

English, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese? Code choice and Austrian export

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This article deals with how *export oriented Austrian companies effect code choice in their business relationships with customers from Romance language speaking countries*. The focus lies on the most widespread Romance languages, therefore on French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese speaking customers.

The question of code choice in export should be raised at different levels: an economic macro-, an industry-related and corporate meso- and an individual micro-level. The latter stands for the interaction between dispositional, motivational and situational factors that can be found in the context of business relationships. This article tries to describe these levels as well as to show their close interdependence within an integrated model. The model is illustrated by three case studies of export oriented Austrian companies from three different sectors of industry. In this way, we aim to show how the different factors of code choice interact and intertwine to create always new and different, but rational and meaningful business and language constellations.

Keywords: business; code choice; export; foreign language use; Romance languages

In which language do buyer and seller communicate? A linguistic and a managerial problem

What are the factors and patterns that determine code choice¹ in Austrian export to Romance language countries? This question, which lies exactly at the crossroads of sociolinguistics and business administration, has given rise to quantitative surveys until now; here, it is first dealt with on the basis of a *qualitative case study method*.

We shall present a *model of business language choices*, may they be on a company language policy or on an individual employee's level, between the three basic options of adaptation, non-adaptation and standardisation (Vandermeeren, 1998, p. 21, see below), a model meant to make business language choices accountable and to a certain extent predictable. Our aim is to determine *the contexts and factors* that are likely to act in favour of one or the other of the three mentioned options, or, more precisely, which determine *the mix* that a given company will select and the measures they will implement to address their language issues. I.e. the model gives a framework within which to make sense of each specific code choice behaviour of a company and of an individual inside a company. We will show that the code choice factors in

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business occur on three different levels, i.e. *a macro-, a meso- and a micro-level* (see Section 4).

This will be done on the basis of *three detailed case studies*, of three Austrian companies exporting to Romance language markets, from three different sectors of industry, which were investigated with a series of oral *qualitative interviews* conducted in Upper Austria in 2003 (for more details, see Section 3, Figure 3).² The case studies have served to elaborate our model, and they are used in this contribution to illustrate the various factors of *corporate and individual language choices in business contexts* as well as their interaction in a variety of authentic situations.

To start on a very concrete, case-to-case level, let us first consider the authentic example of an Austrian sales manager meeting a Portuguese colleague on behalf of a transaction about fire engines. The minutiae of this deal lead to a particularly interesting question: namely, *in which language do they communicate?* Moreover, *why do they communicate in a certain language?* Our scientific interest concentrates not only on code choice itself but, more importantly, on the factors underlying the decision to opt for a certain code. Thus, how can a certain code choice be explained or even predicted? *Which factors exert a decisive influence on code choice, what is their relative weight, and how do they interact?* In our example, English, German, Portuguese, but also Spanish or a combination of several of these languages may be possible code choices. The code choice will be decided, firstly, on the basis of the language skills of both partners. Yet, motivational factors such as laziness, compliance and ambition, or language practice, may also play an important role in making this decision. So much for the sociolinguistic micro-perspective.

However, the two communication and business partners together with the modest single deal they reach have to be seen in a much broader context of language politics and economics. *Which language competences and training possibilities do the education systems of the two countries at stake offer?* Is it likely, e.g., that an Austrian business person speaks Portuguese? This depends, at least in the long run, on the strength of the relevant markets and on the importance of bilateral trade relations: in this sense, language policy can be seen as a by-product of international business relations.

Switching thus from the perspective of sociolinguistics to that of business administration, one can ask *how important is the relevant market* for the industry or the single company concerned? Are employees with the required language skills systematically recruited? Or did the company finance a Portuguese language course for the Austrian sales manager? Maybe his Portuguese colleague has a very good command of German? The last option is not very likely, as linguistic adaptation is usually demanded of the seller and not of the buyer. This may be explained by economic factors such as competition and the particular power balance on buyers' markets.

Among the questions that may be attributed to the academic field of business administration, there is that of a conscious and explicit *corporate language strategy* – even if it is “English only”. The extreme opposite of the latter would imply the linguistic adaptation to all customers, something which may prove too costly in the case of Bantu, Malay or different Native Indian languages, except in those cases where the exotic market is of great importance for the company.

Chinese (Mandarin) is still considered to be an exotic language, though it will probably play an important role in Austrian schools and universities in future decades, given the impressive economic rise of the People's Republic of China.

As far as the most widespread Romance languages French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese are concerned, an adaptation policy may be an interesting option, provided the company follows an explicit and systematic language strategy in order to tackle language barriers. The alternative would be to leave the language problem to the individual language policy of each employee.

Language strategies thus exist at different levels: at the level of the company, at the level of the employee and finally at the level of a single text or conversational episode.

- *Level of the company*: in which language are brochures for customers, in which languages is the internet homepage of the company available?
- *Level of the employee*: which language strategy does a given salesman follow with customers of a certain language area?
- *Level of a single text or conversational episode*: in which language does one speak with a specific Romance language speaking business partner in a specific situation? (e.g. a specific negotiation, a conversation on the telephone, a letter or an e-mail)

Additionally, or also as an alternative (to a) language strategy, the company's *corporate structure and the way it organises its export department and/or its distribution channels* prove to be of great importance. In fact, it is not even sure that our Austrian sales manager and his Portuguese colleague do speak directly to each other. And if they do so, it may be in the presence of a third person, a Portuguese sales agent or an employee of the Portuguese subsidiary of the Austrian company. This person, of course, also acts as linguistic intermediary, which makes the possibilities of code choice even more interesting and varied.

The question of code choice in export can thus be raised at different levels. This article tries to illustrate these levels and their interdependence by constructing an integrated model. This model is illustrated by three case studies of export oriented Austrian companies in three different sectors of industry. In this way, one can show that different factors of code choice always bring about new and different solutions appropriate to the needs of the specific constellation.

Why study code choice in the areas of export to Romance language speaking countries? Barriers and chances

This article deals with *code choice in export oriented Austrian companies with customers in Romance language speaking countries*. The focus lies on the most widespread Romance languages, i.e., French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese speaking customers.

