

From resistance to ‘bricolage’: Forms of ‘power to’ get active and create possibilities in multilingual organizations

Claudine Gaibrois
Universität St.Gallen (HSG)
claudine.gaibrois@unisg.ch

Abstract: This article investigates the underaddressed productive power effects of multilingualism in professional contexts. Instead of conceiving of power in terms of possession, competition or limitation, it focuses on ‘power to’ get active, seize opportunities, create possibilities, take responsibility, make decisions, and relate to others. Re-analyzing data from a case study conducted in Switzerland, it shows how employees discursively construct various forms of getting active and creating possibilities to counterbalance the challenging aspects of their multilingual work environment. As a result, it presents a typology of agency creation in multilingual organizations. Agency is conceptualized as breaking away from a given frame of action and as taking initiatives to transform it.

Keywords: multilingualism, power, agency, international business, management, interdisciplinarity

1. Problem statement

In the era of global “flows” (Appadurai, 1996) of people, communication technologies and economic activities, companies have become “multilingual realities” (Brannen, Piekkari and Tietze, 2014: 496). This has significant effects on the power relations in these organizations, as social scientists, linguists and international business and management scholars have shown. However, most studies have concentrated on the problematic power effects of multilingualism rather than on the ‘power to’ get active, seize opportunities, create possibilities, take responsibility, make decisions, and relate to others (Ahonen *et alii*, 2014).

On a macro level, research has addressed the “contestation between the *global* and the *local*” (Dor, 2004: 97; italics in original), or, in other words, the complementarity between “Englishization” and language loss. Also, the widespread use of English as the “lingua franca” of business has been interpreted as a sign of “English linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 1992) and as “an example of normalization of Anglo-American cultural dominance” (Vaara *et alii*, 2005: 621).

On a meso level, scholars have highlighted that languages are “not equal in terms of socio-politico-economic value” (Hua, 2014: 236). Individuals are therefore endowed with differing “linguistic capitals” (Bourdieu, 1991), which puts them in different positions in the market of linguistic exchanges. In addition, language competence intersects with organizational status and occupation. It has been shown that multilingual professionals tend to occupy “central, powerful positions, and second language speakers [...] low-paid, peripheral jobs” (Gunnarsson, 2014: 27). With regard to English competence specifically, researchers have identified a “fault line” (Barner-Rasmussen and Aarnio, 2011) between white collar and blue collar workers.

On a micro level, language skills can be interpreted as gatekeeping mechanisms for “accessing and acquiring power within each workplace” (Angouri, 2014: 3). Employees with skills in foreign languages might be put in more powerful positions “than would normally be the case” (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch, 1999: 436). Leaders may overvalue their language proficiency and therefore misjudge talent (Neeley and Kaplan, 2014). Lack of language competence, on the other hand, can result in people remaining quiet in interactions (e.g., Vaara *et alii*, 2005) or even being excluded. Organizational members with limited proficiency in foreign languages may also encounter serious obstacles in career progression (e.g., Steyaert, Ostendorp and Gaibrois, 2011; Angouri, 2013; Lønsmann, 2014), the so-called “glass ceilings” (Itani, Järnlström and Piekkari, 2015), or even in accessing the job market (Angouri, 2014). With regard to companies adopting English as

their corporate language, it has been shown that individuals with 'better' English proficiency are put in a position of advantage (e.g., Neeley and Dumas, 2016).

Only to a limited extent have researchers addressed other aspects of using English, e.g., by emphasizing that it also plays an inclusionary role (Lüdi *et alii*, 2013; Kingsley, 2013; Angouri, 2013; Angouri and Miglbauer, 2014;) and that it has a "democratizing effect" (Steyaert, Ostendorp and Gaibrois, 2011) due to the parity in communication among speakers for whom it is not the first language (Neeley, 2013).

2. Object of study

Most research on the power effects of multilingualism has focused on problematic aspects of power. It has addressed power in terms of possession, competition or limitation (Gaibrois and Steyaert, 2017). However, power is not just about "those at the peak wielding over others" (Ahonen *et alii*, 2014: 12). Therefore, this article concentrates on the underaddressed *productive* power effects. It focuses on 'power to' get active, seize opportunities, create possibilities, take responsibility, make decisions, and relate to others (Ahonen *et alii*, 2014).

Based on a re-analysis of data gathered for a qualitative case study which I conducted in Switzerland (Gaibrois, 2015), the article will show how organizational members create agency in the context of the restrictions they face because of their multilingual work environment. Agency is conceptualized as "breaking away from a given frame of action and as taking initiatives to transform it" (Lipponen and Kumpulainen, 2011: 816). Adopting a discursive approach, I will analyze how employees discursively construct forms of getting active and creating possibilities to counterbalance the problematic effects of multilingualism.

3. Theoretical foundation

3.1 Discursive approach

In order to investigate how employees create forms of getting active and creating possibilities in a multilingual organizational context, this article adopts a discursive perspective. The discourse analytical approach is based on the social constructionist premise that language constitutes worlds as much as it represents them (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1985; Gergen and Thatchenkery, 2004). From a discursive perspective, social practice is organized by discourse, which can be defined as "language in use" or "human meaning-making" (Wetherell, 2001a: 3). Discourse builds objects, worlds, minds and social relations (Wetherell, 2001b). One source of regularity is the discursive

practices which “people collectively draw on to organise their conduct” (ibid.: 18). These regular ways of doing things in talk – practices – guide people and order discourse. In short, to “do” social life is to “do” discourse. The study of discourse therefore provides insight into human meaning-making, into the meanings that events and experiences hold for social actors (Wetherell, 2001a).

Importantly, such discursive practices are not a “set of hard and fast rules which people follow like social dopes” (Wetherell, 2001b: 20). Rather, they are flexible and creative resources. A discursive space is, therefore, a place of argument, “an argumentative texture or a discursive fabric that brings together many different threads which can be combined and woven differently” (p. 25). At the same time, “[a]s accounts and discourses become available and widely shared, they become social realities to be reckoned with; they become efficacious in future events” (p. 16).

