

Maintaining and Promoting Linguistic Diversity in Multinational Corporations: Notion of Social Justice and Arguments of Business Sense

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Abstract:

Post globalization multinational corporations have been conceptualized as being multilingual communities that contain significant variations in terms of national-cultural and linguistic background of their employees. The present paper underlines the importance of the study of language issues inside multinational corporations and argues that the debate on language issues should take a center stage as it is marked by a sense of social justice besides having a business sense. The paper asserts that linguistic standardization in terms of implementation of an official language policy can inhibit the professional growth of employees who have a limited exposure to the official language at the workplace and can incite feelings of injustice in terms of unjust favors to those who have learned the official language as their mother tongue. The feeling of injustice would lead to formation of linguistic clusters constituting employees who have similar levels of linguistic inadequacy in terms of perceived inadequate competence in the official language. Such clusters help the employees maintain their linguistic identity inside the multinational corporation and act as a source of power in the local environment, thus serving the purpose of social justice. Moreover, as the power of vernacular lies in its ability to provide access to local information networks and better conversational experiences with the external stakeholders of the organization in the local context, it makes a strong business sense for maintaining linguistic diversity in multinational corporations. In conclusion, the paper reasons in favor of maintaining and promoting linguistic diversity among employees of multinational corporations.

Key words: *Linguistic diversity, Multinational corporations, Social justice, Business sense*

Introduction

The present paper underlines the importance of the study of language issues inside multinational corporations and argues that the debate on language issues should take a center stage as it is marked by a sense of social justice besides having a business sense. The paper is divided into many sections: the paper first asserts that the linguistic standardization in terms of implementation of an official language policy can inhibit the professional growth of employees who have a limited exposure to the official language at the workplace. Citing examples from the social arena it underlines the reasons behind linguistic standardization inside business organizations. The reasons why linguistic standardization happens and the underlying motives are discussed: it is argued that the process of standardization can incite feelings of injustice in terms of unjust favors to those who have learned the official language as their mother tongue.

It is further argued that the feeling of injustice would lead to formation of linguistic clusters constituting employees who have similar levels of linguistic inadequacy in terms of perceived inadequate competence in the official language. Such clusters help the employees maintain their linguistic identity inside the multinational corporation and act as a source of power in the local environment, thus serving the purpose of social justice. Moreover, as the power of vernacular lies in its ability to provide access to local information networks and better conversational experiences with the external stakeholders of the

organization in the local context, it makes a strong business sense for maintaining linguistic diversity in multinational corporations. In conclusion, the paper reasons in favor of maintaining and promoting linguistic diversity among employees of multinational corporations.

Standardization and Diversity – Reasons and Processes

The Reason behind Standardization

Industries need standardization for the simple reason that standardization helps reduce costs by sharing information on best practices or by adopting common processes wherever feasible. Business standardization also helps leverage the human knowledge across the business units as well as the product units (Marchand, 2004). However with the increasing demand of customization of products and services coupled with the increasing diversity of the workforce and the external players, large business organizations often have to strike the right balance between business flexibility and standardization. When we talk of standardization in companies we also talk about the standardization of communication processes and practices. This paper tries to focus on the issue of standardization with a different aspect – the focus of this paper is to underline the increasing linguistic diversity in multinational corporations and to raise some issues which would be important in light of the linguistic heterogeneity. The reason why I have chosen Multinational Corporations (MNCs) is because MNCs have been conceptualized as being a multilingual community that contain significant variations in terms of national-cultural and linguistic background of their employees (Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman, 2005; Björkman & Piekkari, 2009; Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Makela, Kalla, & Piekkari, 2007). The paper would focus on the internal environment as well as the external environment with which linguistically diverse business organizations like MNCs interact and would discuss some of the challenges which the increasing linguistic diversity brings with it.

