MANAGING LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY THROUGH AMBIGUITY: THE CASE OF A NON-FORMALIZED CORPORATE LANGUAGE POLICY

by

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BSc, WU - Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria, 2013
MSc, University of Vienna, Austria, 2016

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We acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

Growing linguistic diversity has become the reality for many organizations, and how such diversity is addressed has become the focus of a stream of research within the management literature. The adoption of a corporate language policy aimed at regulating language choices is considered a common mean to facilitate communication and integration within a linguistically diverse workforce. Most notably, organizations often rely on the formal introduction of a common corporate language. Recent studies, however, have exposed the possible detrimental consequences that can follow the adoption of this policy. In this dissertation, I study an alternative approach to address linguistic diversity – a non-formalized language policy – examining its key features, theoretical assumptions and underlying mechanisms, as well as its perceived positive and negative outcomes.

Relying on a single case study design and employing a variety of data collection approaches ranging from interviews to observations of in-person and virtual interactions, I show how an underlying concept – termed language ambiguity – captures the main features of and assumptions behind this type of policy. Adopting Spolsky's conceptualization of language policies, I develop a framework that links each of the three dimensions of language ambiguity to different dimensions of the non-formalized language policy. Results of this study show also how this policy might contribute to facilitating communication and promoting diversity, while also playing a role in possible losses in knowledge transmission. Finally, based on the findings, I show how the policy can be seen as part of a set of measures aimed at promoting multilingualism within the organization. The frameworks and theoretical insights presented in this dissertation contribute to the ongoing debates in the

fields of language-sensitive management research and equity, diversity, and inclusion on how an organization can better address linguistic diversity by turning it from a potential challenge into a valuable resource.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father who left me at the beginning of this journey and did not make it back in time to see the end of it.

CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

"It goes without saying, then, that language is also a political instrument, means, and proof of power. It is the most vivid and crucial key to identify: it reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity" – James Baldwin, July 29, 1979

Multilingual organizations face the task of managing a workforce that differs (among other factors such as gender and culture) in terms of a key and visible aspect of diversity – language. The decision how to approach language has far-reaching implications that extend well-beyond the goal to bridge language differences and facilitate communication. In fact, the chosen approach becomes evidence of how an organization addresses diversity, whether it fosters it or sees it mainly as a potential challenge (Ciuk et al., 2022). Mismanaging language means potentially creating divisions, such as through the emergence of language-based subgroupings (Kulkarni, 2015). Recognizing the importance of language, a stream of research within the area of management studies has focused on how organizations address linguistic diversity (Karhunen et al., 2018), in particular through the adoption of corporate language policies, which regulate language use within organizations (Bergenholtz & Johnsen, 2006).

Management research on corporate language policies has been dominated by the analysis of formalized corporate language policies, which are characterized by clearly defined and stated guidelines regulating communication within the company, and developed as a result of a top-down decision-making process (Baldauf Jr, 2006; Sanden &

Kankaanranta, 2018). Most prominently, adopting a common corporate language – *a lingua franca* – has emerged as a traditional component of formalized language policies (Fredriksson et al., 2006). For years, scholars have focussed on the benefits of adopting this measure as the main means to overcome language barriers (Tenzer et al., 2017). For example, organizations choosing formalized language policies believe that this will facilitate communication among linguistically diverse employees (Janssens et al., 2004). The most recent research, however, indicates that these policies have not lived up to their potential to bring people together (Janssens & Steyaert, 2014; Welch & Welch, 2018b), contributing to unbalanced power dynamics (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017), and overall failing to reduce language barriers and promote a linguistically inclusive environment (Śliwa et al., 2020). There seems to be no credible alternative to formalized corporate language policies and, despite their flaws, they continue to be widely adopted. Similarly, theoretical advancement has been limited by an over-reliance on organizations adopting formalized policies as contexts for studies investigating how linguistic diversity can be addressed (Karhunen et al., 2018).

My intent with this study was to explore the key features and examine the perceived benefits and challenges behind the logical alternative: non-formalized corporate language policies, which the management literature defines as sets of unwritten rules and guidelines that regulate language choices within an organization (Angouri, 2013; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). The emphasis on examining formalized language policies has left a relative void in understanding what happens to organizations that rely on different solutions. This, despite the fact that non-formalized policies might be very common in organizations (Angouri, 2013, 2014; Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Ylinen, 2010).

Recognizing the lack of systematic management research on the matter, Sanden and Kankaanranta delivered one of the first studies on non-formalized language policies, observing that in these policies "…employees are left with little guidance as to how the company's official stance towards language use should be complied with in everyday communicative encounters" (2018, p. 558). Aside from that study, very little is known on the key features of these policies and their potential outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, the pieces of the puzzle that might explain the assumptions and mechanisms behind these policies (such as how language is conceptualized and managed) seem to be missing. Shedding light on these aspects might help in understanding how these policies play a role in language choices, how they can be positioned in the extant literature, as well as how they might contribute to addressing linguistic diversity.

Overall, this dissertation aimed at providing answers to the following overarching research question:

RQ1: How can a non-formalized language policy be characterized? What may be its key features and underlying theoretical assumptions?

And the related question:

RQ2: What can be the benefits and drawbacks of a non-formalized language policy?

To answer these questions, I designed a single-case study and applied a variety of approaches ranging from interviews to observations of in-person and virtual interactions, and regular conversations with key informants. The context of this study is an internationally-operating organization in the Information Technology (IT) industry, in which typically English enjoys a privileged position, headquartered in the French-dominated province of Québec, Canada.

Following a hybrid approach, which blends inductive and deductive reasoning (Swain, 2018), I relied on concepts from sociolinguistics, communication studies, and language-sensitive management research, as well as on theoretical insights emerging from the analysis, to propose a framework – *language ambiguity* – that captures the key underlying assumptions behind the existence of a non-formalized corporate language policy. Furthermore, through the lens of *language affordances* (Aronin, 2014; Aronin & Singleton, 2010; Menezes, 2011), I show how this policy (and its underlying mechanisms) can be viewed as part of a deliberate effort to value linguistic diversity and in particular foster multilingualism.

Findings from this study contribute to the recent calls for a better implementation of the equity, diversity, and inclusion agenda (specifically, modifying how we think about and act in relation to diversity) into international management research (Ciuk et al., 2022), showing how a non-formalized corporate language policy that is based on reciprocal effort has the potential to promote a more linguistically inclusive environment.

CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review

The relatively young field of language-sensitive management research has developed by borrowing theories and concepts from a variety of fields such as linguistics, equity, diversity and inclusion, organizational behavior, and organizational communication (Brannen & Mughan, 2017; Karhunen et al., 2018). In the first part of this literature review I provide an overview of theoretical perspectives that have influenced the conceptualization of language and have provided the starting point for the development of language research in the management field. The purpose of this part is to highlight relevant theoretical approaches that serve to understand the variety of assumptions behind language management and in particular language policies.

Building upon such knowledge, in the second and largest part of this review, I discuss how organizations typically address language. Starting from general notions on language management (informed mainly by the language policy and planning as well as sociolinguistics literature) I explain how organizations attempt to capitalize on their language resources and overcome possible language barriers by harmonizing communication through the adoption of corporate language policies. I first examine formalized language polices with a particular focus on the well-researched adoption of a common corporate language, and shift then the focus to the key topic of this study, non-formalized corporate language policies, reviewing the limited literature focusing on them, drawing parallels with and distinctions from formalized policies. I conclude this chapter by identifying several gaps and opportunities in the literature.

2.1. Conceptualizations of Language in Management

In the last two decades, a growing number of studies have highlighted the complexity of a multilingual working environment under the broad research area of language in organizations (Karhunen et al., 2018; Tietze & Piekkari, 2020). Such an environment is characterized by a visible trait – language – that denotes the communicative dimension of diversity (Jonsen et al., 2011; Lauring & Selmer, 2012) and is viewed as "…a salient marker of identity" (Ciuk et al., 2022, p. 7).

The general trajectory of research on multilingual working environments has found that while linguistic diversity can be associated with potential benefits for the company (Brannen & Mughan, 2017; Feely & Harzing, 2003; Thomas, 2008), it also entails several challenges, such as the emergence of language barriers (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Harzing et al., 2011; Harzing & Feely, 2008; Karhunen et al., 2018; Tenzer et al., 2017, 2021), the activation of faultlines (Hinds et al., 2014; Kulkarni, 2015) as well as contributing to experiences of unearned status gains (Neeley & Dumas, 2016).

The birth and development of language as an area of interest in management research has been anything but smooth. Language has often been treated as a subcategory under the shadow of the more prominent role of culture (Brannen & Mughan, 2017; Piekkari, 2006). Over time, language has taken its place as a central construct both in management and international business research (Tietze & Piekkari, 2020). It is now "… a necessary constituent of ongoing sequences of decisions and resource commitments that characterize day-to-day organizational life" (Brannen et al., 2014, p. 495) and it "…permeates every facet of international business" (Piekkari et al., 2014, p. 1).

Language-focused research in management has evolved along with a shift in the conceptualization of language. It has been dominated mainly by a simplistic and limited view (i.e. language is mostly independent from the context and has its own clearly defined structure), and only very recently a more complex and dynamic perspective (i.e. language is produced by social interaction) has been considered (Karhunen et al., 2018). This development was brought along by borrowing theories and methodological approaches from other fields such as organizational behavior, sociology, cross-cultural management, and social psychology (Brannen & Mughan, 2017; Tenzer et al., 2017).

In a recent literature review, Karhunen and colleagues (2018) suggested that scholars mainly approached language from three perspectives: structural, functional, and social practice. Understanding each of these views entails gaining a deeper insight into the evolution of the field and of its cross-disciplinary nature, while also providing key assumptions behind corporate language policies and their outcomes.

According to the structural perspective, language is a system consisting of objective elements which are located outside of its user and are mainly unaffected by the context (Karhunen et al., 2018). Language, therefore, consists of clearly defined elements, such as grammatical units, grammatical operations, phonological units, and lexical items, that need to be learned in order to be able to fully communicate (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). In other words, proponents of this perspective see language from a *technical* point of view.

When applied to management studies, this view suggests that the role of language "…is limited to that of a static variable…" that, along with other factors, influences the way a company is managed (Karhunen et al., 2018, p. 989). The structural perspective and its assumption that learning the system of structural elements of a language is the key for

efficient communication has been the underlying theoretical approach for the majority of studies on language management in organizations, with many scholars focusing on the decision to introduce a shared language (common corporate language) to facilitate communication within a linguistically diverse workforce (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Vance & Paik, 2005; Wang & Tran, 2012). Overall, management scholars that are following a structural view tend to see language (and related language choices) as a matter that should be addressed from the management board (top-down approach) and predominantly see language proficiency as the key factor in communication (Karhunen et al., 2018).

A main tenet of the functional view of language is perhaps best explained through the words of French linguist André Martinet, who stated that "…linguistic reality is not necessarily co-incidental with the whole of the observable physical reality of speech, but some of the latter is part of the former" (Martinet, 1977, p. 10). Unlike the structural view, the functional perspective locates the language within the user. Rather than focusing mainly on technical factors (such as grammatical, phonological, and lexical items), it emphasizes the semantic and communicative aspects (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 17). In other words, the functional view sees language as a human trait that can be influenced by the culture of the users and constitutes part of their social identities (Karhunen et al., 2018). This last aspect resonates with social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Turner, 1975), which derives from social psychology, and has often been applied by international management scholars, for example in investigating benefits and challenges for multicultural employees (Fitzsimmons, 2013) or assessing the influence of cultural differences on international capability transfer (Björkman et al., 2007). In the context of

language-related management research, the functional view has contributed, among others, to the investigation of the emergence of language faultlines (Kulkarni, 2015), language-based subgrouping (Hinds et al., 2014), and overall language barriers (Peltokorpi & Clausen, 2011).

Finally, viewing language as a social practice entails a dynamic conceptualization of language that stems from the field of sociolinguistics. Thus, while the structural view locates the language outside of its user and the functional view places it inside, in the social practice view language is located in the interaction between individuals (Karhunen et al., 2018). When thinking about social practices, one might recall the thoughts expressed by the Viennese philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who argued that speaking a language is a form of life and that language consists of a network of linguistic activities, not just a system with a fixed structure. As we use language, we assign meaning to words (Wittgenstein, 1953). Therefore, the social practice view entails that language contributes to the establishment of social relations, it is therefore the result of social interactions (Richards & Rodgers, 1986), rooted in social processes and in how users experience the world (Tusting, 2005; Wenger, 1998).

For management scholars, the social practice view entails that language is a dynamic construct that is affected by interactions. Thus, language is not equal to communicative competences (unlike the structural view, in which language proficiency is often used to gauge them) but constitutes only a part of them (Karhunen et al., 2018). Scholars have relied on this view to analyze instances of linguistic negotiations among employees (Steyaert et al., 2011), the emergence of *company speak* (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017a), the influence of differences in the employees' mother tongues on communication

(Cuypers et al., 2015), the evaluation of non-native speaking employees (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014), as well as using it as the foundation for a novel conceptualization of multilingual organizations as social constellations (Karhunen et al., 2023). Stepping away from the idea of a static language, the social practice view depicts language as part of the social texture of the organization, the result of interactions among its members. As opposed to the structural view, hence, language choices in organizations are not influenced by a top-down approach but are the result of negotiations among employees.

Overall, the three perspectives on language highlight the complexity surrounding how language can be conceptualized in different ways and how this results in diverse approaches to language-related management studies. As previously discussed, language research is informed by a variety of disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, sociopsychology, communication, and cross-cultural management. Each of these disciplines contributes to creating multiple perspectives that ultimately influence how we see languages in organizations. When looking more broadly at how language is treated in international business, we see how the three views are reflected in studies on how organizations internationalize and what influences trade among geographical areas. For example, the static nature of language underlying the structural view allowed researchers to use language as a variable in the gravity model of trade (which originates from the field of economics) to investigate trade flows among nations (Fidrmuc & Fidrmuc, 2016; Melitz, 2008; Melitz & Toubal, 2014). In the specific context of corporate language policies, on which this dissertation focuses, the three conceptualizations of language served as assumptions (the structural view) behind the decision to adopt a formalized common corporate language policy as well as theoretical lenses (functional and social practice

views) through which the limitations and challenges of this type of policies were identified and analyzed. As I discuss next, however, for non-formalized language policies a clear theoretical positioning within these three conceptualizations is rather missing.

2.1.1. Exploring relevant theoretical opportunities

While the theoretical home of formalized common corporate language policies is defined – they assume a structural view –, non-formalized language policies have yet to be clearly positioned within the literature on language-sensitive management research. Perhaps, the reason for this shortcoming is the difficulty in truly understanding the specific features of these policies – mainly due to their implicit nature and the lack of systematic research. In particular, two main aspects seem very relevant: how language is conceptualized, and who determines the language choices.

As discussed previously, the predominant perspective in past research on corporate language policies argues that language choices should be managed via a top-down approach that leaves very little to no room for negotiation by employees. In this situation, management scholars tend to centre their investigations on language proficiency (assuming a technical conceptualization of language). An alternative view, the functional perspective emphasizes the close relationship between individual identity and language, arguing that language choices are part of identity and hence that they should be managed individually. Finally, following the social practice view, however, language goes beyond proficiency and identity, and it is linked to the social context within the organization – suggesting that language choices might arise from negotiation among employees.

The rather limited knowledge on non-formalized corporate language policies does not allow theorizing on how language choices are usually made in an organization pursuing these policies, which contextual factors play a role in influencing them, which actors are involved, and what is the predominant conceptualization of language – among the three discussed earlier – that serves as assumption for these policies to exist. Understanding these aspects not only sheds light on how to position non-formalized corporate language policies in the broader theoretical debate, but also unveils the role that these policies might play in addressing and leveraging linguistic diversity, the ultimate goal of language policy in organizations that I discuss in the upcoming sections. I first explain why linguistic diversity in organizations matters and then present how it has been addressed so far.

2.2. Linguistic Diversity in Organizations

The rise of a global workforce fueled by increased migration flows and technological advancement (Peiperl & Jonsen, 2007; Schiff & Özden, 2005) is reflected in the increased number of multilingual organizations, both domestic and multinational, Language is viewed as a key dimension of workforce diversity and – as a fundamental aspect of communication – it is present in the everyday life of the organization (Kim et al., 2019). Due to growing linguistic diversity, the question of how language is managed within the contenxt of an organization has become of key importance to management scholars (Karhunen et al., 2018).

2.2.1. Language as a valuable asset

On its website, one of the leading global players in the high-tech field and among the largest companies in the world – Microsoft Corporation – praises the benefits of linguistic diversity, claiming that "it leads to innovation, which leads to growth", that it allows organization to be better equipped to serve their clients, to "gain access to an entirely new talent pool" and to become a more attractive employer. These claims are followed by references to various studies and reports, and of course to the company's line of translation tools designed to overcome language barriers (Microsoft Corporation, 2019). Broadly speaking, the content of this webpage can be seen as a sort of preview into what I briefly discuss in this section, namely the potential benefits linked to linguistic diversity.

A linguistically diverse workforce (both among and within employees, the latter referring to multilingual individuals) has long become the reality for many organizations, both domestic and multinational, regardless of their size or industry (Angouri, 2013, 2014; Apfelbaum & Meyer, 2010; Sherman & Strubell, 2013). Scholars have shown how knowledge of languages within an organization can be beneficial for international marketing operations (Swift, 1991), cross-border expansion (Welch et al., 2001), and – in the context of teams – creativity and performance (Lauring et al., 2015). Organizations open to linguistic diversity have also the chance to benefit from the specific skills brought by multilingual individuals, who according to research in psycholinguistics might perform better in task switching situations (Prior & MacWhinney, 2010) as well as in solving conflicts (Bialystok, 2009; Costa et al., 2008). It is important to notice that certain advantages (such as the enhanced ability to find multiple solutions to an issue as well as a better capacity to elaborate ideas) can also be obtained by monolinguals learning a foreign

language during their adulthood (Kharkhurin, 2008). Hence, both hiring multilinguals and fostering second language acquisition in monolingual employees might benefit an organization.

However, to fully profit from the advantages associated with fostering a multilingual workforce, the *language capital of an organization*, which is derived from the interaction between human and social capital of a company and consists of "… the aggregate possession of relevant foreign language skills" (Welch & Welch, 2008, p. 355), needs to be converted to the *language operative capacity*. This capacity entails the efficient allocation of language resources at the right time, in the right location, and within the right context (Welch & Welch, 2008).

An organization's language operative capacity relies on the willingness of its employees and managers to use and enhance their language resources for the benefit of the organization. Therefore, linguistic diversity *per se* might not bring about any of the benefits described above without the organizational effort to enhance and value its language resources. The decision on which language policy to pursue plays an important role in both creating a more multilingual organization and turning its language capital into language operative capacity (Angouri, 2013; Welch & Welch, 2008, 2018a). This involves also fostering a more linguistically inclusive environment where a linguistically diverse workforce can thrive (Ciuk et al., 2022).

2.2.2. Language as a challenge

Failing to properly enhance and manage the language capital of a company can result in the formation of language barriers, which might negatively influence

communication and group dynamics within the organization (Angouri & Piekkari, 2018; Harzing et al., 2011; Harzing & Feely, 2008; Kulkarni, 2015; Piekkari, 2006; Piekkari & Zander, 2005; Tenzer et al., 2021). Rewinding the tape, we are reminded of the potential benefits of linguistic diversity presented on a webpage of Microsoft and the reference made to the company's translation tools designed to overcome language barriers in organizations. Just as any other form of diversity, if mismanaged, language too can become an obstacle. The statement "[M]aking the most of workplace diversity requires hard work as well as good intentions" (The Economist, 2016), thus, applies also for managing linguistic diversity.

Previous studies have highlighted the numerous challenges that an organization might face when addressing language. A case study conducted by Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, and Welch (1999b), for example, shows how language might be an underlying factor in creating an alternative organizational structure that might diverge from the designed structure of the company. Through its impact on communication flows and personal networks, therefore, language might pose a challenge for the effective transmission of knowledge (an aspect that has been shown also by Welch and Welch (2008) and Schomaker and Zaheer (2014)) and for the overall management of the company. Another key factor in organizational dynamics – power and its allocation – has also been shown to be possibly influenced by language. Language skills, for example, might affect employees' likelihood of accessing power structures (Lønsmann, 2014) and affect their capability to capitalize on other sources of power such as professional expertise (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). Finally, language, as argued by Dhir (2005), "… plays a critical role in the formation of the organizational culture through its role in knowledge creation and

application, flow of information, and functioning of the organization" (p. 359). Hence, failing to properly address language might also negatively influence the shared beliefs and values within a company.

Overall, linguistic diversity in an organization can be seen as a double-edged sword – it may constitute both an asset and a liability (Berthoud et al., 2013; Holden, 2002). To leverage the potential benefit (and limit the potential challenges) of linguistic diversity, organizations have engaged in language management (and as part of it, adopting language policies), obtaining, as I discuss in the next section, mixed results. In this sense, by studying a non-formalized corporate language policy I provide insights into an alternative way to manage language, elucidating whether (and how) it might help in leveraging linguistic diversity.

2.3. Language Management

Previously, I discussed how language can be conceptualized in the management field, and what is known about potential benefits and issues deriving from linguistic diversity. In the following, I discuss how organizations engage in language management, starting off by clarifying key concepts and terminology, and then exploring the most prominent approaches chosen – ultimately focusing on corporate language policies –, and highlighting areas in which research gaps exists.

Similar to other language-related aspects in management research, studies on language management borrow, modify, and extend theories and concepts from other fields, such as sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and communication research. The interdisciplinary nature of the topic, while offering a variety of concurrent perspectives,

lends itself to potential conceptual and terminological confusion (T. K. Ricento & Hornberger, 1996), as we have seen, for example, in discussing the three conceptualizations of language (in section 2.1.). While an extensive review of the theoretical debate is beyond the scope of the present study, it is important to briefly discuss selected concepts to clarify the terminology and assumptions that I rely on to position the study in the existing literature, both in the broad areas of linguistics and management.

Before considering organizations, researchers mainly focused on how language was managed within the borders of countries (for instance, in Western European countries (Beardsmore, 1994)) or specific provinces and regions (for example, in Catalonia (Woolard & Gahng, 1990)). Under the umbrella terms of *Language policy* and *Language planning* (or the combination of the two), numerous scholars have investigated how language decisions are developed and implemented (Stemper & King, 2017), as well as examining the important political and social consequences of these choices (Ager, 2001; Hornberger, 2006; Johnson & Ricento, 2013; Kennedy, 1982). The concept of *language management* – a key term henceforth – has been defined in different ways across various schools of thought.

According to *Language Management Theory*, language management encompasses how people interact with language and takes, therefore, a behavioral-oriented approach. Language can be managed across two levels: simple and organized (Jernudd & Neustupnỳ, 1987). The simple level consists of managing aspects of a specific conversations, for example lexical choices made by an individual in a particular conversation. In this sense, simple language management can be understood as being discoursed-based (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2015). Organized management, by contrast, does not focus on managing a

specific instance of conversation, but rather on addressing a language system (Neustupnỳ & Nekvapil, 2003). This system is *managed* by one or more institutions – therefore, organized management is also known as *institutional management* (Nekvapil, 2016). While individual choices in specific conversations certainly play a role in further understanding communication within a company, the concept of *organized language management* better resonates with the purpose of the present study, although it does not fully cover how language management is conceptualized here. The reason for the shortcoming is that language management theory focuses on "…discourse-based perspective, where both simple and organized language management are intended to solve language problems as they appear in individual discourse" (Sanden, 2016a, p. 528). This feature, while relevant, is not the primary aspect when looking at language management in organizations. Still, the view that language can be managed from an institution resembles the picture of a governing body (the management level) deciding on the language-related matters within the boundaries of an organization.