From a discourse analytical perspective, people create forms of getting active and creating possibilities in a multilingual organizational context by drawing upon various discursive practices. These discursive practices are the linguistic resources organizational members draw upon to organize their conduct. Speaking about forms of getting active and creating possibilities in a multilingual work environment thus has an effect on social relations in multilingual organizations. It is a constitutive part of the creation of agency.

3.2 Foucault’s understanding of power

In order to conceptualize power beyond terms of possession, competition or limitation (Gaibrois and Steyaert, 2017), this study draws on the large body of work by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. It is beyond the scope of this article to outline how he addressed power throughout his work and over his many years of writing. Therefore, below I will highlight a few of Foucault’s important thoughts on power, which were the inspiration for the conceptual level of this study. First, Foucault emphasized that power is not a possession. He refrained from viewing power relations schematically in the sense of an opposition between those “who have power” and those “who do not have power” (1981: 239). Rather, he believes that it is “never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth” (1976b: 98). From Foucault’s point of view, individuals are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. Consequently, Foucault asked the researcher to “refrain from posing the labyrinthine and unanswerable question: ‘Who then has power and what has he [or she] in mind? What is the aim of someone who possesses power?’” (ibid.: 97). For Foucault, power is discursively produced. In his view,

power relations make specific discourses possible and, conversely, discourses are used to support power relations (Foucault 1990/1976).

Foucault proposed a “non-economic analysis of power”. He suggested that “power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action” (1976a: 89). In Foucault’s understanding, power “brings into play relations between individuals (or between groups)” (1982: 217). It designates relationships between partners – “not thinking of a zero-sum game, but [...] of an ensemble of actions which induce others and follow from one another” (ibid.). In addition, Foucault emphasized the productive role of power. He suggested considering power “as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (1977: 119). Foucault also asserted that contrary to conditions of domination, power relations are not fixed, but mobile, reversible and unstable (1984: 288) and that power is exercised “only over free subjects, [...] individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized” (1982: 221).

4. Design and methodology

4.1 Case study set-up and research context

This article is based on the re-analysis of data gathered for a qualitative case study, which I conducted in Switzerland (Gaibrois, 2015). While both studies address power relations in multilingual organizations, the present article concentrates on the productive aspects of power in these working contexts. The first study largely highlighted the problematic power effects of multilingualism, such as the disadvantages of language skills. The data was collected in two multilingual companies based in Switzerland, which both produce consumer goods. The multinational corporation ‘Globalos’ (pseudonym) has its headquarters in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and employs around 300,000 people worldwide. Around 7000 employees work at the headquarters. The Swiss company ‘Maximal’ (pseudonym) is also headquartered in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and employs around 2500 people. Besides its headquarters, ‘Maximal’ has around 15 production and distribution centers that are located throughout Switzerland, in all of the country’s four linguistic regions.

The two companies are quite different in terms of the languages that are used in the workplace, and especially in terms of their degree of “Englishization” (Dor 2004). According to employees, staff from a myriad of language backgrounds

work at the multinational ‘Globalos’, and increasingly use English as ‘common platform’. At the Swiss company ‘Maximal’, on the other hand, the two national languages German and French are described as the ones that play the major role. In addition, English was gaining importance because of an IT standardization project that was going on at the moment of data collection. In the wake of this change, English usage, especially in written communication, increased significantly and the linguistic complexity of the organization grew.

One fundamental characteristic of the Swiss research context is the country’s official multilingualism, which is one of the unifying factors of the Swiss Confederation (Büchi, 2015). The country has four official languages: German (spoken by 63.3%), French (spoken by 22.7%), Italian (spoken by 8.1%) and Romansch (spoken by 0.5%) (for all data see Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2016a). However, at the same time there are tensions and divisions between the various linguistic regions of the country, which turn their union into a “*mariage de raison*” or “*marriage of convenience*” (Büchi, 2015) rather than a love marriage. Furthermore, Switzerland is characterized by its diglossia in the German-speaking region (Jaworski and Piller, 2008), with Swiss German being used in everyday oral interaction and standard German (similar to German from Germany) being used in written and formal oral communication (Bickel, 2000). While frequently called the fifth national language (Jaworski and Piller, 2008), English, is only used regularly by a minority (41%), even if it is the ‘*lingua franca*’ in some business sectors. In addition, for historical reasons, with 24.6% of the population, Switzerland has one of the highest proportions of foreign permanent residents in Europe (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2016b). From the economic boom years after World War II on, the country has received significant numbers of migrant workers, first mainly from Italy and Spain, and later from Portugal, the Balkans and Turkey (Dahinden, 2014). The country recruits a significant part of its workforce – especially non- and low-qualified staff – from this pool of Spanish-, Portuguese-, Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian- and Turkish-speaking inhabitants. This adds to the significant language diversity that makes Switzerland an especially interesting research context (Ravasi, Salamin and Davoine, 2015).

4.2 Data collection

From a social constructionist perspective, interviews are reality-constructing occasions for making meaning (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Therefore, in both companies, I conducted semi-structured interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) to collect employees’ accounts of experiences with multilingualism. The

interview script covered different aspects of language use in everyday work. Organizational members accounted for their experiences and practices of using and adopting one or more languages. After participants had been asked about their position in the company and their everyday situation at work, the linguistic context in which they move was addressed: Which language is used in interactions between employees of different linguistic backgrounds and why? How are such language choices made and by whom – if they are made explicitly at all? When and why does English come into play? In order to avoid asking leading questions, I never explicitly used the term “power” during the interviews.

