main target audience were inhabitants of Flanders during the first period and then developed more specifically into Dutch-speaking Belgians during the second period. However, FinCorp's presence in Brussels brought to light the complexities of territorial monolingualism in the urban, superdiverse and highly multilingual capital, resulting in several scale-jumps through the establishment of a

glocalized new Brussels-based bilingual brand in 2015. These complexities were then examined in the context of the national scale of Belgium and shed light on how an MNC navigates local embeddedness and the construction of a corporate image and culture in a country as divided and complexly structured as Belgium. The analysis shows that the historical language struggle lies at the base of the deeply rooted Flemish nationalist ideology present at FinCorp, which in turn clarifies the belief in the importance of Dutch as a common corporate language and the initial opposition against the infiltration of other languages in their corporate culture. This nationally embedded pride-based language ideology eventually shifted after an initial period of resistance as English started to gain importance in the 2000s, a development which can be interpreted in light of upscaling to the international scale of globalized financial markets and the influence of English that has gained particular capital on linguistic markets across the globe under the belief that it is the only language necessary for international communication (Phillipson, 2017). As a result of the company's own internationalization efforts, the connotational value of English was commodified on the basis of a profit-based ideology to illustrate its internationalized image, but the language was nevertheless not adopted as the common corporate language, as is often observed in other internationalized MNCs (Fredriksson et al., 2006).

These different levels of scalar embeddedness bring to light the constant balancing act of the company's language strategy as they navigated their way through pride- and profit-based language ideologies (Duchêne & Heller, 2012), and a few of the data examples showcase that the company actively reflected on this in the form of articles in HelloMagazine. Although the company still persists in underlining its "Flemish DNA", the commodified value of English from an international perspective and of French from a regional perspective have caused shifts in priorities as well as scale-jumps, resulting in an increased use of English and the establishment of a local multilingual new brand in Brussels. To appeal to the client's needs, FinCorp has thus constantly had to reevaluate their linguistic priorities over the course of 20 years, having to take into consideration both their Flemish image which has provided them with a large market share, as well as their internationalization efforts and the potential value of non-Dutch speaking clients in a highly multilingual city. This has resulted in



an increasingly profitable linguistic glocalization strategy which delicately balances the two, and which can only be fully grasped through a scaled approach of the societal contexts that inform the linguistic workings of this continuously evolving company.

Despite the differences in FinCorp and FinCorp Brussels' current language policies, the observed developments over time and the changes made across different spatiotemporal scales underline the importance of a tailor-made language policy that is adapted to a brand or company's specific needs in terms of practice, management and ideology (Sanden, 2016; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). Such a socio-historical approach, which had already been shown to be particularly apt in different institutional contexts and to examine different subjects (Barakos, 2020; Duchêne, 2008; Garrido, 2021; Sokolovska, 2016), we argued is highly suitable to underline the need for such a tailor-made language policy and to highlight the societal complexities that influence and shape a company's multiscalar language policy development in light of globalization.

By examining corporate language changes and structural shifts over the years and including pride- and profit-based language ideologies in the analysis, we have provided further detailed insight into the development of corporate language practices, management and ideology from a holistic perspective. This case study has uncovered the complexities of linguistically navigating different scalar levels of embeddedness in a globalized financial marketplace and has aimed to transcend the gap between socio-historically embedded linguistic practice and research that does not yet comprehensively take this complex embeddedness into account, underlining that companies function as multiscalar, continuously evolving entities and that corporate language policy and practice should therefore be researched as such.

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# 5 THE SYMBOLIC VALUE OF LANGUAGE IN A COMPLEX LINGUISTIC MARKET: EXPERIENCES OF PROFESSIONAL TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANTS IN BRUSSELS

De Malsche, F., & Vandenbroucke, M. (forthcoming). The symbolic value of language in a complex linguistic market: Experiences of professional transnational migrants in Brussels. In F. Tallarico & L. Gajo (Eds.), *Multilingualism at Work: Methods, Practices, Teaching*. Peter Lang Verlag.

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, scholars across disciplines have focused their attention on processes of migration and how such processes interact with other social phenomena. In sociolinguistic research, the language use and linguistic experiences of migrants have become broadly studied topics of interest, particularly in the context of working-class migrants who move across international borders and who often lack capital, be it either economic or symbolic in nature (Vailati & Rial, 2016). Empirical research that maps the linguistic experiences of migrants who have substantial economic and/or symbolic capital is comparatively scarcer (Leinonen, 2012), although reaching a deeper understanding of the complexity of language in processes of migration requires incorporating the perspectives of all types of migrants.

This study topicalizes professional transnational migrants who have also been described as ‘expats’ (Cranston, 2017) or ‘global employees’ (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014), who are often highly educated, perform white-collar jobs, and are characterized by their geographical mobility and desire to pursue ‘boundaryless’ global careers (Itani et al., 2015).<sup>1</sup> In this study, we examine how these migrants deal with language as part of their quotidian international lives, with a specific focus on (i) their perceptions of the role and symbolic value of languages in their lives, (ii) how these perceptions both influence and are shaped by their experiences in the temporary context of their stay in Brussels, and (iii) how their perceptions and experiences can be understood in light of the specific symbolic market - in this case a linguistic market - in which they occur (Bourdieu, 1991). The city of Brussels is an officially bilingual yet in reality superdiverse and highly multilingual city and thus offers a particularly apt context for such a sociolinguistic enquiry.

Our analysis is based on a dataset of 31 in-depth interviews with professional transnational migrants who are currently residing in Brussels, who have moved across

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<sup>1</sup> Although the term ‘expat(riate)’ is often used in the literature, we refrain from doing so with the exception of direct citations or references to literature because the term can be considered problematic (see Cranston, 2017 for a detailed discussion).

international borders in the past, and who plan to seek further professional mobility in the future. By eliciting their experiences with language throughout their global trajectories, we aim to uncover their perceptions of the role and symbolic value of language that are at play in their lives, as they are inseparable from their decision-making processes and interpretations of events (Barakos & Selleck, 2019). In doing so, we critically examine how these beliefs are ratified in lived experiences, particularly in the specific context of the symbolic linguistic market of Brussels. We find that the professional transnational migrants queried in this study encounter a number of (at times unexpected) difficulties assessing in navigating this linguistic market, and that they link these problems to the particular linguistic reality and complexity of the city.

In the next section, we present the linguistic market as a conceptual symbolic metaphor to capture the complexity of assessing the value of language. In Section 5.3, we elaborate on the specific context of bilingual Brussels with a focus on superdiversity, multilingualism, and official bilingualism as its everyday realities. After presenting our research questions and methods in Section 5.4, we discuss the results in Section 5.5. Based on our analysis, we conclude that this research contributes to our understanding of the role and symbolic value of language in more privileged processes of migration.

## 5.2 LANGUAGE AS PART OF A SYMBOLIC LINGUISTIC MARKET

To examine and understand the professional transnational migrants' experiences with language(s) in Brussels, we rely on Bourdieu's (1991) notion of the 'linguistic market' according to which all languages and language varieties essentially function as commodities and are attributed symbolic value depending on the context in which they are used. In such Bourdieusian linguistic markets, languages are hierarchically ordered on the basis of their symbolic value, and proficiency in or knowledge of certain languages can thus provide individuals with symbolic capital that in turn can facilitate their access to financial gains (Bourdieu, 1991). For professional transnational



migrants, such symbolic capital arguably also has the potential to grant them access to more privileged forms of mobility.

The attribution of value to symbolic capital depends on the market in which it occurs, and even when such a market does not necessarily involve the material exchange of goods or services, it is arguably influenced by processes that are similar to the price formation processes of economic markets (Duchêne, 2011). Although the conceptualization of language as a commodity (Del Percio et al., 2016; Heller, 2003; 2010) is not uncontested in the literature (see Petrovic & Yazan, 2021 for an extensive overview), there is a consensus that “there is something going on with language, with the way that we think about language, and how language gets called into being in particular kinds of ways within late capitalism” (Petrovic & Yazan, 2021, p. 3). Within this context, individuals measure and evaluate the ‘return potential’ of their skills for both the individual and the economy (Holborow, 2015, p. 15) with the aim of gaining symbolic benefits which can in turn facilitate access to economic capital (Martín Rojo, 2018).

Particularly in the service sector, multilingual workers are considered more valuable than monolingual workers because they possess a higher number of skills (Duchêne, 2011). However, similar to economic markets, the symbolic linguistic market also values skills on the basis of market supply and demand, resulting in hierarchies of linguistic repertoires depending on the context in which they are being assessed. As such, individuals proficient in multiple languages, especially languages that are considered valuable in a particular symbolic market, are more likely to steer towards career mobility and pursue a ‘boundaryless career’ (Itani et al., 2015).

Proficiency in English in particular is accredited significant symbolic value on linguistic markets across the world, as it is considered a global lingua franca in both business and other contexts and believed to provide a practical solution to problems related to multilingualism (Duchêne & Del Percio, 2014). Although scholars have argued that such presuppositions are problematic because they represent an overly simplistic answer to an exceedingly complex problem (Park, 2011; Park & Wee, 2012), the global

commodification of English is shaped by this persistent belief which serves as a ‘mediating force’ between language and economy (Barakos & Selleck, 2019).

In this chapter, we examine how the professional transnational migrants at the center of this study assess the role of their multilingual repertoires in pursuing their boundaryless careers, and how they try to meet the demands of the symbolic and economic market(s) they are active in. In the following section, we elaborate on the specific (socio)linguistic environment and symbolic linguistic market of Brussels and why the city is an apt context to gain a better understanding of how the (linguistic) experiences and beliefs of professional transnational migrants can be shaped by a specific locality.

### 5.3 THE SUPERDIVERSE AND MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT OF BRUSSELS

The Brussels-Capital Region is a highly multilingual and multicultural area that functions as the *de jure* capital of Belgium and the *de facto* capital of Europe.<sup>2</sup> The city harbors extensive demographic diversity “brought by large scale immigration in the last few decades, that covers the full range from colonial migrants and guest workers, through refugees, to highly skilled professionals of all nationalities” (Favell, 2001, p. 11). With 71,4% of the population reported to be a first-, second- or third-generation migrant (Statistiek Vlaanderen, 2018), Brussels has become a superdiverse city (Vertovec, 2007) and can even be considered a majority-minority city (Janssens, 2016) where the traditional majority communities have, in fact, become minorities.

Brussels’ superdiversity and multilingualism are encapsulated by and stand in contrast with its strict official French-Dutch bilingual legal status imposed by the federal structure of Belgium. The country is characterized by territorial monolingualism in

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<sup>2</sup> All references to Brussels refer to the broader area of the Brussels-Capital Region, an urban agglomeration of 19 municipalities.

Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia, while Brussels is officially bilingual French-Dutch. However, the capital is in reality predominantly French-speaking as a result of a historical language shift to French during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Van Velthoven, 1987). As part of this historical and protracted language struggle, the official status of Dutch in the city does not represent a linguistic reality, but rather represents a political power struggle that is deeply rooted in opposing (language) ideologies and has been developing over the course of multiple decades (Blommaert, 2011). Brussels thus remains an ‘unsolvable problem’ (Blommaert, 2011) and language remains a controversial topic and highly sensitive source of conflict in Belgian politics and society.

Recent language census data indicate that French is still by far the most widely known language amongst Brussels’ population, followed by English and with Dutch only in third place (Janssens, 2018). This growing importance of English can partly be attributed to its international standing as the global lingua franca commonly used in the international organizations and political institutions Brussels harbors. Additionally, English functions as a way not to get involved in the use of ideologically charged official languages amidst Dutch-French socio-political conflict, creating a different ideological local role for the language in Belgium and Brussels. This is also reflected in Brussels-based businesses, where monolingual French workplaces have been replaced by a majority of multilingual ones that primarily include different combinations of French, English and/or Dutch (Janssens, 2018). Moreover, half of the job advertisements in the city explicitly list multilingual job competencies as requirements, with 40% of them requiring English (Actiris, 2020).

The city’s complex linguistic reality and strict language laws can be a potential source of confusion or frustration for newcomers. For example, a guide designed for ‘expats’ states that contact with authorities in Belgium can only occur in national languages (Van Droogenbroeck, 2011), whereas a different guide states: “Perhaps you might be confronted with a linguistic problem, but English is spoken in all the Town Halls” (*Expats in Brussels*, 2020, p. 20). This exemplifies the intricacies of an officially bilingual capital city that is in reality predominantly French-speaking as well as highly

multilingual, and the difficulties that newcomers can face to gain accurate information on sanctioned and accepted language use in the city, let alone to understand the complexities and the sensitivities involved.

Additionally, the linguistic experiences and expectations of professional transnational migrants differ from those of less privileged migrants, who are often encouraged to integrate linguistically in order to gain access to the job market and the host society in general (Duchêne, 2016; Flubacher et al., 2016; Van Hoof et al., 2020), something that is arguably less expected from temporary migrants. In Brussels, the linguistic requirements in job vacancies also differ strongly for jobs that are aimed at blue-collar workers and white-collar workers, as well as for those job seekers who are highly educated and those who are not (Actiris, 2020). As such, the beliefs and experiences of migrants in this specific multilingual symbolic linguistic market cannot be generalized, but rather should be examined from different (yet potentially overlapping) perspectives. This study aims to address this gap in knowledge by topicalizing how the professional transnational migrants involved in this study deal with language and make sense of the role and value of language on a quotidian basis in light of the complex Brussels linguistic market.

## 5.4 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Against the background outlined in the previous sections, this study aims to answer three main research questions:

- I. How the professional transnational migrants perceive the role and symbolic value of languages in their lives;
- II. How these perceptions both influence and are shaped by their experiences in the temporary context of their stay in Brussels;

- III. How their perceptions and experiences can be understood in light of the specific symbolic linguistic market in which they occur.

To answer these questions, the first author conducted 31 semi-structured in-depth interviews with professional transnational migrants via Skype. In addition to participant recruitment via the social media platforms Facebook and InterNations, snowball sampling was used to recruit more interviewees (see Cranston, 2017; Leinonen, 2012). The participants were invited to talk about their experiences and challenges with multilingual workplaces, language in their international lives, and local (linguistic) integration in Brussels. The elicitation of such metalinguistic commentary required a high degree of reflexivity from the participants.

All interviews took place between May and September 2020. After pseudonymized transcription, the data were coded and analyzed using NVivo and an open coding approach allowed for an analysis of emerging themes throughout the coding process (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). In our analysis, we adopt a social constructionist point of view which emphasizes the role of both the interviewer and the interviewee in the construction of reality and meaning in interaction.

The participants of this study were selected according to three criteria. The first was their presence in the Brussels-Capital Region for at least six months. The second was their international mobility trajectory (i.e. they are not citizens of Belgium, they do not actively plan on staying there permanently, and they have in the past moved to a new country more than once). The third criterion was a personal focus on a professional 'boundaryless career' (Itani et al., 2015), entailing that one of the main motivations for their international mobility is linked to the advancement of their careers. This is considered a focal point as the experiences of this type of migrant are underrepresented in current sociolinguistic knowledge.

The final set of 31 participants consists of 23 women and 8 men whose nationalities span across 4 different continents: 7 North American, 2 South American, 22 European and 5 Asian, with 5 of them identifying with more than one nationality. With the

exception of one participant, all interviewees had obtained at least one degree from a higher education institution. 14 of the participants worked for (large) corporations, 10 worked for political or government institutions, 4 were self-employed, 2 worked for an NGO, and 1 was a teacher. All participants were multilingual (i.e. proclaimed proficiency in more than two languages), with a total of 28 different languages known and only 3 participants reporting proficiency in less than 4 different languages.

## 5.5 NAVIGATING THE BRUSSELS MULTILINGUAL LINGUISTIC MARKET

In the next sections, we present an analysis that is divided into two parts. In Section 5.5.1, we examine the ways in which the professional transnational migrants reflect on the role and symbolic value of languages that do not enjoy official status in Brussels, i.e. all languages apart from French and Dutch. Section 5.5.2 then focuses on the role and valorization of the city's official languages, French and Dutch. The specific excerpts and examples examined as part of the analysis do not aim to function as general representations of the full dataset, nor does the analysis overall claim to represent all professional transnational migrants in Brussels. Instead, the analysis aims to illustrate the diversity and complexity of professional transnational migrants' experiences, specifically the ones who participated in this study. In doing so, we outline both their individual experiences as well as similarities that the analysis uncovers in their stories.

### 5.5.1 Assessing the symbolic value of non-official languages in Brussels

In symbolic markets across the globe, proficiency in English is believed to grant access to better jobs as well as more knowledge and information, which can ultimately lead you to “be recognized as a better person” (Park, 2011, p. 443). This belief is implicitly

and explicitly shared by all of the participants, some of whom describe the role of English in their lives as "my most important asset linguistically speaking", "by far the most useful language that I ever learned", and "a big advantage." A Spanish woman adds that it "opens so many doors", and an Italian woman shares that it was "very important if I wanted to a bit also escape my reality", exemplifying the symbolic importance of English proficiency in seeking new opportunities and experiences, thereby ultimately improving the quality of their lives. This global symbolic value of English proficiency is also considered obvious, particularly when the participants discuss the linguistic upbringing of their (future) children, with a large majority of interviewees wanting their children to master English. Overall, the interviews reflect the shared assumptions from both native and non-native speakers that the high symbolic value of English is uncontested across the globe, rather than tied to specific contexts or local linguistic markets.

The participants share similar positive attitudes towards multilingualism, and most of the participants also explicitly express that they would want their (future) children to be multilingual. For some, the reasoning behind this is linked to a belief that international and multilingual environments create open-minded people. For example, a Turkish man shares that he has two children who currently speak English, Turkish, French and some Dutch, but that he would like for them to also learn Spanish and Arabic in the future because he "wish[es] that they have a broader worldview." Similarly, utterances such as "the more languages, the merrier", as shared by a Greek participant, perpetuate the shared idea that the accumulation of symbolic (linguistic) capital enables self-development (Martín Rojo, 2018).

A participant from the USA who works as an independent engineering consultant explains why he believes his multilingual repertoire, which consist of elementary Dutch and French and native English, is an added value on the (Belgian) job market:

"I think it is, just because people will think more highly of you as intelligent if you speak more than one language. I never really- I can't imagine it would really come up in any of my jobs, because as I said, everything's in English, but I

think if you- I think if they understand you speak, you know, you speak several languages, they understand that your, you know, that your learning capabilities and your interests are wide and varied, and so that adds to credibility. So like on my LinkedIn profile, I put that on my profile, because I think it helps.”

As part of his strategy to capitalize on his belief that multilingualism, intelligence and open-mindedness are tied together, he added his multilingual repertoire to his LinkedIn profile under the assumption that the symbolic value he attributes to it will be interpreted similarly by potential clients, and in doing so, he hopes that the symbolic value of his multilingual proficiency will facilitate his access to financial gains. This example thus illustrates the almost tokenistic display value that can be ascribed by individuals to multilingual proficiency in a specific linguistic market.

These reflections on the symbolic value of English and multilingual repertoires are also locally embedded in the participants’ expectations and assumptions of the city of Brussels and are part of the reason why the majority of the participants decided to move there or part of what has made them positively reflect on their stay. For example, an American woman who is a native speaker of English and also has some proficiency in Spanish and French shares that:

“You can hear every language you can imagine here, even just sitting where I am now [in a café], if I take out my earphones I’m sure I’ll hear like four different languages going on. People really come from everywhere here and I think English ties a lot of cultures together.”

This is a sentiment that is shared by many of the participants, who positively evaluate the omnipresence of multilingualism in Brussels as a pull factor, and who report on making use of English as the lingua franca of this superdiverse city. As such, the general beliefs that the participants share with regard to the high symbolic value of English proficiency and multilingual repertoires are part of what makes the local international context of Brussels attractive to them as a potential home, as they consider Brussels to be a superdiverse, multilingual, and international city.



As argued by Bourdieu (1991), languages in a linguistic market are hierarchically ordered, leading to ‘sociolinguistic hierarchies’ (Barakos & Selleck, 2019). In the stories told by the participants, we see how they also embody such hierarchizations in their expressions of belief that proficiency in specific languages (including in particular English, German, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, Japanese, and (Mandarin) Chinese) enjoys particularly high symbolic value across the globe. In Brussels, however, some participants share that the abundance of multilinguals seems to have affected the city’s linguistic market in such a way that even these symbolically valued non-official languages are not or no longer in demand in the workplace as a result of an excess supply of white-collar multilingual workers. For example, when asked if her language skills are an added value on the Brussels job market, an Austrian participant with reported proficiency in German, English and French who works for a business association answers: “No, I wouldn’t say so, because especially in Brussels I’m not-like, I am not a great exception. It’s like, usually people speak more languages than I do, so (laughs).” Despite the fact that her linguistic repertoire consists of languages that all supposedly have high symbolic value on linguistic markets across the globe, she would not consider them an added value on the Brussels job market specifically because of the increased competitiveness that has resulted from an influx of multilingual white-collar workers. Similar experiences of unexpected competition or disappointment are shared by other participants who have native or high proficiency in some of the other non-official languages that are believed to have high symbolic value across the globe.

In sum, the experiences and beliefs shared by the professional transnational migrants reveal that the presumed symbolic value of specific linguistic skills does not necessarily facilitate access to economic capital in contexts where the supply of language skills exceeds the demand, laying bare a contrast between the expectations and the reality of navigating the complex Brussels linguistic market. As such, the participants paradoxically experience the multilingualism and presence of English in Brussels both as a blessing and a curse; on the one hand, most of them consider it a pull factor for migration to the city and an aspect that they consider to have a highly positive influence on their stay, but on the other hand, the abundance of multilinguals in the city has

resulted in a job market that is somewhat linguistically saturated. This then makes it more difficult for internationals in the city to capitalize on the symbolic value of their multilingual repertoires, thus potentially causing uncertainty, unexpected difficulties, or unfulfilled expectations.

### 5.5.2 Understanding the intricacies and symbolic value of Dutch and French

In line with research from the field of language economics which has argued that migrants around the world take into consideration the language(s) of the destination country in deciding where to move to (Chiswick & Miller, 2015), a large majority of the participants of this study reported to take languages into account when deciding where to move next. In doing so, they arguably create internal limitations to their boundaryless careers paths in addition to the external limitations that are set by nationality, citizenship and culture (Scurry et al., 2013), and this is also the case for their move to Brussels. Although their overall experiences make it clear that it is possible for them to live in the city only using languages that do not have official status (including English), one Greek participant makes a conscious distinction between getting around and feeling at home: “With a bit of English you can survive, just survive everywhere (...) but if you want to mingle with the locals and to really feel the culture behind the language, I think that both languages are necessary.” This (linguistic) integration rather than ‘survival’ is something that most participants proclaim to strive for. In general, they also express overtly negative attitudes towards the so-called EU or ‘expat’ bubbles of people who speak neither Dutch nor French. In this respect, we see a stark difference between the participants of this study, who reflect on their willingness to learn local languages as a personal choice, and less privileged migrants, for whom learning the local languages is often experienced as a necessity in order to gain access to the job market and the host society in general (Duchêne, 2016; Flubacher et al., 2016; Van Hoof et al., 2020).

The idea that local languages are important to make the most of their stay in Brussels is also reflected in the linguistic skills of the interviewees, as only two of the 31 participants do not report any proficiency in French or Dutch, and both of them express eagerness to learn French in the (near) future. In line with the reasoning that language is a deciding factor in their international trajectories, those who already spoke French and/or Dutch explained that they oftentimes were drawn to Brussels because they expected to be able to use their language skills resourcefully, and those who did not yet have any proficiency in either language enrolled in classes and/or are actively working on improving their skills. Despite the temporary nature of their stays, the professional transnational migrants in this study thus consider the official languages important, both for professional career opportunities and for personal participation in Brussels' society.

With 28 out of the 31 participants reporting at least some proficiency in French, and with French being the most widely spoken language in the city (Janssens, 2018), most participants share positive experiences and few difficulties regarding French in the Brussels context. Nevertheless, some participants still reported running into some specific problems. For example, an English teacher from the USA with basic French proficiency shares that she experienced social exclusion in her workplace: "The meetings are given in French and English, but the problem is, you know, it's predominantly a French-speaking school, while they all speak English they prefer French, and a lot of things get missed." A different Hungarian participant who has high proficiency in French shares that she speaks a non-standard variety of the language and that she encountered prejudice regarding her accent during job interviews: "They will immediately hear my accent, so they will like 'yes, you are not French' and blablabla, so like there will be like a judgment immediately." These judgments as well as the exclusion experienced by the teacher are not unique to the Brussels context, as both the judgment of non-standardized varieties of French (Bourdieu, 1991) as well as processes of social exclusion in the workplace (Lønsmann, 2014) can and do occur similarly in other contexts around the globe.

Different experiences arise regarding the use and presence of Dutch in the city, a language that 11 participants report to know to a certain extent. The majority of these participants share anecdotes regarding the refusal of locals to speak Dutch with them, like this participant from the UK who tried to order in Dutch in a Brussels restaurant:

“I asked for the thing in Dutch because on the menu it was in French and Dutch, like everywhere, right, and I said it in Dutch and she looked at me like I was a crazy person basically, you know like, what are you talking about (laughs). And then I kind of realized like oh, okay, people don't really speak Dutch.”

The language laws in the city (‘Taalwet Bestuurszaken’) also state that citizens have the right to be addressed in the official language of their choice by government personnel, yet a Dutch participant explains that it is “very rare” to find people in city hall who are able to speak Dutch, nor is he always able to receive official documentation in Dutch. As most participants who speak Dutch also have at least some proficiency in French, they claim to still be able to navigate Brussels linguistically, but the discrepancies between the city’s official bilingualism and linguistic reality are considered surprising and disappointing by all participants who speak the language.

The reasons why Dutch is rarely used and at times even pejoratively denounced in Brussels seem to be largely unclear to the participants, both to those who speak Dutch and those who do not. When asking the participants if or to what extent they understand the complexity of the linguistic situation of Brussels and Belgium, two thirds of the participants reply negatively, that they are not sure, and/or provide inaccurate information (thereby showcasing that they do not understand all of the nuances and the complicated nature of the issue). Overall, the understanding of the linguistic complexity and (historical) sensitivities can be presented on a continuum, ranging from a handful of participants who present a clear grasp of the intricacies of language in both Brussels and Belgium, to those who believe Brussels to be officially French-speaking, or those who simply reply to the question with: “Understand? I kind of gave up at one point (laughs)”, as one Canadian participant jokes. The majority of

the participants are somewhere in the middle of this spectrum and they understand that language and politics are related and that it is a sensitive topic in Belgium. However, they have not reached deep insight into how language and politics are intertwined specifically, why language is so strictly regulated by law, or how the complexity and sensitivities came about, nor do they seem to be aware of the position of English as an alternative or compromise.

This lack of a full grasp of the historically shaped language-related sensitivities in Brussels often leads to assumptions about Dutch having high local symbolic value as one of the city's official languages. This is, for example, the case for a Chinese-Canadian woman who works as a self-employed physiotherapist, who explains that when she arrived in Belgium, she was confronted with the choice between two separate civic integration paths in Dutch or French that are offered to newcomers by the Belgian government, resulting in confusion: "I have to say, as a foreigner, when you say 'come to Belgium' and then you have to choose a community? That's really weird." Under the assumption that the two official languages carried equal status and opportunities, she opted for the Flemish trajectory but now regrets this choice, explaining: "Realistically, to work here in Brussels, probably I should have gone, you know, French." When she came to this realization, switching to the French-speaking integration trajectory and learning French instead of Dutch was no longer possible. This arguably harmed her career potential in Brussels, because a higher proficiency in French early on could have resulted in more Brussels-based clientele and thus more business and income for her physiotherapy practice.

Although none of the other participants' reported experiences include such explicit negative consequences of choosing to focus on learning Dutch instead of French, her specific story does show that a lack of understanding of the symbolic value of a language in a specific linguistic market can result in inaccurate assessments of its economic 'return potential' (Holborow, 2015) and thus in a possible setback in one's professional career. Similarly, most of the participants share confusion and/or misunderstanding regarding language use and language laws in Brussels to different degrees, and this lays bare the difficulties that professional transnational migrants can

face with regard to navigating the language-related sensitivities in Brussels and the potentially harmful consequences that can arise if the symbolic value of a specific language within that market is unknown or misinterpreted.

## 5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has empirically explored how a group of professional transnational migrants perceives the role and symbolic value of language in their lives, and how their perceptions can both influence and are shaped by their experiences during their residence in the city of Brussels. Additionally, we examined how their perceptions and experiences can be understood in light of the Bourdieusian symbolic metaphor of the linguistic market, taking into account the societal processes which can influence the assessment of (symbolic) capital in a globalized era. Overall, the results thereby contribute to our understanding of the role and value of language in processes of migration from a privileged perspective.

The analysis is highly localized, as the stories and experiences shared by the participants tell us more about how the relationship between migration and language is experienced in practice in the highly multilingual and superdiverse or so-called majority-minority city of Brussels (Janssens, 2016). Through these experiences, we have explored the intricacies the participants experienced when moving to and living in an officially Dutch-French capital city where more people know English than Dutch and which hosts a substantial number of all sorts of migrants, thereby revealing and simultaneously underlining the complexity of their linguistic expectations, assumptions, and realities in a specific context.

Finally, this chapter has provided further insight into the specific experiences of these privileged migrants with language, as the stories and beliefs they shared highlight the differences between them and those who have less economic and/or symbolic capital. In general, previous research has argued that less privileged migrants encounter less opportunities on the job market, and for this reason, they are often encouraged to learn

local languages and integrate linguistically as part of a ‘logic of efficiency’ in which their success rate on the job market is assumed to increase if they invest in learning language(s) that are supposedly inherently valuable (Duchêne, 2016; Flubacher et al., 2016; Van Hoof et al., 2020). Moreover, the lack of job opportunities is particularly detrimental in Brussels, where the number of jobs for low-educated workers halved, whereas the number of jobs for high-educated workers doubled between 1990 and 2011 (Jobat, 2017). As such, one’s lack of economic and/or symbolic capital can be linked directly to the host society’s high expectations regarding their (linguistic) integration (Flubacher et al., 2016), a pressure that was not reported in this way in the experiences shared by the professional transnational migrants. Additionally, less privileged migrants arguably have less agency or freedom in deciding whether or not to move to a location where their linguistic repertoires are presumed to have high symbolic value. Overall, the expectations regarding (local) language proficiency and symbolic value arguably differ significantly when it comes to different types of migrants, suggesting that the linguistic market is stratified in this respect. As a consequence, the stark differences between the role of language and language-related experiences in the international trajectories of professional transnational migrants and those with less economic and/or symbolic capital must urge us to consider a wider set of perspectives spanning all types of migrants in order to reach a more profound sociolinguistic understanding of the complexity of language in processes of migration.

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# 6 CATEGORIZING (PRIVILEGED) MIGRATION: A CONTEXTUALIZED APPROACH TO EMIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF MIGRATION- RELATED SOCIAL CATEGORIES

De Malsche, F., & Vandenbroucke, M. (in preparation).

This chapter is in preparation for submission as a journal article at *DiGeSt Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*.

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

As a result of processes of late modern globalization, migration has become an increasingly topical focus in the social and human sciences over the past few decades. In studying migration, different terminology is frequently used to refer to those who migrate, not only across disciplines, but also according to the type of individual under study. Such terminologies, or (social) categories, can either be emic, i.e. based on the term(s) that migrants use to self-identify with, or etic, i.e. decided upon by an outsider who labels an individual as belonging to a certain category on the basis of shared attributes (Harris, 1976). In academic research, grouping individuals together typically forms part of the analytical process, and the categories of analysis which are operationalized to achieve this are often identified from the researcher's perspective rather than by the categorical subjects, i.e. the people themselves (Jacobs, 2018). Examples of such migration-related social categories include 'migrant' (and derivatives such as 'immigrant', 'emigrant', or 'transmigrant'), 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', and 'expatriate', amongst others. Previous research has already engaged extensively with the differences between and complexity resulting from the use of social categories for forced migration, specifically in academic and public discourse (see for example Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; De Coninck, 2020). However, similar insights do not yet exist vis-à-vis those who migrate voluntarily and who dispose of comparatively more economic and/or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). To date, little is thus known about how such individuals choose to refer to themselves and how they ascribe meaning to the migration-related social categories that they could be associated with.

Against this background, this paper topicalizes people who migrate with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) and who experience more privileged forms of migration as a result. More specifically, we focus on individuals who choose to cross geographic borders in order to pursue a 'boundaryless career' (Stahl et al., 2002), and it is assumed that the possibility to do so implies a considerable amount of privilege in the form of different types of capital. On the basis of a dataset comprising 31 in-depth semi-structured interviews, we aim to examine how the participants discursively construct specific migration-related categories as part of the

interactional context of a research interview, and how they position themselves in relation to these categories. In doing so, this paper examines the discrepancies between how different individuals who migrate ascribe meaning to specific migration-related categories, thereby raising questions regarding the need for reflection and transparency in the use of social categories in academic research and beyond (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Jacobs, 2018).

In the next section, we expand on the process of categorization, including the intertwined nature of processes of self- and other-categorization. In Section 6.3, we then elaborate on the different ways in which people who migrate with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital have previously been categorically mobilized in academic research, and we introduce the specific migration-related categories we chose to focus on for the purposes of this research, i.e. ‘migrant’, ‘immigrant’, and ‘expat(riate)’. After presenting our research objectives and methodology in Section 6.4, we continue by discussing the results in Section 6.5. Based on this analysis, we conclude that the migration-related categories under study can be considered ‘floating signifiers’ (Hall, 1996) or ‘elusive signifiers’ (Kunz, 2020) which overlap and intersect in their meanings as they are discursively constructed in the specific interactional context in which they are used.

## 6.2 UNDERSTANDING PROCESSES OF SELF- AND OTHER-CATEGORIZATION

Categorization is a cognitive process in which stimuli in the form of events, objects, or people are placed into a general category or group (Billig, 1985). In other words, categorization occurs so that humans can make sense of chaotic realities, and it can therefore be considered “a fundamental and universal process precisely because it satisfies a basic human need for cognitive parsimony” (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 72). Because of this, examining how categories are discursively constructed in interaction can reveal much about how humans organize their thoughts and actions and how we

make sense of the world around us (Edwards, 1991). One analytical approach which has extensively examined the discursive construction of (social) categories in interaction is that of Membership Categorization Analysis, an ethnomethodological approach which interprets the construction of categories as a means to examine how social order is achieved in a broader sense (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2015).

From a social constructionist perspective, the interactional dimension of categorization means that categories are “always situated, negotiated and emergent” (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018, p. 12) and that they can therefore never be neutral, but rather are perspectival and thus contestable (Gillespie et al., 2012; Mäkitalo, 2003). When it comes to the categorization of people, this perspectival nature of categorization processes entails that people can move between categories throughout their lifetime in addition to the fact that the way people make sense of and ascribe meaning to categories is constantly in flux (Gillespie et al., 2012; see Brahic, 2020 for an example on how this fluidity of categorization applies to migration-related categories in a transnational family context). Such a perspectival understanding of categorization implies that social categories, including those related to migration, inherently have fuzzy membership boundaries, and that the varied ways in which people categorize themselves or others is highly dependent on their positionality in relation to these categories.

Processes of categorization are commonly based on characteristics or features to identify whether an event, object, or person can be considered part of a specific category, also referred to as categorical “attributes” (Billig, 1985). As a result of the potential differences between how individuals define the attributes of specific social categories, the way in which someone would categorize themselves does not necessarily overlap with how others in turn would categorize them. Such potential discrepancies between other- and self-categorization further highlight the perspectival nature of categories, and can be considered particularly problematic in research contexts, where the reproduction of commonsense social categories can naturalize and authorize them through the legitimacy of science (Cleton & Meier, 2023; Howarth, 2009). Given that migration and mobility have become increasingly intertwined with

processes of identity construction that are characterized by flexibility and fluidity (Easthope, 2009), awareness and transparency regarding the use of emic ‘categories of practice’ versus etic ‘categories of analysis’ have become increasingly important in current research on migration (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Jacobs, 2018).

The main aim of this paper is to disentangle the varied ways in which the participants of this study, i.e. individuals who migrate with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital, ascribe meaning to specific migration-related categories as part of a research interview, and how they position themselves in relation to these categories. In doing so, we take into account that because of their participation in the study, each participant is part of a group of individuals who all share a defined set of attributes and who, as a result of these attributes, are often categorized together in scholarly literature and elsewhere, but who nevertheless do not necessarily identify themselves in similar ways, nor with the commonsensical categories that are frequently imposed on them. In the following section, we elaborate further on the social categories that are frequently used to refer to different types of people who migrate, particularly in (linguistic) research on migration.