Perhaps a different, but to a certain extent complimentary, view that might help in better understanding language management is the one presented in the seminal work of renowned linguist Bernard Spolsky (E. Shohamy & Spolsky, 2000; Spolsky, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2012; Spolsky & Cooper, 1991). Discussing what language management is, he argued the following (Spolsky, 2004, p. 8):

> "In studying language policy, we are usually trying to understand just what non-language variables co-vary with the language variables. There are also cases of direct efforts to manipulate the language situation. When a person or group directs such intervention, I call this language management (I prefer this term to planning, engineering or treatment)."

Unlike Language Management Theory, language management, as viewed by Spolsky, focuses mainly on an entity, which he defines as *language manager*, that decides which type of language should be used. More broadly, Spolsky's language management encompasses any type of measures aimed at actively shaping and controlling language choices of a community. Governmental decisions on which language should be adopted as an official language are an example of this view of language management (Spolsky, 2004, 2009). Rather than setting individual interactions as a starting point (as we have seen in Language Management Theory), Spolsky's perspective is closer to a top-down approach, an aspect that is often found also when looking at how language is addressed within a corporation (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Tenzer et al., 2017), although, as I show in section 2.6., in certain scenarios language decisions are partly or completely left to the employees.

In a recent redefinition of his view, Spolsky acknowledges that language management, although mandated by language managers might also be influenced by *advocates*, who are defined as "…individuals or groups who lack the authority of managers but still wish to change its practices" (Spolsky, 2019, p. 326). Furthermore, he argues that an important additional component of language management is represented by individual self-management. This last aspect is formally described by the ability to improve proficiency in a given language (or modify accents) (Spolsky, 2019), a feature that might arguably play a role also in the corporate setting, and that has not been yet considered by international management scholars, who have predominantly relied on a static view of language skills.

Finally, and of key relevance for how the features of a non-formalized language policy are analyzied in the present study, Spolsky views language management as one of

three parts that form the broader concept of *language policy*, which I explore in depth in the next section, along with highlighting relevant research gaps and opportunities that I attempt to address with my research questions.

2.3.1. Language Policies

As discussed previously, organizations might benefit from linguistic diversity (and reduce the impact of potential issues) only if they manage to turn their language capital into language operative capacity (Welch & Welch, 2008, 2018a). A major step that is often adopted to achieve this, is the decision to rely on corporate language policies (Sanden, 2015a). As with language management, language policies have also been mainly associated with macro-level settings such as national or regional institutions (Jernudd & Nekvapil, 2012). In terms of topics examined, scholars have mainly investigated language polices in education, especially at the national level, (Adamson & Feng, 2009; Brisk, 1981; Cots et al., 2014; Erling & Hilgendorf, 2006; Tollefson, 2013; Varghese, 2008) as well as explored political and societal considerations leading to or being a consequence of the adoption of specific language policies (Bamgbose & Bamgboṣe, 2000; Kamwangamalu, 2000; Nelson, 2005; T. Ricento, 2000; Woolard & Gahng, 1990).

Not only the setting of language policies has enjoyed attention, but also their very conceptualization (Sanden, 2015a). Finding a clear and unanimous definition of what a language policy really entails, might be rather complicated and would certainly go beyond the scope of the present study. Instead, in the following, I present three conceptualizations – derived from sociolinguistics – that collectively encompass the view on language polices applied here. Kaplan and Baldauf Jr. (1997) suggest that language policies are "… laws

and regulations…intended to achieve a planned change (or to stop change from happening) in the language use in one or more communities" (p. 3). Similarly, Stemper and King argue that language policies (which can be either explicit or implicit) aim at influencing "…what languages are spoken when, how, and by whom…" (2017, p. 655). Finally, Spolsky views language policy as consisting of three elements: language practices, language belief, and language management. While the latter has been described previously, language practices entail the spectrum of usual patterns belonging to the linguistic repertoire (i.e. the observable language choices and behaviors), and language beliefs comprise the ideologies on language (i.e. status and values given to languages and language use as well as attitudes towards multilingualism) (Spolsky, 2009, 2019). To sum up, language policies – as conceptualized in this study – aim at influencing language choices and behaviors of a given community. These policies typically emanate (explicitly or implicitly) from a language manager (or advocate).

Finally, having defined language policies, the next step consists of identifying how language policies might be realized. For this purpose, I rely on the following broader description offered by Baldauf Jr (2006, p. 149):

> "Language policy may be realised in very formal (overt) language planning documents and pronouncements (e.g., constitutions, legislation, policy statements, educational directives) which can be either symbolic or substantive in form, in informal statements of intent (i.e., in the discourse of language, politics and society), or may be left unstated (covert)".

Language polices exist in a variety of forms and, as argued by Simonsen (2009), on different levels: supranational (e.g. policies emanated by the United Nations), national (e.g. language choices imposed by a national government), and organizational. The

classification into levels reflects the concept of domain of language policies, which according to Spolsky (2004) is the context in which a language policy operates and constitutes a key aspect when analyzing policies. This context may consist of "…any defined or definable social or political or religious group or community, ranging from a family through a sports team or neighborhood or village or workplace or organization or city or nation state or regional alliance" (Spolsky, 2004, p. 40). In the present work, this context is the organization – that is the organizational level described by Simonsen (2009) previously. Therefore, I discuss different varieties of *corporate language policies*, as they have also been labelled in previous studies in the specific field of international management (Lønsmann, 2017; Sanden, 2015a). The previously discussed conceptualizations of language as well as the three levels of language policies offered by Spolsky (2009, 2019) serve also as a framework of reference to analyze such policies. In the present work, I rely on these conceptualizations to analyze a non-formalized language policy, studying elements of its domain (i.e., the organization chosen for the investigation), as well as analyzing factors related to language management, beliefs, and practices.

2.4. Corporate Language Policies

While organizations might draw on a variety of language policies to address a linguistically diverse workforce, by far the most researched policy is the formalized adoption of a common corporate language – that is the documented implementation and enforcement of a lingua franca used for intra-organizational communication (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Fredriksson et al., 2006; Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; Neeley, 2012; Piekkari et al., 2005, 2014). As discussed ahead, multiple types of

corporate language policies exist, and arguably a common corporate language is not as common within organizations as previously thought (Lønsmann, 2011; Sanden, 2015a).

The concentration of research on a common corporate language draws a narrow scenario, in which an established comprehensive taxonomy of the different corporate language policies has long been missing. Drawing mainly on the sociolinguistics literature, the work of Sanden (2015b) attempted to provide a list of corporate language policies, identifying differences mainly along the dimensions of the number of corporate languages (one common corporate language vs multilingual policies) and the form of the policy (formalized vs non-formalized policies, hence written vs. unwritten). The latter dimension is used primarily in the present study to differentiate among different types of policies. In this sense, while not developing a taxonomy, the present study contributes to a better understanding of a non-formalized policy, beyond its most obvious feature (i.e., its unwritten nature).

2.4.1. Types of Corporate Language Policies

Corporate language policies can be differentiated by formalized and non-formalized policies. Ahead, I discuss both type of policies, highlighting research gaps that the present study addresses. As the bulk of language-sensitive research in international management has focused on formalized policies, the lack of sufficient research on non-formalized policies (and their potential benefits and challenges) becomes even more evident.

2.5. Formalized Corporate Language Policies

Long before international management scholars, linguists engaged in analyzing how authorities establish formal rules and guidelines to influence language choices in a given community. Formalized policies – sometimes termed as *formal policies* in the literature (Ndhlovu, 2008), or also *overt policies* (Huebner et al., 1999; Kelly-Holmes et al., 2009; Schiffman, 1998) – have been studied in a variety of contexts, although the most prominent remains the nation state (Spolsky, 2012; Stemper & King, 2017). A key characteristic of these policies is their explicit nature, embodied in "[O]fficially documented in written or spoken policy texts" (Johnson, 2013, p. 10). Often, formalized policies are the results of a top-down approach to language choices and are embedded in a wider political, economic, and societal governmental plan (Huebner et al., 1999). Formalized language policies are common in the context of higher education (Brisk, 1981; Erling & Hilgendorf, 2006; Tollefson, 2013) and the discussion on their effectiveness in classrooms and communities has long been present not only in the linguistic but also in pedagogy literature (Planas & Civil, 2013; Tollefson, 2013). One of the concepts (relevant also in the context of international management) that has often been associated with the explicit regulation of language choices is linguistic imperialism, which is defined as the "…notion that certain languages dominate internationally on others. It is the way nation-states privileged one language, and often sought actively to eradicate others, forcing their speakers to shift to the dominant language" (Phillipson, 2009, p. 780). Linguistic imperialism is believed to have also played a role in the establishment of a language for global business – English –, a development that has also affected the language choices in intra-organizational communication (Ehrenreich, 2010; T. Ricento, 2000).

Looking at the extensive research on formalized language policies in the management field, one might be tempted to believe that only one form of such policies exists, and that almost every company adopts it. This form – the introduction of a single common corporate language – has indeed garnered the attention of scholars, on a mission to first highlight the potential benefits of this policy (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Thomas, 2008) and later unveil its so-called *dark side* (Hinds et al., 2014; Karhunen et al., 2018; Sanden, 2018; Tenzer et al., 2014). While dominating the language-sensitive management research, a common corporate language is not the only form of formalized corporate language policy. As noted in multiple studies (Ahmad & Barner-Rasmussen, 2019; Janssens & Steyaert, 2014; Kingsley, 2010; Sanden, 2015b; Tietze, 2008), corporations might also rely on formalized policies mandating multiple corporate languages. In these cases, management produces guidelines that regulate the use of typically two (and rarely more) languages within the organization.

2.5.1. Common Corporate Language: a panacea for language barriers?

To bridge differences in the mother tongues of their employees, corporations often decide to formally adopt a common corporate language. This decision (also known as *language standardization*) is motivated by the belief that a common language will facilitate intra-organizational communication and learning, as well as help in the creation and maintenance of a common corporate culture (Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; Tietze, 2008; Zander et al., 2011). Formalized common corporate language policies are typically mandated by executives of the company, who therefore embody the role of language managers (as conceptualized by Spolsky – see section 2.3.), hence the

locus of decision-making rests with them, and tend to have a great impact on the language practices within the organization (Feely & Harzing, 2003). In terms of the conceptualization of language discussed previously (see section 2.1.), mandating a corporate language typically assumes a structural view of language, focused on obtaining proficiency in the chosen corporate language.

Although it has become a widespread practice to rely on a common corporate language, researchers have shown that this decision might not only have positive, but also detrimental effects on team dynamics, as well as communication effectiveness and overall workforce cohesiveness (Karhunen et al., 2018; Piekkari et al., 2014). Based on previous studies, Janssens, Lambert, and Steyaert (2004) developed three views on language strategies – the mechanical, the cultural, and the political perspective – and applied them to the decision of formally introducing a language policy. According to the mechanical view, a common language policy is adopted as a result of a corporation believing to have a rather homogenous workforce (both in terms of culture and language). Under this assumption, the adoption of a corporate language can solve communication issues among employees with different mother tongues. Hence, the mechanical view reinforces a structural conceptualization of language in which reaching a high level of proficiency in the corporate language is sufficient to overcome potential language barriers (Karhunen et al., 2018). The cultural view, by contrast, values the importance of the cultural and linguistic diversity within an organization. According to this view, the adoption of a common corporate language might endanger the understanding of cultural differences among employees and create, therefore, misunderstandings in communication (Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001). Also, since language has been viewed as a strong factor in group

identity, conflicts might arise if such diversity is not properly considered (Giles & Johnson, 1981), leading to the possible emergence of *language faultlines* – that is divisions among employees based on linguistic sub-groups (Kulkarni, 2015; Lau & Murnighan, 2005). Referring back to the discussion on the underlying conceptualizations of language, the cultural view on adopting a corporate language seems to be nested within a functional conceptualization, in which language is located within its users and is linked to their social identities (Karhunen et al., 2018).

Finally, following the political view, the decision to adopt a common corporate language is seen as establishing a hierarchy among cultures and languages, therefore affecting the language beliefs held by employees (i.e., status assigned to each language as discussed in section 2.3.1.). Here, again, a functional conceptualization of language is assumed (i.e., language is part of the identity of each individual) (Karhunen et al., 2018). The chosen corporate language emerges as the most important one, placing native or highly proficient speakers of that language in a privileged position. Power conflicts might, therefore, arise following the *political* decision to adopt a shared language. The link between shifts in power dynamics and the introduction of a corporate language has been shown in multiple studies (Hinds et al., 2014; Neeley & Dumas, 2016; Piekkari et al., 2005; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). In the context of multinational teams, Tenzer, Pudelko, and Harzing (2014) showed that degree of corporate language proficiency influenced the professional standing of individuals. In the same study, the authors also found that the presence of language barriers negatively affected the process of trust formation and maintenance among team members. In a series of studies on multilingual teams (Lauring & Selmer, 2010, 2011), differences in the level of proficiency of the corporate language

have been linked to group cohesiveness and extent of knowledge sharing among members. Finally, Vaara and colleagues (2005) analyzed the consequences of the adoption of a common corporate language – Swedish – in a merger between a Swedish and a Finnish bank and found that this decision recreated feelings of post-colonialism in that it "…vitalized historically constructed conceptions of superiority (Swedes) and inferiority (Finns)" (p. 17).

Formally mandating the use of a specific language might also lead to feelings of discomfort by employees who do not believe to possess an adequate level of the language skills needed to communicate in the chosen language. These feelings have been labelled *foreign language anxiety*, which isdescribed as the uneasiness experienced by individuals in situations in which they are expected to communicate in a foreign language. Described in the context of school classrooms, individuals affected by foreign language anxiety display "…apprehension, worry, even dread. They have difficulty concentrating, become forgetful, sweat, and have palpitations" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 126). Foreign language anxiety was also detected among employees of two Austrian multinational corporations in which English had formally been implemented as the corporate language (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017b). Researchers found that in both companies, foreign language anxiety contributed to the formation of language barriers and resulted in affected employees displaying two types of reaction – communication withdrawal and code switching – altering therefore their language practices (see section 2.3.1.). In the first case, employees refrained from initiating and participating in communication in the corporate language, while in the latter, whenever possible, they switched to a common mother tongue with their interlocutors (e.g., Croatian employees switching to the Serbo-Croatian language when

communicating with Serbian employees). Both reactions resulted in potentially harmful consequences for the companies (though, other scholars have shown positive effects of switching to a common mother tongue, see Ahmad and Barner-Rasmussen, 2019), spanning from obstacles to knowledge transfer to misunderstandings and feelings of frustration.

As argued by the Piekkari (2006), while a common corporate language might simplify communication flows, it does not completely solve issues arising from linguistic diversity. Non-native speakers of the language might still encounter difficulties in speaking an unfamiliar language for each instance of communication. While arguably being the most common measure adopted to overcome language barriers, formally mandating a common corporate language might have detrimental effects on organizational processes and performance. Also, a common corporate language does not lead a multilingual environment to become truly monolingual (Fredriksson et al., 2006).

While the three views on language strategies applied to the decision to adopt a formalized common corporate language policy provide assumptions behind as well as potential benefits and drawback of this measure, little is known whether or not they can also explain the outcome of alternative arrangements, such as the non-formalized language policy I am studying in the present work. In this sense, these views are helpful when examining the outcomes of such a policy, in particular when discussing the theoretical assumptions underlying them as well and explaining their positive and negative outcomes.

2.5.2. Other forms of Formalized Language Policies

Aside from introducing a common corporate language, other formalized approaches have been taken by companies to reduce language barriers and facilitate interaction in a linguistically diverse workforce. Companies might, for example, decide to employ translators to bridge linguistic differences (Shademan Pajouh & Blenkinsopp, 2010). Similarly, the implementation of automated language translation tool (including the increased reliance on artificial intelligence) – even if only to translate written communication – might be seen as another measure implemented to manage linguistic diversity (Aiken & Ghosh, 2009; Mitchell, 2017; Piekkari et al., 2014).

2.6. Non-Formalized Language Policies

While management scholars have mainly been focusing on formalized corporate language policies, linguists have long brought to attention the presence of an alternative category of policies. As argued by Spolsky, "…language policy exists even where it has not been made explicit or established by authority" (2004, p. 8). This aspect draws a key distinction between the previously discussed documented (formalized) language policies and the ones that are present within an organization but not in their official communication guidelines. The existence of these policies, henceforth termed *non-formalized language policies* (Sanden, 2015b), has also been noticed by management scholars. Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen, and Piekkari (2006) mentioned in the closing remarks of their study of a major German multinational that it was likely that the management had not delivered a clear formulation of the corporate language policy. A similar situation is the one observed by Angoury (2013) and termed *Common Sense* language choice. In this approach, the

language choice is an ongoing negotiation process among the individuals involved in the interaction. Finally, a recent study by Sanden and Kankaanranta (2018) highlights a broad variety of non-formalized language policies.

The seemingly widespread presence of these policies is also substantiated by a study conducted in Finland, which found that only 21% of the analyzed international companies had a formalized language policy in place (Ylinen, 2010). Similarly, in the context of multinational enterprises headquartered in Germany, Ehrenreich (2010) identified instances in which, despite not being formalized, a common corporate language had implicitly been adopted. Also, studying the language choices within the large multinational Siemens, Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen, and Piekkari detected "…a strong trend of convergence toward English in many parts of the organization, although it is notable that it had not been clearly and unambiguously designated as the common corporate language" (2006, p. 419). Looking at Swedish and Danish corporations, Sanden and Kankaanranta (2018) were unable to locate formalized corporate language policies but detected unwritten approaches to language choices. Finally, Talja (2011) found that the majority of the 71 small and medium-sized internationally operating corporations investigated in her study did not rely on formalized language policies, but rather on bottom-up unwritten arrangements.

The picture that emerges from the reviewed studies depicts a multitude of organizations that either choose not to address language choices or decide to address it without producing official guidelines and rules. On other occasions, companies might even choose to *unofficially* allow multiple languages in the workplace, as opposed to choosing a formalized and strict imposition of one common corporate language (Janssens & Steyaert,

2014). As observed by Janssens, Lambert, and Steyaert, though "…this idea of a common language has long been oversold in international business, several trends indicate that multi-lingual situations are an everyday phenomenon in international organizations" (2004, p. 414).

The phenomenon of non-formalized language policies is not limited to organizations; however, it is rather surprising that despite the previously mentioned observations and studies, most of what is known about these policies stems from the sociolinguistic, communication, education, political science, and anthropology literatures. In the context of education, for example, the development of so called *invisible* language policies (which share a key aspect of non-formalized language policies – the absence of documented guidelines) has garnered the attention of scholars interested in understanding how within small communities "…individual identities shape language policies and practices in a seemingly invisible manner" (Tucker, 2018, p. 221). Similarly, linguists have long detected the presence of *implicit* language policies. The following short paragraph by Shohamy (2006, p. 50) sheds light on what these policies entail:

> "In other contexts, language policy is not stated explicitly, but can be derived implicitly from examining a variety of de facto practices. In these situations language policy is more difficult to detect as it is subtle and more hidden from the public eye. Implicit language policies can occur also at national level as many nations do not have explicit policies that are formulated in official documents".

The implicit aspect also characterizes non-formalized language policies, which are often the result of a tacit agreement between the management and the employees (Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). Oftentimes, language choices of employees are situation-dependent and are also influenced by the organizational culture and structure (Angouri,

2013). In this sense, while employees might enjoy a certain degree of freedom in their language choices, the management can influence these through more subtle hints and other related strategic decisions. Sanden and Kankaanranta (2018), for example, note how the non-formalized language policy of a Danish investment bank has been heavily influenced by the internationalisation strategy pursued by the management. The link between language choices and corporate strategy has been supported also in several other studies (Piekkari et al., 2014; Welch et al., 2001, 2005) to the extent that researchers have argued that language should be seen as being an essential part of strategic planning (Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Sanden, 2016b). Similarly, scholars have also argued that language choices are influenced by – and influence – the organizational context. Studying the language choices in a Finnish multinational corporation, Malkamäki and Herberts, for example, found that due to the absence of a clearly formulated and communicated language policy "…the principles of language use were a part of the organizational culture, which means that every individual who made language choices was aware of the company's shared set of assumptions about which language was to be used for different purposes and which criteria should be observed when making the choice of language" (Malkamäki & Herberts, 2014, p. 90). Accordingly, the employees are guided by unwritten rules that are part of the corporate culture. The abovementioned characteristics clearly differentiate non-formalized policies, in which language choices are addressed implicitly, from organizations not relying on any language policy.

Overall, and to avoid conceptual confusion, non-formalized language policies in the context of management research can be broadly defined as a set of unwritten rules and guidelines that influence language choices within an organization. The implicit nature of

these policies renders them less visible to the general public. Aside from this broad definition, however, very little is known about the features of these policies, the elements of these implicit arrangements, the theoretical assumptions that underlie them, the type of contextual factors that play a role in their existence, and where the locus of decision-making is located.

2.6.1. Effects of Non-Formalized Corporate Language Policies

While a wealth of research on the possible consequences of implementing formalized language policies exist, little is known on the potential effects of non-formalized ones. The *dark side* of a formalized common corporate language camp has produced a multitude of investigations on the potential detrimental effects (discussed previously in section 2.5.1.), perhaps without dedicating enough attention to possible alternative approaches. Non-formalized policies might provide possible benefits that offset the potential drawbacks of formalized arrangements, in that they might rest on different theoretical assumptions (as discussed in section 2.1.1.). In a recent study, Sanden and Kankaanranta (2018) looked at the use of non-formalized English language policies in Scandinavian companies, paving the way to a better understanding of them. The two authors found that the motives behind the (unwritten) adoption of English were similar to the ones already discussed for formalized policies (e.g., internationalization of the company) and that although only implicitly mandated, most employees seemed to comply with the policy. In fact, for many, communicating in English appeared to be a natural choice.

2.6.2. Conclusion – the missing pieces

As discussed previously, we are aware that language (and linguistic diversity) is a growingly important aspect of organizations. We also understand that organizations that fail to address language properly, run into the risk of not leveraging on a valuable resource and potentially face additional challenges in the effectiveness of their internal processes (e.g., communication, knowledge creation and transmission) (see section 2.2.2).

In terms of how language is addressed in organizations, for many years a widespread approach has been to rely on formalized language policies. The concentration of research on these policies has provided a fairly clear picture of what they consist of and why organizations choose to adopt them. Also, from a theoretical point of view, we have identified that these policies are born out of a structural conceptualization of language (see section 2.1.). Similarly, we know that a major theoretical assumption behind their adoption is that language choices should be managed by the executive-level of an organization (hence reflecting a top-down approach in which executives act as language managers, as Spolsky would phrase it – see section 2.3.). However, a growing number of management scholars have argued that, though widely adopted, formalized corporate language policies are linked to a series of negative outcomes (e.g., power unbalances and emergence of language faultlines – see section 2.5.1.). At the same time, researchers have noticed that organizations are relying on alternative approaches to address language. Studies of such approaches, termed non-formalized corporate language policies, are almost absent from the management literature. Because of this, we are unaware of which assumptions lie behind their existence and, perhaps even more important, what these policies really entail

(i.e., what are their characteristics?), how language choices happen in this context, and what the outcomes of these policies are.

