

**Title:** A micro-level study of language influences on task coordination and team relations

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**Organizations as multilingual communities: A micro-level study of language influences on task coordination and social relations**

**Abstract**

In a multilingual community, a lingua franca is commonly regarded as solving the problem of communicating. However, the complexity of language foreignness – a joint influence of cultural and linguistic understanding – still affects knowledge and communication processes. When multilingual community members communicate, they use/choose language selectively, based upon the need for knowledge dissemination, information-sharing/-reporting and strategic positioning. This paper draws upon research on communication within global virtual teams to develop a set of conceptual propositions for how language foreignness distorts communication when community members exchange information. Our research draws attention to the strategic role of language-switching as a basis to create task-/interpersonal-specific assets for competitive advantage in the environment of language diversity.

Keywords: Lingua Franca (LF), Micro-foundation, Communication, Knowledge process, Language foreignness, Language-switching, Strategy.

Past research in international business and strategy studies have focused on macro level—the relation between organization and organization (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Roth & Morrison, 1992). Zaheer, McEvily and Perrone (1998) have emphasized the firm-level of relationship, yet underscore the multilevel nature of difference in dynamics between team performance and interpersonal relations versus relations at the firm-level. Zahra and George (2002, p.191) criticized past organization-level research for applying measures that “have been rudimentary and do not fully reflect the richness of the construct.” Recent research has started emphasizing that relationships between organizational levels need micro-explanations to link macro-phenomena (Felin & Foss, 2005; Foss & Pedersen 2004; Teece, 2007). Organizations need to coordinate and systemize large-scale explicit components from individuals to create systemic knowledge. Individuals are in a micro-level to interchange knowledge, inculcate valued features and provide skills (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Research forging micro-macro linkages has received less attention. Haas and Hansen (2005, p.1151) suggest the contribution of micro-level studies as “filling this gap by articulating fundamental elements of a ‘micro-foundation’ for translating firm-level capabilities into task-level performance.” However, a vital micro-level factor which has been absent from international business literature is the role of language. This paper investigates how the use of language affects knowledge processes—‘transferring, translating and transforming’ (Carlile, 2004), and investigates how multilingual team members manage to use (or switch between) their local home/native language and a lingua franca (LF) to create relational advantage.

In a multilingual community, using a corporate language as a LF may appear to overcome the problems associated with diversity in the native languages of community members. Yet, language as a source to enable communication and as a barrier to mask communication builds a distinctive linkage between multilingual team members to process knowledge. Incorporating a LF to communicate in a multilingual environment is more complicated than using a home/native language in a single environment. Several researchers have examined a number of impacts of language differences: conflict management in cross-cultural teams (Von Glinow, Shapiro & Brett, 2004) and knowledge processes between different multinational organizational units (Ghoshal & Nohria, 1989). We present a deeper analysis of the role of language as the active and subject nature of knowledge that is deeply

rooted in the value systems of individuals. The contribution of the paper is to show that while a LF solves one kind of problem it brings others which organizations need to understand.

The definition of multilingual team members in this paper suggests that communicators are capable of selecting corporate language and/or local home/native language(s) in work. When team members who are based in local subunits own common knowledge proficiency and are also capable of using a foreign LF to exchange knowledge within and between teams, their capability enables them to work cross-functionally. The competitive capability (Argotea & Ingram, 2000; Kogut & Zander, 1992; Lane & Lubatkin, 1998; Minbaeva et al., 2003; Zahra & George, 2002) of knowledge proficiency and language competence enables these teams to manage cross-border organizational integration and to develop joint-projects collectively through the control instruments of a local native/home language and/or a foreign LF. Therefore, teams in local subunits have the potential to bring local knowledge to benefit the foreign (parent) company and pass along knowledge to its local subunits.

Interview statements from our study of multilingual team members who share joint-projects within a MNE serve to introduce the core ideas and present our objectives.

*G. Zhang is a cross-functional team representative in the Regional HQ of an IT company, based in Beijing, China. He describes how the language that he and his colleagues use varies according to the task:*

***‘I use English as a common language to communicate with my teams in Canada... Taiwan, China... My Chinese (work) team members and I use Chinese to discuss issues when we have complicated issues... it’s difficult to fully explain things in English. After all, I am not a native English language speaker.’***

*R. Lin is a cross-functional team representative in a local subunit, based in Xiamen, China. He describes how bilingual team colleagues make improvisational use of two languages in order to achieve their goals:*

***‘English is like a tool to communicate with foreign workmates... mostly about work (technical issues)... using Chinese metaphors... I don’t know how to translate it... we use Chinese style English or combine Chinese and English in a sentence. It depends on***

*topics... and what kinds of issue we would like to emphasize.'*

*V. Ma is a cross-functional team representative based in the corporate HQ of an IT company in Vancouver, Canada. He points to trade-offs involved in choice of language:*

*'It's easier to control the temper in text and hide real emotion in English. It's hard to use a foreign language to show feelings...When there is no emotion exchange, it's easier to make progress in work but the relationship cannot make good progress.'*

These interview quotes draw attention to a variety of language problems. Multilingual team members use language to affect effective communication when LF does not provide a guarantee of effective communication across linguistic boundaries. Henderson (2005, p.75) regards that the main challenge for international team members is that a corporate language is used as a 'surface' language to facilitate exchanges and "continue to use diverse expressive and interpretive mechanisms derived from their respective language systems." Choosing which language to use in communication is associated with a rich array of language cues with which community members can display their social intentions. However, when choosing a specific language between a home/native language and a LF becomes a pattern to coordinate tasks and/or maintain relations, multilingual team members learn to interpret the cognitive intension of language choices during the process of communication.

Due to specific languages characteristics of 'richness' and 'foreignness', there would be distinctive differences when using a home/native language and a foreign language to convey cognitive information. The characteristic of 'language foreignness' suggests a difference between a person's native language and the language of use. Using a foreign language as a LF requires an ability and knowledge to interpret or decipher explicit meaning. Due to an inability to associate with a particular context and to understand language implication, using a foreign language makes information difficult transfer or fully comprehend. While exchanging information, the inability of recognizing the implication (i.e. idioms, slangs; proverbs) may lead to 'language foreignness'. The ability of interpreting foreign language cues would be crucial to its effectiveness. However, when using a foreign language to transfer proficient knowledge, the social and cognitive cues of 'language foreignness' cues may be less prominent. Accordingly, language characteristics provide multi-layers of information. Multilingual users learn to use the richness or foreignness of language cues to develop

a shared mental model for task coordination and social relations.

We set out some of the challenges that teams as a multilingual community face to form the focus of this analysis. This paper includes selected interview quotes from team representatives operating in different levels of MNE units (i.e. local, regional and foreign units), and also incorporates Instant Message (IM) logs to identify the paradox of language usage between individuals. We have chosen to focus on cross-functional teams to explore how team representatives strategize language to manage social relations while coordinating joint-tasks. We also use dyadic communication to illustrate a cross-unit linkage, suggesting that team members communicate to actively manage the flow of knowledge. Yet, we recognize that the issues raised are not specific to cross-functional teams, and we will draw out the broader lessons for communication in organizations.