This may be explained by the Romance background of its authors. Nevertheless, the question of code choice in export operations to Romance language speaking countries is also of great interest because of objective considerations: with Romance languages, linguistic adaptation is definitely neither trivial (cf. English) nor Utopian (cf. Mongolian). In this respect, one needs to consider:

- First, the *great importance of Romance language speaking countries for the Austrian export* (see Figure 1),

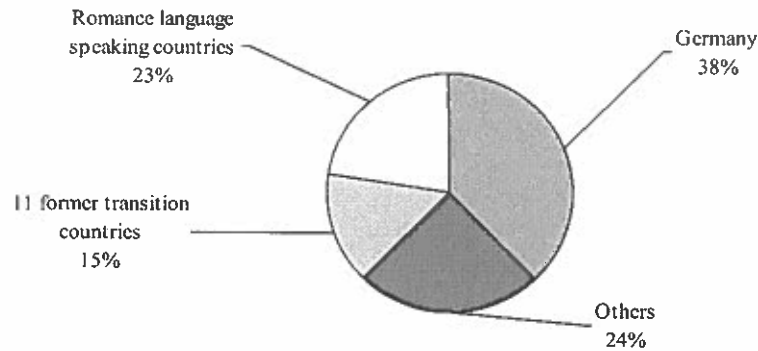


Figure 1. The importance of various country groups for the Austrian export industry (Year 2002 from Statistik Austria, quoted in Wirtschaftskammer, 2003a, and own calculations).

- second, the *language barriers* that seem to be an inevitable drawback because of the lower than average level of foreign language skills in Romance language speaking countries (see Figures 5a–h), and
- third, the *chances offered* by the higher level of language skills shown by Austrians in Romance languages and the related range of code choice options at their disposal in business relationships with Romance language speaking customers (see Figures 5a–h).

Figure 1 illustrates the total importance of the European³ Romance language speaking countries for the Austrian export sector. It shows that Romance language speaking countries⁴ rank second with a share of 23%, despite the existing language barriers.

Of particular interest might be a comparison between Austria's neighbouring countries Germany and Italy. In terms of GDP and imports, Germany's figures are only twice as large as Italy's. Nevertheless, Austria's exports to Germany outdo those to Italy at a four to one rate. Moreover, if one considers that 10% of Austrian exports to Italy sell in the German language speaking area of Southern Tyrol, one may conclude that language is a main business factor in export operations. *So, one may assume that language barriers play a key role in deciding whether the potential of a foreign market is taken into account or not.*

How to explore code choice behaviour? Case studies and a qualitative approach

This study develops a *model* which shows the *relevant factors for code choice* in specific situations and their different interaction patterns. This model is illustrated by three case studies of export oriented Austrian companies. *Qualitative interviews* were conducted with those salesmen who had regular contact with Romance language speaking customers.

This *qualitative approach* distinguishes this study fundamentally from former, more quantitative studies about business language use and language needs,⁵ among which we shall mention especially: Hagen (1999a)⁶; Minkkinen and Reuter (2001); Reuter (2003); Vandermeeren (1998), as well as four MA Theses from the Department of Romance languages at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration (Daublebsky, 2000; Kubista-Nugent, 1996; Rheindt, 1997; Seeböck, 1999).⁷ Very recently, Archan and Dornmayr (2006) conducted such a study based on the Austrian market. And, the collective work by Lavric e.a. (forthcoming)

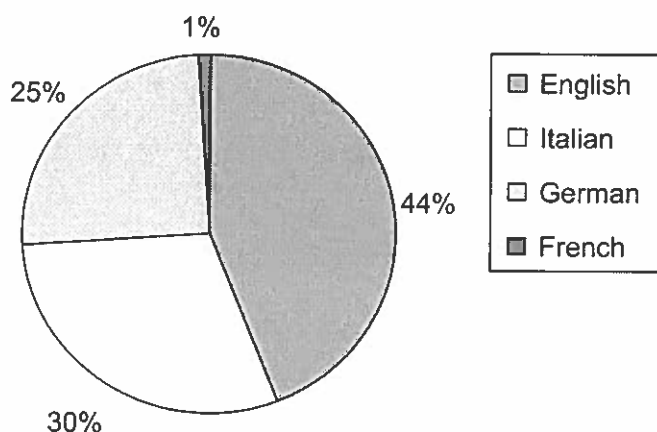


Figure 2. Code choice with Italian business partners (from Kubista-Nugent, 1996, p. 64).

contains a series of contributions about language needs and language choices in business (Bäck, Harder, Kleinberger, Lavric, Mrázová, Schweiger), of which Schweiger is particularly interesting, as she studied (by questionnaire) the need for Tcheque and Slovakian language competences in an Austrian border region.

One should quote here a typical result of such quantitative approaches: Figure 2 forms part of Kubista-Nugent's MA Thesis on code choice practices of Viennese companies with their Italian business partners:

In order to interpret these results, one needs to explain the main concepts. In code choice (by companies), *three main strategies* may be distinguished (see Vandermeeren, 1998, p. 21):

- *Adaptation* stands for the choice of the language of one's business partner – in our context the mother tongue of the Romance language speaking customer (in this case Italian).
- *Non-adaptation* means the choice of one's own mother tongue, in this case German.
- *Standardisation* means the choice of a third language, i.e. of a lingua franca. In international business relationships, English is undoubtedly the most widespread lingua franca. In an Austrian / Romance language speaking context, however, other Romance languages (French) may also serve as lingua franca; in fact, according to Kubista-Nugent (1996) English dominates in the communication with Italian speaking customers, but French is also present to a small extent.
- Figure 2, then, tells us that 30% of the companies follow an adaptation strategy (code choice Italian), 25% a non-adaptation strategy (code choice German) and 45% a standardisation strategy (44% English, 1% French).

However, such quantitative results are unsatisfactory in order to explain code choice. Thus, the question underlying all these figures in a specific situation cannot be answered: *what stands behind these figures?* Why does a specific employee of a specific company use a specific language in a specific situation? Why is one specific code choice behaviour more common than another? How can the three basic alternatives be explained, and how are they evaluated in each specific situation?

	Company A	Company B	Company C
Products	Fire-fighting vehicles	Packaging material	Wooden floors
Main Romance language speaking export markets	Spain Latin America Maghreb countries	France Italy	Italy France Spain
Interview partner	- Sales manager (French speaking markets) - Deputy sales manager (Southern Europe, Spanish and Portuguese speaking markets) - Personnel manager	- CEO - Head of Human Resources - Key account manager (responsible for European key accounts)	- CEO - Sales manager (Spanish speaking markets) - Salesmen for France and Spain

Figure 3. Overview of the companies in the case studies.