### 6.3 CATEGORIES OF (PRIVILEGED) MIGRATION

One of the most prominent distinctions often made in migration literature as well as in non-academic discourse is the dichotomy between the terms ‘expat’ and ‘migrant’ (Yeung, 2016; Kunz, 2020), in which so-called ‘immigrants’, ‘refugees’ and ‘asylum seekers’ are usually conflated on the end of ‘migrant’ (Leinonen, 2012), while so-called ‘expats’ are construed as a monolingual but diverse group of cosmopolitan individuals (Yeung, 2016) who dispose of comparatively more symbolic and/or economic capital and privilege. This dualistic discourse then often implies inherently positive discourses surrounding ‘expats’ or ‘desirable migrants’ (Flubacher et al., 2016), whereas (undesirable) ‘migrants’ on the other end of the spectrum are associated with immigration processes which are perceived more negatively in society (Leinonen, 2012). This categorical dichotomy is typically based on a number of attributes,

including but not limited to differences in educational levels (Theodoropoulou, 2015), estimated (economic) contributions to the host society (Dalsin, 2016; Flubacher et al., 2016), motivation for mobility (Dalsin, 2016), agency in the mobility process (Withaecx et al., 2015), race and ethnicity (Cranston, 2017; Kunz, 2020), socio-economic class (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002), and the type of job performed in the host country (Lan, 2011).

The majority of existing research on migration in (socio)linguistics and sociology focuses on those who are typically conflated under the category of ‘migrant’ (Leinonen, 2012; Kunz, 2016). In the research that has been done on the migration of people with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital, a number of different terms and categories have been used, including “expat(riate)” (Green, 2009), “middling transmigrants” (Van Mensel, 2016), “good migrants” (Cranston, 2017), “highly-skilled knowledge workers” (Yeung, 2016), “skilled migrants” (Canagarajah, 2017), “global employees” (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014), “elite migrants” (Blommaert, 2011), “transnational citizens” (Codó & Pérez-Milans, 2014), “highly-skilled migrants” (Lan, 2011), “transnational elites” (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002), and “rich immigrants” (Vailati & Rial, 2016). This wide array of terminology which is used to refer to groups of people that are often similar in nature exemplifies what Apostolova (2017) calls ‘categorical fetishism’, as new terms and categories emerge to close the gap that results from the lack of consensus on the meaning of the existing terminology.

Despite these numerous categories, ‘expat(riate)’ remains the term that is used most often to refer to people who migrate voluntarily with substantial symbolic and/or economic capital and who thus experience ‘privileged mobilities’ as a result (Kunz, 2016). However, the use of the term ‘expatriate’ has received criticism, as it is also “characterized overall by one key point – a lack of clarity over who or what an expatriate is” (Cranston, 2017, p. 2), and because of its origins which, are based on the Western idea of colonial settlers who lived abroad for a short period of time (Cranston, 2017; for an exhaustive overview of the potential meanings and usages of the term ‘expat(riate)’ as well as its criticisms, see Kunz, 2016). For these reasons, it has been argued that scholars should be particularly careful when opting to use this term, as its

use can reproduce the hegemonic power structures that they are arguably trying to criticize or reflect on (Cranston, 2017; Kunz, 2016; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Despite these criticisms, however, ‘expat’ is a category that has remained powerful and prominent in academic as well as non-academic discourses, and it is likely to stick as a result of this persisting popularity (Kunz, 2016).

In light of the categorical dichotomy between ‘migrants’ and ‘expats’ and the persistent popularity of the latter category to refer to privileged types of migration, this study focuses on the migration-related categories of ‘expat’ and its perceived opposite ‘migrant’, including the derivative ‘immigrant’, which can be but is not always conflated with ‘migrant’. It is relevant to note that we do not examine the meaning of these categories in a legal sense, but rather as they are used in public discourse, as the definitions of migration-related categories are inherently fuzzier in public discourse than in state or policy discourses (Akbar, 2022; Menjívar, 2023). In doing so, we aim to examine how people who move across international borders for the sake of furthering their professional careers ascribe meaning to these terms and how they position themselves in relation to these categories in the specific interactional context of a research interview, thereby underlining the inherently perspectival, fluid, and flexible nature of processes of social categorization in light of privileged migration.

## 6.4 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to examine how migration-related categories are constructed in the interactional context of a research interview by those who migrate with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital. More specifically, it focuses on the terms ‘expat’ and its perceived opposite ‘migrant’, as well as its derivative ‘immigrant’, which can be but is not always conflated with the category of ‘migrant’. Moreover, we aim to achieve a deeper understanding of how the participants of the study position themselves in relation to these categories. In doing so, we intend to underline the complexity of delineating migration-related social categories from the understudied perspective of



privileged migration, thereby also emphasizing the contextual relevance of the interactional setting of the research interview.

The research reported on in this paper forms part of a broader research project on the role of language in the lives of people who migrate in pursuit of a ‘boundaryless career’ (see De Malsche & Vandenbroucke, forthcoming for a detailed overview of the setup and research objectives of the research project). Participants were selected on the basis of the fact that they were living in Brussels at the time of the interview, did not plan on staying in Belgium indefinitely, had moved between countries at least once in the past, and that one of the main motivations for their international mobility was linked to the advancement of their professional careers. Due to the hypermobility of the participants as well as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic at the time of data collection, social media was used to recruit participants in combination with snowball sampling (see also Cranston, 2017; Leinonen, 2012).

To ensure the clarity and integrity of the interview guide, a pilot interview was conducted prior to the start of the data collection, which also included a reflective post-hoc discussion on the interviewing process. This interview was conducted with a friend of the first author who meets all of the selection criteria but who could not participate in the project due to her personal connection with the interviewer. After finalizing the interview guide on the basis of the pilot interview, the first author conducted a total of 31 in-depth semi-structured interviews via Skype between June and September 2020. After receiving written informed consent to participate in the study, each interview was audio-recorded. All interviews were conducted in English as a lingua franca, which was not the native language of the majority of the participants, nor of the interviewer. The participants consisted of 23 women and 8 men whose nationalities or countries of origin spanned 4 different continents; however, it must be noted that the majority of the participants originated from Europe. Although it was not a selection criterion, all interviewees had obtained at least one degree from a higher education institution at the time of the interview, with the exception of one participant. 14 of the participants worked for (large) corporations, 10 worked for political or

government institutions, 4 were self-employed, 2 worked for an NGO, and 1 was a teacher.

The participants had been informed in advance that the interview would focus on the role of language as part of their international lives, but further information or prepared questions were not shared beforehand. After orally confirming informed consent, the participants were asked extensively about the role of language as part of their international lives (see De Malsche & Vandembroucke, forthcoming for a detailed overview and analysis of the topics discussed). In these first phases of the interview, the topic of migration-related categories was not actively discussed. Towards the end of the interaction, the interviewer announced that they would be discussing the interviewee's identity before they ended the interview, and proceeded to ask the four following questions:

1. On the basis of everything we just discussed and given that you are a citizen from another country residing here, how would you identify or describe yourself? Which terms would you use?
2. Would you consider yourself an immigrant or a migrant?
3. Would you consider yourself an expat?
4. What do you think the differences are between expats, migrants, and immigrants, if any?

No migration-related categories were used in the phrasing of the first question, so as to elicit any migration-related categories from the participants' emic perspectives and not steer their response. The second and the third question then both inquired about processes of self-categorization, thereby prompting the participant to discuss and define these categories in light of their own positionality. The second question specifically was phrased as "an immigrant or a migrant" so as to provide the participant with the possibility to either distinguish a difference between the two, or to conflate them into one category. Finally, the fourth question explicitly inquired about the

participant's delineation of meaning of the terms 'expat', 'migrant', and 'immigrant'. These questions were purposefully asked towards the end of the interview, as by then, a certain degree of familiarity and rapport had presumably already been established between the interviewer and the interviewee, which arguably led to more thought-provoking and open answers from the participants (Dörnyei, 2007).

After pseudonymized transcription, the interview data were coded and analyzed using the qualitative analysis software NVivo. First, the participants' replies to the final set of questions were coded throughout the 31 interview based on how they related to the categories 'migrant', 'immigrant', and/or 'expat'. On the basis of this first step, a number of attributes (Billig, 1985) emerged which the participants associated with these different migration-related categories. We then used Excel to create an overview of the different attributes each participant ascribed to the three migration-related categories under study, how they formulated them, and whether or not they would reportedly self-identify with them. This combination of coding in NVivo and the subsequent overview in Excel allowed us to provide a general overview of the data, as well as a detailed micro-level discourse analysis of how each participant discursively constructed these different migration-related categories and how they positioned themselves in relation to them during their individual interviews. The transcription conventions used for the excerpts presented in Section 6.5 can be found in the Appendix (Section 12.2).

Throughout the analysis, we adopted a social constructionist perspective to categorization (Edwards, 1991; Jenkins, 2000), thus taking into account the specificities of the interactional context in the analysis of what was said. One major aspect that was deemed relevant for such a contextualized approach is the interactional context of the research interview. This arguably influenced the interaction because the participants know that they are participants in a research project, that the conversation is being recorded, and that what they say will thus be analyzed and scrutinized. As such, it can be assumed that the participants aim to answer questions in line with the frame of reference as established for them by the interview context, an influence which is commonly referred to as the Hawthorne Effect (Dörnyei, 2007) or the Observer's

Paradox (Labov, 1972). A second relevant contextual aspect is that of the identity and positionality of the interviewer. The first author who conducted the interviews is a white woman who was born and raised in Belgium and who was 24 years old at the time of data collection. Her (perceived) identity is presumed to have played a relevant role in what was said during the interviews, including in how the participants ascribed meaning to the migration-related categories under study, as discourses surrounding the use of migration-related categories are inherently tied to identity and particularly race (Kunz, 2016; 2020). By adopting a social constructionist approach to categorization in our analysis, we thus acknowledge how all categories used in interaction are not merely discursively constructed, but rather co-constructed by the interlocutors as part of the specific interactional context in which they are used (Jenkins, 2000).

## 6.5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To achieve our research objectives, the results are structured into two parts. In Section 6.5.1, we first provide a broad overview of the results, particularly with regard to the core attributes that were associated with the migration-related categories under study and whether the participants identified with them. Section 6.5.2 then zooms in on four participants who exemplify the diversity of the perspectives present in the dataset to examine in detail how each of these participants defined the terms ‘expat’, ‘migrant’, and ‘immigrant’ as part of their research interviews, as well as how they discursively positioned themselves in relation to these categories.

### 6.5.1 Identifying the core attributes of migration-related categories

A total of eight core attributes (Billig, 1985) were mentioned by the 31 participants in their definitions of whether a person could be categorized as part of the migration-related categories ‘expat’, ‘migrant’ and/or ‘immigrant’:

- Duration of stay;
- Ethnicity or region of origin;
- Level of education;
- Motivation for mobility;
- Degree of integration into the host society;
- Freedom or agency of mobility;
- Financial means / contribution to host society;
- Type of job.

All of these attributes were mentioned at least once throughout all the interviews for each of the three migration-related categories. However, the particular attributes considered relevant in defining a category and how these attributes were interpreted differed for each of the participants. We zoom in on four participants in the next section to further illustrate the variety of definitions provided for each of the three migration-related categories under study.

As a result of the formulation of the questions in the interview guide (see Section 6.4), some participants made an explicit distinction in defining the categories ‘immigrant’ and ‘migrant’, whereas others did not make this distinction, either by only referring to one of the two categories throughout their replies, or by conflating the two as one category (i.e. “migrants and immigrants”). In terms of positionality, we then found that 13 of the participants would not categorize themselves as an ‘expat’, a term which is frequently used to refer to the participants in this study in both popular and academic discourses (Kunz, 2016; 2020; Yeung, 2016), and that 15 participants would (also) consider themselves a ‘migrant’ or an ‘immigrant’, although these categories are less often associated with privileged forms of migration (Leinonen, 2012).

We found that certain attributes were considered more relevant in defining migration-related categories in a general sense than others. For example, the attribute ‘duration

of stay’ was considered a defining characteristic for all three of the categories for almost half of the participants. Other attributes were frequently mentioned specifically for one category, but not for the others. For example, the attribute ‘freedom or agency of mobility’ was mentioned most frequently in relation to the definitions of ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’, whereas the attribute ‘type of job’ was most often brought up in relation to the definition of an ‘expat’.

When examining the general attributes associated with ‘immigrant’ and ‘migrant’, we find that these categories were associated with people who stay permanently as well as temporarily, who move for a myriad of potential reasons (including for work, to seek a better standard of living, or for political reasons), who move both voluntarily and involuntarily, and who integrate both well and not at all. In other words, these categories were defined in varied and inconclusive ways, both when they were conflated and when they were not. ‘Expats’, on the other hand, were associated more consistently with specific interpretations of attributes, most frequently referring to people who are white, who migrate temporarily and therefore do not integrate into the host society, and who are highly educated, work for the EU or other political institutions, and are wealthy. As such, the eight core attributes that were used, interpreted, and combined in varying ways by the different participants showcase the intersectional and embodied complexity of the migration-related categories under study. In the next section, we zoom in on this complexity by examining in detail how the participants discursively constructed these categories as part of the specific interactional context of a research interview, and how they positioned themselves in light of them.

### **6.5.2 Discursive construction of migration-related categories in the interactional context of a research interview**

In this section, we will focus on the discursive construction of the migration-related categories under study in the research interviews of four participants. These

participants were chosen to represent the extremities of the diversity of perspectives present in the dataset.

### 6.5.2.1 Example 1 (Participant A)

The first example is Participant A, a man from the UK who was in his late twenties at the time of the interview. He had grown up in the UK, moved to the Netherlands in pursuit of a degree in higher education, and was living in Brussels, where he was working at an international political institution. For this excerpt, it is relevant to note that he reported to have high proficiency in German in addition to native proficiency in English. The interview questions on migration-related categories prompted the following discussion:

EXCERPT 1 (00:48:06 -00:52:33) - INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT A

- 1 INTERVIEWER: SO ON THE BASIS OF EVERYTHING THAT WE JUST DISCUSSED AND GIVEN  
THAT YOU'RE A CITIZEN FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY RESIDING HERE HOW  
WOULD YOU IDENTIFY OR DESCRIBE YOURSELF?
- 2 PART. A: (2.2) UHM (2.0) BRITISH PERSON LIVING ABROAD YOU YOU MEAN  
LIKE UM MY IDENTITY?
- 3 INTERVIEWER: YES
- 4 PART. A: UHM (.) I'D USUALLY CALL MYSELF BRITISH OR ENGLISH (.) UHM  
IF I WAS TALKING TO A BRITISH PERSON I WOULD SAY ENGLISH (.)  
THAT'S JUST A THING WE SAY TO FOREIGNERS ((LAUGHS)) YOU  
WOULDN'T SAY I'M BRITISH TO A TO AN UHM YOU KNOW A SCOTTISH  
PERSON OR WHATEVER
- 5 INTERVIEWER: ANYTHING ELSE?
- 6 PART. A: (2.3) ANY OTHER IDENTITIES?
- 7 INTERVIEWER: ANY OTHER UHM TERMS THAT YOU WOULD IDENTIFY WITH (.) [OTHER  
THAN]
- 8 PART. A: [EXPAT]
- 9 INTERVIEWER: OKAY (.) WHY?
- 10 PART. A: I DON'T KNOW IF I WOULD CALL MYSELF THAT BUT I MAYBE THINK  
OF MYSELF AS THAT BECAUSE I AM ONE I THINK UHM (.) ESPECIALLY  
BECAUSE I'M KIND OF NOT SPEAKING (2.9) PROBABLY IF I LIVED  
IN GERMANY I WOULDN'T THINK OF MYSELF AS AN EXPAT (.) I  
THINK OF MYSELF AS ONE HERE BECAUSE I THINK I ASSOCIATE EXPATS  
WITH PEOPLE THAT ARE SORT OF JUST IN A PLACE BY CIRCUMSTANCE

- THEY'RE LIKE WORKING THERE OR UHM YOU KNOW POSTED THERE OR SOMETHING BUT UHM (.) YEA I'D PROBABLY SORT OF THINK OF MYSELF AS AN EXPAT HERE OR A FOREIGNER UHM (.) YEA
- 11 INTERVIEWER: UHM WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN IMMIGRANT OR A MIGRANT?
- 12 PART. A: (3.1) HM (5.6) PROBABLY BETWEEN THOSE TWO AN IMMIGRANT
- 13 INTERVIEWER: WHY?
- 14 PART. A: (5.3) I DON'T KNOW ((LAUGHS)) WAIT LET ME THINK ABOUT THAT IT'S AN INTERESTING QUESTION (5.9) I THINK I ASSOCIATE MIGRANTS WITH PEOPLE THAT HAVE BEEN (.) UH (3.4) IT'S MORE A SORT OF I THINK OF IT AS PEOPLE THAT HAVE BEEN FORCED TO LEAVE THEIR ORIGINAL PLACE (.) MORE AND I THINK OF IMMIGRANTS MORE OF PEOPLE THAT HAVE WILLINGLY GONE SOMEWHERE ELSE (.) I MIGHT BE WRONG ABOUT THAT BUT THAT'S JUST IN MY BRAIN I I THINK OF A MIGRANT MORE AS LIKE UHM SOMEONE THAT'S SORT OF MAYBE DISPLACED OR MAYBE SOMEONE THAT'S UHM (.) YOU KNOW CAN'T GO HOME IN SOME WAY (.) UHM WHEREAS AN IMMIGRANT I FEEL REALLY LIKE THEY'VE GONE SOMEWHERE FOR A SPECIFIC REASON I THINK (.) BUT I MEAN THAT'S JUST IN MY OWN HEAD I'M NOT REALLY SURE WHAT
- 15 INTERVIEWER: THERE'S NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS LIKE I SAID
- 16 PART. A: [ ((LAUGHS)) ]
- 17 INTERVIEWER: [TO NONE OF THE QUESTIONS (.) UHM WHAT WOULD YOU THEN THINK THE DIFFERENCE IS BETWEEN EXPATS AND IMMIGRANTS AND MIGRANTS? HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THOSE THREE?
- 18 PART. A: UHM EXPATS (.) LIKE I SAID, IT'S KIND OF A SORT OF (1.4) FOR ME, THAT I JUST THINK OF LIKE THESE INTERNATIONAL TYPE GLOBALIST UH YOU KNOW COSMOPOLITAN TYPE PEOPLE UHM THAT UHM THAT ARE SORT OF ABROAD BUT BY CIRCUMSTANCE (.) I FEEL LIKE THEY DON'T REALLY INTEGRATE (.) NECESSARILY (.) EXPATS WHEN I THINK OF AN EXPAT I THINK OF THESE SORT OF (.) INTERNATIONAL VILLAGES THAT EXIST IN BRUSSELS YOU KNOW THAT THERE'S SORT OF (.) EVERYONE WORKS FOR THE EU THERE AND THEY'RE JUST EXPATS YOU KNOW IT'S JUST LIKE THAT'S WHAT THEY ARE (.) UHM IMMIGRANTS LIKE I SAID BEFORE I THINK MORE OF SORT OF LIKE PEOPLE THAT HAVE LEFT THEIR COUNTRY TO COME HERE FOR SOME SORT OF (.) ECONOMIC REASON MAYBE OR SOME SORT OF THEY'VE GOT A DEFINITE GOAL IN MIND OF WHAT THEY'RE DOING (.) UHM AND I THINK OF MIGRANTS AS PEOPLE THAT HAVE (.) MAYBE NOT NECESSARILY WITH A SPECIFIC GOAL FOR THIS COUNTRY IT'S JUST BY CIRCUMSTANCE THEY'VE HAD TO LEAVE OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT UHM (.) YOU KNOW UHM MAYBE PEOPLE THAT HAVE THAT THERE'S WAR IN THEIR COUNTRY OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT (.) FOR SOME REASON I WOULDN'T REALLY ASSOCIATE THAT AS MUCH WITH AN



IMMIGRANT THAN A MIGRANT BUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE ACTUAL  
DIFFERENCE IS BETWEEN THESE WORDS I DON'T (.) THEY MIGHT NOT  
EVEN HAVE A PROPER IT SOUNDS LIKE THESE SORT OF WORDS THAT  
ARE REALLY NOBODY REALLY KNOWS WHAT THEY MEAN ((CHUCKLE))  
IT'S ALL JUST USED

Participant A offered the migration-related category 'expat' without being prompted by the interviewer in turn 8. In turn 10, he then used two core attributes to define this category, namely 'motivation for mobility', which he defined as professional, as well as linguistic proficiency in the language(s) of the host society, which can be tied to the more general attribute 'degree of integration'. He argued that because he himself moved with the aim of pursuing his professional career and does not speak any of the local languages in Belgium, he could be considered an 'expat' in Brussels. However, he also mitigated this statement by topicalizing the difference between self- and other-categorization and adding a marker of uncertainty ("I think"). Moreover, his definition of the category 'expat' underlines the fluidity of processes of (self-)categorization, as he mentioned that he would not consider himself an 'expat' in Germany, a country where he does speak the local language. As such, under the assumption that he would also move to Germany for professional reasons in this hypothetical situation, the attribute of 'degree of integration' in the form of proficiency in the local language(s) took precedence over the attribute of 'motivation for mobility' in his categorization process for the term 'expat'.

Regarding whether he would consider himself an 'immigrant' or a 'migrant', he replied that he would choose 'immigrant' if he had to. This emphasis on the comparative arguably means that he would categorize himself as neither of the two options when identifying himself unprompted, and that he only chose 'immigrant' because he interpreted the interviewer's question as relating to his preference between the terms 'migrant' and 'immigrant'. When asked why he would prefer 'immigrant', his reply was delayed by laughter, long pauses, and an announcement that he had to reflect on this in turn 14. He then went on to define both 'migrants' and 'immigrants' on the basis of the attributes 'freedom or agency of mobility' and 'motivation for mobility', arguing that 'migrants' do not have agency and do not have a specific goal in mind when

migrating, whereas ‘immigrants’ do have agency and decide to move to a certain country, often with “specific” motivations. Even though in essence moving for professional reasons (an attribute he associated with ‘expats’) also comes with economic or financial motives and goal-determination, he interpreted ‘immigrants’ and ‘expats’ as two separate categories

When asked to elaborate on the differences between the three migration-related categories in turn 17, he reiterated and further nuanced what he said previously for the categories ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’. In relation to the category ‘expat’, he elaborated on the attribute ‘degree of integration’ and added the attribute ‘type of job’ to his definition, thereby further nuancing his interpretation of this category when asked to compare it to other migration-related categories.

In sum, Participant A made an explicit distinction between the ‘expat’, ‘migrant’, and ‘immigrant’ as three different migration-related categories on the basis of different core attributes. However, these attributes were not the same for each migration category, as ‘expats’ were defined on the basis of ‘motivation for mobility’ (professional), ‘degree of integration’ (low) and ‘type of job’ (EU-related), whereas ‘migrants’ and ‘immigrants’ were defined by ‘motivation for mobility’ (unspecific and specific, respectively) and ‘freedom or agency of mobility’ (low and high, respectively).

In light of these definitions, he argued that he would primarily categorize himself as ‘expat’. However, throughout the interview excerpt, Participant A made use of a number of mitigation and hedging strategies which indexed the uncertainty of his discursive processes of categorization. Some of these strategies were more implicit, e.g. the pauses and hesitations as well as the repetitive use of “I think”, “you know”, and “for me” throughout his responses, whereas others were more explicit reflections on the uncertainty of his responses, e.g. in turn 14 (“I might be wrong about that but that's just in my brain” and “that's just in my own head I'm not really sure”) and in turn 18 (“I don't know what the actual difference is between these words”). Throughout the excerpt, he thus emphasized that he was aware of the general ambiguity or fuzziness surrounding these terms and that his replies thus only reflected his own subjective

interpretation of them. These hedges and mitigations can be considered particularly relevant in the interactional context of the research interview, as Participant A possibly felt an increased need to mitigate his replies in light of the fact that they would be scrutinized for research purposes.

### 6.5.2.2 Example 2 (Participant B)

The second example is Participant B, a man from the Netherlands who was in his forties at the time of the interview. He was raised as the child of a diplomat, as a result of which he had lived in and attended primary and secondary education in India, Romania, Canada, Hungary, Brazil, and the Netherlands prior to starting his higher education in the Netherlands. He traveled extensively in Asia and Australia after his studies before starting to work for a multinational corporation in Paris, which eventually moved him to Belgium, where he had been living and working for 10 years. He replied to the first question on how he would identify himself with a reflection on his nationality, which did not prompt the use of any of the migration-related categories under study. The other three category-related interview questions yielded the following discussion:

EXCERPT 2 (00:51:30-00:55:58) - INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT B

- 1 INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN IMMIGRANT OR A MIGRANT?
- 2 PART. B: (3.9) OKAY CAN YOU DEFINE THE TWO UH SO I BECAUSE A MIGRANT IS JUST SOMEONE WHO MOVES AROUND LIKE SOUNDS LIKE A NOMAD AN IMMIGRANT IS SOMEONE WHO LET'S SAY COMES HERE TO STAY? IS THAT=  
3 INTERVIEWER: =[IT'S AN OPEN QUESTION]
- 4 PART. B: [I'D HAVE TO LOOK UP THE DEFINITION] SORRY?=  
5 INTERVIEWER: =SO LIKE I SAID UHM THERE'S NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS INCLUDING THIS ONE I'M REALLY CURIOUS JUST TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK THEY MEAN
- 6 PART. B: (2.3) RIGHT UHM (3.0) WELL THEN I WOULD CONSIDER MYSELF MORE LIKE A MIGRANT A MIGRANT IS SOMEONE WHO MOVES AROUND UH MAYBE AN IMMIGRANT IS SOMEONE WHO COMES HERE TO UH TO STAY UHM (.) ALTHOUGH WITH WHAT I SAID IS LIKE I DO PROBABLY (.)

- UH I WOULD PROBABLY YOU KNOW BE MORE INCLINED TO STAY HERE FOR AT LEAST A COUPLE OF MORE YEARS SO UH BUT NO NOT=
- 7 INTERVIEWER: =NO OKAY UHM WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN EXPAT?
- 8 PART .B: (2.6) UH YES I WOULD
- 9 INTERVIEWER: WHY?
- 10 PART. B: UHM (.) WELL ACTUALLY I WOULD CONSIDER MYSELF AN EXPAT ANYWHERE I AM HUH SO UH EVEN IN MY OWN COUNTRY I WOULD CONSIDER MYSELF AN EXPAT UHM WELL BECAUSE I UH (.) BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE UH ROOTS UH IN THIS COUNTRY SO UH I AM NOT ORIGINALLY FROM HERE SO UHM (.) IF THAT MAKES SENSE YEA
- 11 INTERVIEWER: IT DOES (.) UHM ACCORDING TO YOU THEN WHAT WOULD THE DIFFERENCE BE OR THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BE WHEN YOU HAVE TO DEFINE UHM OR DISTINGUISH BETWEEN IMMIGRANTS MIGRANTS AND EXPATS HOW WOULD YOU DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THOSE CATEGORIES
- 12 PART. B: (2.7) YES WELL YOU HAVE TO LOOK AT SOME KIND OF ATTRIBUTES THEN THAT YOU WANT TO UH WHAT IS IT COMPARE THEM ON UHM (.) MAYBE ONE ONE WOULD BE UH THE LENGTH OF THE DURATION THAT SOMEONE THEN STAYS IN THE LOCAL COUNTRY? (.) UHM I DON'T KNOW I THINK AN IMMIGRANT IS SOMEONE WHO WOULD STAY HERE FOREVER (.) A MIGRANT SOMEONE WHO WOULD STAY HERE FOR I DON'T KNOW UP TO TEN YEARS OR SOMETHING (.) AND AN EXPAT SOMEBODY WHO WOULD STAY HERE UP TO THREE YEARS MAYBE (.) IS THAT A (.) I MEAN THAT'S HOW I WOULD TRY TO CATEGORIZE THAT HUH THE DIFFERENT WORDS
- 13 INTERVIEWER: OKAY
- 14 PART. B: BUT THE DURATION I THINK UH WOULD PLAY A ROLE AND THEN UH AND THEN ALSO WELL IT'S KIND OF IT'S RELATED BUT IT'S IT'S THE INVOLVEMENT THAT YOU HAVE WITH THE WITH THE SOCIETY UH (.) YOU WOULD EXPECT PROBABLY IMMIGRANTS TO BE UHM (.) NO IT'S REALLY HARD TO SAY BECAUSE (.) YOU WOULD EXPECT THAT THE LONGER YOU STAY IN A PLACE THE MORE THAT YOU UHM INTEGRATE UH BUT THAT'S WELL YOU PROBABLY KNOW AS WELL AS ME THAT THAT'S NOT (.) UH YOU CANNOT SAY IT LIKE THAT BECAUSE YOU HAVE COMMUNITIES THAT THEN YOU KNOW DEVELOP AND THEN PEOPLE STICK TOGETHER AND THEN YOU HAVE YOUR OWN LITTLE COMMUNITIES WITHIN COMMUNITIES UHM (.) SO UH I DON'T KNOW (.) MAYBE MAYBE THE MIGRANTS WOULD BE UH IF IF YOU PUT THAT CATEGORY ON THEM THE BEST AUDIENCE OR THE BEST GROUP OF PEOPLE THAT WOULD INTEGRATE THE BEST I WOULD SAY UHM
- 15 INTERVIEWER: OKAY
- 16 PART. B: BECAUSE THEY THEY KNOW THAT THEY NEED THE LOCAL UH POPULATION AROUND THEM UH TO FUNCTION (.) UH WHEREAS EXPATS THEY KIND OF LIKE FEEL LIKE WELL WE'RE HERE LIKE TO DO A LITTLE JOB AND

THEN WE MOVE ON SO THERE'S NO (.) NOT MUCH OF A NEED AND  
THEN THE IMMIGRANTS UH WELL SOME OF THEM MIGHT INTEGRATE VERY  
WELL UH BUT YOU WOULD HAVE ALSO THE GROUPS THAT DO NOT  
INTEGRATE AT ALL UHM AND THAT ONLY STICK IN THEIR OWN  
COMMUNITY SO (.) VERY INTERESTING TOPIC YEA

Participant B's initial replies to the interviewer's questions in turns 2, 4 and the start of turn 6 are marked by delays in the form of long pauses as well as questions. When the interviewer clarified in turns 3 and 5 that she would not be providing any further prompts related to the meaning of these categories and that he could not answer this question wrong, he eventually started answering the category-related questions in turn 6. However, his replies are marked by a number of mitigation and hedging strategies through which he sought confirmation (e.g. "if that makes sense" in turn 10), underlined the subjectivity of his reply (e.g. "that's how I would try to categorize that" in turn 12), and emphasized his uncertainty (e.g. "I don't know" in turn 12 and the repeated use of "maybe" in turns 6, 12 and 14). As such, Participant B's initial reluctance to answer the question and the subsequent hedging and mitigating strategies used throughout his replies potentially reflect his uncertainty discussing this topic in light of the research interview context.

In terms of definitions, Participant B adopted an analytical stance towards the categorical boundaries between the terms by using the same attributes to define each of the three migration-related categories under study. Remarkably, he even used the term "attribute" in turn 12, which was not prompted by the interviewer. The core attributes he defined for each of the three categories were 'duration of stay' and 'degree of integration', resulting in three relatively clearly delineated categories: according to him, an 'expat' is someone who stays temporarily for up to 3 years and does not integrate; a 'migrant' is someone who would stay here temporarily for up to 10 years and integrates "very well"; and an 'immigrant' is someone who would stay here permanently and who might integrate, but also might not.

When asked if he would identify as a 'migrant' or an 'immigrant', Participant B replied in turn 6 that he would identify *more* with the former. This is similar to Participant A's reply in turn 12 of Excerpt 1, as this emphasis on the comparative arguably means that

he would not categorize himself as either when identifying himself unprompted. This hesitation was less outspoken when asked if he would identify as an ‘expat’, to which he replied in a more straight-forward manner in turn 8, albeit with a delay. This process of positioning is thus rather similar to the one we observed for Participant A, even though the two participants defined the migration-related categories in different ways.

Moreover, the ways in which Participant B used these terms in relation to himself were not as clear-cut as the definitions he provided for them, as his self-categorization as ‘migrant’ as well as ‘expat’ would mean that according to his own definitions, he integrated very well and not at all, and that his duration of stay would be both shorter and longer than three years. He reflected briefly on the discrepancy between these processes of other- and self-categorization in turn 6, as he showed awareness that in light of his own interpretation of the attribute ‘duration of stay’ for the categories ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’, he would be categorized as an ‘immigrant’. However, he did not reflect on the fact that despite his self-categorization as ‘expat’, he did not meet one of the two core attributes he ascribed to that category, i.e. a temporary stay of less than 3 years. This discursive construction of the three categories over the course of his replies to the different questions, as well as his own contradictive positioning in relation to them, highlights the intricate complexity of migration-related processes of categorization and positionality in the interactional context of a research interview.

### 6.5.2.3 Example 3 (Participant C)

The third example is Participant C, a woman who was born and raised in Hungary, had lived in France as part of her higher education as well as for an internship later on, and had been living in and working for an NGO in Brussels for five years. She was in her twenties at the time of the interview. She replied to the first question on how she would identify herself with a reflection on her nationality, which did not prompt the use of any of the migration-related categories under study. The other three category-related interview questions resulted in the following discussion:

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TO EMIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF MIGRATION-RELATED SOCIAL CATEGORIES

EXCERPT 3 (01:12:02-01:15:25) - INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT C

- 1 INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN IMMIGRANT OR A MIGRANT?
- 2 PART. C: (.) AH (.) YEA IT'S IT'S REALLY FUNNY BECAUSE LIKE UH (.)  
PEOPLE WHO ARE UH RICH OR LIKE UH (.) YEA THEY ARE RICH AND  
EDUCATED THEY CALL THEMSELF EXPATS AND ALL THE OTHER PEOPLE  
WHO ARE POOR AND COME HERE UH TO TO WORK LIKE TO HAVE SIMPLE  
JOBS THEY ARE ALL IMMIGRANTS SO I LIKE UH I LIKE TO REMIND  
PEOPLE WHO WHO HAVE LIKE UH THIS UH DISCRIMINATORY OR RACIST  
UH SENSES THAT ACTUALLY WE ARE ALSO IMMIGRANTS SO WHEN WHEN  
FOR EXAMPLE MY UH COUSIN HE LIVES IN THE UK HE'S HUNGARIAN  
AND THEN HE HAS LIKE THESE RACIST (.) SOMETIMES HE'S VERY  
RACIST TOWARDS LIKE BLACK PEOPLE SO I SAY LIKE WHAT THE FUCK  
YOU ARE AN IMMIGRANT AS WELL SO LIKE IF HE NEEDS TO GO BACK  
TO AFRICA YOU NEED TO GO BACK TO HUNGARY AS WELL SO YOU ARE  
YOU ARE AN IMMIGRANT AS WELL YOU YOU JUST NEED TO KEEP THIS  
IN MIND (.) UHM SO I MEAN FOR ME I'M I'M THE SAME IMMIGRANT  
AS ANOTHER PERSON WHO IS COMING FROM THE POOREST COUNTRY FROM  
AFRICA SO THERE THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE [...]
- 3 INTERVIEWER: OKAY UHM WOULD YOU THEN CONSIDER YOURSELF AN EXPAT?
- 4 PART. C: NO I DON'T LIKE THIS WORD
- 5 INTERVIEWER: OKAY UHM=
- 6 PART. C: =NO ESPECIALLY THAT I AM NOT RICH SO YES ((LAUGHS))
- 7 INTERVIEWER: OKAY UHM SO THEN=
- 8 PART. C: =I'M I'M NOT A RICH RICH NORTHERN UH WELL OR LIKE WESTERN  
EUROPEAN LIKE THIS IS THE EXPAT NO? LIKE WESTERN EUROPEAN UH  
(.) LIKE RICH PERSON (.) NO I I DON'T WANT TO QUALIFY LIKE  
THIS NO
- 9 INTERVIEWER: OKAY UHM (.) ACCORDING TO YOU DO YOU THINK (.) OR WHAT DO  
YOU THINK THE DIFFERENCE IS BETWEEN EXPATS AND IMMIGRANTS AND  
MIGRANTS IF ANY (.) DO YOU THINK THERE IS A DIFFERENCE?
- 10 PART. C: NO THERE ISN'T THERE'S NO DIFFERENCE I MEAN (.) YEA I MEAN  
IT'S VERY POLITICAL (1.4) UHM (1.6) BUT UH (.) I THINK  
LIKE ALL THE PEOPLE COME TO TO TO THE COUNTRY TO WORK AND  
THEY ARE MOTIVATED TO WORK (.) UH MAYBE THE EXPAT UH IS THE  
PERSON WHO WHO ALREADY HAS SOME MONEY TO SPEND (.) UH IN THE  
COUNTRY SO I MEAN LIKE ECONOMICALLY IT'S MORE BENEFICIAL FOR  
THE COUNTRY BECAUSE THE EXPAT WHEN THEY ARRIVE LIKE HE CAN  
ALREADY SPEND HIS MONEY AND THEN HE WILL WORK AND SPEND A LOT  
OF MONEY IN HERE UNLIKE OTHER PEOPLE WHO JUST UH TAKE A SIMPLE  
JOB WOULD UH ECONOMICALLY BE A BIGGER RISK MAYBE FOR THE  
COUNTRY BECAUSE IF THEY LOSE THEIR JOB MAYBE THEY WOULD BE ON  
SOCIAL SECURITY BUT UH (.) THAT'S ALSO IMPORTANT THAT IT IS

UH LIKE SIMPLE JOBS ARE THE BACKBONE OF THE ECONOMY SO UHM  
THEY NEED TO BE ALSO APPRECIATED SO (.) BUT IT'S IT'S VERY  
POLITICAL

When asked if she would identify as an ‘immigrant’ or a ‘migrant’, Participant C brought up the categorical dichotomy that is often used to distinguish between ‘expats’ on the one hand and ‘immigrants’ on the other hand (see also Kunz, 2020; Yeung, 2016), conflating the latter with the term ‘migrant’, which she did not mention explicitly throughout this discussion. She defined the attributes of the ‘expat’ on one end of this dichotomy as ‘financial means’ and ‘level of education’ (“rich and educated”), and the attributes of an ‘immigrant’ on the other end as ‘financial means’, ‘motivation for mobility’, and ‘type of job’ (“people who are poor and come here uh to to work like to have simple jobs”). In turn 8, she added that ‘expats’ are usually northern or western European, thus adding ‘ethnicity or region of origin’ to its categorical attributes. Throughout turns 2, 6, and 8, Participant C reflected on commonsensical definitions of these categories which she explicitly disagreed with. When it came to her own perspective, she argued that the only relevant migration-related category is ‘immigrant’, which she used as a hypernym for all types of people who live in a country other than the one they were born in. In line with an argument that has repeatedly been made in the existing academic literature on migration-related categories, she concluded that any distinction between different migration-related categories is inherently a political one (Brahic, 2020; Cleton & Meier, 2023; Cranston, 2017; Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; De Coninck, 2020; Jacobs, 2018; Kunz, 2016; 2020; Menjívar, 2023; Rosenberger & Stöckl, 2018; Yeung, 2016).

