

Language and work in transnational settings: Policies and practices

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Today's topic

- The impact of transnational mobility on language in the workplace
 - Linguistic and cultural diversity in 'blue-collar' workplaces
 - Language and work in (language) policies vs. in practice
 - Ideologies about language, migration and integration

Language use in globalising workplaces

- The LINGCORP project: An Ethnography of Language Encounters: Language and Interaction in the Globalised Corporation
- Funded by The Danish Council for Independent Research, Humanities 2012-2016

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Transience and norm development

- The [TMC](#) project: Transient Multilingual Communities and the Formation of Social and Linguistic Norms
- Funded by The Danish Council for Independent Research, Humanities 2016-2019

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Warehouse workers and truck drivers

(Lønsmann and Kraft 2018)

Multilingualism in the workplace

- Previous studies focus on
 - Service and knowledge economies (Boussebaa et al. 2014; Duchêne 2009; Heller 2003)
 - Management perspective (Angouri and Miglbauer 2014, Steyaert et al. 2011, Tange and Luring 2009)
 - White-collar workers (Kingsley 2013, Millar et al. 2013, Welch et al. (2005)
 - English as a corporate language (Fredriksson et al. 2006, Lønsmann 2017, Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999, Neeley 2013, Nickerson 2005)
- Integration of 'blue-collar' immigrants (Goldstein 1997, Holmes 2000, Nelson 2014)

Focus on language 'on the floor'

- Less need/opportunity for extended dialogue? (Pillar and Lising 2014)
 - Fewer/other language competence?
 - Less dependence on English as a lingua franca?
-
- What is communicative competence here?

Policy and practice

- Increased internationalisation -> increased linguistic diversity -> the introduction of (monolingual) language policies
- Monolingual policies vs. multilingual practices

The hegemonic status of English in international communication

- English has become the language of globalism:

“by general consent, speakers of other languages choose English in a large number of situations, and consider this choice natural with respect to the existing linguistic world order” (Haberland 2009: 25).

- English positioned as a language of ‘absolute instrumentality’ in international workplaces (Nekvapil and Sherman 2013)

Ethnographic case study

- 13 ethnographic interviews
 - Management and language policy makers
 - Warehouse workers
- 12 days of observation
- Field notes
- Photos
- Written material

Company strategy and language policy

- VET distributes veterinary supplies to >100 countries
- From family-owned and –led local Danish company to international professionally-run company
- Company strategy of international growth and expansion
- A shift to English as the corporate language

1 STE: today we still say that we are an an export (.) company
2 I mean a Danish company with export that is what we call ourselves
3 to[day]
4 INT: [yes]
5 STE: but we would like to be an international company and it requires
6 and that requires that change [to English] actually before we
7 become that

The VET warehouse

- Warehouse employees are Danish
- Truck drivers are Danish, German, Dutch, Romanian, Bulgarian, Italian etc.

“I don’t use that”

“I don’t use that, I look at it a little and
and, order number, external product number,
and quantity. You can get by with that.”

(Marie, warehouse worker)

”What do we speak then?”

”At first when I’m a bit cheeky, I ask them if they speak Danish, but they rarely do, you know ha ha ha. And then I ask them if they speak English, and they say no. And then I ask them if they speak German, and they say no. And then I open my arms wide: So what do we speak then?”

(Tina, warehouse worker)

”We manage”

01 Tina: sometimes a truck driver comes in
02 ...
03 and they know neither English nor
04 German or anything at all
05 so then it becomes kind of uh
06 😊sign language a little😊
07 INT: yes okay
08 Tina: so we manage

Excerpt from field notes

Tina uses Danish to the Bulgarian truck driver, e.g. "Here you go", when she hands him back the paperwork. A little while later she says over my shoulder [in Danish]: "It is ready for you". When I turn around, she is talking to the Bulgarian driver again. When he leaves, he says: "Bye bye", and Tina replies: "Bye bye". She says that he comes here often. He is one of the regulars, driving between Denmark and Sweden.