From a theoretical perspective, we need to borrow from sociolinguistics to help positioning these policies. The knowledge generated in the field of management that has helped us gain a good understanding of how formalized approaches work and what underlying assumptions they entail has only limited applicability to the analysis of non-formalized approaches. The reason for this limitation is that much of this knowledge has been created under the theoretical assumption that the management of the organization would openly determine language choices of the organizational members. Consequently, situations in which the role of the management in the language choices of employees is unclear (as it might be the case in non-formalized language policy) have been largely ignored. Similarly, while most scholars assumed a static view of language, latest studies (Karhunen et al., 2018) showed that a more dynamic view (moving beyond the notion of proficiency) might offer fresh insights into the dynamics surrounding language choices and what drives them, especially in situations where implicit norms exist.

Addressing these shortcomings, the guiding research questions I aim to answer are:

RQ1: How can a non-formalized language policy be characterized? What may be its key features and underlying theoretical assumptions?
RQ2: What can be the benefits and drawbacks of a non-formalized language policy?

Answering these questions might help in discerning whether or not these policies are valid alternatives to formalized approaches, and can serve to advance our theoretical

knowledge on assumptions behind the choice of how linguistic diversity is addressed in multilingual organizations. As discussed in the next chapter, I relied on a hybrid approach (Swain, 2018) – merging a deductive and inductive reasoning – to investigate each aspect of and assumption behind the non-formalized language policy, as well as the domain in which the policy exists (the organization). In this sense, Spolsky's framework reviewed earlier (see section 2.3.1.) helped in exploring the three dimensions of the policy: language management, language practices, and language belief. In so doing, I also answered recent calls by sociolinguists (Kristinsson, 2022) to continue adopting Spolsky's framework in further investigations – also across other research areas (in this case, international management) – on the reality of language policies. Finally, the reviewed studies on corporate language policies helped to position the findings within ongoing debates in language-sensitive management research.

CHAPTER 3 – Research Design and Methodology, Research Context

In the following, I outline the research design, methodology, and the setting of this study. In addition, I describe the rationale behind each of the choices I made in designing the study.

3.1. Research Design

For the present investigation I adopted a single case study design, recognizing that this option allowed me to study a non-formalized corporate language policy in its natural habitat, extracting knowledge from the actors that were confronted daily with the policy and had been involved in its development (Crowe et al., 2011). More importantly, this design allowed me to gain deeper insights into the features characterizing this policy as well as into its perceived outcomes. In seeking a suitable fit between research questions and the choice of the research design, I relied also on suggestions byYin (2018, pp. 4–13), who argues that case studies are an optimal choice in scenarios characterized by the following conditions:

- answering “how” or “why” research questions,
- the researcher has not or only limited influence on behavioral events (as opposed to experiments in which the researcher might influence the behavior through manipulation),
- the investigation centers around a contemporary phenomenon (i.e., present and/or recent past).

All these three conditions apply to the investigated phenomenon – the reliance on non-formalized corporate language policies and its perceived benefits and drawbacks. Aside from the already specified research questions, recollections of interactions and observations might only limitedly be influenced by the researcher. Finally, since the company was at that time relying on a non-formalized language policy, the phenomenon could be classified as being contemporary.

Beyond the aforementioned reasons, choosing a single-case study design allowed me also to rely on a broad variety of data collection approaches, ranging from observations, to interviews and analysis of documents (Yin, 2018). Through this variety, I leveraged the strength of the case study design, i.e. the ability to offer a richer account of the phenomena (De Vaus, 2001), and delivered a holistic view of a non-formalized corporate language policy. In this sense, I followed primarily a postpositivist philosophy, applying a variety of methods to deliver an as accurate as possible depiction of reality (Lincoln et al., 2011). To further ensure the rigor of the conducted research, I followed the suggestions formulated by Houghton and colleagues (2013) and Yin (2018). Accordingly, to safeguard validity I relied on member-checking, a procedure in which participants are asked to verify that their statements have been accurately reported and interpreted (Carlson, 2010; Cho & Trent, 2006). Triangulation between different data collection approaches allowed me to limit possible errors and biases, while also generating extra knowledge about the investigated phenomenon (Flick, 2018), a multi-faceted understanding (Crowe et al., 2011), as well as ensuring the validity of the findings (Yin, 2018). Finally, the decision to opt for conducting a case study was also influenced by the previous successful applications of such design in

investigations on how organizations managed their language policies (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; Welch & Welch, 2018a).

3.2. Research Methods

To answer the investigated research questions, I decided to rely on qualitative methods. Typically, qualitative research in the context of organizations consists of a "… multi-method process that uses 'qualitative data', including linguistic symbols and stories, verbal communication and written texts to understand organizational processes. It produces rich descriptions of naturally occurring behavior in real life organizations…" (Gephart, 2018, p. 34). I followed a similar approach and collected qualitative data through multiple data collection methods, expecting to gain deeper insights into the relevant phenomena – the existence of non-formalized corporate language policy and its outcomes – as well as to capture possible emerging themes (J. W. Creswell & Clark, 2011). The multiple data collection methods allowed me to grasp a multitude of different voices and points of view while adding richness, breadth and depth to the investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). More specifically, I relied on field observations, semi-structured interviews, in-depth conversations, and analysis of material derived from the company's internal messaging system, and documentations. Spolsky's framework on language policies (see section 2.3.1.) helped in deciding which data to collect, especially when answering the first research question (*RQ1: How can a non-formalized language policy be characterized? What may be its key features and underlying theoretical assumptions?*). In particular, it played a major role in designing the protocol of the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3), in that part of the questions addressed the three main dimensions of a

language policy: language management, langue practices, and language beliefs. Similarly, observations often aimed at capturing language practices of the employees. Multiple spontaneous conversations served to provide explanations of language choices while also shedding light on underlying language beliefs that guided them. Aside from allowing me to observe actual language practices, the field work provided insights into the organizational environment of the company – the domain of the language policy (see section 2.3.1.) – while also showing how this policy lived and *survived* within this context. Semi-structured interviews and spontaneous conversations served also as the main instruments to answer the second research question (*RQ2: What can be the benefits and drawbacks of a non-formalized language policy?*).

In terms of method of reasoning, I followed a hybrid approach between an inductive and deductive logics (Swain, 2018). On the one hand, the deductive side allowed me to establish certain preexisting themes derived from the broader literature on language policies (e.g.,Spolsky's dimensions of language policies) that needed to be explored to answer the investigated research questions (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). On the other hand, through the inductive approach I allowed the data collection and analysis process to be driven also by newly emerging themes (Eisenhardt, 1989), focusing on the "…individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation" (J. Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 41). The inductive approach also helped to overcome the limits posed by the scant literature focusing specifically on non-formalized corporate language policies. For example, the concept of *language ambiguity* (see section 6.5.) was developed from emerging themes such as the uncertainty surrounding the interpretation of the policy and features of the decision-making process as well as the organizational culture of CORPIT.

3.3. Site of Study

As highlighted by Yin (2018), the choice of a suitable case is a fundamental aspect of the case study design. In selecting the case, my aim was to find a multilingual organization that operated in a linguistically diverse context within a sector, where communication played a key role for efficient knowledge creation and transmission (Nurmi, 1998). My aim was to select an *instrumental case study*, that is choosing a particular case that because of its features has the potential to provide the insights needed to answer the investigated research questions (Stake, 1995).

The chosen corporation (henceforth named CORPIT) was an internationally operating multilingual organization in a knowledge-intensive sector – information technology. It was headquartered in a highly linguistically diverse geographical area (Montréal, Québec, Canada), with branches also in Ontario (Canada) and France. The majority of customers of CORPIT were located in North America with a growing number of clients in Europe. The company (which represented the domain of the language policy, the context in which a language policy operates – see section 2.3.1.) focused on developing digital platforms for several major local and international clients, spanning the telecommunication, education, and gaming sectors. As discussed previously, English tends to be the dominant language in the information technology sector. Montréal, by contrast, is known for being "…the second most populous primarily French-speaking city in the world, after Paris. French is the mother tongue of two thirds of the city" (Chan, 2018). When looking at the provincial level, the dominance of French becomes even more evident. In fact, over 94% of the population in Québec is able to communicate in French (Statistics Canada, 2017). In an effort to promote the use of the language, the provincial government

offers free full-time French courses to immigrants (Gouvernement du Québec, 2019), while a dedicated institution – the "Office Québecois de la Langue Française" – develops measures to protect the language and ensure that it preserves its status as the official language (Office Québécois de la Langue Française, 2020). Businesses operating in Québec, for example, are required to "…add a French word, description or slogan to their outdoor signage" (CBC News, 2016). Regulations on the use of French (which, for businesses, mainly focus on written documents, such as official documents for local authorities, but do not cover language use for within-company interactions) are laid out in the "Charte de la langue française" (Charter of the French Language), which has been adopted in 1977, following "…a linguistic and social context marked by the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, when French-speaking Quebecers fought to be free from the long economic and cultural oppression by English speaking Quebecers" (Paquet & Levasseur, 2019, p. 376). The historical divide between French and English is embodied in title of 1945 book *Two Solitudes* by Canadian novelist Hugh MacLennan, which has in the past often been referred to when describing the challenges in the cohabitation of the two languages (Bilefsky, 2018).

Nowadays, French still dominates and remains the only official language, while English is seen as a minority language with about 20% of the city's population identifying it as their first language and an additional 6.7% stating that both English and French were their main languages (Statista, 2022).

Aside from French and English, however, Montréal is known for a growing multicultural and multilingual population, with a rapidly increasing number of immigrants who are *Allophone*, a term coined to describe individuals who have "…a language or

languages other than French or English as their mother tongue(s)" (Kircher, 2014, p. 42). Allophones in Montréal represent more than 27% of its population. Arabic, Spanish, Italian, and Mandarin are among the mostly represented languages in the immigrant population, and constituting a growing share of the highly skilled talent pool from which companies operating in knowledge-intensive sector (such as CORPIT) draw future employees (Government of Canada, 2022).

Overall, Montréal constitutes a very interesting environment for language-sensitive research, in that it challenges organizations to operate in a city with a Francophone majority, a significant Anglophone and rapidly growing Allophone minority, embedded in a Francophone province (Québec) but within a country with an Anglophone majority – Canada (Bilefsky, 2018; Statistics Canada, 2017) and a growing linguistically diverse population, with one out of four inhabitants having neither English nor French as their mother tongue (Statistics Canada, 2022). Comparable situations can, for example, be found in areas in which multiple languages coexist (e.g., China, India, and Indonesia).

The previously mentioned aspects, together with the fact that language-sensitive research has mainly focused on the United States, United Kingdom, and Northern European countries as research sites (Tenzer et al., 2017) – ignoring other important linguistically diverse economic areas – have greatly contributed to my choice of the research site.

3.4. Initial Screening of the Company

Based on the initial conversations with the executives of the company and the Human Resource (HR) manager, CORPIT appeared to lack a clearly defined and

formulated language policy. Most of the employees had either French or English as a mother-tongue, though varieties of the two languages were quite present (e.g., Québécois French, Metropolitan French, Acadian French, American English, and British English). A small (but growing) portion of the employees (~15 %) had other mother-tongues (e.g., Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese) but were able to communicate in one of the two aforementioned languages (with different levels of proficiency).

Aside from the previously discussed linguistically diverse geographical area, the company was chosen also because it operated in a knowledge-intensive sector (communication and information technology) that is dominated by the English language; in fact, the most important programming languages are based on English (Fisher, 2015; Guo, 2018). This created an environment in which both the dominant language of the geographical location (French) and the industry (English) had an important role, but for different reasons (cultural and political in the first case and business requirements in the second). Comparable situations might be found in areas in which the dominant language in an industry might not be the most widely spoken by the local population or in which regulations mandate the use of a language that differs from the language of business.

An important feature of the company was the process of growth that it had experienced in its recent past, in which it had increasingly started to address foreign markets and relied on a growing culturally and linguistically diverse workforce. Parallel to the growing diversity of the city, the technological sector of Montréal was flourishing, with an increasing number of both locally and foreign-owned companies entering the market (Moser et al., 2019; Turkina, 2018). CORPIT, hence, was facing the challenge of managing language choices of an increasingly linguistically diverse workforce (and talent pool for

potential future hires as the company continued to grow) while also navigating the complexity of a growing company in an increasingly competitive dynamic industry sector.

When asked to produce documentation regarding the company, the management shared material mainly in French. Regarding language choices, the Human Resource manager shared that there was no written document regulating how language choices were addressed in internal corporate communication. Examples of internal communication varied from e-mail messages only in French, to correspondence in both English and French, and instances of English only communication. Overall, CORPIT constituted a suitable corporate environment to investigate the research questions of the present study.

CHAPTER 4 – Data Collection

4.1. Planning

All the employees working at the headquarters of CORPIT were informed that the research project was about how they communicated within the company and what they thought might have been necessary to facilitate communication. A sample of employees (see Appendix 1 for the recruitment script and Appendix 2 for the consent form) as well as members of the management team were interviewed . Acknowledging the diverse linguistic background of the employees, in choosing the sample I ensured that each linguistic group within the company was represented. Within each group, the choice of individuals to be interviewed was based on their availability as well as on suggestions delivered by other interviewees (snowball sampling) (Parker et al., 2019). To deliver a more comprehensive view on the non-formalized language policy and its outcomes, I included in the sample both employees as well as executives.

By relying on semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 3 for the protocol), I attempted to recreate a guided conversation rather than a fully structured interview. As suggested by Yin (2018), interviews are particularly helpful when trying to collect "…the insights reflecting participants' relativist perspectives" (p. 118). Interviews were conducted mainly in English (all interviewees had at least a basic knowledge of English), though participants who felt more comfortable to answer in French were able to do so and were confronted immediately with a translation of their statements (using an automatic translation tool) to verify its correctness and accuracy. At times, French-speaking respondents asked colleagues of their choice to help in translating. Additionally, I

conducted interviews with key informants who I identified prior and during the company visit. I supplemented the interviews with observations conducted at the company facility. As recently suggested in a literature review of language-sensitive research, observations, while being time-consuming, might provide additional valuable insights on the dynamic nature of language (Karhunen et al., 2018). Furthermore, studying non-formalized language polices in the educational sector context, Crandall and Bailey (2018) suggested that complementing interviews with observation helps in casting light on the generally hidden aspects of language policies. Considering that one of the main goals of this study was offering an in-depth view on the features of this policy in the organizational context, the choice to also rely on observation seemed suitable.

In addition to interviews and field observations, I secured access to the public channels of the internal messaging system (a platform named *Slack*) used by employees to communicate among each other by participating in discussion threads spanning from project management to informal matters. Finally, to help clarify emerging questions as well as to better understand the day-to-day life of the company, I scheduled daily meetings with key informants.

Overall, the broad range of data collection methods served to gain insights into the different aspects of the language policy, in terms of language management, language practices, and language beliefs. Additionally, it allowed me to observe whether language choices vary across different contexts (e.g., communication via e-mail, or instant messaging, as opposed to oral interaction) and in different situations (e.g., formal meetings as opposed to informal spontaneous conversations).

4.2. Data Collection

I conducted interviews with 13 employees, the Human Resources manager, and two executives (including the co-founder and CEO of the company) and completed over 25 hours of observations, including participating in several meetings (for example, a townhall meeting and weekly team meetings – see Table 1 for an overview of the observed formal meetings) and observing spontaneous interactions among employees.

Type of meeting	**Participants**
Townhall meeting to discuss the current situation and the future of the company	All employees and the management team
Developers meeting	5-8 employees
Work allocation meeting	10 employees and 1 manager
Weekly Team Meetings	First meeting: 15 employees Second Meeting: 8 employees Third Meeting: 7 employees

Table 1: Observed formal meetings.

While the first 12 interviews were performed in separated scheduled individual sessions with the interviewees, the last 4 were the result of multiple interactions, partly also unscheduled. In particular, the information collected from the HR manager stemmed from multiple conversations prior, during and after my vist at the company. This was a very important aspect of the data collection phase, as it contributed to both creating the protocol for the semi-structured interviews, as well as adding questions as initial findings emerged, and retrieving additional information about the company when needed.

To be able to observe also informal interactions, I attended three social events and spent each of my lunch breaks with different employees and executives, while also

spending time at the company's kitchen during coffee breaks to observe spontaneous (*water-cooler*) interactions among employees. In observing interactions, I noted the language-choices made by the involved parties. At times, I approached one or more of the individuals involved to ask them about the choices they made. This resulted in multiple spontaneous short conversations that did not resemble the typical semi-structured interviews, but rather so-called *anchored interviews*, in which the questions are based on an observed behavior (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139). For example, after observing multiple casual interactions between two employees, I asked them why they sometimes relied on French to communicate with each other despite both of them having English as their mother-tongue (and having limited proficiency of French), and what factors led to those decisions (e.g., the cultural and linguistic background of all participants, their job positions, the topic of discussion, the particular context in which the conversation was taking place, etc.) – seeking to understand also the role of contextual factors and individual features. The need for additional data stemmed from methodological discussions in the field of applied linguistics, suggesting that factors such as the role and the number of participants and the particular communication activity (e.g., a presentation) in a conversation might play a role in language choices (Schmitt & Rodgers, 2020). Finally, these spontaneous observations and anchored interviews allowed me to capture language practices *as they happen* not only in formal, but also in informal settings, eventually uncovering more subtle aspects and consequences of the language policy.

During my one-week stay at the company, I was given a desk right next to the main floor of the programmers. This position allowed me to easily interact with everyone in the company and observe communication among employees. Each morning, the HR manager

briefed me about all the meetings (general, departmental, and team) – for which she provided me with agendas and lists of participants – and other events of the day. This allowed me to have a better overview of the day-to-day operations of the company and optimize my schedule accordingly. Furthermore, the company assigned me a corporate e-mail address that allowed me to receive every company-wide communication by the management as well as any other public announcement shared by employees. During and after my stay at the company, I had access to the general chat channels of the internal messaging system (access to private chats among employees was not granted). The daily conversations with the HR manager were also of key importance to explore and understand language practices within the organization, while also serving to investigate how language is addressed. For example, in several of these conversations, the HR manager shared that when hiring new employees, language proficiency was not seen as a crucial aspect of the applicants' profile. These valuable insights provided also a hint as how language might be conceptualized – not in terms of proficiency, and hence not following the structural view discussed in the first part of section 2.1. A very important aspect that could help to better position this language policy in the theoretical debate.

4.2.1. Documenting the data collection

From the first contact with the company (eight months before the company visit), I engaged in the practice of writing very brief comments and memos during and after videocalls, interviews, as well as while and after observing the day-to-day operations of the organization. In this phase the suggestions offered by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) proved to be very helpful. In their view, starting earlier with writing memos provides the researcher

with the opportunity "…to reflect on issues raised in the setting and how they relate to larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 165). Frequently, I organized and reviewed all my notes and comments, aiming to create a "…rich storehouse of materials to tickle and otherwise stimulate memories of fieldwork" (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 123) and summarizing them. To capture interactions, and hence, language practices, observed in the public channels of the company's internal messaging system, I wrote small memos summarizing the content of the conversations, focusing primarily on documenting the language choices, type of interactions, and members participating in them.

4.3. Data Analysis – an Iterative Process

Data analysis started parallel to the data collection. This choice is not unusual in the context of qualitative investigations, especially given the explorative nature of my study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each time I added new pieces of information to the existing data, I took the time to reflect on what the collected data was telling me. This practice served also as a *verification* strategy, as the "…pacing and the iterative interaction between data and analysis…is the essence of attaining reliability and validity" (Morse et al., 2002, p. 18).

The frequent interactions with key informants within the company allowed me to ask for clarification on emerging themes, to verify my interpretation of certain patterns, as well as to look for additional ideas. In this sense, these interactions were not only part of the data collection, but also of the analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Furthermore, this

process served to add credibility and trustworthiness to the conducted study (Nowell et al., 2017; Tobin & Begley, 2004).

As an additional step to ensure credibility, in line with the suggestions proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), a senior researcher followed the development of the project from its inception. Frequent debriefs about each step of the project helped in adjusting the research design and also in the interpretation of the emerging themes. By sharing the content of interviews and observations during the company visit, for example, I received immediate feedback and could adjust the focus of the subsequent data collection steps.

Interviews, observations, field notes, summaries of informal conversations, interactions captured in the internal instant messaging system, video-calls, and e-mail messages provided a considerable amount of data (143 pages of interview transcriptions, 11 pages of e-mail interactions, as well as 32 pages of observation reports, summaries, and field notes). While transcribing and organizing the data, I continued to have interactions with key informants, in an effort to involve them as much as possible in the interpretation of the findings.

4.3.1. Approaches to coding and first cycle of coding

I started the coding process by engaging in a microanalysis of the material. The reason behind choosing this approach lies in its ability "…to open up the data and generate ideas, to get the researcher deep into the data, and to focus in on pieces of data that seem relevant but whose meaning remains elusive" (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 89). Cross matching the data from the different sources, I developed content labels that served to briefly categorize the data by marking important passages.

Overall, in the first cycle of coding, I followed a conventional approach, in which themes inductively emerge from the data, without having crafted a predefined codebook. This method is usually applied when scarce literature exists on the investigated phenomenon (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), such as it is the case with non-formalized corporate language policies (see literature review in section 2.6.).

In terms of tools used for the analysis, I relied mainly on the MS Office (Word and Excel) and NVivo software packages. While the former was mainly used to create memos, field notes, and transcriptions, the latter served to conduct the process of coding and analytic memo writing. Each interview has been coded separately. In a subsequent stage I proceeded in coding field notes as well as observation reports and electronic correspondence with selected key informants.

To craft the codes, I initially relied on an *In Vivo* method, in which the codes "…derive from the actual language of the participant" (Saldana, 2016, p. 77). This choice was motivated by the desire to preserve the different perspectives of the interviewees, rather than capturing them immediately in words generated by me. In doing so, I attempted to limit the extent to which my pre-existing knowledge could contaminate the interpretation of the interviewees' words at this early stage of the analysis (Saldana, 2016). As I moved forward towards coding more interviews, I started to merge similar codes and re-use the same codes to categorize similar quotes. For instance, the following quotes were all coded as *Inclusion* (and at a later stage, in the second coding cycle, included in the category *Organizational Culture*):

"…it is like more equal, rather than titles, arrogance getting in the way, power trips and control issues, there is none of that here".

"CORPIT still tries to be like a family".

For field notes and observations I relied on a blend of two approaches, a choice that is usually guided by the willingness to increase the depth and breadth of the results (Mello, 2002). More specifically, I mainly used a descriptive approach to code my notes on the observed behavior, crafting codes that would describe each situation. This approach is typically used to describe social environments (Saldana, 2016, p. 292). Also, at times, I tracked the emotions I detected while observing individuals interacting – an approach labelled *emotion coding* (Saldana, 2016, p. 124). For example, I noticed in certain instances the frustration of a few Anglophone employees when I asked them about their thoughts on a fictional scenario in which the company decided to revert back to French as the only corporate language. Finally, and similar to the procedure used for interviews, I relied on *In Vivo coding* for fragments of spontaneous conversations captured during my stay at the company.