In terms of identification, Participant C categorized herself as an ‘immigrant’, as according to her, it is the only relevant migration-related category there is. She added in turns 6 and 8 that even those who use the term ‘expat’ would not categorize her as such, as she does not meet its categorical attributes for ‘financial means’ or ‘ethnicity or region of origin’.

This third perspective differs substantially from the previous two. First, Participant C made a clear distinction between how other people construct migration-related



categories and how she defines them herself. In doing so, she also did not engage with the meaning of the category ‘migrant’, despite the fact that it was included in the formulation of the questions. In terms of attributes, two of the four defining characteristics she used to define the categories ‘expat’ and ‘immigrant’ were not mentioned by Participant A or Participant B, i.e. ‘financial means’ and ‘level of education’. Finally, Participant C used fewer hedging and mitigation strategies and thus presented her perspective in a more straight-forward manner, thereby arguably reflecting a clear stance on the topic of discussion. Her forthright replies could also mean that she was less explicitly preoccupied with the scrutiny that is inherent to the interactional context of the research interview, and/or that she believed her reply to be in line with the frame of reference of the research interview context.

#### 6.5.2.4 Example 4 (Participant D)

Finally, Participant D is a woman from the United States who was in her forties at the time of the interview. She grew up in the United States, had lived in Japan, Germany, and Belgium for extended periods of time throughout her adulthood, and was working as a teacher. In reply to the question on how she would identify herself, she categorized herself in terms of nationality and currently locality, i.e. as “an American who lives in Belgium.” The questions regarding migration-related categories prompted the following discussion:

EXCERPT 4 (00:46:05–00:48:45) – INTERVIEW WITH PARTICIPANT D

- 1 INTERVIEWER: WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN IMMIGRANT OR A MIGRANT?  
2 PART. D: (.) HM (.) NO  
3 INTERVIEWER: WHY NOT?  
4 PART. D: THE WAY MY LIFE STORY HAPPENED IT JUST (.) I'M A HAPHAZARD  
PERSON HERE IT JUST ((LAUGHS)) IT WAS NEVER A PLAN UHM (4.1)  
IT WAS VERY VERY DIFFERENT FOR ME  
5 INTERVIEWER: OKAY UHM WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN EXPAT?  
6 PART. D: (3.4) PROBABLY  
7 INTERVIEWER: WHY?  
8 PART. D: UHM (.) WELL (1.7) BECAUSE I KIND OF (.) SO LIKE I I LIVE

- LIKE I'M A BELGIAN (.) LIKE I I DO EVERYTHING (.) LIKE YOU HAVE TO DO IF YOU'RE IN BELGIUM UH I DON'T PAY TAXES IN MY COUNTRY (.) UH I I WORK HERE UHM (2.1) YEA I'M MAKING MY LIFE HERE AND I I'M NOT GOING TO GO BACK SO
- 9 INTERVIEWER: (.) OKAY UHM SO THEN ACCORDING TO YOU WHAT DO YOU THINK THE DIFFERENCE IS BETWEEN EXPATS AND MIGRANTS AND IMMIGRANTS HOW WOULD YOU DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THOSE CATEGORIES?
- 10 PART. D: SO WHAT I THINK AN EXPAT IS IT'S SOMEONE WHO GOES TO ANOTHER PLACE (.) AND DECIDES UH (.) THAT THEY WANT TO STAY THERE AND (.) THEY KIND OF MORE IDENTIFY WITH THAT UH WAY OF LIFE AND FOLLOW THE LOCAL RULES FOR THIS TO BUILD A LIFE THERE UH A MIGRANT I THINK IT'S SOMEONE WHO MOVES TO A PLACE BECAUSE OF SOME (.) SOME REASON (.) UHM (1.6) YEA AND AN IMMIGRANT UH YEA IT'S KIND OF THE SAME ACTUALLY THEY KIND OF (.) THEY GO THERE FOR LIKE A BETTER LIFE OR MAYBE (.) MAYBE THEIR FAMILY BROUGHT THEM THERE OR I DON'T KNOW
- 11 INTERVIEWER: OKAY SO THEN (.) THE DIFFERENCE WOULD BE (.) PARTIALLY THE REASON FOR THEIR STAY AS WELL AS THE DURATION?
- 12 PART. D: YEA=
- 13 INTERVIEWER: =RIGHT?
- 14 PART D. HOW THEY ENDED UP THERE AND WHY THEY STAYED AND YEA
- 15 INTERVIEWER: OKAY

Similar to Participant C, Participant D also conflated the categories ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’, although unlike Participant C, she did so in a conscious way in turn 10 (“an immigrant uh yea it's kind of the same actually”). She defined this conflated category only by the attribute ‘motivation for mobility’ in turn 10, and her interpretation of this attribute remained vague (“because of some [...] reason”). This vagueness stands in contrast with her definition of the category ‘expat’, which she defined in turns 8 and 10 by the attributes ‘degree of integration’ (high), ‘financial means / contribution to host society’ (paying taxes), and ‘duration of stay’ (long-term and potentially permanent). This meaning of the term ‘expat’ strongly contradicts the definitions put forward by the majority of the other participants, who associated them primarily with temporary stays and low degrees of integration (see Section 6.5.1). As such, this final example represents an idiosyncratic perspective in the dataset which showcases that even when the same attributes are considered relevant by different participants to define a specific category, they can still be interpreted differently.

In terms of self-categorization, Participant D explained that she would “probably” identify as an expat (turn 6), but not as an ‘(im)migrant’ because of “the way my life story happened”, adding that “it was never a plan” and that it was “very very different” for her (turn 4). This latter quote is indicative of the process of particularization, as the participant distinguishes herself from a general category by presenting herself as a “special case” (Billig, 1985, p. 82). However, the vague nature of these statements is in line with her interpretation of the attribute ‘motivation for mobility’ in turn 10, and as a result, it remains unclear exactly why she did not consider herself an ‘immigrant’ or a ‘migrant’. Moreover, the long pauses in turns 4, 6, and 8 underline the reflection that was required for her to answer these questions, and could potentially also signal hesitation to answer these questions, as observed in the excerpts from the interviews with Participants A and B.

In sum, these four examples have showcased the extremities of the diversity present in the dataset by putting forth four entirely different definitions of the categories ‘expat’, ‘immigrant’, and ‘migrant’, as well as four different ways of positioning oneself with regard to these terms when you are someone who moves across international borders with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital. In doing so, we have aimed to underline the perspectival nature of social categories, which are at times categorically oppositional but can also overlap substantially, as well as the difficulty of grouping people together in categories for which there are no set or agreed upon definitions. Moreover, the analysis has highlighted the interactional relevance of the research interview context in the ways in which migration-related categories are discursively constructed in a specific type of interaction. In light of these findings, we would argue that the categories under study were not merely constructed in interaction, but rather (co-)constructed by the interviewee, the interviewer, and the interactional context of the research interview.

## 6.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In light of the lack of literature on privileged migration, particularly from the emic perspectives of those who migrate, this paper has aimed to examine how specific migration-related categories are constructed in the interactional context of a research interview by those who migrate with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital. More specifically, we zoomed in on the category ‘expat’, its perceived opposite ‘migrant’, and the derivative ‘immigrant’, which can be but is not always conflated with ‘migrant’. Additionally, we have aimed to achieve a deeper understanding of how the participants of the study position themselves in relation to these categories. To answer these questions, the first section of the analysis provided a general overview of the results, particularly with regard to the eight core attributes that were associated with the migration-related categories under study and whether or not the participants identified with them. The second section then provided a detailed micro-level analysis of how four participants with varying perspectives on the matter made sense of the categories ‘expat’, ‘migrant’, and ‘immigrant’ as part of their research interviews, as well as how they discursively positioned themselves in relation to these categories.

On the basis of the general overview provided in Section 6.5.1, we found that each individual participant provided a different definition for the three migration-related categories under study, thereby revealing the diversity of individual migration-related processes of categorization. Additionally, we found that the participants foregrounded certain attributes for a specific migration-related category more frequently than for others, thus further underlining the complexity of migration-related categorization processes in a broader sense. This general overview also revealed that the terms ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’ were conflated by some participants but not by others, and the varying interpretations of the specific attributes used to define these two categories showcased the inconclusiveness of how these terms can be defined and are used. In sum, we concluded that the eight core attributes which were used, interpreted, and combined in varying ways by the different participants showcased the intersectional and embodied complexity of these migration-related categories.

As part of the general overview, we also found that almost half of the participants would not categorize themselves as an ‘expat’, and that almost half of them would consider themselves a ‘migrant’ and/or an ‘immigrant’. These insights then raise questions with regard to the potential discrepancies between the language used in the self- and other-categorization of a group of people who all share a defined set of attributes and who, as a result of these attributes, are often categorized together, but who nevertheless do not necessarily identify themselves in similar ways or with the commonsensical categories that are frequently imposed on them. This can be considered particularly problematic in academic research contexts, where the use and reproduction of commonsense social categories can naturalize and authorize them through the legitimacy of science (Cleton & Meier, 2023; Howarth, 2009).

In Section 6.5.2, we zoomed in on four specific participants to represent the extremities of the diversity of perspectives present in the dataset. On the basis of the detailed micro-analysis of interactional excerpts from the research interviews, we were able to draw three main conclusions. First, we found that there are potential discrepancies between how participants define specific categories and how they categorize themselves in light of them, as seen in the excerpt from the research interview with Participant B. This then highlights the dynamic, complex, and potentially contradictive relationship between defining social categories and positioning yourself in relation to them. Moreover, the excerpt from the interview with Participant D showcased that the potential discrepancies between defining a social category and positioning oneself in relation to it can result in a process of particularization (Billig, 1985), further underlining that social categorization is an *active* process which is discursively constructed in interaction (Cleton & Meier, 2023).

Second, we argued that the discursive processes of (self-)categorization were entrenched within the particular interactional context in which they occurred, i.e. the research interview. Adopting a social constructionist perspective on discursive processes of categorization (Edwards, 1991; Jenkins, 2000), the replies given to the questions on migration-related categories can arguably only be interpreted as part of the specific frame of reference that is established by the interview context. This

contextualized approach then highlighted both the localized and perspectival nature of processes of categorization (Gillespie et al., 2012; Mäkitalo, 2003), as well as the fluidity of constructing (social) categories, particularly in relation to one's own identity (Easthope, 2009). In light of these findings, we argued that the categories under study are not merely discursively constructed in interaction, but rather (co-)constructed by the interviewee, the interviewer, and the interactional context in which the interview takes place.

Finally, we conclude that the categorization processes related to migration-related social categories are inherently perspectival and discursively (co-)constructed, to the extent that they can be considered 'floating signifiers' (Hall, 1996) or 'elusive signifiers' (Kunz, 2020) which are not necessarily categorically oppositional, but rather overlap and intersect in their meanings depending on the interactional context in which they are used. This then raises further questions with regard to the categorization of migration in academic research, and specifically: if there is no one way in which the participants would define these categories *or* their positionality in relation to them, how can we as researchers use their emic 'categories of practice' as the basis of our etic 'categories of analysis' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000)? We would argue that the potential answer to this question is not to refrain from using social categories, as categorization is inevitable, but rather to be mindful of the social stereotyping such processes are prone to, and which are not inevitable (Cleton & Meier, 2023; Edwards, 1991). As such, we echo existing calls from the research community which underline the methodological and analytical relevance of reflection and transparency throughout the research process, both in relation to social categorization and beyond (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Jacobs, 2018).

It is important to note that this study did not aim to provide a representative overview of the perspectives of all people who migrate with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital, and that as a result, the findings from this study are not generalizable to any group beyond the interviewees who participated in this study. However, the findings do provide a first insight into the perspectives of a group of people who are understudied in the broader context of migration, and as such, could potentially be

indicative of larger tendencies. This study therefore echoes a call for more research on privileged migration (Vailati & Rial, 2016), particularly from the emic perspectives of those who migrate themselves. Moreover, the dynamic, complex, and potentially contradictory relationship between defining social categories and positioning yourself in relation to them raises further questions on the relationship between self-categorization and other-categorization as part of the lived experiences of people who migrate, particularly in light of the inherently embodied and racialized nature of migration-related categories (Cranston, 2017; Kunz, 2020), and we believe this dynamic to be a fruitful area for future research.

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# 7 “I’M NOT THAT CHINESE”: (CO-) CONSTRUCTING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN INTERACTION WITH A THIRD CULTURE INDIVIDUAL

De Malsche, F. (forthcoming). “I’m not that Chinese”: (Co-)constructing national identity in interaction with a third culture individual. In S. Bonacchi, C. Junker, I. H. Warnke, H. Acke, & C. S. Brylla (Eds.), *Vulnerability: Real, Imagined, and Displayed Fragility in Language and Society*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

## 7.0 ABSTRACT

Third culture individuals are individuals who have lived the majority of their lives outside of the culture or country where they and/or their parents were born, and previous research has shown that they often struggle with their sense of identity as a result of this discrepancy between where they are from and where they grew up. However, there is limited qualitative research on how they make sense of their own identities in interaction. This contribution focuses on the ways in which a third culture individual makes sense of and constructs her national identity during a research interview from a micro-level discourse analytical perspective, by examining how and when she refers to her national identity categories, which characteristics she ascribes to them, and how she positions herself in relation to them throughout the interview. In doing so, this chapter aims to highlight how these national identity categories are co-constructed within the interactional context of the research interview and how these processes of categorization function as manifestations of vulnerability in interaction, thereby underlining the importance of a discursive approach to categorization.

**Keywords:** categorization; discourse analysis; third culture individuals; national identity; vulnerability

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Processes of globalization have resulted in the increased mobility of goods, services, and people across the world (Appadurai, 1996), and as a result, “globalization is not only a descriptor of an era, but also the dominant logic of many people’s lives” (Moore & Barker, 2012, p. 553). This includes third culture individuals, commonly defined as “a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 13; Moore & Barker, 2012). Previous research on such individuals has shown that the development of their sense of identity is often a difficult process (Fail et al., 2004; Gilbert, 2008; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), including the development of their sense of national identity, as they mostly grow up in a country other than their ‘passport country’ (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). However, there is limited qualitative research on the experiences and sense making processes of third culture individuals as told from their own perspectives (Purnell & Hoban, 2014).

In this contribution, I illustrate the construction of the sense of (national) identity of a third culture individual in the form of a case study on Laura (pseudonym), a married mother of one who was born in Hong Kong in the 1960s and raised in Alberta, Canada. On the basis of a semi-structured interview that I conducted with Laura as part of a broader research project, I examine how Laura makes sense of and constructs her identity from a micro-level discourse analytical perspective. More specifically, I focus on the national identity categories ‘Chinese’ and ‘Canadian’ to examine how and when they are used, which characteristics are ascribed to them, and how she positions herself in relation to them throughout the interview. In doing so, I aim to highlight how these national identity categories are co-constructed within the interactional context of the research interview and how these processes of categorization function as manifestations of vulnerability (Fineman, 2008; 2010) in interaction, thereby underlining the importance of a discursive approach to categorization (Edwards, 1991).

## 7.2 THIRD CULTURE INDIVIDUALS AND THE CATEGORIZATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Previous research on third culture individuals has argued that the mobile nature of their lives can lead to difficulties with regards to their sense of belonging and sense of identity (Fail et al., 2004; Gilbert, 2008; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). As such, establishing a sense of identity is a crucial and potentially difficult process for third culture individuals “because the identity of the TCK [third culture kid] is challenged with every move” (Fail et al., 2004, p. 324). This is also the case for their national identity, as third culture individuals often have a passport from a country that is different from the one they live in and which they potentially have never lived in themselves, often referred to as their ‘passport country’ (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Moreover, the ways in which people identify themselves within the third culture context have been found to be highly individual (Fail et al., 2004); some people may identify completely with the culture of their ‘passport country’, some distance themselves entirely from it, and others might feel a “sense of ownership of both, without total ownership of either” (Gilbert, 2008, p. 94). As such, an in-depth analysis of the construction of national identity throughout an extended interview can provide further insights into the different ways in which a third culture individual makes sense of their own identity.

The construction of identity in interaction can be understood by examining how an individual ascribes meaning to and positions themselves with regard to certain membership categories, in this case national identities. Categorization is the cognitive process of placing events, objects or people into a general category or group and it involves the simplification of complex realities (Billig, 1985) through which “the world is rendered objectively available and is maintained as such” (Heritage, 1984, p. 220). Categorization is based on the identification of a category’s crucial characteristics or attributes, and whether or not a person is categorized a certain way thus depends on whether and to what extent they embody (either as perceived by others or as felt by themselves) a category’s attributes (Billig, 1985). As such, examining how categories

and their attributes are talked into being and discursively used in interaction can reveal much about how people organize their thoughts and how they make sense of the world (Edwards, 1991).

These processes of categorization are not defined a priori, but rather locally produced on the basis of the social interaction in which they are used. In other words, categories are embedded in discursive contexts and therefore perspectival, contestable, and open to negotiation (Mäkitalo, 2003), and from such a social constructionist perspective, identities are thus “conjointly constructed, enacted and negotiated among interlocutors as an interaction unfolds” (Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2017, p. 89). Such processes of constructing identity categories in interaction can be better understood in light of vulnerability theory, which posits that vulnerability is not a synonym for weakness or fragility, but rather an inherent aspect of the human condition which manifests itself in different ways at the individual level (Fineman, 2008; 2010). Given the general difficulties third culture individuals can experience in establishing their sense of identity, the ways in which they construct specific identity categories can shed light on how their particular vulnerability manifests itself in interaction.

### 7.3 METHODOLOGY

In this contribution, I conduct an in-depth examination of the national identity categories used by a third culture individual during a research interview, focusing specifically on how and when they are used, which characteristics are ascribed to them, and how the participant positions herself in relation to them throughout the interview. In doing so, I aim to examine the ways in which this third culture individual makes sense of her national identity within the specific interactional context of a research interview, thereby also shedding light on how vulnerability manifests itself as part of categorization in interaction.

The participant at the center of this study is pseudonymized as Laura. She was born in Hong Kong in the 1960s and moved to Canada with her parents when she was a baby.



As such, Hong Kong is her 'passport country', but she was raised in the Canadian region of Alberta. Additionally, she has not lived in either Hong Kong or Alberta during her adult life, instead living in the Canadian region of British Columbia, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Belgium for prolonged periods of time. Because of her physical appearance as Asian, she can be considered part of a visible minority in each of these locations. Throughout her career and across these different locations, she works as a physiotherapist, and her mobile trajectory has rendered her highly multilingual, with native proficiency in English, high proficiency in Cantonese, and basic professional proficiency in French, Dutch, Punjabi, Arabic and Spanish. At the time of the interview in June 2020, she was in her fifties and living in Brussels, Belgium with her husband and their son.

The semi-structured interview with Laura lasted for 68 minutes and was conducted through telecommunications software. The interview is part of a larger sociolinguistic research project on the role and importance of language in the lives of individuals who pursue 'boundaryless careers', i.e. people who live highly mobile lives to further their professional careers (see De Malsche & Vandenbroucke, forthcoming for a detailed overview of the setup and purposes of the broader study). Although the explicit focus of the interview was thus not to discuss her (national) identity, many of the stories and information she shared dealt with or mentioned her identity implicitly or explicitly due to the intricate ties between language, culture, and (national) identity.

To achieve the research objectives as outlined above, the audio recording was transcribed and pseudonymized and subsequently analyzed from a micro-level discourse analytical perspective (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999). This entails that I first used the qualitative coding software NVivo to code both implicit and explicit references to her national identity. In the second stage, the analysis then zoomed in on the characteristics and attributes that are assigned to the identity categories 'Chinese' and 'Canadian' throughout the interaction. Rather than conceptualizing identity categories as static entities, the discursive approach to categorization that is adopted in this analysis helps us to understand and analyze categories in use within a specific context (Edwards, 1991), thereby allowing for "an understanding of and engagement with the

life world through a commonsense organisation of categories and associated attributes that are made concrete *only in any particular location of their use*' (Fitzgerald et al., 2009, p. 48, emphasis in original).

## 7.4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

By examining a number of sequences from the interview when Laura implicitly or explicitly refers to her national identity, the analysis explores the ways in which Laura makes sense of the two main identity categories 'Canadian' and 'Chinese' during the research interview. The first part of the analysis zooms in on how and when these categories are used, which characteristics Laura ascribes to them, and how she positions herself as both an outsider and an insider with regard to both categories throughout the interview. The second section then provides insight into how these processes of sense-making are embedded in and influenced by the specific interactional context of the research interview.

It should be noted that the Chinese identity or general 'Chineseness' can refer to different groups of people, including Mainland Chinese, Hongkongers, Taiwanese, Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese (Shi, 2005), and that the Canadian identity or general 'Canadianness' can also refer to a number of groups, including immigrant groups, indigenous peoples, and the Québécois (Kymlicka, 2003). However, I use and refer to the general national identity terms 'Chinese' and 'Canadian' throughout the analysis because they are the two main categories Laura herself uses during the interview.

### 7.4.1 Constructing Laura's national identity in interaction

The construction of Laura's national identity starts at the very beginning of the interview when I ask her to introduce herself, and she replies:

Excerpt 1 (00:00:19-00:01:59): "I'm Canadian (laughs). I grew up in Canada, but my parents immigrated to Canada when I was a baby from Hong Kong. So, in terms of language right off the bat, my mother tongue is English, but I grew up in a dual national, dual cultural household. My parents spoke Chinese at home, specifically Cantonese, and of course, tried to instill in me the Chinese values. But of course, being a rebellious Canadian kid, there was this whole constant sort of back and forth [...] They did try to get me to learn Chinese, I went to Chinese school and everything, hated it (laughs), really hated it [...] I grew up actually in Alberta, and I don't know if you know Canada very well, but Alberta's, like, very, like- I'm [age], so back then, I was like the only Asian kid, like the only non, you know, Caucasian child in the entire school. And so of course, that was part of the reason why I didn't want to learn Chinese, because I really wanted to fit in."

Laura starts with identifying herself as Canadian. She then adds that she was raised in a "dual national, dual cultural household", but continues to explain that when she was a child, she distanced herself from her Chinese identity, which is in line with her initial self-identification as solely Canadian. As a child, she explains that she did this because she was the only "non [...] Caucasian child in the entire school" and wanted to "fit in" with the majority, explaining that this is also why she hated Chinese school and did not want to learn Cantonese, thereby accounting for her distancing behavior. As such, she explicitly details why and how she distanced herself from her Chinese identity as a child, and her initial introduction as Canadian implicitly reflects this distancing effort at the time of the interview as well.

Later on in the interview, she reflects on another moment when she introduced herself as Canadian. When talking about her experiences as a physiotherapist working in Saudi Arabia, she shares:

Excerpt 2 (01:01:06-01:01:51): "I was asked to treat the king. He had a bad back. And so, yea, so I went to go to the palace and I went in there and even I could tell, you know, they were introducing me [...] and he still looked at me

and said and went ‘Huh?’, and then I could then hear them explaining that she's Chinese Canadian (laughs), yea because they refer to you as your nationality, so even at the hospital where I used to work, when they book the appointment [...] that's who I was known as, the Canadian [...] So yes, that happened to me a lot.”

In this anecdote, Laura introduced herself as Canadian, but the king reacts confusedly, presumably because he had not categorized her as such. It is implied that this is due to her physical appearance as Asian, which is not in line with the commonsensical characteristics that the king ascribes to the category ‘Canadian’. When someone else clarifies that she is Chinese Canadian, she explains that the confusion is cleared up, presumably because her physical appearance is in line with the commonsensical attributes he ascribes to the category ‘Chinese’. She follows up this story by explaining that she often made herself known as ‘the Canadian’, and that in many other cases, others categorized her that way as well. She then closes the anecdote by adding that “it happened to me a lot”, underlining that she has often experienced being categorized as a certain nationality by others to make sense of her identity. However, when this categorization by others is not in line with how she identifies herself, she is forced to account for herself by explaining the discrepancy between her identity and what people commonsensically associate with the category ‘Canadian’, highlighting that the “identity of the TCK [third culture kid] is challenged with every move” (Fail et al., 2004, p. 324).

In addition to her identification as Canadian, she also shares what she considers to be commonsensically Chinese. When talking about her time in Saudi Arabia, she shares a story of visiting the Chinese embassy, where she was made fun of by the embassy staff for not being able to speak Mandarin. While telling this story, she adds:

Excerpt 3 (00:25:33-00:25:55): “It's quite embarrassing, I actually had gone into the Chinese embassy to renew my- I have a, it's called a Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Passport, because I was born there, but I've actually never been to Mainland China in my life actually, and I've only been to Hong

Kong three times in my life. I know, of all this traveling all over the world, I just for whatever reason haven't done it. So I went to the Chinese embassy in Saudi Arabia..."

When sharing that she was at the Chinese embassy, Laura immediately adds that she only has a Hong Kong passport because she was born there. Although this could be interpreted as another distancing effort, she also says that she experienced not being able to speak Mandarin as "embarrassing", implying that although she distances herself from her Chinese identity, it is not necessarily because she does not want to be associated with being Chinese, but rather because she might be embarrassed by her lack of attributes that are typically associated with the category 'Chinese'. In this excerpt, she highlights never having been to Mainland China, only having been to Hong Kong three times, and not being able to speak Mandarin as reasons why she cannot be considered Chinese, implying that the commonsensical attributes ascribed to being Chinese include visits to or living in Mainland China, more than three visits to Hong Kong, and/or being able to speak Mandarin.

Her lack of identification as Chinese becomes apparent in another anecdote she shares about how she got to know one of her long-time Chinese friends while she was living in Saudi Arabia:

Excerpt 4 (00:14:39-00:14:59): "So it's Chinese New Year [...] and my friend said, 'I know this Chinese woman [...] you should meet her!' And I'm like okay, so I called her, I didn't even know her, I called her up and I'm like 'Hey, I'm Chinese, I'm making some Chinese food, I'm not that Chinese, but would you like to come over for lunch?' She said yes."

In this anecdote, she recounts introducing herself as Chinese to another Chinese person, thereby leaving out her Canadian identity entirely. However, immediately after saying that she is Chinese, she mitigates her own statement by adding "I'm not that Chinese", which arguably functions as an indication to the listener not to expect the commonsensical characteristics that are typically associated with being Chinese.

The reasons why she feels the need to mitigate saying that she is Chinese become apparent towards the end of the interview, when she discusses her general struggle to connect with Chinese people in Belgium and across her international trajectory:

Excerpt 5 (01:03:47-01:04:36): “There are about 5 students in my son's school that are all from China, so they're all embassy workers. They- sadly actually, I'm always a little disappointed, none of them want anything to do with me, because they don't see me as being Chinese, yea, that I'm a little sad about. And that has happened right across the board, wherever I am. In Saudi Arabia, near the end of my time there [...] there were a lot more Chinese families in some of the compounds, and a girlfriend of mine, she was from Hong Kong, so she grew up 20-something years in Hong Kong, and then left to go to the US, so she's American, but she obviously was much more Chinese than me. And we tried to break into (laughs) their little- you know, their little circles, and we couldn't do it, we just couldn't do it.”

Laura explains that she has experienced rejection from multiple Chinese people because she feels that they do not consider her Chinese enough, and she relates this rejection to the fact that she does not meet the commonsensical characteristics that other (Chinese) people associate with Chineseness. She expresses sadness and disappointment over this rejection, and her phrasing of trying to “break into [...] their little circles” metaphorically emphasizes the strength of the efforts she has tried to make in the past. She adds that her friend, who is “much more Chinese than me”, was also rejected despite having lived in Hong Kong for 20 years, underlining once more that the duration of stay is a core attribute of her categorization of Chineseness, but that the minimum length or precise location of this stay remains unclear to her. When comparing this story from the end of the interview with Excerpt 1 at the very beginning of the interview, it becomes clear that when she was young, Laura recalls distancing herself from being Chinese so as to fit in as the majority identity of Canadian, but that others frequently questioned her self-identification as Canadian. Later, as an adult, many Chinese people also reject her, which she connects to her not being Chinese

enough. This lack of sense of identity and belonging is a common experience for third culture individuals (Gilbert, 2008).

Through the narration of her lived experiences, Laura associates the identity category 'Canadian' with growing up in Canada and having a distinct physical appearance which she never explicitly defines. This is in line with previous findings on the conceptualization of being Canadian, which has been argued to be rooted in British colonial history that has strong ties with whiteness (Kymlicka, 2003). Laura then links Chineseness to proficiency in the language, which confirms findings from previous research which underline the importance of knowing Chinese in the construction of 'traditional Chineseness', particularly in diasporic communities (Wei & Hua, 2010; Wei, 2015). However, she does not reflect further on the hierarchies between the different varieties of Chinese in establishing Chineseness (Wei & Hua, 2010), with the exception of a brief mention in Excerpt 3 when she was embarrassed at the embassy for not knowing Mandarin, a language she also shared she would have liked to know better. Additionally, Laura associates being Chinese with having lived in China or having visited it a number of times, although for both of these characteristics, it remains unclear throughout the interview what the minimum amount of time or number of visits should be. As such, Laura embodies certain characteristics of her conceptualization of both of these identities, yet at the same time, she also considers herself a relative outsider with regard to both categories, which is reinforced by the fact that others treat her as an outsider in certain contexts.

Because of the ambiguity of her sense of identity, she thus calls upon the one that she considers most appropriate in the interactional context she is in. Within the span of a little over an hour, the categorization of Laura's national identity shifts between Canadian, Chinese, and Chinese Canadian, thereby underlining the flexible, fluctuating, and negotiable nature of both categories and identities in interaction. Additionally, these shifts can also be considered manifestations of the vulnerability of her sense of national identity, as being part of both categories while simultaneously not embodying all of the characteristics that are commonsensically ascribed to them leads to frequent situations where Laura has to account for herself and her own identity, either because

others question her identity explicitly, or because she feels the need to explain herself in anticipation of other people's reactions on the basis of experiences when her identity has been questioned before.

### 7.4.2 Co-constructing Laura's national identity in interaction

The processes of categorization that are analyzed in Section 7.4.1 are rooted in and negotiated as part of the specific context of the research interview. From a social constructionist perspective, context is key in order to reach a deeper understanding of why and how people use or define certain categories the way they do, and to recognize how all categories used in interaction are thus not merely constructed, but rather co-constructed by the interlocutors and the particular context in which they are used (Jenkins, 2000). As such, the research interview context can be considered 'omnirelevant' to the interaction (Fitzgerald et al., 2009).

Revisiting Excerpt 1 at the beginning of the interview in light of the omnirelevant nature of the interactional context, Laura's immediate identification as Canadian when she is asked to introduce herself highlights the importance of her national identity in her construction of selfhood. However, her self-identification as Canadian is immediately followed by a laugh, which is then followed by an explanation that she was actually born in Hong Kong and moved to Canada as a baby. This laughter arguably marks incongruity of what she just said rather than actual humor (Mazzocconi et al., 2020), as Laura seems to be aware that her identification as Canadian might be questioned by the interviewer because her physical appearance is not what is typically associated with the identity category 'Canadian'. After marking the incongruity, she solves it by explaining that she was raised in a "dual national, dual cultural household." Without being prompted to do so, Laura thus anticipates the interviewer's potential reaction to her categorization as Canadian and further clarifies it before the interviewer has the chance to ask her about it first, thereby showcasing the vulnerability of her sense of national identity.



Taking the identity of the interviewer into account as a white woman who did not experience a third culture upbringing, it is possible that Laura presents herself this way on the basis of previous interactions with other people who do not share a background similar to hers and who have questioned her identity in the past. A number of researchers who have previously conducted research interviews with third culture individuals report that they are third culture individuals themselves, and that they believe this helped them to establish rapport with their research participants (see for example Moore & Barker, 2012; Purnell & Hoban, 2014). Similarly, a lack of the lived experiences that are tied to a third culture upbringing as well as not being a person of color can result in a lack of understanding from the interviewer and can thus also evoke different responses from the interviewee to the interviewer's questions. As such, Laura's identity does not exist in a vacuum, but is rather co-constructed in interaction with the interviewer, whose own identity arguably influences the way in which Laura chooses to present herself throughout the interview.

## 7.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has explored how Laura, a third culture individual who was born in Hong Kong and raised in the Canadian region of Alberta, makes sense of and interactionally constructs the national identity categories 'Canadian' and 'Chinese' within the discursive context of a research interview. In the first section of the analysis, a micro-level discourse analysis of both implicit and explicit mentions of Laura's national identity throughout the interview uncovered how she navigates the complex sense of identity that third culture individuals deal with throughout their lives (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) in interaction, thereby highlighting the vulnerability of her national identity as its ambiguity frequently forces her to account for herself. Additionally, the analysis underlined the ways in which "senses of 'national' identity are local configurations of social organization" (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 78) rather than static, clear or bounded entities, and how the subjective complexity of identity construction manifests itself in interaction. The second section of the analysis emphasized the co-constructed nature of these categories and identities throughout

the interaction by closely examining Laura's first invocation of her national identity, thereby highlighting the different ways in which talk is embedded in its interactional context.

In conclusion, the discursive approach to categorization (Edwards, 1991) adopted in this contribution has foregrounded the complexity and particularity of categorization processes in interaction from a globalized perspective, and thereby also the particularity of the vulnerability (Fineman, 2008; 2010) and complexity that is involved in establishing a sense of identity as a third culture individual. As a third culture individual, the research interview context allows Laura to reflect on how she sees herself and chooses to present herself, which is shown to be influenced by an intricate interplay of self-identification and other-categorization, as well as by rejecting and being rejected. By examining her invocations of the categories 'Chinese' and 'Canadian', the ways she makes sense of them and how she positions herself in relation to them, this contribution has thus illustrated the complexity of carefully constructing identity from a third culture perspective and the intricacies and vulnerability of doing so in interaction with others.

