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Connor Bildfell
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ABSTRACT

As the global business landscape has shifted in response to technological and social innovation, international profit-seeking companies located in China have encountered unprecedented challenges regarding language. Moreover, the notion of a “language strategy” proves central to success for flourishing companies. This paper focuses on the intricacies surrounding English and Chinese language policies; *mechanical*, *cultural*, and *political* theories comprise the foundational analysis. After providing a brief synopsis of China’s cultural and linguistic context, this paper addresses three predominant specific issues. First, what constitutes a language strategy? What theoretical perspectives underpin a language strategy? Lastly, how can the organization build an atmosphere conducive to language strategy success?

Results from my study conducted of international companies located in China are presented; analyses and conclusions are presented alongside leading studies in language and management. Furthermore, this paper provides managers with a foundational framework for developing well-structured language strategies concerning English and Mandarin. I reflect upon and analyse cultural insights, empirical studies, and primary-source surveys to construct a theoretical and practical approach to corporate language decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China has experienced a meteoric rise to supremacy. The late 1970s brought sweeping reforms in pursuit of a market-oriented system. Since then, the nation’s prodigious growth – averaging nine percent over the past two decades – has been spurred by its distinguishing focus on exports, population of over 1.3 billion, and entry to the World Trade Organization in 2001 (CountryWatch, 2012).

At the epicentre of China’s cultural undergirding lies “普通话” – Mandarin. The central government largely established the preeminence of Mandarin by decree: in 1728, Qing dynasty Emperor Yongzheng mandated that all government officials must use Mandarin (Li, 2006). Similarly, in an effort to unite the nation, the PRC fervently conducted symposia in the mid-1950s; this produced the codified national standard language, the simplified writing structure, and the establishment of Mandarin as the national *lingua franca* – a medium of communication between peoples of different languages. These efforts succeeded in raising the percentage of Chinese who could comprehend Mandarin from forty-one percent in the early 1950s to ninety percent in 1984 (Wu & Yin, 1984).

However, despite Mandarin’s imperial linguistic prominence, recent business trends have eroded the national standard to make room for a sweeping force – English. Over 1.75 billion people worldwide – one in four – speak English with useful proficiency (Neeley, 2012). Hiroshi Mikitani, CEO of Japan’s

Rakuten, describes this pervasive phenomenon as “Englishnization” (ibid.). In fact, Rakuten declared what I shall refer to as a *language strategy*, as defined below, which made English the sole corporate language of the company, despite deep Japanese roots.

The purpose of this study is to develop a clearer sense for how language crafts the landscape of the workplace. Questions invoked participants to analyse their work language environments and managerial techniques to develop successful language strategies. From this foundation, we can move forward with best practices and a solid framework for respecting and nurturing cultural interchange in the workplace; indeed, such astute management can provide a competitive advantage.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The basis for the following analysis is an interview/questionnaire survey I constructed for the purpose of extracting critical insights regarding managers’ and employees’ use of language strategies. First, I structured a three-tiered survey: the first section posed open-ended questions allowing respondents to provide deep insights and examples describing how language strategies are carried out in individual companies and what challenges persist; the second portion gives true/false questions that help identify the maturity and nature of the company; the third segment offers a set of Likert Scale questions (with 1 meaning “strongly disagree” and 5 “strongly agree”) in which respondents indicate and rank their sentiment towards various statements.

After I designed the survey, the Human Research Ethics Board granted approval to conduct the proposed primary research. The respondent search process entailed the following: I restricted the study to companies maintaining locations in Mainland China and engaging in some elements of international business. For example, the company could be a US company with an office in Beijing or it could be an entirely Chinese enterprise with significant exports to the West. The key factor is the existence of both *Chinese* and *English* language elements in the workplace. To contact company representatives, I used connections developed through my own professional network, the networks of University of Victoria professors, and through contacts established through my Peking University studies.

Respondents’ nature of work varied. A few respondents held executive or ownership positions in the respective company; the remainder maintained middle management and staff positions. Being located in China, most respondents were of Chinese ethnicity with a lesser portion being expatriates. Once potential interviewees were selected, I sent the survey, implied consent form, and study description via email to the individuals. All surveys were standardized and identical. Respondents completed the survey entirely electronically and then sent the results back for collection. Additionally, the survey was administered in English; however, I also translated the survey into Chinese. This version was verified and edited by fellow Peking University students; however, all respondents felt comfortable reading and responding to the English version. Out of fourteen respondents, twelve were native Mandarin speakers and two were native English speakers.

All company and employee names have been changed for the purpose of confidentiality. The majority of companies are represented by a single employee; two companies provided multiple respondents. The survey and results are shown in the appendices. When question numbers are referenced in the analysis, it refers to the third and final section of the survey.

In order to gain context and better understanding of the role of language in international business conducted in China, I also interviewed an expert in the Chinese business and finance field, Dr. Zhu Xiaoshu of the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing (September 2012). In addition, Mr. Frank Lin, General Manager and Chief Technology Officer of ACD Systems, graciously

offered to give an in-depth personal interview regarding language strategies at his international company (November 2012). These experiences added depth to my enquiries beyond that available using a limited number of survey questions.

