



**HAL**  
open science

## ”Not all multilingual teams are created equal ” : Conceptualizing language diversity management

Amy Church-Morel, A. Bartel-Radic

### ► To cite this version:

Amy Church-Morel, A. Bartel-Radic. ”Not all multilingual teams are created equal ” : Conceptualizing language diversity management. XXIIIe Conférence de l’Association Internationale de Management Stratégique (AIMS), 2014, Rennes, France. 26 p. halshs-01185822

**HAL Id: halshs-01185822**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01185822>**

Submitted on 21 Aug 2015

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



www.cerag.org

Centre d'Études et de Recherches Appliquées à la Gestion\_ U.M.R. C.N.R.S. 5820

**CAHIER DE RECHERCHE n°2014-03 E4**

**“Not all multilingual teams are created equal”:  
Conceptualizing language diversity management**

CHURCH-MOREL Amy

BARTEL-RADIC Anne



Unité Mixte de Recherche CNRS / Université Pierre Mendès France Grenoble 2

150 rue de la Chimie – BP 47 – 38040 GRENOBLE cedex 9

Tél. : 04 76 63 53 84 Fax : 04 76 54 60 68



# **“Not all multilingual teams are created equal”: Conceptualizing language diversity management**

## **Abstract:**

Language diversity is an inherent aspect of international work, and multinational companies have been described as multilingual communities by definition. Recent research has made progress in demonstrating the ways in which language diversity can affect teams and organizations by significantly influencing communication and knowledge-sharing, group dynamics, and power relations, all pointing to the necessity of organizations taking a strategic approach to language management. However, current research does not tell us much about which team language management practices are most effective for specific team configurations and organizational contexts. The aim of this paper is to contribute to fill this knowledge gap through a review of literature in order to build a conceptual model which lays groundwork for studying the connections between a multilingual team’s characteristics, the processes by which the team overcomes or deals with language barriers, and the team’s performance.

Language diversity can be compared with other kinds of diversity, differences among individuals which can play a role in organizational outcomes. We first examine the concept of language diversity and language management through the lens of diversity literature.

Teams can differ significantly in terms of their purpose, their composition, the ways in which they interact, the duration of their collaboration, the institutional context in which they are embedded. Specific to multilingual teams is the notion of team language configuration, a secondary contribution of this paper, that is to say, the number of native and “foreign” languages present, team members’ proficiency and experience in using them, and their attitudes toward language use. We suggest that teams perform better when language management practices are aligned with team characteristics and contexts.

Anchored in diversity theory as well as in research on multicultural teams and in the growing body of work on language diversity in international management, this article then proposes a conceptual model. We have aimed to develop a model that, when followed up with empirical studies will lead us to better understand: 1) whether certain language management practices are best suited to particular types of teams, in particular institutional contexts 2) how it is that some teams handle language diversity more effectively and with a greater degree of satisfaction than others. This knowledge is important if research is to support team leaders and organizations in effective management of multilingual teams.

**Key words:** teams, language management, language diversity, multilingual, international management

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language diversity is an inherent aspect of international work, and multinational companies have been described as multilingual communities by definition (Luo & Shenkar, 2006). Recent research has demonstrated the ways in which language diversity can affect teams and organizations by significantly influencing communication and knowledge-sharing (Welch & Welch, 2008; Buckley, Carter, Clegg & Tan, 2005), group dynamics (Henderson, 2005; Luring & Selmer, 2010) and power relations (Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari & Säntti, 2005; Neeley, 2013). International business scholars have, in the past 15 years, provided rich descriptions of the practices individuals and organizations put into place to overcome language barriers at work (Feely & Harzing, 2003). Case studies have brought to light some of the strategic approaches to language diversity management that multinational companies have used from a *laissez-faire* approach which allows employees to adapt their choice of language to the task at hand (Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2006; Barmeyer & Mayrhofer, 2009) to the policy of adopting a common (national) language to be used in an organization, a policy whose implementation can constitute a complex process of organizational change which fundamentally influences the institutional context and the relationships within it (Vaara et al, 2005; Neeley, 2013). At the level of the team, recent research results have promoted the benefits of adopting a common language, often English, in the interest of team cohesion (Luring & Selmer, 2010) and the formation of team trust (Tenzer, Pudelko & Harzing, 2014).

While the adoption of a common language perhaps may appear as the only feasible option for a highly language diverse group working together long-term on a regular basis, there are other cases in which team characteristics and organizational contexts make the adoption of one language, such as English, as an exclusive common language a less obvious managerial option. This could be due to the disparity in language skills (as demonstrated in a quantitative study by Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011), to the linguistic make-up of the team or the organizational context. Consider, for example, an international marketing team comprised of a majority of native French speakers and one native English speaker. According to the state of the art of international management research on language diversity, what recommendations would we have for this team as far as language management? Should team members adopt a common language for all written and oral communication, no matter what the context? And if so, which one, French or English? If the correct answer is “it depends”, our response, and the main focus of this paper is, on what does it depend?

Teams can differ significantly in terms of their objectives, their ways of interacting, the duration of their collaboration, the institutional context in which they are embedded, and their language configuration, that is to say, the number of native and “foreign” languages present and the team members’ proficiency and experience in using them. Current research does not yet tell us much about which language management practices both at the interpersonal and organizational level are best suited to a particular team configuration. This knowledge is important if research is to support team leaders and organizations in effective management of multilingual teams.

Anchored in diversity theory as well as in research on multicultural teams and in the growing body of work on language diversity in international management, this article proposes a conceptual model which lays the groundwork for studying the connections between a multilingual team’s characteristics, the organizational context in which the team works, the processes the team uses to navigate language differences, and the team’s performance. We are interested in developing a model that, when followed up with empirical studies which lead us to better understand: 1) whether certain language management practices are best suited to particular types of teams, and 2) how it is that some teams handle language diversity more effectively and with a greater degree of satisfaction than others. A secondary contribution is the development of the notion of team language configuration as one of its characteristics.

The paper is organized as follows. First, we review two distinct bodies of literature which both include key concepts related to multilingual teamwork: literature on team diversity (1) and literature on multilingualism in organizations and language management (2). Then, we connect these bodies of literature and present our model of multilingual teams (3).