Standardization and Diversity

In a business organization, standardization in the backdrop of increasing linguistic diversity would mean going for a language policy wherein the company decides how to communicate, to whom to communicate, in which language to communicate, and the likes. While some of the practices may necessarily have to be standardized, for example the formats of billing, the way minutes are to be recorded, maintenance of communication hierarchy, etc. there could be cases where a business organization may bring a language-use policy which tries to curtail the linguistic heterogeneity. An example for such a case would be a MNC forcing one-language policy when its workforce contains significant linguistic diversity. I would discuss the problems and outcomes of one-language policy later in this paper but before that I would focus on the challenges of communicating in a multilingual environment: I would be discussing the notion of communicative competence and would discuss the importance of 'language mediators' in smoothing the process of communication in linguistically diverse environments.

The Notion of Communicative Competence

Because of workforce migration from neighboring as well as far off places, a linguistically diverse workforce is going to be natural phenomenon even for those develop nations which have traditionally been dominated by a single language. Multilingualism is the social reality which the new world will have to accept (Extra & Yagmur, 2004). The biggest problem in such a situation would be the intergroup interaction among the linguistically diverse groups.

When the thought of using languages to interact with different speech communities comes to our mind, we are possessed with the thought of being fluent enough in the language concerned so that we are able to put our ideas and thoughts across without much effort. This thought, somewhere back in our mind, makes us feel that we need to possess the language in a grammatically correct form and that we need to learn the various rules of language which give it the standard form. Most of us believe that a strong vocabulary and a strong command over the rules of grammar would make us proficient in the language concerned. Taking clue from Canale and Swain (1980), I would like to differ from these notions, and would like to introduce what Canale and Swain call 'communicative competence'. Communicative competence as opposed to 'grammatical competence' (knowledge of the grammatical rules of any language) has three elements: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. By grammatical competence, we mean the knowledge of the rules of grammar; sociolinguistic competence involves both the socio-cultural (using language appropriately to the non-linguistic context) as well as discourse competence (application of rules that determine cohesion and coherence); and, strategic competence means the use of verbal and non-verbal strategies of communication to fill the vacuum left

by insufficient competence in other areas. The point that I want to make is: learning language is easy if we take the natural route – if we try to learn it by observing how people use the language. And this is precisely the reason that however hard we try, until and unless we learn the language by being a part of the speech community that uses it, we will always fall short of learning the language in its natural and most effective form. What meaning does it have for a linguistically diverse organization like a MNC? This means that rather than trying to learn languages in the formal way, it would be better for any member of a MNC to learn the language by being in touch with the speakers of the language. Since that seems like a non-viable option for any management, what would be best would be to search for ‘mediators’ who have good communicative competence and let them act as the nodes between the management and the various speech communities inside the MNC.

The Language Mediator

In order to gain entry into any speech community, the first requirement is the command over the language of the speech community. But that command becomes nearly impossible if one is required to talk to people belonging to different speech communities. In such a situation, for any person to get information about the population or to share information with the population becomes a nearly impossible task until the person gets help from what Bochner (1981) and Taft (1981) call a “mediating person”. A mediating person is one, who is a bilingual, and has a positive attitude towards both the communities: their own and the community to which they mediate. Every multilingual society has many such mediating people who make the communication among different speech communities possible. Similarly, in every multilingual organization one can find such mediating persons who can make the communication flow an easy one. By virtue of being placed at important nodes, these mediating persons are also bound to command power and respect from people across different speech communities. The question that arises now is: as the mediators command such powerful positions, should management discourage such people? In my opinion, any such discouragement would only add to the communication gaps which multilingual organizations have already in plenty. Also, as pointed out earlier, the mediating persons are only those who, apart from being bilinguals, have positive attitude towards all the communities to which they are in position to interact by virtue of being the mediator. This way we can say that any management, by letting these mediating persons occupy a position of power, would only stand profited and should thus encourage the establishment of such people. The contrary way to deal with the linguistic diversity would be to oppose any kind of linguistic and go for a ‘linguistic unification’, wherein the organization comes up with a one-language policy. The next section discusses the policy of linguistic unification in light of the French Multilingualism.