LANGUAGE STRATEGY: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

A European Commission survey unearthed that nearly half – forty-eight percent – of small- and medium-sized enterprises espouse a formalized language strategy (European Commission, 2006, p. 71); yet, what does a “language strategy” look like? I propose a language strategy constitutes the following:

A formalized or tacit series of policies and practices governing a company’s scope of language use, promotion of communication diversity, and attitude towards linguistic globalization.

In short, a language strategy seeks to achieve efficiency in cross-culture communication and protection from linguistic roadblocks. To clarify, consider the following example of theory in practice: Baest, headquartered in Prague, trains employees in four languages, conducts cultural briefs, organizes linguistic audits, and promotes corporate use of multiple languages. This has led the company’s exports to comprise eighty percent of overall sales (European Commission, 2011a). Such results constitute the products of the overarching language strategy of the firm. One manager I interviewed highlighted the holistic nature of the firm’s language strategy: throughout his or her career, each employee receives support and encouragement to advance language skills in the pursuit of corporate goals.

In Europe, implementing a formalized language strategy appears causally correlated to export success: after a language management strategy was introduced in forty companies, on average three out of four of these companies increased sales turnover by at least sixteen percent (European Commission, 2011b, p. 22). However, cultural and societal conditions differ markedly in China; thus, a targeted approach is needed.

Copious companies interpret “language strategy” as a synonym for “English language strategy”; yet, I emphatically contend that language strategies are not confined to English. Throughout his book, “The Clash of Civilizations...” Huntington (2006) promulgates that with trends in societal development and economic resurgence, English will be less accepted as a ubiquitous language; civilization (and businesses) will demand linguistic diversity. Moreover, leading businesspeople such as Lee Han Shih, executive of a multimedia company, conjecture that Mandarin will overtake English (Park, 2012); in contrast, a groundswell of experts such as Tsedal Neeley (2012) proclaim English to be the preeminent language of the foreseeable future.

Experts such as Neeley give three fundamental reasons for English predominance: first, competitive pressure drives English as the standard, since suppliers and partners have pre-established English policies. Second, the globalization of tasks and resources necessitates English for efficient operations. Third, mergers and acquisitions (M&A) procedures across national boundaries frequently employ English to project a more global image – this proves particularly important for China, as a McKinsey survey of Chinese companies revealed that fifty-five percent place M&A at the centre of their long-term global strategy (Dietz, Orr & Xing, 2008). My study’s data suggest English remains indispensable: 83.3 percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that it is vitally important for team members to be proficient in English. English still trumps Mandarin as the corporate standard due to its “head start” in capitalist systems and also the sheer difficulty of mastering Mandarin. Despite laborious efforts to simplify the writing structure, it still takes many years of diligent study for foreigners to grasp rudimentary writing concepts.

In speaking with Dr. Zhu (2012) of the University of International Business and Economics, I discovered discreet nuances in oral business Mandarin as well. For example, a boss may say, “Ni pang le,” to her subordinate, which indicates that he or she looks healthy and well. However, it translates to, “You have grown fatter.” Furthermore, Dr. Zhu propounds that, culturally, the Chinese convey their wishes and feelings opaquely; oftentimes, paralinguistic features such as tones and volume exclusive to Mandarin deliver the essence of communication. Achieving true fluency is clearly a formidable task.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE: MECHANICAL, CULTURAL, AND POLITICAL FOCI

In their pioneering dissertation on translation within multinational companies (MNCs), Janssens, Lambert and Steyaert (2004) construct an intriguing series of lenses through which to view the role of translators in corporations. I shall adapt this general framework to critically analyse the topic of language strategy decisions of international companies found in China. I shall proceed by characterizing each lens then coalescing research and analysis to construct conclusions. Each lens espouses a unique attitude or perspective regarding language in the workplace.

Mechanical perspective

To begin, the *mechanical* perspective perceives the corporate language strategy as mitigation for linguistic misrepresentations. The astute Chinese manager will realize the inherent danger in multilinguistic environments – misunderstandings can lead to lost business opportunities. One respondent of this study remarked that business language issues “happen often and it’s really a dilemma for us...”

Thus, from a *mechanical* perspective, organizations are inclined to enact streamlined policies such as a single *lingua franca*; in fact, this theory propagates the notion that employing a variety of languages holds no inherent value. Consider, for example, a Chinese gas exporter with seventy-five percent overall sales to the United States. Preserving Chinese language might yield major inefficiencies: they may flounder in translating marketing materials (consider how Pepsi’s “Come Alive with Pepsi” slogan was interpreted as “Bring Your Ancestors Back from the Dead” in China (Ricks, 1999)), struggle in overseas meetings, and despair in projecting a “global” image.

In contrast, one must assess the effect on employees: is a *lingua franca* feasible? Will deep-rooted cultural values be cast aside? In sum, Chinese companies must comprehend the implications of the *mechanical* approach. Overall, as Charles and Marschan-Piekkari (2002) describe, a common language intends to increase efficiency by “overcoming misunderstandings, reducing costs, avoiding time-consuming translations, and creating a sense of belonging and cohesion within the firm” (p. 409). However, my research questions the applicability of this assumption to China: only 16.7 percent of respondents indicated that a single-language company is more efficient than a multi-language company. Perhaps the Chinese notion of efficiency differs from the Western concept in that Chinese may feel efficiency is built through *cultivating harmony* rather than *streamlining operations*.