Routine interactions

- Relying on shared professional knowledge
- No need for extended dialogue
- Breakdown occurs in unexpected situations
 - Delays
 - Missing paperwork

When the routine is broken

- Use of language brokers
 - Asking one driver to pass message to another
 - Call the VET office/the forwarding agent/have the office call the forwarding agent
- Google Translate
- Drawing pictures

Multimodal communication

- Oral communication
 - Danish
 - English
 - German
- Embodied communication
 - Gestures
 - Pointing
- Written communication
 - Read text message on driver's phone
 - Look at order number on consignment note or tablet
 - Use Google Translate

Policy vs. practice

Language policy:

- Focus on written English
- Warehouse workers seen as lacking language competences
- English classes as a benefit for employees

Language practices:

- Multilingual and multimodal practices
- Warehouse workers see themselves as having the required communicative competences
- Interesting, but irrelevant
- Frustration and fear of exposing weaknesses

Tensions and inequalities

- Language policies favour management and administrative workers
 - "the construction of linguistic competence within the workplace mirrors the repertoires and practices of managers and high-status employees, and therefore their competences are valued more highly than those of their subordinates" (Lønsmann and Kraft 2018: 420-421)
- Stereotypes about 'blue-collar' workers as uneducated
- Only high proficiency in hegemonic languages is recognised
 - 'Non-lingual' Eastern European truck drivers "can't communicate"
- Ideologies about 'language' and 'communication' and how they match multilingual and multimodal practices

The unemployable refugees

Fieldwork and data

The 'Danish at Work' programme

- Classes in Danish language and Danish workplace culture
- Language internships

Data:

- Participant observation
- Audio and video recordings of classroom interaction
- Interviews with teachers, students, case workers
- Facebook data, photos and documents

Discourses and logics surrounding migration, language and integration

- **The employability discourse** (Chertkovskaya et al. 2013; Del Percio 2018; Flubacher et al. 2017)
- **The ‘skills’ discourse** (Allan 2016)
 - Overcoming markedness through the accumulation of soft skills
 - Reinforces difference between migrants and native-born
- **The investment logic** (Del Percio and Van Hoof 2017)

The role of language in integration

- The influence of the 'one language, one nation' ideology (Flubacher, Coray, and Duchêne 2016)
- Immigration policies construct different categories of migrants with different expectations for language learning (Yeung 2016)
- Language *in itself* is not enough
 - Performing an appropriate self (Allan 2016, Piller 2016)
 - Access to material resources (Del Percio and Van Hoof 2017)

Mismatch between future dreams and current position

1 SUZAN: og jeg har lyst læse
2 VUC uh fordi
3 jeg har lyst arbejde som
4 tolk eller lære tegne eller
5 arbejde på computer eller
6 skrive i papir
7 DORTE: ja
8 SUZAN: uh ikke arbejde i hånden
9 DORTE: nej og du hvor
10 SUZAN: ikke bruge hånden meget
11 DORTE: nej
12 SUZAN: ja
13 DORTE: men nu er du i praktik i et
14 køkken
15 SUZAN: i køkken ja
16 DORTE: ja så hvad laver du i
17 praktik
18 SUZAN: øh laver salat og mad og
19 rydder op

1 *SUZAN: and I want to study*
2 *secondary school uh*
3 *because I want to work as*
4 *an interpreter or learn*
5 *how to draw or work on*
6 *computer or write on paper*
7 *DORTE: yes*
8 *SUZAN: uh not work by hand*
9 *DORTE: no and you where*
10 *SUZAN: not use the hand a lot*
11 *DORTE: no*
12 *SUZAN: yes*
13 *DORTE: but now you're interning*
14 *in a kitchen*
15 *SUZAN: in kitchen yes*
16 *DORTE: yes so what do you do in*
17 *the internship*
18 *SUZAN: uh make salad and food and*
19 *tidy up*

From integration citizens to contributing citizens

“The purpose of the education of Danish as a second language (Danish Education) is to help adult immigrants ... in obtaining the necessary Danish language skills and knowledge of culture and society in Denmark, so they can participate and become contributing citizens on an equal footing with the other citizens in society.”

(Danish Ministry of Immigration, Integration and Housing 2015, my translation)

Current unemployable and in need of fixing

“I har brug for to ting. I har brug for sproget, og det er meget vigtigt, at I prøver at tale, når I er i praktik. Og den anden ting er, at kende det danske arbejdsmarked. Mange gange er der meget stor forskel på, hvad en chef eller kollega forventer af jer i jeres hjemland og hvad de forventer i Danmark.”