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW ON TEAM DIVERSITY**

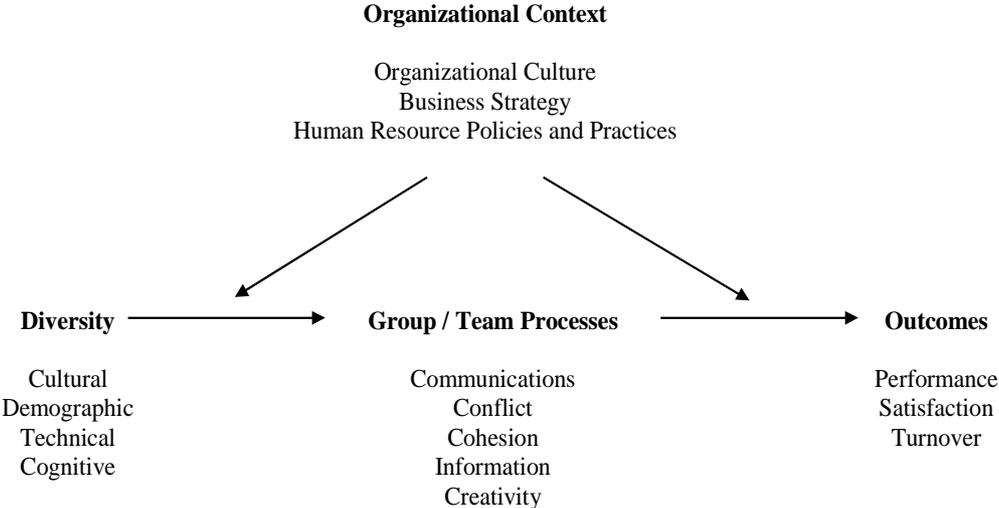
In our effort to conceptualize multilingualism as language diversity, we first propose a review of some of the key contributions to diversity theorizing in management science and organizational behavior research. Over the last 30 years, the topic of diversity has grown into an expansive area of management as much for academic research as for practitioners. Central to investigations in this area of research is the connection between diversity and performance in an organization.

An early finding in the research is that the direct relationship, whether it be a positive or negative one, between diversity and company or team performance is impossible to establish. Milliken and Martins (1996) reviewed literature published from 1989 to 1994 on

diversity and its consequences. They came to the conclusion that various types of diversity have short and long term consequences for individuals, groups and organizations (Milliken and Martins, 1996).

After Milliken and Martins’ seminal article, a five-year study conducted by the Diversity Research Network set out to test business case arguments in four large firms (Kochan, Bezrukova, Ely, Jackson, Joshi, Jehn, Leonard & Levine, 2003). The findings 1) confirmed the idea that a direct relationship between diversity and organizational performance was difficult to establish and 2) affirmed that the relationship was moderated by the organizational context, that is to say, organizational culture, business strategy and human resource policies and practices. Their input-processes-output model of the effects of diversity has become the basis for a considerable amount of subsequent research on diversity, including the model of language diversity in this paper, putting forward the idea that whether diversity has positive or negative outcomes for an organization or team depends on the organizational culture and how diversity is managed. Their framework is represented in figure 1.

**Figure 1: The framework of analysis of the effects of diversity by Kochan et al. (2003)**



The two seminal articles cited above (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Kochan et al. 2003) made fundamental contributions to our understanding of the relationship between diversity and performance in organizations. In addition, they, and other authors, have furthered work on types of diversity with the assumption that various kinds of diversity will affect functioning and ultimately performance differently.

Milliken and Martins (1996) make the distinction between two types of diversity: observable attributes and underlying attributes. This distinction is later referred to by Harrison, Price and Bell (1998) as surface- and deep-level diversity. They look at the impact over time of these two types of diversity on social integration and find that “the length of time group members worked together weakened the effects of surface-level diversity and strengthened the effects of deep-level diversity as group members had the opportunity to engage in meaningful interactions” (Harrison, Price & Bell, 1998: 96). We will discuss this distinction with regard to language diversity in section 2.

Horwitz and Horwitz (2007) make a similar distinction in a meta-analysis on diversity outcomes in teams, conceptualizing diversity as either bio-demographic (similar to observable or surface-level diversity) or task-related diversity, such as differences in functional expertise, education, and organizational tenure. Their finding is that task-related diversity plays a larger (and positive) role in group functioning and merits more managerial attention than bio-demographic diversity.

The concept of diversity addresses various aspects of differences between team or organizational members. Scholars rarely give a precise definition of diversity. To improve clarity of further research, Harrison and Klein (2007) proposed a three-part diversity construct: diversity as separation, variety or disparity. Definitions are given for these in the table below and these constructs are examined further in our characterization of language diversity.

**Table 1: Diversity constructs (Harrison & Klein, 2007)**

Diversity Type	Description
Separation	Composition of differences in position or opinion among unit members, primarily of value, belief, or attitude; disagreement or opposition
Variety	Composition of differences in kind, source, or category of relevant knowledge or experience among unit members; unique or distinctive information
Disparity	Composition of differences in proportion of socially valued assets or resources held among unit members; inequality or relative concentration

In the interest of anchoring the concept of language diversity in the extensive extant academic work on diversity in general, we have reviewed some of the key contributions, including the elements that mediate and moderate the relationship between diversity and

performance and the distinction among the various kinds of diversity that exist. These contributions are highlighted in the table below:

**Table 2: Summary of several key contributions on diversity**

Article	Contribution
Milliken & Martins, 1996	Diversity has short-term consequences including affective, cognitive, symbolic and communication-related effects and to long-term consequences on performance at individual, group or organizational levels. Differentiation between types of diversity: observable attributes vs. underlying attributes
Harrison, Price & Bell, 1998	The length of time a group works together lessens the effects of surface-level diversity and increases the effects of deep-level diversity on social integration.
Kochan et al., 2003	Study by the Diversity Research Network, demonstrating the moderating effects of organizational context and the mediating effects of team processes on the relationships between diversity and performance.
Jackson et al., 2003	SWOT analysis of literature, providing multilevel framework for understanding the dynamics of diversity
Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007	Study on diversity in teams demonstrates that task-related diversity is more significantly related to performance than bio-demographic diversity.
Harrison & Klein, 2007	Conceptualization of diversity as one of three types: separation, variety, disparity

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ON MULTILINGUALISM IN ORGANIZATIONS

We will now turn to the second body of review which will help us answer our research question, which is literature on multilingualism in organizations. In a first sub-section, we relate multilingualism to the literature on diversity, and define multilingualism as language diversity. In a second subsection, we review literature on language management in organizations.

