

The Danish team aimed to investigate everyday knowledge about multilingualism in the corporate sector in Denmark. Research questions included

- how do people understand the notion of multilingualism?
- what do people think about individual languages and their use and how they are learnt?
- how does such everyday knowledge relate to company language strategies and practices?

To answer these questions, the team carried out an on-line questionnaire survey and interviewed 37 managers and employees from a total of 13 companies. Interviews were analysed using Atlas.ti software (designed for qualitative data analysis) with the purpose of devising a taxonomy of the themes that appear in the discourses of the interviewees. These themes provide an insight into how people construct their knowledge about multilingual issues.

Analyses revealed that the notion of multilingualism is discussed in relation to number of languages, the way languages are acquired, and competence levels in the languages. For many informants, multilingualism means more than one language, which allows for bilingualism in, for example, Danish and English, and competence is understood in terms of the native speaker, that is all skills in all languages must be perfect. For some, one can only be multilingual if the languages have been acquired as a child because parents come from different language backgrounds or the family has emigrated.

In both the questionnaire and the interviews, the foreign languages most frequently mentioned were English followed by German, French, Spanish and Chinese (the Nordic languages are not included here). Four themes can be identified when people talk about languages: aesthetics (e.g. beautiful/ugly), complexity (e.g. easy/difficult), status

(e.g. important/not important) and utility (e.g. local/global usability). English is primarily discussed in terms of its undisputed high utility and status; complexity and aesthetics are relatively rarely referred to. Like English, Spanish and Chinese are also viewed positively in terms of utility and status, although these are not comparable to those of English. French, like Spanish, is characterized in relation to aesthetics (as a beautiful language), but its utility is seen as limited. German tends to be given a mixed categorization with regard to its utility and status, but there is general agreement that it is a somewhat difficult and unattractive language.

Language learning is discussed in terms of the characteristics of the learner and the characteristics of the learning process. What is striking in relation to the learner is the notion that people either have or do not have the ability or talent to learn languages, a perception which could influence negatively any promotion of foreign language skills as a general competence for all. Despite this binary categorisation, however, knowledge of English is viewed as an essential ability and one that people are expected to possess.

As for the learning process itself, informal learning is often seen as more efficient than formal and experiences from school are not always positive. Whatever way a language is learned, the ideal target is clearly the native speaker. In discussions about language as used in practice, a pragmatic approach is apparent where the importance of being understood is an overriding factor.

The company language strategies considered were the following: use of a corporate language, language requirements and assessment at recruitment, in-service language training and use of native speakers. The corporate language concept is primarily understood by employees in terms of language exclusiveness: a corporate language permits the use of one language only, i.e. English. Practice, however, is more pragmatic, where various languages are used. Companies do not have systematic strategies in relation to language requirements or assessment at recruitment or in relation to in-service language training. English skills are generally a requirement, but there is no formalized procedure for checking competence. This practice seems to be explained in part by a perception that Danes are good at English. In-service language training typically relies on employees' being proactive and requesting language training themselves. In some cases, companies have, or have had, a semi-strategic approach in relation to the implementation of English as a corporate language, where employees are offered courses in English. Skills in languages other than English are seen as an organisational resource and it is common that native-speaking employees and/or agents are used to deal with language matters.

The findings have relevance for both corporate and national educational policy. On a corporate level, the findings about the lack of a strategic and transparent approach to

language management suggest that certain issues would benefit from greater explicitness:

- The corporate language concept and what that involves, such as its situations of use and relations with other languages, should be made clear to all employees.
- Since English is a general requirement when recruiting, the needs of efficiency in work practices and fairness for employees (issues raised in relation to English by interviewees themselves) might be better served by not merely assuming adequate English skills, but by introducing job-sensitive language competence indicators that exploit the partial competences evidenced in the communicative practice reported by the interviewees. This could be considered for all languages.
- Given that pragmatic practices are in fact perceived as a resource among individual employees, it may be that the absolute ideal of the native speaker is ready to be taken up for discussion, at least in relation to certain language tasks.
- Reasons of efficiency and fairness similarly encourage that the provision of in-service language training be given greater visibility, perhaps by associating language training with general career development, and be better targeted, matching individual need with appropriate levels of competence.
- Alternatives to traditional formal teaching might also be investigated.

At a national level, the findings relating to specific languages could inform the strategy for foreign language teaching in Denmark that is currently being developed.

- Languages which are currently not taught at the Danish primary level of education, i.e. Spanish and Chinese, are viewed positively by interviewees so they might be included in the school curriculum.
  - When talking about their school experiences, interviewees commented on the lack of relevance of language teaching and the exaggerated focus on correct grammar. This would suggest that ways of teaching foreign languages might need more careful consideration

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