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# 8

## SMALL TALK AS RELATIONAL PRACTICE DURING ASSESSMENT: VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INTERVIEWS AT A GLOBALIZED COMPANY

De Malsche, F., Tobback, E., & Vandenbroucke, M. (in revision).

This chapter has been revised following peer review and has been resubmitted as a journal article at *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice*.

## 8.0 ABSTRACT

This paper explores small talk as relational practice in performance appraisal interviews between managers at the Belgian HQ of a small-sized service-oriented company and their sales agents who work remotely from all over world. On the basis of a dataset of 14 online video-recorded appraisal interviews and two follow-up interviews with the managers, we examine the occurrence and function of small talk as relational practice within the specific interactional context of performance appraisal interviews. The analysis shows that within this specific virtual workspace context, the communicative purpose of performance appraisal interviews transcends assessment, as the managers make use of small talk to fulfill the additional aim of instilling the company's corporate culture and personal approach in its employees. In doing so, we reflect on the meaning of relational practice in the workplace and we argue that the communicative purpose of these interactions is broadened so as to adapt it to the company's globalized needs.

**Keywords:** performance appraisal; virtual workspace; globalized workplace; assessment; small talk; relational practice

## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

Assessment-based interviews have become a quintessential bureaucratic medium for career development, particularly in the form of job interviews and performance appraisal interviews. For encounters such as job interviews, as well as other workplace discourse, previous research has shown that talk not only revolves around the specific activity, but often also involves sequences that are not explicitly relevant to the main purpose of these interactions, also referred to as ‘small talk’ (Komter, 1991; Holmes, 2000). Less is known, however, about the occurrence and functions of small talk in performance appraisal interviews, as (socio)linguistic research has primarily focused on how the evaluative aim of performance assessment is interactionally and intertextually achieved (see for example Lehtinen & Pälli, 2021; Meinecke & Kauffeld, 2018; Scheuer, 2014; Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2014; 2017).

In this article, we examine small talk as a form of relational practice in performance appraisal interviews (henceforth: PAIs) at a small-sized service-oriented Belgian company, GlobalCorp (a pseudonym), which operates on a global scale. The dataset used for our analysis consists of 14 online video-recorded interviews which took place in the Summer of 2021 between sales agents who work for GlobalCorp remotely across the globe and managers based at the HQ in Belgium. On the basis of these interactions as well as two follow-up interviews conducted with the managers involved in the appraisal process, we aim to examine the occurrence and function of small talk within the specific interactional context of PAIs at GlobalCorp.

In the next section, we reflect on the activity type of PAIs and the institutional context they are embedded in at GlobalCorp. Section 8.3 then elaborates on the role of small talk as relational practice in workplace interactions. In Section 8.4, we present our research focus and methodological approach and subsequently discuss the results and findings in Section 8.5, which is divided into three parts. Based on our analysis, we conclude in Section 8.6 that the relational practice of small talk is considered a crucial part of PAIs at GlobalCorp, as it fulfills the communicative purpose of instilling the company’s culture and personal approach in its employees and enables the managers



in this sense to talk the specific nature of their virtual workspace “into being” (Heritage, 1984, p. 290).

## 8.2 PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INTERVIEWS IN THE VIRTUAL WORKSPACE

Performance appraisal processes are typically made up of several spoken and written speech events (Van De Mieroop & Vrolix, 2014) “through which organizations seek to assess employees and develop their competence, enhance performance and distribute rewards” (Fletcher, 2001, p. 473). As key interactions in these processes, PAIs can be defined as “recurrent strategic interviews between a superior in an organization and an employee that focus on employee performance and development” (Asmuß, 2008, p. 409). Previous research on PAIs has described “the evaluation of performance, the setting of goals for work, and the agreeing on future developments” (Pälli & Lehtinen, 2014, p. 93) as their main communicative purposes.

Sociolinguistic and pragmatic research on PAIs was initially typically based on post-hoc recollections or simulated encounters of interviews, and as a result of this lack of research based on authentic empirical data, PAIs have been described as an interactional ‘black box’ (Clifton, 2012; Fletcher, 2001), which recent linguistic-interactional studies have aimed to fill. In doing so, the focus has been to identify how the main evaluative, didactic or goal-setting communicative purpose of the interview interactionally takes place, for example by examining how knowledge is negotiated (Bowden & Sandlund, 2019), how leadership is performed (Meinecke & Kauffeld, 2018; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2014) and how the identity of the model employee is negotiated (Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2017). Additionally, a number of studies have examined the interplay between text and talk throughout performance appraisal processes, focusing on how reports and other documents are referenced or used during PAIs (Lehtinen & Pälli, 2021; Nyroos & Sandlund, 2014; Pälli & Lehtinen, 2014; Scheuer, 2014; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2014; Van De Mieroop & Vrolix, 2014).

To date however, little is known about talk in PAIs that is not directly linked to the evaluation of the interviewee, a gap which this paper aims to address.

Encounters such as PAIs are embedded in workplace contexts which have become increasingly international and virtual over the course of the past few decades, giving rise to new types of workplaces where people work together remotely from different locations and no longer share a physical work environment. Despite its potential benefits, such virtual workspaces also contain risks, such as a lack of sense of belonging, lack of management control, and less opportunities to communicate the company's corporate culture and vision (Jacobs, 2004). An annual evaluative conversation such as the PAI can thus function as a way for management to discuss the aims and goals of the company in light of their norms and values, as well as what it means for the employees to be a 'good' member of the team, thereby "creating and maintaining a specific institutional reality" (Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2017, p. 88) beyond the physical reality of a shared office. Against this background of the virtual workspace, we focus in particular on small talk as relational practice and its occurrence and function within the interactional context of PAIs at GlobalCorp.

### 8.3 SMALL TALK IN WORKPLACE SETTINGS

In addition to achieving business objectives, relational practice is a key aspect of workplace interaction (Holmes & Marra, 2004; Holmes et al., 2011). Citing Fletcher (1999), relational practice is defined by Holmes and Marra (2004, p. 378) on the basis of three crucial components:

- “(i) RP is oriented to the “face needs” of others (Goffman 1974).
- (ii) RP serves to advance the primary objectives of the workplace.
- (iii) RP practices at work are regarded as dispensable, irrelevant, or peripheral.”



these different types of talk are difficult to delineate, as it is not always straightforward to define what is business-related and what is not (Holmes et al., 2011; Mak & Chui, 2013; Mullany, 2006).

Small talk, like other types of relational practice, is often considered “dispensable, irrelevant, or peripheral” (Holmes & Marra, 2004, p. 378) in the workplace, despite researchers arguing that it should not be (Coupland, 2000; Darics, 2010; Holmes & Marra, 2004; Holmes et al., 2011; Mak & Chui, 2013; McCarthy, 2000; Mullany, 2006; Pullin, 2010; Yang, 2012). In service encounters, small talk has been argued to function as a means to (re)construct client-server relationships, fill silences, and generally support the achievement of the transactional goals (McCarthy, 2000). Similarly, small talk in business meetings has been found to build relationships, rapport, solidarity, and understanding between interlocutors (Pullin, 2010). Additionally, in business negotiations, small talk functions as a means to build the trust and reliability necessary to achieve an agreement (Yang, 2012), and specifically in a virtual workspace, Darics (2010) finds that small talk as part of synchronous instant messaging can help to form a “collaborative work environment that enhances cooperation and efficient work” (p. 847). It is within this body of research on the role of small talk in specific types of workplace interactions that this study is situated, as we aim to better grasp the occurrence and function of small talk as relational practice in an understudied workplace context, namely the performance appraisal interview.

## 8.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, DATA, AND METHODOLOGY

While earlier studies on small talk have largely ignored PAIs, and studies on PAIs have focused primarily on what Holmes (2000) defines as core business talk and work-related talk, this paper focuses on small talk in the specific context of virtual PAIs at the globally active company GlobalCorp. Following the framework set by Holmes (2000), we describe different kinds of small talk, examining which content elements

these instances bare, where they are located, how and by whom they are initiated and prolonged, and which functions they fulfill. This way, the paper aims to highlight how small talk functions as relational practice, since it plays a crucial role in the realization of some of the communicative purposes of the virtual PAIs at this globalized company, purposes which transcend, as will be shown, the purely assessment-oriented goals of what might be called traditional PAIs.

The data collected for this study are part of the 2021 annual performance appraisal process of GlobalCorp (pseudonym), a small-sized family-owned Belgian business which operates in the tertiary sector, offering services in 59 countries across the world. GlobalCorp's headquarters are located in the Dutch-speaking region of Flanders in Belgium where approximately 25 employees work. Additionally, the company works with 26 sales agents who are located across the globe and who work on commission, i.e. they receive a percentage of the profits for every sale they are involved in. In its corporate policy and mission statement, GlobalCorp describes its core values as '*top*' (meaning 'excellent'), '*people-oriented*', '*globally active*' and '*innovative*'.

The performance appraisal process at GlobalCorp for its sales agents is made up of multiple phases (see Figure 2). First, the managers gather input from employees at HQ (A), which is used to fill out the appraisal form (B), which in turn is used as the basis for the PAI (see also Van De Mierop & Vrolix, 2014). The interview itself (C) then takes place with three interlocutors: (i) Manager 1, who is the main interviewer who poses the majority of the questions; (ii) Manager 2, who observes, sometimes asks questions, and is primarily in charge of completing the appraisal form; and (iii) the interviewee, the agent, whose performance is being assessed during the interview. After the interview has ended, the appraisal form is completed by the managers (D). As the final step, the agent is asked to sign this report (E). This report is then used as the basis of next year's appraisal process.

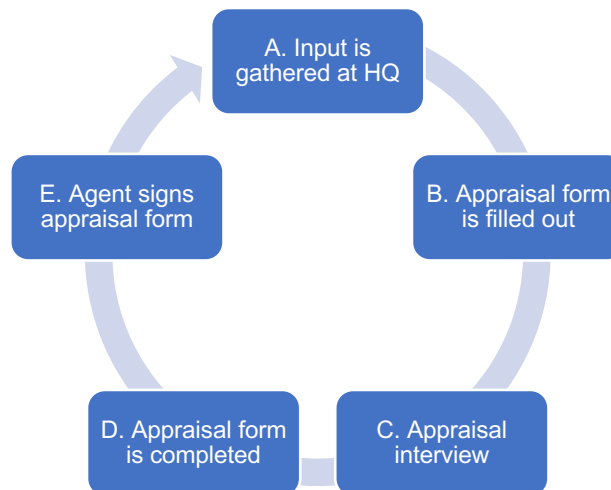


Figure 2. Performance appraisal process at GlobalCorp

The data collected at GlobalCorp used for this paper include:

- (i) 14 video-recorded PAIs (duration varying between 26-91 minutes with an average of 54 minutes), which took place via telecommunications software in English as a lingua franca due to the lack of a shared L1 between the interlocutors<sup>1</sup>;
- (ii) the written documents from phase B;
- (iii) two follow-up interviews conducted with each of the managers in which both the aim of the PAIs and specific data fragments were discussed.

Ethical permission to conduct this study was granted by the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Antwerp, and each participant provided written informed consent to collect their data. After finalizing data collection, data were transcribed on the basis of a simplified version of the Jeffersonian method (2004, see Appendix, Section 12.3 for transcription conventions) and subsequently

<sup>1</sup> The use and function of English as a lingua franca, as well as the other multilingual strategies that are used to bridge the lack of a first language between the interlocutors, will be discussed in another forthcoming paper by the authors.

pseudonymized and analyzed with the qualitative analysis software NVivo. In doing so, we adopted an institutional discourse analytical approach which builds on the premise that “institutions [...] are being constructed and reconstructed in discourse practices” (Mayr, 2008, p. 5) through recipient design, the sequential organization of talk, local context of talk, participant structure, and the experiences and assumptions of the interlocutors present (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999, p. 26). By adopting this approach, we thus aim to examine how small talk as relational practice during performance appraisal interviews is both a product of and contributes to the production of the institutional context of GlobalCorp. In the first stage, this entailed a turn-by-turn content analysis to examine the presence and role of different types of workplace talk in PAIs (following Holmes’, 2000 classification) and how the activity type of the PAI is discursively constructed in interaction. In the second stage, the findings from the first stage were interpreted in light of the insights gained during the follow-up interviews and from the surrounding documentation. This combination of authentic empirical data and follow-up interviews allows for a triangulation of emic and etic perspectives throughout the analysis, thereby strengthening our findings.

## 8.5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present the results of our research. Since our aim is to examine the occurrence and function of small talk as relational practice in the PAIs at GlobalCorp, Section 8.5.1 first offers a description of the overall structure and organization of the PAIs at GlobalCorp and then zooms in on the communicative purposes of the PAI as voiced by the managers in the preparatory appraisal forms, during the PAIs themselves, and in the follow-up interviews. In Section 8.5.2 we then turn to the discursive realization of instances of small talk and broader non-core-business talk in the dataset. Finally, in Section 8.5.3 we take a closer look at the shifts between the different types of talk and by whom small talk is typically initiated and prolonged, which will allow us to show that small talk is not treated as peripheral or irrelevant by the managers at GlobalCorp.





comprehensive reference on what the company expects from their sales agents. Both documents are not shared with the agents prior to their interview, but instead are sent to them in the final stage of the assessment process.

At the start of each interaction, Manager 1 goes over the goals of the interview to contextualize the communicative event and to ensure that its purposes are mutually understood. For example, in the interview with a sales agent for the Balkan markets, the introduction to the interaction goes as follows:

EXCERPT 2 (00:00:19-00:01:50 OUT OF 01:04:09) - INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR BALKAN MARKETS

- 1        MANAGER 1:        YEA YEA GOOD ALRIGHT ALRIGHT PERFECTLY THANK YOU UHM YES THE GOAL OF THIS MEETING IS TO UH TO EXPLAIN YOU A BIT MORE WHAT UH WHAT (MANAGER 2) AND I DID FOR THE SALES AGENTS UH SO
- 2        AGENT:                OKAY
- 3        MANAGER 1:        THE FIRST THING IS THAT WE MADE A DOCUMENT AND UH THAT'S SOMETHING WE WILL SEND YOU AFTERWARDS I DON'T THINK IT'S EASY NOW TO SHOW IT ALSO BECAUSE YOU ARE ON YOUR PHONE UH SO WE I WILL TELL YOU AND EXPLAIN YOU A BIT ABOUT IT UH BUT AFTERWARDS WE WILL SEND THE DOCUMENT AND WE WILL CONTINUE IT IN OUR ONE ON ONE MEETINGS UHM AND I THINK THAT'S THE BEST WAY TO GO THE
- 4        AGENT:                OKAY
- 5        MANAGER 1:        SECOND THING UH THAT'S ABOUT THE EVALUATION OF EVERY SALES AGENT UH WE STARTED THIS YEAR TO DO AN EVALUATION UHM SO WE WE CAN GO THROUGH THE DOCUMENT UHM (MANAGER 2) WILL MAKE A SUMMARY AFTER THE UH THIS CONVERSATION AFTER THIS MEETING AND THEN WE WILL SEND IT TO YOU AND ASK YOU TO SIGN THAT ALSO SO YOU CAN UH YOU NEED TO SIGN TWO THINGS AFTER THE MEETING UHM AND YEA IT'S IT'S ALL ABOUT UH INPUT WE GOT FROM DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS UH IN (COMPANY) HQ AND UH SOME SOMETIMES THEY HAVE A REMARK OR OR SOME FEEDBACK FOR YOU UHM SOMETIMES I DO HAVE SOME FEEDBACK FOR YOU UH SOMETIMES IT'S POSITIVE AND SOMETIMES IT'S A POINT OF IMPROVEMENT BUT WE WILL JUST GO WITH IT AND UH IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS JUST ASK AND UHM (MANAGER 2) AND I ARE ALSO EAGER TO LEARN A BIT MORE ABOUT (PRODUCT MARKET) FROM THE BALKAN UH FROM (COUNTRY) (COUNTRY)
- 6        AGENT:                OKAY OKAY
- 7        MANAGER 1:        ETCETERA SO THERE WE NEED UH YOUR KNOWLEDGE...

In turn 3, Manager 1 mentions a document, which refers to the 18-page document on the expectations of the sales agent, but immediately adds that this will not be the focus of the interview. Instead, he highlights the evaluative purpose of the interaction at the beginning of turn 5, which is continued later in the same turn as he explains that positive and negative feedback from different parties will be discussed. At the end of turns 5 and 7, Manager 1 also adds that the agent can ask questions and that the managers are “eager to learn a bit more” and that they “need” the agent’s knowledge. In the follow-up interview, Manager 1 explained that he added this because he does not consider the PAI to be “one-sided” or a “one-way street.”<sup>2</sup>

Overall, the goals that are explicitly mentioned by Manager 1 during the introductory sequences of all the observed PAIs are:

- (i) Evaluate the sales agent on the basis of appraisal form (mentioned in 11 out of 14 introductions);
- (ii) Explain the expectations for the sales agent in reference to the 18-page document (mentioned in 11 out of 14 introductions);
- (iii) Learn from the sales agent (mentioned in 11 out of 14 introductions);
- (iv) Get to know the sales agent (mentioned in 2 out of 14 introductions);
- (v) Set up a report (mentioned in 6 out of 14 interactions).

It is relevant to note that although the first three goals are mentioned in 11 different interviews, these are not the same interviews for each goal. The topics listed in the appraisal form are not communicated to the sales agents prior to the interview, nor are they introduced during its beginning sequences. Rather than introducing the specific topics of discussion that will be dealt with during the interaction, Manager 1 focuses on the general aims of the PAI, which are not only framed as an evaluation of the sales

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<sup>2</sup> Original Dutch: “Ik vind dat een evaluatie niet eenzijdig mag zijn”; “Ik vind dat het zeker geen eenrichtingsverkeer mag zijn.”

agent, but also include learning from them, getting to know them, and setting up a report.

During the follow-up interviews, both managers explained separately that from a managerial perspective, the performance appraisal process at GlobalCorp does not only aim to structurally evaluate each sales agent's performance of the last year, but that they also aim to get to know the agents and to involve them more closely in the company's general functioning. This latter purpose is emphasized in light of GlobalCorp's globalized virtual workspace, as Manager 2 explains that "that's the problem with those remote workers and those barriers in terms of language, culture, in terms of remoteness too, that all plays a huge, huge role, and the aim is indeed to pull them closer."<sup>3</sup> Manager 1 said during his follow-up interview that managing sales agents from abroad can be considered an added difficulty to his job, as he finds it "more difficult to manage someone from a distance than someone you see every day"<sup>4</sup>, thereby experiencing first-hand what Jacobs (2004) defines as one of the main challenges of a virtual workspace. In light of these experiences, the performance appraisal process was in part introduced to help solve this issue and to make the agents feel more involved as colleagues at GlobalCorp, which may be interpreted as a relationship-oriented goal of the interaction. Although this goal is topicalized in the PAIs, it is not listed in the textual documents of the appraisal process.

On the basis of the above, PAIs at GlobalCorp only partially seem to meet what we called traditional definitions of PAIs (Asmuß, 2008; Fletcher, 2001), since their purpose is not only to evaluate the agents, but also to get to know them better on a personal and professional level, which has the ultimate goal of getting them more involved and in line with GlobalCorp's values. With regard to Holmes' (2000) continuum of workplace talk and taking into account the general fluidity and difficulty of defining strict delineations between different types of workplace talk (Holmes et al.,

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<sup>3</sup> Original Dutch: "Dat is het probleem met die remote workers en die barrières van qua taal, cultuur, qua remoteness ook, en dat speelt allemaal enorm enorm een rol hé, en de bedoeling is inderdaad van die dichter te trekken."

<sup>4</sup> Original Dutch: "Het is moeilijker om vanop afstand iemand aan te sturen dan iemand die je elke dag ziet."

2011), this observation leads to an interesting reflection: from a traditional perspective on PAIs, it may be argued that all elements of the interaction related to the content of the preparatory documents should be analysed as on topic ‘core business talk’ as they concern the assessment of the performance of the agent under evaluation. All other content elements should then fall under non-core business talk, be it ‘small talk’ or ‘work-related talk’, and can be considered relational practice, which is generally perceived as “dispensable, irrelevant, or peripheral” (Holmes & Marra, 2004, p. 378). However, because these elements of relational practice are explicitly put forward by the managers in the interviews as communicative purposes that also contain a ‘business’ goal, i.e. to strengthen the company’s internal cohesion and thereby “advance the primary objectives of the workplace” (Holmes & Marra, 2004, p. 378), the fundamental question arises whether all – theoretically – non-core business talk can effectively be interpreted as non-core business talk in this specific institutional setting, and how relational practice can be defined in light of this distinction between core and non-core business talk. We will return to this question in the final section of the paper.

In the next section, for clarity of description, we define core business talk as all elements of the interaction that relate directly to the evaluation of sales agents and GlobalCorp's performance expectations towards them, i.e. all elements that relate to the topics as outlined in the appraisal form. All other elements of the interaction, then, will initially be treated as 'non-core business talk', which we will analyse in more detail with a focus on what is said, when it occurs, and who initiates and prolongs it.

## 8.5.2 Non-core business talk in PAIs at GlobalCorp

### 8.5.2.1 Small talk

As described earlier, we define ‘small talk’ as comprising all forms of talk that are both relationship-oriented and off-topic, hence not strictly obligatory for the task at hand (i.e. the agent’s assessment). Depending on the degree of personal information that is provided in the small talk, sequences can lean more towards ‘social talk’ (Holmes, 2000), when they are more “context-specific” and “relate more precisely to the individuals involved” (Holmes, 2000, p. 39), or more towards ‘phatic communion’ which is “atopical” and “has relatively little referential content or informational load” (Holmes, 2000, p. 37).

In GlobalCorp’s PAIs, phatic communion includes greetings and partings in the opening and closing phases of the interview (McCarthy, 2000). In addition to these strictly phatic sequences, many instances of small talk in the data range between social and phatic talk. Among the most frequent topics, we find the weather, the Covid-19 pandemic, the agent’s personal life, and the agent’s professional life outside of GlobalCorp.

The weather topic in PAIs at GlobalCorp only occurs at the beginning stages of the interactions. For example, Manager 1 initiates this topic at the start of the interview with a sales agent for a Southern European market, where it is immediately followed by social talk about his professional life outside of GlobalCorp:

EXCERPT 3 (00:02:08–00:02:42 OUT OF 00:39:39) – INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR A SOUTHERN EUROPEAN MARKET

- 1        MANAGER 1:        IT’S UH IT’S BECOMING SUMMER NOW IN OUR COUNTRIES SO UH YEA  
                                 WE’RE HEADING TO UH TO (SOUTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRY) DEGREES  
                                 SO UH YEA LET’S LET’S KEEP IT THIS WAY
- 2        AGENT:                YEA

- 3       MANAGER 1:     AND UH (.) WERE YOU WORKING TODAY UH (AGENT) OR WHAT WHAT'S  
                          YOUR WHAT'S YOUR MAIN JOB?
- 4       AGENT:         YEA YEA YEA YEA YEA I I I AM WORKING IN MY JOB WHAT HAPPENS  
                          IS UH WE HAVE UH FREEDOM TO WORK AT HOME OR TO WORK IN MY  
                          OFFICE SO WITH UH COVID UH I PREFER UH WORK AT MY HOME IN  
                          MOST OF THE DAYS
- 5       MANAGER 1:     YEA

With the minimal response “yea” in turn 2, the agent does not add anything to the topic of the weather, to which Manager 1 responds with a short pause and the initiation of the new topic of the agent’s job outside of GlobalCorp in turn 3. As the sales agents work on commission for the sales they have brokered, several of them have other unrelated jobs to supplement their income. Manager 1 thus prolongs the small talk by introducing this new topic before moving on to the evaluation of the agent, and in doing so, he also moves from a topic that is more phatic, i.e. the weather, to a topic that is more social, i.e. the sales agent’s professional life outside of GlobalCorp, which can be considered personal information in this PAI context. During his follow-up interview, Manager 1 described this type of small talk as an ‘icebreaker’ for the subsequent assessment.

Other instances of small talk come as brief ‘interactional moments’ during the interactional flow of the PAI (McCarthy, 2000). For example, during the interview with the sales agent for an Eastern European market, Manager 2 is sharing his screen as they are discussing the sales agent’s professional website. One of the pages includes an old photo of the sales agent with short hair, while his hair is much longer at the time of the PAI. This triggers the following sequence:

EXCERPT 4 (00:13:32-00:13:48 OUT OF 00:59:58) – INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT:  
MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR AN EASTERN EUROPEAN MARKET

- 1       AGENT:         HERE WITH THE (PRODUCT)
- 2       MANAGER 2:     OKAY SUPER (.) YOU'VE CHANGED A LOT (AGENT) ((LAUGHS))  
                          ((POINTING AT OLD PHOTO OF AGENT WITH CURSOR))
- 3       AGENT:         YEA ((LAUGHS))
- 4       MANAGER 1:     ((LAUGHS))
- 5       AGENT:         EVERYBODY TELLS ME I I LOOK LIKE A MONK RIGHT NOW
- 6       MANAGER 2:     YEA IT'S A GOOD LOOK FOR YOU GOOD LOOK FOR YOU ((LAUGHS))

7       AGENT:               ((LAUGHS))  
8       MANAGER 2:       OKAY I THINK UH WE SHOULD WE WILL CONTINUE?  
9       AGENT:               OKAY I'M LISTENING YEA

After a short pause in turn 2, Manager 2 initiates social talk by joking about this pronounced discrepancy in physical appearance, to which both Manager 1 and the agent reply with laughter. This joke is part of social talk due to its highly context-specific nature and the use of the agent's physical appearance as the punchline of the joke. After the laughter in turns 2 to 4, the agent continues the joke in turn 5 by referring to himself as a monk, which is again replied to with laughter and confirmation from Manager 2 in turn 6. As the laughter subsides, Manager 2 indicates that “we should we will continue” in turn 8, thereby explicitly referring to a transition back from this side sequence.

This side sequence combines two types of relational practice, namely humor and social small talk. Studies on workplace talk have shown that when used successfully, the use of humor can “signal, create and reinforce solidarity among interlocutors” (Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2018, p. 36). In line with this, Manager 2 explained during the follow-up interview that he makes jokes like this to “establish a little bit of rapport”<sup>5</sup> with the agents and that this type of humorous social talk reflects GlobalCorp's general corporate culture, where not everything has to be “pure to the point and just business is business.”<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, references to the personal lives of the agents are offered by the agents or asked about by one of the managers as social talk throughout the assessment of the agent's performance. For example, during the PAI with a sales agent for a market in Southeast Asia, Manager 1 inquires about his hobbies:

EXCERPT 5 (00:15:07–00:15:36 OUT OF 00:58:04) – INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT:  
MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR A SOUTHEAST ASIAN MARKET

1       MANAGER 1:       THAT MAKES SENSE INDEED AND THEN I ALSO THINK THE THE

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<sup>5</sup> Original Dutch: “Een klein beetje rapport opbouwen.”

<sup>6</sup> Original Dutch: “Puur to the point en gewoon business is business.”

- (COMMERCIAL EVENT) YOU'RE ORGANIZING IS ALWAYS UH SUCCESSFUL  
UHM
- 2       AGENT:        YEA
- 3       MANAGER 1:    SO YEA I HAVE IT SCHEDULED FOR FOR LATER THIS MEETING BUT  
                          THAT'S SOMETHING UH I'M ALSO CURIOUS UH AT UH (.) YOU'RE  
                          ALSO UH AN ACTIVE CYCLIST UH I HAVE SEEN (AGENT) IS THAT  
                          RIGHT
- 4       AGENT 1:       AH YEA ((LAUGHS)) I'M A YEA I'M STARTING TO TO RIDE A BIKE  
                          RECENTLY BECAUSE OF THE (.) BECAUSE OF THE THE LOCKDOWNS HERE

Before turn 1, they were discussing commercial events organized by the agent for GlobalCorp in the past, and Manager 1 provides positive feedback regarding these events in turn 1. The agent replies with the minimal response “yea” in turn 2, and Manager 1 then initiates a new topic: one of his hobbies, cycling. In doing so, he refers to his preparation of the interview in turn 3, although it remains unclear whether these preparations refer to the previous topic of the commercial events or the subsequent topic of the agent’s cycling hobby.<sup>7</sup> The agent replies with laughter at the start of turn 4, potentially indicating a surprised reaction to an unexpected question in the interactional context of a PAI. This sequence regarding the agent’s hobbies subsequently transitions into more extended small talk as Manager 1 asks about the agent’s main job as a property developer and his other hobbies, all of which are social small talk topics about the agent’s personal life. This sequence lasts for approximately seven minutes early in the PAI before they return to discussing the agent’s performance at GlobalCorp. During the follow-up interview, Manager 1 could not remember why he had brought up this topic at this specific time, but he explained that he is also an active cyclist himself and that he regularly tries to bring up topics of common interest to get to know the agents better and establish common ground.

The Covid-19 pandemic and Covid-19 vaccination are a final small talk topic that was regularly discussed during the PAIs. Depending on the sequence, this small talk topic can be more phatic, as some of them focus primarily on the restrictive measures that were in place in their respective locations at the time, but some were more social and related to the interlocutors’ personal health and vaccination status and experience. This

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<sup>7</sup> It is relevant to note that the products sold through GlobalCorp are entirely unrelated to cycling.



general small talk topic occurred throughout the interactions, including sequences towards the beginning, the middle or the end of the interview. For example, Manager 2 initiates this topic right before the phatic exchange of partings at the end of the interview with a sales agent for the Balkan markets:

EXCERPT 6 (01:03:29-01:03:56 OUT OF 01:04:08) - INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR BALKAN MARKETS

1       MANAGER 2:       HAVE YOU HAVE YOU GOTTEN VACCINATED ALREADY OR?  
2       AGENT:            NO I WAS UH SICK IN UH DECEMBER SO  
3       MANAGER 2:       YOU HAD CORONA?  
4       AGENT:            YES IT WAS OKAY BUT NOW I I I'M GOING TO VACCINATE I THINK  
                          UH IN THIS WEEK OR NEXT WEEK I THINK  
5       MANAGER 2:       OH SOON SOON YEA YEA YEA OKAY (.) ALRIGHT GOOD SUPER  
6       MANAGER 1:       ALRIGHT THEN UH WE'LL LEAVE IT BY THIS AND UH THANK YOU  
                          VERY MUCH AND UH DRIVE SAFE UH (AGENT)  
7       AGENT:            (( WAVES ))

During the follow-up interview, Manager 2 explained that he asked this question purely out of personal interest and that the agent's vaccination status was entirely unrelated to his evaluation as a sales agent, thus identifying this sequence as social talk rather than potential work-related talk (see Section 8.5.2.2).

Overall, small talk occurs in the form of social talk and phatic communion in all of the observed PAIs. During the follow-up interviews, the managers explained that the different small talk topics function as a means to break the ice, to establish rapport and common ground with the agents, and to bond with them. Hence, the different instances of small talk during the PAIs can be considered relational practice, as they serve a relational communicative purpose of getting to know the agents better, and simultaneously serve to "advance the primary objectives of the workplace" (Holmes & Marra, 2004, p. 378) by trying to involve the agents more closely in the company workings.

### 8.5.2.2 Work-related talk and borderline cases

Earlier we defined ‘work-related talk’ in line with Holmes (2000) as talk which is neither strictly obligatory for the task of evaluating the agent, nor clearly relationship-oriented. It remains business-oriented as it includes more general talk about the company or the business that does not directly refer to the agent’s assessment, as well as talk about their products that is not directly related to the PAI. For example, a number of sales agents personally own products sold by GlobalCorp, and their personal expertise and experiences with the products are sometimes discussed during the PAIs. These instances are not directly tied to the agent’s assessment, but they are indirectly related to the business, and, as such, they can be considered work-related talk. Additionally, these instances can arguably be considered instantiations of the communicative purpose of ‘learning from the agent’, as discussed in Section 8.5.1, and in this sense, they can at times also serve as relational practice, as they help the managers to get to know the agents better through their personal expertise and experiences and in this sense also help the agents to feel more closely connected to the company.

Another way in which talk can blur the distinction between core business and small talk is shown in Excerpt 7, which occurs at the end of the interview with an agent for a Western European market. In this excerpt, the agent asks about what happened with another sales agent who had recently been let go from GlobalCorp:

EXCERPT 7 (00:41:05-00:41:32 OUT OF 00:48:22) – INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT:  
MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR A WESTERN EUROPEAN MARKET

- 1       MANAGER 1:     GOOD (.) (MANAGER 2) ANYTHING UH TO ADD?  
2       MANAGER 2:     NO NOT MUCH TO ADD NO  
3       MANAGER 1:     ALRIGHT WELL THEN WE UH CLOSE THE MEETING I THINK UH  
4       AGENT:         OKAY JUST JUST JUST TO TO KNOW ABOUT IT BECAUSE IT’S NEW UH  
                       WITH (OTHER AGENT) WHAT HAPPENED?  
5       MANAGER 1:     UH YEA (OTHER AGENT) UH HAD HIS EVALUATION ALSO UHM AND WE  
                       PREPARED THE EVALUATION (MANAGER 2) AND I AND WE GOT FEEDBACK  
                       FROM DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS AND THEN WE SAID LIKE YEA THIS IS  
                       (.) THIS IS NOT GOOD UHM...

Following this excerpt, Manager 1 continues to explain why the other agent had been let go, clarifying that he had received prior warnings about his performance in the past and that it had eventually come to a point where the managers had decided to terminate his contract. On the one hand, this stretch of talk could be interpreted as small talk, or even office gossip, given its location at the boundary of the communicative event and as it is not directly relevant to or obligatory for the agent's assessment to discuss the termination of employment of another agent. On the other hand, it arguably cannot be considered purely small talk, as the information contained in this sequence relates to the company's workings, including the agent appraisal processes and possible grounds for termination, and is therefore also relevant (and of interest) to the agent. As such, this type of stretches of talk involves characteristics of both core business and small talk without fully fitting into either category, thereby further underlying the difficulty of clear delineations between different types of workplace talk (Holmes et al., 2011).

### 8.5.3 Initiating and prolonging small talk

One final aspect that we will cover in this paper is by whom small talk is typically initiated and prolonged in GlobalCorp's PAIs. Transitions between the different types of talk can be considered discursive renegotiations as the speakers reflect "their changing local priorities as talk proceeds" (Coupland, 2000, p. 13). As the management of (small) talk can be considered a covert way of exerting control over what is and what is not considered appropriate in terms of timing and topics that are discussed (Holmes, 2000), these negotiations can provide insight into the power dynamics at play within the institutional context of a PAI. In this sense, power or control is not considered rigid or static, but rather a fluid and dynamic concept which is co-constructed, negotiated, and exerted in interaction (Holmes, 2007).

In this case, the managers are considered to be in traditional positions of power vis-à-vis the agents as they are the evaluators. For example in Excerpt 4, after Manager 2 jokes about the agent's hair, Manager 2 asks: "okay I think uh we should we will

continue?” to explicitly direct the conversation back to the assessment of the sales agent. However, he hedges this shift by phrasing it as a question rather than an affirmative statement, thereby allowing Manager 1 to ultimately make this decision. In GlobalCorp’s PAIs, we see that small talk is not bounded by specific constraints or initiative-takers and instead occurs at various points throughout the interaction: in the case for the humorous social talk in Excerpt 4, but also in Excerpt 3 when Manager 1 prolongs the small talk by asking questions about the agent’s main job after talking about the weather, in Excerpt 5 when Manager 1 asks the agent about his hobby of cycling which then turns into a seven-minute sequence about a number of social talk topics, and in Excerpt 6 when Manager 2 asks the agent about his Covid-19 vaccination status at the end of the interview. These findings are similar to what Holmes et al. (2011) have observed in New Zealand workplaces, where managers typically are involved in and even encourage social talk in workplace interaction.

The following excerpt at the end of the interview with an agent for a North American market underlines explicitly that the managers are aware of the personal nature of some of these topics when they initiate them:

EXCERPT 8 (01:01:24-01:01:45 OUT OF 01:05:49) - INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR A NORTH AMERICAN MARKET

- 1       MANAGER 2:     YEA I CAN IMAGINE (.) ALRIGHT UHM (.) (MANAGER 1)
- 2       MANAGER 1:     YEA ONE ONE PERSONAL QUESTION LEFT UH (AGENT) YOU EMAILED YOU  
HAD A MINOR PROCEDURE I DON’T KNOW WHAT IT EXACTLY WAS BUT  
IS YOUR HEALTH UH OKAY? EVERYTHING’S GOOD?
- 3       AGENT:         OH YEA NO NO MY MY HEALTH IS GOOD MY HEALTH IS GOOD FOR THE  
YEA FOR THE MOST PART I’VE THAT WAS JUST UHM...

