

THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE ON VIRTUAL TEAM PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNICATION

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Today's turbulent workplace necessitates that organizations use innovative technologies and adapt to multicultural audiences through leveraging global virtual teams (technology-mediated globally-dispersed groups) (Shachaf, 2010; Dekker, 2010). However, the degree of participation and sense of belonging by non-native English speakers on global virtual teams using English as lingua franca influences communication effectiveness and team success.

Linguistic and cultural differences are frequently top challenges of global virtual teams, followed by technology and information sharing (Bergiel et al., 2008; Shachaf, 2005). Two barriers of language diversity include language competence and sociolinguistic or communicative competence (interpreting social meaning and responding appropriately), the difficulties of which often go unnoticed (Henderson, 2005). Oftentimes these underpinnings are not deeply explored.

This new research highlights the complexities of global virtual teams, focusing on the underrepresented perspectives of non-native English speakers for analyzing effective team communication in organizational settings where English is the standard language of business. Primary research questions were "How do non-native English speakers participate in global virtual teams where English is the lingua franca? How do they leverage technologies? What strategies do they use to share knowledge and communicate? What strategies do they use to collaborate?" In qualitative interviews, 50 native and non-native English-speaking professionals around the world representing several global companies shared their experiences, challenges, opportunities and reflections regarding their degree of participation in a global virtual community.

Preliminary results show that some professionals feel challenged with sense of purpose on a team, fitting in, adding value, contributing, and fully engaging. Still others cite potential difficulties with interpreting formal and informal registers, distinguishing different accents, and handling native speaker assumptions about their level of comprehension. Opportunities in these settings include richer knowledge-sharing across regions, increased cultural awareness and professional development. This presentation will touch on technology, but focus on language's influence on full participation and collaboration on these teams and the relevance to effective business communication.

ON THE REPRESENTATION OF OBSERVATIONS IN BUSINESS DISCOURSE VS. ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

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In this paper, we will analyse the conceptualization of the linguistic tools used to represent results in Spanish economic discourse. More concretely, we compare a corpus of bank reports (various Spanish banks 2006-2011) with academic discourse on economic issues (Revista Internacional del Trabajo-RIT 2004-2011). We focus on how perception verbs (ver 'see', observar 'observe', desprender 'infer', entender 'understand', apreciar 'appreciate') are used to describe observations of respectively economic or research results. By analysing two types of discourse related to economic issues, we want to pin down the specificity of a formal written genre of business discourse (bank reports), as compared to a non-business related formal written genre (academic discourse).

In the first place, we will look at the frequency of these perception verbs in both genres. Since bank reports focus on describing operations and financial conditions yet academic discourse implies a more analytical approach, we expect different lexical choices to be made, which will be reflected in the frequency of these verbs.

Secondly, we also expect the specific constructions in which these verbs occur to be genre-specific. Concretely, previous research (De Cock & Hanegreefs 2012 ms.) has shown that the perception and interpretation of results in business discourse is expressed only through the depersonalizing se-construction (an agent-defocussing construction) (1). We expect academic discourse to use the same construction (2). However, in view of the authorial expression and the higher personal responsibility of the authors, our hypothesis is that there will be a greater presence of constructions expressing intersubjectivity, such as a wider variety of impersonal and personal constructions (including authorial we), and modal (3) and stance expressions.

(1) En el gráfico inferior se observa ... (La Caixa 2010)

'In the lower graph you observe/see ...'

(2) Una "paradoja" similar se observa en la correlación (...).(RIT 2011)

'A similar paradox is observed in the correlation (...).'

(3) En esta bibliografía monográfica cabe observar algunos patrones generales(...)(RIT 2011)

'In this monographic bibliography some general patterns are to be observed (...).'

We wish to show in this paper that, in general, bank reports, as corporate communication, erase the author's involvement in the text, as opposed to the expression of authorial responsibility in academic discourse. Thus, this will reflect both on the choice for specific perception verbs and on the construal in which they occur.

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LINGUISTIC DISCRIMINATION AT THE WORKPLACE – A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CASE LAW IN GERMANY

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In the European Single Market migrant workers basically have free access to the labour markets of other member states. One of the obstacles they often encounter is the shortcoming of proficiency in the language of the host state. As employers regularly require relevant language skills, migrant workers are also put at a disadvantage in comparison to domestic workers.

Against this background the anti-discrimination legislation of the European Union is relevant: According to Directive 2000/43 EC the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin has to be respected. All member states of the European Union had to transpose this directive into their national laws which happened in Germany by the General Equal Treatment Act in 2006.

Language requirements in employment contracts can constitute a direct discrimination by ethnic origin, if only German native speakers are hired for certain posts because migrant workers with another native language are excluded. Language requirements can also constitute an indirect discrimination because of ethnic origin, as non-native speakers are typically put at a disadvantage, when a certain level of language skills is demanded; but indirect discriminations can be justified by a legitimate aim, if the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary (Article 3 paragraph 2 General Equal Treatment Act). Moreover, a difference of treatment on the grounds of ethnic origin is permissible, if these grounds constitute a material and determining occupational requirement, when the objective is legitimate and the requirement is proportionate (Article 8 paragraph 1 General Equal Treatment Act).

Weighing these criteria there are several rulings by German labour courts on linguistic discrimination at the workplace, dealing e.g. with the following questions: Which degree of linguistic proficiency can legitimately be required of an employee? Can vacancies only be filled with German native speakers when excellent language skills are needed? Is an employer obliged to translate the employment contract from German into the native language of the migrant worker? Under which conditions can an employer demand an advanced language training of the employee? Is the request of an employer justified that migrant workers have to talk to each other in German on the job? Can a lack of linguistic proficiency justify the dismissal of an employee? The paper critically reflects and systematizes this case law, puts it in the context of the European anti-discrimination law and considers the implications for the communication in companies employing a multinational staff.