To enhance the reliability of the coding, each interview was coded twice, before proceeding to the second stage of the analysis. This procedure, known as *test-retest method* involves recoding the material without looking at the results of the first coding, basically restarting the procedure to compare whether or not the results are similar and to revise possible discrepancies (Gorden, 1998, p. 183).

4.3.2. Second cycle of coding and moving from codes to categories

In this stage, I focused on looking for relationships among codes and observed recurring and emerging patterns. This *coding for patterns* technique served me to gain a better understanding of the data, creating a systematic synthesis of the data (Saldana, 2016,

p. 234; Stenner, 2012, p. 136). Further subsuming codes into larger categories (i.e., creating labels encompassing multiple codes), eliminating codes that appeared to be less relevant (e.g., “technical details on the tasks delivered by employees”), and drawing parallels between related codes and categories further helped in the data reduction process, in the identification of themes and finally in the generation of insights. Reflecting the hybrid approach followed in this study, in this second phase of the analysis categories derived both from a pre-existing framework (i.e., Spolsky’s framework of language policies) as well as emerged from the collected data. This allowed me to capture all three dimensions of the policy (i.e., language management, language practices, and language beliefs) while also identify additional features and valuable insights that can extend theoretical knowledge and the assumptions behind and the outcomes of this policy.

Accordingly, in answering the first research question (RQ1), I initially relied on findings emerging from the collected data, and then applied a framework borrowed from sociolinguistics (Spolsky’s framework on language policies) to categorize features of the policy into three broader dimensions: language management, language practices, and language beliefs. For other features of the policy that could not be categorized using Spolsky's framework (e.g, the role of the policy in a broader set of measures aimed at promoting multilingualism) as well as for the outcomes of the policy (RQ2) I fully relied on an inductive approach.

As an example of the coding process for RQ1, Figure 1 displays how the reply of an interviewee, when asked whether the management imposed a certain language for internal communication, has evolved from being a single In Vivo code to being subsumed

to a category of Spolsky's framework (Language Management) and, in the end, being related to other categories.

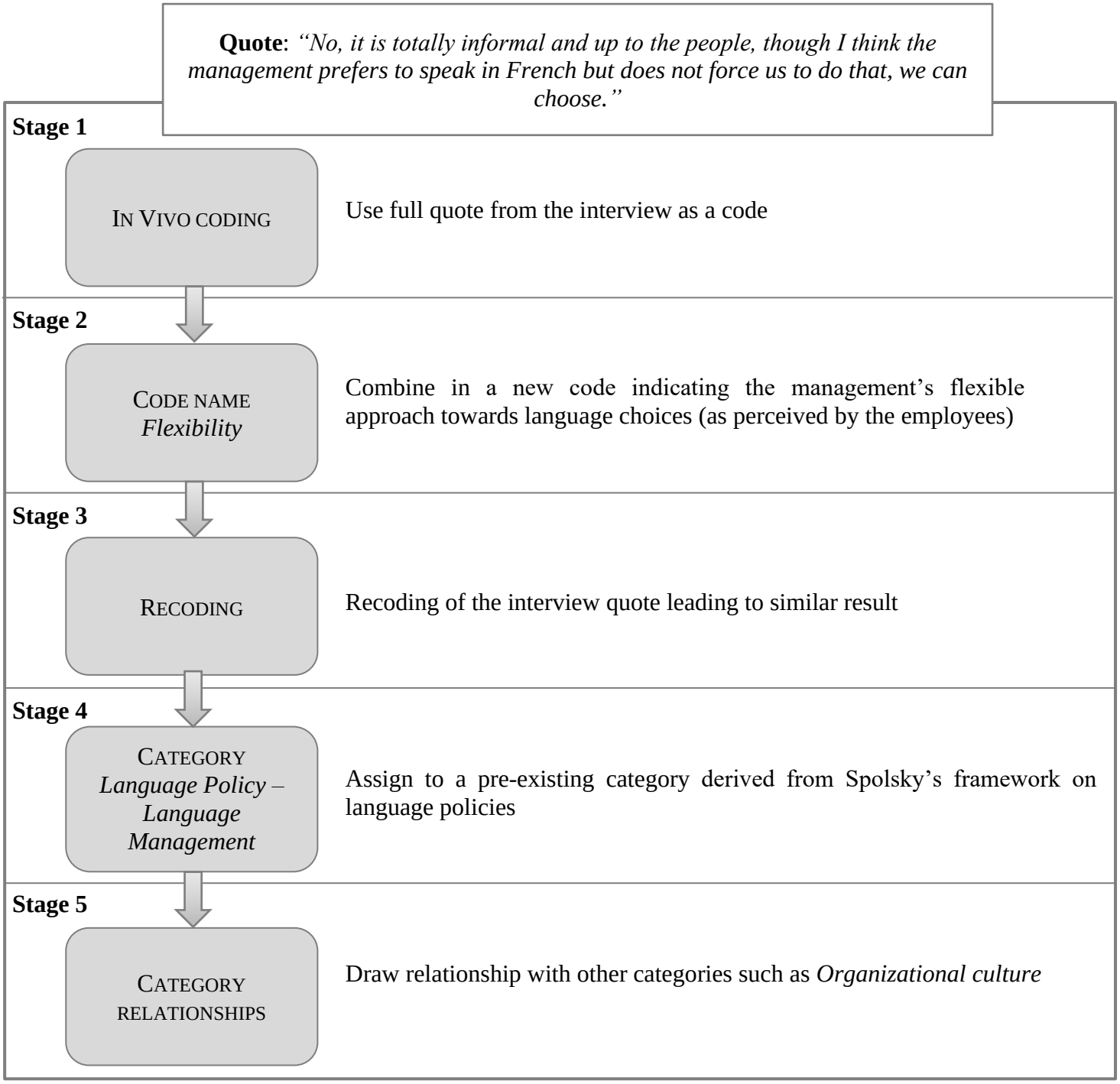

Figure 1: Example of coding process – deductive.

Figure 2 shows an example of how the inductive approach was used to answer RQ2. Here a quote from a respondent is first coded using an In Vivo technique, and then is subsumed to a series of newly created categories. Finally, I draw relationship between categories.

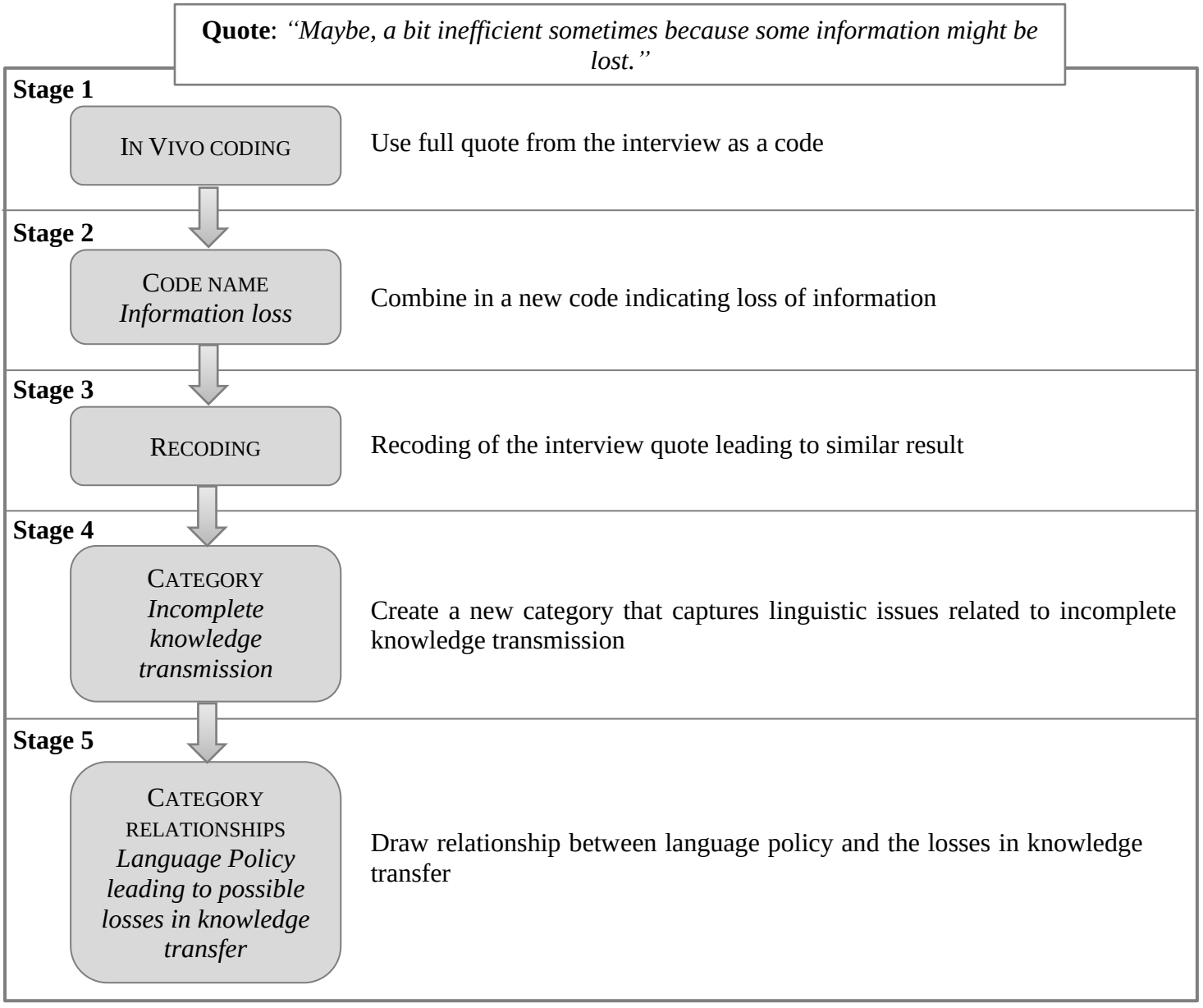

Figure 2: Example of coding process – inductive.

CHAPTER 5 – Results

5.1. Introduction

The analysis of the collected data produced a list of important themes that emerged during the different coding cycles, the continued comparison and merging with analytic memos, field notes, as well as post-data collection conversations with key informants. Table 2 shows examples of how first order concepts were derived from the collected material.

Source	Quote	First order concept
HR Manager	*"We encourage people to use French, but we do not formally require them to do so."*	Verbal suggestion on language choices
Employee	*"I am not really sure what the official language is here, never really thought about it…"*	Lack of clearly mandated language
Employee	*"Well, it is not written, however, when I joined it has been said to me that speaking English was fine, that it would be good to talk also in French, but it is not strictly needed here."*	Oral agreements that both French and English are accepted
Employee	*"So, there are no written rules or so, but I can see how the management is trying to have both French and English here…I think it is important to them. I think that is what they want."*	Management deciding to accept both language
Employee	*"…it is totally informal and up to the people, though I think the management prefers to speak in French but does not force us to do that, we can choose."*	Decision-making rests also with the employees

Executive	*" French is kind of our default language, we shift to English often though, we balance the two languages according to the situation. So, we have a fairly flexible idea of language."*	Flexible idea of language
HR Manager	*"… people mix English, or even different type of French (from France and from Quebec) and technical terms. I think that we really do have an own language."*	Creating own language
Employee	*"We tend to speak French because this is our first language but as soon as you start talking about code more and more English words will be used. It is really a mix, it is both languages at the same time."*	Mixing languages
Employee	*"We are having both languages in the company…it means that we are not linear, we are not just one thing, there is opening, some opening of minds, of cultures. There is something positive with it, the way the company looks like. It is more a welcoming environment, more like a community where everybody can say what they want, in the way they want."*	Promoting feeling of community
Employee	*"I think it gives kind of an international vibe, I think it creates a quite inclusive environment. You know, if you are not that good in French it is not really a problem, we will find a way to understand each other. I think that is a very nice thing here, people are willing to help you feel part of the community. There are very good people here that pretty much speak only English, I do not think they would be here if they would not feel welcome."*	Creating inclusive environment
Executive	*"I think that the reason why it works so well here is that we have not introduced this level of fear between the two languages…We want to make the people feel comfortable in speaking any of the languages they feel most comfortable with while at the same time making sure that they will get the information that they need if it is communicated in another language."*	Reducing Anxiety

HR Manager	*"Well in terms of HR we try to overcome that potential language-grouping thing by being more flexible. So, perhaps, rather than language, socialization here depends on the common projects, or common hobbies... For example, some programmers really like videogames, other people are more into arts, others into sports…*	Grouping based on non-language related factors
Employee	*"…everybody gets along very well, without any language barriers or anything like that. For instance, you saw yesterday that pretty big meeting yesterday at 11am, there were at least 15-20 people. Everyone was getting along, everyone was being supportive… And I think you will find that also in any other type of meetings that we may have. So, is this a function of language? I think that might play a role, yes."*	Language not seen as an obstacle to relationships
Employee	*"Maybe, a bit inefficient sometimes because some information might be lost."*	Information loss
Employee	*"I think sometimes certain things can get lost in translation and I do not think that the essence of the message gets lost."*	Essence of message retained
Employee	*"Not really, maybe sometimes it takes a bit more of time to communicate something."*	Longer time needed for communication
Employee	*"Well, when I write an e-mail in French it takes me longer than it would to write it in English. So, maybe there is a slight loss of efficiency because I have to spend more time, because I want to make sure that my French is correct, the grammar is correct, everything, the vocabulary and all that stuff. So maybe there is a bit of loss of efficiency when I have to write e-mails in French."*	Additional effort required for writing e-mails in other language
Employee	*"They did offer French courses for free but it was not mandatory. I think they also try to help Francophones who would like to learn more English."*	Offering possibility to learn languages

Employee	*"I think it is very good, it is great to hear multiple languages, it is like a melting pot! For example, we have a colleague whose mother tongue is actually Spanish, sometimes a few of us that know the language communicate with her that way, then they switch to French, which she speaks fairly well…It seems like people feel more confident here to try speaking in different languages."*	Increasing confidence in speaking different languages
Employee	*"I think it is an advantage that anybody who works here gets to be exposed to multiple languages and if they want to take that initiative they can improve themselves personally."*	Encouraging learning and practicing a foreign language
Employee	*"I do not feel much pressure, like either I know French, or I am out. I can always communicate in English, but I am also encouraged to use French sometimes, though I do not really have to."*	

Table 2: Examples of quotes and derived first order concepts.

In Table 3, the previously derived first order concepts are further processed into second order conceptualizations from which theoretical insights are inferred.

First order concept	**Second order Conceptualization**	**Theoretical Insights**	**Key Research Question**
No formal requirements, but suggestions	Unwritten guidelines, informal suggestions	Language managementLanguage Policy consists of implicit and ambiguous guidelines	RQ1 Features of the language policy
Oral agreements			
Lack of clearly mandated language	Uncertainty about corporate language		
Management deciding to accept both languages	Locus of decision-making	Language management Decision-making involves both management and employees, no clearly identifiable language manager	RQ1
Decision-making rests also with the employees			

Flexible idea of language	Company-Speak	Language Practices Conceptualization of language	RQ1
Creating own language			
Mixing languages	Translanguaging		
Promoting feeling of community	Language as a mean to create inclusive environment	Language Policy promotes linguistic inclusion	RQ2 Perceived Benefits and Drawbacks
Creating inclusive environment			
Reducing Anxiety	Potentially reducing foreign language anxiety	Language policy reducing language barriers	RQ2
Grouping based on non-language related factors	Reducing language sub-grouping		
Language not seen as an obstacle to relationships			
Information loss	Incomplete knowledge transmission	Language Policy leading to possible losses in knowledge transfer	RQ2
Essence of message retained			
Longer time needed for communication	Inefficient communication	Language Policy slowing doing communication	RQ2
Additional effort required for writing e-mails in other language			

Offering possibility to learn languages	Promoting foreign language acquisition		
Increasing confidence in speaking different languages	Opportunity and motivation to speak foreign language	Language Policy encouraging multilingualism and foreign language acquisition – link to *language affordances*	RQ2
Encouraging learning and practicing a foreign language			

Table 3: Higher order concepts and links to theoretical insights and research questions.

The in-depth case study design adopted for this study allowed me to offer a rich account of the features of the language policy – hence, answering the main research question: how can a non-formalized language policy be characterized? What may be its key features and underlying theoretical assumptions? As suggested in the reviewed literature, a language policy exists within and cannot be separated from a specific context. Accordingly, I first focused on analyzing the context in which the non-formalized policy was embedded. This context consisted of the domain of the language policy – the investigated organization CORPIT – as well as external factors (such as cultural and political aspects that might play a role in language practices within the organization). Recognizing the importance of contextual factors for theorizing (Santangelo & Verbeke, 2022), I aligned myself to previous studies in which a potential relationship between these factors and the design and outcome of languages polices has been discussed (Lønsmann, 2017), and provided insights on the characteristics of an organization relying on a non-formalized language policy. For example, the deliberate effort to value and foster

multilingualism (through a set of measures that I subsequently examine through the lens of *language affordances)* as well as the flat hierarchical structure, among others, emerged as important features of the organizational context of CORPIT.

Then, I present the findings of the analysis of the language policy, unveiling theoretical assumptions behind its existence (e.g., how is language conceptualized) as well as identifying its key characteristics, such as the locus of decision-making (i.e., who determines the language choices). In so doing, I relied also on the conceptualization offered by Spolsky and explored aspects related to three dimensions of the language policy: language management, language practices, and language beliefs. The findings provide insights on the theoretical foundations of the non-formalized language policy as well as how this policy is realized in terms of its form as well as in the language choices and beliefs of the the organizational members. Table 4 shows a compact overview of the results of the analysis of both the domain and the features of the language policy:

Domain of the Language Policy (Organizational Context)		
Flat hierarchy Employees involved in decision making processes Frequent organizational changes Highly linguistically diverse environment Strategic effort to foster multilingualism		
Features of the Language Policy		
Language Management	Language Practices	Language Beliefs
Lack of a designated language manager Implicit guidelines and suggestions by executives but also reliance on individual self-management Flexible linguistic requirements Adjustments to policy according to strategic goals	Fluid notion of language Translanguaging Unclear boundaries between languages Social practice view	No clearly identifiable corporate language Variety of opinions on the role of each language French identity Growing importance of English Valuing multilingualism

Table 4: Main findings related to the domain and features of the language policy.

In the second part of this chapter, I focus on providing an answer for the second research question – *what can be the benefits and drawbacks of a non-formalized language policy?*

5.2. Organizational Context – the Domain of the Language Policy

"The only way for decisions to happen here is when they are taken with consensus of both the employees and the management." – CEO

CORPIT was a rapidly growing midsized company that provided webservices across a wide range of customers, spanning from the educational sector to the videogame industry and the telecommunication industry.

In my conversation with the CEO and co-founder, he explained that his approach to leadership and the way he saw the organization is very much influenced by his past history working in the IT sector, in particular his humbling beginnings. This became evident in the following statement:

"I think sometimes when I see how things work here, it is probably based on the fact that I and M3MF (another co-founder) started on the floor and we climbed up the ladder. I did not start the business as a manager, but as a production assistant… So, I always tend to favour fairness and the value of people from the floor." – CEO

Experience on the field (the *floor* here was the place where all programmers work), appeared to be a recurring theme in the long interview, and also in the following multiple spontaneous interactions with him. Talking about how his history influenced the approach that he took in facing challenges within the company, he argued that:

"…there is some openness from the management, everybody can talk to us. I would say it is a flat hierarchy. That probably helps. We do not tolerate behavior in

which you do not do the work and you ask someone else to do the work. That is probably part of it." – CEO

As evidenced in the opening quote of this section, and according also to another member of the management board, CORPIT appeared to have a flat hierarchical structure, that provided a fair amount of autonomy to the employees (resulting in a feeling of empowerment reported by the employees), who were also involved in decision-making processes. As I illustrate ahead, this aspect played a role in terms of the locus of decision-making (i.e., who decides over language choices of employees) within the language policy adopted by the organization.

While both executives presented the flat hierarchy – and the self-determination enjoyed by employees – as a positive aspect, the CEO recognized that it constituted a potential weakness. In his words, as an employee at CORPIT *"... you have a lot of autonomy, but you can hang yourself with it. Meaning that there were people that could not adapt to it, and they have decided to leave. They felt very insecure to not have direct supervision"*. Later, he also added this brief but quite significant statement, in which he mentioned also the possible drawbacks of this structure:

"It is a very specific culture, and some people are very happy with it because they can do what they want with their job as long as it fits with their co-workers and the general business plan of the company. But people that need direct guidance sometimes are not happy here." – CEO

The flat hierarchical structure was a theme that I often observed when attending both team as well as company-wide meetings. For example, during a work-allocation

meeting, I observed how the weekly schedule for each team member was the result of a negotiation with the team leaders and the other team members, without the former emerging as having more decisional power. The team leaders seemed to provide a framework, a sort of combination of tasks that needed to be delivered by the same person, within which the employees were left to negotiate among each other who would take up each set of tasks. Intrigued by the words of the executives and my own observation, I further explored the theme of the flat hierarchy with a focus on the decision-making process within the organization. An artistic director who had been with the company for over five years, commented on the organizational structure stating that as a CORPIT employee "*…[Y]ou need to be independent. It can be scary if you are a beginner or a junior, but it is pretty cool if you are not. Because you can manage your own things and your hours. People are really nice. There are no big egos, which can happen in this kind of job and expertise"*.

Other interactions with employees and managers, as well as observations of meetings, produced an image of an organization in which decision-making primarily lay in the hands of the management, but a certain degree of freedom was left to the employees, granting them a sense of empowerment. In this sense, the management provided a set of implicit guidelines, principles and values, and offered room for interpretation to the employees. This particular aspect of the organization (which appeared to be embodied also in the language policy) was perhaps best described in the following statement by one of the executives:

"We have a vision, a core set of values, it is there but we have never put it on a chalkboard saying that 'These are the actual values of the company, we should work by

these values…'…that is how we work, that is how we are framing our conversation when we speak to a client, that is how we frame our conversation when we speak to each other, and that is just the way we are as a unit." – Executive

This last statement can also be linked to the organizational culture of CORPIT. Past studies have indicated the important role of language for the development of organizational culture. Language, in fact, "…plays a critical role in the formation of the organizational culture through its role in knowledge creation and application, flow of information, and functioning of the organization" (Dhir, 2005, p. 359). Similarly, organizational culture influences also the successful adoption of a language policy (Peltokorpi & Vaara, 2012). To better understand the language policy of CORPIT, therefore, it is important to also explore its organizational culture as part of the domain of the language policy.

Each interviewee provided their view of the organizational culture. The multiple views painted the picture of a cohesive, friendly, and inclusive culture, facilitated by the flat hierarchy discussed previously. The following thougths of one of the employees seemed to sum up the views of other interviewees:

"Everyone is really like, I would say, humble. Obviously, everyone has their own ego. The CEO is so nice and that is a really good deal. He would come and hang out, we have our drinks. It is not common in a lot of other companies, that just does not happen. There is definitely like a gap between the CEO and the employee but that does not happen here. I think of him as my friend, like he is my friend, he is cool, but I do realize that actually he is the CEO. It is really people are people. It is like more equal, rather than titles,

arrogance getting in the way, power trips and control issues, there is none of that here." – Employee

The concept of an inclusive culture was mentioned, among others, also by other employees, who talked about CORPIT as a cohesive community that followed common goals.