The Case of Linguistic Unification

Linguistic Unification in Social Arena

Is there a need for linguistic unification? That is the question which I would try to answer in this section. I would present examples from the social world and try to fit them inside the business organizations. Let us take the example of one of the multilingual countries ‘France’. Calling France a multilingual country would certainly raise some eyebrows, but if we look at the history of France we would find that it is not long before France became a country where the majority of population spoke the French Language. French language can be said to have gone through four phases to arrive at its current phase in the new millennia: the first phase was from year 1608-1760 in which the French Language got the Royal Status; in the second phase, 1760-1850, it lost its status, only to gain it back in the fourth phase (1960-2000). From 1850-1960 the French language went through a state of compromise and the years 1960-2000 saw, as earlier mentioned, the re-conquest of the French Language (Plourde & Georgeault, 2008).

The linguistic unification of France was driven mainly because the state wanted to mould the diverse population of France into a single nation, by giving them a ‘common identity’. Putting the diverse population under a ‘common identity’ was not the first trial of its kind, the Church had made many trials earlier as well, but while the church tried to sermon the people in their language, the State saw multilingualism as a big barrier. To undermine this barrier, the French government came up with the idea of French as a uniform national language thus shedding its image of being the language of the elite, as a consequence, the regional languages slowly and slowly became extinct with only a handful of them surviving (Bell, 2001a). The French people were thus given a common identity.

In Support of Language Liberty

Does that mean, we need to support a one-language policy? For if it worked for France then will it not work for organizations in general? Even if we look at the history of most of the business organizations, we will see that the one-language policy and linguistic unification policy is something which they have followed, either overtly or covertly. However, what I intend to focus upon is the fact that the new millenia has brought with it many new changes, some changes which would change the way we think about the organizations (whether business organizations or social ones) and the way we manage them. Let us go back to Bell's work again: Bell (2001b) cites the famous saying of Massimo d'Azeglio, "We have made Italy. Now we have to make Italians" and notes that the formal creation of Italy as a unified nation had little meaning to its citizens, as they "remained first and foremost, in language, customs, historical traditions, and political allegiances, inhabitants of their villages and regions: Sicilians, Piedmontese, Tuscans, Calabrians, Romans, Umbrians, Venetians; not Italians". This is precisely the problem that I identify with the new business organizations, especially the MNCs in the global world. The people sharing a common speech would start grouping together inside the organizations if they are forced to come under an 'umbrella identity'. The better option, in such a scenario would be to let these speech communities thrive, respect them, and at the same time have an official language in which the important activities would be performed. This is also important taking into account the new generation and the new set of values that have turned up with it. As Plourde and Georgeault (2008) state, "The attitudes that characterize today's generations are affirmation, life, liberty, autonomy, security, behavior as a majority, openness, self-esteem and self-confidence." No doubt, it would be better if the linguistic liberty is rendered to the new generation.

The Feelings of Injustice

The Case of Two Business Firms

It seems improbable that any multinational corporation by virtue of its linguistic diversity can have a very salient linguistic identity. The best way to manage the linguistic identities of a MNC, in my opinion, would be to have multiple identities. For standard purposes and where linguistic differences can lead to problems, say in R&D Divisions of pharmaceutical companies, the organization can come up with an official language policy, in other cases, it would be best if it lets the employees, decide how they want to define their linguistic identity. I would mention here two such instances when business organizations tried to redefine their linguistic identity as a one-language entity and put themselves in controversy; it was not long before that one of them had to retract. The first case is of a supermarket which issued orders to its workers to speak only in English Language (TVNZ, 2009b). The order attracted the ire of both customers as well as the employees, forcing the management to take back the orders. The second case is similar: a bus company coming under fire for allowing only English to be spoken at the workplace, mainly because of the fact that the bus company has been a multi-cultural employer (TVNZ, 2009a). In the later case, as the management tried delaying its response; the union got up in arms and demanded to take back the orders.

