

GLOBALISATION AND ITS IMPACTS ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to consider some impacts of the process of globalisation on the person-to-person natural communication, especially business communication. The attention is paid to the relationship of monolingualism and multilingualism in communication, relationship of the communication nets and multilingualism, translation and evolution of so-called business pidgin.

1. Definition of globalisation

Globalisation is understood as qualitatively new level of the development of the human society, which consists of three basic dimensions - economic, social and political. Primarily, globalisation is viewed as an economic phenomenon, but theoreticians in different scientific fields keep underlying more and more often that is a complex cultural process, which triggers a fundamental restructuring of the human life in the virtual spaces in the post-modern world (Cerny, P. G.: 1997, 19). Complex social, economic and political processes overlap, get interlaced and create new margins which form new institutional structures.¹ The traditional terms, such as the state and nation, are from this perspective considered historical constructions, which represent fixing of the former conditions, which “froze” into more stable structures, both in the internal and international terms (Granovetter, M.: 1992, 3-11). Besides other distinctive features, the national language is a very important part of national, resp. state structures.

¹ It should be highlighted that globalisation does not mean creation of “the world without boundaries”, it is a convergence process, in which homogenising powers create more and more similar social, economic and political structures.

2. Communication with the natural language in the globalisation era

The natural language functions as a tool of thinking and communicating in a certain communication community. Language is a part of culture and is closely bound to the principles, rules and values which are formed in the given society. Language is one of the most significant signs of ethnos, has effects on its integration, becomes a symbol of belonging to a different community, consequently it has an ethnically significant function. This function develops fully after formation of the nationality and nation, therefore it is commonly marked as nationally-representative. Regardless the forgoing, language performs a number of different functions in the given community and ensures communication in various spheres of human activity.¹ On the other hand, the existence of relatively isolated national languages is a barrier in effective communication with other communication communities. This collision keeps deepening as globalisation progresses. On one hand economic, social and political processes of the individual communities are coming closer, homogenising, on the other hand the basic facilitation tool for communication between the communities – natural languages – remain relatively diversified, they do not “copy” the above-mentioned processes and are in fact the resource of communication barriers. Likewise, Michael Argyle argued that language is one of the most important differences between many cultures, and one of the greatest barriers (Argyle, M.: 1981, 175). The stated contradiction evokes the question, what is the role and perspective of national languages in the globalisation process? Our article is not intended to answer this question in the full extent and in all circumstances, we will focus merely on consideration of some tendencies in natural language communication in the field of business.

Vast majority of national languages have ensured a everyday communication and it does not seem that this function should be taken over by a different code. In our opinion, the situation in business communication, which is internationalised by globalisation tendencies, is completely different. Use of national languages for such communication might represent a considerable obstacle in operation in this sphere. The communication barrier may occur in a certain communication circle (company, institution)² or outside, i.e. towards the client in the wide sense. At the meantime, it is necessary to distinguish between the monolingual and multilingual corporate communication. Use of the national language is very advantageous for communication inside the company, the national language shows a homogenising effect for creation of the corporate culture and corporate communication, company team. The employees in a monolingual company are able to communicate better with their colleagues, because they have mutual knowledge, which reduces occurrence of misinterpretation. Such a fact may prove a disadvantage in external communication of the company, both in a communication with another company at the given market or with companies (clients) outside the national markets. At a fundamental level, therefore, sharing the same language reduces the level of potential distortion in translating action into language and language into action (cf. Allen, T.: 1977, 139).

¹ Commonly functions are divided into informative, interactive and facilitative ones (cf. e.g. Mezulanik, J.: 1993, 76-77).

² In our article a company is understood the communication circle, we will deal above all with the communication in a company.

If it is true that a monolingual environment engenders a homogenous corporate culture and facilitates action, is the converse also true – can multilingualism fragment an organisation? Vern Terpstra provides an evidence to suggest that multilingualism can fragment economies: 80 per cent of linguistically heterogeneous countries are also underdeveloped (Terpstra, V.: 1978, 6-7). In corporate communication however it probably holds true that the language of business is stronger than any national languages. According to Ohmae commonalities in a business culture are so important to economic success that they easily outweigh traditional differences in language or secular culture. Still it is apparent that multilingualism may cause negative impacts, which successful companies attempt to minimise. In fact there exist several means how to eliminate the negative impacts of multilingualism on the company's activities. Fiona Czerniawska, whose work *Corporate Speak* serves as a basis of the further discussion, states the following: formation of the official corporate language, then use of so-called business pidgin, another way is use of translation and foreign language tuition.