5.2.1. Diversity at CORPIT

"*I remember my father came here a couple of years ago and said 'Hey, this is the United Nations'. He used to work with all French Canadians in Quebec City, so to come here and see people from a lot of different backgrounds and countries…he called my company the United Nations!" – CEO*

As outlined in the reviewed literature, a key function of a language policy is to contribute to the enhancement of the language capital of the company and facilitate its conversion into the language operative capacity. Before focusing on what are the features of the language policy and whate role they play in language choices, I examined how diverse CORPIT was in terms of culture and language. These two dimensions of diversity tend to be closely related to each other, to the extent that language might be viewed as "…as the explicit artifact of culture" (Peltokorpi & Vaara, 2012).

CORPIT was both a multicultural and multilingual organization, formed by first- and second-generation migrants, as well as by people who moved from other provinces of Canada. This diversity reflected a typical characteristic of the IT industry in Canada, which experienced a more than 60% increase in the number of first-generation employees in the

past four years (Statista, 2020). The diversity, however, went beyond the immigration from outside Canada and included also within-country migration. French Québecois, French Canadians from other provinces (e.g., New Brunswick), and Anglophone Canadians were all part of the workforce of CORPIT.

In terms of culture, interviewees highlighted the several differences between people identifying themselves as French Québecois and French nationals. An employee, for example, highlighted that *"…with the French from France, you have to pay attention with them because they are more sensitive or susceptible to the critics"*.

Another employee included also Anglophones in her comparison, stating the following:

"For example, we French Canadians do not like confrontation, we would try our best to avoid it and to just smooth things up. French from France are more like "we need to discuss, we need to make things happen". The Anglophones are very driven by performance, they like to make sure that this happens." – Employee

The difference between French nationals and French Canadians appeared to persist over time, with another employee stating the French nationals *"… never become truly French Canadian or always stay French from France, they kind of go somewhere in the middle"*.

The workforce at CORPIT was not only culturally, but also linguistically diverse, ranging from Anglophones to Francophones and Allophones. Similar to culture, the differences existed not only between individuals with different national languages, but also among people that shared a common language (e.g., French), but spoke a different variety

of it (e.g., Québécois French, standard French, and Acadian French, as well as the more loosely defined Canadian French). The very multilingual environment of CORPIT posed a potential challenge for language management, as it was likely to create issues such as language faultlines, power conflicts, and difficulties in building trust (see section 2.2.2. for a more in-depth discussion). As discussed previously, properly addressing a linguistically diverse workforce not only limits the likelihood for challenges to appear, but also fosters the conversion of the language capital of the organization into language operative capacity (Welch & Welch, 2008, 2018a). Therefore, the choice of the language policy becomes of key importance in determining the outcomes of linguistic diversity.

5.2.2. Strategic effort to foster multilingualism

A prominent theme that emerged from the analysis is that both executives and employees saw the multilingual nature of the workforce as a positive aspect that needed to be further fostered. For example, an interviewee describing the multilingual organizational environment (which he defined as a *microenvironment*) of CORPIT, shared the following reflection:

"This microenvironment helps us as individuals because let us say I want to get a new job in the future, the fact that I can speak English and French very functionally, and a little bit of Spanish, is going to help to get a new job, whatever that job might be. It is going to be an asset to have all these languages and to have exposure to other cultures. Because we have somebody from Brazil, from France, Mexico, New Zealand, America…. As individuals, people who work at CORPIT have that advantage, that if they want to in

the future to find another job they have the asset of being multilingual and also being able to work with people from other countries." – Employee

From the interviews with the executives, fostering multilingualism (also through additional language acquisition) emerged as part of the strategic effort to value and enhance linguistic diversity. To achieve this goal, the company offered multiple opportunities to learn languages, for example language courses and employee-organized events (e.g., an English-learning coffee break social event and "French Fridays"). Furthermore, a dedicated channel for language learning was present on the internal messaging platform and was mainly used by employees to help each other in language-related questions. Tracking the conversation within this channel, I observed the following situation:

Language-related public channel, twelve employees signed up, eight are active at the moment. A few ask for translations from English to French words and vice-versa. An employee seems to be very active in offering instant translations from English to French to a native English-speaker, specifying also the different varieties of translations based on two types of French (French Québécoise and Standard French). Another employee joins the conversation and explains in English words in Acadian French. Two English-speaking employees have very recently joined CORPIT and are posing multiple questions on words that they do not understand, one employee addresses their questions and explains that sometimes made-up words are used in the chat. Later, employees are having a conversation about Portuguese words with a Portuguese colleague. – Observation

As I discuss in more detail in section 5.5.1.3 as well as in the section on *language affordances* (6.6.), the language policy at CORPIT can be seen as part of an organizational

effort to create a work environment that foster multilingualism. More specifically, the policy is an element of a set of measures that facilitate foreign language acquisition by creating opportunities to both learn and practice.

5.3. The External Context

The cultural and linguistic diversity at CORPIT, cannot be separated from the external context and the French identity of the geographical location in which the company is headquartered (see section 3.3. for a detailed discussion on this aspect). The strong French Québécoise identity appeared only rarely in the words of the interviewees, however when it did, it was depicted as something that needed to be protected. In the following statement, for example, one employee discussed the importance of the Québécois culture and how speaking French was a way to defend it:

"I am Québécois, from the country, and maybe that is why this is so important to me… For me, it is important. It is part of my history, it is part of my culture… We have to fight to keep French as the main language. If I do not do it, I am part of the problem. I want to be part of the solution. And it is not that I am against English, I am not against something, I am for something." – Employee

Aside from these exceptions, however, cultural and political factors seemed to have played a limited role in the language approach chosen by CORPIT. By contrast, business related aspects appeared to be much more important. This emerged also from the words of the CEO, who while valuing his French Québécoise roots stated that the openness to other

languages was very important, arguing that it led also to advantages for the company and its success. The following statement serves to briefly summarize his view on the matter:

"I would say it is more a romantic thing than politics. I like to speak French and to do most of what I do in French but at the end of the day it is the money, the business." – CEO

Local regulations mandating the use of French for official documents seems to have little influence on the language choices at CORPIT. In fact, informal conversations with Anglophone employees revealed that for many the local French mandate meant they just had to have the operating systems of their personal computers in both languages along with making sure that official documents they drafted were also translated to French.

Finally, when discussing internal communication another executive of CORPIT highlighted how the province-wide regulations do not affect everyday interactions, even in regular meetings:

"If you have a meeting, that is day-to-day operation, it could be in any language, it does not really matter, the government is not going to come in and say: 'You guys have run 500 meetings in English, here is a fine', there is no grounds that we are not observing the law." – Executive

5.4. Language Policy of CORPIT

5.4.1. Language management

"As for now, we never had complaints. It is a system that sets itself by itself, the people are happy in it." – Executive

A thorough examination of the company's material (e.g., internal memos, welcome packages for new employees, and job descriptions) confirmed the lack of written guidelines regulating language choices (i.e., which language should be used and when?) as well as linguistic requirements. Interviews and conversations with executives revealed that, while not formalized, a set of guidelines on language use existed. Accordingly, the company allowed for French and English to be used for internal communication, though the company was not officially bilingual, and employees were not required to be able to speak in both languages. A conversation with the HR manager shed more light on this, highlighting the flexible approach to language management:

"Sometimes they ask us whether the language of the company is French… or English… or whether they should be able to speak both… well, we try to show them that we are open to all three scenarios… that means either one of the languages or both." – *HR Manager*

Later, on a post-company visit conversation, when asked on how language was managed and specifically what the linguistic requirements for employees were, the HR manager confirmed that the company was not truly bilingual and underlined benefits of following this approach:

"We do not do everything in both languages, some teams only speak English, others only French, others both. The good thing is, for example, that we attract also more people that are not Anglophone, nor Francophone, but they do speak English or French. They are not native speakers, but that is ok as long as they can communicate in one of the two languages. We will then assign them to projects conducted in that language. It has already

happened that some people who only knew French started to learn English here and switched then to other projects." – HR Manager

According to interviews with executives, CORPIT previously formally required employees to speak French which was the only language used in internal communication – this was reflected also in the job advertisements and internal documentation. The shift from a formalized French-only language policy to a more flexible approach to managing language happened recently:

"The history of the company is that it used to be more a French company, I will be honest. The switch over to have English-speakers and bilinguals is recent." – Executive

While the questions of why and how an organization would adopt a non-formalized language policy were beyond the scope of this study – in which features and outcomes of this policy were investigated – a few valuable insights related to these themes emerged from the interviews. The adoption of the new policy paralleled an acceleration in the internationalization process of the company, as well as the reliance on an increasingly linguistically diverse talent pool from which the company drew their new hires. The former motive emerged in the words of the CEO, who also highlighted the dynamic nature of the language policy:

"Most of the communication still is in French. But as we are internationalizing further our business, we have to deal more and more with English. So, we are kind of stuck between those two worlds. I have a growing number of employees who speak only English." – CEO

A language policy embedded in the overall organizational strategy is often observed, particularly in organizations that are expanding further internationally (Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Piekkari et al., 2014; Welch et al., 2001). The link between the adopted policy and the strategic changes of CORPIT – moving towards new markets that cannot be served through the use of French – appeared quite prominent. In this sense, the CEO highlighted that the story of the company was one of continuous change and pursue of a dynamic set of strategic goals (such as offering services to different target industries and customers and further internationalizing operations):

"We have changed, I would say, 5 times in the last 16 years. So, that is why now we are going through another change. Last week what I have presented to the employees, is CORPIT 5.0. We are going through our fifth change; it is always going to be the same philosophy." – CEO

A few employees and the HR manager described how the choice of the current language approach was also driven by the labour market and the need to find talented employees with specific technical skills. In this sense, and in the words of one of the employees, the linguistic hiring requirements "…*are mostly about pragmatism. I think we will go with whatever the language is, if the person is technically excellent, we are going to go for that person. Even if the person does not speak French".* Similarly, an executive linked the choice of the current language policy to the need for more skilled employees and the inability of reaching this objective with a formalized French-only policy, citing for example difficulties in hiring skilled employees from India:

"…we need more skilled workers, we are lacking them, we can not stay in the French pool anymore. We have to get resources that are from like India, or somewhere else." – Executive

The "open" approach to language seemed also to be implicitly accepted by the employees, especially when the management offered an explanation for this change. For example, one interviewee, recounted how the hiring of an Anglophone employees for a Francophone-dominated team was motivated by the need to hire a skilled individual proficient in specific programming language and the inability to find a suitable profile among the Francophone candidates, a difficulty that was discussed with and recognized also by the employees. Other employees commented on the language shift, mentioning that it was driven by the need to foster a more inclusive environment, allowing also non-Francophones to actively participate more in meetings and in the everyday life of the organization.

The flexible and implicit nature of the language policy appeared to reflect the broader approach to decision-making that characterized the organization culture of CORPIT. As mentioned previously (see section 5.2.), management deliberately preferred this approach and viewed it as a strength in that it created a more inclusive work environment that granted enough flexibility for the company to grow further. The foundation of the language policy (in terms of the locus of decision-making) was the implicit consensus between and among executives and employees.

In terms of language management (as conceptualized by Spolsky, see section 2.3.), it appeared that there was no clearly designated language manager within the organization. More specifically, a certain degree of ambiguity existed as to which role executives took

in managing language. This ambiguity seemed to be an underlying theme characterizing the management of language in the non-formalized language policy. In the past, when the company pursued a formalized corporate language policy, the role of the executives as designated language managers was clearly defined and documented. Nowadays, as highlighted also in the opening quote of this section – "…a system that sets itself by itself…" –, the executives identify themselves as part of a system (that includes also the employees), though it remains unclear which role do they embody in this system. In time, the only entity that appeared to constantly act as a language manager was external to the organization, the "Office Québécois de la langue française", though the influence of its regulations in communication within the organization (as explored in terms of its relevance in language practices in the subsequent section) seemed to be very limited.

5.4.2. Language practices

A substantial portion of the interviews, as well as of the observations and spontaneous interactions with organizational members was dedicated to discussing and examining language practices. Through the examinations of these practices my goal was to understand the underlying conceptualization of language that characterized the language policy of CORPIT – helping therefore to position the policy within the three notions (structural, functional, and social practice views), reviewed in section 2.1. – as well as shedding light on how language choices happened within this policy and which factors played a role in these decisions.

The wide range of available communication channels, from face-to-face informal and formal interactions, to large presentations, corporate e-mails, and the public channels

of the internal messaging system allowed also to see whether the choices changed depending on the type of channel and situation.

5.4.2.1. Conceptualization of language

To better understand the underlying conceptualization of language, I delved deeper into how the notion of language was understood within the company. When talking about communication, many interviewees mentioned that the boundaries between languages in every-day interactions were not always clear and at times even ambiguous. To some extent, the respondents expressed a *fluid* notion of language. A few of them indicated how members of CORPIT developed an own language, as became evident in the following statement by the HR manager:

"…it is perhaps because people mix English, or even different types of French (from France and from Quebec) and technical terms. I think that we really do have an own language, and I noticed that when I am outside of the company, how unique it is here." – HR Manager

The notion of a language that is created within a specific context stems from what linguists termed *pidgin language*, which is defined as "…a language with drastically reduced linguistic structure and lexicon, not native to any of those who use it" (Hall, 1962, p. 151). A special version of such language in the organizational context is what international management scholars have identified as *company-speak*. It entails acronyms, abbreviations, terminology, and expressions, which are used in interactions within the context of a certain organization (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017a; Welch et al., 2005). Company-

speak is therefore "…truly unique and every single company or organization will develop its own company-speak that competing companies or organizations operating in the same sector or branch of activity cannot and will not use" (De Vecchi, 2020, p. 241).

In addition to company-speak, unclear boundaries between multiple languages (French, Québécois French, and variations of English) often emerged in the interactions within organizational members, especially among the multilingual ones. For example, a bilingual employee, who was a native speaker of both Québécois French and Canadian English, explained how she communicated using a mix of both languages and technical terms, mentioning also that often quotes of other employees became part of the language.

This mixture of languages and the beforementioned fading boundaries among them appeared often in the recollection of the interviewees and evoked the phenomenon of *translanguaging*, which has very recently gained the attention also of management scholars (Barner-Rasmussen & Langinier, 2020; Karhunen et al., 2018) that have called for its applications to better understand the complex language environment of multilingual organizations. Stemming from the field of linguistics, the definition of translanguaging encompasses the use of "…one's idiolect, that is one's linguistic repertoire, without regard for socially and politically defined language names and labels. From the translanguaging perspective then, we think beyond the boundaries of named languages and language varieties including the geography-, social class-, age-, or gender-based varieties" (Li, 2018, p. 19).

Translanguaging became apparent not only in the words of the interviewees, but also in the observations that I conducted. The following scenario, for example, showed one of such instances in an informal setting:

Three employees are sitting at a table, having lunch together. They are speaking French with each other; however, they frequently use English words, even whole sentences in the middle of a conversation. At times it is difficult to distinguish the languages used (elements of programming languages as well as Spanish words appear in the conversations). An employee (who is sitting not far from them) at some point reacts to one statement in English and joins the conversation. Two of the three employees sitting at the table change to English, though their level of proficiency appears to be not that high, they often rely on French words. – Observation

Similarly, in the more formal context of a "task-allocation" meeting, I witnessed the following situation:

During a "task-allocation" meeting the language switches between French and English, depending on who is presenting. Comments among participants are made in both languages, sometimes mixing them. Two employees seem to take up the task of translating when needed. Participants in the meeting are French, English, and Portuguese native speakers; not all participants are proficient in English. – Observation

The two abovementioned scenarios appeared fairly frequently, and not only between French and English speakers. In another instance, for example, a Spanish native speaker resorted to a mixture of French and Spanish in a work-related interaction with a Francophone. Translanguaging at CORPIT was also sometimes used as a method to overcome the limitations of a specific language. The following quote by an interviewee captured one of such instances:

"Sometimes, the French have a really good expression to express something and I do not know what the English equivalent is, so I just use the French one." – Employee

Instances of translanguaging appeared also as a result of *interpersonal aspects*, for example to adjust to the level of proficiency of the interlocutor or to signal the speaker's interest in the interlocutor's mother-tongue. These cases can be viewed "…as an accommodating gesture towards a specific (set of) interlocutor(s))" (Slembrouck & Rosiers, 2018, p. 166).

Finally, an additional feature of language at CORPIT was the industry-specific jargon, which was mainly present in written communication but appeared also often in oral conversations. This jargon consisted of parts of programming codes, application functions, process terminology and other IT-related words.

Overall, language at CORPIT appeared to be a very dynamic construct that did not display clear boundaries and was the result of interactions, recalling therefore a language as a social practice view (see section 2.1.). As an interviewee phrased it, the CORPIT-language was a "…mix of French, English, IT jargon, and kind of CORPIT-words". Heterogenous views on whether there was a corporate language (as discussed in greater depth in an upcoming section on language beliefs) along with instances of company-speak and translanguaging and the use of industry jargon were very important aspects of the reality of language at CORPIT. Arguably, the lack of a clearly mandated language might have contributed to the existence of this dynamic linguistic environment, as evidenced by both executives and employees.

5.4.2.2. Language choices

Delving deeper into the language practices, after having analyzed the underlying conceptualization of language, I further examined internal factors that played a role in the individual language choices: non-written guidelines, language skills of interlocutors, team membership and organizational role, and type of communication media.

Role of non-written guidelines and preferences

In the section of language management, I showed how no formal set of rules regarding language existed, although implicit guidelines were present, such as the acceptance of both French and English as languages used in internal communication. Through the analysis of language practices a further important aspect emerged that confirmed the ambiguous role of the executives. This was the presence of implicitly stated language "preferences" formulated by the executives. These preferences appeared to play a role in individual language choices, mainly in interactions among executives and between executives and employees. According to the HR manager, while CORPIT had no clearly defined internal communication rules, the executives displayed a tendency to speak more in French (i.e., a preference for speaking French) and had also increasingly shown openness towards English. This was also confirmed in the interviews with the CEO and another executive. The following observation (conducted during a coffee break in the kitchen) helps in better understanding this tendency:

An employee is having a coffee with an executive. They are speaking in English, sometimes the executive throws in French words, but then explains their meaning in English. The smoothness of the transition from French to English (to the extent that

sometimes in is not fully clear which language is being spoken) and the immediate acknowledgement of the "translator role" by the executive made it look like a situation that is recurrent. After the conversation was completed, I approached the executive and asked about the situation, he shared that he often shifts language between French and English (and a mix of the two) to adapt to the employees, however he normally defaults to French. The executive goes on to explain that the management tries to promote the use of French, even if they do not write that anywhere. He states that: "French is kind of our default language, we shift to English often though, we balance the two languages according to the situation. So, we have a fairly flexible approach." – Observation

This preference for French displayed by the executives was not only part of their language practices but was also related to the language beliefs they held (which I explore in more depth in a subsequent section).

Adapting to the interlocutors

Aside from implicitly formulated guidelines and management's preference for French, another factor that seemed to play a role in the individual language choices was the language skills of the interlocutors. In this sense, the non-formalized language policy offered a viable environment to engage often in translanguaging as a mean to overcome differences in language skills, hence potentially reducing language barriers derived from differences in proficiency. In many observations, I noticed how multiple linguistic resources (for example, using words or entire expressions from another language, as well as technical terms) were deployed to overcome linguistic differences. This practice was observable across all the types of communication media, both in speaking and in writing.

Interviews confirmed the existence of this habit. For example, an employee explained how being bilingual, and not having to express herself only in one language, resulted in her being able to more easily adapt to the language skills of others, hence influencing her language choices. As discussed in a subsequent part of this dissertation (section 5.5.1.5.), the more relaxed approach to language choices (that favours also translanguaging) promotes communication among employees.

Team membership and organizational role

CORPIT heavily relied on teamwork, with most employees being part of multiple teams. Teams were mainly created around specific projects, with a few being long-term commitments and the majority reflecting short-term endeavours. Language choices within teams were partly influenced by the type of projects (for example, internal as opposed to working with an external party), the specific tasks involved (for example, programming a software as opposed to creating web content for educational purposes), and the language skills of the team members. In one major project for an Anglophone customer, for example, the team was composed mainly of English speakers. The team composition in this case was mainly guided by the need to have members that could create content in English. Meetings in this team were all held in English, though in my observations of two of such meetings I noticed that translanguaging was often noticeable, involving influences from French and technical jargon. I observed similar instances of translanguaging in a French-speaking project team.

Job positions seemed also to play a role in individual language choices. An interviewee, for example, made the following remark:

"I think that the developers have to read a lot about the codes in English, so maybe they read more English, so they understand more English, and they talk more English than the producers that are less exposed to English." – Employee

Similarly, other interviewees mentioned that, in general, programmers tended to be more prone to speak English, whereas other positions, such as content creators and strategists, were more likely to speak French.

Communication media

The choice of communication media appeared to be another factor playing a role in individual language choices. In a heavily used communication media, the internal messaging system Slack (a company-wide online platform that allowed employees to create and join public channels, as well as send private messages), I observed that both employees and executives very often relied on translanguaging. Interviewees confirmed this observation, stating that particularly in public channels, conversations were never truly in one defined language. One employee, for example, mentioned that those channels *"…answers are in both languages all time, even on the same conversation"*, while others mentioned that while both languages were present, compared to oral communication, the use of English words appeared more prominent. Jargon and quotes from employees were also very much present. For example, an interviewee reported the following recurring experience:

"…each time you enter there is a quote from someone. For a new person who comes to work it shows the silly, not the silly silly, but just the twist of words that we might use. Kind of jokes, programmer jokes, most of the times in English." – Employee

According to other interviewees, the online platform was the place in which languages *mixed* the most. From my observations, the different public channels were not language-, but rather topic- or project-based. Official announcements were not communicated via this platform, but rather via e-mail. Executives tended to be less present in the public channels, but when they interacted, they displayed a preference for French, though they changed to English if the interlocutor(s) preferred to interact in that language or if the conversation was on technical subject (e.g., programming, software architecture, etc.).

The creation of my dedicated CORPIT e-mail account allowed me also to receive every message that was sent to the whole company. Official announcements from executives were often written both in French and English. The HR managers explained that recently all HR-related messages were sent in both languages. This, however, was not always the case when employees sent company-wide messages, as evidenced by instances of French-only (e.g., an invitation to a French movie night) or English-only messages (e.g., sharing an article about a new development in a programming software).

Multilingual employees having a good command of both French and English shared that their language choices were also affected by the chosen type of communication media. For example, an native English speaker who was also proficient in French recalled that on the messaging platform it felt like he could stick to speaking his native language (English) only. By contrast, when writing e-mails, he tried to address French-native speakers only in French (even the ones who were proficient in English), resorting to English only if he encountered difficulties in expressing a thought. In oral communication, however, he seemed to rely on a different approach:

"Face-to-face is going to be mainly English, but again there a couple of people to whom I would maybe speak in French, if they are strictly Francophone." – Employee

The link between language choices and communication media has been shown in previous studies on multilingual workforces. In particular, my findings regarding language and media choices partially echo the results of a previous investigation by Tenzer and Pudelko (2016). Accordingly, multilingual employees showed a preference for relying on their native language when utilizing synchronous communication media (e.g., phone calls) while resorting to asynchronous media (e.g., e-mails) when communicating in a different language.