Cultural perspective

However, efficiency is not the sole consideration in communication; significantly, international organizations must appeal to consumers, partners, and team members on a deeper level. Thus, the *cultural* perspective provides intriguing insight: language is not simply a means to an end. Organizations should seek to develop practices that engender respect, rich diversity, and cultural savvy. For example, the *cultural* perspective incites language strategies incorporating cultural workshops, immersion, and

networked organizations. Key benefits include flexibility attributable to a workforce flourishing in diversity, as well as increased global opportunities arising from linguistic breadth in scope. As Janssens et al. (2004) adeptly express, "...cultural specificity is acknowledged and created" (p. 421).

Political perspective

Lastly, while efficiency and diversity are cornerstones of language policies, a pragmatist perspective also arises: the *political* perspective. Here, organizations perceive and accept the connection between language strategy and power dispersion. Lambert and Van Gorp (1985) propound that any time corporations employ two or more languages, those cultures 1) compete and 2) create new combinations of value systems. To clarify, a shining example of the *political* perspective emerges from the case of a merger between two anonymous companies: one spoke French, the other spoke Flemish. To ease potential strife, the newly formed company selected English as a corporate *lingua franca* – a third, "neutral" tongue. Politically, the strategy should have engendered an even playing field and anti-favoritism; contrastingly, neither the French nor Flemish employees felt respected. With their cultural identities eclipsed, employees exhibited anemic productivity and pervasive listlessness (Janssens et al., 2004).

Bourdieu (1986) describes language competition and hierarchy as key determinants of the power structure – the "symbolic capital" of the international company. In short, symbolic capital governs networks of strength within factions. In fact, the language strategy may even govern who climbs the corporate ladder – even who simply *participates* in company functions. Gudykunst's (1988) illuminating study of a Japanese firm produced evidence indicating that American supervisors judged young, English-competent Japanese managers to be more ambitious and intelligent than older non-English-speaking Japanese managers. To extract insight, I propose these data support the notion that the language strategy, politically, determines the values and voices projected by a company. Moreover, this segues into a critical question: how can organizations develop language strategies that incite efficiency, respect employees, and balance power and value systems?

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The following analysis carefully dissects the intriguing insights uncovered by this study's survey of Chinese professionals.

The current nature of language strategies

As a foundation, we must first describe this study's findings regarding the prevalence of language strategies. Of professionals interviewed, 91.7 percent indicated working in an environment with a "single corporate language or one-language policy." Thus, the majority of companies *have* addressed language obstacles by executing the use of one language. However, the mere existence of policy emphatically does not guarantee its effectiveness. Only two-thirds of respondents felt their company had a clearly expressed, formal language policy. In effect, many companies struggle to maintain effective language policies. Furthermore, the data indicate that Chinese employees are highly supportive of company policies: *one hundred percent* of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to feeling comfortable adhering to corporate language policies and strategies. Corporate strategists should therefore focus energy on policy development over policy enforcement.

Simply put, the survey results indicate that English is vital. The mean response to the question, "It is vitally important for team members to be proficient in English," was 4.17/5. It appears that the permeating influence of the West necessitates fluency in English, even thousands of miles away in

China. From the *political perspective*, this statistic suggests the supremacy of English. Through the *mechanical lens*, we see that managers recognize that “fighting against the current” is not feasible. Being rational, profit-seeking free-market participants, companies pursue English competencies due to the opportunistic nature of the marketplace. Intriguingly, the assumption of “free-market participants” is removed in the case of Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Consider Sinopec: this gargantuan Chinese company is state-run and operates in what is called a “parallel leadership system.” Sinopec experiences the impacts of both the *market economy* and the *planned economy*. None of the survey respondents were employed at an SOE, preventing any analysis of this unique business model. A topic of further research would be the government’s influence on language strategies in SOEs, as centrally planned enterprises may hesitate to adopt conspicuous Western elements at the expense of Chinese influence.

Next, we must lay the groundwork by outlining the core language issues facing organizations.

Issue analysis

As described by a credit relations manager:

There are 20 percent foreigners in [our] company. We can’t communicate very efficiently with those people because of language barriers. Sometimes we’re joking in local language, but it’s not funny enough after translating into English which cause[s] lots of embarrass[ment].

Thus, the issues are not confined to *business development*. In fact, corporate culture can suffer at the hands of linguistic misunderstanding. From a *mechanical* perspective, difficulties persist. A segment manager illustrated, “[Language issues] are really a dilemma for us to handle business. Our service engineer’s foreign language capability is limited whilst the operation manuals are all in English.” A senior healthcare management director expressed that, despite being taught English since first grade, Chinese still struggle with English and it is difficult to fill specialist positions involving English.

Another credit manager focused on the issues in business development: “All our Chinese customers require [a] Chinese version of [the] contract, but ou[r] system is in English and [so] is the contract.” To dissect, respondents focused on the *mechanical* and *cultural* issues in language policies as described by Janssens et al.’s (2004) theoretical framework. From inefficient contract infrastructures to punch line mishaps, companies struggle to integrate English and Mandarin language elements. In my interview with Frank Lin (2012), Mr. Lin expressed that the biggest issues arise when non-native speakers lack the confidence to speak up in a foreign tongue, even one-on-one. Strategies must aim at encouraging making mistakes and improving.

