

## Research Article

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# Requests for Help in a Multilingual Professional Environment Testimonies and Actantial Models

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**Abstract:** Professional multilingual environments using English as a lingua franca are prone to imbalances in communication, linguistic insecurity and rising tension. Non-native English speakers develop avoidance strategies in order to lessen their apprehension. To overcome these imbalances, this research aims to understand the relationships formed around languages focusing on the dynamics of integration and the requests for help. Guided by the actantial models of Greimas (1966), this qualitative study employs semiolinguistics and discourse analysis, including 19 narrative interviews with employees of Airbus and UNESCO in Hamburg, Germany in 2013. This methodology draws on actors connected through relationships of power and/or collaboration. The actantial models applied seek linguistic input through designational paradigms, shifters and modal occurrences. The actantial models illustrate how a good language competence provides a better understanding of one's direct as well as passive environment. The learning process is shown to be a conduit to integration. The actantial model and discourse analysis shed light on the complex situation of multilingual communication settings by highlighting the influence of individuals' linguistic skills. As a matter of fact, depending on the role of each individual in a given situation, lending a helping hand sometimes equates to upsetting the balance.

**Keywords:** Discourse, Workplace, Multilingualism, Actantial model

## 1 Introduction

Imposing English as the lingua franca within a company that operates various sites in different countries gives rise to an imbalance in communication, linguistic insecurity and, as a result, rising tension (Beyene *et al.* 2009). Three avoidance strategies used by non-native English speakers to reduce their apprehension have been identified: “1) withdrawal from discourse; 2) exclusion of native English-speaking teammates from communication events; and, 3) code-switching or alternating between their native language and English” (Beyene *et al.* 2009, p. 14).

Be that as it may, English speakers demonstrate great tolerance when it comes to the use of their language. A. Firth (1996) conceptualised the “let it pass” principle. This is a strategy employed by the hearer who chooses not to express his incomprehension in the hope of piecing together a sense during the exchange. A. Firth (1996) also explains that English speakers have a tendency to make the interlocutor's talk appear “normal” when it is not. The hearer thus helps the interlocutor construct his discourse without drawing attention to the fact that it is not correctly formulated. Grammatical mistakes are often tolerated as long as the meaning is understood. Relationships in the workplace are relationships of power, relationships of identity and matters of appearance.

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The language deficiency can be a culture shock factor: “comment se faire comprendre sans ‘perdre la face’ quand on est un adulte et qu’on possède le vocabulaire d’un enfant de trois ans ?” [how to make oneself understood without ‘losing face’ when one is an adult and yet possesses the vocabulary of a three year old?] (Narcy-Combes 2006, p. 29). This deficiency is categorised as a source of intercultural error by M.-F. Narcy-Combes and leads to “des erreurs qui sont d’ordre sociolinguistique et socioculturel” [errors that are sociolinguistic and sociocultural in nature] (Narcy-Combes 2006, p. 31).

Early studies in international companies (Marschan *et al.* 1997; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch 1999) began with observations of colleagues approaching other colleagues of the same mother tongue to ask for help rather than going to a manager in charge. Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari and Santti (2005) examined the complex power implications of language policy decisions for individuals at management level following a merger between a Finnish and a Swedish bank. Their study shows that tensions between languages can be caused by international confrontation and dominant languages. Language skills become empowering or disempowering resources. In our case study, German is the dominant local language, but the high diversity of employees at the two Hamburg-based organisations (80 nationalities for Airbus and 21 for UNESCO) tends to blur the local context.

At employee level, unequal language policies can trigger negative emotional responses (Beyene *et al.* 2009, p. 27) or positive responses in people who want to exercise power over others. The phenomenon of exclusion can be reversed when actors change perspective (“perspective-taking” (Beyene *et al.* 2009, p. 24)). Employees working in international environments are encouraged to develop empathy (Barsade 2002; Davis 1983), making it less stressful for individuals to speak up in a foreign language. Tenzer & Pudelko (2017) explored the influence of language differences on power dynamics in multinational teams, in this case at automotive organisations headquartered in Germany. Their analysis of 90 interviews revealed inhibitions in those with poor language skills, while team members with high proficiency in relevant languages did not make full use of this advantage because it triggered “envy and negative emotional reactions among their less proficient team colleagues” (2017, p. 34). Inhibition impairs performance, but diversity can lead to creativity and can improve performance if team leaders are able to manage the issue of communication effectively (Lauring & Klitmøller 2014). The 676 responses of individuals employed in private multinational companies initially revealed that performance is strongly linked to how communication in the common language is managed. Performance and competence are therefore two concepts which should be treated separately (Firth 2009, p. 166) in order to improve understanding of how a lingua franca works.

Our field of research lies at the intersection of linguistics, intercultural communication and sociology of work. Our corpus consists of 19 interviews conducted with Airbus and UNESCO employees in Hamburg, Germany.<sup>1</sup> These two organisations have English as a lingua franca but they also use other languages, as we will see. Of the 19 interviews, 14 showed markers of integration or help. The interviews<sup>2</sup> were designed to provide us with statements regarding individual language practices as perceived by staff in the multinational organisations. We chose to use a semi-directive interview technique, which complements the theoretical contributions from explicitation interviews (Vermersch, 2006), comprehensive interviews (Kaufmann, 2008) and what are known as semi-directed interviews (Becker, 2002; Flick, 1995).

The interview questionnaire is divided in two main sections, the first of which focuses on our core aims:

- encouraging the interviewees to think about their daily language practices and identify elements that they may not previously have been aware of
- encouraging the interviewees to think about both barriers and positive factors that can result from a multilingual environment

<sup>1</sup> The interviews have been transcribed in their entirety in the original language. The transcriptions have been carried out in accordance with the ICOR convention guidelines. The ICOR (Interactions & CORpus) convention was established by the ICAR (Interaction, Corpus, Apprentissages et Représentations) group of the CNRS/Université Lumière Lyon2. The group’s principals include L. Mondada, V. Traverso and C. Plantin, cf. CORINTE (CORpus d’INTeraction) website: <http://icar.univ-lyon2.fr/projets/corinte/> (accessed on 25/08/16). The transcriptions have consequently been integrated into the text using Courier font, size 10. As prescribed by the ICOR convention, the transcriptions are displayed in lower case, except for the German transcriptions, where we chose to allow upper case for nouns to avoid any discourse ambiguity.

<sup>2</sup> Four in English, seven in French, two in German and one in Spanish.

- identifying whether languages play a role in integration
- identifying whether language skills are a key factor for work or whether they are a secondary factor for all staff (with English as the dominant language)
- encouraging the interviewees to mention anecdotes relating to intercultural communication and comparing them to see whether the same issues frequently come up.

In addition to these core aims, we also set ourselves four more general objectives in relation to our subject:

- finding out about the language skills of the person interviewed and using this information to understand how the person uses languages on a daily basis
- identifying whether languages are valued in the company and if staff with a good command of languages have additional opportunities
- discussing the advantages and disadvantages of a monolingual or multilingual system
- looking in more detail at a specific meeting, if possible a recent meeting, to see whether the use of English was sufficient. If not, why was this?

Bearing in mind that the individuals interviewed for our study had in some cases filled out a previous questionnaire or had been prepared for the subject matter through prior informal conversations, a typical interview averaging 30 minutes was able to meet our expectations. Where possible, we chose to conduct the interviews in the mother tongue of our successive interlocutors: German, Spanish, French and English. For this purpose, we prepared our questionnaire in four languages.

Discourse analysis was used in this case to conduct an analysis of the construction of representations of language practices in the workplace from a selection of statements made by the interviewees.

The head offices of the two organisations are located in France with further sites in England, Spain and Germany. All the employees referred to in this article work at the Hamburg site in Germany. It is easier to move within the linguistic group one belongs to by speaking to those members only. English being a Germanic language, the hypothesis can be made that Germans have an advantage over their Spanish and French-speaking co-workers. The largest port in Germany, Hamburg, hosts about 100 shipping companies, a large railway station, refineries, and more than 3,000 companies engaged in international trade. Although the choice of the aeronautical company and the international institution does not have a comparative purpose between the two institutions selected, it allowed us to focus our attention on two institutions; one reflecting the commercial aspect and the other reflecting the diplomatic aspect of the city, and thus to account for what multilingualism can be in places where the variety of nationalities involved and the multiplicity of international contacts can influence the different (formal and informal) communicative situations. On the one hand, Airbus produces airplanes, and on the other hand, UNESCO produces knowledge for education.

UNESCO is a specialised agency of the United Nations (UN). The UNESCO Institute of Hamburg, UIL, is one of UNESCO's six centers of education. UIL's mission is to develop programmes to promote lifelong learning in all regions of the world. Its activities are grouped around four main themes: lifelong learning, literacy, adult learning and Africa.

Most aeronautical manufacturers are multinational companies. It is not unusual for the latter to have factories on very remote sites. The aeronautical company is unique in the fact that it is a European company born of the merger of the major French, British, German and Spanish aerospace companies. Each of the partners manufactures a part of the aircraft, which needs to be transported to a final assembly site, to form the complete aircraft.