### a. MULTILINGUALISM AS LANGUAGE DIVERSITY

The notion of “language diversity” merits some clarification for several reasons. First, language diversity often refers ambiguously to the differences in native languages and/or differences in languages used in an organization. Secondly, the notion of language diversity does often but not always refer exclusively or explicitly to national languages. Finally, it is

important to note that not all academics interested in this area of research employ the term “diversity” to describe a multilingual group. For some, the terms “language differences” (Welch, Welch & Piekkari, 2005) or “multilingual” are used without mention of “diversity,” a term that carries with it an implicit reference to large body of writing in academia (in management and organizational sciences but also well beyond in law, human rights, environmental sciences). Here we take a closer look at these semantic issues.

While rarely defined explicitly in the literature, the notion of “language diversity” in international management research is most often implicitly consistent with one or both of the definitions. Luring and Selmer put forth in their 2010 article on common language and group cohesiveness. For the purposes of that study, they conceptualize language diversity as “the presence of a multitude of speakers of different national languages in the same work group” (Luring & Selmer, 2010: 269). They give a second definition of language diversity as “associated with the number of languages spoken in the organization” (2010: 270). This is an important distinction to clarify. This means that language diversity is both a function of the number of native languages represented by the team members, and, as people can speak more than one language, as a function of the number of languages that are actually used among those members in the context of their work in the team.

Some authors, such as Henderson (2005) and Geoffroy (2001) argue that the challenges that language diversity poses to communication and building team rapport are rooted in the fact that we have expectations about linguistic performance that are related to our native languages, and that, according to Luring and Selmer’s (2010) first definition, a common language does not indeed reduce the language diversity of a group or the difficulties associated with it. However, in the case that language diversity is conceptualized according to Luring and Selmer’s (2010) second definition, as the number of languages actually used, organizations or teams that adopt a common language would thereby reduce the degree of diversity in a group. The notion of greater or lesser degree of diversity is important to keep in mind when we consider one element of diversity management to be the deliberate design of work groups with a requisite level of diversity for the task at hand (Bartel-Radic & Lesca, 2011).

The focus of these two definitions is on national languages. There are other types of language diversity which researchers have taken into consideration. In the same way that Chevrier (2012) describes layers of culture in a team as national/political, culture related to one’s profession, and corporate culture, language can be defined by other categorization than national languages. For example, in a paper on language and international management

processes, Welch, Welch, and Piekkari (2005) deal not only with “foreign languages” but also three layers of language: everyday spoken/written language, technical language, and company speak. Other researchers have taken a closer look at the form the company language takes, regardless of the national language in which it is expressed. In this vein, Brannen and Doz (2012) describe a company’s language in terms of its degrees of contextual specificity or conceptual abstraction, linking it to a company’s strategic agility. While much of the research on language diversity focuses on national languages, it is useful to keep in mind these other notions of language difference as they may be key to understanding how diversity of national languages constitute more of a challenge for some teams than for others.

For the purposes of this paper we note four notions related to language diversity or differences in language that can be observed in organizations and groups:

**Table 3: Notions of language diversity or difference**

	<b>Authors</b>
Language diversity as the presence of a multitude of speakers of different national languages in the same work group.	Lauring & Selmer, 2010
Language diversity as associated with the number of national languages spoken in the organization	Lauring & Selmer, 2010
Differences in various layers of language: everyday spoken/written language, technical language, and company speak	Welch, Welch, & Piekkari, 2005
Differing degrees of contextual specificity or conceptual abstraction in an organization’s corporate language	Brannen & Doz, 2012

With these four definitions, we now turn to the task of anchoring the concept of language diversity in the larger context of diversity theory as it was reviewed in section 1. Research on language diversity in management sciences has been criticized as being “a-theoretical and fragmented” (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013). Anchoring work on language diversity in the larger context of diversity theory, as we make an effort to do in this paper, might very well be key to providing interesting and productive avenues for future research which will inform not only the work on multilingual organizations but also, in turn, contribute to diversity theory.

The central question we might ask is, what kind of diversity is language diversity? Let us return to Millikin and Martins' (1996) distinction of diversity as observable diversity or underlying attributes.

**Table 4: Observable and underlying attributes of diversity (Milliken & Martins, 1996)**

	<b>Description</b>
<b>Observable attributes</b>	Visible differences, particularly likely to evoke responses that are due directly to biases, prejudices, or stereotypes: race, nationality, gender, age.
<b>Underlying attributes</b>	Differences in values, in skills and knowledge, in cohort membership

The authors state that some kinds of diversity might overlap these categories, and language diversity is an example of a kind of diversity that does not fit neatly into one category or the other. Language differences are perceptible as soon as someone communicates in speaking or writing. Listeners will notice which language a person is speaking and, with varying degrees of accuracy, whether a person is a native speaker or not and what their degree of proficiency depending on their accent and level of grammatical and syntactical mastery. At the same time, language can certainly be considered to be a skill, one that is connected to one's professional and personal background, and many aspects of the speaker's language experience can only be observed over a period of extended interaction, such as the mastery of vocabulary in a particular subject area. Also, to the extent that a language can be connected to a particular way of thinking and seeing reality and that people can have values related to the use of particular languages, it can also be considered an underlying attribute.

In what is perhaps a clearer distinction, we can turn to the diversity constructs of Harrison and Klein (2007), evoked in section 1) to examine the ways in which language diversity functions as variety, separation and/or disparity. Harrison and Klein assert that "diversity of age, sex, race, tenure, and education can all be, and have been, conceptualized as separation, variety, or disparity" (2007: 1215). They give the example of how gender as one kind of diversity can be construed as 1) separation – when researchers imply that gender differences reflect opposing beliefs about team process, 2) variety – when researchers suggests that men and women hold differing caches of knowledge, and 3) disparity – when researchers focus on the power differences among men and women. We follow in this example, asserting that language diversity can be studied from each of these three perspectives. In the table below, we summarize the construct according to Harrison and Klein, propose a corresponding description for language diversity, give a description of what this might look like in teams, and finally suggest a few examples of research in which we consider that the scholars conceptualize language diversity in this way, perhaps not exclusively but at least in part.