Business Necessity – The Cloak of Legitimacy

While most of the cases of linguistic unification are based on the fancies of the top management that look at the linguistic diversity as a source of conflict, there indeed are some cases where linguistic differences, or rather a non-availability of a single standard language can create operational problems, say for example in Military, or as mentioned earlier, in R&D Division of a pharmaceutical company, where the one-language policy caters to a 'business need', vital for the proper functioning of the organization. At this point of time, it would be wise to mention Valle's (2003b) argument that the term 'business necessity' can even be used as a "cloak of legitimacy" by the top management to shield the linguistic differentiation from the judicial hammer. Taking the issue of judicial hammer a bit further, I would acquaint the readers with the legal framework on one-language policy in the next section, but not before discussing the formation of linguistic clusters inside a MNC. It is reasoned that owing to group cohesion based on common language background and language competence, employees would either try to assimilate with the dominant group (constituting those employees who have high level of proficiency in the official language, i.e. employees who have learned the official language as their mother tongue) or maintain their linguistic identity.

The Formation of Linguistic Clusters

The Degree of Cohesion in Linguistically Diverse Communities

Now we move to the topic of cohesion among groups of people belonging to different linguistic communities. In a multilingual society, any business organization is bound to have employees belonging to different linguistic backgrounds provided the population of employees inside the organization reflects the population of the culture in which the business organization functions. In such a case, managing the degree of cohesion among the employees would be an important but challenging task for the business organization. This degree of cohesion, as noted by Taylor (1999) would be important for development of a level of understanding so that the decision making process is not just a vote counting exercise but is shaped by the process of joint deliberation.

What does this mean for the business organizations? The business organizations must understand that better understanding cannot come through a standard tongue to which no one can relate. If the business organization has got a common language with which everyone is comfortable then there are not going to be any major problems related to issues of language use: as is the case with those business organizations which function in those countries which are largely monolingual, and confine themselves to the national boundaries. But, as I have mentioned earlier, my focus is MNCs, where people with different linguistic background quiet often come together under one roof. In case these people do not have a common language, the business organization would be better placed if they come up with some innovative ways to communicate with them – an example would be the use of mediators. However, a better approach would be to have a positive tolerance for diversity (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003), thus promoting and stimulating heterogeneity at workplace.

Assimilation through the Hierarchies

In this section I would focus on the role languages play in social assimilation process. It is a common knowledge that to get acceptance into a social community which speaks a particular language, one would be better placed if she/he can speak in the way in which the people belonging to that speech community speak. This is well documented in many researches and has even been presented in media: the play 'Pygmalion' by George Bernard Shaw (1920), and its theatrical version 'My Fair Lady' (Cukor, et al., 1964) are two masterpieces which help us understand how language can be used as a great assimilator, and how one can gain access to the 'higher levels' of the social hierarchies by using the language of the higher social class. The question that now we need to ask is: how to gain access to the 'lower levels' of social hierarchies? Taking the case of business organizations, such an inquiry would mean finding out the way in which people belonging to the higher management can gain acceptability below the ranks. There are many companies which have taken steps to reach the lower levels of hierarchies by reaching them in their languages; a very good example would be ITC's e-Choupal System. As Prahlad (2010) writes, ITC has created an interface where the farmers write e-mails in their native language Hindi by using a Standard English keyboard. This example gives us a hint of how to approach the different speech communities when we want to have a proper interaction with them. Let us now explore another possibility: in this case the people at the 'lower levels' of social hierarchies are ready to assimilate with the 'higher levels' by leaving their identity and learning a new language (the language of the community to which they wish to assimilate). When can such assimilation occur? As Audard (1999) writes how the peasantry from Brittany, Central France, etc. who successfully tried to assimilate to the higher levels of social strata through acquisition of French Language: the acquisition of the French Language (the language of the elite) ultimately translated into huge gains in terms of social mobility. Putting it in an organizational frame, if the employees at the lower hierarchical level perceive that learning the language of higher management can mean gains in terms of social mobility then they would try their best to learn the language in which the higher management interacts, else they might like to stick to their distinct linguistic identities.