A French-native speakers who worked in a French-speaking team (but had a good knowledge of English) offered a quite interesting description of the complexity of his everyday language choices at CORPIT, outlining not only the role of the communication channel, but also of the previously mentioned team membership, while again highlighting the phenomenon of translanguaging and the importance of adapting to the interlocutors:

"When we communicate verbally we are always in French… but the technical terms are in English… sometimes we use some kind of Frenglish because sometimes half of the sentence is in French and we switch… but we are used to it. Otherwise, when we write things… when we chat it is in French but the code that we write and all the comments that are in the code are in English. Even the documents to help people when they arrive in the team…wow..it is mixed…I am trying to think because I was writing documentation today and I do not even remember if I was writing in French or in English…this is something that is odd about this kind of mixed environment. Documents that are meant to

be read only by a human who enters the team are only in French. So, there are like work-tools for the day-to-day. Everything that is committed to the technology could be taken by someone else from another company…so, basically, it is always in English." – Employee

Overall, what emerged from the analysis across the communication media and in different situations (both formal and informal), was the picture of a language policy that allowed a degree of freedom for employees to make their own language choices, while at the same time showing the management's preference for French. The consequences on language choices of this policy emerged across all analyzed communication media, though, seemingly, to a different extent. This analysis of the language practices served to better understand the locus of decision-making of language choices, showing how at CORPIT language choices were the result of a flexible approach to language that blended managers' implicit guidelines and preferences with employees' self-management. This fundamental characteristic of the language policy confirms the previously argued (see section 5.4.2.1.) language as social practice view that underlies the approach chosen by CORPIT.

5.4.3. Language Beliefs

To gain a deeper insight into the language beliefs (i.e., status and values assigned to languages and language use as well as attitudes towards multilingualism), I began by asking a simple, but arguably fundamental, question: is there a corporate language at CORPIT? And if so, how would you define it?

Looking at the employees' answers, there appeared to be a mixed and unclear idea about the corporate language of CORPIT. Answers ranged from the language being French,

to English, to both, and to respondents not being able to clearly identify the presence of a corporate language. The balance between French and English seemed also to be unclear. The role of English, for example, ranged from being the corporate language, to a rather secondary language far behind French. In a related question of whether or not CORPIT was a truly a bilingual company, interviewees displayed a wide range of different answers, showing again a lack of a homogenous view.

As mentioned previously when discussing language practices, a finding that emerged in the interviews was management's preference for communicating in French. For example, an employee stated that when interacting with executives, she noticed that they tended to promote the use of French, though they did not impose it and appeared to fully accept the use of English. This opinion was reinforced by the words of the HR manager, who reported that the executives typically preferred French over English, though they accepted both.

The *privileged* status of French over English appeared also to be linked to the identity of the organization. The CEO, for example, saw CORPIT as a *French company* and language appeared to be a means through which it was communicated. Two interviewees argued that the role of French needed to be protected and that it remained the most important language, despite the openness to English. An interesting finding was that while promoting the role of French, no preference was given to the local variety of French (French Québécoise) as opposed to other varieties (e.g., Acadian French, Standard French, etc.). In this sense, the company could be seen as having a broader French identity rather than a specific local Québécoise one.

In general while being more prominent among executives, this higher status of French was not shared by most of the interviewees, demonstrating differences in the language beliefs. Perhaps most interestingly and somehow ambiguous, it appeared that while executives did prefer French, their intention was not to establish the dominance of French; arguably quite the contrary. This factor emerged in the interview with another executive, who made the following statement:

"There is a bit of education to give to the people who think that French should be the predominant language, to say that there are people with other languages too and that you are sort of shutting their voices if you wish to only have one language." – Executive

Furthermore, it appeared that at times executives seemed to promote the French identity, while simultaneously stressing the increased need for English to pursue changing business needs. Hence, the preference for French was a rather ambiguous language belief.

Asked about the reason for this dynamic balance between languages, one of the executives argued that through this approach, they wanted to maintain the importance of French while allowing English-speakers to feel as comfortable as they could be. The changing strategy of the company (i.e., growing importance of foreign customers) and the attractiveness as an employer, as previously discussed, remained among the factors that contributed to the choice of a policy that allowed for the possibility of a shift in the balance between the languages.

Another theme related to language beliefs that emerged both in the interviews with executives and employees was that, despite holding different opinions about the role of each language, respondents shared a positive attitude towards the multilingual reality of

CORPIT. Additionally, they seemed to acknowledge and accept the existence of different language beliefs regarding the role of each language. Finally, in all but one case, in which a respondent stated that they would have preferred the company to have maintained the French-only formalized language policy, interviewees recognized the importance of following an open attitude towards languages and were favourably inclined toward increasing multilingualism at CORPIT.

5.5. Perceived Benefits and Challenges

“There is something positive with it, the way the company looks like. It is more a welcoming environment, more like a community” – Employee

"Maybe, a bit inefficient sometimes because some information might be lost." – Employee

A substantial part of the data collection was dedicated to answering the second research question – exploring the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the language policy pursued by CORPIT (see Figure 3 for an overview of the results). I addressed these topics in all interviews as well as in multiple conversations before and after my company visits. Observations also helped in better understanding the dynamics of communication.

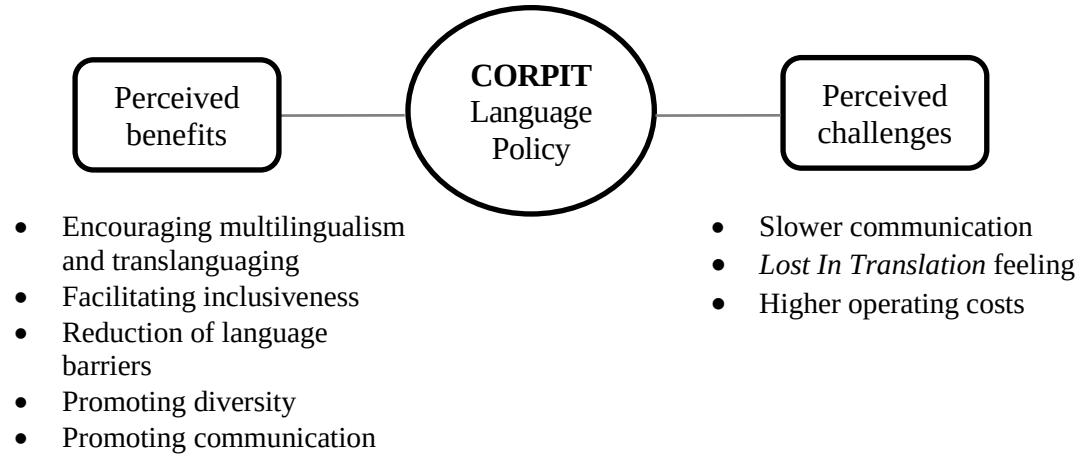

Figure 3: Perceived benefits and challenges of the language policy.

5.5.1. Perceived benefits

5.5.1.1. Facilitating linguistic inclusiveness

The theme of inclusiveness connected to the language approach chosen by COPRIT emerged consistently across almost every interview and was mentioned both by executives and employees, with the latter emphasizing it stronger than the former. For example, one employee, speaking of the consequences of the language approach, shared the following comment:

"We are having both languages in the company… it means that we are not linear, we are not just one thing, there is opening, some opening of minds, of cultures. There is something positive with it, the way the company looks like. It is more a welcoming environment, more like a community where everybody can say what they want, in the way they want." – Employee

Feeling included in a company-wide community was linked to the absence of a mandated corporate language by several employees, hinting to the fact that the flexibility in language choices might have played an important role. This opinion was held both by the majority of English- and French-speaking employees, and was also supported by speakers of regional varieties of the languages (e.g., French Québécois and Acadian French).

From a broader perspective, the language policy appeared to be one of multiple factors that promoted inclusiveness at CORPIT. According to multiple interviewees (and related to the organizational culture discussed in section 5.2.) the approach to language was embedded in a broader effort to create a relaxed and welcoming working environment. In this sense, what emerged from the interviews and conversations with employees was that the language approach facilitated the acceptance of new employees with linguistically diverse origins, while maintaining the feeling of inclusiveness of existing ones. The following two quotes – regarding the language policy – summarized the connection between language and inclusiveness:

"I think it gives kind of an international vibe, I think it creates a quite inclusive environment. You know, if you are not that good in French it is not really a problem, we will find a way to understand each other. I think that is a very nice thing here, people are willing to help you feeling part of the community. There are very good people here that pretty much speak only English, I do not think they would be here if they would not feel welcome." – Employee

"…people feel free to communicate in either language. If we were obligated to speak French all the time, all meetings conducted in French... I know there are a lot of people that probably would not share their ideas that much because they cannot, they maybe feel shy because of their language capabilities." – Employee

5.5.1.2. Promoting diversity

Parallel and related to facilitating inclusiveness, the theme of promoting diversity emerged from the data as a very important perceived benefit of the language policy. As stated by one of the interviewed employees, the flexible approach to language was seen as a driver of both language and culture diversity, and as a mean to foster "…diversity of opinions, different ways of looking at the same things". Through the co-existence of multiple languages, the diversity of the workforce became more apparent which was a positive aspect that garnered praise from multiple employees, who felt that such diversity increased the attractiveness of CORPIT as an employer. As discussed in a subsequent part of this dissertation (section 6.4.), this aspect of the policy can be linked to a cultural view on language strategies. Speaking of how the flexible approach to language was related to diversity, one employee made the following statement that seemed to resonate with the view of many other respondents:

"I think it is a plus, I do not believe in a monoculture, I like when it is diverse." – Employee

This desire of not working in a mono-cultural environment, and the role of the language policy in emphasizing diversity can be linked to one of the views of corporate

language discussed previously (see section 2.5.1.). According to the cultural view, the formal introduction of a corporate language might ignore the existence of multiple cultures and languages in the workforce. In this sense, through its more open approach to language choices, the non-formalized approach chosen by CORPIT seemed to better recognize and emphasize cultural and linguistic diversity of the workforce.

For executives, the emphasis on diversity meant further internationalizing the company as well as the ability to attract a greater number of skilled employees – similar to statements by employees arguing that the promotion of diversity benefits the reputation of CORPIT as a potential employer. According to the CEO, CORPIT was operating in an industry where the continuous need to find skilled labour with very specific and up-to-date expertise (e.g., a certain programming language) was key. Hence, the ability to tap into a wider pool of potential employees by having a flexible language policy was an important positive outcome that he identified. This was also mentioned by another executive, who argued that language skills should not be an important criterion in hiring a new employee, stressing instead the key relevance of technical knowledge.

5.5.1.3. Encouraging multilingualism and polylingualism

Arguably, one of the key outcomes of the language policy, together with supporting and fostering multilingualism (which also emerged from the data, as I discuss ahead), was the promotion of *polylingualism*. While multilingualism entails the knowledge of multiple languages, polylingualism refers to "…combination with features ascribed to other languages… Language users employ whatever linguistic features are at their disposal to achieve their communicative aims as best they can, regardless of how well they know the

involved languages" (Jørgensen et al., 2015, p. 151). This became very evident especially in the conversations that I observed on the internal messaging system. Here, participants frequently relied on terms or even whole expressions in foreign languages, even when they themselves were not speakers of the languages. For example, at times Spanish expressions were used even though not a single participant was fluent in Spanish. Even more often, English words and expressions were used to describe particular situations, regardless of whether the participants were communicating in French or English. This *borrowing* of words and expressions from foreign languages seemed to be often employed to overcome lack of vocabulary in a foreign language, an issue that in the past has been linked to communication issues in linguistically diverse workforces (Schweiger et al., 2003).

The language policy seemed to create a fertile ground for the proliferation of multilingualism, allowing employees to improve language skills and learn new languages. This theme emerged strongly throughout the collected data. Francophone employees, for example, reported that the growing importance of English brought them closer to that language. This argument was also supported by the HR manager, who shared that in multiple instances "…people who only knew French started to learn English here and switched then to other projects". The following observation captures how the willingness to learn a foreign language was not limited to English and French:

An employee (Spanish native speaker) is chatting with a colleague in French; however, they sometimes switch to Spanish. After observing the interaction, I approach the employee and ask about the use of Spanish. She tells me that she feels comfortable using Spanish at work sometimes because a few colleagues got interested in learning the language, and sometimes others help her with English, in which she has a rather limited

level of proficiency. She says this is the first company where she can actually use her Spanish while improving her English. – Observation

The encouragement of multilingualism appeared to be a deliberate organizational goal that was embodied (along with other initiatives that seemed to share the same objective, see section 5.2.2.) also in the chosen language policy. In fact, the CEO repeatedly praised the advantages of becoming multilingual and how that could help the wellbeing, cognitive capacities, and career of his employees (while also addressing the business needs of a dynamic industry). The following statement that he delivered offered a clear summary of his view on promoting multilingualism:

"My world is changing every year and if you do not have the capability to learn, and the language is one of those things… how can you survive in an industry that reinvents itself every 2 to 3 years? And being multilingual makes you a better person." – CEO

Overall, the language policy emerged as one of the tools used by the company to foster multilingualism, accommodating the needs of an increasingly linguistically diverse workforce and talent pool. In fact, the CEO indicated that while English and French were both accepted at CORPIT, other languages could gain a more prominent role in the future (showing again the dynamic nature of the policy):

"Now what we are seeing in the CV we receive is a lot of people from the Mediterranean, Maghreb… Algeria, Morocco… South America... So maybe we are going to have a third language, that is going to be Spanish." – CEO

5.5.1.4. Reduction of language barriers

A frequently mentioned important characteristic was the limited presence of perceived language barriers. As discussed in section 2.2.2., language barriers are among the most common issues encountered in multilingual environments. When asked specifically about the presence of these barriers (and related issues, such as language faultlines) the majority of employees reported that they did not perceive these barriers to be high.

Interestingly, only a couple of employees mentioned that they felt that different language skills created barriers. Both of these respondents were native French speakers from Quebec who displayed a noticeable *protective* attitude towards French, arguing that they have difficulties communicating with English-speaking colleagues. This indicated that while perhaps rather less obvious, language barriers still existed at CORPIT. Aside from these two instances, the rest of the respondents argued that barriers were derived from team membership rather than from languages, though the fact that many rotate through different teams helped mitigate those divisions. Linguistic subgroups were rarely observed. The following quote from an interview broadly summarized this view:

"I do not feel like there is a separation in languages and or cultures here. I think everybody is pretty mixed. Even in the job, developers hang out with producers, who will hang out with designers. I do not feel like there are any walls here." – Employee

The limited presence of linguistic subgroups is an important outcome that interviewees linked to the non-formalized language policy. The finding runs counter to previous investigations that showed how this type of subgrouping is common in

linguistically diverse working environments (Kulkarni, 2015). Perhaps the lack of a single clearly defined corporate language might partially explain this phenomenon. Previous studies have highlighted that difference in fluency in the imposed corporate language contributed to the formation of linguistic subgroups, for example through the activation of power conflicts (Hinds et al., 2014).

5.5.1.5. Promoting communication

Employees and executives both identified promoting communication as another likely consequence of the language policy. More specifically, the *relaxed* approach to language seemed to encourage individuals with different language skills to participate in conversations, as the following quote by one executive summarizes:

"I think that the reason why it works so well here is that we have not introduced this level of fear between the two languages. I do not know how we did it. We want to make the people feel comfortable in speaking any one of the languages they feel most comfortable with while at the same time making sure that they will get the information that they need if it is communicated in another language." – Executive

The previous quote might also be linked to the possible reduction of the instances and extent of foreign language anxiety that has been discussed previously (see section 2.5.1.). Similar to linguistic subgrouping, instances of foreign language anxiety in multilingual couporate settings have been mainly linked to the imposition of a corporate language (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017b). Arguably, the more relaxed approach to language choices – that allows employees to draw from a broader linguistic repertoire – and the

encouragement of multilingualism might contribute in limiting instances of foreign language anxiety. This possibility seemed to be confirmed also by other respondents. For example, an employee argued that due to the policy adopted by CORPIT "…it seems like people feel more confident to try speaking in different languages", confirming how this approach seemed to encourage multilingualism. The last two quotes hinted at the achievement of a more linguistically inclusive environment, lending further support to the argument that the language policy promoted inclusiveness. Overall, the flexibility in language choices offered by the language policy appeared to facilitate communication, an aspect mentioned by almost every respondent.

5.5.2. Perceived challenges

5.5.2.1. Higher operating costs

Executives highlighted that the language policy, while granting more flexibility, likely increased operating costs. In particular, the CEO argued that having to send official company-wide announcements in both languages, as well as having to compile material in multiple languages, required both an increased time and financial commitment. Given that official company-wide announcements had to be in French (to follow the "Charte de la langue française" discussed in section 3.3.), additional resources had to be invested to ensure that each of these messages was also translated into English. Similarly, official documents, such as written project guidelines that were mainly used by teams in which English was spoken, needed to be translated to French to follow the law.

Overall, the openness to an additional language – English – while retaining French was seen by the executives to likely increase operating costs.

In terms of the employees, one of the interviewees mentioned that the language policy might have contributed to greater resource commitment. To support this claim, he delivered an example of non-French speakers having to rely on a French-speaking colleague to translate messages that could have been relevant for the whole workforce. In my observations, I noticed that in portions of a townhall meeting that were presented in French, bilingual employees were in charge of drafting notes for English-speakers. This phenomenon was confirmed by the HR manager, who stated that when the French-only parts were summarized and sent via e-mail to the non-French speakers, she often followed up with debrief meetings. Arguably, this showed the need to commit additional resources to ensure that important messages were delivered to and were clearly understood by the whole workforce.

5.5.2.2. Slower communication

Related to the higher resource commitments described previously, executives and several employees argued that the adopted language policy could have led to delays and an overall slower speed of communication. This emerged as an important theme both from the interviews and my observations. The CEO and the HR manager, for example, recognized this drawback, arguing that they tried to minimize those delays. In my observations, and also in several conversations with the employees, I noticed that a key role was played by *linguistic boundary spanners* (previously discussed in the seminal work by Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014)), who often intervened to maintain the flow of communication and help in speeding it up. These individuals, who were often multilinguals, delivered quick translations and acted as link-pins between the linguistically

diverse employees. Ahead is an example of these instances, along with two relevant quotes from interviews with the HR manager and an employee.

The CEO approaches a group of 5 employees who are sharing a table in the kitchen, one of them does not speak French. The employees are busy on their phones, not really interacting with each other. The CEO speaks in French to the group, but then changes to English a few seconds after, conversation stays in English, occasionally using French words. One employee helps in translating those words. – Observation

"Many times, I found myself acting as a translator between French and English speaking employees, I am not the only one doing that, there is a few of us that kind of feel like they should do that whenever someone has difficulties saying something in the other language." – HR Manager

"…usually when someone struggles with some concepts or words, they can say it in English or French and the other person kind of understands, I do not think there is an impossible barrier to cross. There are some people that help in translating." – Employee

5.5.2.3. Lost in translation feeling

The *open* approach to language choices pursued by CORPIT might have contributed to creating instances in which certain pieces of information did not reach all of the intended audience. For example, an employee reported how he sometimes felt a bit lost and had the feeling of missing some points in a presentation and conversations. A few other employees also mentioned instances of feeling *lost in translation*. A previous study (Blenkinsopp & Shademan Pajouh, 2010) has highlighted how the inability to translate

"…culturally-salient but inherently untranslatable words or phrases" (p.38) might contribute to inaccurate and incomplete translations in intercultural communication. Therefore, despite the efforts to translate messages and the reliance on linguistic boundary spanners, the language policy of CORPIT left room for difficulties in knowledge transmission among employees.

CHAPTER 6 – Discussion

6.1. Introduction

The findings of the present study show how a non-formalized language policy can be characterized and what its perceived benefits and drawbacks might be. A language policy cannot be completely separated from the context (Lønsmann, 2017) in which it is embedded (the domain of the policy). Therefore, because a better understanding of the former implies acquiring knowledge about the latter, I first briefly discuss the key insights of the analysis of the organizational and external environment of CORPIT. Here, my research contributes mainly to discussions on the interplay between the organizational characteristics and the chosen corporate language policy (Sanden, 2018; van den Born & Peltokorpi, 2010), showing the alignment of specific features of the organization, such as the organizational culture as well as the decision-making processes, with the design of the language policy. By discussing contextual factors, my aim is also to clarify contextual boundaries that are relevant in better understanding and positioning the findings and theoretical insights of the present study (Santangelo & Verbeke, 2022).

Then, from the broader field of view of the organization, in a few turns of lenses I zoom in on the main theoretical insights generated from the analysis of the non-formalized language policy as well as of its perceived benefits and drawbacks. I discuss the role played by the language policy in the linguistic environment of CORPIT while also theoretically positioning the policy within the three conceptualizations of language (structural, functional, and social practice views) introduced in the literature review (see section 2.1.). Furthermore, I rely on the previously reviewed categorizations (mechanical, cultural, and

political – see section 2.5.1.) of language strategies to compare the non-formalized policy to formalized approaches. Beyond that, I propose a new conceptualization – termed *language ambiguity* – that captures and explains the key characteristics and underlying assumptions of the non-formalized language policy. I propose that language ambiguity consists of three main pillars (ambiguity in the formulation of the policy, ambiguity in the boundaries between languages, and ambiguity in the role of each language) that are each linked to a correspondent dimension (language management, language practices, and language beliefs) of the language policy, as conceptualized by Spolsky (2009, 2019). Here my theoretical contribution is mainly twofold. First, I show how a popular framework derived from the field of sociolinguistics can be used by language-sensitive management scholars to analyze language policies in the organizational context. Second, I extend theoretical knowledge on a non-formalized language policies by unveiling a key mechanism (ambiguity) and showing how it is reflected in the features of the policy.

Finally, I discuss how the investigated non-formalized language policy plays a role in promoting linguistic diversity and fostering multilingualism (mainly through new language acquisition), linking the findings to current debates at the intersection of language-sensitive management research and equity, diversity and inclusion (Ciuk et al., 2022; Welch & Welch, 2018b). More specifically, through the concept of *language affordances*, I suggest and explain how the chosen language policy can be viewed as a tool to enhance the language capital of the organization, and overall increase linguistic inclusiveness.

6.2. Alignment between Policy and Context

The analysis of contextual factors – both organizational and external – delivered insights into factors that might contribute to explaining features and outcomes of the non-formalizd corporate language policy. Identifying these factors helps in delineating possible contextual boundaries (Santangelo & Verbeke, 2022).

The internal decision-making processes at CORPIT were often the result of a consensus between executives and employees. This process was not formally regulated, resembling a key feature of the non-formalized nature of the language policy. In this sense, an important condition for this policy to exist might be the organizational informal approach to decision-making. In particular, CORPIT displayed an *internal participation* approach, in which decisions were "…collaborative to include owner-managers and employees at different organizational levels" (Verreynne et al., 2016, p. 421). The participative decision-making process might also partly explain the outcomes of the policy, specifically the feeling of inclusiveness. It has been argued that to achieve an inclusive work environment, organizations need to display competencies of inclusion – featuring a participative decision making process – that enable them to adequately address potential opportunities and issues within a diverse workforce (Pless & Maak, 2004). Accordingly, the shared management of language – that characterized the investigated language policy – might be seen as an important factor in achieving a linguistically inclusive environment (an outcome that emerged from the results of the present study – see section 5.5.1.1).

The organization displayed a flat hierarchical structure that appeared to be flexible to the frequent changes required for its rapid growth. The feeling of a certain degree of autonomy reported by the employees (which also emerged in terms of language choices

within the adopted policy) could be linked to the acceptance of continuous organizational change processes (Lang-Lehmann et al., 2022) that characterized the recent past and near-future strategic efforts of the company. Openness to change constitutes an important feature of the organization that might be linked to the existence of the non-formalized language policy, which due to its implicit and ambiguous formulation (as discussed in greater detail in Section 6.5.) lends itself to continuous adjustments.