**Table 5: Diversity constructs (based on Harrison & Klein, 2007) applied to language diversity**

Diversity Type	Meaning and Synonyms	Language diversity constructs	Description and examples in teams	Examples of research addressing this language diversity construct
Separation	Composition of differences in position or opinion among unit members, primarily of value, belief, or attitude; disagreement or opposition	Composition of differences in attitudes and values related to language use (ex. attitudes about multilingualism, common language adoption, the use of specific languages, and language proficiency as a reflection of professional competency).	Degree of language diversity is a function of difference in attitudes about language use. Ex. Group members have differing attitudes about the de facto or explicit imposition of a particular common language or about the use of “foreign” languages in general in the workplace.	Lauring & Selmer, 2010 Lauring & Selmer, 2012 Steyaert, Ostendorp, & Gaibrois, 2010 Vaara et al, 2005
		Composition of differences considering languages as structuring mental frameworks through which reality is viewed.	The greater the difference among the represented languages in a team, the greater the degree of language diversity. Difference between languages can be considered as “linguistic distance” or as the difference in language structure and its influence on communication practices.	Dumitriu & Capdevila, 2012 Henderson, 2005 Brannen & Doz, 2012 Zander, Mockaitis & Harzing, 2011
Variety	Composition of differences in kind, source, or category of relevant knowledge or experience among unit members; unique or distinctive information	Composition of differences of proficiency in particular languages as a category of knowledge, skill and experience in a language diverse context.	Degree of language diversity is a function of the number of native and secondary languages represented in the group and the varying degrees of proficiency. A group of people each having a different first language and varying degrees of proficiency in other language = high degree of diversity; a group sharing the same native language and a similar level of a secondary language = low degree of diversity.	Welch & Welch, 2008 Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman, 2005 Grin & Faniko, 2012

---

Disparity	Composition of differences in proportion of socially valued assets or resources held among unit members; inequality or relative concentration	Composition of differences in language proficiency in particular languages (or lack thereof) as a means of gaining, losing or maintaining power and status in a language diverse context.	Degree of language diversity is a function of the difference in status or resources held by team members according to their language proficiencies. High degree of disparity = post-acquisition situation in which engineers who speak fluent English are retained and promoted over those who do not. Low degree of disparity = group members may have varying degrees of language skills but this plays little or no role in power or resource distribution.	Neeley, 2013 Vaara et al, 2005 Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari & Säntti, 2005
-----------	---	---	--	--

---

We make this connection between language diversity and diversity constructs as a way of strengthening the connections between language diversity and diversity theory and exploring the ways in which both streams of literature might benefit from the comparison.

## **b. LANGUAGE MANAGEMENT**

If we consider language diversity as one kind of diversity, we might also consider language management as a kind of diversity management. The term “language management” while often referred to in the literature is rarely defined explicitly. Language management has been defined in one study as “the extent to which the company is able to satisfy its language needs through prudent deployment of a variety of language management tools including for example language training and expatriation” (Feely & Winslow, 2005 : 13). This definition is specific to the question of national language diversity, whereas language management may very well be used in a monolingual setting, such as the deliberate choice of metaphors and wordsmithing efforts used in strategy development or a collective effort to follow certain communication and linguistic guidelines for writing email or dealing with conflict. Language can be considered one of the many human, material and symbolic resources that an organization mobilizes strategically in pursuit of its objectives (Girin, 2005). We adopt a broad definition of language management, proposing that language management is: strategic awareness and/or intervention as to the use of language(s) within an organization.

What practices does “language management” actually refer to? The first notion to consider is determining which language or languages are to be used on the organization. Chevrier (2013) outlines three basic approaches that companies take: 1) Using “globish” or an internationalized form of English as a lingua franca, 2) relying heavily on translation for overcoming language barriers, 3) multilingualism in which members can speak and be understood in their native languages, what she describes as an ideal solution that is difficult to put into practice.

This first option is the center of much of the debate on language management. While the term “corporate language policy” could simply mean strategic language management at the organizational level, it is often used to mean a top-down initiative at the level of upper management to use a particular language, often English, for all company activity. A corporate language policy may be a stand-alone managerial decision, such as in the case of a merger and acquisition (Vaara et al., 2005) or it may be treated as a complex process of organizational change with employees being accompanied over the course of years to bring it about (Neeley,

2012; Neeley, 2013). The choice of which language to use may also be done through an emerging strategy, with companies leaving it up to employees to figure out how best to adapt their language choice to particular contexts (Fredriksson et al., 2006). While there is debate in the literature about whether or not it is beneficial and feasible to adopt a common language and how best to do it, the two points of consensus is that language is a complex and game-changing aspect of business deserving of both significant academic attention and strategic managerial consideration within organizations and that language audits are beneficial, providing clear vision as to the linguistic needs and resources in an organization.

The determination of which language to speak happens not only at an organizational level, but also at an interpersonal level. One of the significant contributions in recent literature has been a rich description of how co-workers actually go about negotiating this. In a two-case study approach, Steyaert, Ostendorp, and Gaibrois (2010) describe the ways in which Swiss employees negotiate the language to be used in a particular setting. The table below summarizes their findings:

**Table 6: Six discursive practices to negotiate the position of English (Steyaert, Ostendorp, & Gaibrois, 2010)**

<b>Practices</b>	
1	Adapting to the language of a certain location in which a particular language should be spoken
2	Adapting to the language of the other, of the person with whom one is interacting
3	Collective negotiation of the use of common language
4	Simultaneous use of different languages in which people can use their own native languages as a rule
5	Compromise using a third language
6	Spontaneous mix of languages when it is not possible to find a common one

In addition to a closer look at how organizations and individuals determine which language they will use, one of the significant contributions of recent literature on language diversity management has been the rich description of what employees in international and multilingual contexts actually do to overcome language barriers whether between co-located employees (Steyaert et al., 2010) or in the communication between headquarters and subsidiaries (Harzing, Koster & Manger, 2011).

Researchers have used case studies to describe the language management tools and solutions that can be put into place at the organizational, team and interpersonal level. The

results of two such papers are summarized below in tables 7 and 8. The results overlap but are not identical.