For the purpose of this study, socio-linguistic code choice theories were used, and actual behaviour and its motivations were examined with the help of detailed qualitative interviews. These steps were needed in order to support the *qualitative focus* of this study. The results helped to construct the model of code choice which is described in Section 4.

As for the *case studies*, the identity of the three selected companies, for obvious reasons, cannot be revealed. All three companies are relatively important Austrian middle-sized companies with a strong focus on international markets (at least 75% of their turnover). The language policies and choices were investigated through a series of oral qualitative interviews conducted in Upper Austria in 2003 (in fact, the interviewees had previously received a short questionnaire (Figure 3)).

Romance language speaking markets are of great importance for all three companies: for company A, which focuses on the Spanish and Latin American markets; for company B, which holds a strong market position in France, and for company C, which concentrates especially on the European markets. Italy is the most important non-German speaking market for company C, which is quite typical for an Austrian company in the timber industry.

Which factors determine code choice? A model with examples

This model represents the factors influencing code choice in terms of hierarchy and interaction (as well as feedback effects) and offers a framework within which to explain each specific code choice behaviour. Each single code choice responds to a specific constellation of the described factors, and their interaction will be illustrated by examples from the qualitative case studies.

The model tries to reconstruct the decision-making process that underlies each single code choice in a meaningful way. Moreover, the model should also be able to predict future code choice behaviour, whenever information is accurate and precise. Thus, the model represents all the factors one should know in order to be able to predict code choices in export in a special context of interaction.

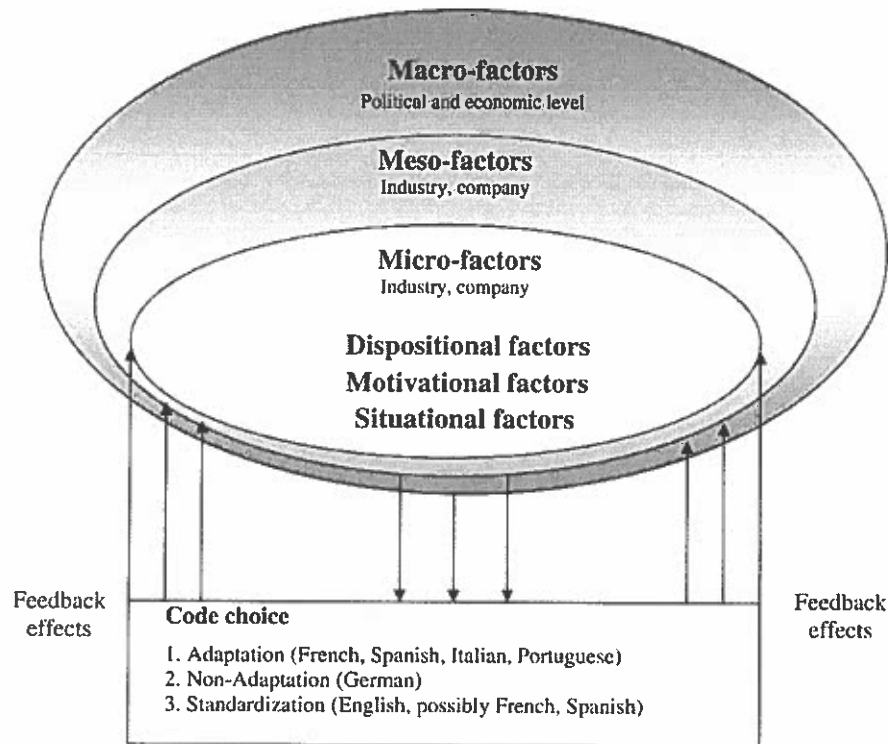


Figure 4. Factors of Code choice: three-level-model (from Bäck, 2004, p. 126).

Of course, the premise of precise and accurate information seems unrealistic, particularly since the motivational factors are difficult to estimate in the “black box” of consciousness. However, it makes sense if it is applied to one’s own (or well-known persons’) code choice behaviour. Generally speaking, we claim that code choice can be predicted in each specific case, provided all relevant factors are known (Figure 4).

The code choice behaviour (in its basic options, namely adaptation, non-adaptation and standardisation) is determined by factors at three different levels.

Macro-factors play a role at the economic and political levels (e.g. political and economic importance of different languages and language areas), *meso-factors* at the level of a certain industry or company (e.g. distribution channels, corporate language strategy of company and competitors) and finally *micro-factors* at the level of a certain department or a single employee. They can be divided into *dispositional factors* (language skills and preferences of a single employee), *motivational factors* (psychological and interactional motives such as efficiency, compliance, prestige), and *situational factors* (e.g. topic, place, time, medium of communication). Finally, one also needs to mention the *feedback effects* that occur when a successful code choice has a positive medium term influence on the degree of internationalisation of the company.

All these factors apply to Austrian exporters and Romance language speaking customers at the same time. In this survey, however, we will concentrate on the *view of the Austrian exporter*.

Macro-factors

The following factors play an important role at the economic and political levels:

Importance of bilateral trade

Figure 1 has shown the great importance of Romance language speaking countries for Austrian exporters. These statistics, as well as the growth potential for exports into a certain language area, can be considered as relevant factors for the corporate demand for employees with a certain language competence.⁸ At this point, one should stress that Italy and France are, respectively, the second and the sixth most important export markets for Austrian exporters. As far as Spain is concerned, it is the growth rate of Austrian exports that is quite impressive: Austrian exports to Spain grew by 190% between 1994 and 2002, which more than doubles the growth rate of Austrian exports to other EU states (see Statistik Austria, quoted in Wirtschaftskammer, 2003b). In fact, it has even outperformed that of exports to the new EU member states Czech Republic or Hungary.