This paper highlights that multilingual team members in different MNE units incorporate different characteristics of their corporate language and local home/native language. When multilingual users collaborate on joint-projects in a multilingual environment, the strategy of using a foreign LF neglects the impact of language foreignness in communication. We propose that the choice of language will have important consequences for managing relationship conflict and for knowledge exchange. Our four contributions to the literature are listed below.

1. The breadth and capacity of ‘language richness’ vary with the context, i.e. richness is context-dependent.
2. A single lingua franca is insufficient to facilitate the interdependence of team and task. We will show why this is so, and what language users can do to manage such problems.
3. ‘Language foreignness’ characteristics hinder the awareness of social appeal to affect team performance and task effectiveness.
4. The impact of language foreignness influences the process of knowledge exchange and accordingly affects communication processes within a network.

Communication between team members build on ‘parallel processes’ of current issues, including proficient/technical and cognitive dimensions of information to be processed simultaneously. Our research on language-switching/choice focuses on how multilingual team members choose an optimal LF when managing information and knowledge process; i.e. accentuating and strengthening

information accuracy and process velocity for effective exchanges. We argue that language-switching is negotiable to promote continuous communication, through which team members operate task coordination across teams and manage information-sharing/learning and activity configuration. In a sense, language is the single most significant attribute in knowledge and communication processes.

An understanding of how these team members combine the use of language(s) to facilitate the interdependence of team and task will benefit existing literature in a variety of different areas of management, including international business, corporate strategy, communication, teamwork and knowledge management. There are five sections in the rest of this paper: 1. Theoretical background, 2. Development of theoretical framework, 3. Challenge, 4. Discussion and Implication; 5. Conclusion.

## **1. Theoretical background**

Organizations commonly form task-force groups whose membership is based on the skills and technical knowledge required to complete a task, drawing together people who may be based in different parts of the world and who have different native languages (Marks, Mathieu & Zaccaro, 2001). However, possessing the requisite skills and technical knowledge for a team task is necessary but insufficient, since the language capability of team members has profound effects on the ways in which they process knowledge and communicate information within the team. It is timely to consider how team members cope with language diversity (i.e. the use of LF in a common foreign or a local home/native language) and how the challenge of using a LF affects communication. The broad impact of language factors would influence many aspects of international business and management, including internal and inter-unit communication, the process of knowledge exchange and management of the organizational units' relations (Marschan, Welch & Welch, 1997). Our theoretical background has three subsections, which are: 1.1 Language: a neglected problem, 1.2 Language characteristics: foreignness and richness and 1.3 Language impact in knowledge and communication processes.

### ***1.1 Language: a neglected problem***

Within management literature, analysis of the concept of language is commonly subsumed under cultural factors and therefore, the distinctive problem of language tends to be neglected. Language

diversities in a multilingual community cause communication barriers. It is widely recognized that communication is very difficult where those involved do not share a common language (Harzing & Feely, 2008; Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Vaara et al., 2005; Welch, Welch & Piekkari 2005). Specifying the use of a single LF is the typical corporate response to the difficult issue of ‘thinning out’ the viscosity or ‘stickiness’ of knowledge transfer (Szulanski, 1996). This stickiness challenges the flow of knowledge (Szulanski, 1996; 2003). Research has stressed that LF is a pre-requisite for teams within organizations to enable them to work across language diversities.

A shared language can be understood as a pre-requisite for communication in a multilingual environment. Organizations (macro-level) choose a LF to bridge language diversity and facilitate corporate communication. However, team members based in local subunits may naturally adopt their local home/native language when communicating with each other. Luo and Shenkar (2006) argue that using a single corporate language within a global network challenges the knowledge dissemination of headquarters policy between headquarters and globally dispersed subunits. When teams are grounded in a local environment (culture, institution, history, etc) or based within the same country, teams (meso-level) and individuals (micro-level) choose the language of use. Furthermore, when the fundamental level of multilingual team members (micro-level) are in ‘parallel processes’ of exchanging technical/proficient information/knowledge and managing social relations simultaneously, they could switch between a (foreign) LF and a home/native language or from a monolingual to a multilingual context to clarify ongoing task or consult on relational issues.

An exclusive research focus on LF misses both the challenges and the opportunities of multiple language usage. A LF solves the immediate problem of being able to communicate, but brings with it its own problems (capability and characteristics to exchange knowledge), which existing literature has failed to address adequately. We will argue that there are issues involved in both language choice and language use which seriously impact on the micro-working of teams and therefore on the effectiveness of the organization as a whole. A group of international business and strategy researchers also assert that adopting multiple language design positively can affect global organization performance (Cossette, 1998; Donnellon, 1986; Sackmann, 1989; Schulz, 2001).

### ***1.2 Language characteristics: foreignness and richness***

Media richness theory is used to refer to the medium within which a message is encoded. The concept of ‘language foreignness and richness’ builds on media richness theory (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987) — the ability to facilitate shared understanding and change understanding within a time interval. We apply similar ideas to the language as medium for encoding messages — the ability to carry information on the use of language. Media used for communication transactions that can clarify ambiguity and change understanding within a time interval are considered rich. The choice of language that can change understanding in a timely manner provides capacity of richness to clarify information uncertainty and/or to integrate understandings into a shared mental model.

Since we argue that languages convey multiple layers of meaning, the concept of media richness theory as an explanatory framework (Dennis, Fuller & Valacich, 2008) associates the ability to carry information with different task types: uncertainty and equivocality. Uncertainty is associated with a lack of information needed for a given task. Equivocality is associated with negotiating meanings of a task and requiring multiple interpretations for ambiguous situations. Media richness can serve as a reference for the choices of language used in different situations. When dealing with the type of task uncertainty, team members select a language that enables them to exchange information and resolve uncertainty. Yet, the choice of language for equivocal tasks would require language capacity of richness that enables team members to interpret and integrate the acquired information.

We suggest that the breadth and capacity of ‘richness’ in the use of language is context-dependent. When a single LF integrates proficient/technical information to develop proficient knowledge, the use of a LF provides ‘language richness’ to process task uncertainty across different levels and to develop intra-network communication. In contrast, when a task issue is associated with cognitive dimensions of information-processing, a (foreign) LF used in a multilingual community may be insufficient to convey multiple layers of meaning. We suggest that team members (micro-level) will make strategic use of language-switching in order to facilitate an ongoing task more effectively. Multilingual team members at the micro-level are able to communicate in a home/native language to manage social relations. Therefore, the language of use that provides richness to process uncertainty may not be the same as the chosen language that provides breadth to negotiate a difficult situation.

As media vary in the characteristics that media richness theory includes, languages also vary in two respects – the language itself and also the difference between the person’s native language and the language of use. While adopting the corporate language as a foreign LF, foreign language users who have sufficient language sophistication may be competent in delivering knowledge. Yet, Vaara et al. (2005) specifically highlight language skills that become both empowering and disempowering resources in communication. Meanwhile, not every member will exhibit the same level of language capability to communicate effectively. Team members may encounter contrasting levels of ‘language foreignness’ between a corporate and a local native/home language.