Earley and Mosakowski’s (2000) study of multinational teams bolsters the evidence supporting the conclusion that insufficient language strategies may uproot the organization. The study formed multinational teams ranging from low to high heterogeneity by mixing East Asians and Americans. In analysis, moderate heterogeneity groups with minimal time spent developing communication strategies achieved the lowest performance ratings; these group exhibited “bifurcation” and nonparticipation due to linguistic difficulties. Contrastingly, groups with high heterogeneity who did develop language strategies drastically outperformed the competition and exhibited higher satisfaction levels (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000, p. 32). To garner insight, the data suggest that by combining group diversity with formal language strategies, teams can outperform the competition.

Efficiency and positivity are two chief elements in corporate environments. When asked if a single-language policy environment is more *efficient* than a diverse-language context, interviewees responded

with a 2.67/5 mean, indicating no efficiency gains from a *lingua franca* strategy. Employees' enjoyment of work life cannot be overemphasized. Accordingly, companies should note that participants, when asked if a single-language environment is more *enjoyable* than a diverse-language context, indicated a 2.42/5 mean, which suggests employees seek to work for companies that support multiple languages. The insight to draw from these statistics is that Chinese concepts of efficiency may not align with Western notions of communications streamlining. Furthermore, Chinese professionals place a premium on companies that can integrate and cultivate diversity in language. This insight refutes the *mechanical* assertion that there is no inherent value in language diversity. Let us now turn to what companies are *currently* doing.

Corporate initiative analysis

Despite daunting challenges, companies are striving for solutions. The survey data suggest that two types of corporate language solution perspectives exist: first, some companies seek to solve the problem via what I shall call the "*ex ante*" strategy. These companies simply only hire those with significant English fluency, thus avoiding language diversity outright. A program director noted, "Some managers will only recruit those who reached their expectation on English speaking." The downside of this strategy is the gradual erosion of Chinese influence; if all employees are told Mandarin is less valued, this will deter Chinese talent and demean Chinese culture. Conversely, "*ex ante*" ensures efficient communication through evading the burden of duplicating materials and decreases training costs by avoiding investments in language training.

The second strategy is the "*foster*" strategy. This approach encourages a breadth of cultures and languages while developing English proficiency as a central focus. One respondent illustrated, "(Company name) hires [an] outside professional English training organization to train us three times a week. We are able to apply [to] this course freely once [we] get approval from [the] direct manager."

One may leap to the conclusion that the "*foster*" strategy is superior, as it constructs a competitive advantage in diversity and flexibility; however, I suggest using increased rigor. For massive companies with sizeable training budgets, the "*foster*" strategy proves preferable because global talent can be integrated and training can be effective. In contrast, smaller companies with budgetary constraints may reap rewards of efficiency in implementing the "*ex ante*" strategy. Moreover, managers must address industry idiosyncrasies. For example, a partner at a global law firm indicated a dearth of English-speaking Chinese lawyers; the solution was to send Chinese from America overseas to the Chinese offices. As another example, Lin (2012) proposes that, for the software industry, it becomes less vital to emphasize Chinese because all software programming is based on English.

Lin (2012) extracted a keen insight: by drawing talent from across the globe, companies grasp elements of those cultures and can utilize these inroads to compete more effectively on a *cultural* level, not just a *language* or *economic* level.

In addition to the aforementioned strategies, the survey highlights peer support as a crucial link in the language chain. In fact, 83.3 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that "support from more fluent speakers is key" to success. A junior trader noted that co-workers "review the reports or meeting recaps for others and give them their [personal] ideas for improvements, or try to provide more exercise opportunit[ies]." Interviews suggest that company culture is the element that truly enforces and sustains language strategies, not executive edicts – even in the palpably hierarchical culture of China. The following view from a trading manager elucidates:

Language communication should be based on trustable culture. Company culture is of prime importance.

Respondents positively noted corporate efforts such as foreign managers slowing speech, holding face-to-face meetings to clarify issues, the provision of translators in meetings, subsidised or free language training, e-learning, and overseas assignments. However, these efforts cannot prevent coinciding *political* issues from arising.

Political implications

Fascinatingly, the political power balance swings like a pendulum with the thrusts of language strategies. While two-thirds of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that increased English use would benefit the company, one-third of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that decreased use of Chinese would harm the company (with fifty percent indicating neutrality). Paradoxically, companies wish to increase the prevalence of English without decreasing Chinese usage. Is such a feat possible? From a *political* perspective, power is a limited resource. Each company distributes power according to prescribed goals and structures; thus, emphasizing English inevitably suppresses Chinese.

Accordingly, employees feel major impacts of language strategies in everyday work life. This study reveals that seventy-five percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that those with English proficiency receive priority to upper-level jobs and opportunities. Implications include a self-enforcing cycle: if English-speakers primarily reach the top ranks, or in the case of monopoly, policies will further thrust English into valued status. Moreover, respondents indicated a 3.42/5 mean score on question ten, meaning that they generally feel that important Chinese values are lost or overlooked due to the emphasis on English. One may conjecture this implies that Chinese elements found in corporate structure, relationships, long-term orientation, and so on will gradually recede. In contrast, this may simply reflect a shift in how Chinese values will be manifested in the future – through the veil of another tongue.