Unjust Favors to the Native Speakers of the Official Language

As mentioned in the last section, there could be instances where employees stick to their linguistic identity, one of the reasons being the factor of social mobility across the organizational hierarchy. However, there could be other reasons why employees maintain their linguistic identity. One of the reasons could be related to the perceived linguistic inadequacy in the official language of the MNC: limited proficiency in the official language of the MNC would restrict employees to interact with only those employees who share the same language background. This way, even though the employees



would maintain their linguistic identity, there would be a feeling of discomfort and injustice meted out to them because of their linguistic background. The feeling of injustice would be related to the undue advantage meted out to those employees who have learned the official language of the MNC as their native language. The undue advantage could be in terms of access to extensive communication networks or ease at completion of language related tasks. Researchers have demonstrated that employees having restricted competence in the official language of the MNC have often restricted access to extensive communication networks which further affects their performance (Beyene, 2007; Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999; Tange, 2009). Moreover, non-native speakers of the official language of the MNC often face difficulty completing language related tasks in the official language which further affects their performance at workplace (Neeley, Hinds, & Cramton, 2009).

The Feeling of Injustice and the Formation of Linguistic Clusters

As native speakers of the official language of the MNC are expected to have a natural advantage over the non-native speakers (who have lower levels of perceived linguistic competence in the official language), a feeling of injustice would lead to the formation of linguistic clusters constituting employees who have similar levels of linguistic inadequacy in terms of perceived inadequate competence in the official language of the MNC. Such clusters would be formed as they would help the employees gain power in the local environment thus cancelling out perceived injustice meted out to them because of their linguistic inadequacy. Furthermore, employees might form groups wherein the group membership is defined on the basis of commonality of language background and similarity of inadequacy (perceived inadequate competence) in the official language of the MNC. This way, owing to linguistic inadequacy, language based clusters could be formed inside a MNC (Tange & Luring, 2009).

The language based clusters could also be formed because of the advantages linked to the competence in the vernacular. One of the advantages could be in terms of status and values connected to the vernacular (Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari, & Säntti, 2005): the fear of such loss would force the employees to maintain their linguistic identity through maintaining their membership in the linguistic clusters. A necessity to converse with the external stakeholders in the local environment, for ex: local media, customers and suppliers, can also lead to the maintenance of linguistic identity of linguistically diverse workforce inside the MNCs (Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen, & Piekkari, 2006). Another reason would be power: as the vernacular language has the potential to provide easy access to information networks, it could be a source of power in the local environment (Nurmi, Bosch-Sijtsema, Sivunen, & Fruchter, 2009), moreover as this source of power is unavailable to those who, even though highly proficient in the official language, have restricted command over the vernacular, employees would prefer to maintain their linguistic identity associated with the vernacular and would thus be members of linguistic clusters. Accessibility to such linguistic clusters would be restricted for those employees who are proficient in the official language but have limited command over the vernacular.

The Legal Framework on One-Language Policy

One-Language Policy and the Legal Issues

In this section we would be focusing on the legal issues that might crop up when there is one-language policy being followed by any business organization. Due to constrain of time and space we would focus only on the issues inside the United States of America. With the spurge in immigration after the year in the last decade many business organizations tried to put into practice English-only policies in place. These policies not only attracted backlash from the immigrant population, the linguistically diverse population also reported discriminatory practices. It is because of these policies that the charges reported with The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and related to the English-only policies saw an increase to more than 120 in 2006 from 30 in 1996 (Law.com, 2007). It is not only the employment relations issues that are being affected because of the English-only policies; in 'Fibre Leather Manufacturing Corporation and International Leather Goods, Plastics and Novelty Workers Union, AFL-CIO' case, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) found a violation of the clause of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which requires that during the elections of the labor union, the employees must be able to exercise a uniformed choice. Since such a clause would mean that the employees get their ballots in the languages which they understand; the one-language policy, i.e. English-only policy, of the company violated the aforementioned clause of the National Labor Relations Act. The NLRB set aside the results of the union elections, quoting the violation of the Act, as 15-20 of the