We use the term ‘language foreignness’ to refer to the difference between a (foreign) LF and a home/native language. Feely and Harzing (2003) have suggested that language forms a key aspect and a facet of culture. The levels of cultural context and the differences of linguistic structure may strongly influence how individuals articulate, interpret and deliver during the processes of communication and knowledge transfer, and then affect language usage (either written or spoken language). A group of researchers (Bhagat et al, 2002) argue that the condition of cultural differences would cause difficulties when exchanging knowledge. People from different cultures would have associated cultural idioms when expressing or interpreting information. The use of foreign LF creates the ‘foreignness’ characteristics, which may reduce the contextual ‘richness’ in communication.

For example, low-context languages (i.e. English, German or Scandinavian) which emphasize explicit knowledge require less knowledge of the context in order to be interpreted correctly. By contrast, high-context languages (i.e. Japanese, Korean or Chinese) tend to absorb and transmit implicit information and prefer contextually relevant knowledge (Hall & Hall, 2000). Accordingly, the knowledge of how to use a LF that is embedded within one culture is unique and quite different from the way it is embedded within another. If the cultural diversities affect multilingual members to think and/or interpret the communication content differently, degrees in language foreignness could cause different levels of understandings and lead to communication barriers. Thus, the joint influence of cultural patterns and language diversities form ‘language foreignness’.

Language foreignness affects team members in local subunits when reporting issues to their foreign headquarters/units. These teams may face difficulties when addressing local knowledge. Without

effective communication, task coordination and conflict would influence successful information dissemination between teams. Also, teams in local subunits may be in a disadvantageous position to fully adopt a single unified approach (i.e. policies, procedures and actions) from their headquarters. Noorderhaven and Harzing (2009) suggest that communication is a form of social interaction, which facilitates knowledge flows within a network. However, when using a foreign LF to communicate with same home/native language speakers, 'language foreignness' may create social and relational boundaries. Subsequently, the process of communication both within and across organizational units may hinder the flow of knowledge affecting corporate performance.

There are at least four aspects of 'language foreignness'—a joint influence of linguistic-cultural understanding. The first aspect is how well people know or understand the language, the second aspect is the local levels of difference in the use of a common home/native language, and the third aspect is different alien levels of using a common foreign language. The last aspect is the difference between the home/native language and the foreign language. Consider the following:

1. Two people speaking a shared language, but one is fluent whilst the other is not.
2. Two people who share similar cultural contexts use a common native language as a LF but may use their native language differently. Both the United States and the United Kingdom are English-speaking nations. Taiwan and China or other Chinese-speaking countries (i.e. Hong Kong and Singapore) all speak Chinese Mandarin but write differently (i.e. Taiwan and Hong Kong use Traditional Chinese, but Chinese Mainlanders or Singaporeans use different styles of Simplified Chinese. In addition, Singapore and Hong Kong as cultures were influenced by British Imperialism, using Chinglish—a combination of Chinese and English).
3. Two people who are equally familiar with a shared language, but for one of them, the native language is very different (in linguistic structures) while for the other the native language is very similar (for example a French and a Chinese both speaking Japanese).
4. Two people speaking a shared language where this is the native language for one but a second language for the other (e.g. an American and a Korean both speaking English).

While reviewing the association between language and communication, we will investigate how multilingual team members use, choose and switch between languages in order to process

information/knowledge. Daft, Lengel and Trevino (1987, p.358) suggest “natural language conveys a broader set of concepts and ideas.” When team members use a foreign LF to communicate, their cultural-linguistic logic would affect them to interpret and deliver information. Translating words from one language to another can limit the full richness of meaning. An externalization of implicit knowledge may not be done effectively in a corporate language other than a home/native language, especially when the corporate language and local home/native language have a high contrast level of contextual cues (e.g. Chinese and English). In this paper, we focus on the last characteristic of ‘language foreignness’ impact — how multilingual team members choose language or switch between a foreign LF and a native/home local language to manage task coordination and maintain relations.

### ***1.3 Language impact in knowledge and communication processes***

While communication is essential to manage business and is a necessary condition amongst global units to exchange complex knowledge (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000), language is seen as a structural element of organization design for global strategy, operations and dynamics. Yet, global units (i.e. individuals, teams or organizations) may encounter communication problems due to the challenge of language foreignness and richness. Heath and Bryant (2000, p.91) suggest “language allows people to function on two levels: that of their individual thoughts and the realization that other share similar meaning and interpretations.” Through communication and interaction, individuals learn to know ‘what’ is transferred (i.e. facts and information), and also learn to know ‘how’ to transfer (i.e. the ability to do something). The three types of knowledge process, transferring, translating and transforming, help us review how team members recognize problems, evaluate task/knowledge types, and then choose an optimal language to coordinate task and manage social interaction and interpersonal relations.

#### **1.3.1 Choice of language: hidden signals and intention in a dyadic communication**

Nonaka (1994) indicates that language is behavior. This expression implies that language is a socially creative activity. Robichaud, Giroux and Taylor (2004) suggest that both social entities and organizations persist and evolve through the mediation of language. These scholars have consistently

posited that the choice of language affects our thinking and information interpretation and may constitute an essential inhibitor in knowledge reception. We argue that the choice of which language is selected is itself meaningful. Also, the choice of language presents people's intentions, even when people are not aware.

When team members choose to use either their corporate language or a local native/home language, that choice of language implicitly displays social intentions for collective awareness; meanwhile, gives social value to others in social situations. The characteristics of language richness and foreignness presented in the context of conversations imply modes of discourse and emotions. How language choices enact occurs in the context of purposeful activity, providing cognitive messages that people process to define and evaluate one another (Heath & Bryant, 2000). Message senders are conveying meaning in their language choices (whether they intend to or not), and message receivers will make inferences about meaning from those languages choices (even if the sender did not knowingly intend it). Individuals absorb and convert the characteristics of language richness and foreignness into conscious perception, knowing and understanding for better adaptation.

Next, we elaborate on what the intentions are for people in their language choices. When multilingual users acquire an encountering circumstance, they may choose a particular language (intentionally or inadvertently) to manifest purpose or present problem awareness. Multilingual team members may select their local native/home language to reduce language foreignness and to associate with the sense of relational closeness. Contrastingly, these team members may use a corporate language/foreign LF to imply relational distance. Without the support of 'language richness' in communication, team members may be unable to display their relational closeness and/or emotional openness. In addition, multiple language choices allow multilingual users to switch between languages while coordinating tasks or managing relations. Multilingual team members may switch between a foreign LF and a local native/home language when attempting to provide proficient and cognitive contexts of information/knowledge to achieve their goals. Language-switching as a pre-articulated code may draw different attentions to associate with different sets of information, which facilitates negotiation and coordination with those joint-task participants.

Meanwhile, dialectic information-exchanging is a repetitive and spiral process to connect language

and reality created through dialogue, in which affirmation and negation are synthesized to form knowledge. The consistency of repetitive information enhances an individual's learning perception. The spiral development as reflection-in-action generates various combination of information flexibly and thereby developing an individual's recognition and mutual experiences. The developed knowledge is adopted to fit changing requirements from circumstances both inside and outside the organization; then to accommodate work flows. Having incorporated the influence of 'language foreignness/richness' characteristics, we posit that language-switching/choice between team members reduces the adverse impact of knowledge stickiness.