Du-Babcock (1999) extracted corroborating evidence specific to China: in Hong Kong, significant peer pressure deters individuals from learning English in their younger years. Yet, as one's career progresses, English becomes indispensable. Furthermore, the study uncovered a central consideration to language strategies. Bilingual groups were instructed to conduct some meetings in Chinese, and some in English. Du-Babcock uncovered two distinct communication patterns: when speaking Cantonese, participants used a circular, interactive behavior pattern; when speaking English, the same group exhibited a linear, directive communication pattern. Du-Babcock concluded that the Chinese adopted Western thought patterns when speaking English and retained Chinese thought patterns when speaking Cantonese. Further, one can surmise that the Chinese "collectivist" tendency (Hofstede, 2010) engendered reluctance to spontaneity when speaking English.

My research supports this assertion. In an in-depth conversation with Dr. Zhu (2012), Zhu noted that Chinese protect "face" by avoiding spontaneity and outspokenness in using foreign languages. If a misstatement were to occur, it would bring great shame in the group. The implications cannot be overstated. *I propose that, by manipulating core language strategies, companies may even dictate the prominent values and thought patterns nurtured.* To clarify, if the hypothetical Chinese multinational GlobeTron wishes to penetrate the Canadian market, then employing a language policy that fosters Western thought patterns might inspire exemplary entry success; contrastingly, it might uproot the very culture, pride, communication pattern, and image undergirding the organization.

To elucidate, Dr. Zhu (2012) imparted upon me the four cultural roots of Chinese communication: 1) *Guanxi* – one’s relationships and networks used to “grease the wheels”; 2) *Mianzi* – preserving one’s own face and the face of others, especially the boss; 3) *Renqing* – reciprocity and favor-returning; and 4) *Qianxu* – the state of modesty. The implication of these roots is that, without the Mandarin context in communication, these fundamental concepts will likely be thrust aside in favor of Western methods. That is to say, the language itself influences the cultural practice, as these concepts cannot be separated from linguistic connotations.

My study suggests that those who are less fluent in the corporate language are less able to participate in communications and decision-making, as question 12 received a mean score of 3.75/5. To analyse, even employees with theoretically equal lateral power in the hierarchy do not receive equal *effective power*. To clarify, two individuals with equal work history, status, and creativity may wield markedly different influence in the organization solely on the basis of fluency. Therefore, as the *political* perspective asserts, language strategies are conduits for conferring power on specific team members.

DRAWING INSIGHTS: WHAT INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES IN CHINA MUST DO TO CRAFT A SUCCESSFUL LANGUAGE STRATEGY.

Figure 1: The four E’s of essential strategy (Bildfell, 2012)



After dissecting the data and analyzing various strategic approaches, we can now draw insight by condensing the preceding discoveries into a comprehensive framework for developing language

strategies. The framework developed is a product of empirical evidence – successful strategic steps as measured by the standards of survey and interview participants.

Essential strategy

Before embarking on a language strategy, the company must conduct external and internal analysis of language use and organizational goals. My research suggests that many companies do not create a sufficiently strong link between organizational goals and language strategies; the two are not mutually exclusive, rather, company goals are supported and contingent on language. Significantly, successful companies forecast market strategies and trends five, ten, even twenty years down the road. Similarly, companies must discern whether the current linguistic challenge is characterized as short or long term and plan accordingly. For example, if an American purchaser wants a quote for a small order from a Beijing-headquartered manufacturer, such minute challenges may not necessitate a full-scale language policy change. In contrast, a series of new major foreign clients or increased global penetration may compel language strategies.

The European Commission's study (2006, p. 54) of 200 exporting enterprises illustrates remunerations of essential strategy development:

Table 1: Language strategy elements vis-à-vis export increases

Language Measure	Percentage Increase in Exports as a Share of Overall Survey Sales
Hiring staff with language skills	16.6
Establishing language strategy in advance	13.5
Employing native speakers	7
Using professional translators	7.4

To clarify, these figures indicate that, in comparison to those who do not, companies that do adopt a given measure increase their market share of exports by the corresponding percentage. The insight to be drawn is that by structuring Chinese multinationals around a formal, comprehensive language strategy, one can outperform the competition in exports.

This chief acuity opens up the remaining four E's to guide the corporation.

Evaluation

The incisive company first grasps its current state before plunging forth. A key step in evaluation is conducting a *language audit*: Chinese companies must observe *in situ* – examining boardrooms, memos, water cooler chats (or perhaps more accurately, teapot chats), and so on. Sørensen's (2005) landmark study of seventy Danish companies revealed that essentially every document was produced in the local language in addition to the corporate-standard English (p. 410). My study supports this finding, as numerous managers cited the efforts taken to duplicate materials in both English and Chinese. One credit manager noted her company discovered it even had to “develop a Chinese version of [the] trading system.” In the example given by the respondent highlighting the misunderstanding of jokes shared in Chinese, such intricacies can be difficult to uncover; hence, the language audit serves a vital purpose. Subsequently, this can lead to efforts to promote inclusion.

Clearly, the simple formalization of a language policy is meaningless without understanding the minutiae of the company's language use. The implications of haphazard policies are extensive: efficiency detriments, cultural upheaval, and image confusion. Furthermore, my research demonstrates that companies are wise to survey employees regarding fluency, comfort with linguistic changes, and desired support factors. Thus, I implore Chinese companies to look within before stepping out.

