Concluding remarks and perspectives

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Introduction

The intent of the contributions in this volume is to explore various language practices and strategies that multilingual individuals and groups put in use to transcend perceived language barriers for effective team communication and good collaboration.

By examining language practices, this volume has addressed the following questions:

1) Under what circumstances and in which context is language diversity considered a barrier and by whom?
2) How are practices of overcoming language barriers related to power issues?
3) What are the power effects of knowing and using certain languages to transcend language boundaries?
4) How are top-down policies and bottom-up strategies interrelated to deconstruct or reinforce language borders in professional communication?
5) How do monolingual or plurilingual solutions impact participants' language ideologies and the construction of their professional and that of group identities?
6) Which understanding of language do the various practices draw upon?

1. Power issues related to practices in spanning language boundaries

As the findings have suggested, the practices adopted to transcend language boundaries are power-relevant in various ways. On an individual level, boundary spanners (see Barner-Rasmussen) can be viewed as more powerful than they would be based on their organisational function. Whether they intend to or not,

boundary spanners are able to determine information flows. In a broader sense, the intervention of a boundary spanner with skills in specific native languages of the participants might have positive effects on the well-being of the participants. This could have implications on the atmosphere of the interaction and thus be relevant to the level of knowledge exchange and efficiency.

And when these boundary spanners occupy the position of a group leader, the way they use language plays an even more central role in group leading and enacting power, in developing and negotiating the linguistic norms, discursive standard, and interactional behaviours that characterise the working group (see Yanaprasart). By stretching their own boundaries and stepping out of their comfort zones, leaders play an active role in reducing anxiety, tension and pressure by providing the team with a more relaxed environment. When pushing team members to stretch the sub-boundaries inside the team itself, leaders empower all individuals to cross their zone of routine, creating participation possibilities and constructive cooperation.

In terms of language use, Gaibrois's study has suggested the importance of collective efforts. From the employees' perspective, boundary spanning activities are neither limited to individuals with multiple language skills, nor based primarily on individuals' language proficiency. According to the employees, overcoming language barriers involves both highly skilled and unskilled language speakers and necessitates collective endeavours. However, on this collective level, it must be emphasised that if language practices can either transcend or reinforce language boundaries, they can at the same time construct, reconstruct and even deconstruct language barriers.

While helping to include interlocutors of differing mother tongues, using English as a *lingua franca* or using local or regional languages may also have exclusionary effects on those who do not master the corresponding languages at a satisfactory level (see Miglbauer, Gaibrois). As an example of the ambivalent role of English as a *lingua franca*, which both facilitates participation and excludes others, the use of local languages also makes full participation impossible for those who do not speak them. This raises the question of which employees are more powerful in multilingual business settings: those who speak English ONLY or those who speak English AND local languages (see Miglbauer and Yanaprasart).

2. The role of identity in practices to cross language borders

Language practices to cross language borders are also related to questions of identity construction. The negotiation processes around language use in multilingual contexts are closely related to questions of individual and group identity. Using the local language vs. using English as a *lingua franca* has very different implications on the level of identity construction. Miglbauer's study characterises situational identity constructions based on being the speaker of

the local language – a form of differentiation "against" the "English invasion" – or being the speaker of the common corporate language, viewed as contributing to the construction of a common corporate identity (using English as a unifying practice). At this point, it bears emphasizing that in a setting in which all participants interact in the *lingua franca*, in this case English, boundary spanners are not as necessary as in conversations where this is not the case, at least when it comes to boundary spanning based on language skills.

3. Employee practices and ideologies for transcending language boundaries

English as a *lingua franca* is by its nature a form of hybrid speech (see Lüdi). Other forms of hybrid speech have been observed, including options such as employing several languages at the same time "plurilingual *lingue franche*" (see Lüdi; Yanaprasart), "broken" languages (see Gaibrois), "hybrid constructions" (see Ehrhart), "language mixing" (see Gaibrois; Yanaprasart), "Charabia-Espéranto, Chuderwälsch-Esperanto," "le parler bilingue" (see Lüdi; Yanaprasart). This plurilingual speech represents not only collective and collaborative practices in the multilingual workplace. It could also be interpreted as a sort of "company speech" or "group speech" (see Miglbauer), which might facilitate the construction of a common corporate identity and, in the long run, contribute to creating a shared identity allowing transcendence of earlier subgroup boundaries (see Barner-Rasmussen). As opposed to the unilingual ideology and native-speaker norms, using a *lingua franca* or *lingue franche* by making "mistakes," having an accent or being imperfect has been described sympathetically as a form of "authenticity" (see Melo-Pfeifer), speaking not "perfectly" (see Yanaprasart) or without following the usual rules of grammatical "correctness" (see Gaibrois).

4. The relevance of context for overcoming barriers

These forms of communicative and linguistic strategies must not be interpreted as standardised "solutions," suitable for every interaction in every type of company. On the contrary, depending on the situational, organisational and geographical context, the same strategies might play different roles, have different impacts and might be perceived, interpreted and judged differently. Language mixing would probably look very different if the workplace were located in a monolingual region. Although multilingual employees can add value to organisations in terms of resources, in the monolingual context, companies look for and positively evaluate (top-down view) highly skilled corporate language speaking individuals.

As Gaibrois's contribution has shown, practices to transcend language barriers are closely related to language ideologies. Employees' descriptions of their practices to cross borders, overcome barriers or transcend boundaries are

based on different perceptions of language use. When it comes to assessing and evaluating a multilingual person on his or her language skills with native-speaker norms, this can be interpreted as viewing languages as separate entities. In this case, the first priority is to protect and fight so as to keep the norms respected. By contrast, collective and collaborative boundary spanning might occur when speakers acknowledge that the boundaries between languages become blurred in real situations. It is all about "all-together-languaging-practices" that can allow people to bridge gaps, dialogue, collaborate and establish relations (see Yanaprasart).

5. Building a bridge across disciplines

All in all, analysing practices for overcoming language barriers in a comparative perspective has proved to be very fruitful both on the theoretical and methodological levels. The comparison of empirical studies conducted in different countries and regions has shown the diversity of the global, national and regional contexts when it comes to questioning concrete practices in multilingual settings, comparing language ideologies and their relevance on identity constructions. The interdisciplinary exchange between specialists in Linguistics, Management scholars and Education experts has clearly shown that, although research questions and foci might be different, a quest unites research from these fields to understand practices of language use in linguistically diverse workplaces and their effects on cooperation. There clearly is room for a promising cross-pollination as well on the theoretical level (e.g., around the definition of the notion(s) of languages, language use and language choice) as on the methodological level (e.g., forms of data collection, methods, analysis and interpretation frames). It is our hope that this volume represents a starting point for fruitful dialogue.