### 1.3.2 Language impact in the 'transferring, translating and transforming' processes

Knowledge is organized by the flow of information, which includes proficient/technical and cognitive dimensions (Nonaka, 1994). The proficient/technical dimension of information contains concrete 'know-how' and skills that apply to specific context. The cognitive dimension of information suggests how individuals create or manipulate the analogies as their translation/interpretation in their minds. The strategic use of language-switching involves an iterative process wherein multilingual team members become more skilled at expressing and developing their shared knowledge through their language choices. The next step is to specify how that development occurs, and identify what the varying degrees of skill would look like.

Carlile (2004) incorporated 'transferring, translating and transforming' types of knowledge processes to develop an integrative framework for managing knowledge. The transferring process involves proficient/technical dimensions; however, cognitive dimensions could impact the translating and transforming processes. Language-switching/choices as an action-oriented concept can be a strategy used across different boundaries. We next consider the strategic role of language in each of these.

*Transferring processes: Using lingua franca across information-processing boundaries* Szulanski (1996) suggests that the movement of information-processing across organizational boundaries is "knowledge transfer". Transfer is likely to be most effective for tasks where the required technical knowledge is itself expressed in an international language. Examples of such include: the use of

English for technical terms in IT-related fields, the use of Latin in biochemical-related fields, and customized lexicons or jargon in a corporate environment. In all of these cases, using the appropriate LF by multilingual users does not place them at a disadvantage since LF is the language used to express the required knowledge itself.

*Translating processes: Language-switching/choices across information-interpretation boundaries* A flow of messages or meanings that individuals form in their minds in the beginning initialize and formalize knowledge. Following that, a dialectical procedure drives individuals to develop new ideas/concepts. The awareness of language choices guides or influences an individual's action—developing or avoiding their social interactions. An explicit choice of language is relative to present what the circumstances an actor is aware of or how an actor defines the situations (i.e. potential conflict, relational concern or task focus). That is to say, the choice of language is utilized as a means to present an actor's intention, but also to restructure and/or changing his/her counterpart's perception. Subsequently, language choices available suggest how best an actor conveys his/her meaning and present his/her intention, and through which, his/her counterpart learn to interpret and identify the intention of language-switching/choice. During the process of communication, language-switching is a cognitive act and can be intuitive, which discloses that the actor encounters contradicting perceptions. Accordingly, the choice of language used in a continual dialogue not only displays explicit information, but also discloses implicit information. Such a cognizant procedure forms a spiral model of learning and sharing processes to drive communicators to develop joint-understanding. The repeated and habitual acts involved in regular interaction present consistency, and thereby establishing common meanings and developing a shared mental model (Nonaka, 1994).

*Transforming processes: Strategizing language across social boundaries* When a multilingual user changes the communicating language to his/her counterpart's language, language-switching as a contextual cue by communicating in the same language and/or by imitating his/her counterpart's language shows performs 'echoing behavior' (Henderson, 2005) . When an actor experiences a new behavior by making inference from another behavior, echoing behavior suggest that both communicators are experiencing the same perspective and aware of the consequences. Therefore, a common interest or recognition is developed to alter current knowledge and transform 'purposive'

nature of knowledge collectively (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Based upon it, the role of language is strategized to be an adequate means. Once an adequate means is established through ‘echoing behavior’—suggesting the willingness of sharing and assessing knowledge, the change of perspective allows communicators to address/display the consequences, differences and dependencies of each other’s specific concerns. The combination of language use or language-switching is a simultaneous and contextual phenomenon, in which communicators are cognizant of a change occurring, experience the same sense of change, and are moved to take action.

## **2. Development of theoretical framework**

Language in international strategy and management literatures has received relatively little specific attention and is embedded within the broader construct of cultural distance (Kogut & Singh, 1988; Salk & Brannen, 2000). Yet, language factor is recognized as a potential communication barrier that may impede coordination (Brannen, 2004). In this section, we propose a multilevel framework for the strategic role of language, with three levels: organisation, team and individual.

Knowledge transfer in organization-level is routine-based (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) while LF as a means operates in routine activities. Organizations and teams both rely on the use of LF to the sustaining of cooperative interaction and to promote proficient knowledge assimilation through routine information-processing. In order to manage intra-network communication, Sohn (1994) suggests that social knowledge is an important element, enabling the participants to learn and process the acquired understandings of others’ behaviors and then interpret and/or predict the behavior of others. When using a single LF, cognitive dimensions of information may be easily neglected.

The span of team activities is not confined to organizational boundaries. Through team collaboration within or between organizations, team activities gather individuals who can provide or contribute useful information. At the team level, organizational members have to communicate for task coordination and learn continuous mutual adjustment to each others’ activities and thereupon, exchange information making extensive use of knowledge. The investigation of personal coordination, language impact and team performance provides insight into how the use of language creates problems in knowledge and communication processes. Salk and Brannen, (2000) indicate that the use

of a LF on the processes and the effectiveness of international teams rises to obstacles and tensions and also significantly impacts on teamwork and relationship building. Yet, social interaction provides an immediate forum to share and access knowledge, and by that means, spanning organizational boundaries (Nonaka, 1994). By linking active learning and sharing processes through co-experience of language usage to the routine dimensions of daily task coordination, collaborative teams as evolving communities of practice are “more fluid and interpretive than bounded, often crossing the restrictive boundaries of the organization” (Brown & Duguid, 1991, p.49). The choice of languages adopted in social interaction provides a multilingual community a negotiation capacity to integrate appropriate aspects of emerging knowledge into a strategic development.

Although individuals, teams and organizations could choose a single LF across different levels and knowledge boundaries, a complex environment does not lend itself to standardized coordination or planning. The organization provides individuals a ‘field’ to articulate their perspectives and to nurture the emergent property of social and proficient knowledge. In a multilingual community, language choices are adopted to change from a monolingual context to a multilingual context. Moreover, the choice of languages can cause environmental fluctuation, and through which, individuals reflect their belief and value systems while operating routine tasks. Accordingly, the choice of languages trigger the breakdown of routine and then affect inter-unit perception (i.e. feelings, emotion; relational closeness) towards trust-building. Such a breakdown or contradiction affects knowledge processes and provides an opportunity to pay attention to the fundamental level—individuals who control and develop fundamental thinking and perspectives.

Based on theoretical background, we developed to show the role of language in linking how task and knowledge types affect performance outcomes. Language-switching and choices may suggest a pre-articulated association between the focus of proficient/technical and cognitive information. Also, we incorporate factors at different levels and identify the increasing recognition of the importance of multilevel models in research. A language strategy is developed to facilitate communication and knowledge processes in a multilingual community. We suggest four points in the use of language.

1. The breadth and capacity of ‘richness’ in the use of language is context-dependent based on types of task and knowledge. The ‘richness’ in the use of a LF supports information-processing across

different levels.

2. Yet, a single LF bridges language diversity for effective communication, but this depends on how competent multilingual team members manage a foreign LF. So there are conditions where using a single LF is not effective.
3. Using a foreign LF in communication increases language foreignness and in contrast, using local native/home language increases language richness.
4. Choosing and switching between languages is used strategically to manage relations in an attempt to coordinate tasks.