As documented in the results, the specific features of the language policy were linked to the strategic goals of the company (international expansion and reliance on a broader talent pool), confirming how a language policy is part of and is aligned with the overall strategic plan followed by the organization (Dhir & Gòkè-Paríolá, 2002; Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Millar, 2018; Sanden, 2016b). Hence, this policy might be more viable for organizations that plan to further expand internationally – recognizing the co-evolutionary process between language strategy and international expansion (Welch & Welch, 2018a).

The results also showed that the adoption of a non-formalized language policy had implications in terms of HR practices, and specifically the linguistic requirements observed in the recruitment process. The flexible approach to language of the investigated policy could be seen as part of a geocentric recruitment policy in which the company tried to tap a linguistically diverse pool of job candidates. While this approach might entail the formal adoption of a common corporate language (and consequently the exposure to the potential negative consequences discussed in section 2.5.1.), Van den Born and Peltokorpi (2010) argue that companies can also choose alternative approaches to better acknowledge linguistic diversity, respect linguistic identity, and reduce uneasiness in communication. The policy chosen by CORPIT seemed to constitute an example of the latter scenario.

Finally, when looking at the external context, an important aspect that might partly explain the features of the policy is the contrast between the geographical dominance of French (with English seen as a minority language) and the industry-specific preeminence of English (see section 3.3.). The necessity to find a balance between the languages – and the need to make frequent adjustments according to strategic changes – might partly motivate the desire to maintain an implicit and ambiguous policy (as discussed in more detail in section 6.5.3.).

6.3. Fluid Linguistic Environment

What emerged from the collected data was a multilingual environment in which the language choices that organizational members faced were influenced by a set of unwritten guidelines that allowed for the use of French and English. The influence of these guidelines appeared to go deeper than just allowing those two options. The *privileged* position of the French language, for example, was at times implicitly communicated by the executives but not equally acknowledged among the employees. At the same time, executives emphasized an increased focus on other languages – and in particular English – due to the need to further internationalize the business, and to rely on a greater international talent pool.

Overall, a multitude of different dynamic language beliefs co-existed within the context of the organization and were part of its language policy. The lack of written codification of the language guidelines granted a certain degree of flexibility in language choice and resulted in an ambiguous realization of the non-formalized language policy.

The influence of government regulations on the use of language was mainly noticeable in the production of official documents (e.g., contracts and company-wide

written announcements), while it appeared to be less important in any other type of communication (e.g., oral communication, internal messaging system, written communication within teams, internal memos, etc.). Other factors that appeared to play a role in language choices were the language skills of the interlocutor, as well as the type of communication media.

In terms of the underlying conceptualization of language in the language policy of CORPIT, this could be described by the concept of *fluidity*, which entails moving "..away from the binary distinction between native and non-native speakers towards fluidity of languages in use" (Śliwa et al., 2020). More specifically, in the context of the language policy of CORPIT, multilingualism was not seen with the rigid notion of the proficiency in several languages, but rather the ability to mobilize different linguistic resources. Consistent with the notion of polylanguaging, it allowed individuals to move across their whole linguistic repertoire (Jørgensen et al., 2015), and stemmed from a social practice approach to language (see section 2.1.). This collective mobilization of language assets also served the business needs of an expanding company and the related growing importance of international customers. From a theoretical perspective, mobilizing linguistic resources is a process that has already been suggested to possibly result in the conversion of the language capital of an organization into its language operative capacity (see section 2.2.1.). In this sense, a non-formalized language policy, through its encouragement of dynamic language practices (e.g., translanguaging and polylanguaging) and its open approach to language choices might be a viable option to obtain such capacity. At CORPIT the non-formalized language policy creates a multilingual environment that encouraged individuals to broaden their language skills, as mentioned in several comments

made by employees. This was a desired outcome, as the CEO praised the potential benefits of learning new languages.

6.4. Mechanical, Cultural, and Political Views on the Language Policy

Looking at the non-formalized policy of CORPIT through three views (mechanical, cultural, and political) on corporate language strategies (see section 2.5.1.) highlights a few of its key features and helps in comparing them to formalized approaches. In particular, from a political perspective, while in the non-formalized policy French was not officially the preferred language at CORPIT, the role implicitly assigned to it appeared to be somehow more important than the one assigned to English, and tied to the identity of the company, at least according to the executives (see section 5.4.2.2.). The non-formalized language policy of CORPIT might have not fully prevented the power conflicts derived from a language hierarchy that are usually observed in formalized common corporate language policies.

From the cultural view the results painted a picture of a cosmopolitan and inclusive reality that appeared to value diversity (see sections 5.5.1.1-2). This aspect is not typically associated with formalized common corporate language policies (Janssens & Steyaert, 2014). These outcomes could be related to the flexible approach to language that characterizes the policy chosen by CORPIT, which stands in contrasts with the rigid enforcement of a common corporate language (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012). Through the cultural view, the non-formalized language policy can be seen as an example of an approach in which "…the multiplicity of languages is respected" (Janssens et al., 2004, p. 421).

Finally, through the lens of a mechanical perspective, the non-formalized language policy at CORPIT did not fully solve these potential language-related communication issues. Results indicated instances in which messages were not fully translated or the communication speed became slow. Interestingly, the presence of language barriers seemed to be minimal. This is arguably an important finding, since these type of barriers are very commonly observed in linguistically diverse organizations (Hinds et al., 2014; Peltokorpi & Clausen, 2011). As discussed ahead, the reasons for this phenomenon could be found in an ambiguous approach to language – that allowed individuals to rely on their broader linguistic repertoire – as well as in the encouragement of multilingualism found in the non-formalized language policy. In this sense, the formulation of the policy seemed to contribute to limiting the presence of *evident* language barriers derived from syntactical and lexical challenges (Tenzer et al., 2021).

6.5. Language Ambiguity

An underlying characteristic of the non-formalized corporate language policy of CORPIT was the presence of ambiguity. While past studies (e.g., Fredriksson et al., 2006) detected the possibility of ambiguity in the formulation of certain language policies, an in-depth look was missing. In particular, it remained unclear what part of those policies was ambiguous and a potential explanation of why that ambiguity was present and whether it was linked to particular outcomes of the policy.

In the case of CORPIT, the ambiguity seemed to be present on three different dimensions: ambiguity in the formulation of the policy, ambiguity in the boundaries between languages, and ambiguity in the role of each language. These three dimensions

can be linked to three elements of a language policy suggested by Spolsky (see section 2.3.1.): language management, language practices, and language beliefs, respectively.

Drawing primarily on the organizational communication literature as well as on research in the fields of multilingual education and sociolinguistics, I outline these three dimensions of ambiguity and their inherent properties (see Figure 4 for a graphical overview).

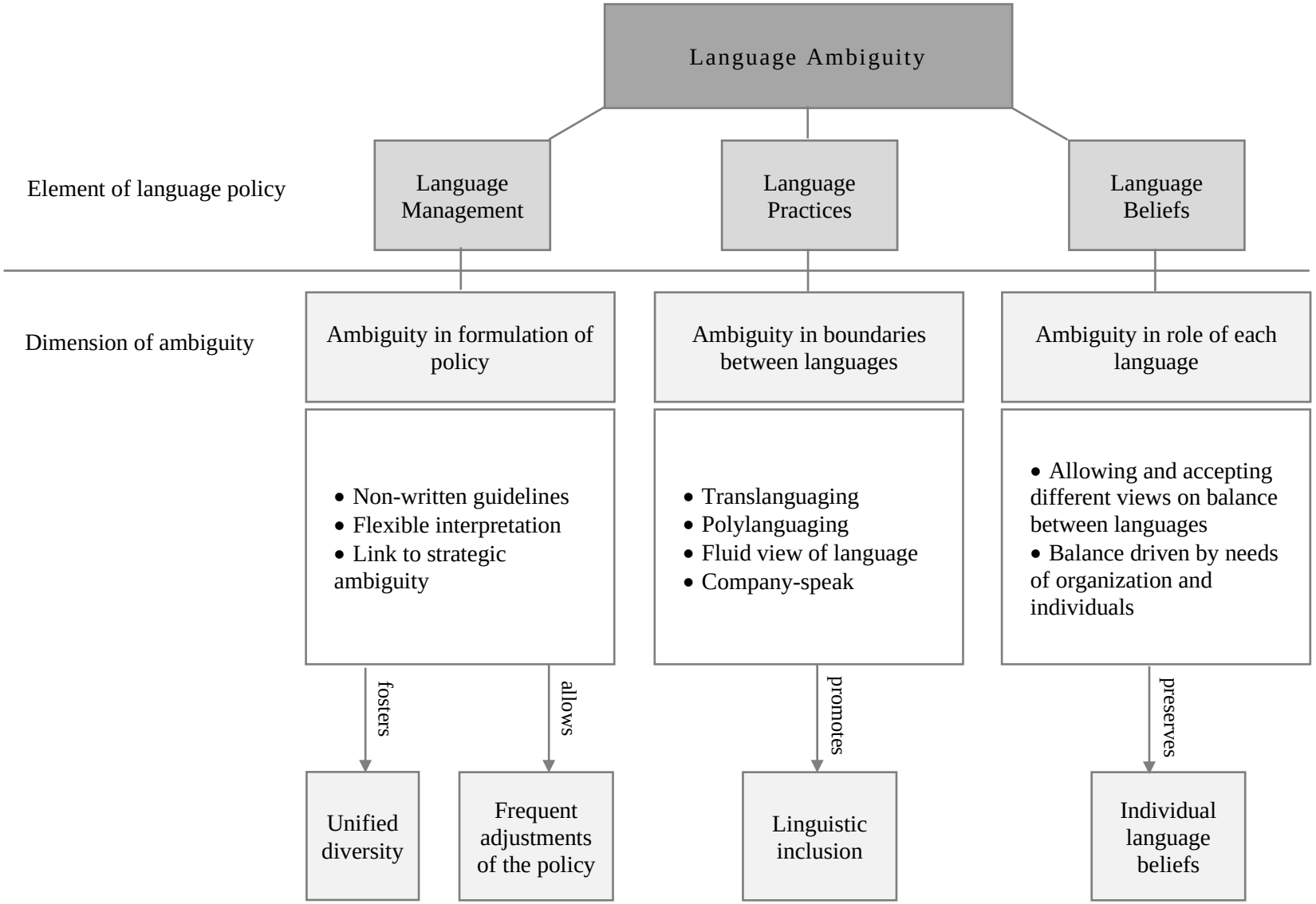

Figure 4: The three dimensions of language ambiguity.

6.5.1. Ambiguity in the formulation of the policy

The results indicated that a key aspect of the language policy at CORPIT was its implicit, non-written formulation. This formulation, as outlined by the executives, was deliberately pursued by the organization that saw in it numerous advantages, at both individual and organizational levels. It appeared to be part of an effort to create a more welcoming and community-centered working environment, at the cost of maintaining an ambiguous policy, as outlined by the wide range of different interpretations of it (see Table 5 for a selection of quotes denoting this dimension of ambiguity).

Respondent	**Interview excerpt**
Employee	*"I am not really sure what the 'official' language is here, never really thought about it…"*
Employee	*"I guess it is rather unclear, I mean…perhaps it was more French before and now I would say that English is also important."*
Employee	*"The fact that the management is fairly flexible with languages helps... I do not feel much pressure, like either I know French, or I am out. I can always communicate in English, but I am also encouraged to use French sometimes, though I do not really have to."*
Employee	*"It is totally informal and up to the people, though I think the management prefers to speak in French but does not force us to do that."*
HR Manager	*"Well, communication within employees happens in multiple languages, we do not formally regulate that, though we do encourage the use of French and we started a few years ago to be more open towards English…."*
CEO	*"As for now, we never had complaints. It is a system that sets itself by itself, the people are happy in it."*
Executive	*"My feeling is that I want to have people to be as free as possible and speaking whatever language they feel most comfortable with."*

Table 5: Excerpts of quotes supporting the existence of ambiguity in the formulation of the policy.

Both the organizational communication and political science literatures (Bräuninger & Giger, 2018; Eisenberg, 1984) refer to *strategic ambiguity* to describe instances in which an organization (a company but also, for example, a political party) does not clearly define its organizational plans. According to Eisenberg, strategic ambiguity is viewed as "…essential to organizing because it allows for multiple interpretations to exist among people who contend that they are attending to the same message –i.e., perceive the message to be clear." (1984, p. 231). In the concluding remarks of her 2013 study on language policies in multinational corporations, Angouri mentions the concept of strategic ambiguity and invites scholars to explore its role in language policies. This call remained largely unanswered.

The unclear and implicit formulation of a non-formalized language policy seems to be well-explained through the lens of strategic ambiguity. Organizations pursue ambiguity to avoid promoting a single view of the organizational reality, and preserving different perspectives. In this sense, a non-formalized policy can be seen as an attempt to pursue such diversity in interpretations. Eisenberg argues that through strategic ambiguity an organization can promote unified diversity, which emerges from the results of the present study. Furthermore, an ambiguously formulated policy allows the organization to make adjustments to it at a later point in time, hence granting a certain degree of flexibility, as found in this study. According to the executives, the organization regularly underwent strategic changes, that also affected its language approach.

Language ambiguity entails an implicit and unclear formulation of language policy. A related concept, strategic ambiguity can help understand the reasons behind this choice. In the context of language management, the ambiguity exists with regard to language

manager, since this position is not clearly assigned. As previously discussed, language management might rest in the hands of a designated entity (individual or institutional) or left to be determined by each individual (individual self-management). Additionally, language advocates, who by definition are "…individuals or groups who lack the authority of managers but still wish to change its practices" (Spolsky, 2019, p. 326), might also play a role in language choices. From a theoretical standpoint, it appeared that the role of executives at CORPIT was not contemplated. In fact, while they tried to influence language choice by formulating non-written suggestions they could not be seen as language managers, or as language advocates. They possessed the authority to change practices, but deliberately decided not to exert it. The unclear role of the executives added a furtherambiguous aspect in the formulation of policy. The concept of language ambiguity extends existing theoretical knowledge by adding another role in the language management of an organization.

Overall, language ambiguity results from the implicit formulation of a language policy, in which the role of the language manager is not clearly defined. There is a heavy reliance on informal guidelines that are continuously adapted according to the needs of the organization. This type of ambiguity fosters unified diversity in terms of different interpretations of the policy and allows for frequent adjustments.

6.5.2. Ambiguity in the boundaries between languages

While communication at CORPIT happened across different languages, it was difficult to see each language as being a separated entity. Accordingly, the ambiguity resided also in a less *strict* view of language based on proficiency in a given language.

Blurred boundaries between languages (i.e., the limits of each language were unclear) were embraced.

Language ambiguity entails the implicit acceptance and promotion of a dynamic view of language. This view differs substantially from the relatively rigid structural perspective and resembles the social practice perspective discussed previously (see section 2.1.). A key aspect of language ambiguity is the presence and promotion of fluid language practices such as translanguaging and polylanguaging, both detected in the case of CORPIT. Previous studies in the field of multilingual education have shown the positive role of such practices in fostering a more linguistic inclusion. For example, in the classroom, the promotion of translanguaging "…resulted in cooperative learning giving more translanguaging space and opportunities for students to discuss, solve problems, generate solutions, provide ideas, help each other, and give text competent and knowledgeable output" (Yafele & Makalela, 2022, p. 129). Translanguaging has also been indicated as a viable approach to achieve inclusion in multilingual and multicultural settings (Tai, 2022), such as the workforce at CORPIT. Polylanguaging has been recently proposed as an approach to embracing increasingly diverse environments. As observed at CORPIT, people did not use a language exclusively, but rather linguistic features (e.g. words and structures borrowed from other languages, use of idiolects), as part of their linguistic repertoire, which is a key aspect of polylanguaging (Blommaert & Backus, 2011; Jørgensen et al., 2015).

Overall, this dimension of ambiguity captures the wide range of fluid language practices that can be found within an organization pursuing a non-formalized language policy (see Table 6 for a selection of quotes regarding this dimension of ambiguity).

Among these practices were the use of *Frenglish* (as mentioned previously by one of the interviewees), mixing of regional variations of languages, the reliance on entire phrases from other languages (e.g., Spanish), CORPIT-own terminology and the frequent use of expressions derived from technical jargon. Thus, language ambiguity favours linguistic inclusion.

Respondent	**Interview excerpt**
Executive	*"French is kind of our default language, we shift to English often though, we balance the two languages according to the situation. So, we have a fairly flexible idea of language."*
Employee	*"… especially on Slack. There is a mix of French, English, IT jargon, and kind of CORPIT-words there. I believe people that do not work here would not always understand what is written there."*
Employee	*"We tend to speak French because this is our first language but as soon as you start talking about code more and more English words will be used. It is really a mix, it is both languages at the same time."*
Employee	*"A colleague is from Mexico, her first language is Spanish but her second language is French and the third one is English. Nevertheless, I still speak to her in English or I try to say a few words in Spanish, my Spanish is terrible, but I try to say a few little things and then I switch to English."*
Employee	*"… sometimes we use some kind of Frenglish because sometimes half of the sentence is in French and we switch… but we are used to it. Otherwise, when we write things… when we chat it is in French but the code that we write and all the comments that are in the code are in English. Even the documents to help people when they arrive in the team… wow... it is mixed… I am trying to think because I was writing documentation today and I do not even remember if I was writing in French or in English… this is something that is odd about this kind of mixed environment."*
Employee	*"… it would be interesting to have a lexicon of how CORPIT is talking. I think we also use some quotes from colleagues. For example, on the Slack channels, each time you enter there is a quote from someone. For a new person who comes to work it shows the silly, not the silly*

	silly, but just the twist of words that we might use. Kind of jokes, programmer jokes, most of the times in English."
HR Manager	*"… people mix English, or even different types of French (from France and from Quebec) and technical terms. I think that we really do have an own language, and I noticed that when I am outside of the company, how unique it is here."*

Table 6: Excerpts of quotes supporting the existence of ambiguity in the boundaries between languages.

6.5.3. Ambiguity in the role of each language

A final dimension of language ambiguity lies in the ambiguity surrounding the language beliefs within CORPIT (see Table 7 for a selection of quotes denoting this dimension of ambiguity). The unclear balance between languages was perhaps the most prominent manifestation of this ambiguity. The rich variety of opinions regarding the status assigned to each language (e.g., whether there was a corporate language and if so, which one was it, as well as what was the role of other languages) confirmed the lack of a unanimous view on the matter.

Users of the languages were not bound by specific guidelines and seemed to accept the lack of clarity surrounding the role of each language. They seemed well-aware that executives and other employees might have held different views on the matter. For example, even though the executives preferred French, this was not viewed as limiting the language choices of the employees, nor did it elevate French to the status of being the main corporate language. Furthermore, it appeared that the preference for French did not affect the hiring requirements at CORPIT (in which, by contrast, speaking English seemed to be enjoying greater importance), creating further ambiguity regarding the role of each language.

Several factors seemed to influence the balance of languages and could explain the existence of ambiguity. Executives had the flexibility to deploy language resources according to the business needs, for example focusing on English to further internationalize operations, while also maintaining the *French identity* of the company (through their preference for French). Also, the balance was driven by individual choices of the employees, that were motivated by their preferences. For example, the desire of a French-native programmer to communicate mainly in English because most technical terms were in that language. Overall, the ambiguity surrounding the role and status of each language – and the employees' willingness to accept this ambiguity – preserved individual language beliefs.

Respondent	**Interview excerpt**
Employee	*"French is more important, but sometimes it depends who you are talking to."*
Employee	*"I guess it is rather unclear, I mean… perhaps it was more French before and now I would say that English is also important."*
Employee	*"It is a truly bilingual company."*
Employee	*"I think it is not fully bilingual only because it is not a work requirement, like I know that some people do not really speak English and they are put on French project."*
Employee	*"I see it as a French company which uses English and tries to accommodate a lot the people that do not speak French."*
Employee	*"I think English is the language of the company. French is the lovely twist we have".*
Executive	*"Three years ago, I would have said French. Now there is a cultural shift, definitely… we prioritize a good English over a good French."*

Table 7: Excerpts of quotes supporting the existence of ambiguity in the role of each language.

6.5.4. Language ambiguity beyond CORPIT

Previous studies, while not focusing on it, have also observed the presence of ambiguity in corporate language policies. For example, Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen, and Piekkari (2006) have suggested that language might be addressed in a consciously ambiguous way. This ambiguity might be analyzed through the lenses of the three different dimensions of language ambiguity, understanding how it presents itself across the language management, practices, and beliefs of the organizations. Similarly, while studies report the potential for a wide-spread use of non-formalized policies (Angouri, 2014; Ylinen, 2010), how these policies are realized (which aspects are left ambiguous) remains unclear. By offering potential explanations (e.g., needs for flexibility, fostering diversity, etc.) across different dimensions of implicit corporate language approaches, language ambiguity has the potential to uncover the reasons behind the existence of such policies. For example, a recent study on a non-formalized language policy reported the existence of implicit agreements on language choices within an organization (Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018). However, the reasons behind this approach and why it is maintained remain missing. Through its dynamic view of language, which has recently gained traction in studies on linguistic diversity in organizations (Karhunen et al., 2018) and its acknowledgment of different elements of a language policy, language ambiguity has the potential to offer a more holistic view on the elements and mechanisms of corporate language policies.

Finally, while the language ambiguity framework might be applied to both formalized and non-formalized policies, the implicit nature of the latter might be more prone to maintain this ambiguity and favour its potential outcomes (i.e., fostering unified diversity, allowing for frequent adjustments, promoting linguistic inclusion, and preserving

individual beliefs). For example, formalizing the content of the policy might limit the possibility of multiple diverging interpretations, removing part of that deliberate ambiguity that characterizes an implicitly formulated approach, such as the investigated non-formalized policy.

6.6. Affordances Theory

Perhaps one of the most important findings of the analysis of the outcomes of the non-formalized language policy was the encouragement of multilingualism, frequently through new language acquisition (see section 5.5.1.3.). More specifically, the language policy appeared to be part of a set of measures undertaken by the company to promote and support multilingualism (see section 5.2.2.). As a possible theoretical explanation, I argue that the concept of *affordances* that originated in perceptual psychology might provide a suitable starting point. According to Gibson "the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (Gibson, 1979, p. 127). A stream of research has focussed on the exact interpretation of Gibson's words and what affordances imply, becoming a key construct in the field of ecological psychology (Scarantino, 2003). I adopt the interpretation by Greeno (1994), who argued that affordances are "…preconditions for activity… The presence in a situation of a system that provides an affordance for some activity does not imply that the activity will occur, although it contributes to the possibility of that activity" (p. 340). Accordingly, affordances enable (and to a certain extent facilitate) an agents' action (Khetarpal et al., 2020). In the context of business research, the concept of affordances has found application mainly in the study of management information systems (Volkoff & Strong, 2017), for example to

investigate how a technological change might encourage the implementation of environmentally sustainable business practices (Seidel et al., 2013).