Prior to this sequence, Manager 2 and the agent had been discussing an issue with one of their products, after which Manager 2 hands the discussion back to Manager 1 in turn 1. Manager 1 then takes this opportunity to ask the agent a question about his health, which he explicitly phrases as “personal”, thereby indicating that he is potentially going beyond the boundaries of what can be considered appropriate in a professional interaction. By inquiring about his health as a yes-or-no question in turn 2, Manager 1 is careful to consider these boundaries as he provides the agent with the

opportunity to either reply briefly, or to elaborate on the topic and share his health issues with the managers. In turn 3 and the subsequent turns, the agent chooses the latter option as he starts to explain what the health issue was. According to Manager 2, initiating these types of topics and asking these types of questions helps to reflect GlobalCorp's core values, particularly that of being 'people-oriented', explaining that "this is just another example of okay, we don't only care about your performance but also about you as the human being."<sup>8</sup> Manager 1 confirmed this, explaining that "the reason why I asked it [the question] is of course because I'm interested yes."<sup>9</sup>

In all of the above analyzed examples of small talk and in the majority of the instances of small talk identified in the dataset, the managers initiate and/or prolong them rather than divert from them. These findings then further underline that relational practice is indeed part of the explicit communicative purpose of the interaction, as the managers attempt to make the agents feel more closely involved as colleagues, and the topics initiated by the managers and discussed during the small talk sequences showcase that this goes beyond the professional sphere. When asked if it is important to him that there is room for small talk during the PAI, Manager 2 confirmed that it is, as he believes that initiating and making enough room for these sequences helps to reflect GlobalCorp's core values and corporate culture by making it clear to the agents that GlobalCorp cares about their well-being and that the PAI is a two-sided interaction, thereby helping to communicate those values to the sales agents in a latent way. Manager 1 expressed similar views, underlining that the interaction should not be a "one-way street" and that he uses small talk to connect and build trust with the agents. As such, rather than (only) explicitly saying that being people-oriented is part of GlobalCorp's core values and that they care about their sales agents, the managers also convey this implicitly by making room for (social) small talk during PAIs. In doing so, the managers at GlobalCorp do not consider the relational practice of small talk to be "dispensable, irrelevant, or peripheral" (Holmes & Marra, 2004, p. 378), as is usually

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<sup>8</sup> Original Dutch: "Dit is gewoon weer een voorbeeld van oké, we don't only care about your performance maar ook about you as the human being."

<sup>9</sup> Original Dutch: "De reden dat ik hem stelde is natuurlijk dat ik geïnteresseerd ben ja."

the case in workplace contexts, but rather consciously make use of it as a communicative strategy to further their business objectives.

## 8.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has aimed to provide a first insight into the occurrence and function of small talk in the specific and understudied interactional context of PAIs. Our analysis has shown that small talk as part of the PAIs at GlobalCorp comprises a number of topics, including more phatic ones such as the weather as well as more socially context-specific ones such as the agent's personal lives, and that it can occur throughout all phases of the interaction. Similar to findings from other workplace activity types, it functions as a means to break the ice, to establish rapport and common ground, and to build relationships (Darics, 2010; McCarthy, 2000; Pullin, 2010; Yang, 2012). Additionally, we found that the managers – who are arguably in control of the interaction – initiate and/or prolong small talk and explicitly ask about personal and social topics rather than diverting away from them.

In terms of the communicative purposes of the PAIs in general and of small talk specifically, we found that although the assessment of the sales agent remains central and crucial to the interaction, the managers made explicit during the follow-up interviews that small talk as relational practice is considered an integral part of the PAIs at GlobalCorp, as it helps to serve the relational communicative purpose of getting to know the agents better as part of the company's virtual workspace, thereby also serving the business-oriented purpose of involving them more closely in GlobalCorp's general workings. Similar to findings on small talk in workplace contexts in New Zealand, we thus find that "social talk serves, then, not just as relational work in general, but more specifically as RP (Relational Practice), since it relates to more than purely interpersonal objectives such as building rapport" (Holmes et al., 2011, p. 86).

These findings showcase that in contrast to how relational practice in general and social talk specifically are largely perceived in workplace settings, i.e. "as peripheral and

irrelevant to serious workplace business" (Holmes et al., 2011, p. 84), the managers at GlobalCorp do not consider it as such. Instead, they themselves topicalize it during the follow-up interviews as relevant to establishing a workplace culture in a virtual workspace. Their emic perspectives and reflections showcase that the general negative connotation which often surrounds the notion of small talk or relational practice in workplace settings is not universal, and that instead, the managers at GlobalCorp consciously make use of the benefits associated with relational practice to "advance the primary objectives of the workplace" (Holmes & Marra, 2004, p. 378).

Finally, although we find that Holmes's (2000) model and definitions of different types of workplace talk provide a strong and useful basis for the analysis of talk in PAIs, and we agree that clear delineations of the different types of talk are difficult to achieve due to the inherently ambiguous nature of workplace talk (Holmes et al., 2011), we would argue that the small talk occurring during PAIs at GlobalCorp cannot be represented on a spectrum as the opposite of core business talk, as small talk and social talk in particular showed, in this specific setting, to be "on-topic" and relevant rather than "irrelevant in terms of workplace business" (Holmes, 2000, p. 37), since its main purpose is explicitly to serve the business-oriented goal of having the agents more involved in the company. Thus, we would argue that the term 'core business talk' can wrongfully imply that only assessment-related talk is business-related.

In conclusion, the ways in which the managers at GlobalCorp make use of the PAI to achieve multiple communicative purposes emphasizes that workplace interactions are malleable and that they can display both stability as well as flexibility as they are adapted to fit the needs of those who make use of them, thereby further underlining the need for authentic data to fully understand the 'black box' of PAIs (Clifton, 2012). This case study has explored how within the specific globalized context of this small-sized service-oriented firm where remote workers do not share a physical workplace with their superiors at HQ, the institution, its corporate culture, and its norms and values are "talked into being" (Heritage, 1984, p. 290) through the use of online video interactions, which serve both the main purpose of assessing the agents' performance,

as well as a secondary purpose of getting to know them better and thereby making them feel more involved and valued in the company's general workings.

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# 9

## MULTILINGUALISM IN PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INTERVIEWS: STRATEGIES TO BRIDGE LANGUAGE GAPS

De Malsche, F., Tobback, E., & Vandenbroucke, M. (in preparation).

This chapter is in preparation for submission as a journal article at *Frontiers in Communication*.

## 9.0 ABSTRACT

This paper explores the use of three different language strategies to bridge the lack of a shared first language during performance appraisal interviews, namely English as a business lingua franca, receptive multilingualism, and a lay interpreter. The study is based on authentic video-recorded performance appraisal interviews at a globally active Belgian company, and follow-up interviews with the managers. The analysis focuses on how the company deals with multilingualism from a management perspective, how the managers perceive the respective multilingual strategies from a language ideological perspective, and how these language ideological beliefs shape the language practices of the performance appraisal interviews. We conclude that this study provides novel insights into how globalized companies deal with multilingualism in the high-stakes and potentially sensitive interactional context of a PAI by underlining the intertwined nature of language ideological beliefs and language practices as part of a broader multilingual language management strategy.

**Keywords:** performance appraisal; workplace multilingualism; miscommunication; English as a lingua franca; receptive multilingualism; lay interpreting; globalization; language management; language beliefs; language policy

## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

As a result of late modern globalization, companies and their employees cross linguistic, professional, and national boundaries on a daily basis (Appadurai, 1996), and the ways in which companies and employees make use of language are therefore changing continuously. A crucial and recurrent interaction in the modern workplace is the performance appraisal interview (henceforth: PAI), a high-stakes encounter defined as “recurrent strategic interviews between a superior in an organization and an employee that focus on employee performance and development” (Asmuß, 2008, p. 409). Although a growing body of research has focused on this type of institutional interaction, most of the existing studies that are based on authentic empirical data are situated within specific nation-state frameworks where the interviews primarily take place in the respective dominant language (e.g. Asmuß, 2008; Bowden & Sandlund, 2019; Lehtinen & Pälli, 2021; Meinecke & Kauffeld, 2018; Mikkola & Lehtinen, 2014; Nyroos & Sandlund, 2014; Pälli & Lehtinen, 2014; Van De Mieroop & Carranza, 2018; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2014; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2017; Van De Mieroop & Vrolix, 2014). As such, the interactional specificities of multilingual PAIs remain relatively unknown to date, as well as how institutional interlocutors perceive them and how they fit into a broader language management strategy as part of an organization’s general language policy.

Against this background, this paper examines the language practices, language management, and language ideological beliefs (Spolsky, 2004; 2009) present during the PAIs at GlobalCorp (pseudonym), a small-sized service-oriented Belgian company that is active in 59 countries across the world. More specifically, we examine video-recorded PAIs between managers who work at the company’s headquarters in Belgium (L1, i.e. first language: Dutch) and sales agents who work for the company from all around the world (L1: not Dutch). During these interviews, the interlocutors make use of different multilingual strategies to bridge the language gap, namely English as a business lingua franca, receptive multilingualism, and lay interpreting. Additionally, the dataset includes two follow-up interviews with the managers responsible for the performance appraisal processes at GlobalCorp to better understand these multilingual processes

from their insider perspectives. On the basis of this dataset, we adopt a qualitative interactional approach to examine (i) how the multilingual strategies used during PAIs at GlobalCorp fit into their general language management strategy, (ii) how the managers perceive of the use of these strategies during PAIs, and (iii) how the managers' language ideological beliefs manifest themselves in the language practices of the PAIs themselves.

In the next section, we reflect on the role and influence of globalization on corporate language policies, particularly in the form of workplace multilingualism, to contextualize why we adopt a globalized and multilingual perspective on PAIs. We then elaborate on our methodology, research objectives, and qualitative analytical framework in Section 9.3. The analysis in Section 9.4 first provides insight into GlobalCorp's general management strategy and then focuses on each of the three multilingual strategies used during the PAIs specifically. Finally, we conclude that this study provides novel insights into how globalized companies deal with multilingualism in the high-stakes and potentially sensitive interactional context of PAIs by underlining the intertwined nature of language ideological beliefs and language practices as part of a broader multilingual language management strategy.

## 9.2 LANGUAGE POLICY AND MULTILINGUAL INTERACTIONS IN A GLOBALIZED WORKSPACE

Following Spolsky's (2004; 2009; 2019) theoretical model of language policy, each (corporate) language policy is built on and comprises "three independent but interconnected components" (Spolsky, 2019, p. 326), i.e. language beliefs, language practice, and language management. The first component of language beliefs is described as "the values or statuses assigned to named languages, varieties, and features"; language practices are defined as "the observable behaviors and choices – what people actually do"; and the third aspect of language management comprises "the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims authority

over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs” (Spolsky, 2009, p. 4). In a globalized setting, most, if not all aspects of workplace communication have undergone complex changes over the past few decades (Argenti, 2006), and in light of such changes, most language policies have been argued to include a balancing act between finding an efficient way of communicating internally, which is often encouraged in the form of a common corporate language, and communicating externally with customers, which often requires more than one language (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014).

In light of globalization, existing research on corporate language policies has focused strongly on the use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) or English as a business lingua franca (BELF, see Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salmina, 2013) for internal communication in workplace contexts, as ELF can be considered both “the consequence and the principal language medium of globalizing processes” (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 303). Researchers have argued that BELF specifically is characterized by the resourcefulness and flexibility of its speakers to dynamically accommodate to different interlocutors in order to establish mutual understanding (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013; Kankaanranta & Lu, 2013; Köster, 2010; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2008) and by an emphasis on intercultural comprehension, cooperation, accommodation and recipient design (Cogo, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2011; Mustajoki, 2017). However, research has also shown that the implementation of English as a common corporate language often does not solve the problems that linguistic diversity can pose in a multilingual workplace (Angouri, 2013; Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014; Lønsmann & Kraft, 2018; Sanden & Lønsmann, 2018), thereby underlining that a “one-size-fits-all” solution to corporate language policy does not exist (Sanden, 2016). Taking into account the balancing act between internal and external language policy needs, the use of different languages can be encouraged by companies if the use of these languages contributes to or results in financial advantages, particularly in the tertiary sector (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014; Heller, 2010; Park & Wee, 2012); however, research has shown that managing this type of linguistic diversity can be challenging in practice (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014; Ehrenreich, 2010; Fredriksson et al., 2006).



Next to BELF, a number of other strategies can be used to bridge the lack of a shared L1 in spoken communication (see Lüdi, 2013; Zeevaert, 2007 for an overview). One option is to make use of a *lingua receptiva* or receptive multilingualism, which entails that different interlocutors express themselves in their own preferred languages and at the same time have at least receptive proficiency in the language(s) that the other interlocutor is using (Zeevaert, 2007). Making use of these “asymmetrical competences” has been argued to benefit the efficiency as well as the fairness of the interaction (Lüdi, 2013). Another frequently applied strategy to bridge the lack of a shared language in all types of institutional encounters is the recruitment of an interpreter (Raymond, 2017). This can either be a professional interpreter, i.e. a trained, certified interpreter such as a sworn or community interpreter, or a lay interpreter, i.e. someone who is proficient in the relevant languages but has not been trained to act as an interpreter.

The use of such multilingual strategies forms part of an organization’s broader language management strategies, and the thought processes behind when, how, and why these different strategies are used are indicative of the language ideological beliefs that the interlocutors adhere to. Language practices thus form a central locus of corporate language policies, and they become particularly relevant in interactions where the interlocutors do not share the same L1. Recurrent examples of such interactions include meetings, email communication, as well as more informal encounters such as coffee or lunch breaks. In this paper, we focus on the recurrent interaction of PAIs, as the evaluation of the performance and development of an employee makes this type of interaction a high-stakes and potentially sensitive encounter (Asmuß, 2008). This arguably results in an increased need for mutual intelligibility and successful information exchange, which can be complexified when the interlocutors do not share an L1.

Given their crucial role for both the employee and the employer, there is no lack of research on PAIs (see Asmuß, 2008 for a literature overview), and, especially over the past decade, scholars around Europe have examined these high-stakes interactions from discourse analytical perspectives on the basis of authentic empirical data,

including studies from Sweden (Bowden & Sandlund, 2019; Nyroos & Sandlund, 2014; Sandlund et al., 2011), Germany (Meinecke & Kauffeld, 2018), Finland (Lehtinen & Pälli, 2021; Mikkola & Lehtinen, 2014; Pälli & Lehtinen, 2014; Sorsa et al., 2014), Denmark (Asmuß, 2008; 2013; Scheuer, 2014), Belgium (Van De Mierop & Carranza, 2018; Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2017) and the Netherlands (Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2014; Van De Mierop & Vrolix, 2014). The interactions in these studies primarily occur in the respective dominant language of specific nation-state frameworks and have significantly contributed to demystifying the interactional “black box” of PAIs (Clifton, 2012) through foci on facework, the (co-)construction of knowledge, leadership, and employeeship, and the interplay between talk and text during PAIs. However, despite the increasing globalized nature of corporate contexts, no studies to date have topicalized multilingual PAIs, i.e. PAIs in which interlocutors do not use their L1 to communicate. This study therefore aims to add such a globalized perspective to this existing body of empirical research on PAIs through a case study on the multilingual practices, beliefs, and management present during the PAIs at GlobalCorp as part of the company’s broader language policy.

### 9.3 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research context for this study is a small-sized Belgian company pseudonymized as GlobalCorp. The company has approximately 25 employees working at their headquarters (henceforth: HQ) in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, and operates in the tertiary sector in 59 different countries around the world. Instead of having a central point of communication at HQ for its clients, GlobalCorp employs 26 sales agents who are located around the world, each of whom represents a specific geographical market and is responsible for facilitating sales and maintaining contact with clients in their region.

For this study, we focus mainly on the communication between HQ and the sales agents at GlobalCorp, particularly during the performance appraisal process of the sales agents. The dataset analyzed for this study consists primarily of 7 video-recorded

PAIs which were conducted via telecommunications software in 2021 and were part of the first round of structured PAIs ever conducted for sales agents at GlobalCorp. Ethical permission to collect this dataset was provided by the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Antwerp, and in line with this, all participants provided written informed consent prior to the recording of the interviews, and all data were pseudonymized during transcription.<sup>1</sup>

Five of the PAIs were conducted in BELF, one through the use of receptive multilingualism, and one through the use of a lay interpreter. Each interview took place with at least three interlocutors: the main interviewer (Manager 1, L1: Dutch) who is primarily responsible for asking most of the questions; a second interviewer (Manager 2, L1: Dutch) who is primarily responsible for setting up the report after the interview; and the interviewee (Agent, L1: not Dutch) whose performance is being evaluated. During the interview which was mediated by a lay interpreter, the interpreter functioned as a fourth interlocutor.

Manager 1 and Manager 2 are responsible for the PA processes at GlobalCorp and are the same in each PAI. After a preliminary analysis of the interactional data, the first author conducted and audio-recorded two separate follow-up interviews with them to gauge their emic experiences with and perceptions of the performance appraisals at GlobalCorp, including language and multilingualism as part of these processes. The interview guide for these semi-structured interviews can be found in the Appendix (Section 12.4.1).

Building on Spolsky's theoretical model of language policy which comprises "three independent but interconnected components" (Spolsky, 2019, p. 326), we formulate three research objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> While the specific country and market for each agent are known to the authors, they are not revealed in the analysis for confidentiality reasons.

1. We aim to examine how the multilingual mediating strategies used during the PAIs at GlobalCorp, i.e. BELF, receptive multilingualism, and lay interpreting, fit into the company's general language management strategy.
2. We aim to shed light on the ways in which the managers talk about and perceive of the use of BELF, receptive multilingualism, and lay interpreting during PAIs as reported on during the follow-up interviews, as their reflections provide insight into the language ideological beliefs they adhere to with regards to the use of these different multilingual strategies.<sup>2</sup>
3. We aim to examine these language ideological beliefs in light of the interactional language practices of the PAIs, and we focus in particular on (potential) miscommunication during the PAIs, as we argue that the managers' risk assessment of a particular strategy shapes the way in which they prevent, signal, and/or repair (potential) miscommunication in interaction, thereby reflecting the language ideological beliefs they adhere to with regards to that strategy.

To achieve these research objectives, the first author first conducted a discursive in-depth turn-by-turn analysis (Van De Mierop & Vrolix, 2014) of each PAI with a focus on instances of (potential) miscommunication using the coding software NVivo. To do so, she identified prevention and signaling strategies on the basis of previous research on miscommunication in multilingual spoken interaction (Linell, 1995; Mauranen, 2006; Vasseur et al., 1996), as well as examined the ways in which the interlocutors repair (potential) miscommunication (Schegloff et al., 1977). Miscommunication is generally considered a “slippery concept” (Coupland et al., 1991, p. 11) which is closely related to concepts such as “misunderstanding”, “trouble talk”, “conflict talk”, or “communicative breakdown” (Linell, 1995). For the purposes of this

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<sup>2</sup> Although the language beliefs of the agents could also be considered relevant to reach a full understanding of language policy and practices at GlobalCorp, our focus is limited to the managers' perceptions and beliefs because the data access agreement with GlobalCorp precluded us from being in direct contact with the agents.

study, miscommunication is defined as “talk non-deliberately generating or mobilizing and sometimes leaving discrepancies between parties in the interpretation or understanding of what is said or done in the dialogue” (Linell, 1995, p. 176-177). Although many examples of miscommunication in the dataset were ambiguous in terms of why they occurred, the examples discussed in the analysis are chosen on the basis of their clear link to the language gap between the interlocutors, thereby aiming to exclude other sources of potential miscommunication such as internet connection. The excerpts in the analysis are transcribed according to a simplified version of the Jeffersonian transcription method (Jefferson, 2004) and the transcription conventions can be found in the Appendix (Section 12.4.2).

To link the findings on language practices with the managers’ language ideological beliefs and language management strategies, we then adopted an interactional sociolinguistic approach to foreground “what people do versus what they say they do” (Marra et al., 2022), as part of which we analyzed and coded the follow-up interviews with the managers on the basis of a topic-based categorization in the second phase of the analysis. All sequences relating to language, multilingualism, language management, language policy, the use of English/BELF, receptive multilingualism, or lay interpreting were considered relevant to and included in this analysis.

## 9.4 LANGUAGE PRACTICES, MANAGEMENT, AND BELIEFS IN MULTILINGUAL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL INTERVIEWS AT GLOBALCORP

In the following section, we focus on the first research objective relating to language management as we provide an overview of GlobalCorp’s general language management strategy and discuss how the multilingual PAIs are part of it. In the subsequent sections, we then focus on the second and third research objectives relating to language ideological beliefs and language practices by examining the specific language ideological beliefs that the managers adhere to related to the use of BELF,

receptive multilingualism, and lay interpreting respectively during the PAIs, and how these beliefs manifest themselves in the language practices of the multilingual interactions.

### 9.4.1 GlobalCorp's language management approach

Similar to other globally active companies, it became clear during the follow-up interviews with management that GlobalCorp's language management strategy involves a balancing act between their internal language policy, which strives for efficiency in the form of a common corporate language, and their external language policy, which aims to reach as many potential clients as possible in the language of their preference (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014). Instead of working with a central point of communication at HQ in Belgium, the managers at GlobalCorp explained during their follow-up interviews that they believe it is the agents' knowledge of the local market, local culture, and local language(s) in their targeted markets around the world that makes the sales agents more approachable for potential clients as company representatives, thereby resulting in more clients and thus more sales. In other words, the agents' proficiency in local languages and knowledge of the local culture is considered marketable and therefore encouraged for external communication as part of a "transnational business model" which ties together "local responsiveness" with "strong global direction" (Feely & Harzing, 2003, p. 37). Manager 2 explains that "from a commercial viewpoint, [we] always adapt to the language of the client whenever possible"<sup>3</sup>, and GlobalCorp's general external language policy can thus arguably be considered flexible and client-oriented.

The company's approach to external communication differs from their internal approach, as the managers explain that Dutch is the primary language used for all communication between the employees at HQ (including management), while English

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<sup>3</sup> Dutch original: "...uit commercieel belang altijd aangepast aan de taal van de klant waar mogelijk."

forms the baseline of the internal communication between HQ and the agents abroad. Multilingual strategies other than BELF are construed as “pragmatic solutions”<sup>4</sup> which are only called upon when BELF does not suffice to achieve mutual understanding. In terms of their own linguistic repertoires, both managers have Dutch as L1 and both are proficient in English, with Manager 1 reporting intermediate to high proficiency and Manager 2 reporting near-native proficiency. Additionally, they both report intermediate receptive proficiency in German and Manager 2 also has intermediate proficiency in French. Although both managers report on using their multilingual repertoires in different ways and to different extents in the workplace, Manager 1 explains that from a language management perspective, “I actually hope that in time, we can do it with everyone in English of course, but yeah, unfortunately not yet at the moment.”<sup>5</sup> As such, when it comes to internal communication between HQ and the agents abroad, GlobalCorp currently adopts a flexible approach to language management, but in line with other European businesses operating on a global scale (Gunnarsson, 2014), they hope to eventually adopt English as a common corporate language with all the sales agents, sharing an implicit belief that this is the best solution to solving any problems related to workplace multilingualism.

#### 9.4.2 English as a business lingua franca in PAIs

Despite their overall positive attitude toward the use of English as a common corporate language, both managers adopt a more nuanced view with regard to the benefits and disadvantages of using English specifically during the PAIs. During the follow-up interviews, Manager 1 acknowledges that it is more difficult for agents to express themselves in a language that is not their own L1, and Manager 2 shares that he believes it would be best if everyone could use their own L1, especially in high-stakes and potentially sensitive encounters such as PAIs. However, both managers also

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<sup>4</sup> Dutch original: “Pragmatische oplossing”

<sup>5</sup> Dutch original: “Ik hoop eigenlijk met het verloop van tijd dat iedereen weer in het Engels verloopt natuurlijk, maar ja, helaas op dit moment nog niet.”

seem to consider English to be a marker of “intergroup neutrality”, meaning that “no member of the group is particularly privileged” when everyone is required to use a language other than their L1 (Park & Wee, 2012, p. 146). The interpretation given to this ‘neutrality’ differs however slightly between both managers, as for Manager 1, it concerns all interlocutors including himself, since he is also not an L1 speaker of English and thus explains that he shares the disadvantage of not using his own L1 with the agents. Manager 2 arguably adopts a more top-down perspective when he explains that they prefer to opt for English “...because then we can put everyone on equal footing”<sup>6</sup>, and in doing so, he reflects mostly on how the managers aim to ensure equal treatment for all the sales agents as part of this evaluative process, rather than including the managers themselves in his conceptualization of ‘everyone’.

Overall, Manager 2 also adds that he considers the use of English to be commonsensical because “English is the only lingua franca that, I mean, it is the only one that you can actually assume or reasonably expect someone else, other people to also know and understand.”<sup>7</sup> In sum, the managers seem to share the widespread language ideological belief regarding the hegemonic status of BELF in international business (Gunnarsson, 2014) and believe that it offers a ‘neutral’ solution to bridge the language gap between the managers and sales agents at GlobalCorp because the disadvantage of not having English as their own L1 is shared by the agents. Because of this assumed neutrality, English forms the baseline of GlobalCorp’s internal language management strategy for all communication with the sales agents, and is therefore also the multilingual strategy used in the majority of the PAIs.

During the PAIs, we find that the managers’ awareness of the shared disadvantage of not being able to speak their own L1 also shapes their language practices. An example of this occurs with a sales agent responsible for a Western European market (L1: French) when they are discussing his home office space. Prior to the PAI, the agent did not have a proper home office space and his laptop had recently broken as well,

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<sup>6</sup> Dutch original: “...omdat we dan iedereen op een gelijk niveau zetten.”

<sup>7</sup> Dutch original: “Engels is de enige lingua franca die, allez, dat is de enige dat eigenlijk dat je vanuit kunt gaan of van kunt verwachten redelijkerwijs dat een ander, dat andere mensen dat ook gaan kunnen begrijpen.”





the form of two interactive repairs, thereby successfully solving the potential miscommunication.

A few minutes later, Manager 1 is providing feedback for the agent when he adds that he thinks this new home office will also help improve the agent's performance.

EXCERPT 1 - PART 2 (00:15:13-00:15:30 OUT OF 00:48:22) - INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR A WESTERN EUROPEAN MARKET

- 38     MANAGER 1:     ...AND I THINK A NEW CHAMBER WILL BE UH INTERESTING FOR YOU SO  
                          UH (.) ANY IDEA WHEN IT'S WHEN IT'S DONE?
- 39     AGENT:           (1.7) WHAT WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
- 40     MANAGER 1:     THE CHAMBER WHEN UHH WHEN YOU HAVE AN OFFICE?
- 41     AGENT:           OH UHH @ I JUST NEED I JUST NEED TO FIND SOME TIME TO GO TO  
                          THE STORE AND FIND A A A BIG OFFICE AND PUT IT IN MY ROOM  
                          THAT'S IT BUT UH=
- 42     MANAGER 1:     =YEA YEA YEA OKAY

In doing so, Manager 1 repeats the word “chamber” instead of “room” in turn 38, arguably to accommodate the agent by using the same word that the agent had used earlier. It is possible that because Manager 1 does not have any proficiency in French himself, he interpreted the miscommunication in the first part of the sequence as the agent not knowing the word ‘*room*’, instead of as word-finding difficulties related to confusion or unawareness regarding the double meaning of the word in relation to French. This attempt to accommodate then results in miscommunication as the agent pauses and then explicitly asks for clarification in turn 39, launching a repair sequence of which the word “chamber” is likely the trouble source. Manager 1 tries to repair the miscommunication in turn 40 by first repeating the false friend again and then offering the English alternative “office”. Finally, in turn 41, the agent laughs and uses the term “room” in the sense of its French equivalent ‘*chambre*’, and the miscommunication is definitively repaired. This second part of the sequence shows that paradoxically, Manager 1's attempt to accommodate to the agent's linguistic proficiency in order to prevent miscommunication backfires and results in a repair sequence, the exact thing he was presumably trying to avoid by saying “chamber” instead of “room”.

In sum, despite the fact that the language gap is arguably rendered less visible through the use of a lingua franca, this sequence highlights both managers' awareness of the potential risks that might arise from not being able to speak one's own L1 in a high-stakes interaction such as a PAI, especially when it concerns the discussion of performance improvements. In the first part, when the agent wants to clarify that he aims to improve his performance by improving his home office space, Manager 2 makes an effort to accommodate to the agent's proficiency in English by offering proactive repairs on the basis of his own proficiency in French. In the second part, Manager 1 then provides positive feedback on the agent's effort to improve his performance, and thereby also makes an effort to accommodate by repeating the false friend that the agent himself had used only minutes earlier. These two examples are illustrative of the many and different ways in which the managers aim to establish mutual understanding during moments of feedback in the 5 PAIs that they conducted in BELF.

This analysis and the interlocutors' linguistic behavior in the PAIs aligns with findings from previous research on (B)ELF which has argued that interlocutors are resourceful, accommodating, and cooperative in achieving mutual intelligibility (Cogo, 2009; 2012; Firth, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2011; Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005; Mustajoki, 2017, Rogerson-Revell, 2008) and "exhibit a high degree of interactional and pragmatic competence" when dealing with (potential) miscommunication (Pitzl, 2005, p. 69). Although the managers share a language ideological belief in the hegemonic status of English as a neutral and fair solution to the lack of a shared L1 between the managers and the agents, the linguistic strategies they use in interaction to prevent, signal, and repair (potential) miscommunication and achieve mutual intelligibility during moments of feedback also suggest awareness of the risks they associate with not being able to speak one's own L1, particularly in potentially sensitive interactions such as the PAI.

### 9.4.3 Receptive multilingualism in PAIs

One PAI with an agent responsible for a Western European market (L1: German) takes place primarily through the use of receptive multilingualism. During the follow-up interviews, Manager 1 explains that this agent had made it clear that he prefers to speak German whenever possible, and the managers are able and willing to accommodate to the agent's linguistic preference in the PAI context because of their own receptive skills in German. As a result, the managers speak English and the agent replies in German, with both parties occasionally and briefly code-switching to the other language as an accommodation strategy (Cogo, 2009).

Both managers express that they find this strategy a bit unusual or what Manager 1 calls "unique", but they believe it works well given the circumstances, particularly because it allows the agent to express himself in his own L1 in a potentially sensitive interactional context, tying in with the managers' beliefs regarding the use of one's own L1 as discussed in the previous section. Reflecting on their own proficiency in German, Manager 2 says: "I think that both (MANAGER 1) and I understand German well enough that misunderstandings wouldn't occur, I think"<sup>8</sup>, a statement which he hedges through the double repetition of "I think", arguably reflecting some hesitation or doubt. Despite this implicit association with a potential risk of miscommunication and despite their own lack of productive proficiency in German, the managers thus prioritize the agent's comfort in this potentially sensitive and high-stakes workplace interaction.

During the PAI, the interlocutors' awareness of the unusual nature of this multilingual strategy seems to result in the frequent use of a number of linguistic strategies to prevent (potential) miscommunication and accommodate to the use of different languages. For example, Excerpt 2 showcases Manager 1's alertness to the potential risks of receptive multilingualism when discussing a potentially sensitive topic. Leading

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<sup>8</sup> Dutch original: "...ik denk dat zowel (MANAGER 1) als ik Duits genoeg begrijpen om geen misverstanden daar te hebben, denk ik."

up to this excerpt, they had been discussing the opportunity for the agent to visit a specific client in person, something Manager 1 considers important for the agent as part of maintaining good client relations. However, in turn 1, the agent explains that he actually does not think this is a good idea, as the client in question has not seemed interested in maintaining a good relationship with him in the past:

EXCERPT 2 (00:12:31-00:12:51 OUT OF 01:30:51) – INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR A WESTERN EUROPEAN MARKET

- 1        AGENT:            ABER (.) UH ES IST SO DASS DASS UNSER KUNDE (NAME) UH JA  
KEINEN WERT DARAUF GELEGT HAT MIT MIR KONTAKT ZU HABEN  
BUT (.) UH IT IS SO THAT THAT OUR CLIENT (NAME) UH YES DIDN'T  
FIND IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE CONTACT WITH ME
- 2        MANAGER 1:        HM-HM KEINEN KEINEN WERT WHAT WHAT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN IN IN  
UH (MANAGER 2) DO YOU KNOW WHAT (AGENT) MEANS?
- 3        AGENT:            JA ER HAT KEINEN KONTAKT ZU MIR GESUCHT  
YES HE DID NOT REACH OUT TO ME
- 4        MANAGER 1:        OKAY

In turn 2, Manager 1 then initiates a repair sequence through the use of a specific metalinguistic question (Vasseur et al., 1996, p. 88) by stating that he has not understood the agent's prior utterance due to the use of a German expression in turn 1 ("auf etwas Wert legen"). He asks Manager 2 if he knows what it means, thereby seemingly asking for a translation to Dutch rather than a repair from the agent. However, before Manager 2 can reply, the agent himself rephrases the expression in German in turn 3, albeit in a simplified way, as he leaves out the client's lack of willingness to be in contact with the agent and replaces it with a more neutral description of the client's lack of action. Manager 1's minimal reply in turn 4 indicates that he has understood, and that the miscommunication has thus been successfully repaired, allowing them to move on. This type of specific metalinguistic question arguably "always results in better understanding, because it clearly, precisely and cooperatively triggers working sequences" (Vasseur et al., 1996, p. 88), and as such reflects Manager 1's alertness and clear orientation to finding an efficient solution to potential miscommunication at a sensitive moment in the interaction, namely when he suggests for the agent to do something, and the agent disagrees with him.



The excerpts show that the interlocutors make use of a number of linguistic strategies to ensure that miscommunication is prevented or that it is signaled and repaired efficiently when it does occur, including (but not limited to) during potentially sensitive moments such as disagreement. With this type of language strategy, the language gap is rendered highly visible because the interlocutors are not only confronted with an interlocutor speaking in a language which they do not fully master, but they are also consistently replying in a language that is different from the language used in the previous turn, and this heightened risk awareness arguably shapes the language practices of both the managers as well as the agent during the high-stakes workplace interaction of the PAI.

#### 9.4.4 Lay interpreter in PAIs

The PAI with an agent responsible for North African and Middle Eastern markets (L1: French and Arabic) is mediated entirely by a lay interpreter, i.e. someone who is proficient in the relevant languages but has not been trained to act as an interpreter. In this case, it is the agent's spouse who translates to and from English for the managers, and to and from French and sometimes Arabic for the agent. Although Manager 2 also knows French, he reports not speaking it during this interview so as to not exclude Manager 1, who does not have any proficiency in French. The agent's spouse interprets consecutively, mostly waiting for one of the primary interlocutors to finish their turn before she starts translating it.

When discussing the potential risks of using a lay interpreter during the follow-up interviews, Manager 1 shares that in this specific PAI, he believes “nothing was lost [in translation], I think.”<sup>9</sup> Manager 2 explains that there are general risks associated with interpreting, but that he believes “those risks will always be there”<sup>10</sup>, arguably referring to both lay and professional interpreters. He concludes that they choose to rely on colleagues, family or other acquaintances “because there is always someone

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<sup>9</sup> Dutch original: “Daar is niks verloren gegaan, denk ik.”

<sup>10</sup> Dutch original: “Dat gevaar heb je altijd.”

who already fills that gap”<sup>11</sup>, indicating that he believes they do not require outsourcing to fill the position of the interpreter.

Both managers also argue that the benefits of using a lay interpreter during the PAIs outweigh the potential risks. Manager 1 adds that the use of someone’s spouse as a lay interpreter, though perhaps unprofessional, is considered acceptable at GlobalCorp because they are a small-sized business where hiring a professional interpreter would be considered “over the top.”<sup>12</sup> Manager 2 agrees that GlobalCorp has never and most likely would never consider hiring a professional interpreter, partly because of its costliness, but also out of fear that sensitive corporate intel might be leaked as a result of working with a third party.