**Table 7: Language Management Tools (Feely & Wilson, 2005)**

<b>Tools</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>1 Language training:</b>	The use of company-funded training programmes to improve the language skills of employees.
<b>2 In-house departments:</b>	The maintenance by the company of a team of language professionals who provide translation and interpreting services.
<b>3 External providers:</b>	The contract employment of external language specialists to provide translation and interpreting services on call.
<b>4 Selective recruitment:</b>	The recruitment of language skilled personnel to fill identified gaps in the language skills possessed by the company.
<b>5 Acculturation:</b>	The training of both international and domestic managers to understand and respond sympathetically to the cultural differences they encounter. This may or may not include some basic language training.
<b>6 Expatriation:</b>	The transfer of headquarters personnel to work in the subsidiaries (in another country) to serve as a communications interface between the two.
<b>7 Inpatriation:</b>	The transfer of subsidiary personnel to work at head office to serve as a communications interface between the two.
<b>8 Language buddies:</b>	The establishment of a formal scheme whereby language skilled personnel within the organization have an obligation to assist their colleagues even though they may be in different departments.
<b>9 Machine translation:</b>	The use of computer-based systems to translate text, and sometimes voice, from one language to another.

**Table 8: Language Barrier Solutions  
(Feely & Harzing, 2003; Harzing, Koster & Manger, 2011)**

<b>SOLUTION</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>Informal day-to-day solutions</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building redundancy in communication</li> </ul>	Asking your partner to repeat information, checking understanding by asking your partner to reformulate what has been said, providing illustrative examples, building in frequent summaries, especially in meetings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust mode of communication</li> </ul>	Strategically adopting a mode and format of communication to improve understanding, whether this be a choice of email over phone calls, for example for partners who are not co-located or a

	choice of drawings and numbers over words
• Code-switching	Second language users reverting to talking among themselves in their native language, often understood in international business as a negative phenomenon leading to a deterioration of the relationship quality.
• Functional multilingualism	The use of a cocktail of languages, switching to the language that is most appropriate for the situation and the speakers present.
<b>Bridge individuals</b>	
• Bilingual employees	Employees speaking two or more languages who serve as language nodes, intermediaries, or “translation machines” within the organization.
• Expatriation	Expatriates from headquarters working in subsidiaries
• Inpatriation	Employees from subsidiaries working at headquarters
• Non-native locals	Employees hired locally but who are originally from another country, for example the country of the headquarters, with the language skills that accompany it.
• Parallel information networks	Information channels based on language skills rather than official responsibilities or the organizational charts. For example, an employee will be contacted because he shares the same native language as the person looking for information, not because he is officially in charge of a project.
<b>Structural solutions at organizational level</b>	
• Corporate language	Establishing a corporate language and officially adopting a common language to be used throughout the organization. This language is most often and increasingly English but not exclusively.
• Controlled language	A corporate language policy that consists of limiting the vocabulary that can be used in official communication. The high cost of design and implementation of such a policy restricts its use. Ex. Caterpillar Controlled English – 8000 words, including product terminology.
• Machine translation	Used to glean a very basic understanding of the translated material. Generally understood to be very ineffective beyond this particular use.
• External translators/interpreters	The services of professional translators and interpreters. The high cost associated with this solution limits its use to significant documents and events (ex. contracts and important board meetings). Translators are often unfamiliar with the company’s specialized vocabulary.
• Language training	Training offered by companies with varying conditions (voluntary or compulsory, paid for by the company or not, taking place on employees work or free time, evaluation required or not)

These lists of practices are by no means exhaustive and further case studies may contribute additional ones. We have elaborated them here in the interest of including them in a model that helps us understand which practices are best suited for which kinds of teams. We can also point out here that these practices may be considered, in terms of Schein's (1991) model of organizational culture, as the top level of the culture pyramid. It would be interesting to see, in an embedded case study, the extent to which these practices are similar throughout an organization or significantly different and specific to each team.

### **3. A MODEL OF MULTILINGUAL TEAMWORK**

As stated in the introduction, the objective of this paper is to provide a model for multilingual teams which is anchored in diversity theory and takes into consideration the various elements of team characteristics that exist as well as the language management processes that multilingual teams employ. We want to lay the foundation for empirical studies that will explore whether certain language management practices are best suited to particular types of teams, in particular institutional contexts, and how it is that some teams handle language diversity more effectively and with a greater degree of satisfaction than others. In this section, we first explain the foundation of the model (a) and then present each element of it further detail (b).

#### **a. TYPOLOGIES OF MULTILINGUAL TEAMS**

To gain a full understanding of how multilingual teams deal with language diversity with varying degrees of satisfaction and effectiveness, it is important to look at the various kinds of teams that exist. While existing research on language diversity looks at teams throughout organizations and details the institutional context and country environment, little research has as yet considered the specific characteristics of individual multilingual teams to generate a typology and to study how language management practices are more or less suitable for a particular one.

In her research on multicultural teams, Chevrier (2013) developed a typology of multicultural teams to take into account the fact that multicultural teams cover a wide variety of configurations and contexts. The typology includes:

- strategic coordination teams

- managing mixed nationalities in a single business unit
- interaction between headquarters and subsidiaries
- project teams
- teams sharing same profession
- one ‘diverse’ member submerged in an otherwise homogeneous team.

She arrives at this grouping by first considering five team characteristics and the repercussions that they might have on the dynamics of the multicultural teams.

**Table 9: The repercussions of team characteristics on team dynamics (Chevrier, 2013)**

	<b>Team Characteristics</b>	<b>Repercussions on team dynamics</b>
<b>Objective or task</b>	Coordination versus shared production	Degree of integration required
<b>Participants’ profile</b>	Number of cultures represented	Degree of the team’s diversity, eventual polarization between cultures with the most members Awareness of differences
<b>Ways of interacting</b>	Face-to-face or at a distance frequency	Degree of risk of misunderstanding and opportunities for mutual adaptation
<b>Duration</b>	Permanent or temporary	Opportunities for experimentation and learning from other team members
<b>Institutional context</b>	Homogeneity or heterogeneity of participants contexts, e.g. organization, job, department	Degree of convergence around a mission Intercultural climate

Here we adapt Chevrier’s model for multicultural teams to the multilingual teams, making use of the five characteristics: language configuration (team members’ language competencies), objective or task, ways of interaction, duration, and organizational context. We organize these elements both according to the literature on language diversity and according to Kochan and colleagues’ (2003) input-process-output model on the effect of diversity on teams.