In this article, our research focuses on the dynamics of integration and request for help, which come into play in relation to individual language abilities. The issue is to understand what kinds of relationships form around languages, and whether multilingual employees or native English speakers have an upper hand over their colleagues.

After presenting our qualitative analysis entries involving semiolinguistics and discourse analysis, we will discuss the results in the form of actantial models that we have designated as follows: integration and request for support.

**Table 1.** Interviews Airbus, Unesco of the interview

	N°	Language of the interview	Lasted	Name of the person and nationality	Mother tongue	L2 and L3	Position
Airbus	2	English	25:02	Paulina (Mexican) et Jana (Russian)	Spanish Russian	English (C1/C2) and German (B1) English (C1/C2) and German (B1)	Engineers
	3	English	16:25	Serkan (Turkish) et Rosa (Russian)	Turkish Russian	English (C1/C2) and German (B2) English (C1) and German (A2)	Engineers
	8	French	40:31	Samantha (German)	German	English (C1) and French (C1)	Head of Divisions
	9	French	29:15	Henning (Franco-German)	French and German	English (C1/C2) and Spanish (A2)	Manager
	10	French	18:44	Elise (French)	French	English (C1) and German (B1)	Manager
	12	English	22:45	Arthur (English)	English	French (A1) and German (A1)	Manager
	14	German	14:00	Özgül (Turco-German)	Turkish and German	English (C1/C2) and French (A2)	Senior manager
		French	20:32	Aude (French)	French	English (B2) and German (B2)	Manager
	15	Spanish	35:50	Valerio (Spanish)	Spanish	English (C1) and German (A2)	Senior Manager
	17	German	25:00	Anton (German)	German	English (C1/C2) and French (A2)	Senior Manager
UNESCO	1	French	26:05	Manji (Indian)	Hindi and English	German (B2) and French (B1)	Senior programme specialist
	6	French	56:00	André (Malian)	French and Bambara	English (C2) and German (C1)	UIL director
	13	French	11:38	Wolfgang (German)	German	English (C1) and French (C1)	Senior programme specialist
	18	French	35:07	Paul (Swedish)	Swedish	English (C1/C2), French (B2) and German (B1)	Senior programme specialist

## 2 Professional relationships can be modelled

According to J. M. Adam (1997), the “*récit*” [narrative] is made up of a series of temporal actions and is completed by either success or failure as the result of an employment. Given that they involve the narration of a sequence of elements, the interviews are similar in structure to narratives. They constitute declarative utterances. These are *a posteriori* reconstitutions of workplace incidents deemed to have been sufficiently significant to be told. Our interviews reveal actions situated in time and in space with specific interlocutors. These are testimonies of the narratives of past workplace facts. The actantial model (Greimas 1966), originally developed for stories, encompasses all the roles (the actants) and relationships, which serve to tell a narrative through actions. Consequently, this article proposes to apply these models to the professional world and more specifically, to workplace discourse. Such models bring into play several

actors connected through relationships of power and/or collaboration. Here we work on the assumption of a functional borrowing of the semiolinguistics of A.J. Greimas when it comes to his actantial model, since this conceptual tool allows for a structured analysis of any narrative (whether or not it is a story). The inputting of the actantial models is legitimate from the narrative aspect of the interview, from the prescriptive aspect of the work and the organisations, as well as from the collaborative aspect.

## 2.1 The actants of a narrative

The narrative of the employees is punctuated by the connector “mais” [“but”], which juxtaposes elements of the narrative (Lejot 2016). It is detailed and elaborate, involving specific circumstances. The employees recount their everyday working life, substantiated by the framework of temporal and spatial markers. These are thus detailed narratives. Moreover, the pragmatic dimension of the work situations, involving both missions to be fulfilled and tasks to be carried out, allows the actantial model to be mobilised. Beyond relating facts, the interviews reveal relationships of power and command. The relationships created in the workplace allow all employees to form an entity and claim all the professional facets that make up their profile, as we will endeavour to illustrate in our analysis. In a detailed modalisation, A.J. Greimas (1966) distinguishes three actantial categories: the subject-object relationship; the receiver-sender relationship and the opponent-helper relationship. The model of A. J. Greimas (1966) is depicted as follows:

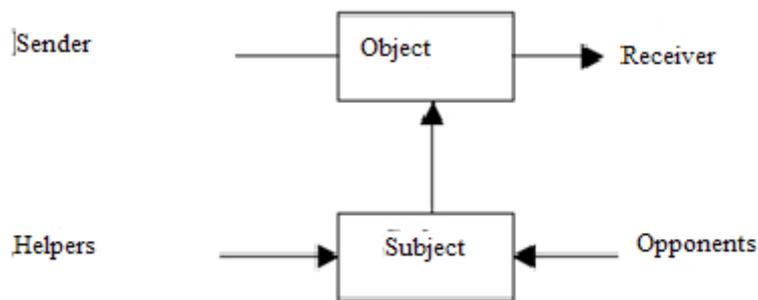


Figure 1. Actantial model of A. J. Greimas (1966)

The subject is the hero of the quest. It is he who must endeavour to surmount the obstacles and reach an objective, i.e. the object, determined by the sender. The subject can be the narrator himself or a third party.

The object is “that which or he who” is coveted: this is the object of the quest. There is thus a relationship of desire between the subject and the object, by way of a quest or an initiatory path. The object can be a tangible item, but it can also take on an abstract form, such as power. The object can thus be material, but in a workplace context, we prefer the concept according to which it can also be abstract. The motivation behind a quest can indeed be recognition or a connection established with another person.

The sender is “that which or he who” suffers a wrongdoing or deprivation and appoints someone to rectify this. The sender is at the origin of the quest and can be an entity, a person, a feeling even. The sender has no direct contact with the receiver. Only the subject is the master of his destiny and he has the opportunity of attracting positive attention from his superiors by multiplying his successes. The sender does not enter into contact with the subject for a single quest but can contemplate becoming closer to the subject following the accomplishment of a whole series of fruitful actions, which is why we have not placed the sender in direct connection with the subject in our model diagram.

The receiver is he who benefits from the mission. This role can materialise in an object being surrendered to a person, i.e. the receiver. It can also be a symbolic action for a group of people or, if the object is recognition, the receiver can also be the actual subject.

Lastly, the opponent provides the obstacle to the subject's quest while the helper supports it. Helpers can be individuals who, –voluntarily or not, come to the assistance of the subject. They can also come in the form of elements, such as good weather, that favour the advancement towards the object. The opponents can take on the same aspects as the helpers, but instead their objective is to hinder the advancement. The actantial model of Greimas underlines that relationships of cooperation create relationships of power, which are underpinned by obstacles and relationships of mutual assistance to achieve an objective. The actantial model identifies relationships of power that establish themselves among individuals. These relationships can be made up of opponents and helpers, which restrict the conditions governing the action's development. In the cases that interest us, a helper (the multilingual abilities of colleagues) assists the subject to facilitate communication. An opponent could for instance be the lack of language ability of a monolingual English-speaking colleague who forces a German-speaking group to speak the lingua franca, despite it not necessarily being mastered by the entire group.

Greimas' actantial model illustrates forces of attraction by defining the roles of "receiver", "helper", "opponent", etc., but we decided to use an additional model to help us identify questions that would clarify these roles. We selected a model devised by drama teachers from the Nancy-Metz education authority (2012). This model illustrates a correspondence between two individuals. The expressions of "that which initiates", "que cherche-t-il?" [what does he seek] or even "dans quel but?" [for what purpose] can be transposed to a narrative conveyed by a conversation. We note that when an element is not influential in a determined action, the word "nothing" is used. We will base ourselves on this terminology to complete our models, if applicable.

## 2.2 The actantial model as a result of interview discourses

As a result of our observations and the A. J. Greimas model, we have drawn up the structure below, adapted to the institutions that interest us. It allows the places occupied by the elements of the actantial model to be tangibly highlighted within a system that is restricted in reality:

