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Exploring Translanguaging in International Business. Towards a Comparison of Highly Context-embedded Practices: Evidence from France and Finland

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When translanguaging, interlocutors mobilize and combine multiple languages repertories, creating new words and expressions to improve comprehension (García, 2009). This and similar practices such as code-switching, long recognized by linguists and sociolinguists, have only recently received significant interest among language-sensitive international business (IB) scholars, and the understanding of their dynamics in the context of cross-border business and management relationships remains limited. This chapter thus documents an inroad into relatively uncharted territory, with all that this entails of unexpected challenges and answers generating new questions at each turn.

Our overarching ambition is to explore translanguaging patterns in two different IB contexts, and discuss in what sense and under what epistemological assumptions such patterns might meaningfully be compared across these contexts. Based on interviews in the subsidiary of a German multinational corporation (MNC) located in France at the French-German border, and in Finnish businesses with large exposure to Sweden, we shed new light on translanguaging practices in MNCs by describing and analyzing patterns of language use. We want to understand how individuals relate to their translanguaging at work, and the role(s) it may grant them in the organization.

Translanguaging practices are deeply embedded in, and derive much of their legitimacy from, the socio-historical environment of the geographical areas where they occur. Hence, a traditional positivist comparison of such practices makes little sense. What is possible is to analyze and contrast how these practices relate to their separate contexts and thereby attempt to decode the “areas of meaning” (Romani, Barmeyer, Primecz, & Pilhofer, 2018) that make individuals in the respective contexts resort to translanguaging. Such comparison can stimulate our understanding of translanguaging in cross-boundary business contexts as a practice embedded not only in an organizational, but also a social and societal context (Heller, 1988), with various degrees of interplay between these. This helps answer recent calls for IB research on translanguaging and on language(s) in international business and management overall (Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze, 2014).

Distinguished anthropologist and historian Alan Macfarlane (2006) has argued that comparison in the social sciences plays an important role in distancing the over-familiar, familiarizing the distant, making absences visible, and testing answers (ibid., p. 95-98). Research on adult education has found that comparison of cases promotes learning processes by encouraging appropriate analysis, inspiring curiosity, and generating abstracting principles (Loewenstein, Thompson, & Gentner, 2003, p. 125). We believe that the approach outlined below does generate at least some of these valuable benefits.

To this topic, we apply the theoretical lens of language ecology (Haugen, 1972; Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2006, Van Lier, 2006). Language ecology engages with the relation between languages and their environment in specific areas, with a focus on interpersonal co-creation of meaning. It offers several possible approaches to understanding situated language practices. We follow Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) in drawing upon language ecology to explain hybrid language use in multilingual settings by referring to three main dimensions: history, time and space.

Methodologically, we are inspired by current approaches in cross-cultural management (CCM) as outlined by Romani et al. (2018). We leverage international collaboration between researchers to explore interview data on embedded practices from two contexts that the researchers individually know very well. Previous research from a language ecology perspective has insisted on highly immersive methodologies such as ethnomethodology; compared to this, our empirical approach trades depth for breadth, and detailed context-specific insight for insight generated by distancing from the familiar through contrast and dialogue. Compared to traditional positivist research on cross-cultural management, again, which has tended to focus on "quantifiable relationships between national culture (…) and management and organizational practices" (Romani et al., 2018, p. 249), our approach is highly context-sensitive and immersive. This aligns us with the *interpretive* view on cross-cultural management (Romani et al., 2018).

Literature review

Language(s) in IB

Increased heterogeneity of local environments (Jaussaud & Mayrhofer, 2014) forces global businesses to take into account local specificities and calls for a new understanding of relationships between global and local (Mayrhofer & Very, 2013). This entanglement of universality and particularity (Janssens & Steyaert, 2014) implies understanding MNCs as sites where local practices reflect global embeddedness, where global and local co-construct reality. This simultaneous interest in the global and the local has also guided language-sensitive IB research from a focus on discrete national languages and barriers between these (see e.g. Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999) to a more refined understanding of processes associated with linguistic diversity in MNC contexts.