### **b. A MODEL OF MULTILINGUAL TEAM FUNCTIONING**

We propose a model here of multilingual team functioning that includes four elements: team characteristics, team processes, organizational context, and team performance, each of which is described more fully below.

### **i. TEAM CHARACTERISTICS**

In the same way that we can consider the degree of cultural diversity of a team by looking at the profiles of the team members, we can also consider the degree and the nature of the language diversity and language skills of the team, which we group here in the notion of team language configuration. The notion of language configuration includes: the number of native languages in the group and the linguistic distance between those languages, the levels of language proficiency group members have in other languages, as well as the values or attitudes that group members might hold about languages (ex. speaking a particular language is a source of stress vs. a source of pleasure and stimulation, etc.)

Following Chevrier (2012) and others, the “input” of a multilingual team also includes the team’s task or objective. The type of team’s task may influence the degree of information-sharing and collaboration required. The localization of team members (the co-located vs. dispersed nature of the team) is also an aspect of “input” that will affect the way in which the team members interacts (Klitmoller & Luring, 2013).

### **ii. TEAM PROCESSES**

Team processes include language management practices as they were explained in detail above (Feely & Wilson, 2005; Steyaert et al, 2010; Chevrier, 2013). Additionally, we know from recent research on communication in dispersed teams (Klitmoller & Luring, 2013) that media richness plays a role in a multilingual team’s ability to communicate effectively, media richness meaning the level of content that a particular medium allows its users to communicate. (Ex. Video-conference is considered to be a richer media than email). We propose including here a look at the team’s use of media.

Finally, the duration of the team’s collaboration is also an important element of team processes, as this duration plays a role in the opportunity that a team has to learn to adjust to one another and develop practices related to diversity management at an interpersonal level (Chevrier, 2013).

### **iii. ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT**

Teams are embedded in organizational contexts that, to a greater or lesser extent, shape and inform the groups’ ways of working. Two aspects of the organizational context seem to particularly influence multilingual teamwork. The first is the institution’s internationalization strategy, trajectory and philosophy (Barlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Perlmutter,

1969). The needs of an organization in terms of language competency and the language resources it possesses via the language competencies of its employees will be related to the company's present degree of internationalization, as well as its history and its strategy for a future trajectory.

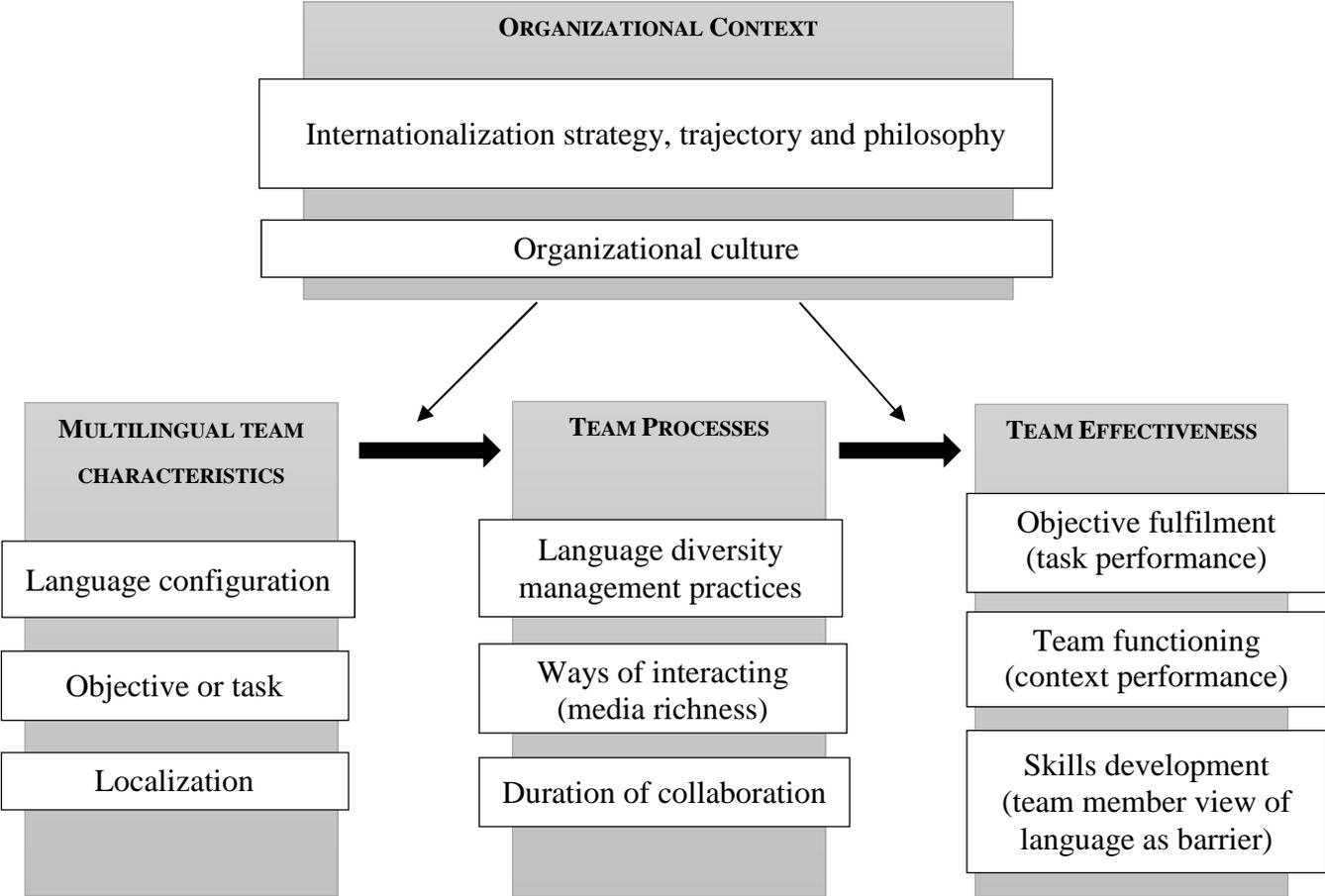
The second of organizational context that highly influences multilingual teamwork is, corporate culture with respect to language management. That is to say, we are interested in knowing the extent to which there is a common set of practices, attitudes, and basic assumptions about language management within the organization and how it could be characterized (Schein, 2010). For example, does the company have a laissez-faire approach or is there a conscientious effort to address the issue of language management as a strategic element, as it was done in the Renault-Nissan merger (Barmeyer & Mayrhofer, 2009). To what extent does professional competency tend to be judged by the quality of language expression (Tenzer et al., 2014)? Here we might consider larger societal views that include certain languages like English (Hagège, 2012) or Swedish (Vaara et al., 2005) as languages of political domination.