Empathy

Neeley, Hinds and Cramton's (2012) insightful research on global collaboration within companies revealed a cyclical nature: non-native speakers of the *lingua franca*, whether consciously or unconsciously, frequently reverted to their mother tongue – referred to as “code-switching” – or even skipped meetings held in the foreign language. This practice placated inner-anxiety regarding job status and communication frustration; however, native speakers balked at such behaviors and it eventually “...erod[ed] their collaborative spirit” (Neeley et al., p. 239). Inclusion, not exclusion, is key. Empathy describes the concept of understanding and supporting co-workers' efforts to progress in language comprehension.

My research supports this finding, as humour was cited as a tactic that excluded those who could not speak the mother tongue. Moreover, respondents gave a mean score of 3.75/5 when asked if non-native speakers are less able to participate in decision-making and communications, which implies some exclusion. Lin (2012) describes that Chinese may “basically give up” in meetings conducted in English. An astute counter-strategy is to assign a Chinese project manager – this manager will have a strong command of English and, once meetings finish, can clarify goals and discuss details with other Chinese staff. However, Lin notes, this inevitably slows the process down; the key is finding a balance between *efficiency* and *effectiveness*.

Thereupon, companies can take specific strategic measures to cultivate collaboration within the workplace. My research suggests that non-native speakers should be encouraged to participate; moreover, native speakers must pave that path. From a co-worker perspective, fluent speakers demonstrate support by slowing their speech, repeating what has been expressed, and verifying understanding. From a managerial perspective, my research discoveries and those of experts such as Neeley (2012), and Charles and Marschan-Piekkari (2002) support actions such as organizing language lunches, recruiting linguistically gifted employees, and providing training in an effort to build empathy. One trading manager provided an excellent example of empathy amongst co-workers who mutually review reports, clarify meeting recaps, and offer language suggestions to one another.

Enrichment

My research demonstrates that one of the most arduous challenges lies in the inevitable discrepancies in fluency. Neeley (2012) contends that, to progress from beginner to advanced communicator, employees must master about 3,500 words. Moreover, each mind develops uniquely; one method will not cultivate fluency across an entire company. Thus, a multifaceted approach proves essential. My research suggests that successful organizations enrich the learning experience of team members by offering immersion, university courses, and language partners, all tailored to goals and budgetary constraints.

One respondent illustrated a strong system in which managers lead by teaching:

The manager may need to review the reports, meeting notes, even emails and ask the employee to revise if there is something incorrectly or inappropriate[ly] expressed. By doing this, the employee could improve the English skills.

However, managers cannot carry the entire burden of language enrichment. Another manager highlighted the merits of hiring an outside agency to teach English in the company three times per week. In addition, e-learning is highly effective, as respondents noted its flexibility and tailoring to specific learners.

Benne and Sheats (1948) suggest implementing native speaker “group maintenance roles.” These individuals can ask direct questions of less confident speakers and respectfully provide ample time to respond. These “gatekeepers” can also help by nodding emphatically, displaying positive body language, slowing speech, and so on. Lin (2012) professes that it is natural and beneficial for groups to gravitate towards the most fluent speakers to act as liaisons, and strategies should aim at placing these individuals as focal points of meetings.

My research suggests that enrichment of *oral* language will not suffice. A major element surfaces: body language. Strategies must be *comprehensive* in that employees understand the *modus operandi* for both oral and physical communication. To elucidate, Dr. Zhu (2012) highlighted that Westerners draw their finger towards themselves to summon somebody near; when this motion is used in China, it indicates a man’s desire to court a female. Thus, companies clearly must establish if Western-context body language shall be the norm as well. Training, open forums, and cultural immersion can all bolster these efforts.

Execution

The eventual enactment of a language policy proves cumbersome, and data support this assertion: when 164 employees at a French firm were interviewed two years after a slapdash formal English-only language policy took effect, nearly seventy percent of employees experienced frustration. Moreover, forty-two percent of low-fluency speakers expressed advancement concerns (Neeley, 2012, p.120). I argue that by haphazardly enacting policies without first analyzing the three key perspectives, corporations simply cannot execute their goals.

For strategies in China to “bite,” steadfast advocating and role modeling from executives is vital. From my conversations with professors and business people, the notion of respect to superiors encompasses Chinese culture – the prevalence of Confucianism provides an explanation for this phenomenon. Moreover, one of Hofstede’s (2010) five cultural dimensions – power distance – illuminates this concept: China scores an astounding 80 on power distance, indicating that subordinates unquestioningly accept superiors’ mandates and unequal power distribution is accepted. To clarify, Hofstede’s landmark study examined employee value scores from over 70 countries, then quantitatively positioned each country’s dimensions comparatively. Based on this unique perspective, I propound that by holding executives responsible for modeling and even touting the policy, Chinese companies can execute comprehensive language strategies. Employees are highly supportive of corporate initiatives – as previously noted, when asked if interviewees feel comfortable conforming to and supporting language strategies, one hundred percent agreed or strongly agreed. If the executives are positive and transparent in policies, employees will support.

CONCLUSION

Concurrent with China's prodigious rise in international business, language management has risen to the top of organizations' priorities. In fact, Dietz et al. (2008) interviewed executives at thirty-nine Chinese companies – nearly eighty percent proclaimed globalization as a strategic priority (p. 1). These ambitions require a language strategy.