Janssens and Steyaert's (2014) concept of *multilingual franca* highlights a negotiated, situated approach to English[i]as a lingua franca in continuation with other languages where speakers use multiple linguistic resources in complex ways to express voice. Ricento (2015) and colleagues also stress the situated importance of the environment for choices made by language managers in international contexts. This interest in the multilingual potential of collaborators in cross-boundary business contexts forms an important avenue of future inquiry in language-sensitive IB research (Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze, 2014).

Translanguaging

EXPLORING TRANSLANGUAGING IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

The notion of languages that are distinct and almost impermeable to each other is linked to the rise of the nation-state in Europe. In many other historical periods and other geographical and anthropological contexts, the emphasis is on the links between communicative systems of different human groups. For example, Romaine (1994, p.12), describing the complex language situation in Papua New Guinea, has argued that *"Any attempt to count distinct languages will be an artefact of classificatory procedures rather than a reflection of communicative practices."*

Present-day contact linguistics does not insist on the number of languages used or their denomination, but rather on speakers' capacity to draw on a range of linguistic elements in interactions with specific partners in specific contexts. (Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2006; Canagarajah, 2016). By contrast, IB research still tends to focus on different autonomous languages and the organizational and/or individual consequences of knowing or not knowing these. With the exception of some research on issues such as code switching (e.g., Harzing, Köster, & Magner, 2011; Boussebaa, Sinha, & Gabriel, 2014; Gaibrois, 2018, few have heeded Janssens and Steyaert's (2014) call for a more 'cosmopolitan' approach, even if exploring the context-specific mixing of linguistic resources offers a fruitful way towards understanding "real" language use in the business world.

Below, to capture these mixing practices, we use the notion of *translanguaging*. It was introduced by the linguist García (2009, p. 40), who defined it as '*the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential. It is an approach to bilingualism that is centred, not on languages as has often been the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable in order to make sense of their multilingual worlds*.'

When translanguaging, interlocutors mobilize different languages simultaneously (e.g., French, German and English), sometimes in the same sentence, and even create new words in order to improve comprehension. This shifts our focus to language-in-use, opening up significant potential to understand complex interplays of languages within MNCs. This can help bridge divides between proponents of common corporate languages (e.g., Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Harzing, Köster, & Magner, 2011), and critics of the imperialistic and hegemonic effects of such linguae francae (especially English) on actors in local subsidiaries (e.g., Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari, & Säntti, 2005; Tietze, 2008).

A focus on translanguaging may also help MNCs benefit more from employees' existing linguistic skills. When translanguaging, interlocutors break free from grammatical rules, draw on all their language repertories and combined different national languages and dialects to make themselves understood in a specific context (García, 2009). In this perspective, MNC employees who lack officially recognized language qualifications and are reluctant to learn languages in traditional classrooms may find creative ways to communicate efficiently with foreign colleagues in the context of their subsidiary. This ability constitutes a Language Operative Capacity for the company (Welch & Welch, 2018). Language is approached as a social practice where language is negotiated in situation (Karhunen et al., 2018).

Language ecology

To help understand how translanguaging practices are embedded in wider cultural and historical processes (Heller, 1988), we locate our exploration within the framework of language ecology (Haugen, 1972; Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2006; Van Lier, 2006). Language ecology explains the relation between languages and their environment in a specific area with a focus on the interpersonal co-creation of meaning.

In IB, multilingual practices have often been attributed to the individual behaviors and capabilities of a small elite labelled e.g. 'language nodes' (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch 1999). An ecolinguistic framework points beyond individuals to account also for the contexts in which speakers communicate, and highlights that each member of a community has the potential to cross linguistic and cultural boundaries; the main limitation to this is not of linguistic nature, but due to unequal distribution of power. Following Kramsch and Whiteside (2008), *history*, *time* and *space* form the main dimensions of our inquiry into translanguaging practices. “Time” refers to when interlocutors resort to translanguaging, on what occasion and with whom. “Space” refers to the geographical location(s) of actors in relation to the use of specific languages. “History” refers to cultural memories enacted in words and how history is recreated in today’s multilingual interaction.