At 'Globalos', I conducted 22 semi-structured interviews with employees working at the company headquarters. Of the 14 'Maximal' employees interviewed,¹ 11 were based at the headquarters in the French-speaking part of Switzerland and three at one of the subsidiaries in the German-speaking part. On average, the interviews lasted 60 minutes. In order to capture the perspectives of employees in different organizational positions and occupations, organizational members from lower hierarchical levels were systematically included in the samples. Unlike linguistic research (e.g., Angouri, 2013; Angouri, 2014; Lonsmann, 2014; Gunnarsson, 2014; Jansson, 2014), much research on multilingualism in organizations in the field of International Business has mainly collected data on the managerial level (e.g., Barner-Rasmussen and Aarnio, 2011; Harzing *et alii*, 2011; Heikkilä and Smale, 2011; Zander *et alii*, 2011; Neeley, 2013; Harzing and Pudelko, 2013; Logemann and Piekkari, 2015). The studies by Hinds *et alii* (2014), Luring and Klitmøller (2014) and Peltokorpi and Vaara (2014) are some of the more recent exceptions, which suggest a shift away from a largely managerial focus.

In both cases, I made sure people of different linguistic and national backgrounds were included in the sample. The participants were chosen in an attempt to include people from a wide variety of native languages. At 'Globalos', the sample consisted of employees with a French, English, Italian, Swiss German, German (from Germany), Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish and Arabic language background. In the case of 'Maximal', staff who spoke Swiss German, French, Italian, English, Russian, Portuguese and Flemish as their first language were included in the sample.

Interviews were conducted in English, French, Swiss German, Standard German and Spanish. They were all recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim

¹ At 'Maximal', eight interviews were conducted by members of a research project from the Research Institute for Organizational Psychology of the University of St. Gallen I participated in. The research project was carried out within the research program Nr. 56, "Language diversity and linguistic competence in Switzerland" thanks to a grant from the Swiss National Foundation (SNF). I have completely re-analyzed the interviews for this study.

in four different languages: English, French, German (interviews conducted in Swiss German were translated to standard German, since standardized written Swiss German does not exist) and Spanish.

4.3 Data analysis

Inspired by Foucault’s invitation to view power as discursively produced (1990/1976) and as an ensemble of actions (1976a) that subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities exercise (1982), this study focuses on the discursive production of ‘power to’ get active, seize opportunities, create possibilities, take responsibility, make decisions, and relate to others (Ahonen *et alii*, 2014). It aims to develop a typology of agency creation in multilingual organizations by drawing on an understanding of agency as “breaking away from a given frame of action and as taking initiatives to transform it” (Lipponen and Kumpulainen, 2011: 816). On the basis of my assumption that agency is created in discursive practices, I formulated the following analytical questions: 1) What instances of ‘power to’ get active, seize opportunities, create possibilities, take responsibility, make decisions, and relate to others do employees of multilingual organizations describe? 2) What discursive practices on getting active and creating possibilities in a multilingual work context do these accounts draw on? 3) What types of agency creation in multilingual organizations result from these discursive practices?

In the first step of the analysis, I used the first analytical question to scrutinize the interview transcripts in search of instances in which participants describe how they and others get active, seize opportunities, create possibilities, take responsibility, make decisions, and relate to others (Ahonen *et alii*, 2014) in the context of the restrictions of their multilingual work environment. I collected all excerpts on the topic with the help of the electronic data processing program ATLAS/ti to organize, compare and categorize recurring accounts of language use.

In the second step of analysis, I systematically looked for patterns, similarities and dissimilarities (Berg and Lune, 2014) in the interview excerpts. Carefully balancing my desire to group similar instances with the need to do justice to nuances, I identified a set of discursive practices on getting active and creating possibilities in a multilingual work context. From a discursive perspective, discursive practices are linguistic resources “people collectively draw on to organise their conduct” (Wetherell, 2001b: 18). The following eleven discursive practices on getting active and creating possibilities in a multilingual work environment were found: 1) ‘Resisting the use of English on principle’; 2) ‘Making use of dependencies’; 3) ‘Asking for adaptation’; 4) ‘Helping’; 5) ‘Facilitating

participation'; 6) 'Translating'; 7) 'Encouraging people to 'just talk''; 8) 'Using the 'everyone his/her language' model'; 9) 'Mixing languages'; 10) 'Using jargon'; 11) 'Developing new languages'. Each of the discursive practices was assigned excerpts from the interview transcripts.

In the third step of analysis, I identified the forms of agency creation that emerge from the eleven discursive practices by conceptualizing agency as "breaking away from a given frame of action and as taking initiatives to transform it" (Lipponen and Kumpulainen, 2011: 816). Looking for the characteristics and underlying motives of each of the discursive practices on getting active and creating possibilities, I grouped similar discursive practices into one type of agency creation, thus gradually developing a typology of four forms of agency creation in a multilingual work environment. Four types of agency creation resulted from this concentration process: 1) Agency creation by resistance; 2) Agency creation by asking for adaptation; 3) Agency creation by being supportive; 4) Agency creation by 'bricolage'.

5. Main results

The following section discusses the typology of four forms of agency creation in a multilingual work environment, which were identified in the analysis of the 'Globalos' and the 'Maximal' companies. The various discursive practices that make up the four types of agency creation will be introduced as separate elements within each of the types. Each of the discursive practices will be illustrated by quotes from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with employees at 'Globalos' and 'Maximal'.

5.1 Agency creation by resistance

The first type of agency creation consists of resistance. It radically differs from the other three types, because it does not involve cooperative elements of getting active or creating possibilities in a multilingual work environment. Agency creation by resistance includes two discursive practices; namely 'Resisting the use of English on principle', and 'Making use of dependencies'. While both discursive practices resist the use of English, the latter is a specific form of resistance that lower-level employees describe.