86 employees were Portuguese speakers and they were provided the ballots which contained only English Language (Valle, 2003a). Citing from the same source, i.e. Valle's (2003a) work, in the case of 'Kraft, Inc. Retail Food Group and Zenon N. Olow and Local 34, United Food & Commercial Workers of America, AFL-CIO' the NLRB decided that even though multilingual ballots were provided for union elections, the ballots contained a very bad translation and were so defective that they hindered the right to exercise the vote with informed choice. In another case, the EEOC found Watlow Batavia, Inc., a subsidiary of Watlow Electric Manufacturing Co. of St. Louis, guilty of discrimination against Hispanic workers; the Hispanic workers were fired by Watlow Batavia, Inc. for their refusal to speak only English while on job. The Federal District Court, under the settlement of the dispute, fined the company \$192,500 for the alleged discrimination (EEOC, 2009). This way we observe that there can be legal issues related to the problem of one language policy in a multilingual business environment. The business organizations are therefore advised to consider these legal issues while crafting any one-language policy.

Crafting a One-Language Policy

In earlier sections we have discussed that in some special cases, when there is 'business necessity', a business organization may need a one-language policy. In such cases though, the careful crafting of the one-language policy would be the prime area of concern for any business organization. Here I would like to introduce in brief the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 of the United States of America. The National Origin Discrimination (NERC) of the US, on the basis of the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, protects individuals against discrimination on the basis of national origin as well as race, color, religion and sex. We would be focusing on the Speak-English-Only Rule as discussed under the Code of Federal Regulations Title 29, Volume 4 CFR 1606.7. Part (a) of the Speak-English-Only-Rule states the following (I am reproducing part a in its original form as the wordings are very important, and the presumptions involved are important to our understanding of the issues which might arise in a multilingual business organization):

When applied at all times. A rule requiring employees to speak only English at all times in the workplace is a burdensome term and condition of employment. The primary language of an individual is often an essential national origin characteristic. Prohibiting employees at all times, in the workplace, from speaking their primary language or the language they speak most comfortably, disadvantages an individual's employment opportunities on the basis of national origin. It may also create an atmosphere of inferiority, isolation and intimidation based on national origin which could result in a discriminatory working environment. Therefore, the Commission will presume that such a rule violates title VII and will closely scrutinize it.

Part (b) of the rule deals with the possibility of an employer having a speak only English in case of business necessity, and Part (c) deals with the notification of the rule about the time periods when the speak-English-only rule would be enforced and the consequences of violation of the rule. It further states that if the Commission finds that the employer has not notified its employees about any such rule and yet makes an adverse employment decision against any employee, then the Commission would consider the 'application of the rule as evidence of discrimination on the basis of national origin'. Going back to Part (a), we find four important presumptions: 1) A rule requiring employees to speak only English at all times in the workplace is a burdensome term and condition of employment; 2) The primary language of an individual is often an essential national origin characteristic; 3) Prohibiting employees at all times, in the workplace, from speaking their primary language or the language they speak most comfortably, disadvantages an individual's employment opportunities on the basis of national origin; 4) A one-language policy can create an atmosphere of inferiority, isolation and intimidation based on national origin which could result in a discriminatory working environment.

It would be worth noting that in Presumption '2' I used the word 'often': this was because of the fact that there can be citizens of a country who do not speak the official or national language (in case the country has a national or official language) of the country. In fact, in a multilingual country like India, it would be hard for anyone to guess anyone's primary language. This will raise issues for a researcher as to how to find the linguistic background of any person. Rest of the three Presumptions raise important issues for a researcher working in the field of Organizational Behavior or Human Resource Management: they raise issues like how and when a One-Language Policy should be crafted, and how should people belonging to different linguistic background be grouped together and their groups be managed. While these topics would not be discussed in this paper, they offer an interesting challenge to researchers and practitioners alike.