Worldwide importance of single language

On the question of why some languages are considered to be more important than others, the following criteria may be found in the scientific literature (see Ammon, 1998, 1991; Crystal, 2000, p. 17ss; Siguan, 2001, p. 122ss) (in parenthesis the Romance languages are “ranked” according to their relative importance):

- Worldwide dissemination as L1 (Spanish, Portuguese, French) and as L2 (Spanish, French, Portuguese) (see Griebhaber, 2003; Haarmann, 2001)
- Number of independent countries where a certain language has an official status (Spanish, French, Portuguese) (see Fischer, 2004; Quid, 2004)
- Economic strength of different language areas (French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese)⁹
- Dissemination in international organisations (French, partly also Spanish) (see Siguan, 2001, p. 148)
- Dissemination of a language in science (French), culture and media (French, Spanish, Italian) (see Tsunoda, 1983)

The importance of a single language has a regional aspect, too. This means that the languages of neighbouring countries and trade partners always play an important role. In the case of Austria, these two criteria apply particularly in relation to Italy.

The factor “*degree of relationship between languages*” is also to be taken into account in this context. On the one hand, the Eurobarometer survey clearly indicates that in Romance language speaking countries, the competence in other Romance languages is well above the average. On the other hand, it proves relevant for *intercomprehension* between Romance languages (see below), and with regard to what is called “multilingual communication” (Eschenbach, 2002) or “passive Mehrsprachigkeit” (Arntz, 1997) or “rezeptive Mehrsprachigkeit” (Finkenstaedt & Schröder, 1991, p. 35ff.): this concept means that the partners use each one a different language within one conversational episode. Each communication partner speaks his own mother tongue or alternatively another language in which the other communication partner needs only passive competence.¹⁰

Language policy of the European Union, of the Council of Europe, of the single Romance language speaking countries and of Austria

Politicians tend to stress the importance of foreign language skills for European integration – therefore different programmes (such as Socrates, Leonardo, Lingua) have been initiated (European Commission, 2003, p. 3):

Building a common home in which to live, work and trade together means acquiring the skills to communicate with another effectively and to understand one another better. Learning and speaking other languages encourages us to become more open to others, their cultures and outlooks.¹¹

EU commissioner Viviane Reding, office holder of Education and Culture, clearly announced widespread trilingualism as the long term target of the language policy of the EU. In the context of the Eurobarometer survey 2001 (European Commission, 2001b, p. 6), she considered the results to be encouraging, although she stressed that there was still a lot of work to be done before all European school-leavers would be able to speak two foreign languages. (European Commission, 2001b, p. 1).

At this stage, one should mention the efforts of the Council of Europe to favour European linguistic diversity which began already in the 1950s, and especially their European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, which formulates the following goal in its mission statement (European Centre for Modern Languages, 2004a):

The ECML hopes to promote the dissemination of good practice in language teaching and learning, and to contribute to the respect and reinforcement of linguistic diversity in a multilingual, multicultural, democratic and tolerant Europe open to other.

It remains the task of European nation states to implement these goals. (See “national reports” at the homepage of the European Centre for Modern Languages, European Centre for Modern Languages, 2004b).

Language competence in Europe

The existing foreign language skills of the population of a certain country may be seen as the basis and the long term product of language policy. Figures 5a–h give an overview of the percentage of the population (in a certain country) speaking different languages. The figures always consider the four most widespread languages other than the mother tongue.

The Eurobarometer survey came to the conclusion that citizens of those countries where a widespread language is spoken tend to have less knowledge in foreign languages. This applies particularly to Romance language speaking countries such as France, Italy and Spain. On the other hand, citizens of smaller EU-countries with less widespread languages (the Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries) are mostly better “equipped” with foreign language skills.

These nationwide figures are, of course, not representative for exporting companies, because it can be assumed that most employees of exporting companies have an above than average knowledge of foreign languages. Nevertheless, some important conclusions may be drawn from the results of the Eurobarometer survey:

- *The knowledge of English among the population of Romance language speaking countries is partly well below the EU average. Thus, in many cases, standardisation with English as lingua franca may be the wrong strategy. On the other hand, the competence in other Romance languages is above average, which means that other Romance languages may be chosen as linguae francae.*