Although both managers thus showcase a certain awareness regarding some of the potential risks involved with (lay) interpreting in general, neither of them indicates that something might have gone wrong during this PAI specifically, and they both defend the company’s decision to use the spouse as an interpreter in a number of ways. Additionally, by sharing their beliefs that “nothing was lost” and by referring to the position of the interpreter as a “gap” that needs to be filled, they seem to implicitly adhere to the language ideological belief that during the PAIs at GlobalCorp, the interpreter functions as “a mere medium of transmission” (Knapp-Potthoff & Knapp, 1986, p. 153) who renders an original utterance from language A to language B as (nearly) equivalent. This common assumption is captured in the “conduit metaphor” (Reddy, 1979) and reflects a language ideological belief of “referential transparency” (Haviland, 2003, p. 764) which considers interpreters to be “invisible” or “machine-like conduits” (Berk-Seligson, 1990, p. 54; see also Angermeyer, 2015; Pöchhacker, 2004).

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<sup>11</sup> Dutch original: “... omdat er altijd wel iemand is die al dat gat vult.”

<sup>12</sup> Dutch original: “Dat zou echt over the top zijn.”



Despite this lack of perceived risk, the interlocutors do make use of a number of linguistic strategies to signal and repair (potential) miscommunication so as to achieve mutual intelligibility, examples of which occur in Excerpts 5 and 6:

EXCERPT 5 (00:07:20–00:07:27 OUT OF 00:51:56) – INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR NORTH AFRICAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN MARKETS, INTERPRETER

- 1 INTERP.: HE SAID UH HIS STRATEGY IT'S TO WORK ON THE UHH ((MAKES HAND GESTURE MOVING HANDS FORWARD))
- 2 MANAGER 1: LONG TERM?
- 3 AGENT: [(NODS HEAD)] OUI LONG TERME  
[(NODS HEAD)] YES LONG TERM]
- 4 INTERP.: [YES LONG TERM] AND UHH AND UH BE PATIENT

EXCERPT 6 (00:35:38–00:35:47 OUT OF 00:51:56) – INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR NORTH AFRICAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN MARKETS, INTERPRETER

- 1 INTERP.: YES AND UH WE ARE REALLY UHM (1.1) UH ON A BIEN AVANCÉ UH  
[WE ARE  
YES AND UH WE ARE REALLY UH (.) UH WE'VE MADE GOOD PROGRESS  
UH [WE ARE
- 2 MANAGER 2: [YOU'RE ALREADY FAR IN THE PROCESS [YES OKAY YEA
- 3 INTERP.: [(NODS HEAD)] YES YES

Both excerpts are examples of interactive repairs (Mauranen, 2006, p. 137) at moments when the interpreter is conveying positive aspects of the agent's performance and where the managers make an effort to co-construct a turn when the interpreter is experiencing word-finding difficulties in English. Manager 1 tentatively reformulates the interpreter's hand gestures with rising intonation in turn 2 of Excerpt 5 into a successful repair, which the agent is able to confirm himself despite his lack of proficiency in English due to the likeness of the English "long term" and the French "long terme". In Excerpt 6, Manager 2 makes use of his own proficiency in French to achieve mutual intelligibility for Manager 1 in the form of a translation to English in turn 2. Such examples underline the cooperative nature of achieving mutual understanding, particularly during the explicit discussion of the agent's performance.

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However, the ‘double discourse’ of original turns and subsequent renditions in interpreter-mediated interaction also allows researchers to observe “latent miscommunication” or “pseudo-agreements”, i.e. instances of miscommunication of which there are no traces in the interactional data and where the interlocutors believe that they have understood each other when, in fact, they have not (Linell, 1995). This occurs multiple times in the interpreter-mediated PAI, for example when Manager 1 attempts to provide the agent with positive feedback on his everyday communication with HQ in Excerpt 7:

EXCERPT 7 (00:12:18-00:12:57 OUT OF 00:51:56) – INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR NORTH AFRICAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN MARKETS, INTERPRETER

- 1       MANAGER 1:       PLUS IT'S IT'S GOOD TO COMMUNICATE WITH (AGENT) SO EVERYBODY  
IN (COMPANY)=
- 2       INTERP.:       =[ ( )
- 3       MANAGER 1:       [HAS EASY COMMUNICATION WITH UH WITH (AGENT) (.) UHHM AND  
IT'S CLEARLY IT'S A FAST REPLYING ALWAYS THAT'S GOOD AND YOU  
AL-ALWAYS TELLS US UH NO I WILL CALL IT TOMORROW OR TODAY OR  
(.) IT'S ALWAYS IT MAKES SENSE SO THAT'S GOOD AND ALSO IN  
ENGLISH IT'S UH IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE SO UH VERY GOOD YEA @@
- 4       INTERP.:       IL A DIT VOILÀ TU MAINTIENS CE QUE TU FAIS MAINTENANT  
!8"!7!65!%)%65%4!3"!&\$!-3!!-2!0/,!%!.-!-,+\*)!(!&!\$!#!"SUR PLACE !:)%90!(0/,!\$#!"  
:)%9 MAIS L'ESSENTIEL C'EST LA COMMUNICATION [TU DOIS  
TOUJOURS  
HE SAYS WELL YOU KEEP DOING WHAT YOU'RE DOING RIGHT NOW IF  
ANYONE SAYS ANYTHING AND IF YOU CAN RESPOND DO SO RIGHT AWAY,  
IF YOU CAN'T, TELL THEM YOU WOULD CALL THEM AGAIN BUT THE  
IMPORTANT THING IS THE COMMUNICATION [YOU HAVE TO ALWAYS
- 5       AGENT:       [LA  
COMMUNICATION BIEN SUR  
[THE  
COMMUNICATION OF COURSE
- 6       INTERP.:       COMMUNIQUER TOUJOURS MAINTENIR LA COMMUNICATION AVEC LE  
CLIENT  
COMMUNICATE ALWAYS STAY IN TOUCH WITH THE CLIENT
- 7       AGENT:       HM-HM
- 8       INTERP.:       SI TU PEUX LUI REpondre tout de suite tant mieux si tu ne  
peux pas bah si tu le dis que je te rappelle apres et maintenir  
a sa parole (.) VOILA C'EST TOUT ÇA

- IF YOU CAN RESPOND TO HIM IMMEDIATELY THAT'S GREAT IF YOU  
CAN'T WELL IF YOU TELL HIM I'LL CALL YOU LATER AND STAY TRUE  
TO YOUR WORD (.) WELL THAT'S IT
- 9        AGENT:        OUI OUI BIEN SUR BIEN SUR  
                              YES YES OF COURSE OF COURSE
- 10       INTERP.:        LA COMMUNICATION  
                              THE COMMUNICATION

In turns 1 and 3, Manager 1 gives the agent exclusively positive feedback, emphasized by the word “good” which is repeated four times throughout his explanation. In turn 4, the interpreter starts with providing a reduced rendition of this positive feedback (“keep doing what you’re doing right now”). She then continues with an expanded rendition in turns 4, 6, and 8, as she emphasizes the importance of replying to clients quickly, something that was not mentioned explicitly in the original turns 1 and 3. Additionally, the rendition of the feedback in turns 4, 6, and 8 is phrased as recommendations on how the agent could improve his communication in the form of a number of imperatives (“do so right away”, “tell them”, “you have to”, “stay true to your word”), not reflecting the positive emphasis of Manager 1’s original utterances. In her renditions, the interpreter thus changes both the content and the connotation of Manager 1’s original turns from praise to implicit criticisms. In turns 5, 7, and 9, the agent then signals agreement with this rendition, despite it not being an accurate reflection of Manager 1’s original feedback, indicating pseudo-agreement between the primary interlocutors. It is also relevant to note that Manager 2 does not interfere to repair this pseudo-agreement despite his own proficiency in French, though this could be due to part of the rendition being in Arabic rather than French, which he has no proficiency in.

Although there are also sequences in the interview where such mistranslations are intercepted and repaired by one of the other interlocutors, sequences such as Excerpt 7 highlight that miscommunication occurs and remains invisible and therefore largely unrepaired during this PAI, including during crucial moments such as the communication of positive feedback.



between the primary interlocutors depends on the mediation and understanding of a third party (Wadensjö, 1998), and problems occur more frequently when the interpreter is not a trained professional (Angermeyer, 2015). This is highlighted in Excerpts 5 and 6 as the lay interpreter frequently experiences word-finding difficulties in English and requires help from the other interlocutors to complete her renditions. Yet despite the numerous risks associated with non-professional interpreters in the workplace (Raymond, 2017), they are still frequently used due to their low cost and relative ease of availability.

Although both managers at GlobalCorp express awareness on a meta-level over some of the general potential risks involved with using an interpreter, they do not reflect on any problems that might occur or have occurred in the past with this specific lay interpreter. When asked during the follow-up interviews, Manager 1 explicitly indicates that he believes “nothing was lost”, and Manager 2 reacts surprised when the first author eventually tells him that we observed mistranslations as part of our interactional analysis. This reveals that they were, in fact, unaware of the miscommunication that occurred during this PAI, even when they could have been alerted to it, for example by using Manager 2’s own proficiency in French to intercept the pseudo-agreement in Excerpt 7 or by being alert to the length of the rendition of the interpreter in Excerpt 8. Such examples showcase that the managers seem to consider the prevention, signaling or repair of any potential miscommunication and the general achievement of mutual intelligibility to be primarily the interpreter’s responsibility, rather than that of the primary interlocutors, and they only jump in to help when the interpreter indicates that she needs it, as is the case in Excerpts 5 and 6. This lack of perceived risk potential is arguably embedded in the managers’ implicit language ideological belief that an interpreter provides (nearly) equivalent renditions of original utterances (Reddy, 1979), and as such, they assume an “ideal interpretation” in which the interpreter solves any potential miscommunication that might occur, which stands in contrast with the reality of the “actual performance” of the lay interpreter (Wadensjö, 1998, p. 103).

## 9.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In light of the increasingly globalized and multilingual nature of corporate contexts worldwide and the institutional relevance of PAIs for workplace development, this paper has aimed to contribute a multilingual perspective to the existing body of research on PAIs by examining the language policy of a small-sized yet globally active Belgian company through a qualitative analysis of the different multilingual strategies they use to bridge the lack of a shared L1 during PAIs. In doing so, we have explored how these multilingual strategies fit into the company's general language management strategy, how the managers perceive of the use of these different multilingual strategies during PAIs, and how their language ideological beliefs manifest themselves in the language practices of the PAIs themselves, particularly during sequences of (potential) miscommunication.

In terms of their general language management strategy, the follow-up interviews revealed that GlobalCorp currently adopts a multilingual “pragmatic and flexible approach to language use” (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005, p. 418) for their internal communication. However, similar to other international businesses in Europe (Gunnarsson, 2014), they aim to implement English as a common corporate language for all communication with their sales agents in the future, which we argued is rooted in their language ideological belief in the hegemonic status of English in international business as a neutral and fair solution to the lack of a shared L1.

For the PAIs, we found that they currently make use of three different multilingual strategies, namely BELF, receptive multilingualism, and a lay interpreter, and that the decision to use of either of these strategies is rooted in specific practical considerations as well as language ideological beliefs, which result in differing language practices during the PAIs. We found that despite the managers' general language ideological belief in the problem-solving potential of English, the language practices in the PAIs showcased some risk awareness regarding communicating in a language other than one's own L1 during a high-stakes and potentially sensitive workplace encounter. The managers expressed more risk awareness for the use of receptive multilingualism,

which is reflected in the language practices of all interlocutors in the PAI through a number of linguistic prevention and repair strategies, including during potentially sensitive moments such as disagreement. Finally, the findings on the lay interpreter-mediated PAI seemed to lay bare a discrepancy between the managers' perceived risk of the strategy and the actual language practices of the PAI, which was tied to the managers' implicit language ideological belief that an interpreter provides equivalent renditions of original utterances, and we argued that such a discrepancy results in unrepaired miscommunication during crucial feedback and information moments of the PAI.

In sum, we have offered novel insights into how a small-sized yet globally active company deals with multilingualism on the levels of language management, language beliefs, and language practices as part of their performance appraisal process, thereby contributing an explicitly globalized perspective to the growing body of research on PAIs. In doing so, we highlighted that in the interactional context of multilingual PAIs, the language beliefs regarding the potential risks of specific multilingual strategies can shape the interlocutors' language practices in interaction. For strategies which are associated with a risk of miscommunication, such as BELF and receptive multilingualism, we found that the interlocutors make an effort to prevent, signal, and/or repair (potential) miscommunication, particularly during moments in the PAI which could be sensitive in nature, such as during the discussion of performance improvement and the communication of feedback. We would argue that it is exactly because of the high-stakes and potentially sensitive nature of the PAI setting that the necessity of achieving mutual intelligibility is heightened, thereby contributing to these interactional efforts. However, a lack of perceived risk can similarly shape language practices in the form of a lack of interactional effort to prevent miscommunication, as seen in the lay-interpreted PAI, resulting in miscommunication at crucial and sensitive moments. Methodologically, we argue that the qualitative triangulation of authentic empirical data and emic interview data has been crucial to achieving these insights, and that similar approaches can further contribute to achieving multifaceted and detailed insights on the role and function of language and multilingualism in workplace interactions and corporate settings as a whole.

Reflecting further on the importance of the managers' emic perspectives, a fruitful area for future research could be to investigate their language ideological beliefs from a more critical discourse analytical perspective, for instance by investigating further what it means for managers to achieve 'linguistic equality' (Tonkin, 2015) or fairness in a multilingual workplace setting where everyone is disadvantaged if they cannot speak their own L1, yet not equally so, as the degree of disadvantage is dependent on an individual's personal linguistic repertoire. By further examining these language ideological beliefs and relating them back to a multilingual company's language management strategies and language practices in high-stakes interactions such as the PAI, we can gain a better understanding of what linguistic equality and fairness mean in globalized corporate contexts.

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# 10 RECONTEXTUALIZING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK THROUGH TALK AND TEXT IN CORPORATE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROCESSES

De Malsche, F., Tobbyack, E., & Vandenbroucke, M. (in preparation).

This paper is in preparation for a special issue on qualitative methods in business communication research of the *International Journal of Business Communication*. An extended abstract based on this chapter has already been accepted.

## 10.0 ABSTRACT

Providing and discussing feedback is a crucial component of the high-stakes and sensitive corporate process of performance appraisal, and typically takes place over the course of different phases and throughout different modalities in a professionalized workplace context. In this article, we examine the discursive construction and recontextualization of negative feedback throughout 15 individual performance appraisal processes at GlobalCorp, a small-sized Belgian company. The analysis is based on video-recorded performance appraisal interviews and the textual preparation and report of each interview, as well as two follow-up interviews with the responsible managers. On the basis of this dataset, we examine the position and importance of negative feedback in the company's performance appraisal processes in comparison to other types of feedback, and we explore the different ways in which negative feedback is formulated and recontextualized throughout the separate yet intertwined discursive phases of the individual performance appraisals. In sum, we find that there is an institutional need to formulate negative feedback clearly, particularly in the textual documents, but that at the same time, the managers orient to negative feedback as a socially problematic action in both written and spoken form, despite its integral role in the appraisal process.

**Keywords:** performance appraisal; recontextualization; corporate assessment; negative feedback; workplace communication; intertextual chain; institutional interaction; entextualization

## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

Performance appraisals (henceforth: PAs) in corporate contexts are “a variety of activities through which organizations seek to assess employees and develop their competence, enhance performance and distribute rewards” (Fletcher, 2001, p. 473). The discursive construction of feedback is a crucial aspect of this high-stakes and sensitive evaluative process, and negative feedback related to employee performance is particularly central to achieve changes and future improvement. Asmuß (2008) examined the interactional formulation of negative feedback during the performance appraisal interview. However, fully grasping the complexity of performance appraisals implies approaching them as linguistic processes that comprise multiple discursive modalities and phases (Fairclough, 2006, p. 86-87), in which the textual documents which precede and follow the performance appraisal interviews (henceforth: PAIs) are of equal importance to the process as the interviews themselves (Scheuer, 2014; Townley, 1993). To date, however, little is known about the interplay between talk and text in the construction of (negative) feedback.

In this article, we examine the discursive construction and recontextualization of negative feedback throughout individual PAs at GlobalCorp (pseudonym), a small-sized Belgian company. The analysis draws on 15 video-recorded PAIs, as well as the related documents, i.e. the written preparations for and the reports on each interview. Additionally, two follow-up interviews were conducted with the managers responsible for the PA process to add their emic perspectives to the analysis. Based on this dataset, we set out to examine the position and importance of negative feedback in GlobalCorp’s PA processes *vis-à-vis* other types of feedback, and we explore the different ways in which negative feedback is formulated and recontextualized throughout the separate yet intertwined discursive phases and modalities of the PA processes.

In the next section, we discuss the corporate relevance of PAs as a locus for employee assessment, elaborate on the role and importance of textual documentation in institutional contexts in general and in PA processes specifically, and contextualize



what we aim to contribute to the existing literature on PAs. We then discuss the research context, the research questions, and our methodology in Section 10.3. Finally, we examine the formulation and recontextualization of (negative) feedback in the analysis in Section 10.4, before providing some concluding remarks in Section 10.5.

## 10.2 PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS AS PATHWAYS OF LINKED EVENTS

A PA is commonly characterized as a discursive context for providing and discussing feedback as part of the assessment of employees to enhance their performance and reward positive development (Fletcher, 2001, p. 473). The performance appraisal interview (henceforth: PAI) is then an intra-organizational gatekeeping interaction (Holmes, 2007) which, as an integral part of PAs, plays a crucial role in achieving these goals. Organizations typically invest substantial resources in evaluating their employees' performance and development (Asmuß, 2008), and an abundance of research and popular literature exists on how to best conduct PAs and PAIs more specifically (Asmuß, 2008; Clifton, 2012; Fletcher, 2001). However, this body of literature mostly relies on anecdotal data and typically does “not reveal anything about what actually happens when the supervisor and the employee meet in a performance appraisal interview” (Asmuß, 2008, p. 410). As such, despite their corporate relevance and organizations' interest in professionalizing the process (Van De Mierop & Vrolix, 2014), PAIs have for a long time “remained a black box around which numerous theories and quasi-theories of interaction have emerged” (Clifton, 2012, p. 284) due to the lack of research on authentic empirical data.

To bridge this gap, a growing body of research has examined authentic PAIs from a linguistic and primarily conversation analytical perspective, including foci on question-answer adjacency pairs (Adams, 1981), facework (Clifton, 2012), and the (co-)construction of knowledge (Bowden & Sandlund, 2019) and employeeship (Sandlund et al., 2011; Van De Mierop & Schnurr, 2017). As feedback in general and negative

feedback in particular can be considered both relevant and crucial for employee evaluation and development, Asmuß (2008) focused on the formulation of negative feedback during PAIs and specifically the conversation analytical notion “preference”, i.e. the sequential relationship between un/expected or dis/preferred actions in interaction (Sacks, 1973). She found that giving negative feedback, which interlocutors in ordinary talk-in-interaction typically orient to as a socially problematic action through the use of markers of dispreference, also emerges as socially problematic in PAIs, “despite the fact that negative feedback is an integral part of performance appraisal interviews” (Asmuß, 2008, p. 425).

More recent studies have topicalized the interplay between talk and text during spoken PAIs, thereby highlighting the interactional relevance and centrality of textual documents in the PA process (Lehtinen & Pälli, 2021; Nyroos & Sandlund, 2014; Scheuer, 2014; Sorsa et al., 2014; Van De Mieroop & Carranza, 2018; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2014; Van De Mieroop & Vrolix, 2014). This focus on the importance of written reports and textual documentation in workplace contexts is not new; in bureaucratic institutional contexts, documents play a central part in many, if not all types of encounters, particularly as tools to organize and structure both the interactions and the institutions in which they occur (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Slembrouck, 2020). The use and relevance of texts in spoken interactions have been researched in different institutional settings, including corporate meetings (Svennevig, 2012), social work (Hall, 1997), job interviews (Glenn & LeBaron, 2011), police interrogations (Defrancq & Verliefdde, 2018), academic supervision meetings (Svinhufvud & Vehviläinen, 2013), legal counselling (Jacobs, 2023), and service encounters (Moore et al., 2010), to name a few. Similarly, the PAI is usually based on a written preparation and renders a written report, which in turn becomes the structuring document for the next round of PAs (Scheuer, 2014). Hence, the final report functions both as a descriptive outcome of the interaction and as the evaluative basis for future employee performance assessment; it thus “fix[es] organizational reality in a way that talk cannot” (Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2014, p. 3). The text that results from a PAI “always transcends or outlasts its context of production” (Cooren, 2000, p. 123), and it is this “restance” of texts – i.e. their “capacity to last throughout space and time” - that “imbues them with value

within the discursive and the social system of the organization” (Van De Mieroop & Carranza, 2018, p. 2-3), thus marking them as authoritative artefacts that become difficult to challenge afterwards (Park & Bucholtz, 2009).

Against this background, PAs should arguably be studied not only from the interactional perspective of the PAI, but rather as ‘pathways of linked events’ (Wortham & Reyes, 2015) or ‘intertextual chains’ (Fairclough, 1993). Indeed, during the PA process, information is lifted from a written preparational document, topicalized in the spoken encounter, and resituated in the written report (Scheuer, 2014). Each of these movements involves different entangled modalities and phases through which the information is de- and recontextualized from one source into another (Bauman & Briggs, 1990, p. 74), a process of “entextualization” which “is never a pure transfer of a fixed meaning” (Linell, 1998, p. 145; see also Scheuer, 2014). To date, no studies have examined this interplay between the PAI and the PA’s textual artefacts as part of an intertextual process with a focus on doing assessment and providing feedback, despite the fact that these are two key characteristics and integral aims of the PA process. In this paper, we set out precisely to address this gap and focus specifically on negative feedback as we build on Asmuß’ (2008) analysis to examine whether or not the participants “orient to criticism as a socially problematic action” (Asmuß, 2008, p. 425), i.e. as something that is interactionally dispreferred, both in text and in talk. Based on our analysis, we argue that only by considering the intertextual *chain* rather than isolated spoken encounters, we can reach a better understanding of the construction of (negative) feedback in PA processes.

### 10.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The research context for this study is GlobalCorp (pseudonym), a company located in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. This company is active globally in the tertiary sector as they facilitate sales between individual clients and sellers in 59 countries across the world. To do so, they have approximately 25 employees at HQ in Belgium, as well as 26 sales agents who work for the company from all across the

world, each of which represents a specific market and is responsible for facilitating the sales in their region. Due to the differing linguistic backgrounds of the employees at HQ and the sales agents abroad, most of the communication with the agents occurs in English as a lingua franca (see De Malsche, Tobback, & Vandenbroucke, in prep. for a detailed analysis of GlobalCorp's language policy).

The data collected for this study primarily consist of 15 individual PA processes which took place in 2021 via telecommunications software between two managers at HQ in Belgium and 15 sales agents abroad. For each individual PA process, the following data were collected:

- a video-recording of the PAI;
- the written preparations by the managers before the interview;
- the finalized version of the appraisal form which was signed by all parties after the interview.

Ethical permission to collect this dataset was provided by the Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Antwerp, and all participants provided written informed consent prior to collecting the data. Finally, the first author also conducted two follow-up interviews with the managers responsible for the PA processes to contextualize specific data fragments (including excerpts used in the analysis of this paper), discuss GlobalCorp's general workings, and reach a better understanding of the PA process from their emic perspectives in addition to the researchers' etic perspective as relative outsiders to the institutional context under study (Copland & Creese, 2015).

The structure of a professionalized PAI is typically based on an appraisal form, i.e. a list with topics and/or questions that help to guide and structure the assessment of the employee, and what was said during the interview is typically summarized in a written report afterwards (Scheuer, 2014; Van De Mierop & Vrolix, 2014). This is also the case for the PA process at GlobalCorp, which is visualized in five steps in Figure 1.

Note that we did not have access to phase A, and that as a result, we only analyze phases B-E of GlobalCorp's PA process.

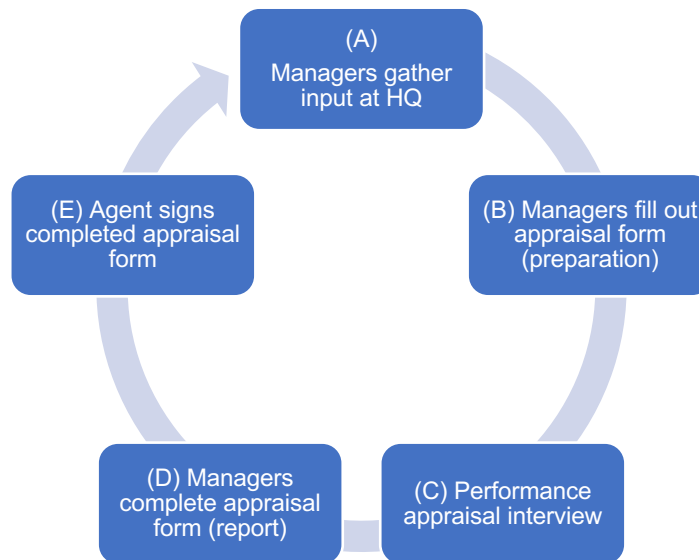


Figure 1. Performance appraisal process at GlobalCorp

The appraisal form functions as a structuring tool or agenda in all phases of the PA process at GlobalCorp (see also Svennevig, 2012; Van De Mierop & Vrolix, 2014). A blank and pseudonymized version of this form can be found in the Appendix (Section 12.5.2). It lists a number of topics rather than questions, assessment boxes that can be ticked as either ‘*Insufficient*’, ‘*Sufficient*’ or ‘*Good (≥ expectations)*’ for each subtopic, and space for written comments for each general topic as well as at the bottom of the form, where there is a dedicated item for ‘*Overall rating*’ and ‘*Goals*’. The appraisal form was devised by the two managers (henceforth: Manager 1 and Manager 2) at HQ who are responsible for the PAs of the sales agents. After gathering input on the agent’s performance from colleagues at HQ (A), they partially fill out the appraisal form together as preparation prior to the interview itself (B), but they do not share this preparation with the agents. Both managers are present in each individual PAI, where Manager 1 is generally in charge of the interview and Manager 2 asks fewer questions and primarily takes notes to complete the appraisal form (C). This form, including the notes taken by Manager 2 during the PAI, is then finalized by both managers (D) before sending it to the agent to sign, after which it functions as a final report of the

process (E), and is used as the basis for the agent's next PA. Although agents are allowed to request changes to the reports prior to signing them, none of the participants did, and as such, the documents in phase D and E are identical for our dataset with the exception of the addition of the agent's signature.

Our objectives in this paper are twofold. First, we want to gain a general understanding of the position and importance of negative feedback in GlobalCorp's PA processes in comparison to other types of feedback by examining in which discursive phases of the PA processes negative and other types of feedback occur. Next, we focus on how negative feedback is formulated and recontextualized throughout the intertextual PA processes at GlobalCorp, and how the different formulations of negative feedback reflect the managers' orientation to social problematicity when giving it.

For the analysis of negative feedback, we first make use of the semantico-pragmatic framework as set forth by Nguyen (2005), which identifies a number of criticism strategies, including a distinction between direct (i.e. more explicit) types of criticism on the one hand (e.g. negative evaluations, disapprovals, identifications of problems) and indirect (i.e. more implicit) types of criticism on the other hand (e.g. demands for change, advice about change, indicating standard). Following Asmuß (2008), we also examined markers of dispreference specifically when negative feedback was formulated in the spoken interactions of the PAI. Building on the conversation analytical notion of preference (Sacks, 1973), dispreferred utterances can be defined as turns which are not "oriented to" the talk in the way it was "invited" to be (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 63) and are characterized by markers of dispreference in the form of "significant pauses immediately prior to the utterances, repairs, restarts, intraturn pauses, and other signs of hesitation", thereby contrasting the "short and direct" nature of preferred utterances (Asmuß, 2008, p. 414-415). As such, both Nguyen (2005) and Asmuß (2008) argue that feedback can be both indirect and direct, but the former focuses primarily on semantico-pragmatic strategies, whereas the latter focuses on the specificities of sequential turn-taking in talk-in-interaction. We include both interpretations of (in)directness in our analysis due to the multimodal nature of the dataset, as a single focus on markers of dispreference would limit our analysis of the

textual documents, and a single focus on semantico-pragmatic strategies would limit our analysis of the spoken data. Finally, we argue that both forms of indirectness can signal an interlocutors' orientation towards an utterance as being socially problematic, as feedback which includes indirect feedback strategies and markers of dispreference is argued to reflect a stronger orientation to social problematicity than direct feedback strategies which lack markers of dispreference.

After transcription and pseudonymization<sup>1</sup> of the data (see Appendix, Section 12.5.1 for transcription conventions), the first author used NVivo to code and analyze the data in five phases, with the exception of step 4, which was done by the second author, and step 5, which was in part a joint endeavor of all three authors:

1. First, the data was structured to identify the one-on-one relation between information included in the data of each distinct spoken and written phase. To do so, the content from each of the three discursive phases (i.e. preparation; interview; report) for each agent's PA process was grouped as relating to one of the 40 different evaluation subtopics as outlined in the appraisal form (see Appendix, Section 12.5.2). For the documents, marked assessment boxes were coded as part of the subtopics they were marked for, and additional written information in the comment sections was coded under specific subtopics on the basis of what it was considered most closely related to. After coding the documents, sequences from the spoken phase were also linked to these different subtopics on the basis of the content of what was said.
2. Second, for each agent's PA process, the occurrence of each of the 40 subtopics was identified per discursive phase, i.e. whether it was 'prepared' by the managers, 'discussed' in the interaction, and/or 'reported' in the finalized report (see Figure 1 for clarity). For example, when information relating to a specific subtopic occurred in all three phases, this subtopic was coded as '*prepared-discussed-reported*'; if information was only discussed in the interaction

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<sup>1</sup> All data excerpts in the analysis have been pseudonymized in accordance with the company's wishes to protect the privacy of the company and its employees. We believe that the changes made to the transcriptions do not affect the content of the excerpts.

and not present in any of the written texts, a subtopic would be coded as *'unprepared-discussed-unreported'*.

3. Third, each subtopic that was topicalized in each agents' PA process was coded in terms of the type of feedback that was given, where a distinction was made between positive feedback, negative feedback, and descriptive or neutral content (e.g. "*There were no events last year due to Covid situation*"). This coding was not only determined based on what was said and/or written, but also on the scoring of the assessment boxes for each subtopic on the appraisal form (see Appendix, Section 12.5.2); an assessment box marked *'Sufficient'* or *'Good ( $\geq$  expectations)'* was considered positive, whereas a box marked *'Insufficient'* was coded as negative. The distinctions between these categories were not mutually exclusive, as one topic could contain multiple types of feedback. For example, when an assessment box in the report was marked as *'Good ( $\geq$  expectations)'* but additional negative feedback or descriptive information were written in the comments, this could result in a final categorization of the topic as *'positive+negative'*, *'positive+descriptive'*, or *'positive+negative+descriptive'*. Instances where negative and positive feedback are combined are included as part of the analysis of negative feedback, as in this case negative feedback, however partial, was formulated about the agent's performance and thus considered relevant to our analysis.
4. Fourth, the frequencies of each type of feedback were calculated, and chi-square tests were used to test the statistical significance of a number of observed oppositions in the occurrence of positive and negative feedback. The results of this analysis are presented in Section 10.4.1.
5. The final step consisted of the qualitative analysis of all topics that were coded as (partially) negative throughout the different phases of the PA processes. Both for the documents and the spoken interactions, this consisted of identifying the different types of negative feedback strategies (Nguyen, 2005) as well as any markers of dispreference (Asmuß, 2008) in the formulation of



negative feedback. The qualitative analysis was then concluded by comparing these findings for the different phases of each topic. For this paper, specific excerpts were selected to illustrate the diverse ways in which negative feedback was constructed throughout the PAs, and these excerpts were analyzed in depth by all three authors. The results of this analysis are presented in Section 10.4.2.

## 10.4 THE CONSTRUCTION OF (NEGATIVE) FEEDBACK THROUGHOUT THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROCESS

In order to better understand the occurrence and formulation of negative feedback, Section 10.4.1 first provides insight into the managers' perspectives on the role of text and talk in the performance appraisal process, and presents an overview of the frequencies of the different types of feedback and how feedback occurs in and throughout the different discursive phases of the PA processes. We then zoom in on negative feedback specifically in Section 10.4.2 as we examine how it is constructed and recontextualized throughout the PA process, and how the formulations reflect the managers' orientation to social problematicity when giving negative feedback.

### 10.4.1 Preparing, discussing, and/or reporting feedback

During the follow-up interviews, Manager 2 singled out three general goals of the PA processes at GlobalCorp. First, the PA commonsensically exists to evaluate the sales agents, as he explained that it is “a moment during which you measure the performance of an agent over the past year and during which you also just discuss about look, how

can you improve, what we actually expect of you, establishing a clear framework.”<sup>2</sup> Second, due to the limitations of not sharing a physical workplace with the agents, the PA process “is a sort of attempt to also involve them more in the company”<sup>3</sup> and their general workings. Finally, he elaborated on a third aspect, particularly related to the textual documentation of (negative) feedback as part of their professionalized PA process, as he explained that the report “offers us the possibility to impose more sanctions in a legal sense.”<sup>4</sup> Manager 1 also elaborated on the reasoning behind the textual documentation process during his follow-up interview, explaining that the appraisal form helps to structure the interaction, and that they set up a report because it helps them to assess employee development during next year’s round of PAs, and because it can function as proof of bad performance in case they want to fire an employee or impose other sanctions such as pay cuts in the future. The final report thus functions in a threefold manner; (i) as a descriptive record of the PAI encounter, (ii) as an evaluative overview of the agent’s past performance and goals for future improvement, and (iii) as an artefact of institutional authority in case of any future problems or sanctions (Park & Bucholtz, 2009).

In light of this broader institutional relevance of the textual documentation surrounding the PAI for GlobalCorp in general and of the entextualization of (negative) feedback specifically in the final report, it is relevant to examine in which discursive phases of the PA feedback occurs. Overall, we identified 278 topics which were topicalized over the course of at least one discursive phase of the 15 individual PA processes. 58 topics were categorized as purely descriptive (20,9%), 172 as positive feedback (61,9%), and 47 as containing negative feedback (16,9%).

Zooming in on the topics that include positive or negative feedback specifically (leaving aside the purely descriptive or neutral content), we examined in which discursive phases of the PA process these topics occurred in general, as summarized

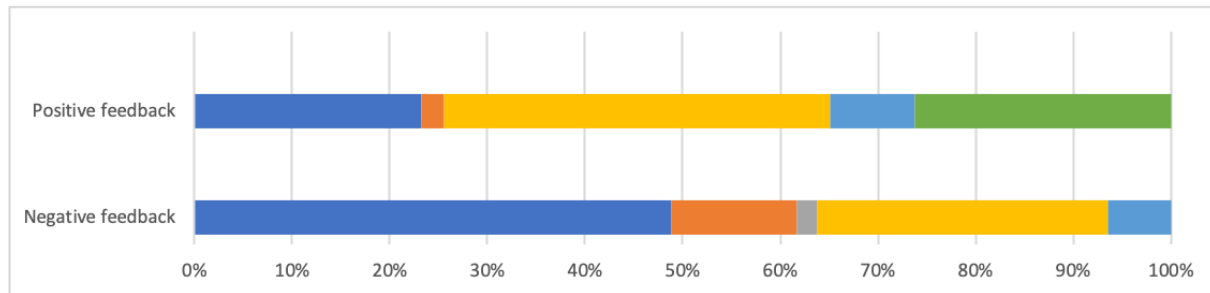
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<sup>2</sup> Original Dutch: “Een moment waarop dat je de prestatie gaat meten van het voorbije jaar van een agent en waarbij dat je ook gewoon in overleg gaat van kijk, hoe kan je beter doen, wat verwachten wij eigenlijk van jou, een duidelijk kader scheppen hé.”

<sup>3</sup> Original Dutch: “...is dat een soort poging om hen ook meer te betrekken in het bedrijf.”

<sup>4</sup> Original Dutch: “...biedt ons de mogelijkheid om juridisch meer sancties te nemen.”

in Figure 2 and Table 1. Additionally, we focused on the respective degrees of textual documentation of feedback in Table 2, i.e. specifically on whether positive and negative feedback was prepared or reported.