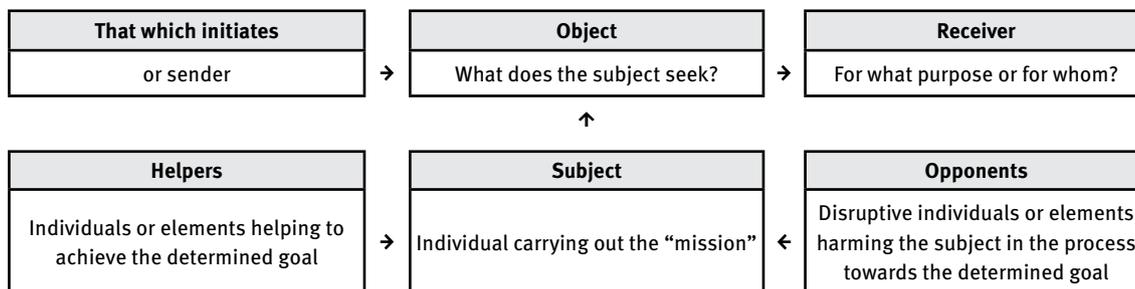


Figure 2. Actantial model adapted for our analysis

The identification of the roles from the remarks made during the interview implies an interpretation. Our observations suggest that the relationships of cooperation and opposition crystallise in how the various professional actors are designated. The linguistic markers involved, beyond the personal pronouns evoking proximity (we, one) or distance (they, them), are principally those that discourse analysis defines as designational paradigms. They allow the same referent to be summoned several times in an utterance in the form of paraphrases, nominal syntagms or even personal pronouns. According to M.F. Mortureux (1993, p. 23), the paradigms are "listes de syntagmes (en général nominaux, parfois verbaux) fonctionnant en coréférence avec un vocable initial dans un discours donné" [lists of syntagms (generally nominal, occasionally verbal) functioning in co-reference with an initial word in a given discourse]. The frequency of the designations referring to a same referent, the grammatical function of the syntagms as well as the positive or negative connotation generated by the chosen word, reveal a firm stance of the enunciator who

is most often also the protagonist himself. Designating colleagues as “the colleagues” or “my colleagues” does not imply the same effect of the enunciator. The designational paradigms are reformulations attributed to a same referent. They accentuate the individuals who take responsibility for the action and those who are subjected to it. According to D. Maingueneau (1976), “l’analyse du discours est celle de l’articulation du texte et du lieu social dans lequel il est produit” [the discourse analysis is that of the articulation of the text and of the social space in which it is produced]. We base ourselves on this assumption to analyse the *mise en texte* processes in 19 interviews in French, English, German and Spanish. This entails a delinearisation of the verbal chain, as also practised by P. Stalder (2010) for the analysis of her interviews carried out within companies after meetings.<sup>3</sup>

In order to analyse the taking charge of the discourse, we must introduce a second analysis entry, that of the shifters: “[les embrayeurs] délimitent l’instance spatiale et temporelle coextensive et contemporaine de la présente instance de discours contenant *je*” [the shifters delimit the spatial and temporal instance coextensive and contemporary with the present instance of discourse containing *je*] (Benveniste 1974, p. 253).

The person interviewed, the speaker of the discourse, sometimes registers as “we”, “one” or “I”.

Analysing the designational paradigms, the shifters and the modal occurrences reveal the positioning of each individual in a given situation and allow the forces acting between the individuals to be appreciated, as well as the roles they assume.

In order to appreciate the outlook of the individuals interviewed on the institutionalised roles and role exits, we will highlight the modal occurrences. Modality is defined by F. Saussure as “la forme linguistique d’un jugement intellectuel, d’un jugement affectif ou d’une volonté qu’un sujet pensant énonce à propos d’une perception ou d’une représentation de son esprit” [the linguistic form of an intellectual judgement, of an affective judgement or a desire that a thinking individual utters regarding a perception or representation of his spirit] (Bally 1942, p. 3). The modalities of utterance do not apply to the speaker/interlocutor relationship but illustrate how the speaker situates the utterance with regard “à la vérité, la fausseté, la probabilité, la certitude, le vraisemblable, etc. (modalité logiques) ou par rapport à des jugements appréciatifs, (l’heureux, le triste, l’utile, etc., modalités appréciatives)” [to the truth, the falsity, the probability, the certainty, the plausible, etc. (modal logic) or with regard to appreciative judgements (the happy, the sad, the useful, etc., appreciative modality)] (Maingueneau 1976, p. 112).

The characteristic feature of modal adverbs (or modal disjuncts) is that they do not relate to the core of the sentence, but instead provide information on the attitude of the enunciator, of the speaker in reference to his own discourse. Such adverbs comment more on the enunciation than the utterance. They are discourse disjuncts. They are frequently independent of the syntax and thus approximate interjections or parenthetical phrases. This phenomenon can be noted in all four languages, such as for instance the use of the adverbial syntagm “no... todavía” [not yet] in Spanish:

porque **todavía** no soy capaz de hablar(.) aunque como te he dicho\ entiendo ya un porcentaje muy elevado de alemán<sup>4</sup>  
(E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 347-348)

In the above, an engineer expresses his colleagues’ expectation of his progression in German with the adverb “todavía”.<sup>5</sup> Verbal adverbs guide the meaning of the sentence, as illustrated in the following example with “bien”:

elle fait partie des les les heu les rencontres sociaux=\ [...] les collègues et **c’est bien estimé** par tout le monde et on le sait\ (E. Wolfgang [Unesco], L. 211-213)

<sup>3</sup> The process of delinearisation consists in treating the text in separate excerpts rather than in continuous speaking turns. The process of delinearisation of the verbal chain is sequential in nature, allowing the various topics used in the interviewee discourses to be classified.

<sup>4</sup> Our translation: because I am still not capable of speaking, although as I have told you, I already understand a very high percentage of German because I am still not capable of speaking

<sup>5</sup> Our translation: still not

The positive and the negative, illustrating what is targeted or rejected, are thus substantiated by such adverbs. We note that the modal adverb “bien” reinforces a shared knowledge, valorised in principle by everyone. The speaker does not just say “on dit”, instead he emphasises the truth of his statement. The modalisation establishes a “taking of responsibility” and a commitment to missions. Consequently, it accentuates the position of the employee with regard to the practices of his professional environment and with regard to the sender.

The subject of everyday multilingualism is thus invoked in the discourses of the individuals questioned with the introduction of appreciative terms marking a personal opinion. These markers show that the employees speak for themselves and exclude any involvement of the organisation:

mi jefe lo que me dice es que Víctor tu (.) no es obligatorio que tu hablas alemán en tu puesto de trabajo/ pero eh:: (1.3) pienso que aprender aleMÁN es algo importante en tu carrera (0.7) vale/ [...] no es una formación que yo utilizo en mi día a día en mi trabajo (.) pero\ forma parte de mi desarrollo profesional\ vale/ pues algo parecido estamos haciendo con el alemán [...] **yo: pienso que es FUNDamental**<sup>6</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 228-248)

y **creo** que para desarrollar completamente una carrera profesional (0.7)\ en esta empresa (0.7) es algo **MUy positive**<sup>7</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 267-268)

**pienso** que hablar los cuatro idiomas [head office] es **MUy importante**<sup>8</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 273-274)

**ich denke** (0.3) also sprache skills sind schon ein **großer Faktor**<sup>9</sup> (E. Ozgöl [Multinational], L. 57-58)

**ich glaube** das Team(.) das in dem ich arbeite(.) ist **sehr(.) sehr\ sehr international**<sup>10</sup> (E. Anton [head of procurement in Multinational], L. 262)

**j'ai pas l'impression que** ce soit très clair quand moi je parle anglais aussi\ **j'ai pas l'impression** qu'ils [German suppliers] comprennent exactement tout<sup>11</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 274-275)

The assessment of the multilingual dimension by the employees from our two fields of study is introduced by the personal pronoun “I”, leaving no doubt as to the taking of responsibility of the statement. The adjectives and adverbs used are primarily absolute:

**definitiv** [...]gut (.) weil wir halt vor allem in unserer Organisation (.) also in\ Procurement sehr international arbeiten (0.5) und natürlich versuchen wir alle auf h:: Englisch zu sprechen ((lacht))<sup>12</sup> (E. Ozgöl [Multinational], L. 64-67)

multilingual/ ja würd ich schon sagen(.) **tota:l** ja<sup>13</sup> (E. Anton [head of procurement in Multinational], L. 151)

parce que **clairement** si je ne: pouvais pas communiquer euh:: parce qu'en fait le métier qu'on fait finalement est très peu technique (0.2) mais c'est beaucoup un métier de relationnel donc si on maitrise pas la langue euh:: déjà d'un point de vue culturel c'est pas: si je vais discuter par exemple avec des allemands, de BASE/ ils sont pas forcément euh euh: en phase avec les stratégies des achats etcetera si **jamais** je fais pas l'effort de communiquer avec eux dans leur langue, je pense que j'aurais beaucoup plus de diffi[cultés]<sup>14</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 337)

6 Our translation: My boss tells me that “Victor, it is not obligatory that you speak German in your job”, but hey I think that learning German is something important in your career, ok. Is not a training that I use in my day to day work, but it is part of my professional development, ok? So I am doing something similar with German. I think it is fundamental

7 Our translation: and I think in order to fully develop a professional career in this company it is a very positive thing

8 Our translation: I think speaking the four languages of [head office] is very important

9 Our translation: I think that language skills are actually an important factor

10 Our translation: I believe that the team I work with is very very very international

11 Our translation: I am not sure if it's really clear when I speak English. I am under the impression that they don't understand everything

12 Our translation: definitely, because we mainly maintain, I mean in international procurement (0.5) and, of course, we try to speak all English (laughs)

13 Our translation: multilingual, yes we can say that, absolutely

14 Our translation: because clearly if I do not: could not communicate because, in fact the profession we do is very little technical, but it is much a profession of relational so if one does not master the language, ah... Already from a cultural point of view it is not... if I am going to hold a conversation for example with German people, basic; they are not necessarily uh ah: in line with the strategies of purchases etcetera, if I never do the effort to communicate with them in their language, I think I would have much more difficulties.

The employees express their opinions more openly with regard to the situations linked to multilingualism, since they are out of the norm.