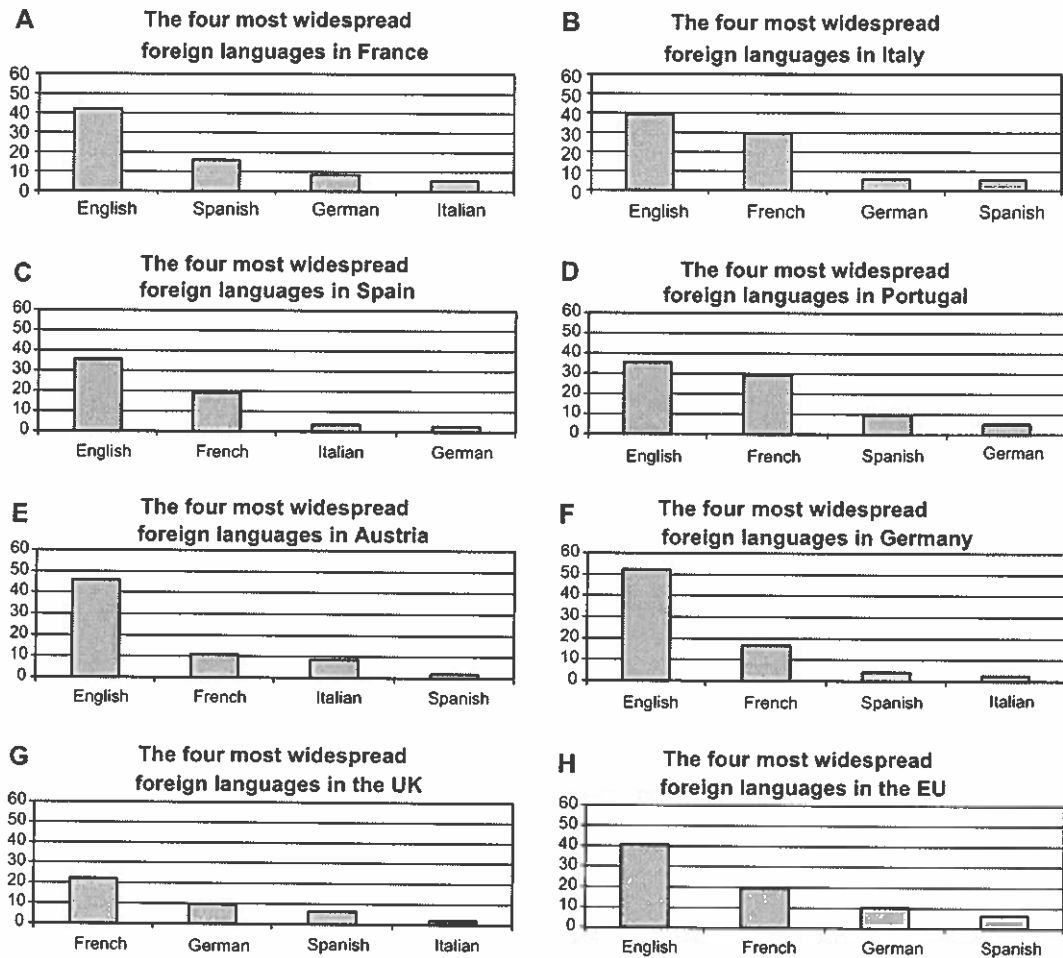


Figure 5. a–h. Foreign language competence of citizens of selected European countries (in percent of the total population) (Question: “Which languages do you speak besides your mother tongue?”) Source: Eurobarometer survey, quoted from French Ministry of Educational Affairs (2001, p. 2).

Besides, one needs to take intercomprehension into account, i.e. the mutual understanding between (Romance) languages. This works especially well between Spanish and Portuguese, but also between Spanish / Portuguese and Italian speaking persons. (For Romance intercomprehension, see e.g. Schmidely, 2001, as well as critically Ilescu, 2001. In the last few years it has been the subject of prominent and successful European projects, like the Eurom4 Project – see Crocco-Galeas, 1993, and above all, Stoye, 2000 –, the Galatea project – see Dabène 1992 – and, of course, the EUROCOMROM project – see Klein and Stegman, 2000 as well as Klein and Rutke, 1997; Klein, 2002.¹²)

- *The knowledge of German in Romance language speaking countries mostly lies well below the EU average.* Accordingly, the code choice strategy non-adaptation may hardly ever be available (but non-adaptation does not seem to be a suitable choice for the exporter in a *foreign buyers' market* anyway, for reasons of courtesy).
- *Basically, Austrians have a better knowledge in Romance languages than vice versa:* this applies particularly to Italian. As regards French and Spanish, one should not forget that these languages have traditionally been very important in the education of future (international) sales managers at commercial academies

such as HAK (business secondary schools) or the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration. Moreover, Spanish and French continue to be two of the most popular languages of choice for Austrian language students, only outdone by English. Therefore, a lot of linguistic know-how is available at a high level. (See Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, 2004; De Cillia & Haller, 2003.)

On the other hand, Scandinavian countries show very good results in English and German according to the Eurobarometer survey. In this case, the question of code choice would thus have to be raised from a different angle, especially because Scandinavian languages are not particularly widespread in Austria.

In short, the knowledge of foreign languages by citizens of a certain country determines the offer of foreign languages on the labour market for export oriented companies.

Meso-factors

According to our definition, meso-factors influence code choice at the level of a specific sector of industry or of a single company. (For company language policies and choices of multinational companies in the context of a globalising world, see Truchot, 2001 with many individual examples; see also Lavric 2008a, b as well as, Lavric, forthcoming a, b, c, d.)

Sectors of industry, products

The meaning of the sector of industry and its own “language culture” is illustrated by one example from our case studies. Company C engages in the production of wooden floors. The Italian market is of crucial importance for the Austrian timber industry. Therefore, e.g. secondary schools in Austria specialising in timber industry (“HBLA für Holzwirtschaft” in Bruck/Mur and “Holztechnikum” Kuchl) offer Italian as a second foreign language. The HBLA Bruck even has a trilingual homepage (German, English and Italian, see www.forstschule.at.) Not surprisingly, Italy is the most important non-German speaking market for company C. Therefore, the company’s homepage is available in three languages: German, English and Italian. Most German speaking competitors of company C offer their homepages in Italian, too.

Company/distribution channel

Distribution channels also play a key role in the context of code choice. In effect, the pure communication model “Austrian exporter / Romance speaking customer” hardly exists in the real world of business. Usually intermediaries such as independent sales agents or local distribution subsidiaries exert a key function in the process of selling. Therefore, the question of code choice tends to be more a triangle than a dyad.

Figure 6 shows the channel of distribution in corporate business communication with international customers.

Our case studies illustrate all these three possibilities, which are usually combined in real business life. Company A’s central distribution department works closely

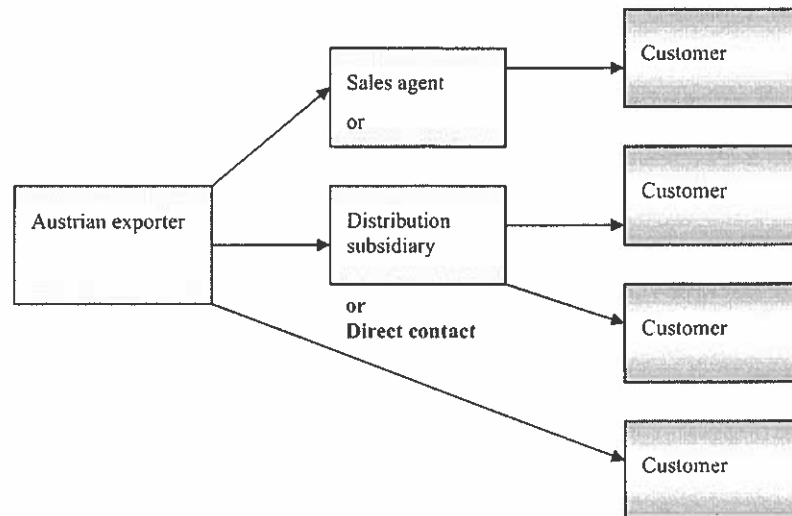


Figure 6. Distribution channels in exportation.

together with local sales agents (in Latin America and the Maghreb countries) or with subsidiaries (in Spain).

Company B concentrates on the European markets and has its own distribution subsidiaries in France and Italy. Moreover, key account managers cooperate with local distribution subsidiaries or local sales agents in order to offer good support service to international key accounts.

As far as company C is concerned, its Austrian headquarter is directly responsible for distribution. The particularly important Italian market is worked on directly, whereas in Spain and France the Austrian area managers cooperate with local sales agents.