Analyzing our data within a language ecology framework helps illuminate what specific linguistic practices owe to their context and helps account for their links to different spatial and temporal timescales. This enables us to answer calls for more research on the links between language and culture (Brannen, 2004; Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä, 2014), especially on the influence of linguistic specificities of regional culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Davoine, Schroeter, & Stern, 2014).

Empirical approaches to translanguaging and cross-cultural management

As mentioned above, previous research from a language ecology perspective has insisted on highly specific data and a deep understanding of each empirical field to explore the meaning potential of interactions in a specific context. For example, ethnomethodology has been used to help understand how history (e.g. colonial domination or former territorial affiliation) is recreated in today’s multilingual interactions, how the location in a specific territory impacts the co-creation of meaning, or how these macro dimensions interplay with corporate culture. Ecolinguists analyse situated language interactions based on transcripts, but linked with other data such as field maps or geographic or historical accounts of the analysed context. In Kramsch and Whiteside (2008), actors with roots in Yucatan in a mainly Mexican area of San Francisco used Maya as a form of public resistance to Spanish colonial discourses which hold Maya in low esteem among Mexicans. Mühlhaüsler (2003) used a language ecology approach to natives' pidgins and creoles to show how the introduction of colonial English in Australia was interwoven with an increasingly detrimental relation to the environment and the abuse of natural resources. Such deeply embedded approaches differ from traditional methods in the fields of cross-cultural management and IB, where quantitative comparative studies at high levels of analysis (e.g. units, MNCs, countries) form an important fundament of empirical activity.

As a middle road between these extremes, we follow what Romani and colleagues (2018) have termed an *interpretive* approach in the context of CCM. This implies an interest in "the systems of meaning and national institutions [and] underlying historical rooted assumptions that reveal national management practices" (ibid., p. 250), and a view of "interpersonal interactions… as a system of social interactions with negotiated contextual meanings" (p. 251). The advantage of this approach is illustrated by our initial empirical insight that some translanguaging patterns in our data were very similar even if they occurred in quite different contexts. An approach strongly focused on a single context might misinterpret such a pattern as specific to a particular locale, thereby ignoring dynamics generating similar patterns also in other conditions. An approach focused on the general might ignore important context-specific factors. In short, the value of the kind of comparison we advocate here is to enable the training of empirical interpretations against a varied base of practices at both organizational and social/societal levels, while remaining sensitive to the forms and consequences of translanguaging practices in different contexts.

Such an approach requires accord between researchers who know their 'own' context and data very well, including in-depth historical, cultural and linguistic knowledge that is hard to convey to outsiders. The challenge is to expose the insights generated by such in-depth understanding for collegial examination and critique while remaining receptive to the alternative insights generated by that dialogue. This requires biases and pet interpretations to be openly recognized as part of the research process.

Such confrontation of perspectives, ideas and insights between colleagues each immersed in their own field but both familiar with the core theoretical concepts of joint interest provides alternative understandings of how things might be connected. For instance, the finding that Swedish-speaking Finns from the Helsinki region label their translanguaging practices as “sloppy language” raised the awareness of the French researcher of the pride that the French interviewees at the French-German border attached to their translanguaging. In Paris, such practices might have been despised as well; dialogue around these dynamics helped us to characterize employees’ special relation to translanguaging in cross-border settings.

Method

Data collection

To understand language diversity through a translanguaging perspective we need to focus on how and why individuals draw on all their language repertories. For this paper we approach such language practices primarily through interview data, supplanted by on-site observations as well as internal and external secondary data (see e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These data were collected in one company in France at the German border, and in seven Finnish companies with strong links to Sweden in the Helsinki region. Our empirical examples are thus of translanguaging between organizational units straddling neighbour countries with intensive business and cultural links (implying extensive interaction in both scale and scope, as well as rich opportunities for interaction) but mutually non-intelligible languages (implying specific expertise in both languages is needed to cross between them).