'Resisting the use of English on principle' can be found in the following excerpt from an interview with a person from Belgium whose first language is Flemish working for the Swiss company 'Maximal'. The marketing employee described the reactions she got when she was new in the company:

At the beginning I was sending emails in English, but I received a remark: “Are we in England?” And since then I haven’t done that. It’s really not well seen. (Maximal 4, 168)

‘Making use of dependencies’ is a discursive practice that employees in the internal services of the multinational corporation ‘Globalos’ draw upon. Most of them are recruited locally from the French-speaking region where the company has its headquarters. They are either locals with French as their first language, or immigrants who have learnt French to one extent or another. According to their self-declaration, their English skills are very limited. However, they do not believe that it is their responsibility to make sure that they understand their English-speaking interlocutors who do not master French. Rather, they put the ball right back into the English speakers’ court, as the following statement by the administrative director of the cleaning services, whose first language is French, shows:

Me and other colleagues, we are not afraid to tell them: “Well, listen, sorry, we can’t solve your problem this way. Give us the explanation in French.” (...). People have no choice. In a way – it’s very easy what I’m going to say – but if they want their requests to be fulfilled, or their technical problems or their logistics problems to be solved, we have to understand each other at a certain point. (Globalos 12, 88-92; transl. from French)

The statement shows that employees of the internal services make their support subject to the condition that English speakers with no knowledge of French provide a French translation of their request. So they articulate resistance by making use of the English speakers’ dependencies on them. This reversal of the formal power relations, in which the internal services are subordinate to the ‘regular’ employees they are supposed to support, can be interpreted as a form of “breaking away from a given frame of action and as taking initiatives to transform it” (Lipponen and Kumpulainen, 2011: 816).

In both cases, creating agency by resistance involves resisting the use of English as a ‘common platform’ to communicate. In the first case, the underlying motive for resistance is a principle, i.e., defending the local languages French and German against English at the Swiss company ‘Maximal’ in the sense of a “contestation between the *global* and the *local*” (Dor 2004: 97; italics in original). In the second case, blue collars at the multinational ‘Globalos’ create agency by making use of the fact that white collars depend on them if they want certain problems to be solved. So temporarily they invert the formal hierarchies of the organization, showing that privilege is not necessarily uncontested (Atewologun and Sealy, 2014).

5.2 Creating agency by asking for adaptation

The second type of agency creation consists of navigating everyday communication hurdles in multilingual working environments by inviting people with superior language skills to contribute to common understanding. It consists of the discursive practice 'Asking for adaptation', which frequently involves people with English as a second language asking first language speakers of English to adapt to them. In the following example, a local administrative assistant with French as first language working for the multinational 'Globalos' describes an example:

I'm not afraid to say to people on the phone "Can you speak slowly?" (Globalos 2, 112; transl. from French)

Similar examples were given by other 'Globalos' employees. When talking to anglophones he does not understand, the head of the pension fund at 'Globalos', a Swiss German, used sentences such as "Please speak slowly", or "Can you repeat?" (Globalos 19, 409-412). The receptionist at the company's hotel, an immigrant whose first language is Spanish, also stressed: "I ask them to repeat" (Globalos 18, 297). 'Asking for adaptation' was also described by employees on the managerial level, as in the following excerpt with a regional manager for Asia at 'Globalos', whose first language is Swiss German:

And then you can also ask them "What do you mean by that? I've never heard that word." (Globalos 22, 208; transl. from Swiss German)

Contrary to the first type of agency creation, this second type does therefore not draw on principles such as a suggested need to fight the use of a certain languages. Rather, it is based on the accommodation to the use of English, adapting an individual 'How to best get through as a speaker of English as second language' approach. Since this type of agency creation consists of inviting people with superior language skills to contribute to common understanding, it depends on these employees' goodwill to act in such a way.

5.3 Agency creation by being supportive

The third type of agency creation consists of being supportive. It concerns explicit efforts by employees with superior language skills to make communication among staff of various language backgrounds possible. This type of agency creation is composed by the discursive practices 'Helping', 'Facilitating participation' and 'Translating'. Interviewees drawing on 'Helping' describe how employees who are more proficient in the language of the interaction actively support them to express

themselves. This quote by the responsible for the standardization of payment processes at 'Globalos', whose first language is Spanish, serves as an illustration:

[My boss whose first language is English] paves you the way. For instance, if he realizes that I am struggling with sentences, he starts to ask: "Is it because of this?", "of this?", "of that?". "No." "Well, what is it you want to say then, that it is this, that, that?". And I say: "Yes, it is because of that." (Globalos 13, 239-246; transl. from Spanish)

The second discursive practice, '*Facilitating participation*', addresses the active change of the language of an interaction in order to make it possible for others to join the conversation. This is an example from the interview with a finance and controlling employee at 'Globalos':

I'm Italian, but I speak French, the others are French or Swiss, but we have a girl who is Bulgarian and who doesn't speak French. So of course, when it comes to communicating within our team, we do it in English. It's a form of politeness. We won't prevent the girl from understanding what we are saying to each other. (Globalos 5, 23; transl. from French)

'Translating' is a discursive practice that is oriented towards employees who do not master the required language at all. In most cases, this concerns employees on the lower levels who do not speak English. In the following example, a member of the IT support staff at the Swiss company 'Maximal', whose first language is Swiss German, described how he took care that blue collar workers were informed about what was happening in the company:

Interviewer: You briefly suggested that people in the warehouses don't speak English.

Maximal 12: That's the bridge we need, people like me. How else should it work that the know-how is transferred totally down, totally down in quotation marks [i.e. onto the lowest levels]? (Maximal 12, 213-217; transl. from Swiss German)

Contrary to the second type, agency creation by being supportive therefore is not mainly concentrated on problem-solving initiated by the person who experiences the problem. Rather, people with superior language skills make initiatives to include people with inferior language competence, thus taking responsibility in the sense of Ahonen *et alii* (2014). As in the case of creating agency by asking for adaptation, this type of agency creation depends on the goodwill of employees with superior language skills.