Business Sense for Linguistic Diversity

Language Issues with the External Environment

Till now the paper focused on the issues which a multilingual business organization might face because of the huge linguistic diversity reflected in its workforce. However, the organization can as well face issues outside its boundaries, especially when it interacts with the external environment. Let us take a recent case of a Quebec law outlawing English-only-titles for Video Games (Thestar.com, 2009). The Quebec government brought into effect the law which its language charter 'The Charter of the French Language' mentions in Title 1, Chapter VII, 52.1. "All computer software, including game software and operating systems, whether installed or uninstalled, must be available in French unless no French version exists." This has led to frustration and consternation among the game manufacturers and distributors, as they have to face a new set of challenges. It might be noted that the language charter is an old one and the game manufacturers were informed earlier; the game companies have been trying their best to come to terms with the law and it would only be a matter of time before the local population in Quebec enjoys video games being offered in French Language. This case should alert those organizations that have confined themselves to a single language.

Economic Powers of Languages

An important question remains: why are such laws passed? As Veltman (1996) discusses, Quebec saw a gradual shift from English as a dominant language to French becoming the language of the government as well as the masses. The reason behind the English Language dominance was primarily the economic affluence of the English Speaking population. However, with the steady economic growth and with the Quebec society turning into a 'consumer society', the French Speaking people also became a large market which needed to be served according to their tastes and preferences. Nonetheless, the taste and preferences of the new economically affluent French Speaking population was to a great extent similar to the English Speaking population. Apart from the economic growth, a social movement was also on rise which led to the separatist movement in 1957 which promoted a 'French-Speaking monolingual Quebec'. The decade of the sixties saw huge economic growth fuelled by government spending to improve the living conditions of the local population. This further attracted immigrants to the area who tried to integrate with the population by learning either of the two languages: the English Language and the French Language. Most of the immigrants favored learning English Language because of its economic power. However, things changed as the French Language speaking people started to gain economic strength. The 1970s saw various language legislations coming into force giving French an upper hand over English; the legislation boost to French Language was possible because of the rise of the Parti Québécois (a separatist provincial political party and one of the main opposition parties) coupled with the rise of nationalist and leftist activists. The Parti Québécois was elevated to the power and formed the Government in the Province of Quebec for the first time in the year 1976. Soon it adopted Law 101 in 1977, which came to be known as "The Charter of the French Language". What happened next is history – the English language started losing its shine to French Language and French became the only official language of Quebec. As many parts of the world have such kinds of issues ready to be raised, it is only a matter of time that the local governments of linguistically diverse communities start taking measures to satisfy the will and requirements of the local population. Once that happens, the business organizations will have to respond fast so that its pillars are not shaken with the newfound challenges related to cultural and linguistic shift.

Catering to the Local Needs

In this section I would be describing how some business organizations successfully tapped the local markets by catering to their local language needs: the focus is on regional language newspapers in India. Their growth in terms of numbers and circulation is appealing enough to attract the attention of anyone interested in doing market research based on linguistic diversification. The first newspapers in India were in English Language and were owned by the foreigners, mainly the British. The Indian Language newspapers, restricted in circulation were sponsored and promoted by the European Missionaries to propagate religious communication and sermons (Vilanilam, 2005). However, the far reach of the Indian Language newspapers attracted the attention of the social and political reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy who started their own newspapers to communicate with the masses. The reach of newspapers was still highly restricted as the level of literacy was too low. Post independence, many commercial Indian Language newspapers started and made huge gains. The growth of Indian-Language newspapers, post independence, was also fuelled by the huge and unprecedented adver-



tisements flowing to them (Jeffrey, 1997). This way, business organizations tried to reach to the linguistically diverse market through the newspapers. The locals demanded that they be served in the language which they understood and the business organizations responded – ultimately both stood gained.