The data collections were independent and the decision to compare translanguaging practices across the contexts was made *post hoc*, but followed similar procedures in both contexts. In France, we looked for occurrences referring to border-crossing situations with a focus on language, local specificities of the organization, the way global and local were intertwined in relation to language, and what such practices could bring to the organization. At the end of the interview, interviewees were asked to complete a language biography, to indicate what language(s) they use or used at a certain period of their lives, and also at what level of competency and under what circumstances. In Finland, the focus of the interviews was more varied, but individuals' own language competences, their practices of language use – especially in relation to the local-global tension – and organizational specifics that influenced language use were topics of interest at all stages of the data collection.

In both locations we interviewed employees from different backgrounds, with different language skills, working for different departments, of different hierarchical status, age, gender and professional experience. Thus our conceptual argumentation is informed by a varied range of empirical material. We conducted all our interviews in the language preferred by our respondents (Welch & Piekkari 2006). Each interview in France was conducted by two researchers, one native German and one native French. In Finland, all interviews were carried out by either one of two researchers who were bilingual in Finnish and Swedish.

Data analysis

The recorded and transcribed interviews were open-coded (see e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for evidence of communicative activities by the respondents or their colleagues that could be described as translanguaging (García, 2009). For the Finnish data, this step was conducted by a bilingual Finnish management scholar. For the French data, the analysis was conducted by a German linguist bilingual in French and German and a French researcher from the management science field with some knowledge in German. Next, we carried out an in-depth cross-contextual analysis together based on the ecolinguistic approach, focusing on the impact of context on translanguaging practices. Time, space and history form the main dimensions of our inquiry as environmentally conditioned factors that may affect the willingness to enact translanguaging practices (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008).

The combination of two contexts and three dimensions, illustrated in Figure 1, constitutes the structural backbone of the results presentation which follows after short descriptions of the studied contexts. Findings from each analytical dimension and context are discussed separately before an analysis across both contexts and dimensions.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Context descriptions

*The French case. W*e investigated language practices in the car plant *smart* (subsidiary of the German group Daimler AG) mainly because linguistic borders in the organization were a matter of concern for the leadership and because of its cross-border location in France at Hambach near the French/German border. The territory where smart is located has belonged alternatively to France and Germany throughout history. Here locals are often bilingual, most of the time they have family links to Germany, they go out or go shopping in Germany and they tend to develop a bicultural and bilingual identity (Hemker, 2014). The use of the Franconian dialect drawing on French and German can act as a communicative bridge between both sides of the border. The development of these skills has been supported locally by the educational system in the eastern part of Lorraine. However, a growing number of students choose to learn English.

This fact played an important role in the choice of Hambach for Daimler, along with economic factors like the lower labor cost in France compared to Germany. There were also strategic factors like market development, as *smart* considered France to be the most important market for this new car model (Dörrenbächer & Schulz, 2008). *smart* France counts 800 employees, the majority of which is French-speaking, only 5% of the employees are German, working mostly in administrative support functions. However, the firm is headed by a German. While no formal and explicit linguistic policy is communicated at *smart*, French and German linguistic skills appear as recruitment criteria at least for support and management functions.

We interviewed the CEO, the director of human resources and the communication director. We also met 15 employees, and discussed with them based on a semi-directed dialogue guideline, and the interviewees were asked to complete a language biography and to draw their space of living at the end of their interview. Finally, we compiled internal documentation like statistics on employees and internal corporate documentation. We triangulated interviews with the employees with the ones conducted with the management team.

The Finnish case. 18 interviews were carried out with top and middle management members and regular staff in two Finnish MNCs with large subsidiaries in Sweden, and five Finnish subsidiaries of Swedish-owned firms, all located in the Helsinki region. The MNCs included a state-owned utility and a family-owned alimentation company. The subsidiaries belonged to firms active in both the service and manufacturing sectors. This forms a representative selection of Finnish businesses with a significant interface to Sweden. This choice is relevant for our study because both Finnish and Swedish are official languages of Finland. Until 1809, when it became a Russian grand duchy, Finland was part of Sweden for some 500 years. The national economies of Sweden and Finland are among the most integrated in the world, and cross-border ownership and pan-national organizations are common. However, Finnish and Swedish belong to different language families and are mutually unintelligible, whereas Swedish is closely related to Danish and Norwegian.