Application: How company A managed to conquer the Latin American market

When company A (fire engines) decided to enter the Latin American market in the 1970s and 1980s, they faced the following problems: (see Bäck, 2004, p. 278–279)

- The company lacked a distribution network in the region.
- The market there was dominated by their US competitors, who used to sell their products through sales agents.
- Therefore, company A was primarily interested in attracting the best sales agents away from their American competitors.

They found a starting point in the fact that all the information materials that American firms were sending to their sales agents (brochures, catalogues, technical notes) were written exclusively in English. The Americans were thus running a strategy of standardisation, as they were convinced that “everybody has to speak English anyway”. But the fact was that the clients hardly ever spoke English, and so it was the sales agents’ task to translate all materials before they could pass them on to their clients – a considerable extra work load, given that for them, fire engines were only a small share of the products they were offering. Moreover, whenever there was a complex query about a product, the client would first contact the sales agent, who would then have to translate the query, before transmitting it to the producer. This,

by the way, considerably increased the potential rate of mistakes, as the sales agent was no expert on the product and could easily fall into the trap of some mistranslation. Moreover, it hindered the process, since only then could the sales agent pass on the query to the American producer. As for the answer, it followed the same path, only in a reversed sequence.

I often happened to attract a sales agent away from my competitors. Especially in Latin America, at the beginning, when the sales agents realised that there was at last someone with whom they could speak Spanish and who would send them the offers in Spanish. They thought, I'd rather work for that other man, instead of my former American provider. That is someone who comes with me when I go and see the clients and who is able to explain his products to them himself." (Deputy sales manager, company A)

In comparison with their US competitors, firm A thus had the advantage to be able to give the sales agents the information materials in Spanish, which they could then directly pass on to their clients without having to translate them. Equally, they could handle difficult technical queries directly in the clients' language. This meant remarkably less working time and/or lower costs for the sales agents.

This linguistic adaptation strategy paid largely for the company, currently as big a player on the Latin American market as their US competitors are. In this case, therefore, language adaptation has shown to be the best strategy, not only in relation to the clients, but also towards such relevant mediators/brokers as the sales agents are.

This special case is remarkable because this company does not simply use the fact that the distribution channel comprises some intermediaries to pass on the language problem. On the contrary, they see the possibility of linguistic adaptation as a chance to do better than their competitors. Of course, an opportunity of this kind is more likely to occur in a market where intermediaries are more independent than, e.g. simple subsidiaries, and therefore find themselves in a relatively stronger position.

The importance of conveying product information in the foreign language

For the overwhelming importance of producing product information materials in the language of the client (*adaptation*), see the following remarks:

Any kind of publicity materials really do have to be written in the client country's language. That is a truth that I have so often seen confirmed. As soon as I had translated the product information into Spanish, the sales agents would start selling a certain product. As long as they had only an English brochure, the product would not sell, because it is the brochure that goes to the client, who has to be able to read it in order to be interested. It is not enough if he only sees the picture. In fact, we do not translate everything into Spanish, but we choose a certain number of products we want to promote for the Latin American market, and then we put all our information material into Spanish. (Deputy sales manager, company A)

We find the same emphasis on translating product brochures also in the words of company C's sales manager:

It means a lot of work to translate catalogues and product information brochures, but it is a fact that I can only sell something if I adopt the language the client understands.

As for company B, they chose to found a subsidiary in each of their most important market countries, as for instance France or Italy, because this structure

seemed to them most appropriate in order to have their clients' queries always handled in the client's own language. Additionally, they have special key account managers (based in Austria) for those clients that are very big companies which are active in several European countries.

Issues of power balance between seller and buyer

Among the meso-factors, one should not forget the important fact that the power balance between seller and buyer is usually unequal (Lavric, 2003, p. 10s). Moreover, because excess supply is an important characteristic of most of today's markets, which means that the client can always choose from a series of suppliers, sellers will experience strong pressures to adapt to the needs of their clients as well as they can. In the world of export–import, this means adapting on a linguistic level, too.

Micro-factors

At the level of micro-factors – i.e. the factors concerning one single department or one single employee – one should distinguish between dispositional, motivational and situational factors.

Dispositional factors

By dispositional factors we understand, grossly, the language competence of each individual employee, and the profit the whole company derives from their language potential. Another point would be the employees' attitude towards the different countries, cultures and languages they usually deal with.

Language competence within the sales department and language competence of each individual employee. Our research confirms the fact that companies that have direct contact with their clients (even if a local sales agent is present) will employ sales people that are capable of implementing a linguistic adaptation strategy¹³; this is especially true for Romance language markets. Needless to say that by doing so, these companies implement their corporate strategy, i.e. the importance they assign to the potential of the different markets.

Our philosophy is, at least for important countries, to have somebody who speaks their language. (Sales manager, company C)

For me, foreign language skills are fundamental. Whenever I hire a new person for the sales department, be it as an area manager or for simple office work, we try to cover the widest possible range of foreign languages.

For us, the Italian market is extremely important, and that means that Italian is important, so we have to provide for the corresponding skills at any given moment. There must be enough Italian speaking employees, in case one of them gets sick, for instance. The next person I'll hire here for the sales department will have to speak Italian and English at any cost. (Sales manager, company C)

The minimal requirement, when recruiting for the sales department, in terms of language skills is at least English. This is an absolute need. If possible, they should speak one more language. Of course there are special cases, such as e.g. the Slavic languages. But the question is always the size of the market and the additional costs I have to afford if I recruit, let's say, a specialist with these extra language skills. (Sales manager, company A)

In company A, it is the language skills available in the department, i.e. the language competences of the sales manager and his deputy, that allow the company to implement a linguistic adaptation strategy towards their French and Spanish speaking partners.

This point clearly illustrates the strong interaction between the macro- and the micro-level of language policy. Only because Romance languages play a relatively important role in the Austrian educational system (especially in business oriented training), can export oriented companies easily recruit employees with language skills in French, Italian or Spanish and thus adopt an adaptation strategy with their respective clients.¹⁴

Attitude of individual employees towards a certain foreign language, its country and culture. A positive attitude towards the culture, country and language of particular clients will certainly raise the willingness to adapt to them or even to learn the language in question. Conversely, a lack of interest for the culture and language of the interlocutor on the part of the sales person will favour a standardisation or non-adaptation language choice.