As explained above, the actantial models highlight the role assumed by the interviewed individuals in their professional environment. The actantial models imply a double facet of “narrative and pragmatic”, which appears absolutely appropriate as an analysis entry in order to better ascertain the relationships of power caused by the different language practices depending on the influence of three factors (Lejot 2016): the temporal universe, the spatial universe and the language profiles of the interlocutors. We will now present two actantial models for which we will systematically detail the elements of the A. J. Greimas model (1996) and we will illustrate them through interview excerpts. Each model will be drawn up at the end of the corresponding analysis.

### 3 Cooperative work as leverage of the multilingual workplace

We will now unify the outlined concepts of integration, exclusion, linguistic insecurity and tolerance and model them in terms of facilitation or obstacle by using the actantial models (Greimas 1966). The objects of the actantial models can vary depending on whether they constitute stated objectives, obvious objectives or objectives complying with requirements. While there is no ideal situation, every situation has its counterpart. In the first model, we will take on the perspective of those who come to the assistance of their colleagues. This same model will show us the position of the person requesting help. In the second model, we will treat integration within the company thanks to partial language skills.

#### 3.1 The requests for help

The complex influence of language differences on power dynamics in multinational organisations generates “asymmetrical power relations in organisations” (Itani, Järnlström and Piekkari 2015, p. 376). Reception and compensation strategies in an international and multilingual environment put some employees in situations in which they must turn to a third party to understand what is going on. The linguistic markers and our field observations will allow us to categorise the helpers and the opponents of an objective to be achieved.

The subject is the narrator, identified by his peers as a colleague with skills in the target language. The subject receives the request and takes responsibility for the action in the first-person singular:

wenn **ich** einen Deutschen in einem Meeting habe\ der nicht so gut Englisch spricht (0.5) ihm aber was sehr Komplexes erläutern muss= [...]AND dann mach ich kurz eine Pause (1.1) und dann spreche **ich** zu ihm auf\ Deutsch und **erkläre** ihm dann kurz auf Deutsch(.) worum es dann geht(.) damit er das auch versteht (0.5) und dann gehen wir wieder zurück ins Meeting<sup>15</sup> (E. Anton [head of procurement in Multinational], L. 220

j'ai quelques fournisseurs qui sont pas du tout à l'aise en anglais/ (.) donc **je PARLE** constamment au téléphone avec eux en allemand/ (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 25-26)

I translate from English to English (E. Arthur [Multinational], L. 296)

clairement parce que **je jongle** entre trois langues toute la journée\ (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 426)

The subject exits his normal role to provide assistance. The **object** is to achieve the professional fixed objectives as a team:

<sup>15</sup> Our translation: If I have a German person in a meeting who does not speak so good English but I have to explain to him something very complex, then I take a short break, and then I speak to him in German and explain and then briefly in German what it is about so he understands it and then we go back to the meeting

avec le peu de euh: de d'connaissances que j'ai/ (.) j'ai réussi quand même à: (0.2) à me débrouiller mais clairement c'était pas possible sinon de de **faire avancer le projet**\<sup>16</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 167-170)

dans **l'avancement des projets**/ (.) je (0.5) au travail/ (.) dans l'équipe on travaille sur des projets en commun donc il y a certains interfaces communes et hmm : (0.3) lorsque je vais à des réunions qui sont organisées par mes collègues allemands/ (.) par exemple/ (.) il y a une différence de vitesse/ dans l'avancement du projet (.) quand on parle pas la langue/ (.) quand on n'a pas la même culture\ (.) ça prend énormément ça prend beaucoup plus de temps pour arriver au même au même but que si on est déjà avec la langue/ (.) avec la culture\ (.) enfin/ (.) mon impression/ (.) hein \<sup>17</sup> (E. Henning [Multinational], L. 38-45)

Comprehending information received by email or verbally during a meeting is key here to being able to carry out one's professional tasks, because when there is a flow of information in a language other than the lingua franca, it requires interpretation. Some employees identify these situations or are called upon to provide linguistic support.

The receiver is designated in the utterance by a group or an affiliation, he is not specifically identified. The referent taken up by the designational paradigm constitutes all the colleagues:

il y a aussi **certains collègues** qui me demandent d'appeler auparavant à leur place<sup>18</sup> (E. Henning [Multinational], L. 353-354)

I'm watching **two people talk** and you can see they have no- no- they're not getting it (E. Arthur [Multinational], L. 283)

je fais toujours l'effort de le faire en allemand\ UN de par la nature de **la population** parce que c'est parce que **la plupart des gens** ne parlent pas anglais\<sup>19</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 109-111)

wenn ich **einen Deutschen** in einem Meeting habe\ der nicht so gut Englisch spricht (0.5) ihm aber was sehr Komplexes erläutern muss=<sup>20</sup>(E. Anton [head of procurement in Multinational], L. 215)

c'est que par exemple **mes fournisseurs** euh: j'ai **quelques fournisseurs** qui sont pas du tout à l'aise en anglais/<sup>21</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 239-241)

In certain cases, the subject can help himself and thus be both subject and receiver at the same time. To this end, he can access automated tools:

you can quite easily get by with English and the **online translation tool** is not SO bad i mean you lose some of the sense but you get the ji- the basics (E. Arthur [Multinational], L. 147-148)

im Zweifel kann ich das auch in ein Übersetzungstool eingeben (0.8) aber ich würde lieber meinen Kollegen in Frankreich oder in Spanien anRU:fen<sup>22</sup> (E. Anton [head of procurement in Multinational], L. 191-193)

I will copy and paste some text sometimes **just to be sure that I've understood things** (E. Arthur L. 152-153)

<sup>16</sup> Our translation: with the little knowledge ah that I/ (.) I managed nevertheless to: (0.2) to manage but clearly it was not possible otherwise to advance the project\

<sup>17</sup> Our translation : in moving projects forward/ (.) I (0.5) at work/ (.) in the team we work together on projects so there are some common interfaces and um: (0.3) when I go to meetings organised by my German colleagues/ (.) for example/ (.) there is a difference how quickly/ the project progresses\ (.) when you don't speak the language/ (.) when you don't have the same culture\ (.) it takes a huge amount it takes much more time to achieve the same goal than if you already have the language/ (.) the culture\ (.) anyway/ (.) that's my feeling/ (.)

<sup>18</sup> Our translation: There are also some colleagues who ask me to call before in their name

<sup>19</sup> Our translation: I always make the effort to do it in German\ firstly because of the nature of the group because it's because most people don't speak English\

<sup>20</sup> Our translation: If I have to explain something very complex in a meeting to a German who can't really speak good English

<sup>21</sup> Our translation: the thing is for example that my suppliers um: I have some suppliers who are not at all comfortable in English

<sup>22</sup> Our translation: In doubt, I can also enter this into a translation tool (0.8) but I would rather call my colleagues in France or in Spain

The receiver is sometimes active since he triggers the introduction of help towards achieving the quest of the object, occasionally shared with the subject:

**bitte ich um eine Übersetzung**<sup>23</sup> (E. Ozgül [Multinational], L. 105)

**j'ai demandé/ (.) j'ai demandé**<sup>24</sup> (E. Samantha [Multinational], L. 32-33)

je vérifie enfin je reçois des: emails qui dont le contenu est important dans ce cas là **je vérifie avec mes collègues** directement<sup>25</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 234-235)

**meinen Kollegen in Frankreich** oder in Spanien anRU:fen<sup>26</sup> (E. Anton [head of procurement in Multinational], L. 192)

We note that the person providing help does not occupy the position of subject in the structure of the sentences. We count two helpers to facilitate multilingual communication in an international environment.

The first helper is the language ability of the subject or the one of the colleagues. The subject presents himself as one of the individuals within the group who has the ability to act:

**je jongle entre les trois langues toute la journée**<sup>27</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 426-427)

il y a **des volontaires** qui se portent volontaires toujours pour les aider avec une traduction/ (.) une traduction chuchotée [de l'allemand en anglais]<sup>28</sup> (E. André [Unesco], L. 49-50)

The resorting to the subject's multilingual skills may be due to an explicit request for help or to an individual taking of initiative upon the simple observation that there is an obstruction to communication. And in the case of a conversation between colleagues in German, if only one participant is not a native German speaker, this person feels as though he is assisting since he does not demand that the entire team speak German. He is in fact the only one to make an effort, since he takes advantage of his multilingual skills:

**j'suis obligée** d'le faire de [parler allemand]<sup>29</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 443)

quand je me suis retrouvée en Espagne/ (.) avec le peu de euh: de d'connaissances que j'ai/ (.) **j'ai réussi** quand même à: (0.2) à me débrouiller mais clairement c'était pas possible sinon de de faire avancer le projet<sup>30</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 168-169)

**on arrive toujours à se à se débrouiller** avec un peu rationalité/ (.) c'est encore plus avantageux de connaître la culture\ (.) de connaître l'approche\ (.) de de de sentir ces (0.4) les tensions les les ondes positives quand on est en réunion ou quand on rencontre quelqu'un en business surtout<sup>31</sup> (E. Henning [Multinational], L. 64-67)