Since Finnish independence from Russia in 1917, the status of Swedish as a second national language is constitutionally enshrined but not unequivocally accepted. It has been interpreted by some even in postcolonial terms (see e.g. Vaara et al., 2005) and has not fitted easily with efforts to craft a Finnish national identity. Still, perhaps due to the widely recognized importance of positioning Finland as part of the Nordics and not of the East, Swedish remains a mandatory school language alongside Finnish and English, and basic knowledge of Swedish is required for civil service positions. These rules have majority public support despite frequent criticism that they are inefficient and counterproductive; the mandatory school Swedish is colloquially known as ‘forced Swedish’.

5.2% of Finns are formally Swedish-speaking (Statistics Finland, 2019), but in the Greater Helsinki region most are bilingual, work in Finnish, and speak Swedish mainly in private. The Swedish slang of the region has absorbed many Finnish words and more recently also structures. The spoken Swedish of schoolchildren and youngsters today is only partly comprehensible for Swedish-speakers who do not know Finnish.

Findings

Time

In our framework, this analytical dimension is related to when interlocutors resort to translanguaging, under what occasion and with whom. In France translanguaging occurs spontaneously between locals at the Hambach site; the main objective is to be understood by one’s interlocutors, regardless of grammatical rules or vocabulary accuracy. A German project manager explains:

"*With one colleague, I speak German, with others French, with others a mix of everything*"

Our respondents mobilize accurate technical vocabulary to develop cars or get information from suppliers or maintenance firms; some words are simply not translated in French. In parallel, mobilizing French words or dialect elements around technical German words helps convey the right message to colleagues with a lesser command of German, thus fostering knowledge sharing between *smart* and the Daimler head office. This is important because all reporting activities at *smart* are in German, as are 90% of suppliers. Thanks to their translanguaging practices mixing French and German, local employees act as boundary spanners between the German HQ and the Hambach plant. Even employees at lower hierarchical levels, who are often excluded from this kind of dialogue (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011), can join it.

Similar translanguaging patterns emerge in Finland. Swedish-speaking Finns will speak Swedish to each other and to Swedes, but the bulk of their work in Finland is carried out in Finnish, and many also use English on a daily basis. This creates office microenvironments where respondents typically say, "We speak a mix of everything, everyone speaks whatever comes first to mind", and interlocutors produce translations as well as mixed-language expressions and constructions. However, native Swedish-speakers are aware that when interacting with Swedes, they have to control their accent and vocabulary to produce Swedish that is 'Swedish' enough. One respondent noted that her children would always know when she was on the phone to Sweden due to the linguistic adaptations she would make. Still, Finns who know Swedish and interface with Swedes in their job tend to benefit from their language skills, which enable them to play bridging or boundary spanning roles in many daily interactions. At higher hierarchical levels, they are able to talk directly to

Swedish top managers and boards, and also at lower levels they often gain career advantages related to visibility, participation and effectiveness.

In both research contexts we find that employees are willing to adapt to their interlocutors, highlighting the pragmatic use of translanguaging to improve comprehension among colleagues. In both cases we also find respondents – including at lower hierarchical levels – whose language skills enable them to act as boundary spanners.

Space

Space relates to the relevance of specific language skills in relation to the geographical location(s) of the firm. Most of the French employees are locals from the cross-border region where smart is located. They are bicultural and bilingual, or master at least the common dialect used on both sides of the borders, they live, go out or go shopping in France as in Germany, some of them are married with people from the other side of the border. They strongly identify with this cross-border region as a third space where the border between France and Germany is blurred. We observed their pride at belonging to this region and at performing translanguaging, when we referred to the introduction of English at smart because of a new project with a French car producer from Paris. A local project manager shared his experience: “On the project team you had the French from Paris and the Germans from Stuttgart”. For him the cross-border region appears as a third space where he is proud to resort to translanguaging practices to help French and German colleagues avoid misunderstandings when they struggle in English.