#### **iv. TEAM EFFECTIVENESS**

Research in management and organizational sciences is underpinned with the question of what works. The dominant thinking about team effectiveness is guided by so-called « input-process-output » models (West & Richter, 2007) like the ones presented in section 1. We include the notion of effectiveness in the model with the understanding that the connections researchers have been able to make between diversity and performance are tenuous, often contradictory, and moderated by organizational context (Bruna & Chauvet, 2013; Jackson et al., 2003; Kochan et al., 2003). Team effectiveness includes three components (Hackmann, 1987): the productive outcome (objective fulfilment), the extent to which a team develops as a well-functioning performing unit (including the team members' level of satisfaction with the group's language management), and the extent to which individual members become more knowledgeable or skilled as a result of their team experiences. This last aspect, in the context of multilingual teams, also recovers the extent to which the team members consider language diversity to be an obstacle to their group collaboration.

This model of multilingual teamwork with its four elements is represented below.

**Figure 2: A model of multilingual team functioning**



**RESEARCH AVENUES AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

This paper highlights that multilingual teams are not all created equal. We assert that in order to understand how multilingual teams function and how it is that some teams handle language diversity with greater satisfaction than others, it is necessary to take into consideration the specificities of each team. The main contribution of this paper is a conceptual model that is based on a well-established model of diversity in teams and that includes four main elements: the team’s characteristics, notably its language configuration, the organizational context in which the team is embedded, the team’s work processes, notable language management practices, and the team’s effectiveness, or its ability to fulfill its tasks and create a context that is favorable to collaboration. This paper also makes contributions by 1) further conceptualizing language diversity, as it has been presented in international

management literature, with the help of diversity constructs in research on diversity management and 2) advancing the notion of “language configuration” as a team characteristic.

The primary limitations to this paper are related to the interdisciplinary nature of research on language management. Research in this area calls on knowledge housed not only in management science and organizational behavior but also in linguistics, sociology, literary theory, educational sciences, and communications, to name a few. The conceptual model can go further in its inclusiveness of the principal debates and findings in these areas, disciplines themselves in which academics are taking increasing interest in language and languages within organizations. Another limitation is the fact that this model has not yet been tested empirically, a process which will reinforce or question the connections we make here. We hope that this model will be the groundwork for future empirical research on the specificities of multilingual teams and perhaps even a typology.

An empirically-tested framework of language diversity and team functioning and performance can provide support to managers of multilingual teams by: 1) drawing attention to the different ways in which teams can be language diverse, not just in the number of language they speak but also in the attitudes that team members have about language use and the degree to which language skills are valued as resources, 2) developing increased understanding of how the organizational context and practices with respect to language may influence attitudes and practices at the team level, 3) helping to evaluate the ways in which language diversity enhances and hinders team performance, 4) increasing awareness about the language management options available with advice as to which options might be best suited for a particular team language configuration and organizational context.

## REFERENCES

- Barmeyer, C. and U. Mayrhofer (2009), Management Interculturel et Processus d'Intégration: une Analyse de l'Alliance Renault-Nissan, *Management & Avenir*, 22 : 2, 109–131.
- Barner-Rasmussen, W. and C. Aarnio (2011), Shifting the Faultlines of Language: A Quantitative Functional-Level Exploration of Language Use in MNC Subsidiaries, *Journal of World Business*, 46 : 3, 288-295.
- Barner-Rasmussen, W. and I. Björkman (2005), Surmounting Interunit Barriers Factors Associated with Interunit Communication Intensity in the Multinational Corporation, *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 35 : 1, 28–46.
- Bartel-Radic, A. and N. Lesca, (2011), Requisite Variety and Intercultural Teams: To What Extent is Ashby's Law Useful?, *Management International*, 15 : 3, 89-104.
- Bartlett, C. A. and S. Ghoshal (2002), *Managing Across Borders: The Transnational Solution*. Cambridge, Harvard Business Press.
- Brannen M.Y. and Y. Doz (2012), The Languages of Strategic Agility: Trapped in your Jargon or Lost in Translation?, *California Management Review*, 54 : 3, 77-97.
- Bruna, M. G. and M. Chauvet (2013), La Diversité, un Levier de Performance : Plaidoyer pour un Management Innovateur et Créatif, *Management International*, 17 : numéro spécial, 70-84.
- Buckley, P. J., M. J. Carter, J. Clegg and H. Tan (2005), Language and Social Knowledge in Foreign-Knowledge Transfer to China, *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 35 : 1, 47–65.
- Chevrier, S. (2012), *Gérer des Equipes Internationales: Tirer Parti de la Rencontre des Cultures dans les Organisations*, Quebec : Presses de l'Université de Laval.
- Chevrier, S. (2013), Managing Multicultural Teams, in J.-F., Chanlat, E. Davel, et J.-P. Dupuis, *Cross-Cultural Management: Culture and Management Across the World*, New York: Routledge, 203–223.
- Dumitriu C. and Capdevila, I. (2012), L'entreprise Multinationale à La Croisée de la Mondialisation et du Management Interculturel: Comment Relever Le Défi Posé par la Distance Linguistique?, *Management & Avenir*, 55 : 5, 103–124.
- Ely, R. and D. Thomas (2001), Cultural Diversity at Work: The Effects of Diversity Perspectives on Work Group Processes and Outcomes, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46, 2 : 229-273.
- Feely, A.J, and Harzing, A.W. (2003), Language Management in Multinational Companies, *Cross Cultural Management*, 10 : 2, 37–52.
- Feely, A.J and D Winslow (2005), Talking Sense—A Research Study of Language Skills Management in Major Companies, United Kingdom: CILT, National Centre for Languages.
- Fredriksson R., W. Barner-Rasmussen and R. Piekkari (2006), The Multinational Corporation as a Multilingual Organization: The Notion of a Common Corporate Language, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 11 : 4, 406-423.
- Geoffroy, C. (2001), *La Mésentente Cordiale Voyage au Cœur de l'Espace Interculturel Franco-Anglais*, Paris : B. Grasset : Le Monde de l'Éducation.