5.4 Agency creation by 'bricolage'

The fourth type of agency creation addresses various forms of getting active and creating possibilities which involves all participants of an interaction. It includes the discursive practices 'Encouraging people to 'just talk'', 'Using the 'everyone his/her language' model', 'Mixing languages', 'Using jargon' and 'Creating new languages'. All discursive practices have in common that they refer to a form of language use which is not based on the frequent and unexpressed norm of monolingual conversations between (first language) speakers of national languages. Such forms of language use have recently been conceptualized as 'bricolage' (Hinnenkamp, 2016; Mondada, 2018). 'Encouraging people to 'just talk'' describes how people with 'imperfect' skills in foreign languages may feel more confident in expressing themselves when accents or grammar errors do not matter. The following illustration is provided by a controller working for 'Globalos', whose first language is Turkish:

[We have] (...) our [internal] training center (...). They organize courses - for a week or for two weeks. So people come from many countries. And the first thing the lecturer says when he kicks off the training, that "language is broken English". (...) So you don't need to be shy, because your accent, the way you try to explain, is not really good. So feel free. Feel free. It's broken English. So it's not English. It's broken English. (Globalos 8, 406-412)

'Everyone his/her language' consists of each person speaking their preferred language in a conversation. It thus describes the parallel use of various national or regional languages within one interaction, also called "receptive multilingualism". This form of language use might relate to the national context in which the study was conducted, since Switzerland is one of the European countries where this form of language use is practiced (Zeevaert and Ten Thije, 2007). The following quote by the customer service director from the Swiss company 'Maximal', whose first language is Swiss German, explicitly points at the level playing field that 'Everyone his/her language' creates:

Let's say in a telephone conference with three [people] of a [Swiss-German subsidiary], they all speak German and French more or less, and three people [of the headquarters in Romandy] who all speak French very well and a little bit of German. You could hold the meeting in German as well as in French. Probably the same amount of people would have the same amount of advantages and disadvantages, on the one and on the other side respectively. Then I would suggest that the meeting is not simply hold in German, but rather, that the [representatives of the Swiss-German subsidiary] may speak German and those

from [the headquarters] in French. If people understand each other, it's okay. (Maximal 13, 205; transl. from Swiss German)

The next discursive practice, 'Mixing', consists of a spontaneous combination of languages. This excerpt from an interview with an IT standardization employee at 'Maximal', whose first language is French, highlights that language mixing can help employees getting their message across better than if they have to stick to one language:

In general, meetings are held in French. But there are moments in which we suddenly switch to English. [...] I have never seen anybody [...] saying "We do it all in German now" or "We do it all in English". [...] I would say that if someone struggles to express himself, he or she will choose a language in which he or she has more capacities to express what he or she has to say. (Maximal 7, 99; transl. from French)

'Using jargon' shows certain similarities with 'Mixing'. Here, the use of technical terms or "company speech" (Logemann and Piekkari, 2015) are used as language elements that are mixed into (national languages) in order to facilitate common understanding. The following statement by a Human Resources coordinator at 'Globalos', whose first language is French, gives an example:

I think the important thing is to know what you want to say, and if one doesn't use the right terms, nowadays, we understand each other, because we also have a jargon a bit of the professional world we are in. (Globalos 20, 104; transl. from French)

The discursive practice 'Creating new languages' even goes a step further. It accounts for various forms of language creation, be it in the form of combining elements from various languages or in the form of "simplified" (Maximal 6; transl. from French) or "third" (Maximal 12; transl. from Swiss German) English. The creation of new languages is illustrated by the following quote from an interview with an IT standardization employee at 'Maximal', whose first language is Portuguese:

I think now [...] the boundaries of the languages are becoming thinner, becoming narrow, more subtle [...]. For us who work in that whole [IT standardisation project], you have what we joke as the [IT standardisation project language], which is jargon, which is sometimes ["Maximal"], sometimes [IT] system [...]. And then you use that as a verb, you use that as a noun, as an adjective, you kind of throw those [IT standardisation project language] words into the thing, and then it crosses all the boundaries. I mean you use that in German, in French, or whatever. (Maximal 10, 116-117)

The creation of a language can also be found with regards to English specifically. Interviewees describe that using an English which is “rather short and not flowery” (Maximal 12, 43; transl. from Swiss German), a kind of “third English” (Maximal 12, 43; transl. from Swiss German), makes it possible for people to understand each other. This statement by a graphic designer from ‘Globalos’, whose first language is Standard German, explains why:

I think there is a European English, which is a minimal English [...] reduced to a simple form [...]. People use it as a language, as a medium for communication. [...] And it's not about a very elaborate phrasing and the rich vocabulary. It's simply about people understanding each other and transmitting information. (Globalos 11, 117-119; transl. from Standard German)

In sum, the various discursive practices included in agency creation by ‘bricolage’ (Hinnenkamp, 2016; Mondada, 2018) all neither emphasize monolingualism nor homogeneity, or, in other words, neither purity nor ‘perfection’ (Canagarajah, 2007). In the various excerpts, interviewees stress the many options for getting active and creating possibilities (Ahonen *et alii*, 2014) that this lacking emphasis on purity helps develop. Also, and importantly, agency creation by ‘bricolage’ involves all participants of an interaction. It could thus be said that in this case, the responsibility for creating agency in a multilingual work environment rests on the shoulders of all people involved in a conversation from the outset, contrary to the three other types of agency creation. In the case of asking for adaptation and being supportive, it is only one side involved in the interaction which gets active and either invites the other to adapt (asking for adaptation), or adapts to others based on own goodwill (being supportive by helping, facilitating participation, translating).