### **3. Challenge**

We review how organizational units bring complementary capabilities together and share the associated competencies by generating new competitive knowledge, helping define how teams coordinate tasks and manage social relations by continuously adjusting to each others' mutual activities. This paper uses extracts from the daily IM logs of cross-functional teams. The IM logs illustrate a dyadic form of communication which disclosed one's own moves and counter moves, and demonstrate how language choices could facilitate communication effectiveness and process knowledge effectively by clarifying ambiguity of cognitive dimensions and exchanging proficient/technical information. The dialogic interactions enable communicators to observe individual behavior, attitudes or values and interpret the implicit information through language usage. The daily communication records evolutionary and progressive process of knowledge to underpin organizational structure, strategy and experience.

The selected quotes from interviews and IM logs (Chen, 2008) exemplify how team members use a LF and a local native/home language to manage language competence and deploy knowledge as global strategies within the context of evolving environmental and organizational realities. We disclose the hidden 'language foreignness/richness' characteristics which surface during the communication process. The examples of selected events illustrate how team members strategize language to exchange different types of knowledge/information and incorporate language characteristics to integrate proficient knowledge while coordinating tasks. Meanwhile, we diagnose

how the language characteristics are negatively or positively used in social, emotional and cognitive context, and which language is used to manage relations. Aligning the use of language systems with organizational strategy and dynamics not only reduces knowledge viscosity but also improves task coordination and social relations. The following section highlights three key situations:

1. how team member choose/use languages to process proficient/technical information/knowledge and thereby transferring knowledge effectively (section 3.1).
2. how team members utilize ‘language richness/foreignness’ characteristics to disclose individual intentions and manage social relations while coordinating tasks (section 3.2).
3. how the language strategy combining language choices and language-switching serves effective communication and thereby knowledge could be successfully processed (section 3.3).

### ***3.1 Using lingua franca to coordinate proficient/technical tasks***

In the example of this subsection, both multilingual team members from the same place of origin use a corporate language as a foreign LF. When these team members focus on task coordination and when the type of task is associated with proficient knowledge, a LF is adopted to transfer technical information. Accordingly, teams based in different locations could integrate the shared and assessed information and transfer knowledge across organizational units.

#### **3.1.1 Using a foreign LF for joint-task coordination**

We use an interview quote and illustrate an IM conversation quote to show how both team members use a foreign LF to transfer proficient/technical types of information in an attempt to manage their joint-task coordination. The use of LF facilitates communication and knowledge processes to explore the proficient/technical dimension of information/knowledge rather than disclosing the cognitive dimension of information.

Go-si is Chinese working in Regional HQs of an IT company, based in Beijing, China. He describes how he uses a foreign LF for joint-task coordination while communicating with subunits in China or with his HQs situated in Canada.

***We are all familiar with the technical language in the discussion. Sometimes translation might***

*cause misunderstandings... Because most of our software and materials were written in English...*

Xiaota (in Xiamen) and Rui (in Beijing) are both native Chinese speakers in cross-functional teams of an IT company. They use a foreign LF to coordinate joint-tasks and communicate across different MNE units in China.

1. Xiaota: what's <OK,bcTxt> mean?
2. **Rui: it menas, the pytest is expected to received the OK and bactxt from the MMB**
3. **Rui: With 007 promotion, my side can pass the above test, but now fail with**
4. Xiaota: so do u mean when u test under 004, u call back to 004, chassis fail, and in 007 gbeswitch flash fail?
5. **Rui: yeah, when i test 004, the chassis fail for the modinfo. Then when i try on 007, it fails at GBESwitch flashing after the modinfo step pass.**
6. Xiaota: loop time, test leveling is for saftlaunch only? or...??? help me understand >'< (a para-verbal text '???' and an emoticon >'< are used.)
7. **Rui: just ask the safe launch site turn off safe launch if volumn is large**

This IM log example illustrates that both team members who speak the same home/native language (Chinese Mandarin) choose to communicate in a foreign LF to process proficient/technical dimensions of information; consequently, manage to share and access knowledge successfully. Although the content of information is disclosed in English, the content may only be understood by these team members due to the associated proficient/technical knowledge. After Xiaota initiates his enquiry relating to a context-specific knowledge by giving syntactic information (line 1), Rui processes the acquired information and then shares the associated knowledge (lines 2-3) to function on their joint-tasks. Continuing the task coordination, Xiaota and Rui cooperate to test the acquired information interdependently (lines 4-7) as their routine actions. During the dialectical process of information exchange, Rui shares knowledge in a LF (lines 2/3/5/7); simultaneously, Xiaota learns to adopt the acquired information to develop knowledge (line 4). While Xiaota emphasizes his concerns of information uncertainty, Xiaota—a local home/native language speaker, finds it difficult to express personal feelings in a foreign LF (line 6). Then, he incorporates symbolic cues to disclose an emotional context and to highlight his personal intention—need for immediate knowledge support.

### 3.1.2 Discussion

Using a foreign LF to manage proficient/technical task coordination may effectively exchange a context-specific information/knowledge dialectically; thereof using LF limits the concern for language barriers to perform their proficiency and enhances the process of information conveyance in routine task coordination. Through the use of LF, team members who own the knowledge in proficiency are not conditionally restricted to the ‘language foreignness’ characteristics and may function collectively and effectively to develop and/or create knowledge. When team members are linked by a key asset—a type of knowledge proficiency, the use of LF may constructively align task operations between diverse teams/organizational units and facilitate the flow of knowledge within a network. Meanwhile, repetitive task coordination refers to routine interaction in the form of fixed sequences of individual actions and orientations. Yet, the repetitive sequences and developed knowledge contents are combined to produce systematic behavior to make the realization of sustainable competitive advantage and to be absorbed by an entire organization. Thus, the concern of language capability and the complexity of language foreignness may not be as influential or severe to hinder the knowledge transfer process. This leads to our first proposition.

<p><b>Proposition 1: When the use of lingua franca is associated with proficient/technical types of knowledge, ‘language foreignness’ characteristics and language capability do not affect the process of knowledge transfer.</b></p>
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### *3.2 Adopting language characteristics to disclose personal intention*

The example in this sub-section illustrates that both multilingual team members from the same place of origin communicate in different languages to coordinate tasks. The ‘language foreignness/richness’ characteristics as symbolic cues are incorporated to pre-articulate cognitive information while coordinating a joint-task.

#### 3.2.1 Cognitive information disclosure through the use of different languages

We quote an IM conversation that one team member only uses a corporate language to focus on a task concern/issue and adopts the ‘foreignness’ characteristics to present an intention of ‘distance’. In contrast, the other team member only uses a local home/native language to show the intention of ‘closeness’ as both members share home/native language.

Both Gao and Qinwa are native Chinese speakers, working in cross-functional teams, situated in China. Qinwa works in Regional HQ (Beijing) and Gao works in local unit (Shenzhen). They communicate across different MNE units in different languages.