	Positive feedback (N=172)		Negative feedback (N=47)	
■ Prepared – discussed – reported	23,3%	N=40	48,9%	N=23
■ Prepared – undiscussed - reported	2,3%	N=4	12,8%	N=6
■ Prepared – undiscussed – unreported	0%	N=0	2,1%	N=1
■ Unprepared – discussed – reported	39,5%	N=68	29,8%	N=14
■ Unprepared – discussed - unreported	8,7%	N=15	6,4%	N=3
■ Unprepared – undiscussed – reported	26,2%	N=45	0%	N=0

Figure 2 and Table 1. Topics including feedback in the different discursive phases of the performance appraisal process

Overall, it becomes clear in Figure 2 and Table 1 that positive and negative feedback are not treated the same way throughout the PA processes.<sup>5</sup> For instance, whereas negative feedback receives full coverage, i.e. appears in the three discursive phases, in almost half of the cases (48,9%), this applies to far fewer cases of positive feedback (23,3%).<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, strikingly, positive feedback appears exclusively in the report in more than a quarter of the cases (26,2%), whereas this never happens in the case of negative feedback. It should be noted that in all these cases, the positive feedback only consists of ticking an assessment box (either as ‘*Sufficient*’ or ‘*Good*’ (≥

<sup>5</sup> The overall distribution of the different configurations over the two types of feedback is statistically significant. Discarding the smallest category (‘prepared-undiscussed-unreported’), the chi-square test yields the following results:  $\chi^2 = 31,118$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ;  $df = 4$ .

<sup>6</sup> The chi-square test applied to the opposition ‘prepared-discussed-reported’ – ‘other configurations’ yields the following results:  $\chi^2 = 11,88$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ;  $df = 1$ .

*expectations*)<sup>7</sup>) and as such, these topics were not verbalized in any of the discursive phases. However, the contrast with negative feedback remains clear, highlighting that negative feedback is without exception verbalized and thus explained in talk and/or text in at least one phase of the PA process.

	Positive feedback (N=172)		Negative feedback (N=47)	
Prepared	25,6%	N=44	63,8%	N=30
Reported	91,3%	N=157	91,5%	N=43

Table 2. Degree of textual documentation of the topics including feedback in the performance appraisal process

Table 2 then provides a closer look at the extent to which positive and negative feedback are textually documented in the preparation of the appraisal form and in the final report. It is clear that a large majority of feedback is textually documented in the report (>90% for both types of feedback), and because the appraisal form functions as the structuring tool for all three of the discursive phases and the report consists of a completed version of the preparation, information which occurred in the preparation phase mostly occurred verbatim in the report as well.<sup>7</sup> Finally, we find that although both negative and positive feedback are strongly anchored in the report, there is a statistically significant difference between the degree of preparation for positive and negative feedback, since negative feedback is prepared in 63,8% of the cases, compared to only 25,6% for positive feedback.<sup>8</sup> This preparedness arguably reflects the need to have an explanation or justification for any negative feedback prior to discussing it with the agent during the PAI.

The observation that negative feedback is anchored in text more thoroughly than positive feedback, especially in the preparation phase, may also be related to the general

<sup>7</sup> An exception to this is the category *'prepared-undiscussed-unreported'*, of which only one instance was identified in the dataset. In this example, negative feedback is prepared in the form of a remark in the comments section under the general topic Finance, which says: "Point of improvement, try to answer e-mails faster." However, this negative feedback is not brought up in the spoken phase, and it was later deleted from the written report.

<sup>8</sup> The chi-square test applied to the opposition 'prepared' – 'unprepared' feedback yields the following results:  $\chi^2 = 24,138$ ;  $p < 0,001$ ;  $df = 1$ .

importance of (negative) feedback for achieving the main purpose of the PA process, i.e. enhancing employee performance (Fletcher, 2001). In sum, we thus find in Figure 2 and Table 1 that negative feedback is without exception accounted for, and in Table 2 that it is textually prepared more thoroughly than positive feedback, both of which might be because negative feedback requires more thorough reflection and preparation than the documentation of positive feedback in light of its ‘restance’ and potential purposes of negative feedback in case of any future (legal) problems. In what follows, we will examine how this negative feedback is formulated and recontextualized throughout the individual PA processes observed at GlobalCorp, with a focus on how these formulations might reflect the managers’ orientation to social problematicity across talk and text when providing it.

#### 10.4.2 Formulating and recontextualizing negative feedback

Asmuß (2008) found that interlocutors consistently make use of markers of dispreference when formulating negative feedback during PAIs, thereby reflecting their orientation to social problematicity in doing so, despite the fact that providing and discussing (negative) feedback is an integral aim of the PAI. Similarly, in the PA processes observed at GlobalCorp, we found no examples of the managers providing negative feedback in a direct way without any additional indirect feedback strategies or markers of dispreference throughout the intertextual PA processes. Instead, we observed a continuum of dispreference, where more indirect feedback strategies and more markers of dispreference indicate a higher orientation to social problematicity. The data examples analyzed below aim to showcase the spectrum of this continuum.

The most direct formulation of negative feedback was identified in the PA process of a sales agent for a North American market. In the preparation of the appraisal form, the managers wrote in the comments under the topic ‘Sales’:

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*Must be regularly alerted to the (CLIENT LIST). (AGENT) then follows up, but often outside the agreed period of 24 hours.*

This written feedback was then topicalized as follows in the PAI:

EXCERPT 1 (00:19:12-00:21:07) – INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR A NORTH AMERICAN MARKET

- 1       MANAGER 1:       (AGENT) THE THE THE NEXT TOPIC I WANT TO MENTION IS UHMM I WANT TO DISCUSS IS IS ABOUT SALES AND UHH THE MAIN TOPIC IN SALES IS THE (CLIENT LIST) UH I I WROTE DOWN THAT IT'S UH LET ME SEE UHM (.) MUST BE REGULARLY ALERTED TO THE (CLIENT LIST) UH THEN FOLLOWS UP BUT OFTEN OUTSIDE THE AGREED UH DEADLINE OF TWENTY FOUR HOURS (.) I THINK SOMETIMES YOU LOSE CONTROL UHM (.) OVER THE (CLIENT LIST) IS IS THAT IS THAT RIGHT
- 2       AGENT:            = SOMETIMES (.) NOT REALLY SOMETIMES I CALL THEM AND I'M WAITING TO SEE IF THEY CALL ME BEFORE I ANSWER=
- 3       MANAGER 1:        =HM-HM=
- 4       AGENT:            YOU KNOW AND THEN I ((CHUCKLES)) LIKE YOU KNOW I FORGET TO WRITE WHAT I I TRIED ALREADY BUT (.) YEA THE ODD TIME I DO I'M NOT I'M NOT SAYING I'M PERFECT ON IT BUT I I'LL UH I'LL DO THAT (     ) IT'S NOT A PROBLEM
- 5       MANAGER 1:        NO OKAY BUT JUST IF YOU TRY TO TO TO CALL SOMEONE AND THEY DID NOT ANSWER JUST JUST WRITE DOWN IN A COMMENT I TRIED TO CALL THEM BUT THEY DIDN'T ANSWER (.) IN IN THAT CASE I KNOW [YOU
- 6       AGENT:            [NO AND THAT'S WHAT I (1.6) NO NO AND THAT'S MY FAULT THAT PART
- 7       MANAGER 1:        YEA
- 8       AGENT:            =[YOU KNOW ((LAUGHS))
- 9       MANAGER 1:        =[SO THAT'S THAT'S REALLY SOMETHING=
- 10      AGENT:            =BECAUSE I CALL
- 11      MANAGER 1:        YEA
- 12      AGENT:            BECAUSE SOMETIMES I'M DRIVING AND I AND THEN I FORGET TO GO BACK TO PUT IT ON BECAUSE I DON'T I TRY NOT TO TEXT WHEN I'M DRIVING ((LAUGHS))
- 13      MANAGER 1:        NO NO AND THAT THAT'S A GOOD THING HUH DON'T DON'T DON'T TEXT WHILE YOU'RE DRIVING UHH BUT IT'S IMPORTANT THAT YOU IMPROVE THAT POINT UH I THINK YOU YOU YOU ALSO DO SOME STOPS UH WHEN YOU'RE DRIVING UHH BUT (.) FOR ME FOR YOU TO UNDERSTAND IS THAT I DON'T SEE A COMMENT AFTER A FEW HOURS=

- 14     AGENT:             =NO NO YOU'RE CORRECT=  
15     MANAGER 1:        =OR OR THIRTY SIX HOURS I WILL SEND YOU AN A MESSAGE LIKE HEY  
                          CAN YOU CHECK IT (.) AND THEN I'M ALSO WORKING ON YOUR  
                          (CLIENT LIST) AND THAT'S THAT'S NOT THE DEAL OF COURSE AND  
                          IT'S NOT MY JOB TO (.) YEA TO DO THE (CLIENT LIST)  
16     AGENT:             NO NO I AGREE WITH YOU THERE

Finally, in the report, the assessment box for the subtopic regarding the client list is marked as *'Insufficient'*, the same information as in the preparation is listed under the comments for the topic *'Sales'*, and under *'Goals'*, it says:

*(AGENT) should try to find a way to make sure he doesn't forget to put comments in the (CLIENT LIST) and give feedback about his actions.*

The feedback is phrased directly as an identification of a problem in the preparation phase, but it is not brought up as such in the PAI. Instead, in turn 1, the feedback is delayed by different markers of dispreference, including a preface and a number of hesitations, and although it is then ventriloquized almost verbatim from the preparation (see Van De Mieroop & Carranza, 2018), it is formulated in the form of reported speech ("I wrote down that"), thereby potentially distancing Manager 1 from the words as he talks from 'behind' the text (see Sorsa et al., 2014). Finally, the feedback is rephrased as a personal opinion that lacks certainty ("I think"), as something that does not occur often ("sometimes"), and as something that is open to negotiation ("is that right"), all of which serve as further mitigating strategies. In turns 2 and 4, the agent seems to partly disagree with the negative feedback, attempts to laugh it away, and confirms it indeed does not happen often ("sometimes", "the odd time"), thereby repeating one of Manager 1's mitigation strategies from turn 1. Faced with this dismissal of the negative feedback, Manager 1 then uses an indirect feedback strategy in the form of a request for change in turn 5, which provides practical advice on how the agent can improve his performance ("if you try to to to call someone (...) just write down in a comment"), to which the agent replies in turn 12 with the excuse that he sometimes forgets because he is driving. Finally, seemingly as a last resort, Manager 1 phrases the negative feedback in a more direct manner in turns 13 and 15, as he topicalizes both the importance of the agent's improvement on this point, albeit in an

impersonal way (“it’s important that”), and formulates a clear demand for change by delegating the responsibility of this task explicitly to the agent (“that’s not the deal”, “it’s not my job”). The agent then finally agrees with Manager 1 in turns 14 and 16, and they move on to the next topic. Overall, this interactional excerpt highlights that Manager 1 initially attempts to formulate the negative feedback in an indirect way, and that he only resorts to more direct feedback strategies when the agent disagrees with his assessment.

The entextualization of this interaction includes both direct and indirect feedback strategies. It is relevant to note that throughout all 15 observed PA processes at GlobalCorp, this is the only instance where an assessment box is marked as ‘*Insufficient*’, which underlines the clear and direct negative nature of the marking of the assessment box as ‘*Insufficient*’ here. The comments under the ‘*Sales*’ topic remain a direct identification of the problem, and the addition of the comments under ‘*Goals*’ formulate constructive feedback in the form of advice for change (“(AGENT) should try to...”), mitigated by the phrasing that he ‘should try’ to change rather than that he ‘should’ change, in clear contrast with the eventual more direct demand for change at the end of Excerpt 1. In sum, this example is considered the most directly phrased instance of negative feedback in the dataset as it includes the only marking of an assessment box as ‘*Insufficient*’ as well as other direct feedback strategies. However, it also includes a number of indirect strategies as well as markers of dispreference, showcasing that although feedback can be formulated through direct feedback strategies and without any markers of dispreference in some part(s) of the PAs at GlobalCorp, it is never done exclusively this way throughout the process.

In most cases, feedback is formulated exclusively in an indirect way throughout the PA process, and within these instances of indirect feedback, we can also observe different degrees of indirectness. An example of indirect feedback which is formulated in a relatively direct way occurred in the PA process of a sales agent for a South Asian market. In the comments for the general topic ‘*Finance*’, the managers wrote both in the preparation and in the report:







that he mostly uses WhatsApp with his smaller clients, i.e. buyers, but that he spends a lot of time on the phone with more important clients:

EXCERPT 4 (00:30:02-00:32:30) - INTERLOCUTORS PRESENT: MANAGER 1, MANAGER 2, AGENT FOR A SOUTHEASTERN EUROPEAN MARKET

- 1       AGENT:           ...BUT WITH THE BIG BUYERS I STAY EVEN HOURS (2.4) LIKE I STAYED WITH (CLIENT NAME) YOU KNOW UH A LITTLE UH A LITTLE STORY UH WHEN I WAS UH I I AM DIVORCED RIGHT NOW UH FIVE YEARS (.) BUT WHEN I WAS WITH (CLIENT NAME) I WAS WITH MY WIFE (EX WIFE NAME) AND I WAS HERE EACH NIGHT ON THIS COUCH AND HE WAS KEEPING ME ON THE PHONE FOR HOURS (.) AND UH LIKE I'M NOT EXAGGERATING (COLLEAGUE NAME) AND (COLLEAGUE NAME) KNOWS IT LIKE UH SIX SEVEN EIGHT HOURS PER DAY (.) AND IN THE NIGHT (EX WIFE NAME) WAS GOING TO SLEEP IN THE (.) NEXT ROOM AND UH AFTER TEN TWENTY MINUTES SHE SHE CALLED ME (AGENT) PLEASE SPEAK A LITTLE BIT UH NOT NOT SO NOT LOUDER YOU KNOW BECAUSE I WANT TO SLEEP (.) AND (CLIENT NAME) (.) UH HEARD THAT MY VOICE WAS A LITTLE BIT LOWER YOU KNOW MY UH YEA AND HE TOLD ME WHAT HAPPENED I DON'T HEAR YOU GOOD AND I SAID MISTER (CLIENT NAME) (EX WIFE NAME) IS SLEEPING (.) SHE GO TO BED AND HE SAID AH DON'T WORRY YOU CAN SPEAK LIKE THIS LOWER I CAN HEAR YOU AND HE KEPT ME LIKE ONE TWO IN THE MORNING YOU KNOW
- 2       MANAGER 1:       ((NOSE LAUGHS))
- 3       AGENT:           ((LAUGHS))
- 4       MANAGER 1:       ((SHAKES HEAD))
- 5       AGENT:           YEA
- 6       MANAGER 1:       YEA THAT'S CRAZY YEA
- 7       AGENT:           I KNOW
- 8       MANAGER 1:       BUT YEA YOU HAVE TO ALSO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF (AGENT) AND DON'T LET UH PEOPLE TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOU AND UH=
- 9       AGENT:           =I I I'VE LEARNED FROM [MY MISTAKES YEA
- 10      MANAGER 1:       [OH PERFECT YEA YEA GOOD YEA

In the report, the comments under the general topic '*Buyer Management*' from the preparation are repeated verbatim, and the managers have added:

*Don't waste time with buyers who only buy few (PRODUCTS) and/or (VALUE ASSESSMENT). With big buyers, (AGENT) spends many hours (cf. (CLIENT NAME)).*

*(AGENT) should watch over his time with big buyers. We don't expect him to spend unnatural amount of time with some buyers. Protect your own time/ health.*

In the preparation phase, the indication of a standard (“it is important to identify and speak to VIP buyers regularly”) could be interpreted as an indirect feedback strategy, but the questions that follow imply that the managers are actually unaware of how the agent manages his clients, and that they aim to ask him about this topic during the PAI rather than criticize him about it. This latter interpretation of their intention was confirmed by the managers during the follow-up interviews. However, when the topic is recontextualized in Excerpt 3 during the PAI, the questions from the preparation are not asked. Instead, Manager 1 topicalizes only the indications of the standard, making use of a number of imperatives in doing so (“don’t waste your time”, “work as efficient as possible”). Additionally, turns 1 and 3 also contain markers of dispreference such as a delay by a preface in turn 1 (“in bullet E is build-up long-term relationships”) and phrasing as a personal opinion in turns 1 and 3, all of which could point to Manager 1’s orientation to this topic as potentially socially problematic.

Later on, the agent launches a story in turn 1 of Excerpt 4 to emphasize the long duration and late-night timing of his calls with a particular client. As a result of the ambiguous phrasing in Excerpt 3, it is possible that the agent felt the need to tell this story to defend himself by emphasizing that he did, in fact, spend a lot of time with important clients, and that he might have interpreted the indication of a standard in Excerpt 3 as indirect negative feedback to his performance. This anecdote is also entextualized in the report, but Manager 1 then replies to this story in both the PAI and the report by clarifying that this type of communication with clients is actually *not* what they expect from sales agents. In the PAI, this feedback is phrased indirectly yet clearly as a demand for change (“you have to also take care of yourself (...) don’t let uh people take advantage of you”), whereas in the report, it is phrased more mildly as

advice about change (“(AGENT) should watch over his time with big buyers”). Additionally, the feedback is accounted for in the PAI and in the report in the form of a concern regarding the agent’s health. In turn 9 of Excerpt 4, the agent replies to this feedback in the PAI by clarifying that he has ‘learned from his mistakes’, and although Manager 1 assesses this positively in turn 10, this clarification and subsequent positive assessment are not entextualized in the report. In sum, we see in the spoken phase of this topic that there is a potential ambiguity of framing expectations as either indicating a standard or providing indirect feedback, and that this arguably results in a compensation strategy by the agent, which does not succeed, as the story he tells eventually becomes a source of indirect negative feedback in the PAI as well as the report.

These data examples showcase the varied ways in which negative feedback is formulated and recontextualized throughout the intertextual chain of the individual PA processes at GlobalCorp as part of a continuum of dispreference. We have argued that despite the institutional importance of textually documenting and accounting for (negative) feedback (see Section 10.4.1), it is without exception formulated throughout the PA process as (at least somewhat) socially problematic through the use of markers of dispreference and indirect negative feedback strategies. Given that processes of recontextualization inherently include alterations in the form of deletions, additions, or other types of discursive changes (Rock et al., 2013) and that the entextualization of a performance appraisal interview into a report has specifically been conceptualized as a summarizing process (Townley, 1993), it could be assumed that the social problematicity associated with negative feedback in PAIs (Asmuß, 2008) is limited to the spoken phase of the PA process, and that the increased distance between the interlocutors in written form would result in direct negative feedback formulations from the managers. However, our analysis finds that this orientation to social problematicity is not limited to the PAIs, but can be observed across modalities and discursive phases when negative feedback is provided by the managers during the PA processes at GlobalCorp.

## 10.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In light of the broader corporate relevance of PA processes as well as the specific importance of providing (negative) feedback in achieving the PA goal of enhancing employee performance, this paper has aimed to shed light on the ways in which negative feedback is formulated and recontextualized throughout the different modalities and discursive phases of the intertextual PA processes of the sales agents at GlobalCorp, a small-sized globalized company in Belgium. First, the findings in Section 10.4.1 highlight the “entanglement of modalities” that the PA process consists of (Scheuer, 2014, p. 408), and that although each individual PA process consist of distinct written and spoken phases, not all feedback is present in each of these phases, nor do all types of feedback occur in different phases to the same extent, as we found that the degree of textual documentation in the preparation phase was significantly higher for topics containing negative feedback than for positive feedback. This was then tied to the institutional ‘restance’ of text, as the managers explained that the textual documents surrounding the PAI do not only serve the descriptive and evaluative aims of the PA process, but also serve a broader purpose as an authoritative artefact (Park & Bucholtz, 2009) in case of future (legal) issues with the agent in question, thus arguably requiring more thorough reflection from the onset of the PA process than positive feedback. Second, the analysis in Section 10.4.2 showcases the different ways in which negative feedback is constructed and recontextualized throughout the intertextual chain of the PA as part of a continuum of dispreference. We found that each topic which contained negative feedback was formulated (at least somewhat) indirectly, and that this was not only in the case in spoken interaction, as could be expected, but rather occurs across spoken and written modalities, thereby further underlining the social problematicity of providing negative feedback in a PA context beyond the face-to-face PAI encounter (Asmuß, 2008). In sum, these findings then highlight a potential paradox in the general PA process and the aim of appraisal form specifically at GlobalCorp, as on the one hand, we observe an institutional need to formulate negative feedback clearly, reflected in its preparation and general degree of textual documentation, but on the other hand, the managers orient to negative

feedback as a socially problematic action, reflected in the use of a number of indirect feedback strategies and markers of dispreference in both written and spoken negative feedback. In a broader sense, our analysis of PAs has thus underlined the sensitive nature of providing feedback in workplace settings, even if it is one of the inherent aims of the PA process (Asmuß, 2008), and has further revealed the complexity of doing so beyond the spoken interaction as part of ‘pathways of linked events’ (Wortham & Reyes, 2015) or ‘intertextual chains’ (Fairclough, 1993).

It is noteworthy to highlight that the final entextualization of an institutional report is “a fundamental process of power and authority” (Park & Bucholtz, 2009, p. 486), and that in the PA processes at GlobalCorp, it is in the best interest of the company to formulate negative feedback as carefully as possible, but similarly, it would be in the best interest of the sales agents if positive feedback would be prepared and formulated equally carefully. Future research on recontextualization in PA processes could further examine this significant difference between the preparation of negative feedback and positive feedback from a critical discourse analytical perspective, as setting up the report (both in the pre-interview and post-interview phase) is a clear way in which intra-organizational gatekeeping can manifest itself (Holmes, 2007). Although the recontextualizing nature of the intertextual process inherently entails the deletion and selection of information in a general sense, the power imbalance between the different interlocutors raises the question of when and how such deletion and selection potentially “amounts to misuse” (Linell, 1998, p. 152). In line with previous research that has emphasized the institutional power of appraisal forms in the PA process (Holmes, 2007; Townley, 1993), this paper has argued that the PA process should be examined as a discursive process that consists of multiple modalities and phases, and as such, examining how power and authority manifest themselves throughout these intertextual chains would be fruitful area of future research.

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# 11 CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter, I aim to tie together the different research chapters and case studies conducted as part of this dissertation. In Section 11.1, I will present the general conclusions of the different research chapters and case studies that make up this dissertation, including reflections on how the insights gained from this research project relate back to the theoretical and societal frameworks as presented in Chapter 2. In Section 11.2, I will reflect on the academic and applied relevance of the research conducted as part of this dissertation, and finally, in Section 11.3, I conclude by presenting some of the limitations of this research project, as well as a few recommendations for future research.

## 11.1 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation has aimed to offer novel insights on language and language use in different types of corporate contexts in Belgium from a sociolinguistic perspective, particularly against the background of the increasing internationalization and globalization in and of these types of contexts over the past few decades. Specifically, it has aimed to unravel the intricacies of language as part of these developments from different institutional, individual, and interactional perspectives (Jenkins, 2000). To do so, the dissertation is made up of three empirical qualitative case studies which resulted in seven individual research chapters, as visualized in Figure 1. In conducting this research, the aim was not to achieve representative results for (parts of) a specific population, but rather to showcase and highlight the specific complexities of language as part of the three corporate contexts in which the different case studies were conducted (Blommaert & Jie, 2010), i.e. an MNC, an SME, and a professional transnational workspace in a more general sense. In the subsequent sections, I will first summarize the findings from each research chapter, and these summaries then serve as the basis of the concluding remarks for each of the three separate case studies. I will then tie these findings of the different research chapters and case studies back to the theoretical and societal frameworks presented in Chapter 2, so as to showcase the different ways this dissertation has aimed to contribute to existing and ongoing

research on globalization, text and talk in institutional settings, language policy, and the (socio)linguistic context of Belgium.

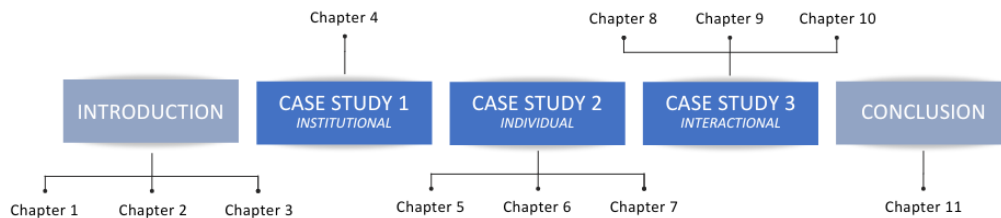


Figure 1. Structural overview of the dissertation

### 11.1.1 Conclusions of the first case study

The insights gained from the first case study as presented in Chapter 4 have aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ‘ways-of-doing-things’ (Jenkins, 2000) regarding language in corporate contexts from the perspective of a specific type of ‘globalized institution’ as the main starting point. To do so, Chapter 4 focused on FinCorp, a Belgian MNC which has its headquarters in Brussels. In this specific research context, we adopted a scaled socio-historical approach to examine the impact that the structural changes within FinCorp had on their language practices and language management over the course of more than 20 years, and which underlying language ideological beliefs could be observed as part of these structural changes, specifically within the internationalized and language-sensitive context of Belgium. We found that the company’s language practices and language management were largely informed by a Flemish nationalist (language) ideology, but that this pride-based ideology also coincided and sometimes collided with other more profit-based ideologies (Duchêne & Heller, 2012), particularly in relation to English. This delicate balancing act between pride and profit incorporated influences from globalized and more localized scales, which in turn resulted in a number of shifts in priorities and scale-jumps with regards to their language practices and language management strategies over the years. In conclusion, the analysis presented in this chapter provided

a holistic historical overview of the development of language policy (Spolsky, 2009) at FinCorp, and, in doing so, underlined the different scalar levels of embeddedness which informed FinCorp's political economy and sociolinguistic functioning over time.

Overall, the findings from this first case study have showcased that the theoretical notion of language policy can be operationalized in different ways on different corporate levels and throughout different periods of time (Schiffman, 1996; Shohamy, 2006), thereby underlining the dynamic and flexible nature of such policies in corporate settings. In line with this structurally, ideologically, and practically complex conceptualization of corporate language and language policy, we have also problematized the notion of an MNC as a static entity in favor of a more dynamic and flexible conceptualization of corporations as constantly in motion (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018). From a methodological perspective, the case study has underlined the value of a socio-historical and scaled approach to language policy (Barakos, 2020; Duchêne, 2008; Garrido, 2022; Sokolovska, 2016) to fully grasp the complexity of language and language policy as part of an MNC, thereby arguing in particular that the triangulation of historical archival data and semi-structured interviews with higher management is a particularly apt way to combine historical data with emic insights on how things took place from the perspective of key corporate figures in the process.

### 11.1.2 Conclusions of the second case study

The insights gained from the second case study as presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 have aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the 'what-goes-on-in-their-heads' (Jenkins, 2000) regarding language in corporate contexts from the perspective of a specific type of 'globalized individual' as the main starting point. To do so, Chapters 5, 6, and 7 focused on the general transnational workspace in Brussels, and more specifically on the personal and professional experiences of professional transnational migrants who cross international borders and lived in Brussels with the aim of advancing their careers.

In Chapter 5, we examined how these individuals perceive the role and symbolic value of languages in their professional and personal lives, how these perceptions influence and are shaped by their experiences in Brussels, and how their perceptions and experiences can be understood in light of the linguistic market in which they occur. We argued that the stories, expectations, and beliefs shared by the participants are highly localized within the specific linguistic market of the multilingual and superdiverse “majority-minority city” of Brussels (Geldof, 2021, p. 45). Against the background of existing research on less privileged migration, we also argued that there seem to be differences between the role of language and language-related experiences in the international trajectories of professional transnational migrants and those with less economic and/or symbolic capital, thereby underlining the importance of researching all types of migrants to fully grasp the sociolinguistic complexity of language as part of processes of migration. In conclusion, the analysis presented as part of this chapter operationalized concepts such as the commodification of language (Heller, 2003; 2010) and the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991) to grasp the sociolinguistic complexity of individual multilingualism in relation to societal multilingualism in a superdiverse urban setting, and thereby underlined the importance of studying the role and value and of language in a specific and localized linguistic market as part of a broader globalized context.

In Chapter 6, we adopted a micro-level discourse analytical approach to examine how migration-related categories are constructed in the interactional context of a research interview by those who migrate with substantial economic and/or symbolic capital. More specifically, we focused on the terms ‘expat’ and its perceived opposite ‘migrant’, as well as its derivative ‘immigrant’, which can be but is not always conflated with the category of ‘migrant’. Moreover, we aimed to achieve a deeper understanding of how the participants of the study positioned themselves in relation to these categories. In the analysis, we found that each of the 31 participants associated different attributes and provided different definitions for the three social migration-related categories under study, thereby highlighting the lack of a shared or agreed upon definition of these terms. Additionally, we shed light on the dynamic, complex, and potentially contradictory relationship between defining social categories and positioning yourself



in relation to them. Finally, we argued that the discursive processes of categorization were entrenched within the particular interactional context in which they occurred, i.e. the research interview. In conclusion, the emic perspectives of the privileged migrants presented in this analysis have underlined that categorization processes related to migration-related social categories are inherently perspectival and discursively (co-)constructed, to the extent that they can be considered ‘floating signifiers’ (Hall, 1996) or ‘elusive signifiers’ (Kunz, 2020), i.e. terms that “can evoke different meanings simultaneously, in different combinations and with different valuations” (Kunz, 2020, p. 2157). In doing so, we also emphasized the methodological and analytical relevance of reflection and transparency throughout the research process, both in relation to social categorization and beyond (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Jacobs, 2018).

In Chapter 7, I zoomed in on an interview I conducted with Laura, a third culture individual who was born in Hong Kong, raised in Canada, and who lived in Brussels as a professional transnational migrant at the time of the interview. More specifically, this chapter aimed to disentangle the ways in which this third culture individual made sense of the national identity categories ‘Chinese’ and ‘Canadian’ within the specific institutional context of a research interview. In doing so, I found that the construction of her own national identity as Chinese, Canadian, or both can be considered a complex and fluid process, as the ambiguity of her sense of belonging frequently leads her to account for herself and her sense of identity during the research interview. In conclusion, the analysis showcases that “senses of ‘national’ identity are local configurations of social organization” (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 78) rather than static, clear or bounded entities, thereby underlining the importance of a discursive and interactional approach to categorization to fully grasp the complexity, subjectivity, and vulnerability (Fineman, 2008; 2010) of constructing (national) identity in interaction for third culture individuals (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Overall, the findings from this second case study have underlined the importance of language in processes of (privileged) migration, both in terms of linguistic repertoire, as showcased in Chapter 5, and the ways in which language is used in interaction to construct migration-related and national identity categories, as showcased in Chapters

6 and 7, respectively. In doing so, this case study has contributed new perspectives on privileged migration as part of the general transnational workspace in Brussels to the existing literature on language and migration in Belgian corporate contexts, which to date had focused primarily on the linguistic integration of migrants in the workplace (Van Hoof et al., 2020; Theunissen & Van Laer, 2023; see Section 2.4.3). Theoretically, the findings from this case study, and particularly from Chapters 6 and 7, have also underlined the importance of a contextualized approach to social categorization. Categorization and the delineation of meaning were found to be particularly difficult as part of a globalized social world which is constantly in flux, resulting in ambiguous, ever-changing, and deeply complex social relations, social categories, and identification processes. In line with these observed complexities, the analyses of the three research chapters have also highlighted the relevance of examining migrants' trajectories and experiences individually, rather than presenting (privileged) migrants as a homogeneous group. Methodologically, the insights from this case study were achieved through semi-structured in-depth interviews and have underlined the potential of this type of data collection to foreground migrants' language use as well as their experiences with and beliefs surrounding language from their own emic perspectives.

### 11.1.3 Conclusions of the third case study

The insights gained from the third case study as presented in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 have aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the 'what-goes-on-between-people' (Jenkins, 2000) regarding language in corporate contexts from the perspective of a specific type of 'globalized interaction' as the main starting point. To do so, Chapters 8, 9, and 10 focused on GlobalCorp, a Belgian SME that has its headquarters in Flanders and is active on a global scale. More specifically, the case study topicalized the high-stakes and potentially sensitive activity type of performance appraisals at GlobalCorp, particularly those which take place between management at HQ and the agents who work for the company from all around the world.

In Chapter 8, we adopted an institutional discourse analytical approach to examine small talk as part of this specific type of corporate interaction, aiming to understand how small talk occurs during the performance appraisal interviews at GlobalCorp, where it is located, how and by whom it is initiated and prolonged, and which functions it fulfills. We found that although employee assessment remains the core communicative purpose of these types of interactions, as is the case in other studies (Fletcher, 2001; Asmuß, 2008), the managers at GlobalCorp consciously make use of small talk as relational practice (Holmes & Marra, 2004) to achieve the more relational communicative purposes of getting to know the agents better, thereby also contributing to the business-oriented purpose of involving them more closely in GlobalCorp's workings. Connecting these insights to the specificities of the GlobalCorp workspace, we concluded that GlobalCorp adapts the purpose of the performance appraisal interview to its own globalized and virtual needs, thereby underlining the malleable nature of these types of workplace interactions as well as the role that different types of talk can play in achieving the different communicative aims of a specific activity type (Holmes, 2000).

In Chapter 9, we focused on multilingualism as part of the performance appraisal interviews at GlobalCorp by zooming in on their use of three different multilingual strategies, i.e. BELF, receptive multilingualism, and a lay interpreter. More specifically, we examined (i) how the multilingual strategies used during the performance appraisal interviews fit into GlobalCorp's general management strategy, (ii) how the managers perceive of these multilingual strategies, and (iii) how their language ideological beliefs manifest themselves in the performance appraisal interviews. We found that the managers' language beliefs regarding the potential risks of specific multilingual strategies shaped their language practices during the performance appraisal interviews, resulting both in clear efforts to prevent, signal, and/or repair (potential) miscommunication during sensitive moments of the interview when there is a perceived risk of miscommunication, as well as in a lack of effort to do so when there was no perceived risk, resulting in miscommunication during crucial and sensitive moments. In doing so, the chapter showcased how a covert corporate language policy (Shohamy, 2006) is put into practice in a specific and potentially sensitive type of

corporate interaction, thereby contributing an explicitly globalized and multilingual perspective to the growing body of research on performance appraisal interviews.

In Chapter 10, we adopted a mixed-method approach to study the recontextualization of feedback throughout the performance appraisal processes at GlobalCorp. More specifically, we examined the importance and occurrence of negative feedback in GlobalCorp's performance appraisal processes in comparison to other types of feedback, as well as how negative feedback is formulated and recontextualized throughout the different written and spoken phases of individual performance appraisals. We found that there is a potential paradox in the way negative feedback is formulated throughout the appraisal processes at GlobalCorp: on the one hand, we observed an institutional need to formulate negative feedback clearly in case of potential future issues with the agents under review, reflected in its preparation and general degree of textual documentation, whereas on the other hand, the managers orient to negative feedback as a socially problematic action in both written and spoken form, reflected in the use of indirect feedback strategies and markers of dispreference. On the basis of this analysis, the chapter has highlighted the importance of including both textual and interactional data in the analysis of an 'intertextual chain' (Fairclough, 1993) such as the performance appraisal process so as to fully grasp its complexity. Additionally, from a methodological perspective, the chapter has also showcased the potential affordances of triangulating a robust qualitative analysis with a statistically supported quantitative approach to consolidate the findings from both perspectives.

Overall, the three research chapters as presented in the third case study have showcased that the uses, affordances, and applications of language as part of a specific activity type within a specific corporate context are highly multifaceted and intricately complex. In doing so, all three research chapters in this case study have answered to the call "to develop studies that open the lid on the black box of AIs [appraisal interviews] and to study what actually goes on from a communicative perspective" (Clifton, 2012, p. 284), particularly within a multilingual and international workplace context, which have generally been underrepresented in existing research on workplace interaction (Canagarajah, 2020). Methodologically, opening the lid of this 'black box'

is arguably best achieved through interactional analyses of authentic empirical data (Clifton, 2012). The different research chapters have showcased that these interactional insights are further strengthened through triangulation with follow-up interviews with the interlocutors, so as to compare “what people do versus what they say they do” (Marra et al., 2022) and identify the similarities and discrepancies between the two. Moreover, these spoken data were further triangulated with written documentation within a workplace context where the ‘restance’ of text (Cooren, 2000) is a crucial aspect of how interactions are fixed as part of institutional reality, and this approach further strengthened the analyses of the multifaceted role of language as part of a specific institutional setting. Finally, similar to one of the arguments made in the first case study (see Section 11.1.1), the analyses presented as part of this case study have further underlined the different ways in which the complexity of a company’s structure and setup are interrelated with the way language is used and the role it plays as part of the company in question. Particularly in Chapters 8 and 9, the virtual and globalized nature of GlobalCorp were shown to have a considerable influence on the role of small talk and the use of multilingual strategies during the performance appraisal interviews respectively, thereby highlighting the relevance of a highly contextualized sociolinguistic approach to language in corporate settings.