The employees cited above give the impression of assisting others by themselves resolving the problems of communication that the others have possibly not even noticed. Their abilities to analyse these situations put them in a position of constraint. The subjects underline the redundancy of their action by means of a modal adverb:

<sup>23</sup> Our translation: I ask for a translation

<sup>24</sup> Our translation: I asked/ (.) I asked

<sup>25</sup> Our translation: I check, I mean if I receive: emails whose content is important in that case I check with my colleagues directly

<sup>26</sup> Our translation: call my colleagues in France or Spain

<sup>27</sup> Our translation: I juggle between the three languages all day long

<sup>28</sup> Our translation: there are volunteers who always volunteer to help them with a translation, a whispered translation [from German to English]

<sup>29</sup> Our translation: I have to do it [speak German]

<sup>30</sup> Our translation: when I was in Spain, with the little knowledge ah that I managed nevertheless to, to manage but clearly it was not possible otherwise to advance the project

<sup>31</sup> Our translation: you can always manage to get by with a bit of logic, it helps even more if you know the culture, if you know the approach, if you feel those tensions the positive vibes when you are in a meeting or when you meet someone in business especially

mes fournisseurs euh: j'ai quelques fournisseurs qui sont pas du tout à l'aise en anglais/ (.) donc je PARLE **constamment** au téléphone avec eux en allemand/<sup>32</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 248-249)

**nearly every day (.) nearly EVERY single** (0.2) i'll say to the guy "just one- one second guys (.) so you meant dadada/ yeah sure okay so this means (0.2)" and then i reexplain it [...] i translate from english to english yes (.) yes regu- really honestly **every day nearly every day** (.) it happens **REGularly** (E. Arthur [Multinational], L. 289-298)

almost INSTANTLY i'm watching two people talk and you can see they have no- no- they're not getting it (.) one can't find the words to explain it or he's explained it and the other one didn't find the words in their ears when they arrived and to know what they were saying so yeah i **CONstantly** go "guys maybe i can just (.) reformulate/" (E. Arthur [Multinational], L. 283-287)

clairement parce que je jongle entre trois langues **toute la journée**<sup>33</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 414-415)

on me dit **toujours**/ (.) voilà\ alors/ (.) je voudrais dire ça\ (.) est-ce que je peux l'écrire comme ça en anglais/ (.) sachant que c'est un français qui va le lire (0.3) et que je suis allemand (0.5) heu/<sup>34</sup> (E. Henning [Multinational], L. 361-363)

quand on a une maîtrise (.) même **assez assez** avancée mais quand même **assez** limitée il y a des- des- une discrimination (.) il y a un désavantage certain<sup>35</sup> (E. André [Unesco], L. 448.450)

The subject may also situate the action within a recurrent activity:

**in einem Meeting**<sup>36</sup> (E. Anton [head of procurement in Multinational], L. 390)

The second helper is the attention paid by the subject to the communication situations that surround him. This taking of initiative is possible thanks to the subject paying attention to and observing the quality of the exchanges of information:

**I'm watching** two people talk and **you can see** (E. Arthur [Multinational], L. 283)

Showing oneself to be available and receptive to one's colleagues applies equally to a multilingual person and a monolingual English-speaking person who identifies communication failures and is able to rephrase (Lejot 2014, p. 169). Some subjects do not position themselves as the protagonists of the action, instead they discreetly assume the position of object complements. They are the subjects of the mission and their role takes on a social dimension. Their action has an effect on their image within the team. In this type of situation, the subject-narrator willingly places himself as an object personal pronoun in the sentence:

qui **me** demandent d'appeler<sup>37</sup> (E. Henning [Multinational], L. 360)

**m'a** demandé aussi d'écrire des emails à un/ (.) à une certaine personne en france\<sup>38</sup> (E. Henning [Multinational], L. 363-364)

The third helper is the desire to maintain control over the communication. Some employees attempt to relativise their difficulties by relegating the intervention of a third party to a simple verification. They endeavour to provide their own translation first. First and foremost, they rely on either their own partial skills, even if they are weak, or on the use of an online translator. The importance of the intervention of the

**32** Our translation : my suppliers um: I have some suppliers who are not at all comfortable in English, so I always SPEAK with them in German on the telephone

**33** Our translation: clearly because I juggle between three languages all day long

**34** Our translation: I'm always being told, right so, I want to say this: can I write it like that in English? bearing in mind that a French person will be reading it and that I'm German

**35** Our translation: if your ability is fairly advanced but at the same time relatively limited there is a degree of discrimination, there is a certain disadvantage

**36** Our translation: in a meeting

**37** Our translation: ask me to call

**38** Our translation: also asked me to send emails to a, to a certain person in France

receiver is intentionally minimised by modal adverbs to allow the subject to save face within his professional environment and the shifter is the personal pronoun “I”, the narrator and person maintaining control:

from time to time\ normally i asked my colleagues to explain it to me but i will copy and paste some text sometimes **just to be sure that i've understood things** (E. Arthur [Multinational], L. 152-153)

je vérifie avec mes collègues **directement**\<sup>39</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 234-235)

The first opponent is the gap in written and verbal comprehension skills of the subject's interlocutors, both in terms of working language(s) and the local languages of the different sites. There is an assumption that everyone speaks good English, but this is not always the case. Developing at least a receptive ability guarantees the linguistic security of the interlocutors willing to speak a third-party language. Some employees thus converse in French, German or Spanish when their interlocutors do not have sufficient command of the language of the institution:

**La plupart des gens** parlent all c'est pour ça que **moi j'**suis obligée d'le faire de [parler allemand]\<sup>40</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 442-443)

parce qu'on **a des fournisseurs** (0.7) qui : parlent pas très bien en anglais\ (. ) donc c'est beaucoup plus facile pour moi de parler allemand que pour eux d'parler anglais et euh : au niveau des **clients internes/ la plupart en allemand**\<sup>41</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 30-33)

also Französisch verstehen würde dann **einem Franzosen** es leichter machen mir eine Nachricht zu geben\<sup>42</sup> (E. Anton [head of procurement in Multinational], L. 251-252)

ich glaube speziell bei den Franzo- **bei den\ französischen Kollegen** wäre das ein erheblicher Vorteil<sup>43</sup> (E. Ozgül [Multinational], L. 109-110)

Faced with their colleagues' language deficit, some employees feel obliged to seek a solution in the others' mother tongue.

A second opponent is “saving face” by not accepting the situation of dependence on others in relation to the subject behind the help created. This situation can place the colleague in need in an awkward position as he reveals himself to be dependent on his colleagues and can thus appear to be lacking in autonomy. Some colleagues therefore prefer not to admit that they do not understand:

il y a des MALentendus/ [...] les gens ne diront pas toujours/ je ne comprends pas\ (. ) parce qu'on n'est pas à l'aise<sup>44</sup> (E. André [Unesco], L. 108-110)

je parle mieux que je comprends, il y a parfois des situations que je comprends pas réellement<sup>45</sup> (E. Wolfgang [Unesco], L. 85-86)

il y a beaucoup de situations où on se comprend pas/ (. ) mais on on l'a on l'avoue pas qu'on se comprend pas\<sup>46</sup> (E. Wolfgang [Unesco], L. 156-157)

<sup>39</sup> Our translation: I check directly with my colleagues

<sup>40</sup> Our translation: Most people speak German that's why I have to do it [speak German]

<sup>41</sup> Our translation: because we have suppliers, who don't speak English very well, so it's much easier for me to speak German than for them to speak English and um: when it comes to internal clients, mostly in German

<sup>42</sup> Our translation: if I understood French, it would be easier for a Frenchman to convey a message to me

<sup>43</sup> Our translation: I feel that, particularly with the French, my French colleagues, it would be a considerable advantage

<sup>44</sup> Our translation: there are MISunderstandings, people won't always say, I don't understand because they don't feel comfortable

<sup>45</sup> Our translation: I speak better than I understand, there are sometimes situations that I don't really understand

<sup>46</sup> Our translation: there are often situations where we don't understand each other, but we don't admit that we don't understand each other