1. Gao: 你知不知道加拿大那边的服务器为参数 ta88888888 做的配置呀? (Do you know the default setting in accordance with the data ta88888888 at the server in Canada site?)
2. Gao: 现在我用这组参数连加拿大, 返回的 custom 域是一些乱七八糟的字符 (The feedback of current parameter that I am using to connect to Canada site are unreadable data on its custom setting.)
3. ***Qinwa: what do you mean? which parameter>\?***
4. Gao: 我不确定是服务器配置就是那样, 还是因为解密错误 (I am not sure whether it is the server default or it is the reason of error decoding.)
5. Gao: TA88888888
6. ***Qinwa: Does Juan assign this terminal ID for u?***
7. Gao: 对啊 (Yes)
8. ***Qinwa: I don't know the setup on canada side***
9. Gao: 嗯 谢了 你服务器现在能用吗? (ok, thanks, can it work on your server now?)
10. ***Qinwa: no, sorry, i am testing another terminal now, have some problem with it***
11. ***Qinwa: sorry about that***
12. Gao: 没事 (nothing, Here ‘nothing’ means ‘it’s ok.’)

Gao uses the same home/native language to display connectedness when needing assistance on either joint-task support or when requesting a personal favor from Qinwa (lines 1/2/4/7/9/12). Although both share the same native language (Chinese Mandarin), Qinwa chooses to respond in a corporate language/foreign LF—English (lines 3/6/8/10/11) to coordinate a task and avoid doing a favour (lines

9/10). The language of choice discloses cognitive dimension of information. Meanwhile, using a foreign LF increases language foreignness and also it may indicate an intention of social distance. The choice of using a corporate language highlights a focus on task-oriented interaction without relational involvement. Although Qinwa is able to use their home/native language, his choice of using foreign LF may reveal feelings of apathy (lines 8/10). Qinwa incorporates language foreignness cues to appear less motivated to participate in problem-solving on a joint-task.

Towards the end of the conversation, Qinwa use a LF to appologize (line 11). However, his use of a foreign LF may suggest a form of 'distance', transmitting that Qinwa avoids prioritizing Gao's task concern. Comparing the use of a home/native language, using a foreign LF may be relatively difficult to present cognitive information of 'closeness'. Yet, Qinwa's apologetic gesture implies that he is concerned that he may damage their assoication. In contrast, Gao continues using their local home/native language in response to Qinwa's apology, and appears to emphasize harmonious inter-relations through the use of compliance (line 12).

### 3.2.2 Discussion

Team members converse effectively even though each member uses a different language to coordinate tasks. Using different languages to interact suggests that there is no echoing interaction among participating team members. Such an act may suggest that each individual is attempting to find a bargaining position by emphasizing their own concerns. Gao chooses/uses their home/native language to provide rich language cues. The use of local home/native language may imply closeness and connectedness due to common ground in an attempt to encourage task participation.

Contrastingly, using a foreign LF to respond to requests initiated in local home/native language draws closer attention to the subject of 'distance'. Thus, how team members interpret the intention and how the language of choice presents during an interactive process of communication would affect social relations. In order to develop a global strategy from the complexity of language diversities, we argue that using/choosing multiple languages to communicate with multilingual team members can be a flexible and effective strategy. The choice of language may highlight an association between language characteristics and cognitive information, and thereby discloses personal intention for

social/relational distance or interaction. This leads to our proposition 2:

**Proposition 2: Language usage displays different intentions.**

- 2-1. Using corporate language as a foreign lingua franca increases language foreignness displaying social/relational distance.
- 2-2. Using local home/native language to provide language richness suggests an intention to evolve social/relational interaction.

**3.3 Strategizing language to manage relations while coordinating tasks**

This section investigates how multilingual team members use their language resources (a local home/native language — Chinese Mandarin and a corporate language — English) to manage relations while coordinating tasks. The following examples illustrate how team members strategize language through choice of language and the adoption of language-switching on joint-task collaboration. Our research illustrates two groups. One group of team members are from the same place of origin (3.3.1/2). The other group of team members have different origins (3.3.3).

**3.3.1 Uncoupling tasks and personal issues in conflict**

We quote an interview statement and an episodic IM log to illustrate how team members incorporate their local home/native language to disclose emotional context and highlight a personal concern. While using a corporate language to respond to task conflict, language-switching is adopted when attempting to avoid potential relationship conflict.

Snowy is Chinese based in Regional HQs of an IT company in Vancouver B.C. Canada. She describes how she switches between a foreign LF and her home/native language when communicating with subunits in China.

*I use English most of time, but I mix Chinese and English when it's hard to express my feelings in English. But since Chinese, especially in China, is more implicit than western language, there is no much body language even in face-to-face meeting so it makes not so much difference via text and the real meeting.*

Go-si works in Beijing Regional HQs of an IT company and switch between languages while communicating with his cross-functional team member (Lai) who works in local subunit, based in Shanghai. Both team members are Chinese in China.

1.Lai: john 到底有没有给你们发信？(Does John finally send you guys e-mail or not?)

2.Go-si: *I don't know if john send the email to Grant*

3.Lai: 奇怪！(Strange!)

4.Lai: 这个事情拖了一个多礼拜了！！!(It's been taking over a week!!! a para-verbal text '!!!')

5.Go-si: *Hmm* (a para-verbal text)

6.Go-si: *我也不知道*(I don't know the reason as well.)

Issue initiator (Lai) and issue follower (Go-si) communicate in different languages (lines 1-5), but at the end (line 6), Go-si switches from their corporate language to their home/native language. The interplay of language and information affect communicators to examine how to perceive and interact with their counterparts in all aspects of communication. When choosing a LF or their local home/native language, team members would inadvertently or deliberately use a specific language to express their intention.

Lai uses a local home/native language to disclose his personal concern (lines 1/3/4) and Go-si uses their corporate language to convey content-based information as a response to Lai's task enquiry (lines 2/5). When Lai receives unsatisfactory information that his team member has not done what he had expected (line 2), Lai expresses his complaint relating to the task progress through para-verbal text—exclamation marks (lines 3/4) increasing the number of language cues, which places firm attention to emotional context. The disclosed multiple cues act as a trigger affecting Go-si to switch to their local home/native language (lines 5/6). Go-si's act of language-switching indicates his recognition of the ongoing issue. Language-switching to the same local home/native language displays connectedness to affirm accountability before the task issue jeopardizes inter-unit relations.

### 3.3.2 Echoing to increase empathy

Quotes from episodic IM log serve to illustrate that both team members use their corporate language

and home/native language to coordinate task. Both members switch language simultaneously to echo their understandings in an attempt to manage task coordination and avoid relational discomfort.

Both cross-functional team members locate in the same MNE units, based in Xiamen, China and are native Chinese speakers. While coordinating a joint-task, they switch between languages.