#### **11.1.4 Conclusions on globalization and corporate contexts**

Each of the different case studies conducted as part of this dissertation was conceptualized on the basis of the idea that language and globalization are intricately and complexly intertwined in contemporary societies (Blommaert, 2010; Fairclough, 2006), to the extent that “we cannot adequately understand or analyse globalization as a reality without taking language —discourse— into account” (Fairclough, 2006, p. 143). Indeed, the “trans-contextual networks, flows and movements” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 1) which characterize the contemporary era of globalization were inherent to the setup of each case study; in the first case study, the aim was to study language as part of the socio-historical development of an MNC; in the second case study, the aim

was to study the complexity of language as part of professional transnational migration in the superdiverse urban context of Brussels; and in the third case study, the aim was to examine the role of language as part of the inner workings of a globally active SME through a focus on performance appraisals.

The three case studies have each revealed different ways in which the role of language as part of globalization in specific corporate contexts serves as a reflection of the role of language as part of processes of globalization in a broader societal sense. In the first case study, the language ideologies, practices, and management present at FinCorp were found to reflect the complex socio-historical development of language in Belgium, as well as the increasing importance of English in light of the general internationalization of the financial markets over the years. In the second case study, the role of language as part of the lives of professional transnational migrants in Brussels reflected the intricate interplay between language and migration as part of processes of globalization, both in terms of linguistic repertoire and in terms of the language used to construct migration-related and national identity categories. Finally, in the third case study, the multifaceted role of language was found to reflect the specificities of the highly globalized and virtual workspace through which the company operates. In doing so, the role of small talk, the use of different multilingual strategies, and the interplay between text and talk during the performance appraisals at GlobalCorp all showcased the increased complexity of language in an increasingly globalized (corporate) world. As such, each of the three case studies has underlined that studying the relationship between language and globalization in a specific context “can and do[es] indeed reveal a lot about the very big things in society” (Blommaert & Jie, 2010, p. 13).

In acknowledging this intricate and complex relationship between language and globalization, this dissertation has explicitly positioned itself as part of what Blommaert (2010) refers to as a sociolinguistics of globalization, which “forces sociolinguistics to unthink its classic distinctions and biases and to rethink itself as a sociolinguistics of mobile resources, framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements” (p. 1). Indeed, the analyses presented as part of the different case studies

have showcased that existing static definitions of specific concepts or ideas do not suffice to represent the dynamic reality of language and globalization in corporate contexts today. The first and the third case study argued against definitions of a company as “an entity that is made up of its material and legal structure and that is fixed in time and space” (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018, p. 18) in favor of a more dynamic, evolving, and ever-changing definition of a company. The second case study argued against homogenous and one-dimensional etic definitions of specific groups of migrants in favor of a focus on emic perspectives which foreground individual experiences, stories, and perspectives to grasp the complexity of migration in a globalized era. Chapter 8 of the third case study also argued against the conceptualization of small talk in high-stakes virtual workplace interactions as “dispensable, irrelevant, or peripheral” (Holmes & Marra, 2004, p. 378) in favor of small talk as a conscious form of relational practice in a virtual workspace. To achieve these insights, each of the case studies was embedded in a highly contextualized interpretation of processes of globalization so as to help uncover “the myriad ways in which global processes enter local conditions and circumstances and become a localized reality”, thereby further contributing to a sociolinguistics of globalization that aims to do justice to “vernacular globalization” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 197).

The research presented as part of this dissertation has also contributed novel insights on the role and value of English as part of globalization. In case study 1, the position and role of English as part of the historical development of language policy at FinCorp were topicalized as both *globalized*, i.e. considered necessary in this globalized day and age, as well as *globalizing*, i.e. used to portray an international presence (Jenkins et al., 2011). Moreover, we observed a language ideological shift from the perception of English as a threat to the perception of English as a potential gateway to financial profit, thereby tracing the complex development of how the current perception of English came to be in a specific multinational corporate context. In case study 2, the role of English was discussed at length during the interviews with the professional transnational migrants, and was found to be crucial to their personal and professional lives throughout their international trajectories. Specifically in Brussels, the strong presence of English and multilingualism in a broader sense was considered a pull factor

that brought many of the participants to the city. However, at the same time, we also found that this strong presence of English and different forms of multilingualism has seemingly resulted in a job market that is somewhat linguistically saturated, rendering the participants' English proficiency less relevant in a professional sense within a competitive linguistic market. In case study 3, the majority of the written and spoken communication between HQ and the agents abroad was found to occur in English. This importance of English for the general workings of GlobalCorp was also topicalized explicitly in Chapter 9, where we found that the managers at GlobalCorp consider English as a *lingua franca* to be a neutral strategy to bridge the lack of a shared L1 between HQ and the sales agents abroad, and that in light of this perceived neutrality, they aim to implement English as a common corporate language for internal communication with the sales agents in the future. However, we argued that as part of this language ideological belief, they underestimate the complexity and potential impact of seeking a 'one-size-fits-all' solution to the lack of a shared L1, particularly within high-stakes and sensitive interactional contexts such as the performance appraisal interview. Overall, the different case studies and research chapters in this dissertation have thus highlighted the relevance of English in globalized corporate contexts and contributed to the idea that English is "part of the texture and infrastructure of globalization" (Jenkins et al., 2011, p. 303), thereby underlining the complexity and multifaceted nature of its role within processes of globalization.

In addition to English, other languages were also found to be highly relevant in the three globalized corporate contexts under study. In the first case study, the Dutch language was construed as a crucial means of communication to stay true to FinCorp's "Flemish DNA" throughout the development of their language policy. This language ideological belief was found to initially collide with the increasing presence of English, but eventually shifted into a glocalized language strategy which combined the international potential of English with the localized importance of Dutch. In the second case study, all research participants reported to either be proficient in at least one of the official languages of Brussels or to want to learn them, despite the relevance and presence of English in the city. These insights then reflected the tension between being able to get around on the one hand and feeling at home on the other hand in a



superdiverse city such as Brussels. In the third case study, the knowledge of local languages and the local culture was reported to be the main reason why GlobalCorp works with sales agents abroad, showcasing that English is primarily viewed as a means to facilitate internal communication, while external communication is not meant to occur in English. As such, the findings from the different case studies confirmed that in globalized corporate contexts, English is not replacing other languages, but that instead, other languages often “interact with English in many ways”, and that “this interaction is played out on the individual, the social, as well as the organizational level” (Ehrenreich, 2010, p. 411), thus resulting in potential tension fields between English and other languages in increasingly multilingual corporate settings. Moreover, by topicalizing the multilingual nature of the three corporate contexts under study, each case study has served as a contribution to the statement that in different types of globalized corporate contexts, “monolingual spaces are an exception rather than the rule” (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018, p. 19).

### 11.1.5 Conclusions on text and talk in institutional settings

Throughout this dissertation, and particularly in the first and third case studies, I have adopted a social constructionist perspective on the role and importance of talk and text in institutional settings, thereby arguing that all types of spoken interactions as well as written documentation contribute to the creation and maintenance of institutional life on a daily basis. In the first case study, the language policy at FinCorp was historically reconstructed primarily on the basis of textual documentation retrieved online and from the company archive. As such, written documents were used as the main building block to reconstruct the development of language policy at FinCorp. In the third case study, talk-in-interaction was foregrounded as a crucial medium through which the aims of the performance appraisals at GlobalCorp are achieved. The spoken interactions of the performance appraisal interviews were thus used as the basis of the analyses presented as part of this case study, following the idea that “it is through

interaction that institutions are brought to life and made actionable in the everyday world” (Heritage & Clayman, 2010, p. 7).

In both cases, the insights gained from focusing on text and talk respectively were also triangulated with other spoken and written types of data to further strengthen and corroborate the research findings. In the first case study, the insights gained from the archival and online datasets were triangulated with spoken follow-up interviews with key figures in higher management to gauge their personal views on the development of language and language policy at FinCorp, thereby providing rich emic contributions to our etic understandings of the written documents. In the third case study, the insights gained from authentic spoken performance appraisal interviews were triangulated with the written preparations and reports of each individual interview, as well as more general written documents and two follow-up interviews with the managers responsible for the performance appraisal processes at GlobalCorp. As such, both case studies have underlined the importance of talk and text as building blocks of the institutional context in which they occur, not just individually, but in relation to and in combination with one another. Moreover, both case studies have also highlighted the research potential of triangulating the data on what happens in a specific institutional setting with follow-up interviews with the people who were involved in what happened, so as to better grasp the complexity of language in a specific institutional setting from their emic perspective (Slembrouck & Hall, 2019).

### 11.1.6 Conclusions on language policy

In light of this dissertation’s focus on language in different types of corporate contexts, the notion of language policy (Spolsky, 2009) served as a theoretical guiding tool throughout the dissertation to grasp the multifaceted and multilayered specificities and complexities of language use, language management, and language beliefs in corporate contexts in a general sense. Moreover, in Chapters 4 and 9, the concept of language policy was operationalized as a structuring device and theoretical framework to grasp

the complexity of language in two specific corporate settings, i.e. FinCorp and GlobalCorp respectively.

The analyses presented in Chapters 4 and 9 confirmed that language policy is an important aspect of corporate functioning which is highly dependent on the specific structural, societal, and historical context of company as part of which it is studied. In Chapter 4, we topicalized the interplay between the historical development of language policy at FinCorp and the regional, national, and international scales on which FinCorp operates. In Chapter 9, we topicalized the multilingual nature of the performance appraisal interviews at GlobalCorp as part of their broader language policy, and tied these insights to the globalized and multilingual nature of the company as a whole. These analyses thereby underlined that a corporate language policy is a “complex and chaotic non-hierarchical system” (Spolsky, 2009, p. 326) that is “processual, dynamic, and in motion” (McCarty, 2011, p. 2) and that a contextualized approach is thus necessary to grasp this complexity, particularly in globalized workplace settings.

Language management in particular was foregrounded in Chapters 4 and 9 as central to the working of corporate language policies, as language management strategies were argued to reflect the language beliefs present at a company and are aimed at guiding its language practices, thereby impacting the general (linguistic) workings of the company as a whole (Sanden, 2016). The analysis presented in Chapter 4 topicalized the language management strategies at FinCorp from an institutional perspective, and found that the company made use of a number of internal language management tools over the years, ranging from more implicit ‘language tips’ in their in-house magazine to an explicit and formalized language policy at FinCorp Brussels. From an interactional perspective, Chapter 9 zoomed in on the use of three specific multilingual strategies during the performance appraisal interviews at GlobalCorp and interpreted them in light of the broader language management strategies present at the company, concluding that they currently adopt a rather “pragmatic and flexible approach to language use” (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005, p. 418) for their internal communication with the sales agents, but that they aim to implement English as a common corporate language in the future. Both at both FinCorp and GlobalCorp, we observed similar

perspectives on language as part of these language management strategies, as language and particularly multilingualism were primarily conceptualized as a ‘problem’ for internal communication, as opposed to a potential ‘resource’ for external communication (Ruiz, 1984). In summary, the analyses presented as part of Chapters 4 and 9 have echoed that there are no “one-size-fits-all” solutions to language management in multilingual workplaces (Sanden, 2016), and that it is therefore crucial for a globalized company’s general workings to devise a language policy that is based on the company’s specific linguistic needs and resources (Sanden, 2016; Spolsky, 2009; Welch et al., 2005).

### 11.1.7 Conclusions on the (socio)linguistic context of Belgium

One of the main motivations for conducting research on language and globalization in corporate contexts in Belgium was that to date, relatively little sociolinguistic research has been done on language in Belgian corporate settings, despite the fact that “there is a long tradition in sociolinguistics of looking at Belgium” (Blommaert, 2011, p. 241), and despite the fact that Belgian companies have changed considerably over the past few decades in light of the increasing globalization of financial markets (Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen, 2017). In light of this, each of the three case studies conducted as part of this dissertation has aimed to provide novel qualitative insights on language in different types of corporate contexts in Belgium, i.e. an MNC, an SME, and a professional transnational workspace in a more general sense. In doing so, the analyses presented as part of the different case studies have highlighted the intricacies and complexities, as well as the affordances and constraints of language and multilingualism in different shapes and forms in different types of corporate contexts in Belgium, thereby providing new insights into the complex interplay of language and globalization in these types of settings.

The complexity of the socio-historical development of language in Belgium in particular formed a relevant backdrop for two of the research chapters. In Chapter 4,

the development of the language policy at FinCorp over the years was analyzed in light of the socio-political and historical development of language in Belgium. More specifically, the so-called ‘language struggle’ (Blommaert, 2011) and the Flemish Movement were topicalized as relevant influences on some of the language ideological beliefs present at FinCorp. In Chapter 5, the value of different languages as part of the lives of professional transnational migrants was interpreted vis-à-vis the specific linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991) of Brussels, a superdiverse city with a complex linguistic history. More specifically, we found that the complexity of language use and language laws in Brussels often results in confusion and misunderstandings for the participants, which ultimately leads to difficulties and challenges in their daily lives. The analyses presented as part of Chapters 4 and 5 thus explicitly showcased the relevance of the historical development of language in Belgium to sociolinguistic studies situated in the country.

Zooming in on Brussels specifically, the analyses presented in Chapters 4 and 5 also showcased the interplay between national multilingualism in the form of official French-Dutch bilingualism and more international multilingualism in the form of broader linguistic diversity in the superdiverse capital city. Chapter 4 represented an institutional perspective on these different types of multilingualism as part of the language beliefs, practices, and management strategies present at FinCorp, reflecting on the tensions between Dutch and French in the structural organization of the MNC, as well as the tensions between these official languages and the languages associated with internationalization, particularly English. Chapter 5 provided insights into individual experiences related to the multilayered tensions that can result from living and working in a city that is *de jure* bilingual yet *de facto* much more linguistically complex, and did so from the point of view of an understudied type of privileged migrant of which there are many in Brussels specifically (Mahroum, 2001). In doing so, the analyses presented in these two research chapters further underline that Brussels is “unique as a multileveled, multinational and multicultural city” and that because of this, it can be considered “a research site of extraordinary richness” (Favell, 2001, p. 9).

Finally, this dissertation has shed further light on the presence and relevance of English in different types of corporate contexts in Belgium. English was made relevant and analyzed in a number of ways throughout the three case studies that make up this dissertation, and this was presented as particularly relevant against the background of globalization in Section 11.1.4. In doing so, the dissertation has also showcased the different roles and positions the language can fulfill in globalized corporate contexts in Belgium specifically, ranging from more globalized functions, including as a practical lingua franca and as a marketing tool with international allure, to more localized functions, particularly as a “stand-off compromise” between Dutch and French in light of the historical language struggle (Vandenbroucke, 2015, p. 175). As such, the role of English in different types of globalized corporate contexts in Belgium specifically can be considered multilayered and multifaceted, thereby reflecting the complexity of language in Belgium in a more general sense.

### 11.1.8 Final remarks

To conclude this section, I would like to repeat, as mentioned in Section 1.1, that the crossing of boundaries was considered central to the setup of this dissertation as a whole, doing so at different points between different types of corporate settings, between different types of institutional interactions, between national borders, between different regions in Belgium, and between different qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. One particular way in which boundary-crossing was made relevant throughout the dissertation was through crossing the boundaries of the different orders of society (Jenkins, 2000), i.e. institutional, individual, and interactional. Although the dissertation was structured in such a way that the three perspectives were used as the primary starting points for the three case studies, the three orders arguably cannot be separated from one another if the research aim is to achieve in-depth insights on the sociolinguistic topic at hand. To repeat Jenkins’ (2000) words:

“The use of the word ‘order’ signifies both distinctive domains of activity, and the ordered and orderly nature of the social world (Goffman 1983: 5). However, there is no suggestion that there are, in some realist sense, three separate social domains. The orders overlap completely; each is implicated in each of the others; none make sense without the others.” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 10)

This was also clearly the case for each of the case studies conducted as part of this dissertation. In case study 1, it would not have been possible to fully grasp the ‘ways-of-doing-things’ (Jenkins, 2000) regarding language and globalization from the institutional perspective of FinCorp without the individual perspectives as represented through the follow-up interviews with higher management. In case study 2, it would not have been possible to fully grasp the ‘what-goes-on-in-their-heads’ (Jenkins, 2000) regarding language and globalization from the individual perspectives of professional transnational migrants without reflecting on their experiences with language as part of the institutions they worked for and on the interactional dynamics with other people around them. Finally, in case study 3, it would not have been possible to fully grasp the ‘what-goes-on-between-people’ (Jenkins, 2000) regarding language and globalization from the interactional perspective of performance appraisals at GlobalCorp without the individual perspectives as represented through the follow-up interviews with the responsible managers, nor without the institutional information as gathered through the additional textual documentation. As such, each perspective is inherently influenced by and simultaneously influences the others, thereby creating an intricate and complex relationship between the institutional, individual, and interactional perspectives on language and globalization in Belgian corporate contexts, which was foregrounded by the qualitative case study approach adopted in this dissertation.

## 11.2 REFLECTIONS ON RELEVANCE

In what follows, I will reflect on and recapitulate the academic and applied relevance of this dissertation. First, I will summarize the different ways in which the research

chapters and case studies in this dissertation have contributed to existing research on specific concepts and as part of specific frameworks. In doing so, I should note that there is some overlap with the contributions to the literature as outlined in the individual research chapters and in the concluding remarks in Section 11.1. Subsequently, I will also reflect on the potential applied relevance of the three case studies.

### 11.2.1 Academic relevance and contributions to the literature

In a broad sense, this dissertation has contributed novel qualitative sociolinguistic insights to existing research on the interplay between language and globalization, specifically within corporate contexts in Belgium. I have drawn on literature from a number of fields, including but not limited to international business communication, pragmatics, applied linguistics, management studies, economics of language, anthropology, and sociology, with the aim of contextualizing this sociolinguistic approach so as to gain multilayered insights into the specific intricacies of language and globalization in these different types of corporate contexts. As a result of this approach, each of the seven research chapters has contributed new insights and perspectives to specific theoretical and methodological frameworks, which I will briefly recapitulate now.

The first case study as presented in Chapter 4 examined the interplay between language and globalization at a Belgian MNC from a socio-historical perspective. In doing so, it showcased the methodological and theoretical potential of adopting a socio-historical approach to language policy (Barakos, 2020; Duchêne, 2008; Garrido, 2022; Sokolovska, 2016) to analyze its development in a corporate setting, as this approach enabled us to foreground the societal complexities that influence and shape a company's multiscalar language policy development in light of globalization.



The second case study as presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 examined the interplay between language and globalization from the understudied perspective of privileged migrants as part of a professional transnational workspace in Brussels. Chapter 5 showcased how the operationalization of the theoretical concepts of the commodification of language (Heller, 2003; 2010) and the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991) can contribute to our understanding of the complexities surrounding the role and value of language for a specific type of migrant in a specific superdiverse urban setting. Chapter 6 contributed to the literature on processes of social categorization of migrants from the understudied emic perspective of privileged migration, thereby also raising questions regarding the potential tensions and discrepancies between self- and other-categorization in academic research (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; Jacobs, 2018). Chapter 7 provided novel insights on the complexities surrounding the (co-)construction of identity and the delineation of meaning of national identity categories for third culture individuals, and in doing so, foregrounded the theoretical concept of vulnerability (Fineman, 2008; 2010) as a useful tool to fully grasp these complexities.

The third case study as presented in Chapters 8, 9, and 10 examined the interplay between language and globalization as part of the understudied interactional context of performance appraisal interviews at a globally active SME in Flanders. Chapter 8 provided novel insights on the use and role of small talk as relational practice (Holmes & Marra, 2004) in a globalized virtual workspace, as we argued that it can be used as a conscious tool during performance appraisals to optimize workplace relationships. Chapter 9 adopted an interactional sociolinguistic approach to topicalize “what people do versus what they say they do” (Marra et al., 2022) regarding the use of multilingual strategies, thereby offering novel insights on the interplay between language beliefs, language management, and language use in a specific type of high-stakes workplace interaction, and contributing an explicitly multilingual approach to the existing body of literature on performance appraisal interviews. Chapter 10 examined the ways in which (negative) feedback is formulated and recontextualized throughout individual performance appraisal processes, thereby contributing to the argument that performance appraisals are ‘pathways of linked events’ (Wortham and Reyes, 2015) or ‘intertextual chains’ (Fairclough, 1993) and therefore should be researched as such.

### 11.2.2 Applied relevance

As part of their seminal work on *Talk, Work and Institutional Order*, Sarangi and Roberts (1999) argued that there are three possible perspectives on the relation between research and practical relevance when studying workplace discourse:

- First, there are “those who would argue that research studies are irreducible and should not be boiled down for practical use” (p. 39);
- Second, there are those who “accept that research can be applied to solving practical problems but that the theoretical research must be done first and then the boiling down can follow”, or in other words, who believe that “the application does not constitute research but is a by-product of it” (p. 39);
- Third, there are those who adhere to a view which “argues that researchers have a responsibility to contribute to social change and to working towards better and more equitable work practices”, thus conceptualizing research and its applied relevance as “a joint enterprise” (p. 40).

Without taking a firm stance on what discourse analysis *should* do, the research presented as part of this dissertation falls under the second perspective; in other words, the applicable relevance of the results was not considered one of the main aims of this dissertation, but some of the insights gained from the research can potentially be relevant for specific applied purposes, which I will briefly reflect on now.

The first case study has shed light on some of the practical complexities that companies can face when trying to keep up with the globalization and the increasing linguistic diversity in the workplace that often goes hand in hand with it. More specifically, the results in Chapter 4 showed that FinCorp adopted a number of different linguistic management strategies over the years to accommodate these changes, including but not limited to the implementation of Dutch as a common corporate language, the establishment of an in-house translation and interpreting department, and the setup of

an explicit and strict multilingual language policy at FinCorp Brussels specifically. Moreover, in navigating these different language management strategies, we found that they increasingly leaned towards a glocalized approach which aims to combine their globalized corporate structure as an MNC with a highly localized brand, both for FinCorp in Flanders and for FinCorp Brussels. As such, the case study offers a deeper understanding of how a globalized company deals with multilingualism on a quotidian basis over time, and in doing so, it underlines how these changes do not occur in a vacuum, but rather in tandem with the broader socio-historical developments as part of which the company operates. In this sense, the applied relevance of this case study lies in the increased awareness it can create regarding the importance of a well-suited and flexible language policy for the general functioning of a corporation as a whole.

The second case study has provided novel insights on the ways in which professional transnational migrants in Brussels deal with language as part of their globalized lives. Chapter 5 has highlighted some of the specific linguistic difficulties and challenges that these migrants face as part of their lives in Brussels, and although the sample of participants does not claim to be representative of all professional transnational migrants in Brussels, these insights could be indicative of larger problems that these types of migrants deal with on a quotidian basis, which could then potentially inform policy decisions on how to inform migrants on what to expect from their stay in Brussels in terms of language. Chapters 6 and 7 have shed light on the complexities of processes of categorization as part of migration, particularly in terms of specific social migration-related categories and national identity categories, respectively. The insights gained from these research chapters can be applied to reflect further on social categorization in academia, as emphasized in Chapter 6, but can also be extended beyond that context, as it is relevant to create awareness in any type of institutional context on how specific social categories are defined and which assumptions underlie these definitions.

Finally, although there are a number of publications that have aimed to identify generalizable best practices to conduct performance appraisals (see Asmuß, 2008 for a list of such sources), it should be noted that the chapters of the third case study

explicitly do not aim to contribute such insights to the literature. In fact, the findings of Chapters 8, 9, and 10 have echoed claims of other researchers stating that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions or recommendations that can result in effective and efficient performance appraisals, because such interactions are highly context-sensitive to the institutional settings in which they occur (Clifton, 2012; Fletcher, 2001). However, each of the research chapters in this case study can contribute to an increased awareness on the role and importance of different aspects of language as part of corporate performance appraisals, i.e. the potentially multifaceted role of small talk (Chapter 8), the potential strengths and pitfalls of specific multilingual strategies (Chapter 9), and the intricacies of the interplay between text and talk when giving feedback (Chapter 10). The findings from the three research chapters have also been communicated back to GlobalCorp on their request (see Section 3.4.1), and as part of this report, we formulated a number of specific suggestions for the future regarding each of the separate phases that make up the performance appraisal process, i.e. the preparation, the interview, and the report, and regarding the setup of the paper trail and their multilingual approach in a more general sense. As such, the third case study has aimed to contribute to a call from within the research community “to develop studies that open the lid on the black box of AIs and to study what actually goes on from a communicative perspective” (Clifton, 2012, p. 284) by presenting empirical research on what actually happens in the institutional context of a performance appraisal process in a specific corporate setting, without attempting to offer generally applicable recommendations to conduct such appraisals.

### 11.3 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The interplay between language and globalization is a rich topic of study, and as such, it can be examined in many ways (Fairclough, 2006). The research conducted as part of this dissertation has presented a few ways to approach the topic in a specific type of institutional setting, namely corporate contexts, and in a specific geographic locality,

namely Belgium. In the following sections, I will first reflect on some of the limitations of my approach, and I will then subsequently present some areas of future research which I believe could further deepen our knowledge on the intricate interplay between language and globalization, particularly in corporate contexts.

### 11.3.1 Limitations

The first limitation of the research presented in this dissertation is tied to the qualitative case study approach. As a result of adopting such an approach, none of the findings from the different case studies and research chapters in this dissertation can be generalized beyond the specific corporate context as part of which they were situated. In other words, the research has not yielded any representative results for any type of corporate context, group of people, or activity type in a broader sense. Moreover, because of the specific methodological approaches that were adopted for data collection and analysis, none of the studies can be replicated in the exact same way as they were conducted for this dissertation. As such, the well-known limitations that are frequently associated with qualitative case studies in terms of generalization, representativeness, and reproducibility are also applicable to the research presented as part of this dissertation. However, as mentioned in Section 1.1, I chose this approach for its strengths, particularly in terms of the depth, complexity, and detail that it can yield. As a result, although the limitations outlined above are valid and should be acknowledged, I do not consider them to be weaknesses to the research design.

A second limitation to the research conducted as part of this dissertation is the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic at the start of the project, and particularly its lasting effects on the possibilities and opportunities for data collection. For the first case study, we fortunately were able to collect most of the archival data before the outbreak of the pandemic, but all potential avenues for a more linguistic ethnographic approach (which could have included participant observation and other types of data collection at FinCorp) were halted in March 2020. For the second case study, the lasting impact of the pandemic meant that I had no choice but to interview the

participants through telecommunications software, despite the potential constraints of a lack of face-to-face contact for in-depth interviewing (Salmons, 2014). For the third case study, we were fortunate that GlobalCorp was able and willing to facilitate an entirely virtual data collection process, but in-person observations at the company premises arguably could have further contributed to our understanding of the inner workings of the company. Throughout the three case studies, I have attempted to minimize the potential impact of these constraints, e.g. by collecting additional types of data and by making additional interactional efforts to make participants feel comfortable in a virtual interview setting. Moreover, I believe that some of these exceptional circumstances also gave rise to certain affordances, particularly in terms of time efficiency, as the data collection for the second and third case studies did not require any physical mobility from me or from the participants. However, it remains important to acknowledge that the occurrence of a global pandemic during this research project heavily impacted how the research was conducted.

A final potential limitation is related to the geographical regions that are covered as part of the different case studies that make up this dissertation. Although it was not the intention to provide a representative overview of language and globalization in corporate contexts in all of Belgium, the lack of focus on the Walloon Region, which includes both French-speaking and German-speaking Communities, arguably represents a limitation to the scope of this project, particularly in light of the general lack of insights available on language in Walloon corporate contexts (see Section 2.4.3). This limitation leads me to potential avenues for future research, which I will elaborate on in the following section.

### 11.3.2 Recommendations for future research

On the basis of the insights gained from this dissertation, I want to conclude with a few suggestions on potential areas for future research to further deepen our understanding of the relationship between language and globalization in Belgian corporate contexts. The first suggestion is tied to the final potential limitation of this

dissertation as outlined above, as one of my main recommendations for future research would be to focus on language in corporate contexts in Wallonia. The literature review presented in Section 2.4.3 revealed that Wallonia is understudied in the field of language use in Belgian corporate contexts, and the findings from the research presented as part of this dissertation raise particular questions on the relationship between language and globalization in these corporate contexts.

The second suggestion for future research is to expand further on the different types of contexts under study. This dissertation has focused on three specific types of corporate contexts in Belgium, i.e. an MNC, an SME, and a more general professional transnational workspace. One type of corporate context which could be interesting for further research on language and globalization particularly in the virtual sphere is the social media platform LinkedIn (see also Tobback, 2019). Another potential focus could be to zoom in on companies which are even smaller than SMEs, yet still operate on a global scale, such as self-employed entrepreneurs with international clientele. This inclusion of more traditional as well as more unconventional types of corporate contexts in research on language and globalization can then contribute to a more complete grasp of the complex interplay between the two.

The third and final suggestion is to examine the topic of language and globalization in corporate contexts from different methodological perspectives, both in terms of data collection and data analysis. For example, with regard to authentic interactional data, this dissertation focused on one type of corporate interaction, namely performance appraisal interviews. Future research could expand on these findings by connecting them with other types of authentic workplace interactions, such as job interviews (see for example Van De Mierop & De Dijn, 2021) or corporate meetings, so as to further examine language and globalization in corporate contexts from an interactional perspective. In terms of methodological frameworks, there are also a number of discourse analytical approaches which I did not explicitly make use of in this dissertation, but which can help to further deepen our qualitative understandings of language and globalization in corporate contexts from new perspectives. Possibilities include linguistic ethnography (Blommaert & Jie, 2010; Copland & Creese, 2015),

which could deepen our insights through participant observation in different types of corporate contexts, or critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2006; 2012), which could further examine language and globalization in terms of power dynamics and the (in)equalities of language in corporate settings. Moreover, the mixed-method analysis as presented in Chapter 10 has highlighted the research potential of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, and this combination could also prove fruitful for future research in the field. In conclusion, I believe there are a number of opportunities which can further expand our knowledge and understanding of language and globalization in corporate contexts, both in Belgium and beyond, and I hope that this dissertation has made a valuable argument in favor of further exploring this topic of study in all of its rich complexity.

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# 12 APPENDICES

## 12.1 APPENDIX CHAPTER 3

### 12.1.1 Interview guide for the first case study

Note: the original interview guide was in Dutch.

1. As I have the opportunity to talk to you today, I understand that you have had past and/or current experience with decisions regarding language use within (FinCorp). Could you perhaps start by outlining what your role is and has been within that, and how exactly you have come into contact with those types of decisions throughout your career at (FinCorp)?
2. How do you experience language as part of the general workings of the company?
3. How would you summarize the changes in terms of language within the company over the past 20 years? Which roles have internationalization and digitalization played as part of these developments?
4. How would you describe the role of English within (FinCorp)?
5. How would you describe (FinCorp)'s current language policy in terms of internal communication?
6. How would you describe (FinCorp)'s current language policy in terms of external communication?

7. How would you compare (FinCorp)'s internal and external language use? In your opinion, are there discrepancies between the two, or do you consider those strategies similar?
8. (FinCorp)'s headquarters are in Brussels. In your opinion, what is the linguistic importance of the city for the company?
9. How do you personally experience working and dealing with language in Brussels?
10. (FinCorp Brussels) has existed since 2015. How do you think the development of this subsidiary fits into the (linguistic) development of the company as a whole?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share or bring up before we conclude the interview?

### 12.1.2 Interview guide for the second case study

1. Could you introduce yourself?
2. Can you tell me a little bit more about your history of international mobility, where you've lived and for how long?
3. What role have different language(s) played in your international trajectory, both privately and professionally?

4. Have you ever experienced issues with language over the course of your international career, either privately or professionally?
5. What is the role of your international career in the linguistic upbringing of your children? / If you had children, do you think your international career would impact their linguistic upbringing?
6. What brought you to Brussels?
7. How have you experienced living in Brussels and dealing with language here?
8. Do you believe that you have to be able to speak French and/or Dutch to feel at home in Brussels?
9. Do you have any idea of your future plans, and will language play a role in where you decide to go next?
10. On the basis of everything we just discussed and given that you are a citizen from another country residing here, how would you identify or describe yourself?
11. Do you consider yourself an immigrant or a migrant?
12. Do you consider yourself an expat?
13. What do you think is the difference between expats and (im)migrants?
14. How do you think others would define or see you?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share or bring up before we conclude the interview?

## 12.2 APPENDIX CHAPTER 6

Transcription conventions based on Jefferson (2004):

((action))	Description of a non-verbal action
(.)	Brief pause (less than 1 second)
(0.0)	Longer pause (length indicated in tenths of seconds)
?	Rising intonation
[	Start of overlap
]	End of overlap
=	No break or gap between turns

## 12.3 APPENDIX CHAPTER 8

Transcription conventions based on Jefferson (2004):

(WORD)	Pseudonymized word
((action))	Description of a non-verbal action
(.)	Brief pause
?	Rising intonation



## 12.4 APPENDIX CHAPTER 9

### 12.4.1 Interview guide for the third case study

Note: the original interview guide was in Dutch.

1. Can you explain how the appraisal process fits within the broader functioning of (GlobalCorp)?
2. What is your role is within the performance appraisal process?
3. Can you elaborate on the purpose of the appraisal interview, both from your own perspective as well as from the general perspective of (GlobalCorp) as a whole?
4. What is the role of the written process and the different documents associated with the performance appraisal interview?
5. Which languages are used most frequently at (GlobalCorp)?
6. To what extent is the multilingualism at (GlobalCorp) something good or rather something inconvenient for the appraisal interviews specifically?
  - a. Most of the performance appraisal interviews take place in English. Why is that, and what do you think about this approach?

- b. You sometimes make use of an informal interpreter. Why is that, and what do you think of this approach?
  - c. You sometimes make use of more than one language. Why is that, and what do you think about this approach?
7. Why do you work with sales agents around the world instead of with contact points at HQ in Belgium?
  8. How does the geographical spread of the sales agents affect your work and collaboration with them?
  9. What would you say are (GlobalCorp)'s most important values?
  10. How do you communicate (GlobalCorp)'s norms and values to the agents working for the company from another country?
  11. In-depth discussion of excerpts from the recordings.

### 12.4.2 Transcription conventions

Transcription conventions based on Jefferson (2004):

(WORD)	Pseudonymized word
((action))	Description of a non-verbal action
( )	Unintelligible utterance
(.)	Brief pause (less than 1 second)

(0.0)	Longer pause (length indicated in tenths of seconds)
?	Rising intonation
[	Start of overlap
]	End of overlap
=	No break or gap between turns

## 12.5 APPENDIX CHAPTER 10

### 12.5.1 Transcription conventions

Transcription conventions based on Jefferson (2004):

(WORD)	Pseudonymized word
((action))	Description of a non-verbal action
( )	Unintelligible utterance
(.)	Brief pause (less than 1 second)
(0.0)	Longer pause (length indicated in tenths of seconds)
[	Start of overlap
]	End of overlap
=	No break or gap between turns

## 12.5.2 Blank and pseudonymized appraisal form

COMPANY NAME

### Performance Review

#### Personal Information

<b>Name</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>Job Title</b>	Sales Agent	<b>Manager</b>	
<b>Department</b>			
<b>Review Period</b>	2020-2021		

#### Ratings

	Insufficient	Sufficient	Good (≥ expectations)
<b>Organizational roles</b>			
<b>1 Sales Prospector</b>			
• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>			
<b>2 Account Manager</b>			
<b>2.1 Contact</b>			
• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>			
<b>2.2 Buyer Management</b>			
• Relationship building			
○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>			
• Sales			
○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>				
	• Finance	Insufficient	Sufficient	Good (≥ expectations)
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>				
	• Logistics	Insufficient	Sufficient	Good (≥ expectations)
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>				
	• After Sales	Insufficient	Sufficient	Good (≥ expectations)
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	○ SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>				
<b>3 Consultant</b>				
		Insufficient	Sufficient	Good (≥ expectations)
	• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	• SUBTOPIC - REDACTED	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Comments</i>				

**Evaluation**

Overall Rating:

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GOALS  
*(as agreed upon by agent and manager)*

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**Verification of Review**

*By signing this form, you confirm that you have discussed this review in detail.*

Agent Signature		Date	
Manager Signature		Date	