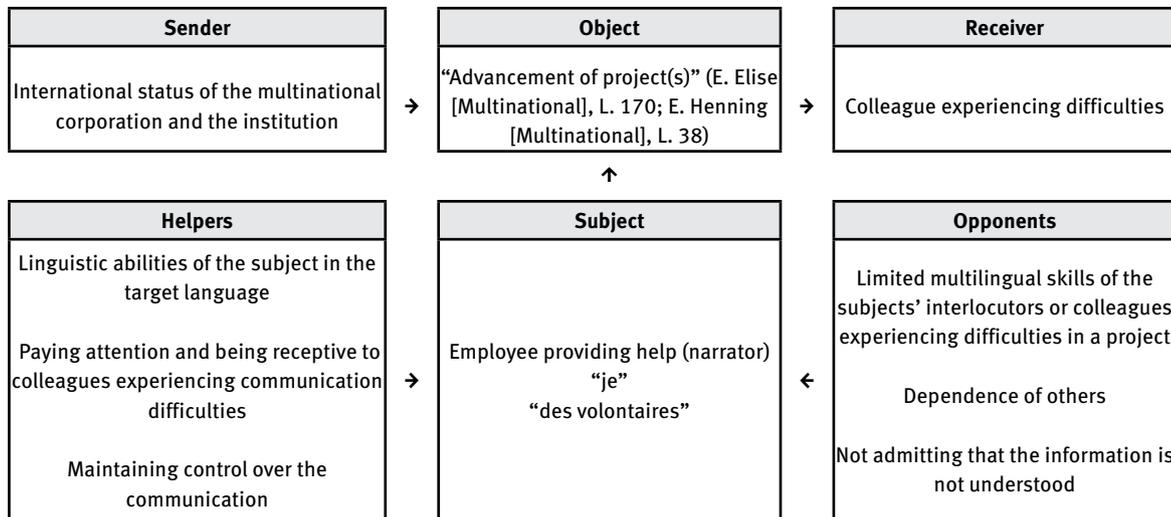


Figure 3. Actantial model 2: request for help

The role of providing help is more willingly evoked given that it is more gratifying than asking for help. Having the option of turning to a team member brings with it a feeling of linguistic security, without which the receiver of the information faces his document alone. The counterpart of this assistance is that the power ultimately rests in the hands of those who speak several languages, as the person assuming the role of intermediary has the choice of whether or not to convey information. It is important to know whom to turn to in the event of requiring translation, but equally to not “lose face” and expose a position of weakness. This would be acknowledging vulnerability, which is unacceptable when dealing with a professional document that other colleagues are able to comprehend, all the more that a smooth flow of information is essential for positioning oneself. The use of translation tools ensures only relative linguistic security, seeing as they are not entirely reliable. A lack of linguistic competence is both inhibitive and restrictive:

Sometimes when they were having really technical conversations/ or really elevated conversation/ I couldn’t participate that much/ maybe I could have done it in English but I just forced myself to speak/ to speak German even if that looks quite weird// (E. Jana, L. 113-115)

Communication obstacles often arise from the linguistic insecurity of the non-English speakers who are not always confident of using the most appropriate terminology to express themselves (Beyene *et al.* 2009, p. 27).

### 3.2 Integration thanks to partial linguistic skills

In this model on integration, the subject is the narrator.

The object in this second model is the energising of his professional profile, which involves local integration and therefore the development of German language skills:

viviendo\ **en alemania** quiero **hablar bien alemán**<sup>47</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 429)

**après l’allemand** c’est le projet\ [d’améliorer mon espagnol]<sup>48</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 178)

j’aimerais **améliorer mon allemand**/49 (E. Paul [Unesco], L. 348-349)

<sup>47</sup> Our translation: living in Germany, I would like to speak German well

<sup>48</sup> Our translation: after German that’s the plan\ [to improve my Spanish]

<sup>49</sup> Our translation: I would like to improve my German

well i really see it as (.) **an opportunity** (0.2) **to somehow speak german** (E. Paulina [Multinational], L. 101)

The individuals interviewed refer to an objective linked to this learning process:

**es una Pérdida de tiempo est' vivir en alemania** tres cuatro o cinco años o más no lo sé/ y **no aprender bien alemán**<sup>50</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 227-229)

**pour être opérationnel** dans la société\ [...] allemande à l'extérieur\ (.) et aussi éventuellement euh trouver un autre travail\ (.) peut être en allemagne pour rester allemagne\ (.) ou bien si je retourne en suède ou si je vais\ (0.3) en france ou: autre part c'est toujours bien d'avoir une troisième langue\<sup>51</sup> (E. Paul [Unesco], L. 349-354)

die nationale Sprache(.) die braucht man natürlich **für Small Talk** (1.0) so das heißt also man kann so **ein bisschen (0.7) ja Small Talk betreiben**<sup>52</sup> (E. Anton [head of procurement in Multinational], L. 82-84)

The learning process is therefore a means that leads to integration. The spatial universe of Germany takes precedence over the international dimension of the company and the institution:

because we are **in germany** (.) people tend to speak german (E. Serkan [Multinational], L. 9-10)

there are germans and we are **in germany** (E. Jana [Multinational], L. 194)

**en allemagne**<sup>53</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 378)

dans la production [...] je pense qu'ils parlent **naturellement** allemand\<sup>54</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 435-444)

Some reduce the scope of the spatial universe to the working group:

**In my/ my working team/** they were 8 people/ 1 of them was Turkish and 2 of them are French but they could speak really well German// And let say the official/ the official/ language of the working team is also German and I also tried to speak always in German with them// Even though maybe that also made/ (E. Jana [Multinational], L. 108-112)

Nevertheless we note that one UNESCO employee clearly separates the professional sphere from the geographical localisation:

quand tu entres ici tu: tu quittes **l'allemagne**\<sup>55</sup> (E. Paul [Unesco], L. 250)

Even if the localisation is not a valid argument for all, a reason for the code switching is the mix of nationalities and above all the superiority in numbers of some (in particular German nationals). In this case, the emphasis is placed on the presence of Germans rather than the fact of being in Germany:

s'il y a deux collègues ((rire)) **s'il y a deux collègues allemands**\ (0.4) [...] Ils vont ils vont se parler en allemand\<sup>56</sup> (E. Paul [Unesco], L. 318-321).

<sup>50</sup> Our translation: it is a waste of time to live in Germany for three, four, five years or more, I don't know, and to not learn German

<sup>51</sup> Our translation: to be able to get by in German society outside and also potentially ah to find another job, maybe in Germany so that I can stay in Germany or if I go back to Sweden or if I go to France or elsewhere it's always good to have a third language

<sup>52</sup> Our translation: the national language is of course required for small talk, meaning one can engage in a bit of, yes, small talk

<sup>53</sup> Our translation: in Germany

<sup>54</sup> Our translation: in production I think they naturally speak German

<sup>55</sup> Our translation: when you arrive here you, you leave Germany

<sup>56</sup> Our translation: if there are two colleagues (laughs) if there are two German colleagues, they speak to each other in German

In response to these facts, the individuals questioned conclude that the German language is de rigueur in their immediate working environment. Even if its use is not officially prescribed, for some this observation is unequivocal:

the official- the official language of the working team is **also** german/ (E. Jana [Multinational], L. 89)

i was using **also** english german mixed (E. Serkan [Multinational], L. 17)

The modal adverb “**also**” sets the tone for this mix, or rather the compromise with multilingual practice. English is the working language, supplemented by activities in other languages. German is predominantly used as a result of localisation. French and Spanish make an appearance according to the number of native speakers, as seen in the analysis of meetings.

Mastering the local language can always prove useful in the long term. In this case, the receiver of the mission is the subject himself as he attempts to improve his skills:

i try to speak only in german (E. Paulina [Multinational], L. 102)

**estoy** aprendiendo<sup>57</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 227)

pour les phrases simples des fois **je** vais spontanément dans n’importe quelle langue<sup>58</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 414-415)

j’ai parlé allemand<sup>59</sup> (E. Paul [Unesco], L. 260)

**euuh allemand/ (. ) c’est très, c’est très spontan\ [...] nous parlons aussi sur des thèmes professionnels** en allemand<sup>60</sup> (E. Manji [Unesco], L. 112-116)

The first helper is the individual’s motivation to make good use of his time in Germany. The employees endeavour to trigger situations to learn another language or to create a connection by taking advantage of informal and one-off temporal universes:

**parfois** je parle avec des collègues allemands, heu: des choses qui ont rien à voir avec le travail<sup>61</sup> (E. Paul [Unesco], L. 263-264)

**quand c’est très très informel** peut-être j’veis aller jusqu’à l’allemand parce que c’est c’est c’est rigolo<sup>62</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 420-421)

The head of the purchasing department, Anton, is the only one not using personal pronouns, instead choosing the impersonal “man” (indefinite pronoun “one”). This reflects a desire to relegate languages other than English to a non-professional level. He associates a quantitative expression “ein bisschen” [a little] with small talk, thereby reducing the importance of the multilingual potential.

The second helper is the informality of this learning process. In principle, this is an individual decision that is not subject to any pressure. Given that German is spoken in an informal setting, its learning is relativised and approached in a playful manner. This results in a semantic field characterised by play and laymanship:

avec mes collègues quand c’est très très informel peut-être j’veis aller jusqu’à l’allemand parce que c’est c’est c’est **rigolo**<sup>63</sup> Entretien Elise, L. 420-421)

they **just play** (E. Paulina [Multinational], L. 106)

57 Our translation: I am learning

58 Our translation: for simple sentences sometimes I spontaneously switch to any language

59 Our translation: I spoke German

60 Our translation: ah German, it’s very, it’s very spontan, we also speak about work matters in German

61 Our translation: sometimes I speak with German colleagues, er: about things that have nothing to do with work

62 Our translation: when it’s very very informal I might go for German because it’s funny

63 Our translation: with my colleagues when it’s very very informal I might go for German because it’s funny

i am **really trying** the german thing so ((laughs)) (E. Jana [Multinational], L. 126-127)

[Multinational]So I try to speak only in German with them even though all of them can speak in English// And one of **my colleagues** is from Sweden and he doesn't speak any German so everybody speak in English with him or he also speaks French and Spanish/ So sometimes **they** are just playing and practicing French// Sometimes **they** just play and they are practicing Spanish/ (E. Paulina [Multinational], L. 102-107)

The colleagues are active and trigger the exchange:

they are trying **to push him** to speak GERMAN\ (E. Paulina [Multinational], L. 125)

they **speak** in German **with him** (E. Paulina [Multinational], L. 126)

The colleagues reveal themselves to be receptive and open to the use of German:

à notre heu notre concierge par exemple<sup>64</sup> (E. Paul [Unesco], L. 261)

die nationale Sprache (.) die braucht man natürlich für Small Talk (1.0) so das heißt also man kann so ein bisschen (0.7) ja Small Talk betreiben **mit den Kollegen**<sup>65</sup> (E. Anton [Multinational], L. 81-84)

on a **une certaine catégorie de personnes** à qui on permet de s'exprimer/ (.) même dans les réunions officielles/ (.) EN allemand/<sup>66</sup> (E. André [Unesco], L. 56-57)

The patience of the native German speakers is sometimes put to the test, but they know that the more the local language is represented within the department, the more chance it has of being used.