1. Xiaota: 现在 smart diags II 进展是怎样? (What's the current status of smart diags II??)
2. **Lin: no news**
3. Xiaota: in progress? Or not??? (a para-verbal text '???')
4. **Lin: do not know**
5. Xiaota: concept?
6. **Lin: still trace phase 1 result, I guess**
7. Xiaota: not good :( (an emoticon)
8. **Lin: Yes 没办法..** (nothing we can do about it... a para-verbal text of '...' is incorporated)
9. Xiaota: can you check again tomorrow
10. **Lin: ok**
11. Xiaota: good

Issue initiator (Xiaota) incorporates both a home/native language and a corporate language to enquire about task progress and issue respondent (Lin) responds by using their corporate language (lines 1/2). In lines 2/4/6, Lin uses a foreign LF in an attempt to reduce/limit the language cues while reporting an issue regarding task progress uncertainty. Team members switch languages to a corporate language/foreign LF (lines 1/3) to highlight the reporting action by means of reducing the number of language cues or increasing language foreignness (lines 3-7; 9-11, echoing behavior).

Following Xiaotao's disclosure of an unsatisfactory emotion with an additional language cue (line 7), Lin switches from English and adopts their home/native language — Chinese (line 8). The action of language-switching to use their home/native language suggests that an increased number of language cues highlight one's awareness. Using a home/native language to disclose one's empathy is an act of emotional connectedness, which may positively influence mutual relations.

### 3.3.3 Expressing closeness in a social context

An episodic IM log below shows a kind of echoing interaction. Both Chinese and Canadian team members switch between languages and adopt specific language cues. These team members use/switch to their corporate language to process proficient information. Meanwhile, they convey a social connectedness through the use of Chinese phonetics instead of actual Chinese characters.

Both Go-si and Grant work in cross-functional teams, based in different Regional HQ in China. However, Grant is Canadian, based in Shenzhen. Go-si is Chinese, based in Beijing. They both switch between languages during the communication process.

1. Go-si: grant, one question here
2. **Grant: she me wen ti?** (Chinese spelling, meaning ‘what question?’)
3. Go-si: on Shanghai server, you create some sample pin and sample products
4. Go-si: how did you create those sample products
5. Go-si: with TC or duplicate database?
6. **Grant: it is my sample database so I created with TC on another server and then imported the sample database**
7. Go-si: So the products were created with TC but the data is copied from your sample database
8. **Grant: shi de, mei cuo** (Chinese spelling, meaning ‘yes, you are right.’)
9. Go-si: I C (a para-verbal text of ‘I see’)
10. Go-si: xie le (Chinese spelling, meaning ‘Thanks’)
11. **Grant: bu ke qi** (Chinese spelling, meaning ‘you are welcome.’)

In lines 2/8/11, Canadian team member (Grant) uses a local home/native language (Chinese Mandarin) to communicate with his local team member (Go-si) instead of using a corporate language — English — his mother tongue. Grant’s choice of using a local home/native language may benefit his local counterpart. When Grant monitors the local peer subunit to assist their joint-task (lines 1/2; 7/8), he reverts to Chinese Mandarin to reinsure the conclusion and to indicate the accountability of the answer (line 8) in an attempt to facilitate the accomplishment of strategic objectives. Towards the end of the conversation, to display his appreciation (lines 9-11), Go-si echoes Grant by switching to Chinese Mandarin. Thus, the use of local home/native language may indicate a social connectedness

among local team members.

#### 3.3.4 Discussion: Strategizing language by language choices and language-switching

Individuals preserve equivalent perceptions through the use/choice of language, which suggests a sense-making process when attempting to enhance communication. The choice of languages affects individuals to perceive others' intention and to interpret others' expectation. Based on Heath and Bryant's (2000) language usage in the concept of communication theory, team members learn to co-create the knowledge of using language to share their thoughts and interpretations. Henderson (2005) suggests that corporate language is used as a surface language. Multilingual team members deploy the choice of language to disclose their intention. A range of meaning can be conveyed with language symbols. Multilingual team members strategize language through the use of language characteristics to imply (or to recognize) different intentions — task and/or relational concerns.

Multilingual team members switch between a corporate language and a local home/native language to integrate both cognitive and proficient/technical types of information/knowledge. The use of language-switching distinctively discloses cognitive, emotional and social contextual cues. Local team members adopt the 'richness' characteristics of a local home/native language to manage complex transactions when seeking explanation and clarification purposes. Thus, team members incorporate language characteristics through the choice of language and switch between languages in order to access deeper meaning systems and get to the core of contextual information.

The knowledge exchange process between team members includes multi-directional information flows. While team members interact in group activities, individuals learn to incorporate meaning and action implicitly during the communication processes. The action of language-switching promotes continuous communication and provides additional behavioural language cues to support expression. This tendency may reveal an underlying motive when managing task coordination and social interaction. The process of communication not only generates the knowledge of learning, but also formalizes explicit knowledge. Multilingual team members learn to use a preferable language and choose the most applicable language to manage relational interactions to enable swift and efficient responses. In addition, team members learn to switch between languages to collaborate across

language diversities in an attempt to encourage continuous mutual interaction within or across units.

Either users will fail to express all that they intended due to language foreignness, or they will express things unintentionally by being obliged to use a foreign LF. This leads to our propositions:

**Proposition 3: When team members from the same place of origin are multi/bilingual,**

- 3-1. home/native language is used as a rich language.
- 3-2. corporate language as a foreign lingua franca is used as a surface language.

**Proposition 4: Switching-language to find a bargaining position.**

- 4-1. When using a (foreign) lingua franca causes language foreignness, language-switching to a local home/native language increases language cues to enhance inter-unit relations or to mitigate potential relational conflict.
- 4-2. When using local home/native language provides too rich language cues, language-switching to a (foreign) lingua franca reduces language richness to focus on task coordination and/or to divert ongoing tension.

#### **4. Discussion & Implication**

While knowledge is embedded in language competence, the language of choice may disclose individuals' choices, abilities, intentions, expectations and motivations. Communicators incorporate language characteristics to perform a unique type of implicit knowledge; hence how communicators strategize/perceive the use of language cues would affect knowledge process. We argue that language stands as an individual factor to affect social interaction and rule out cultural influences. This section uses three key challenging situations (IM log examples) in section 3. The first situation (3.1) associates the use of LF with the information-processing of proficient/technical dimensions for knowledge transfer. The section (3.2) illustrates how multilingual team members incorporate language characteristics through language choice to present personal intention. The last section (3.3) points out that the adaptation of language strategy to manage relations while coordinating tasks and a single LF is insufficient. The impact of 'language competence' feature is incorporated and associated with the following sub-sections, which indicate how the 'language foreignness/richness' concept could apply

to different language users (in 4.1) and how the strategy of language-switching/choice affects teamwork (in 4.2). In addition to the discussion of how language foreignness causes knowledge stickiness (in 4.3), we also suggest how language strategy could create social relations to benefit knowledge flow within a network (in 4.4).

#### ***4.1 Implication to other multilingual teams***

Language can be used as a multi-faceted construct in communication. We compare the local home/native language with corporate language/LF by adopting language foreignness/richness concept, instead of reviewing different levels of linguistic/cultural context. While multilingual team members use a LF to transfer proficient/technical knowledge, the strategy of language-switching/choices suggests how these team members convey the actor's meaning and interpret the counterpart's intention of language-switching/choice. Yet, echoing behavior (changing to use a single unified communicating language) provides capacity to negotiate interests, which suggests an act that team members imitate to transform 'current' knowledge to help explain the actor's recognition. The way in which non-native language speakers use their foreign LF to manage relations in task communication is quite different from the way that they use foreign LF to process knowledge proficiency.