6. Conclusion

This article has set out to investigate the underaddressed *productive* power effects of multilingualism in professional contexts. Inspired by Foucault's invitation to view power as discursively produced (1990/1976) and as ensemble of actions (1976a) that subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities exercise (1982), it has focused on the discursive production of ‘power to’ get active, seize opportunities, create possibilities, take responsibility, make decisions, and relate to others (Ahonen et al., 2014). The majority of research on power effects of multilingualism has focused on problematic aspects of power, addressing power in terms of possession, competition or limitation (Gaibrois and Steyaert, 2017). Based on re-analyzing data from a qualitative case study which I conducted

in Switzerland (Gaibrois, 2015), the present study has investigated how organizational members create agency, which is conceptualized as “breaking away from a given frame of action and as taking initiatives to transform it” (Lipponen and Kumpulainen, 2011: 816), in the context of the restrictions that they experience in their multilingual work environment. Adopting a discursive approach, I have analyzed how employees discursively construct forms of getting active and creating possibilities to counterbalance the problematic effects of multilingualism.

In the analysis, I developed a typology of agency creation in multilingual work environments by identifying four types of agency creation, namely 1) Agency creation by resistance; 2) Agency creation by asking for adaptation; 3) Agency creation by being supportive; 4) Agency creation by ‘bricolage’ (Hinnenkamp, 2016; Mondada, 2018). Each of the agency types is composed by a series of discursive practices on getting active and creating possibilities in multilingual professional contexts. The four types of agency creation differ in their orientation and with regards to who is held responsible for making communication across language boundaries possible. In the first type, resistance, getting active consists of resisting the use of a certain language, mostly English, by employees whose first language is not English. All three other types on the other hand involve efforts to get along with the challenging effects of multilingualism. In type two, asking for adaptation, very much in contrary to type one, people whose first language is not the language used as ‘common platform’, often English, adopt an accommodating approach to the use of that language and create possibilities for understanding across language boundaries by inviting first language speakers to adapt to them. Reversely, type three, being supportive, addresses various variants of taking responsibility for including as many people as possible in interactions that take place in a particular language by helping them to express themselves or by changing the conversation language in order to facilitate participation. Type four, ‘bricolage’, comprises a series of jointly developed forms of creating possibilities for understanding and relating to others, namely encouraging people to ‘just talk’, using the ‘everyone his/her language’ model, mixing languages or developing new languages – or forms of “hybrid language” (Gaibrois, 2018). This form of agency creation is the only one which includes collective responsibility – among employees – for participation in multilingual professional contexts. In the case of asking for adaptation and being supportive, it is only one side involved in the interaction which gets active and either invites the other to adapt (asking for adaptation), or adapts to others based on own goodwill (being supportive by helping, facilitating participation, translating).

All types of agency creation are forms of 'power to' in the sense of Ahonen *et alii* (2014). Type one, resistance, is a form of getting active (Ahonen *et alii*, 2014) and of expressing voice (Janssens and Steyaert, 2014) in the light of challenges encountered in multilingual professional contexts. On the other hand, types two to four, asking for adaptation, being supportive and 'bricolage', involve creating possibilities, taking responsibility, relating to others (Ahonen *et alii*, 2014), expressing voice (Janssens and Steyaert, 2014) and creating participation possibilities (Mondada, 2004). Type four, 'bricolage' (Hinnenkamp, 2016; Mondada, 2018), also puts all speakers on equal terms (Canagarajah, 2007), because it is not based on the ideal of the first language speaker of a (national) language. While types one (resistance), two (asking for adaptation) and three (being supportive) differ in their orientation, they all stick to the frequently implicit norm that conversations have to be conducted in one language by speakers who aim at 'perfect' proficiency. Type four ('bricolage'), however, de-emphasizes perfection and focuses on making communication possible regardless of 'errors'. Whether multilingualism is understood as a sum of national languages, which need to be spoken as perfectly as possible, or as a joint mobilization of linguistic resources (Lüdi, Höchle and Yanaprasart, 2013) has important implications for power relations. As Canagarajah (2007) showed: "Constructs based on monolingualism and homogeneity are well suited to communities that desire purity, exclusivity, and domination" (p. 934). Moving away from such territorially oriented perspectives, "[a]cknowledging the heterogeneity of language and communication would force us to develop more democratic and egalitarian models of community and communication" (*ibid.*: 934).

The focus of this article has been on the productive power effects of multilingualism in professional contexts, because research to date has tended to concentrate on problematic aspects of power relations in multilingual organizations. However, this by no means signifies that the many problematic aspects of multilingualism, such as exclusion, the proficiency-related "faultline" (Barner-Rasmussen and Aarnio, 2011) between white collars and blue collars or "glass ceilings" (Itani, Järnlström and Piekkari, 2015) should be downplayed. The point of our study is to show that multilingualism does not only have problematic effects on power relations in organizations. Further research would benefit from a less one-sided understanding of power, which not only focuses on possession, competition or limitation, but also addresses *productive* power effects (Gaibrois and Steyaert, 2017).

On another note, our study has focused on agency creation by employees. However, potential organizational forms of agency creation should not be

forgotten. Critical diversity studies have made the important point that we live in times of individualized responsibilities, which should not lead to the neglect of power (Holck, Zanoni and Romani, 2018). While I agree with this, I also suggest that some forms of agency creation, particularly at the micro level, are frequently overlooked. This study aimed to shed light on various ways of creating such micro-level agency in a multilingual work environment. I therefore propose that further research should investigate both power and agency in organizations on the individual and organizational level, and address the interplay between the two.

Another open question is the relevance of the specific national context, here Switzerland, to the findings. Some forms of agency creation might be more prevalent in this linguistically very diverse country, which has four official languages and considerable language diversity because of the many immigrants. Practices such as “receptive multilingualism” (Zeevaert and Ten Thije, 2007) or the various forms of “hybrid language” (Gaibrois, 2018) are potentially more acceptable in Switzerland than they are in other language contexts. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct similar research in other countries in which languages play a different role on a political and societal level (e.g., in monolingual or bilingual countries, Anglophone countries in which the current global ‘lingua franca’ is the dominant language, or countries with a strong language policy).

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for valuable comments on a previous version of this paper.