A third helper is a good negotiation of the communication contract in the first stages of the professional relationship, compelling employees to decide from the very outset which languages they wish and are able to use in the workplace. The employees emphasise the temporal universe of their first exchanges, crucial in deciding whether they speak German or English with their colleagues:

Oh/ there are Germans and we are in Germany so the first language to use anyway is German and if you are responding and they see that you speak in German then all the rest is in German// If you/ **the first you say** is like "I don't speak German" then they will speak English with you// (E. Jana [Multinational], L. 194-197)

that is really important that **at the beginning** you say "I speak"/ yeah "I speak German"/ otherwise they are going to get used to speak to you in English and then you don't any chance to practice your German// (E. Paulina [Multinational], L. 198-201)

A first opponent is the behaviour of the colleagues who do not wish to waste time by contributing to this language learning process:

ellos mantienen su **velocidad** y su: y su **slang**<sup>67</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 474-475)

tienen **poca paciencia** para hablar con extranjeros en general (0.3) en alemania<sup>68</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 512-513)

A second opponent is a feeling of unnaturalness resulting in situations of awkwardness. The individuals interviewed use verbs to describe a scene:

<sup>64</sup> Our translation : to our um our caretaker for example

<sup>65</sup> Our translation: The national language, one needs it of course for small talk so that means you can do so a bit... yes small talk with the colleagues

<sup>66</sup> Our translation: there's a certain category of people who you let yourself talk to, even in official meetings, IN German

<sup>67</sup> Our translation: they keep up their speed and slang

<sup>68</sup> Our translation: they have little patience when it comes to talking to foreigners in general in Germany

I couldn't participate that much/ maybe I could have done it in English but **I just forced myself** to speak/ to speak German even if that looks quite weird// (E. Jana [Multinational], L. 114-115)

**je ne actuaire pas comme une professionnelle/** (E. Manji [Unesco], L.\_129-130)

This unease is also qualified by modal adjectives:

I just forced myself to speak german even if that looks (.) **quite weird** (E. Jana [Multinational], L. 115-116)

c'est trop **quelque chose d'enfant** peut-être mais [...] **awkward\ awkward/** (E. Manji [Unesco], L. 134-137)

y continuábamos en francés\ era **un poco raro**<sup>69</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L.\_338)

**un bon flou** quoi bon<sup>70</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 278)

If the opponents have a strong impact and cause one of the learning actions that lead to the failure of achieving the object, the mission fails and the subject can lose his motivation:

**DEjo de aprender alemán [...] pierdo una oportunidad**<sup>71</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L.\_529)

es un problema [expectation of high proficiency to work in the target language] por el cual yo no hablo alemán mejor y esto es una crítica a **mis compañeros**<sup>72</sup> (E. Valerio L. 463)

Employees who are not German feel they are making an effort for their local colleagues but the latter are not prepared to use their mother tongue in anything other than an informal context, or else only at an advanced level:

ça dépend si on peut **parler allemand allemand bien**<sup>73</sup> (E. Manji [Unesco], L. 118)

Even if the work atmosphere is good and English is spoken among everyone, there is a sense of passive pressure from the German-speaking colleagues.

A third opponent is having to constantly be on the alert, which can cause fatigue with regard to the continuous learning of a language in parallel with a professional activity. Depending on the case, this learning process is seen as a long-term effort (“estoy aprendiendo”) as well as an exclusive effort as indicated by the modal adverb “only”. In other cases, the use of German corresponds to

- a state of mind:

selon l'envie que j'ai\ (.) **si je suis fatiguée/ (.) j'ai pas envie de réfléchir**<sup>74</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 417-418)

- availability

pour des phrases simples des fois je vais **spontanément** dans n'importe quelle langue<sup>75</sup> (E. Elise [Multinational], L. 414-415)

<sup>69</sup> Our translation: and we continued in French, it was a bit strange

<sup>70</sup> Our translation: very vague but anyway

<sup>71</sup> Our translation: I have stopped learning German... I am losing an opportunity

<sup>72</sup> Our translation: it's a problem [expectation of high proficiency to work in the target language], therefore I do not speak German better and this is a criticism to my colleagues

<sup>73</sup> Our translation: it depends if you can speak German well

<sup>74</sup> Our translation: depending on whether I feel like it, if I'm tired, I don't want to think

<sup>75</sup> Our translation: for simple sentences sometimes I spontaneously switch to any language

vous changez de personne/ (.) **automatiqueMENT** vous changez de langue/ (.) parce que c'est c'est **automatique/** (.) mais bon **vous vous rendez pas compte**<sup>76</sup> (E. Henning [Multinational], L. 505-507)

**aujourd'hui** j'ai parlé allemand heu : à notre heu notre concierge par exemple<sup>77</sup> (E. Paul [Unesco], L. 260-261)

And one of my colleagues is from Sweden and he doesn't speak any German so everybody speak in English with him or he also speaks French and Spanish/ So **sometimes** they are just playing and practicing French// **Sometimes** they just play and they are practicing Spanish// (E. Paulina [Multinational], L. 102-107)

I am using also English german mixed **every day** (E. Serkan [Multinational], L. 17)

**por la mañana** para tomar un café (0.4) para ir a comer etcetera<sup>78</sup> (E. Valerio [Multinational], L. 473-474)

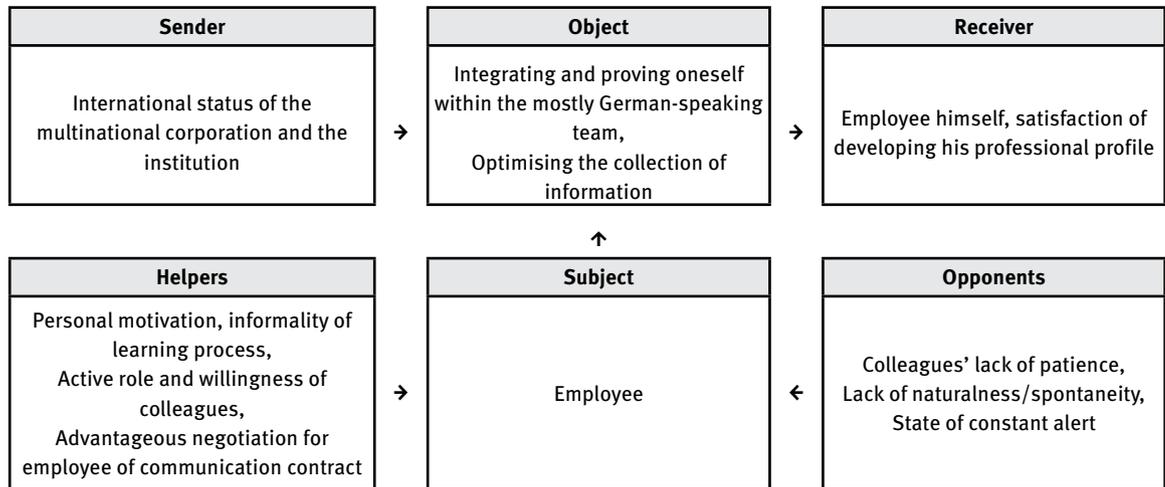


Figure 4. Actantial model 3: integration

German is presented as an option that is used in an informal manner in the professional environment. This is true for German, and to a lesser degree, for Spanish and French.