Our propositions could apply to multilingual team members of any origin who are co-located or dispersed and who manage to use their home/native language and a LF (i.e. Finnish and Swedish in Finland, French, German and English in Switzerland; Spanish and Portuguese in South America). Accordingly, our research argues that:

1. when the use of LF is associated with proficient/technical dimensions of information, the use of LF provides adequate breadth of 'language richness' for successful knowledge transfer.
2. team members incorporate the richness cues of their common home/native language to relate to cognitive perception and/or to disclose the sensitivity of their emotions.
3. team members adopt language foreignness of a LF to avoid social connectedness and/or relational closeness.

#### ***4.2 Strategy of language-switching/choice in teamwork***

Coff (1999) argues that organizations do not appropriate values, but individual appropriation affects their motivation to contribute to organizational value-creation. In this research, team members interact and learn to acquire how best to send comprehensible messages and how context-dependent messages should be relevantly decoded. Team members use language to define/nurture states-of-mind (including patterns of beliefs, attitudes; norms) to develop their social integration by sharing relevant knowledge. The accumulated experience of using/choosing languages while managing joint-tasks and social relations forms as an implicit routine pattern between individuals. When individuals' language capability affect their mutual cognitions to evolve social interaction (or avoid conflict), the strategy of language choice creates social/relational values. Hence, individuals function inherently and collectively to synergize and make up the relations between teams or organizations. Spender (1996) indicates that organizations learn knowledge only to the extent that their members are malleable and organizational members are aware of their 'sense of self' from the organization's evolving social identity. Spender's explanation suggests a micro-macro linkage of individual-organization that organizations learn knowledge from social facts that individuals develop. We argue that a strategic application of language-switching and language choice reinforce the selective exposure of information and consequently, reduce uncertainty and the potential for conflict.

When team members utilize 'language foreignness' characteristics of a LF to reserve emotional openness, the awareness of 'foreignness' may result in emotional disconnection and/or social/relational distance. If the limitation of language richness cues mitigates social evolvment, language-switching to home/native language is adopted to change/manifest one's perception and cognition (state of mind) while attempting to manage social integration (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In contrast, when the amount of information richness being provided by the use of home/native language relates to participants' social awareness, it expands the sense of 'connectedness' and 'closeness' to increase the probability of task participation. Yet, when team members attempt to conceal their language cues to avoid potential conflict that may harm mutual relations, using a local home/native language may be overly rich, leading to negative emotion. Hence, switching language to use a LF as a neutral language may create common ground (i.e. a task focus) comprehensible to all involved and a benefit to the collaborative joint-project.

#### ***4.3 Language foreignness resulting in sticky knowledge***

Multilingual team members naturally adopt their local home/native language to avoid the distorted knowledge of organizational strategies. When team members communicate (or negotiate) in a foreign LF, the full richness of meaning may not be fully conveyed and implicit knowledge may become sticky. The strategy of language-switching/choice governs the ‘capacity’ to transmit context-dependent information/knowledge and to promote ongoing joint-activities. However, when using a foreign LF to communicate, the ‘language foreignness’ characteristics may result in ineffective communication. Accordingly, the social relations challenge communication between units based in home and/or host countries, and meanwhile, challenge the motivation of transferring local concerns back to headquarters. We suggest that language foreignness is an indicator to explain how the use of corporate language/LF can impede knowledge exchange across subunit boundaries and not to be transferred beyond local organizational boundaries (Szulanski, 1996; 2003).

#### ***4.4 Language impact on social relations towards knowledge flow***

This research proposes that language-switching is adopted to better cooperate tasks and acts as a trigger, to connect participants and then generate knowledge to better team effectiveness. Also, language-switching to find a bargaining position enhances continuous interaction for intense exchanges of information and mutual knowledge to create dynamic capabilities (Zahra & George, 2002). Thus, a unique social form is developed to facilitate the process of knowledge exchange. Schulz (2003) found that informal relations between units have a positive influence on knowledge inflows. We adopt our ‘language foreignness/richness’ concept to illustrate how team members strategize language to manage interpersonal relations and social interaction that may positively affect team interdependence to share knowledge in a network. Our IM log examples illustrate that team members adopt language-switching strategy, which echoes Luo and Shanker’s (2006) proposition of incorporating multiple languages as a part of a global language design. These teams adopt language strategy by selecting/switching between languages to increase their ability to obtain, share and transmit information as part of their effort to affect the outcome of performance.

While strategizing language to cooperative ventures, language-usage increases opportunities for social construction of knowledge. Our examples illustrate that the use of language constructs a form of social learning (through echoing behavior) in task communication. The strategy of language-switching and language choice has a considerable effect on mutual relations for social interaction. Consequently, the social interaction and task communication build a linkage between teams that collaborate on joint-tasks. Noorderhaven and Harzing (2008) suggest that the effect of social interaction increases motivation of subsidiaries to share and learn knowledge to benefit the integration of workflow. Thus, our proposition of language strategy suggests that team members incorporate their language capabilities to promote knowledge process and then to facilitate efficient knowledge flow.

## **5. Conclusion**

Our research exemplifies the role of micro-level processes in influencing macro-level outcomes. The examples provided in this paper suggest the sole use of LF is insufficient. Those multilingual team members who combine LF and local home/native language are more effective when managing relations and when coordinating tasks. We propose that team members strategize languages by selecting a context-dependent language or switching between languages to manage relations while coordinating tasks. In a global or multilingual environment, the ways in which language is used within a corporate communication system constitutes a strategy for achieving team interdependence on both global integration and local adaption.

How individuals based in subunits or headquarters coordinate their tasks and develop their relations suggest a higher level of association between peer subunits or between headquarters and subunits. Also, how individuals function has the potential to erode their team synergy (Speitzer, Shaprio & Von Glinow, 2002) or to hamper the relationship, organization or network. We rely on the analysis of micro-foundations to gain a ‘fine-grained understanding’. Jackson (2009) argues that when developing explanatory mechanisms from the individual to the collective, the simplified assumptions (Foss, 2003; Osterloh & Bruno, 2000) ignore social processes, which influence individuals’ perception and behavior and thereby affect collective decisions. The analysis of micro-foundations in a multilevel approach presented in this paper is an example of how we can “capture more fully what

we know” (Gavetti, 2005, p.599). Our framework shows one of the forms of linkage between micro-level interaction and macro-level performance. Meanwhile, organizations as systems rely on different types of teams (meso-level) to operate their tasks independently and coordinate with their counterparts interdependently. The interdependence between individuals within teams (micro-level) or between different types of teams (meso-level) develops an inter-related system of behavior that affects the outcome of organizational performance (macro-level).

While developing this micro-level research, our intention was to build a multilevel model that includes both ‘within level’ and ‘cross-level’ influences on the outcomes of team effectiveness and organizational performance. We consider the potential benefits of applying micro-level analysis to enhance our understanding of cross-level linkages by linking macro-level input factors and macro-level outcomes mediated by micro-level processes. Therefore, we suggest that a multilevel approach is better suited for future research.

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