There is a number of studies that confirm the interrelation between language skills and what could be called “intercultural know how”. Though this paper does not focus on intercultural communication as such, it can be said that companies are well aware of the link between language and general cultural awareness factors. E.g. Andersen (1997) and Hagen (1999a) deal with the problem of linguistic and cultural barriers in international business relations.

The important thing about languages is that they give you access to the mentality of the people. If I come to a country and only speak English, locals will understand me of course, but they will react differently. They will be less friendly, less open to me, and I will not understand them so well. I am not speaking about the content of what they say, but about their reaction. (Head of human resources, company B)

Motivational factors

In her 2000, 2001 and 2003 articles, Lavric distinguishes – there being equality regarding the language skills – four main motivational factors that guide language choices at an individual level. In some situations these factors might be competing with each other; and depending on the situation and on the personality of the people involved one minor factor might sometimes overrule a more important one. These factors are:

- natural choice, efficiency,
- compliance,
- language practice,
- prestige / fear of losing face.

These motivational factors have to be seen in the context of the linguistic-pragmatic *theories of politeness*, with their basic concepts of positive versus negative face (see Brown & Levinson, 1987, e.g. after Goffman, 1967):

- *positive face*, that is, the need of each of us to be worshipped and respected by others, our image we want to build up and get confirmed by our environment,

- *negative face*, that is the need of unimpeded self-determination; it is what could be called the territory of the self. This territory certainly comprises a linguistic aspect, the freedom of action or scope related to a person's competence (or lack of competence) in a given language. (For the relationship between code choice and face, see Lavric, 2007b.)

Natural choice, efficiency

"Natural" or "efficient", or "default" language choice corresponds to what Myers-Scotton (1983 and *passim*) would call the "unmarked language choice". It means e.g. using a common mother tongue. If no such common mother tongue exists, the interlocutors choose the language for which the product¹⁵ of their competences is highest. For instance, a Frenchman with poor English competence and an Englishman who speaks rather good French will choose French as their most "natural" or efficient language.

Speaking in terms of face, this maximises the negative face of both partners, as we saw that language competence may be equalled with freedom of action in one particular language.

We can find a good example of that efficiency factor in the case of the sales manager of company C, who is responsible for the Spanish market together with a Spanish sales agent who speaks very good English. The two speak English in their meetings, because the sales manager, who has to switch anyway, speaks better English than Spanish: "*For me speaking in Spanish with the sales agent would be much more strenuous, I would have to think a lot more than in English.*"

But naturalness/efficiency is not the only factor that guides language choice, and people do not always choose the language that would be easiest for them. In effect, there are various contexts, especially business contexts, where the two partners are far from having the same rights.

Compliance

The compliance factor proves to be especially important in business contexts, when it comes to selling something to a client one has to adapt to. But it also plays an important role in more egalitarian constellations, if only for reasons of simple general politeness. Compliance means adapting to the language preferences of your partner by speaking either his mother tongue or a language he has a very good command of and/or has a preference for. At an individual level, this can even mean learning a new language in order to be able to comply with an important partner. At a business level, it can lead a company to recruiting special personnel with the language skills adapted to a certain market.

Compliance is a truly polite way of acting, because it means reducing one's own negative face in order to increase that of your partner. This in turn will contribute to the positive face of both partners: one will feel important because they are being complied with, while the other gets the image of a kind and polite person.

This face balance explains not only why compliance is a very popular behavioural pattern, but also why it is important to learn foreign languages (in order to be able to comply with others), and why it is important to have as good a command of them as possible (in order to keep one's negative face (or freedom of action) intact while making a compliance language choice).

From a business administration point of view, linguistic compliance can be explained as follows: a sales department must always try to fulfil as well as possible the needs of the clients; in international sales contexts, these needs certainly include a linguistic aspect. (Actually, Møller & Jensen, 1997, p. 16, consider language to be simply part of the product.)

This is important insofar as today's markets are, mostly, buyer's markets, with a strong competition between different sellers and wide choice on the part of the client. In this sense, see the following statement by a key account manager of company B about the importance of complying with the client through an adaptation language choice:

It seems that a number of our competitors do not take the language factor seriously enough. One important factor for our success with company X in Spain was the fact that negotiations could be held in Spanish, and that the day-to-day cooperation is also done in Spanish.

Nevertheless, it has to be said that all partners do not always want to be complied with in that way. In fact they might prefer the compliance to take another form, which does not mean they do not want to be complied at all. The point is, there are two more factors that may overrule the natural preference for one's mother tongue.

Language practice

Choosing a language not because it is the easiest but because one wishes to practise it somehow means using the interlocutor as a sort of "sparring partner". (In general, this is done with a native speaker and not with a non-native speaker.)

Speaking in face terms, practising means consciously reducing one's negative face (or freedom of action) for the moment in order to increase it in the long run. As for positive face, practising a language one does not speak so well means weakening one's positive face (or image) for the moment, in order to strengthen it in the long run.

The practice factor can be very important in some kind of environments, e.g. in a language department, as Lavric described in her 2000 study. This same factor, however, might be less important in business contexts – though many people working in export sales departments say they chose this kind of job precisely in order to put their language skills into practice. In these cases, practice and compliance are both on the side of the seller and can organically coincide.

The example of a key account manager of company B also illustrates the factor language practice. This manager, who cooperates on a regular basis with employees of the company's Italian sales subsidiary, says that they often have to drive for hours when they visit individual clients. The key account manager now uses these long travelling stretches in order to practise his Italian by chatting with his Italian colleague. This, however, is a typical example of internal communication. Whether a client in a negotiation might abandon the linguistic advantage afforded by their mother tongue in order to practise a foreign language, remains highly unlikely.

Prestigefear of losing face

Prestige is always linked to its opposite factor, namely, the fear of losing face by making mistakes. This dichotomy strongly depends on the degree of competence, but also on the personality of the interactants. It is clearly the positive face (or image) aspect of language choice, since one might want (and manage) to impress the partner with one's good language competence, or one might fear making a bad impression for one's lack of fluency or one's mistakes.

There are some contexts where the "prestige / fear of losing face" factor plays a very important role, as Lavric's study (2000, 2001) on a language department has shown. The reason is that language competence in this context is to a high extent identical with professional competence. This is much less true in a business context, where the important thing is primarily to understand and to make oneself understood. There it seems improbable that someone should renounce to use a certain language only because he cannot speak it perfectly, though this kind of effect also depends on personality features.