6.6.1. Language affordances

While not yet applied in management research, affordances theory has enjoyed increasing interest in the field of applied linguistics, especially in the study of language acquisition and multilingualism (Aronin, 2014; Aronin & Singleton, 2010; Kordt, 2018; Ziglari, 2012). More specifically, scholars have coined the term *language affordances* to denote "…the affordances through the realization of which communication using a language or languages (and/or the acquisition of a language or languages) is possible" (Aronin & Singleton, 2010, p. 116). It is important, however, to stress that language affordances are typically not embodied in a single initiative but rather in set of affordances. Such sets include "…actions and material objects, emotions and feelings, and social affordances relative to a given community" (Aronin & Singleton, 2012, p. 321). Language affordances, as I discuss ahead, might be important factors in the encouragement of language learning (and hence promotion of multilingualism) at CORPIT, and are part of its approach to language.

6.6.2. Language affordances at CORPIT

Through the lens of affordance theory, a set of language affordances can be identified from the findings of the present study. This set comprises formal language training, language policy, social learning language spaces, autonomy, executives' ideologies, and attitude towards languages. I argue that the interplay among these language

affordances resulted in the promotion and facilitation of foreign language acquisition at CORPIT, and hence increased multilingualism.

As documented in the results, and similar to other organizations, CORPIT offered formal language training to its employees. The opportunity to join these language courses was granted to every employee. However, while being the most common measure adopted by organizations to facilitate additional language acquisition, language training programs are often inefficient due to the difficulties in employees retaining motivation and efficient engagement in learning the additional language, along with the individuals' fear of learning a foreign language. Accordingly, fostering language acquisition by solely relying on offering language training programs has proven to be an insufficient measure (Moreno, 2017).

The literature on language affordances recognizes the importance of social language learning spaces in foreign language acquisition. In these non-formal settings individuals come together to learn with and from each other. The existence of these spaces "…can facilitate language learning by providing a number of learning opportunities" (Murray & Fujishima, 2013). Similarly, research in the field of applied linguistics has long recognized how the presence of such spaces contributes to successful language acquisition (Little, 1993). Hence, social language learning spaces can be viewed as a language affordance. As shown in the results, social language learning spaces existed at CORPIT, for example, in the form of English-learning coffee breaks and the language-learning dedicated channels on the internal messaging platform. In this informal context, language learners (and prospective language learners) had the possibility to interact with native

speakers or highly fluent individuals, training their language skills, receiving feedback, and creating co-learning experiences with other language learners.

A theme that often emerged in the findings was the sense of support that employees felt within CORPIT. As an informal support mechanism, social language learning spaces were viewed as means to increase learners' sense of autonomy. According to Murray and Fujishima (2013), this feeling of autonomy is itself a further affordance that benefits community building as well as efficient language acquisition (Benson, 2013; Murray & Fujishima, 2013). Noticeably, social language learning spaces at CORPIT were mostly independently organized and managed by employees, with the support of the organization. The theme of autonomy was also a key aspect of the language policy, which granted a certain degree of freedom in the language choices of the employees by not mandating a corporate language. As documented in the results, employees reported a sense of independence in their language choices. Thus, autonomy as a language affordance at CORPIT was a function of both the existence of social language learning spaces and the pursued corporate language policy.

Language affordances can also be embodied in the form of ideologies and attitudes towards languages (Aronin & Singleton, 2010). The presence of this affordance emerged in the results of this study. The open approach to languages, the executives' ideologies on language learning and awareness of its benefits on the practical and cognitive levels, and the support offered to employees organizing language-learning events could all be seen as additional language affordances. As a feature of the language policy, the lack of a clearly mandated corporate language resulted in the presence of multiple actively used languages,

creating a truly multilingual environment. This daily foreign language exposure served as a further language affordance (Aronin & Singleton, 2012; Murray & Fujishima, 2013).

Overall, the results of this study showed how the language approach pursued by CORPIT encouraged multilingualism through additional language acquisition. Affordance theory, and more specifically the concept of language affordances, offers an explanation of which factors, as a set of language affordances, might have contributed to this phenomenon. Based on the findings of the present study I propose a set of language affordances that promoted multilingualism. The effect of the affordances on promoting multilingualism , along with interplays among different affordances, is shown in Figure 5.

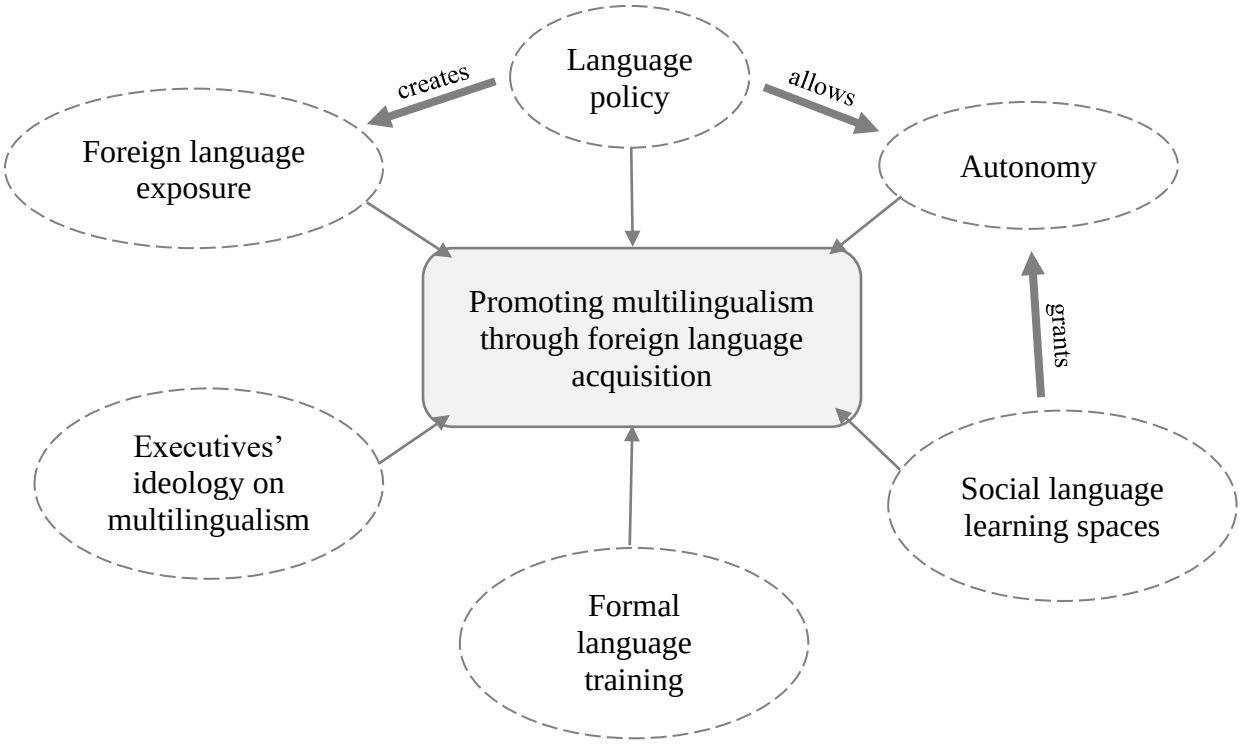

Figure 5: Set of language affordances promoting multilingualism through foreign language acquisition.

For language-sensitive management research, the language affordances lens can help shed light on how multilingualism in organizations can be fostered through foreign language acquisition. Furthermore, the set of language affordances found at CORPIT can serve as an example of how corporations can enhance their language capital (Welch & Welch, 2018b) through a more flexible approach to language derived from a social practice view. These findings contribute to the literature on promoting and benefitting from linguistic diversity (Karhunen et al., 2018) and suggest the adoption of a language affordances perspective to study how companies can pursue the goal of valuing and fostering a linguistically diverse workforce.

CHAPTER 7 – Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

My goal in this dissertation was to provide a holistic view on the reality of a non-formalized corporate language policy. Specifically, I focused on the key features and outcomes of this policy. In addition to delivering theoretical contributions (as outlined in Chapter 6), the findings of the present study have also practical implications that I outline ahead. Then, I discuss limitations as well as potential avenues for future research, and reflect on my role in the research process. Finally, I conclude this dissertation by providing a brief summary of the research objectives and main insights.

7.2. Practical Implications for Managers and Organizations

Managers have become increasingly aware that "…language strategy is critical for global talent management" (Neeley & Kaplan, 2014, p. 70). In fact, multilingual organizations that fail to properly address language are exposed to potential obstacles in communication as well as power imbalances and difficulties in interpersonal relationships (Karhunen et al., 2018; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017).

The results of this dissertation show how in addressing linguistic diversity managers can rely on an alternative approach – a non-formalized language policy – that differs substantially from the more common formalized adoption of a corporate language. Through this approach, the managers are spared the burden of being the sole decision-makers by sharing the responsibility of language management with employees. At the same time, however, through implicit guidelines and suggestions they have the opportunity to

adapt the policy to the needs of the organization and its strategic goals. Furthermore, the findings showed that a non-formalized policy can contribute to leveraging linguistic diversity while promoting inclusiveness and communication. It is important, however, to recognise that such a policy requires a coordinated effort and might come at expense of higher operating costs. Beyond addressing linguistic diversity, managers that wish to promote and support multilingualism might see the non-formalized language as part of a set of tools (together with, for example, language courses and language-dedicated events) to foster interest in foreign language acquisition as well as to improve the language skills of the employees.

7.3. Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

The study presents a series of limitations that should be considered in the interpretation of the findings and can constitute exciting opportunities for further research. Limitations resulted from the chosen research design, research methods, as well as data collection instruments.

First, in terms of research design, the choice of a single case study design limits the generalization of the findings (De Vaus, 2001). In choosing the investigated organization – a multilingual company operating in a knowledge-intensive IT sector – I aimed to provide an *instrumental* case that could potentially answer all the research questions. However, the findings reflect only a particular organizational context. Therefore, future studies could focus on different types of organizations, such as companies operating in sectors where knowledge exchange does not play a prominent role.

Second, as far as the choice of research methods is concerned, the decision to rely on a qualitative approach presents a few important challenges. Most notably, while I discussed the perceived outcomes of the non-formalized policy, I did not quantify and measure the extent of each perceived benefit and drawback. Similarly, the lack of measurement precluded the possibility to quantify the level of ambiguity of the policy. While this is an important limitation, it also constitutes the opportunity to create a scale measuring the level of language ambiguity. The proposed framework featuring the three dimensions of ambiguity might serve as a suitable starting point for the development of this measure.

Finally, while I relied on a wide range of data collection methods, the implicit nature of the policy, data privacy concerns, and the language used for the interviews potentially limited the type and depth of data collected. I investigated the features of the policy through recollections of interviewees as well as analysis of corporate material and observations of oral and virtual interactions, in both formal and informal settings. Due to concerns about data privacy (specifically, the possibility to capture sensitive information), I could not record the content of actual interactions and had to rely on summaries of my observations. This constraint limited the ability to offer illustrative excerpts of language practices, for example through the transcription of real-life conversations or by sharing screen captures of virtual interactions, that would have more accurately captured language choices of organizational members. Future studies could apply additional data collection methods, such as videos of interactions, to further analyze language choices of participants and relevant contextual factors. Lastly, even though I am fluent in English and have a limited understanding of French, I conducted the interviews in English, while granting the

option for participants to rely on automatic translation tools as well as to request assistance from their colleagues. During the interviews I often provided summaries of the answers to the interviewees to ensure the correctness of my interpretation. All participants displayed at least a basic knowledge of English. As shown in numerous previous studies, individuals expressing themselves in a foreign language might encounter difficulties in transmitting emotions as well as conveying the intended message (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004). Future studies might employ multiple investigators with different language skills to accommodate for the diversity in the linguistic profiles of the interviewees.

Unlike formalized corporate language policy, research on non-formalized approaches is still in the early stages of its development. Many important questions remain to be answered. For example, while beyond the scope of the present study, a few possible reasons for choosing a non-formalized language policy (such as the desire to rely on an increasingly linguistically diverse workforce) emerged from the analysed data. A thorough investigation of factors leading organizations to adopt these policies, however, is missing. Similarly, the process through which non-formalized language policies are implemented remains rather unknown.

While an emergent theme of this study was the role of the language policy as part of a set of measures (language affordances) aimed to support and foster multilingualism, more research is needed to understand how organizations design these language affordances. Perhaps future studies could rely on a configurational approach (A. D. Meyer et al., 1993) to study different sets of affordances and their outcomes. For example, to encourage additional language acquisition, an organization might create other language affordances such as sending employees to work in "…contexts which offer more

opportunities for language learning and fewer constraints than others" (Menezes, 2011, p. 65), such as highly linguistically diverse geographical locations. These initiatives (combined with other measures, such as offering language courses and setting target language proficiency scores) might create alternative sets of language affordances.

7.4. Reflexivity and Researcher Bias

In conducting the research for this dissertation, I had both academic and personal aims. Growing up as a multilingual individual across different countries, and having worked in several multilingual organizations, I have been exposed to linguistic diversity from the very start of my life. The topic of how to deal with linguistic differences, therefore, has long been a keen interest of mine. This interest was one of the main reasons for choosing the topic for this dissertation. When reading previous studies on how language is addressed within organizations, I often thought of my own experience and of the communication issues that either I or my peers have encountered. Certainly, investigating how an organization broke the conventions and pursued an alternative way to address language choices constituted an opportunity to both advance theoretical and personal knowledge about this topic.

In acknowledging my close relationship and personal experience with linguistic diversity, through the process of research reflexivity (Marshall, 2011; Willing, 2013), I reflect on my own assumptions and beliefs that might have affected how I conducted research for this dissertation, and how I tried to minimize the resulting researcher bias (Zickar & Carter, 2010). When interviewing participants and listening to their stories about navigating multiple languages, I sometimes experienced what Karl E. Weick (2002)

described as "…seeing oneself in the data" (p. 894). In these instances, I could relate to the challenges expressed by the interviewees. This probably influenced my spontenuos interpretation of their stories. To minimize the impact of my own views, I engaged in the practice of *clean repeats.* This approach consists of a "…recap of interviewee's words that has no introduced content, presupposition, or evaluation, nor does it ask a question" (Cairns-Lee et al., 2022, p. 173). Through this technique, the participants are granted space and time to rehear what they have stated, "…, encouraging them to reflect further on their constructs, often dispensing with the need for a question and thereby minimizing potential unintended contamination by the interviewer's implicit assumptions" (Cairns-Lee et al., 2022, p. 175). Frequent interactions with a senior scholar – with a very different background than mine – in the stages of designing the questionnaire and conducting the interviews helped in gaining a different perspective and possibly reducing researcher bias (Haynes, 2012). My journey through interpreting the data and confronting myself with my own assumptions has also benefitted from the participation of key informants who helped me in obtaining a better understanding of emerging themes and underlying relationships between them (J. W. Creswell & Miller, 2000). Overall, while recognizing the presence of researcher bias, I attempted to follow a postpositivist approach. My idea of such philosophy closely resembles the opinion expressed by Patton (2014), who argued that "…postpositivism does not embrace naive belief in pure scientific truth; rather, qualitative research conducted in a strict postpositivist tradition utilizes precise, prescribed processes and produces social scientific reports that enable researchers to make generalizable claims about the social phenomenon within particular populations under examination" (p. 988).

7.5. Conclusion

Relying on a single case study design and on a variety of data collection methods (ranging from interviews to observations of both face-to-face and virtual interactions), I analyzed the non-formalized language policy of a Canadian multinational and multilingual organization. I set out to explore and explain the features of this policy, including its underlying assumptions (RQ1). Furthermore, I investigated the perceived outcomes of the policy, unveiling both positive and negative consequences (RQ2).

In terms of method of reasoning, I relied on a hybrid approach – blending elements of inductive and deductive logics – that allowed me to both rely on established frameworks (i.e., Spolsky's framework on language policies) as well as to generate emerging theoretical insights. In this sense, "… theory was both a precursor to, and an outcome of, the data analysis" (Swain, 2018, p. 5).

The results of the study showed that the non-formalized language policy (while implicitly formulated) consisted of both guidelines and suggestions on language use within the organization. At the same time, however, the policy also allowed for a certain degree of freedom in the language choice of employees, thereby blending a top-down with a bottom-up approach to language management that rested on both the management's guidelines and individual self-management. This ambiguous policy allowed for adjustments according to the changing needs of the organization, such as its effort to internationalize further and the growing importance of tapping into a more linguistically diverse pool of job candidates.

In terms of language practices, interactions at CORPIT were characterized by blurred boundaries between languages, as evidenced in the heavy reliance on translanguaging and polylanguaging. Hence, the policy created a very fluid linguistic environment, in which employees used their full linguistic repertoires.

In terms of language beliefs, the policy allowed for the coexistence of multiple views regarding language use and the role assigned to each language. Both executives and employees displayed the lack of a homogeneous view as to whether or not there was a corporate language at CORPIT, and if so, what was it. From management perspective, this seemed to be a deliberate effort to maintain an ambiguous language policy.

The holistic approach to the investigation of the policy allowed me to explore the organizational context in which it was embedded. I found that the language policy was embedded in an organization in which decision-making processes relied on consensus between executives and employees. Furthermore, I found the policy to be part of a set of measures – *language affordances* – that the company employed to actively encourage and support multilingualism.

In this dissertation, I provided four main theoretical contributions. First, by blending research on sociolinguistics and language-sensitive management research, I investigated the key features of and theoretical assumptions behind the existence of a non-formalized language policy, thus, positioning it within a social practice view of language. Second, I showed that while providing a number of perceived benefits, such as promoting communication and multilingualism, this policy also played a role in increasing operating costs as well as in instances of inefficient communication. Third, based on my findings and

building on studies in communication and political science, I introduce the concept of *language ambiguity* and develop a framework that helps to identify and explain the key mechanisms behind the language policy and its ambiguous nature. Finally, borrowing from evolutionary psychology and applied linguistics, I discuss how the concept of language affordances can help scholars to investigate how multilingual organizations foster diversity through supporting and enhancing multilingualism.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Recruitment script

Hello, I am Carlo Brighi. I am a Doctoral researcher at University of Victoria, and I am here to help CORPIT learn how languages are affecting employee communication. Would you please talk with me about your experiences working with people who have a different language than yours? This document explains the risks and benefits of participating. [present consent form] <u>You do not need to decide at this moment. Please contact me if you have questions.</u>

Appendix 2: Consent form

University of Victoria

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Multilingual Company Effectiveness

Researcher(s):

Carlo Brighi
PhD Candidate
University of Victoria, Gustavson School of Business
[redacted]

Dr. Stacey Fitzsimmons
Associate Professor of International Management
University of Victoria, Gustavson School of Business
[redacted]

Purpose and Objective of the Research

- To learn how employees at [redacted] communicate across languages and cultures.
- To help [redacted] and other multilingual companies develop processes that will improve communication.

This Research is Important because

- Most multilingual companies insist all employees use a single language. Multilingual companies like [redacted] are demonstrating an alternative that othe companies can follow.

Participation

- You have been chosen to participate because you work at [redacted]
- Participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will bare no future cosequences.

Procedures

- Interviews will be done in person here at [redacted], in a private office.
- With your permission, interviews will be audio recorded.
- Interviews will last 10-15 minutes.

Benefits

- This research might help [redacted] improve their internal communication processes.

Risks

- To mitigate any risk that your participation would have an effect on your job security, we will only share aggregated group-level results with company leaders. All information shared with company leaders will be framed in terms of how to improve communication.

Withdrawal of Participation

- You may withdraw at any time without explanation or consequence.
- Should you withdraw, your data will be destroyed.
- No one will be informed of your withdrawal.

Confidentiality

- Confidentiality will be protected by storing data on a secure UVic server in Canada, with pseudonyms to represent individuals. Only the researchers will have access to data.

Research Results will be Used/Disseminated in the Following Ways

- Results will be presented at academic conferences, published in academic journals and in a PhD dissertation (which will be publicly accesible on the university's library website). Aggregated group-level results will be shared with the company leaders.

Disposal of Data

- Data from this study will be disposed of within ten years, by deleting the electronic data. Data will be stored on a secure UVic server, in Canada.

Questions or Concerns

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1; or
- Contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria, (250) 472-4545 ethics@uvic.ca

Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix 3: Protocol for semi-structured interviews

Beginning of the interview:

Introduction (see Recruitment Script)

Present Consent Form

Small talk to break the ice

Anytime interviewees will be encouraged to share examples/anecdotes. Item content and order to be adapted depending on the conversation flow and emerging themes. A few questions are similar, they are rephrased differently in case one of them is not clear.

General questions, providing context

Tell me about your role and the current department/project team/the people you usually work with. What are you working on and how long have you been working together?

What is your professional and educational background?

Which culture do you identify with? And which language?

CORPIT working environment, corporate culture

How would you define the organizational culture *(explain terms, if needed)* at CORPIT?

In which aspects of it you do identify with and in which not?

How does the organizational culture of CORPIT differ from the one of other companies?

What is a typical feature of CORPIT, something that is unique to its working

environment?

Does the company organize something to bring the people together?

Language beliefs – Corporate Language

Is there a corporate language *(explain what is a corporate language, if needed)* at CORPIT? If so, ho would you define it? Has it changed over time?

Is CORPIT a monolingual or a bilingual company?

Is the company language French/English? And what role does each language play?

Language beliefs – Role of languages

Do you think anyone has an advantage in knowing a specific language?

Does one have an advantage because they speak very well one language as opposed to someone who speaks very well another? Are there any consequences in the way the people are judged?

Do you think that knowing one specific language gives more power to someone? If so, why?

Has there ever been a time when it was a problem to have multiple languages within the organization? Is it a benefit to have more than one language in the organization?

Language practices – Language choices

How do you decide which language you use to communicate (which factors play a role in the decision)? Do you use English/French sometimes rather then French/English depending on the occasion?

Do you feel different when you speak in French/English?

Does it affect the way you communicate and how you think/behave? *(in case they speak both language but are native speaker only of one, or speak only one and are native speakers of a third language)*

Is there a difference in the communication you have with French (from France) and French Québecois?

Language practices - Language choices and communication media

What communication tools do you mostly use within your team? And with other colleagues? Do your language choices change across different communication media? If so, why?

Language practices - Language and socialization

Does language influence the formation and maintenance of social groups here?

Do you feel culture matters? For example, do you see French Canadians hanging out with each other rather than with French from France?

When you speak with people outside of the company (the same co-workers), which language do you tend to use more often? If you meet your colleagues outside of the

company, do you tend to spend more time with the native speakers of a particular language?

Language Management

In which language does CORPIT expect you to speak in?

Are you required to have meeting in a specific language, or can you decide?

How does the company facilitate communication among employees? Do they communicate their expectations?

What language does CORPIT use to communicate with employees? Does it differ depending on the situation?

Benefits and challenges associated with language/communication

What do you think is a communication strength (and challenge) here at CORPIT?

Are there separate groups because of different languages and/or cultures?

What do you think can be done to improve communication?

Are there any benefits or challenges that derive from having a multilingual environment here at CORPIT?

Additional questions to the management

How has the company been founded?

How do you handle the communication with the employees? How do you manage

linguistic and cultural differences within the organization? How do you address the topic of language in CORPIT and why?

How do you manage the potential contrasts between the strong French identity given from the Québécoise environment, the increased business requirement to have English, and the workforce that consist of more French than English native speakers?

Throughout the history of the company how did you change the way you communicate with the employees?

Do you clearly communicate to the employees which language you expect them to use? If so, why, and what is their reaction? If not, why? Do you influence their language choices?

Ask if interviewee has additional comments and/or anecdotes, explore emerging themes with further questions.