In Finland, the picture is more complex. Geographically, translanguaging between Swedish and Finnish is mainly done in Finland, because few Swedes know Finnish: compared to the French case, there is no ‘cross-border region’ where mixing languages is mutually accepted as a social practice. Those who do engage in it often feel they occupy a position as intermediaries or middlemen, and are able to broker or translate between Swedes and Finns. However, for native Swedish-speakers in the Helsinki region, this position also makes them outsiders to some extent. Speaking "proper Swedish" takes a significant effort, whereas the colloquial accented Swedish with many Finnish words is illegitimate in both Sweden and Finland as "sloppy language" or "not proper Swedish". A native Finnish speaker highly fluent in Swedish commented on the mixed-language practices of Swedish-speaking Finns:

- *If a third of the words are Finnish, some contorted Finnish, well I think that's totally awful. My daughter-in-law is a Swedish-speaking Finn and I listen to her and look at her facebook postings*[ii]*, well, dear God what language.*
- *Yeah, maybe that's a bit true.*
- *It really is, it's not just a bit, especially here in Southern Finland, you hear like,"det var huisin kiva där på Särkänniemi"* [structure Swedish, several words Finnish]*, and I think [...] soon I will go and tell these people off because all their talk is like this.*

These different perceptions of translanguaging highlight the difference between the geographical areas where these practices occur: a regional cross-border area versus a capital more distant from the country of the language used for translanguaging. They also made us aware of the French employees' strong identification with the territory where *smart* is located.

History

History is recreated in today's multilingual interactions: In Lorraine, the region at the French German border, a strong common history between territories on both sides of the border explains a strong identification of the employees to the region along with a bicultural-bilingual identity (Hemker, 2014). This territory has alternatively been French and German, most locals have family links with Germany and both border regions suffered from the demise of a formerly flourishing mining industry that structured the whole life of locals. This explains the common identification of both French and Germans to this region and the pride at resorting to translanguaging practices related to the region.

If French and German can be said to be kept together by history in Lorraine, Finnish and Swedish are perhaps slowly being torn apart by history in the Helsinki region. In Finland, the Swedish language has longstanding historical associations to privilege and, despite its evident usefulness for business and cultural contacts to Sweden, has been an uneasy fit with efforts to develop a Finnish national identity and raise the status of Finnish. This somewhat conflicted historical background may help explain why efforts to engage in translanguaging practices mixing Finnish and Swedish can raise emotional reactions among Finnish speakers, even if done to smoothen the comprehension between MNC units. Native Swedish-speakers in Finland risk alienating both Swedes and native speakers of Finnish with "sloppy" Swedish-Finnish translanguaging.

Analysing our data from the perspective of history thus alerts us to the salience of identification with a cross-border entity as opposed to either of two separate country contexts in explaining how translanguaging efforts are received.

Discussion

We find that in both contexts, employees combine languages to improve comprehension between interlocutors, and individuals' willingness to engage in specific translanguaging practices is influenced by their identification with a region, group or common history. This aspect may be conceived in terms of how socially acceptable it is to cross certain language boundaries.

Some respondents – while immersed in broader national-cultural contexts that emphasize French and Finnish – construct their own identity partly or even extensively around German and Swedish, and belong to cultural subgroups that have historically bridged these cultures and languages. In the context of such spatial and historic dynamics, some individuals perceive translanguaging as a natural and accepted part of their identity.

In France, we observe a pragmatic approach towards language more than the desire to cross borders; employees are not aware of crossing a boundary while mixing French and German. As mentioned earlier, locals employees at smart in the French-German cross-border area are often bilinguals and biculturals, they live in France or Germany, have Germans in their family, the notion of boundary in itself does not make sense to them.

In Finland, there is greater awareness on behalf of bilinguals – especially native Swedish-speakers – that they act as cultural boundary spanners. The geographical distance to Sweden makes the boundary more perceptible, although this is mitigated by frequent trips to Sweden, family members and work experience there, Swedish media etc. They do mostly not think of themselves as bicultural, but rather as 'between cultures', although sufficiently familiar with both cultures to be able to broker between them. As suggested by Wismann (2012), who highlights a weaving between thinking and cultures enacted in language use, these individuals think between cultures. As for language use, they do think of themselves as bilingual, but also are aware that their variety of Swedish is not identical to the one spoken in Sweden.