The first of the three ways to overcome the negative impact of multilingualism in a company is introduction of the official language for the internal communication. This approach shows besides its advantages two main drawbacks. First, it necessarily draws a line between those people within the organisation who can communicate effectively in the organisation's native language, and those who cannot. The other problem with establishing a single official language is that the use of chosen language may in practice cut across a conventional organisational hierarchy in a way which is outside the management's control (Czerniawska, F.: 1997, 130-131).

An alternative way of overcoming the negative impacts of multilingualism in a company is the use of business pidgin, kind of a *lingua franca*, which is most frequently a form of English. Terpstra states an example of Caterpillar tractor Company, which introduced company pidgin English – Caterpillar Fundamental English (CFE) – a condensed form of English, by help of which communication barriers of multilingualism were overcome at various subsidiaries of the company. The CFE manual comprises 8000 expressions, which are necessary for the corporate communication (Terpstra, V.: 1978, 22-23). It is obvious that the use of business pidgin is limited to relatively closed communication community or/and very specialised fields of communication. Although the use of business pidgin is more “democratic” than introduction of the official corporate language, both the approaches return in fact to a monolingual structure of communication with all their bottlenecks.

The third approach is translation of communicates to/from other languages, according to the communicative competence of recipients. This approach is used especially for official communication. Its disadvantage is a considerable loss of time, high costs and loss/discrepancies of translation (so-called misinterpretation or mistranslation), which may in the end lead to communication barriers.

The final approach enabling to overcome barriers in multilingual environment is language tuition in business. Fayerweather considers this approach the most effective when he says “if the businessman wishes effective communication with labours, government officials, customers and others, he must be able to communicate directly with them in their own language” (Fayerweather, J.: 1960, 17-20). It is true that the above-mentioned approach is more commonly used in European conditions than in the monolingual USA.

It is very interesting and practical for corporate communication to look for the relationship between the structure of the company and the above stated approaches. Czieniawska (ibid 136) distinguishes four basic types of company's organisational networks. These networks are variants of the four types of corporate communication: vertical – horizontal and centralised – decentralised communication structures (cf. e.g. Level, D. – Galle, W.: 1988, 234):

Vertical communication	Translation	Business pidgin
Horizontal communication	Official language	Language tuition
	Centralised structure	Decentralised structure

Company structure may optimise or distort the communication. As it is apparent from the scheme, the structure of multilingual company is either centralised or decentralised. Another factor is to what extent the company communicates vertically or horizontally. According to Czerniewska the need for vertical communication will occur in any organisation where one point acts as a hub for similar activities spread across different geographical locations (such as marketing for a world-wide brand). By contrast, horizontal communication will predominate where an organisation operates discrete functions in different locations, which must then communicate directly in order to function effectively (ibid 134). For centralised structures, where the need for vertical communication is the highest, the logical form of communication is translation, which makes communication upward and downward easier. Decentralised structures prefer to use business pidgin. Similarly to translation, this approach makes easier vertical communication. In multilingual companies where centralised structure prevails a quality horizontal communication is necessary. Therefore, official language is easy to apply here.

The only approach out of the four above-mentioned is based on decentralised structure with a predominance of horizontal communication, which is adequate for quite multilingual environment. The mentioned schemes are not always applied in the communication practice exactly. Michalman states an example of communication within the European Union, which uses translation for communication between member countries, which might be interpreted as centralised or bureaucratic tendencies in communication of EU countries.

From the majority of research carried out into all types of multilingual companies, two things seem clear. First, communication within tends to be bad, irrespective of the structure: however efficient the internal system, tension and conflict exist which distort the dissemination of information. Second, most companies which recognise there is a problem try to re-engineer their structure rather than their means of communication. There is little evidence that this works.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasise that the mentioned problems of relationship between globalisation and communication in the sphere of business represent only a fragment of the whole process. It is apparent that globalisation of communication will take place at different countries, regions, at a different pace and in various forms. In our article we placed attention to overcoming of communication barriers in multilingual companies with respect to their organisation structure.

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