- Girin, J. (2005), La Théorie des Organisations et la Question du Langage, in A. Borzeix et B. Fraenkel, *Langage et Travail: Communication, Cognition, Action*, Paris: CNRS Editions, 167-183.
- Grin, F. and F. Faniko (2012), Foreign Language Skills and Intercultural Abilities: Operationalization with a Large Population, *Management & Avenir*, 168–184.
- Hackmann, J. R. (1987), The Design of Work Teams. in Lorsch, J. *Handbook of organizational behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 315-342.
- Hagège, C. (2012), Imposer Sa Langue, C'est Imposer Sa Pensée, *L'Express.fr*. publié le 28/03/2012.
- Harzing, A.-W., K. Köster and U. Magner (2011), Babel in Business: The Language Barrier and its Solutions in the HQ-Subsidiary Relationship, *Journal of World Business*, 46 : 3, 279–287.
- Harzing, A.-W. and M. Pudelko (2013), Language Competencies, Policies and Practices in Multinational Corporations: A Comprehensive Review and Comparison of Anglophone, Asian, Continental European and Nordic MNCs, *Journal of World Business*, 48 : 1, 87–97.
- Harrison, D. A. and K. J. Klein (2007), What's the Difference? Diversity Constructs as Separation, Variety, or Disparity in Organizations, *Academy of Management Review*, 32 : 4, 1199–1228.
- Harrison, D. A., K. H. Price and M. P. Bell (1998), Beyond Relational Demography: Time and the Effects of Surface- and Deep-Level Diversity on Work Group Cohesion, *Academy of Management Journal*, 41 : 1, 96–107.
- Heikkilä, J.-P. and A. Smale (2011), The Effects of 'Language Standardization' on the Acceptance and Use of E-HRM Systems in Foreign Subsidiaries, *Journal of World Business*, 46 : 3, 305-313.
- Henderson, J.K. (2005), Language Diversity in International Management Teams, *International Studies of Management & Organizations*, 35 : 1, 66-82.
- Horwitz, S. K. and I. B. Horwitz, (2007), The Effects of Team Diversity on Team Outcomes: A Meta-Analytic Review of Team Demography, *Journal of Management*, 33 : 6, 987-1015.
- Jackson, S., A. Joshi and N. L. Erhardt (2003), Recent Research on Team and Organizational Diversity: SWOT Analysis and Implications, *Journal of Management*, 29 : 6, 801-830.
- Klitmøller, A. and J. Luring (2013), When Global Virtual Teams Share Knowledge: Media Richness, Cultural Difference and Language Commonality, *Journal of World Business*, 48 : 3, 398-406.
- Kochan, T., K. Bezrukova, R. Ely, S. Jackson, A. Joshi, K. Jehn, J. Leonard. and J. D. Levine, (2003), The Effects of Diversity on Business Performance: Report of the Diversity Research Network, *Human Resource Management*, 42 : 1, 3-21.
- Luring, J. (2008), Rethinking Social Identity Theory in International Encounters: Language Use as a Negotiated Object for Identity Making. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 8 : 3, 343-361.
- Luring, J. (2011), Intercultural Organizational Communication: The Social Organizing of Interaction in International Encounters, *Journal of Business Communication*, 48 : 3, 231-255.
- Luring, J. and J. Selmer (2010), Multicultural Organizations: Common Language and Group Cohesiveness, *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 10 : 3, 267–284.

- Luo, Y. and O. Shenkar (2006), The multinational corporation as a multilingual community: Language and organization in a global context, *Journal of International Business Studies*, 37 : 3, 321–339.
- Milliken, F. J. and L.L. Martins (1996), Searching for Common Threads: Understanding the Multiple Effects of Diversity in Organizational Groups, *Academy of Management Review*, 21 : 2, 402-433.
- Neeley, T. (2012), Global Business Speaks English. *Harvard Business Review*, 90 : 5, 116–124.
- Neeley, T. (2013), Language Matters: Status Loss & Achieved Status Distinctions in Global Organizations, *Organization Science*, 24 : 2, 476–497.
- Perlmutter, H. V. (1969), The Tortuous Evolution of the Multinational Corporation, *Columbia Journal of World Business*, 4 : 1, 9-18.
- Piekkari, R., E. Vaara, J. Tienari, and R. Sääntti (2005), Integration or disintegration? Human Resource Implications of a Common Corporate Language Decision in a Cross-border Merger, *International Journal of Human Resources Management*, 16 : 3, 330-344.
- Schein, E. H. (2010), *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Steyaert, C., A., Ostendorp, and C. Gaibrois (2010), Multilingual Organizations as ‘Linguascapes’: Negotiating the Position of English through Discursive Practices, *Journal of World Business*, 46 : 3, 270-278.
- Tenzer, H., M. Pudelko, and A.W. Harzing (2014), The Impact of Language Barriers on Trust Formation in Multinational Teams, in press for *Journal of International Business Studies*.
- Vaara, E, J. Tienari, R. Piekkari, and R. Sääntti (2005), Language and the Circuits of Power in Merging Multinational Corporation, *Journal of Management Studies*, 42 : 3, 595-623.
- Welch, D. E. et L.S. Welch (2008), The Importance of Language in International Knowledge Transfer, *Management International Review*, 48 : 3, 339–360.
- Welch, D.E., L.S. Welch and R. Piekkari (2005), Speaking in Tongues: the Importance of Language in International Management Processes, *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 35 : 1, 10–27.
- West, M. and Richter, A. (2008), Team Performance. in S. Clegg, & J. Bailey (dir.), *International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1523-1528.
- Zander, L., Mockaitis, A. I. and Harzing, A.-W. (2011), Standardization and Contextualization: A Study of Language and Leadership across 17 Countries, *Journal of World Business*, 46 : 3, 296–304.