It is evident that managers in China have copious issues to consider. The *mechanical*, *cultural*, and *political* perspectives embody lenses through which to approach these challenges. Companies in China have evidently adopted simple strategies such as the *ex-ante* strategy or the *foster* strategy, but these policies can be greatly enriched. Built upon contextual analysis and interviews with Chinese professionals, I offer the *Four E's of Essential Strategy* framework to provide managers and strategists with valuable insight regarding the formulation, adaptation, and execution of language strategies. As economic, cultural, and societal paradigms shift with the waves of international exchange, managers should seek to respect and understand one of the most remarkable forces of our world: language.

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APPENDIX 1: Survey form

Language Strategies Survey:

Name: _____

Company: _____

Position: _____

(Please note: your personal information will remain anonymous in the results)

Interview Questions:

Please type your response to the following three questions in the blank spaces provided. Thank you.

1. Has the company experienced notable difficulties arising from language barriers, cultural differences, or language policy failure? Please explain:
2. What specific actions do managers and executives take to ensure that corporate language policies and strategies are carried out effectively? Furthermore, what resources are provided to employees to develop these skills? Please explain:
3. Are team members supportive of one another in pursuing language proficiency? If so, how is this support manifested? Please explain:

Survey Questions:

True or False

Please type "True" or "False" below each statement. Thank you.

1. The company has a single-language usage policy or a "common corporate language."
2. The company primarily uses English and Chinese in communication.
3. The company is a multinational company.
4. The company sells goods overseas.

Scaled Responses

(Please indicate your feelings towards each statement with 1 meaning “Strongly Disagree” and 5 meaning “Strongly Agree.”)

- 1 - *Strongly Disagree,*
- 2 - *Disagree,*
- 3 - *Neither agree nor disagree,*
- 4- *Agree,*
- 5- *Strongly agree*

For example, if you feel that English is very important in your company, you would write “4” or “5” below Questions #1.

1. It is vitally important to the company for team members to be highly proficient in English.

Answer (1-5):

2. The company has a formalized, clearly expressed strategy about which language to use in communications.

Answer (1-5):

3. I feel comfortable adhering to corporate language policies and strategies.

Answer (1-5):

4. I feel increased use of English will benefit the company.

Answer (1-5):

5. I feel decreased use of Chinese will hurt the company.

Answer (1-5):

6. I feel a corporate environment demanding the use of a single language is more efficient than one that emphasizes diversity in language usage.

Answer (1-5):

7. I feel a corporate environment demanding the use of a single language is more enjoyable than one that emphasizes diversity in language usage.

Answer (1-5):

8. I feel that by emphasizing English, the company will attract more business internationally.

Answer (1-5):

9. I feel that those with proficiency in English language are given priority to upper-level jobs and opportunities.

Answer (1-5):

10. I feel that important Chinese values are lost or overlooked due to the emphasis on English.

Answer (1-5):

11. I feel that support from more fluent speakers is key to language learning success.

Answer (1-5):

12. I feel those who are less fluent in our spoken languages are less able to participate in decision making or communications.

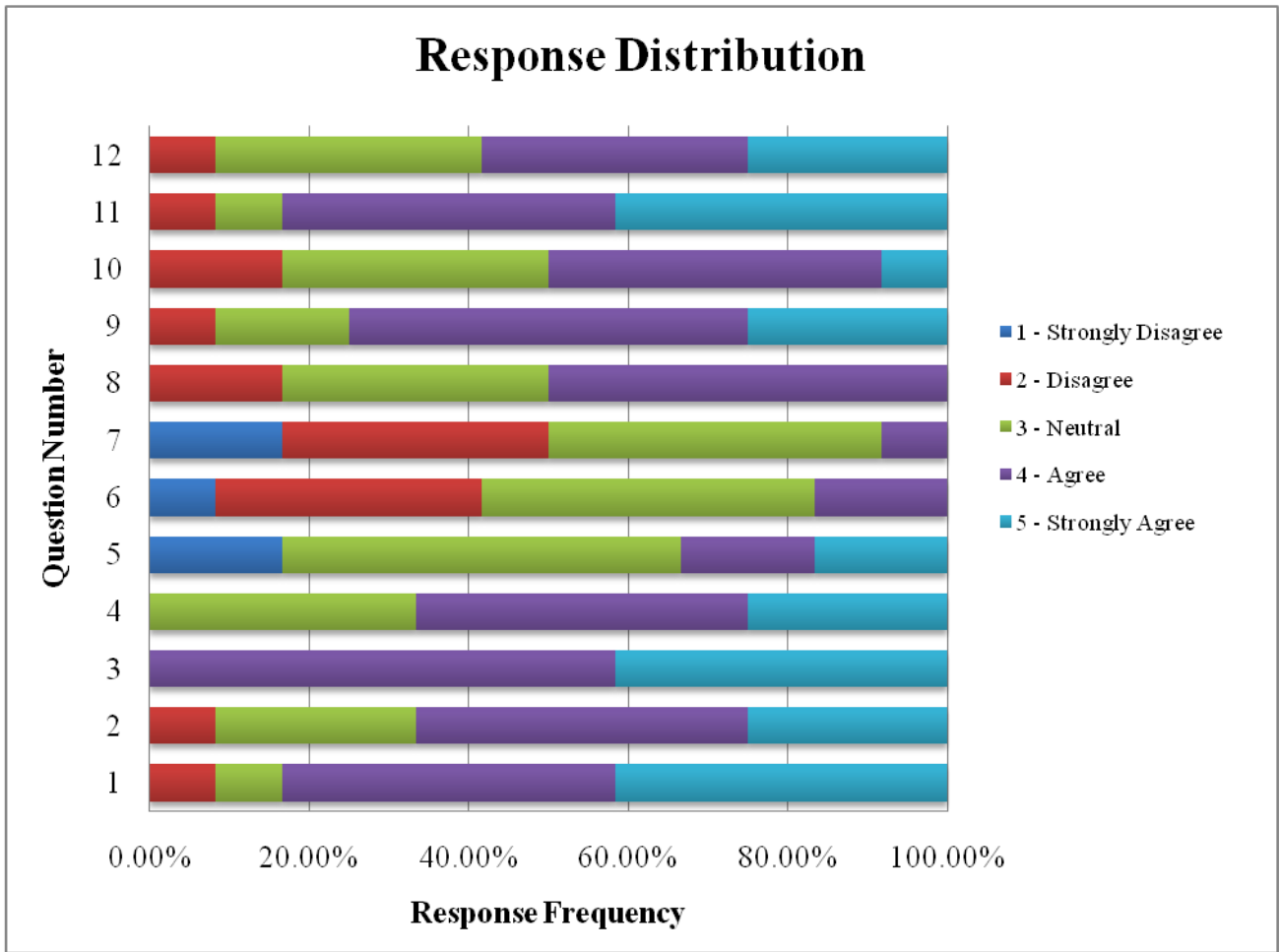
Answer (1-5):