We observe in both areas the development of some jargons specific to the firm or work situation, for instance mixing German words in French sentences or Finnish words in Swedish sentences, or vice versa. However, these practices are perceived differently. In France, they mix words very naturally, a practice supported by the use of the Franconian dialect from both side of the borders mixing French and German with some liberty towards to the grammatical rules of these languages, even if the use of this dialect is declining. In Finland, the mobilization of both Swedish and Finnish also occurs smoothly in the context of "Greater Helsinki slang", but results in a conflict for Swedish-speaking Finns torn between the goals to be speaking ‘proper Swedish’ and remaining in the comfort zone of their Finnish context. These respondents are very aware that their translanguaging breaks the boundary of correct, ‘acceptable’ language.

In organizational terms, our bilingual respondents in both Finland and France play a role of boundary spanners in the sense of Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014). In both cases, bilingual individuals span the linguistic boundary between organizational entities in their working environment, aiming for better comprehension through a pragmatic approach to language. The main difference lies in the way they experience their translanguaging practices.

The ecolinguistic approach helps understand these differences in light of the histories of our research contexts. The specific location of the company studied in France at the cross-border area with Germany is extremely important. Germans and French in this region on both sides of the border have a common history, local employees from Germany and French have strong ties outside the professional context, and they naturally mobilize all their language repertories to understand each other without any constraint to do so. It is important to specify that this occurs even if in this working environment, languages are not free from power influence, and mastering German is a prerequisite to progress in the hierarchy.

In Finland, the somewhat conflicted position of Swedish-speaking Finns is explained by the history and present status of Swedish in Finland. Historical tensions between the language groups in combination with the emphasis on being able to produce ‘normal’ Swedish and not a local dialect influenced by Finnish, fosters a less serene approach to language than in France among both Swedish- and Finnish-speakers.

Conclusion

Exploring contextually embedded translanguaging practices in Finland and France with a focus on comparing “areas of meanings” in the sense of Romani et al. (2018) proves fruitful. A language ecology oriented data analysis highlights how translanguaging practices relate to the history, time and space in the territory where they occur. These categories offer us “tertia comparationis” and give the opportunity to distinguish different phenomena peculiar to each context, enabling both of us to distance us from our respective fields (Macfarlane, 2006).

Drawing on ecolinguistics helps understand the significant influence of context on translanguaging practices. Highlighting the role of actors anchored in different local specific contexts through their translanguaging practices illustrates Janssens & Steyaert’s (2014) view on cosmopolitanism, pointing out how local practices reflect global embeddedness. Our cross-country study helps clarify the concept of translanguaging in MNCs and the circumstances in which it may support communication between different organizational entities. These insights facilitate future IB research on translanguaging and related issues and advance the overall understanding of language(s) in international business and management, for example by highlighting how history as recreated through multilingual interactions interplays with corporate culture – an important contribution overlooked in current research. While doing so we illustrate a way to approach language as a social practice, thus answering the call of Karhunen et al. (2018).

Against the background of recent calls for research problematizing the nature of intercultural communication processes in international business (e.g., Szkuldarek, Nardon & Osland, 2017), we note that there is much that firms can do to encourage employees to draw upon translanguaging as a positive resource for themselves as well as the organization. The workplace has two important advantages over educational settings: people spend a lot of time there and they really have to communicate in authentic situations. Especially in manual activities like on the production line of a car factory, the context gives an important frame for the exchange, providing an excellent means of fostering linguistic exchange and mutual comprehension or even the acquisition of another language.

Translanguaging can take different shapes (Garcia & Li Wei, 2014). It can consist in translation and interpretation with intercultural sensitivity and linguistic awareness, or be driven by a desire to promote improvement in a second language (Garcia, 2009). Originally translanguaging referred to a pedagogy that encouraged the use of two languages (Welsh and English) so as to promote the acquisition of Welsh (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). Another aspect of the productive use of translanguaging is the development of receptive bilingualism, where each person speaks his or her language. Such practices may enable employees with limited educational background at lower hierarchical levels to be included in exchanges with HQ.

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[ii] The fundamental dynamics of this process extend beyond the use of any specific language; the key point is the use of multiple linguistic resources

[ii] Respondent uses Anglicism ”postaus” in Finnish.