“You need two things. You need the language, and that is very important that you try to speak when you are in the internship. And the second thing is to know the Danish labour market. Often there is a lot of difference between what a boss or colleague expects of you in your homeland and what they expect in Denmark.”

Ready for the labour market?

"Suzan skriver, at hun kan lave mad og passe børn, fylde varer på hylder. En af de andre fortæller om sin uddannelse og erfaring som tøjdesigner, Suzan fortæller at hun gerne vil tegne. Klassekammeraten spørger om hun har en uddannelse i at tegne og male, og Suzan siger, at hun kun har gymnasiet fra Syrien."

"Suzan writes that she can cook and take care of children, stock shelves. One of the other students talks about her degree and her experience as a fashion designer. Suzan says that she would like to draw. Her classmate asks her if she has a relevant education, and Suzan says that she only has secondary school from Syria."

"Jeg hedder Marwa. Jeg er fra Syrien. Øh jeg er 52 år gammel. Jeg arbejdede som læge. Øh jeg færdig universitet 1993. Efter et år jeg starte arbejde øh som læge i Syrien."

"My name is Marwa. I'm from Syria. Uh I am 52 years old. I worked as doctor. Uh I finish university 1993. After one year I started work uh as a doctor in Syria."

Why only one type of jobs?

Why only one type of jobs?

"Cleaning, restaurant, nursing home, daycare, waiter ... I sometimes I think big Denmark only one kind of work? Not doctor, not engineer, not, not, not. Why?"

Refugees are human beings too

199 MARWA: (0.6) flygtning (1.6) flygtning
200 (0.6) refugees (1.6) refugees
201 DORTE: (0.7) ja
202 (0.7) yes
203 MARWA: (1.0) er det samme (0.6) hun flygtning arbejder
i der (0.2) nede
204 (1.0) is the same (0.6) she refugee works
down (0.2) there
205 DORTE: (0.3) ja
206 (0.3) yes
207 MARWA: (1.2) hvor d d det også mennesker
208 (1.0) [flygtning også] mennesker
209 (1.2) where they are also human beings
210 (1.0) refugees are also human beings
211 DORTE: [det er også mennesker] ja
212 they are also human beings yes

Refugee work is menial work

- A hidden curriculum (Blasco 2012): Socialisation into low-status jobs
 - Kitchen work, stacking shelves, cleaning
- Only Danish-speaking

Loss of work identity and symbolic capital

- From experienced judge or efficient housewife to unskilled, unemployable worker
- Refugee resistance to the internships
- Decapitalisation: “acts of subtracting capital and of discouraging capital formation” (Martín Rojo 2013: 138)
 - a lack of valuation of previous schooling, languages and knowledge
 - orientation toward unskilled positions in the labour market

The local language as the key to the labour market

- Employability discourse framing labour market access as an individual responsibility
 - Individualisation of structural problem of labour market discrimination
 - Positioning migrants as deficient
- Danish as a proxy for barriers to the labour market
 - Discrimination, lack of work experience, lack of (formal) education, IT literacy, health and family issues, trauma

Danish as the magic pill

- Empowering or reproducing inequalities?
- Positioned as lacking and directed towards low-status jobs -> marginalisation
- Beneficial for resourceful migrants, but overlooking the many barriers faced by less resourceful migrants



Conclusion

Policies and ideologies

- Policies influenced by discourses and ideologies
- Language and work
 - Monolingual ideologies (One nation, one language)
 - English as the language of globalism
 - The local language as the key to labour market access (and integration)
- Globalisation and employability
 - Internationalisation and growth
 - Employability and skills discourses

Monolingual policies vs. multilingual practices

- Stereotypes and positions in policies do not match practice
- Devisibilisation of certain linguistic resources
 - The multilingual and multimodal communicative competence of warehouse workers (Lønsmann and Kraft 2018)
 - And truck drivers (Dijkstra 2017)
 - Refugees' existing language competences
 - Problematisation of certain kinds of multilingualism at work
 - Don't refugees have English?
 - Don't refugees need English? (Dahl, Krulatz and Torgerson 2018)

Inclusion vs. exclusion

- Exposing weaknesses in unnecessary English classes
- Glossing over real barriers to labour market access
- ‘Exclusive inclusion’: the social exclusion of migrants from the labour market (Roberman 2015)
 - Lack of recognition and belonging





**THANK
YOU FOR
LISTENING
ANY
QUESTIONS?**

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