Using Technology to Tap Multilingual Markets

In the last section we saw how business organizations tried to tap the local markets by reaching them in local languages, however in the modern world where technology has penetrated deep into the markets, to manage the vast linguistic diversity, a multinational business organization can use the new technologies which are constantly being upgraded to interact with its linguistically diverse employee base, as well as communicate effectively with the external environment. The race to offer emails in local languages and the translation of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) is one such step in this regard. Not only have the email providers like Google offered emails in Hindi language they have constantly upgraded their services, like offering the customers to type the characters of the local languages directly from their mailbox, thus encouraging linguistic diversity (Techtree.com, 2009). Such steps are also beneficial for the business organizations as they help tap a relatively larger market and make inroads into markets which would have otherwise remained untapped. In the book 'Global diversity: Winning customers and engaging employees within world markets' Bidhan Chandra (2007) remarks that the language diversity can be act as a gold rush for companies who have businesses in documents processing, creation or translation business. He mentions Microsoft Office Bundle and Adobe Systems as examples of companies who have been trying to tap the larger share of the local market by offering their products and services in different languages. The Cell Phone companies have also successfully utilized the linguistic diversity by offering services in different languages. This shows how technology can be used both for promotion of multilingualism and for tapping the multilingual market: in the long haul, the advantage gained though through offering products and services in different languages would give a new dimension to market growth. Kenneth Keniston (2001), while discussing about the Software Market in India, rightly states: "The winners in the next ten or twenty years in the Indian domestic market will be the firms that provide access to computers, Internet and the Web in local languages".

The Functioning of the Global Giants

I now go back to the Internal Environment of the Business Organizations. In this section I would discuss how business equivalent of erstwhile empire like the British Empire 'the conglomerates' have fared in the last few decades. Taylor (1999) talks about how the empires need to break up when there is a call for nationalism. He calls the new era as "the era of nationalism, of the break-up of empires". What does this new era mean for the big businesses? We can see a similar break up of empires in the business organizations in the form of the break-up of the conglomerates like Cedant, Hyundai Group, and ITT Corporation: all of them splitting into separate entities. Similar was the fate of many electronic companies like Hewlett-Packard Co. and AT&T with most of them slowly and slowly moving towards disintegration: it seems the trend of breakups is there to remain with big institutions going to follow the suit sooner or later.

What is the reason behind such break-ups? Going back to Taylor (1999), one of the main reasons behind the breakup of empires was subgroups which could no longer be bound together; these subgroups started demanding their own states, hence the concept of nationalism took precedence over the formation of empires. We find one difference here, such a demand of breakup was not made by the different entities inside the business organizations, rather they responded to the sinking profits and unmanageability by breaking the conglomerates. This way we can say that the business organizations better understood the problems and had learnt their lessons from the happenings in the social sphere. However the business organizations might falter on the issue of 'empire building' if they indulge in the cases of linguistic unification through one-language policy. I hope this does not happen.

The Road Ahead

Has the industry responded to the new challenges raised by the increasing linguistic diversity of the workforce? To some extent it has, more so because of the market obligations – wherever it could feel that being multilingual would help tap a multilingual market, it has tried to use different languages to its benefit, but there are fewer examples where an organization has found itself 'willing' to incorporate

support for multilingualism in its charter. One reason for this would be the fact that most of the developed nations only recently become open to this idea. Let us take the case of the European Union (EU); with the formation of the EU, there have been wide scale support for creation of a block of nations which protects and promotes multilingualism.

The Industry has time and again tried to mould itself to suit the needs of the society. The era of globalization has brought with it many challenges, one of them being the challenge of linguistic barriers. It is high time the Industry starts paying attention towards this challenge in a more constructive way. The focus of the Industry, as of now, as mentioned earlier in this paper, is more or less to go for linguistic unification, which, as the paper argued, is not a healthy approach to deal with this challenge. The reason behind such thoughts of linguistic unification is generally the lack of democratic thinking: whenever people from different cultures try to fight for their right of maintaining their communal identity, the system responds in the typical way of resisting any changes. This is what one observes when an organization which has remained confined to one country tries to become a multinational organization and has to assimilate people from different communal backgrounds in its organizational hierarchies. The first reaction towards such assimilation is development of stereotypes which further lead to conflicts. The way to avoid such conflict is to root out these stereotypes by understanding why they develop and how they develop over time. Business organizations especially the MNCs are small representatives of the society and thus share the problems, challenges, and features of the society of which it is a part. This way, business organizations are bound to have linguistic diversity in its population, i.e. the employees are bound to belong to different linguistic backgrounds. The social arena has had, and is going through, a major change in its attitude towards assimilation of linguistic diversities in the last few decades, and the business organizations would be better placed if they respond to the changes as soon as possible.

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