References

- AHONEN, P.; TIENARI, J.; MERILÄINEN, S., and PULLEN, A. (2014). “Hidden contexts and invisible power relations: a Foucauldian reading of diversity research”, *Human Relations*, 67(3): 263-286.
- ANGOURI, J. (2013). “The multilingual reality of the multinational workplace: language policy and language use”, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 34(6): 564-581.
- ANGOURI, J. (2014). “Multilingualism in the workplace: language practices in multilingual contexts”, *Multilingua*, 33(1-2): 1-9.
- ANGOURI, J. and MIGLBAUER, M. (2014). “And then we summarise in English for the others’: the lived experience of the multilingual workplace”, *Multilingua*, 33(1-2). 147-172.

- ATEWOLOGUN, D. and SEALY, R. (2014). "Experiencing privilege at ethnic, gender and senior intersections", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 29(4): 423-439.
- BARNER-RASMUSSEN, W. and AARNIO, C. (2011). "Shifting the faultlines of language: a quantitative functional-level exploration of language use in MNC subsidiaries", *Journal of World Business*, 46(3): 288–295.
- BERG, B.L. and LUNE, H. (2014). "A dramaturgical look at interviewing". In BERG, B.L. and LUNE, H. (eds.), *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (pp. 105-163). Harlow: Pearson.
- BERGER, P.L. and LUCKMANN, T. (1967). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Doubleday.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Translated by Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- BICKEL, H. (2000). "Deutsch in der Schweiz als nationale Varietät des Deutschen", *Sprachreport* 4: 21-27.
- BÜCHI, C. (2015). *Mariage de raison. Romands et Alémaniques: une histoire suisse*. Carouge: Editions Zoé.
- CANAGARAJAH, S. (2007). "Lingua franca English, multilingual communities, and language acquisition", *The Modern Language Journal* 91: 923–939.
- DAHINDEN, J. (2014). "„Kultur“ als Form symbolischer Gewalt: Grenzziehungsprozesse im Kontext von Migration am Beispiel der Schweiz" In NIESWAND, B. and DROTBOHM, H. (eds.). *Kultur, Gesellschaft, Migration* (pp. 97-121). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien.
- DOR, D. (2004). "From Englishization to imposed multilingualism: Globalization, the internet, and the political economy of the linguistic code", *Public Culture*, 16(1): 97-118.
- FEELY, A. J., and HARZING, A.-W.K. (2003). "Language management in multinational companies", *Cross-Cultural Management: An International Journal* 10(2). 37–52.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1976). Two Lectures. Lecture Two: 14 January 1976. In: Gordon C (ed.). *Foucault, M. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings. 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 92-108.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1977). "Truth and power". Interview by A. FONTANA and P. PASQUINO. In: GORDON, C. (ed) *Foucault, M. Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings. 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books, pp. 109-133. (Original: "Intervista e Michel Foucault". In: FONTANA, A. and PASQUINO, P. *Michel Foucault: Microfisica del Potere*. Turin, 1977.)
- FOUCAULT, M. (1982) "The subject and power". In DREYFUS, H.L. and RABINOW, P. (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago:

- University of Chicago Press, pp. 208-226. (part 1 – “Why Study Power: The Question of the Subject” – written in English by Foucault; part 2 – “How is Power Exercised” – translated from French by Leslie Sawyer)
- FOUCAULT, M. (1990/1976). *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books. (Original: *La volonté de savoir* (1976). Paris: Gallimard).
- GAIBROIS, C. (2015). *Power at work: The discursive construction of power relations in multilingual organizations*. Bamberg: Difo-Druck.
- GAIBROIS, C. (2018). “It crosses all the boundaries’: hybrid language use as empowering resource”, *European Journal of International Management*, 12(1/2): 82–110.
- GAIBROIS, C. and STEYAERT, C. (2017). “Beyond possession and competition: investigating cooperative aspects of power in multilingual organizations”, *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management* 17(1): 69-84.
- GERGEN, K.J. (1985). “The social constructionist movement in modern psychology”, *American Psychologist* 40(3): 266-275.
- GERGEN, K.J. and THATCHENKERY, T.J. (2004) “Organization science as social construction: Postmodern potentials”, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 40(2): 228-249.
- GUNNARSSON, B.-L. (2014). “Multilingualism in European workplaces”, *Multilingua*, 33(1-2): 11-3.
- HARZING, A.-W. and PUDELKO, M. (2013). “Language competencies, policies and practices in multinational corporations: a comprehensive review and comparison of Anglophone, Asian, Continental European and Nordic MNCs”, *Journal of World Business* 48: 87-97.
- HEIKKILÄ, J.-P. and SMALE, A. (2011). “The effects of ‘language standardization’ on the acceptance and use of e-HRM systems in foreign subsidiaries”, *Journal of World Business*, 46(3): 305-313.
- HINDS, P.J.; NEELEY, T.B. and CRAMTON, C.D. (2014). “Language as lightning rod: power contests, emotion regulation, and subgroup dynamics in global teams”, *Journal of International Business Studies* 45: 536-561.
- HINNENKAMP, V. (2016). “Languaging in the global contact zone: Polylingual performances as transcultural interface”, In KAZZAZI, K. et alii (eds.). *Migration–Religion–Identität. Aspekte transkultureller Prozesse* (pp. 139-165). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien.
- HOLCK, L.; ZANONI, P. and ROMANI, L. (2018). “Diversity and inclusion at work: time to talk (again) about class”. Call for papers for a Special Issue in *Gender, Work and Organization*.