Thank you for your participation. After you complete this survey, please e-mail your completed survey to:

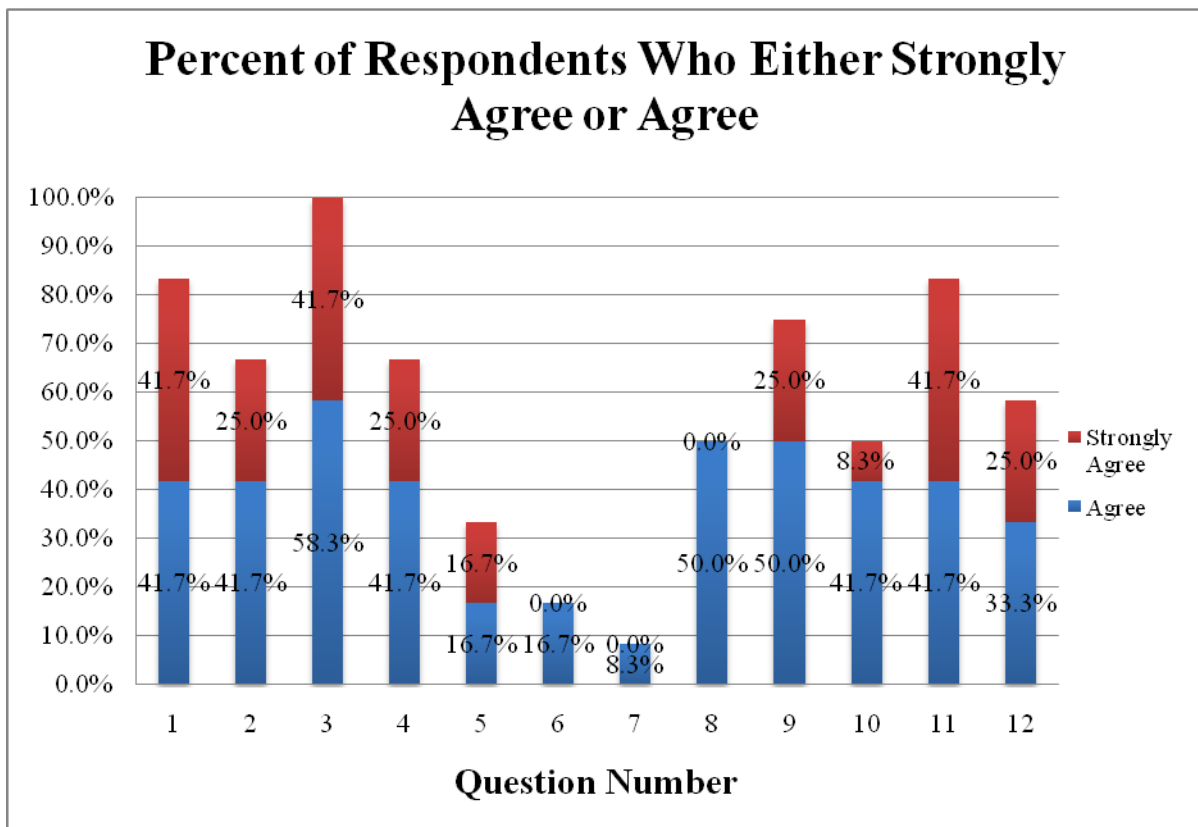
connorb@uvic.ca

Thank you,
Connor Bildfell
Peking University and the University of Victoria

APPENDIX 2: Response distribution



APPENDIX 3: Agree or strongly agree response distribution



APPENDIX 4: Mean response