## 4 Conclusion

We have shown that we can invoke the actantial models for linguistic input thanks to the designational paradigms, the shifters and modal occurrences. Furthermore, we have shown that there is a sociological dimension to these analyses. Contrary to the situations found in stories, there are no fixed positions in the context of professional relationships. The actantial models emphasise that “roles” can be played by different players. This new perspective requires us to return to studies analysing the model of top-down hierarchical power in organisations (Finkelstein 1992, Tenzer & Pudelko 2017), which reveal the key role of language policy and the involvement of the team leader. The actantial model and discourse analysis shed light on the complex situation of multilingual communication settings by highlighting the influence of individuals' linguistic skills. The various actors change place, while a story is much more stereotypical with villains and heroes. As a matter of fact, depending on the role of each individual in a given situation, lending a helping hand sometimes equates to upsetting the balance. Putting the other in the spotlight sometimes equates to putting oneself in the spotlight. To achieve the same goal, several strategies can therefore be communicated alongside each other in the same utterance. Furthermore, this objective or the receiver can be an abstract

<sup>76</sup> Our translation: when you switch from one person to the next/ (.) automatically you switch language/ (.) because it's automatic/ (.) but of course you don't realise

<sup>77</sup> Our translation: today I spoke German um: to our um our caretaker for example

<sup>78</sup> Our translation: in the mornings, when grabbing a coffee or a bite to eat, etc.

concept such as satisfaction or recognition. In this range of combinations, the actantial models reveal the multidimensional facets of multilingualism. The relationships of power and status are built by means of these balancing acts. The multilingual interlocutors proceed with “une exploitation fonctionnelle de leur repertoire” [a functional exploitation of their repertoire] in order to obtain “un bénéfice maximal” [maximum benefit] from it (Lüdi 2008, p. 214). The scope of the repertoire of the employees of these two professional environments plays a key role in their everyday comfort. Languages are a means to achieve objectives that themselves are very heterogeneous. In fact, sometimes languages can be prohibited in a bid to respect the company’s language policy, just as they can be in use at other times.

Employees working in departments with an unclear language policy do not always feel at ease in their exchanges with their colleagues. They oscillate between various systems, and this results in working methods that are arbitrary and thus unreliable for those who are not multilingual. The lack of clarity and strong rules in these two organisations is a factor that generates stress. Given the differences in language abilities, certain employees are more at ease working in their mother tongue than in English. G. Lüdi (1987) explains that during an exolingual conversation, a compromise is consciously or subconsciously reached “sur la conduite des revisions” [on the behaviour of corrections] and that this “synchronisation codique” [code synchronisation] is indispensable for developing a verbal exchange. The choice of the languages is constantly “renégociable et renégocié” [renegotiable and renegotiated] (Lüdi 1987). The purpose is to find a system of organising discourses so as to be able to understand and be understood while optimising the wealth of information being transmitted. In the actantial models, the object corresponds to the quest, to what must be achieved. By transposing, in the form of a model, the cumulation of the various individual situations, our aim was to get closer to the reality of the employees’ day-to-day life. The actantial models reveal that a good command of languages provides a better understanding of one’s environment, even if passive and hence discreet. Employees who have a good understanding of their professional environment know that they benefit from a twofold margin of manoeuvre. In a first instance, during the development of a project, partial skills in German, French and Spanish provide access to all the information and an opportunity to disseminate some of it. Not everyone can always adequately interpret the degree of significance of the information. In a second instance, at the end of a project or a negotiation, an excellent command of English allows individuals to position themselves, both in writing and verbally. Indeed, in the two institutions featured in our research, the written record in English is ultimately the only one that counts and thus the only one to endure. This study may contribute to the debate as to whether language training should first be offered to “employees with sub-par proficiency in the official corporate language[s]” (Tenzer, Pudelko, 2016, p. 35) in order to lighten the cognitive burden of working in a foreign language (Volk and al. 2014). We would add here that if the local language is not the corporate language, it should also be a training priority. In the case of UNESCO, the official languages are English and French, whereas at Airbus, English is the official language. At the Hamburg site of both organisations, French and German are regularly used (staff at both Airbus and UNESCO are frequently in contact with headquarters in France). When employees join one of these companies in Hamburg, they should be offered at least passive training in the languages they do not master at B2 level: for UNESCO, the languages used by staff on a regular basis are French, German and English, and for Airbus, in addition to these three languages, Spanish is often needed. A pilot concept of intercomprehension training could be proposed as part of the welcome package in these multilingual settings.

For the head of UNESCO in Hamburg, language skills should be a mandatory condition for employees, but the organisation should not be required to offer training.

quand j’ai commencé mes premiers contacts avec/ (.) avec l’unesco/ (.) euh (.) début/ milieu des années soixante-dix (0.2) donc c’est pas : (.) et je ne connaissais personne dans le système qui ne : qui n’était pas au moins/ (.) au moins trilingue/ (.) c’est-à-dire écrire/ (.) comprendre/ (.) réfléchir parfaitement en français/ (.) anglais/ (.) espagnol [...] ça c’est un prérequis/ (.) c’est le fondement<sup>79</sup> (E. [Unesco], L. 194-203)

<sup>79</sup> Our translation: when I started my first contacts with UNESCO um early/ mid-1970s so it’s not: and I didn’t know anyone in the system who didn’t: who didn’t at least, at least speak three languages. In other words, writing understanding, thinking perfectly in French, English, Spanish, that’s a prerequisite, it’s the basis

On the one side, we have the Director of UNESCO in Hamburg, himself highly multilingual and with strong expectations of his employees, while on the other side, we have a team leader of 200 employees who does not speak French and does not expect his team members to learn either French or German.

However, these same procurement employees clearly state in their interviews that without French and German, they are unable to carry out their work effectively with the providers and teams on other sites.

In conclusion, multilingual abilities with an advanced level of English allow individuals to control professional conversations in a multilingual group and to extend their social network. Volk *et al.* (2014) state that team leaders should ensure that a language policy which requires staff to work with a mandatory language should not increase stress levels and affect individual performance. By expressing themselves in the language of their interlocutors, employees are given an opportunity to show an interest in the culture of the other as well as to showcase their linguistic skills. Offering employees an in-house opportunity to develop skills in passive multilingual comprehension would be a first step in facilitating local integration.

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## Appendix

### Entretien Airbus/UNESCO

Numéro de l'entretien: \_\_\_\_\_

Date et lieu de l'entretien: \_\_\_\_\_

Numéro du document enregistré: \_\_\_\_\_

Nom de la personne interviewée: \_\_\_\_\_

Nom de l'entreprise: \_\_\_\_\_

Secteur: \_\_\_\_\_

Métier/Fonction/Position hiérarchique de la personne interviewée: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Profil**

1. Quelle est ton expérience chez Airbus/à l'UNESCO?  
**What is your experience in Airbus/UNESCO?**
  
2. Quelles langues sont utiles dans ton activité professionnelle ? Comment répartirais-tu leur fonction ?  
**Which language are useful in your working activity? How would you explain the function of each of them?**
  
3. Penses-tu que les langues pourraient avoir une influence sur ta carrière ?  
**Do you think that that your languages'skills could have an influence on a your career?**

#### **L'entreprise**

4. Depuis que tu travailles dans ce secteur d'activités, as-tu observé un changement dans l'utilisation des langues au quotidien ?  
**Since you started to work in this field, have you seen any changes in the practice of languages ?**
  
5. Qualifierais-tu ton entreprise de multilingue ?  
**Would you describe your firm as multilingual?**

#### **Pratiques langagières**

6. Que penses-tu de l'anglais de tes interlocuteurs étrangers ?  
**What do you think about the English of your colleagues?**
  
7. As-tu connaissance d'un document sur les pratiques linguistiques de l'entreprise ou d'une politique linguistique?  
Si non, peux-tu imaginer par rapport à ton expérience, quelles pourraient en être les grandes lignes ?  
**Do you know a document about the language policy?**

8. Est-ce que des traductions (officielles ou directement sur le lieu de travail entre collègues) sont parfois réalisées ? Si oui, à quelle occasion et dans quelles langues ? Par qui?  
**Are there some translations done? If yes, for what and why? Who makes them?**
9. Quel type de communication (rdv ou réunion en face à face, téléphone, email, visio-conférence) est privilégié pour communiquer sur un projet ? Personnellement, que préfères-tu ? Pourquoi ? Et qu'aimes-tu le moins ? Pourquoi ?  
**Is the communication mainly oral, written or computerised? What do you prefer?**
10. Vous arrive-t-il d'utiliser plusieurs langues lors d'une même activité ?  
**With your colleagues, do you use sometimes more than one language for a same activity? What do you like the less?**
11. As-tu déjà été mal à l'aise dans certaines situations professionnelles où ils ne maîtrisaient pas bien une langue ? Si oui, penses-tu que tu aurais pu gérer cette situation différemment avec de meilleures connaissances en langues ?  
**Did it happen to you to feel insecure and uncomfortable because you didn't understand well information? If yes, would have it gone better with better language skills?**
12. ...Ou inversement... as-tu déjà brillé grâce à tes compétences en langue ?  
**Or in the other way around, have you already made an especially good impression with your language skills?**

### **Réunion**

1. Quelle(s) langue(s) parlez-vous ?  
**Which language(s) do you speak?**
2. Penses-tu que l'anglais est suffisant pour ce type de rencontre ?  
**Do you think English is enough for the meetings?**
3. Quelle différence cela fait-il pour un Allemand de parler français ou espagnol ?  
**What difference does it make if a German colleague speak Spanish or French?**
4. En quelle langue vous contactez-vous avant les réunions ?  
**In which language do you use to organize the meeting?**
5. Penses-tu qu'un traducteur aurait dû être présent ?  
**Would have been the presence of a translator useful?**

Commentaires: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_