- HOLSTEIN, J.A. and GUBRIUM, J.F. (1995). *The active interview*. London: Sage.
- HUA, Z. (2014). "Piecing together the 'workplace multilingualism' jigsaw puzzle", *Multilingua* 33(1-2): 233-242.
- ITANI, S.; JÄRLSTRÖM, M., and PIEKKARI, R. (2015). "The meaning of language skills for career mobility in the new career landscape", *Journal of World Business* 50(2): 368–378.
- JANSSENS, M. and STEYAERT, C. (2014). "Re-considering language within a cosmopolitan understanding: toward a *multilingual franca* approach in international business studies", *Journal of International Business Studies* 45(5): 623-639.
- JANSSON, G. (2014). "Bridging language barriers in multilingual care encounters", *Multilingua* 33(1-2): 201-232.
- JAWORSKI, A. and PILLER, I. (2008). "Linguascaping Switzerland: language ideologies in tourism". In LOCHER, M.A. and STRÄSSLER, J. (eds.). *Standards and Norms in the English Language* (pp. 301-321). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- KINGSLEY, L. (2013). "Language choice in multilingual encounters in transnational workplaces", *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 34(6): 533-548.
- LAURING, J. and KLITMØLLER, A. (2014). "Corporate language-based communication avoidance in MNCs: a multi-sited ethnography approach", *Journal of World Business* 50(1): 46-55.
- LIPPONEN, L. and KUMPULAINEN, K. (2011). "Acting as accountable authors: Creating interactional spaces for agency work in teacher education", *Teaching and Teacher Education* 27: 812-819.
- LOGEMANN, M., and PIEKKARI, R. (2015). "Localize or local lies? The power of language and translation in the multinational corporation", *Critical Perspectives on International Business* 11(1): 30-53.
- LØNSMANN, D. (2014). "Linguistic diversity in the international workplace: language ideologies and processes of exclusion", *Multilingua*, 33(1-2): 89-116.
- LÜDI, G.; HÖCHLE, K. and YANAPRASART, P. (2010). "Plurilingual practices at multilingual workplaces". In MEYER, B. and APFELBAUM, B. (eds.). *Multilingualism at work: from policies to practices in public, medical and business settings* (pp. 211-234). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- LÜDI, G.; HÖCHLE, K. and YANAPRASART, P. (2013). "Multilingualism and diversity management in companies in the Upper Rhine Region". In BERTHOUD, A. C. et alii (eds.), *Exploring the dynamics of multilingualism: The DYLAN project* (pp. 59-82). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

- MAKONI, S. and PENNYCOOK, A. (2012). "Disinventing multilingualism: from monological multilingualism to multilingua francas". In: MARTIN-JONES, M. et alii (eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism* (pp. 439-453). London: Routledge.
- MARSCHAN-PIEKKARI, R.; WELCH, D. and WELCH L. (1999). "In the shadow: the impact of language on structure, power and communication in the multinational", *International Business Review* 8(4): 421-440.
- MONDADA, L. (2004). "Ways of 'doing being plurilingual' in international work meetings". In GARDNER, R. and WAGNER, J. (eds.). *Second Language Conversations* (pp. 27-60). New York: Continuum.
- MONDADA, L. (2018). "Bricolage linguistique et dissolution des frontières linguistiques – à la douane", In AUZANNEAU, M. and GRECO, L. (eds.), *Dessiner les frontières* (pp. 171-195). Lyon: ENS Editions.
- NEELEY, T.B. (2013). "Language matters: status loss and achieved status distinctions in global organizations", *Organization Science* 24(2): 476-497.
- NEELY, T.B. und DUMAS, T.L. (2016) "Unearned status gain: Evidence from a global language mandate", *Academy of Management Journal* 59(1): 14-43.
- PELTOKORPI, V. and VAARA, E. (2014). "Knowledge transfer in multinational corporations: Productive and counterproductive effects of language-sensitive recruitment", *Journal of International Business Studies* 45(5): 600-622.
- PHILLIPSON, Robert (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- RAVASI, C.; SALAMIN, X. and DAVOINE, E. (2015). "Cross-cultural adjustment of skilled migrants in a multicultural and multilingual environment: an explorative study of foreign employees and their spouses in the Swiss context", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(10): 1335-1359.
- STEYAERT, C.; OSTENDORP, A. and GAIBROIS, C. (2011). "Multilingual organizations as 'linguascapes': negotiating the position of English through discursive practices", *Journal of World Business* 46(3): 270-278.
- Swiss Federal Statistical Office (2016a). "Sprachen, Religionen – Daten, Indikatoren: Als Hauptsprachen genannte Sprachen, 2014". Neuchâtel: Bundesamt für Statistik. <<http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/01/05/blank/key/sprachen.html>> (Accessed 3 January 2017).
- SWISS FEDERAL STATISTICAL OFFICE (2016b). "Migration und Integration – Indikatoren: Ständige ausländische Wohnbevölkerung nach Staatsangehörigkeit, 2015". Neuchâtel: Bundesamt für Statistik. <<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/>

- de/home/statistiken/bevoelkerung/migration-integration/auslaendische-bevoelkerung.html> (Accessed 3 January 2017).
- TIETZE, S.; COHEN, L. und MUSSON, G. (2003). *Understanding organizations through language*. London: Sage.
- VAAARA, E.; TIENARI, J.; PIEKKARI, R. and SÄNTTI, R. (2005). "Language and the circuits of power in a merging multinational corporation", *Journal of Management Studies* 42(3): 595-623.
- WETHERELL, M. (2001a). "Editor's Introduction". In WETHERELL *et alii* (eds.). *Discourse theory and practice: a reader* (pp. 1-8). London: Sage.
- WETHERELL, M. (2001b). "Themes in discourse research: the case of Diana". In Wetherell *et alii* (eds.). *Discourse theory and practice: a reader* (pp. 14-28). London: Sage.
- ZANDER, L.; MOCKAITIS, A.I. and HARZING, A.-W. (2011). "Standardization and contextualization: a study of language and leadership across 17 countries", *Journal of World Business* 46(3): 296-304.
- ZEEVAERT, L. and TEN THIJE, J.D. (2007). "Introduction". In TEN THIJE, J. D., and ZEEVAERT, L. (eds.). *Receptive multilingualism: linguistic analyses, language policies and didactic concepts* (pp. 1-21). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.