This primacy of communication over perfection is especially valid in face-to-face situations, with the exception perhaps of business negotiations, where the slightest linguistic advantage or disadvantage can be decisive. In written business communication, however, much more care is given to correctness and thus to avoiding mistakes as far as possible. The saleswoman at company C in charge of the French market confirms this point. She admits seeking help of her deputy sales manager, whose French happens to be much better than hers, whenever she has to write an important business letter. She does so precisely because she wants to avoid mistakes in important written documents.

As for e-mail communication, it might seem that the standards are lower than for written correspondence; but this hypothesis was invalidated by the research of Beer, (2004), who found out that external business e-mails (if not internal ones) demand as much language correctness as written business letters.

However, in some situations of external business communication, there might be an apparent conflict between the prestige and the compliance criterion. This happens when one drops a brick by obstinately trying to adapt to a partner who in fact would be very proud of practising his real or presumed foreign language skills. In such a case it would be wiser to comply by adapting to the language preferences rather than to the language competence of the partner.

As an example of a conflict of this kind, the sales manager of company A refers an anecdote that happened to him with a waiter on the Champs Elysées. The waiter kept on speaking English to the client who had ordered his coffee in very good French, and so, through his wrong choice of linguistic standardisation at the wrong time, lost what could have been a very good tip.

Situational factors

Following partly Pütz (1994) and Calderón (1999), we distinguish a series of situational factors that may influence language choices:

- *People present*: Who is taking part in the communicative exchange and what are their (real and presumed) language competences and preferences?
- *Type of interaction*: Are they, e.g. negotiating, giving a presentation, or having a more informal kind of meeting?

- *Place*: In which country and in which kind of environment does the interaction take place?
- *Subject*: Is it small talk or business talk? Private or public? Is the theme possibly a very complex one?
- *Time*: Does the conversation take place at a moment when one or both of the interlocutors are still fresh and energetic, or when they are already very tired? Is it a first contact, where linguistic competences and preferences are still to be tested, or a further contact with clear cut habits between the partners concerned?
- *Medium*: Is the communication written or oral? Is there support from additional non-verbal channels? (In written communication: is it paper or electronic? In oral communication: is it face-to-face or on the phone? Or is it a video-conference?)

Of all the factors mentioned, the “people present” is certainly the most important one, for it is at this stage where the general language competences and preferences of all interlocutors are taken into consideration. In other words, this factor determines the basic language choice options that are available to a certain communicative dyad or to a certain group of people.

For a dyad, we have seen the calculus of the most “natural” or “efficient” or “default” language choice (the language for which the product of the competence of both partners is highest). But things get more complicated when this involves several partners with different language backgrounds. As a rule of thumb, one may say that they have to choose a language which everybody present can speak; see Myers-Scotton’s “Virtuosity Maxim” (1990, p. 98): “Switch to whatever code is necessary in order to carry on the conversation / accommodate the participation of all speakers present.” (And our calculus of the product of all competences is still valid in that case, as this product will be 0 for a given language if only one of the partners does not speak it.) If there is no common language, one or more of the people present might act as translators. This is the basic rule, but in big and non-homogeneous groups it may sometimes be broken, which leads to someone being passed over or a person in the translator’s role being thoroughly overstrained.¹⁶ Quite often in such plurilingual groups, the language chosen is not constant, and code switching occurs. Mondada and Pekarek (2003a) and Mondada (2004) show how language choices in a plurilingual working environment are being negotiated (often explicitly) in interaction, and how switches can signal changes of footing or of participation framework as well as alignment of a participant with different subgroups of the team; they are closely related to membership categorisation and to the structuring of current activities.

The following examples taken from our case studies show that in a given situation, when it comes to choosing a language, there are usually various situational factors at play.

Persons present/type of interaction

Language competence can be absolutely crucial in order to safeguard direct communication within a certain subgroup of partners in a bigger situation.

For company A, which sells fire engines, communal urban entities represent an important market segment, with a public call for tenders and a hearing, i.e. a

presentation of the product to a mixed commission (*type of interaction*). The latter usually comprises several firemen technicians and one financial expert (*people present*). One must not forget here that, crucially, the financial expert is the only one who can speak foreign languages. Hence, he naturally takes on the role of translator and thus mediates communication between the technicians and the bidder. This, however, might be a critical point for the following reasons:

- The technicians and the financial expert do not have the same concerns. So, while the technician firemen want to get the best product, no matter the price, the financial expert is interested in getting the cheapest product and sophisticated technical details count much less for him.
- Moreover, the financial expert hardly knows about relevant technical details, therefore his translations might be incomplete and erroneous. This is important insofar as fire engines are complex products very much dependent on technical support.
- As a consequence, it might be the case that the financial expert consciously or unconsciously misguides the technicians by trying to favour the cheaper product through his translation. This aspect is crucial for company A, the products of which are located in the high quality/high price segment of the market.

Under such conditions it is indispensable to carry out an adaptation language strategy, in order to be able to communicate directly and without a translation with the technicians present at the hearing. This is the only chance of building up a coalition with them against the wishes of the finance expert.

Persons present/type of interaction/subject

When it comes to negotiating (*type of interaction*) with his Spanish clients, the sales manager of company C usually acts together with his Spanish sales agent (*persons present*). The negotiations take place in Spanish, but the most complex content points (*subject*) are translated into English by the sales agent to make sure the sales manager can understand every detail.

Persons present/subject

Choice of language is always done in relationship to the client's market and language. But this can also mean mixing more than one language. For instance, with a Spanish manager working in France (*persons present, type of interaction*), we do the small talk in Spanish and the hard business in French (*subject*), if it is a meeting where several people are present. (Key account manager, company B)

This statement shows that it is a very common alternative to do the small talk and the business talk in two different languages. Especially in negotiations, the small talk might be an opportunity to show compliance in a language one does not speak well enough to conduct the whole negotiation in. See Poncini (2003, p. 30): “[S]witches to languages other than English can fulfil a solidarity-building function and help create a kind of groupness”.

Subject

An interesting example for the influence of the subject on the choice of a language is told by the sales manager of company C. He usually speaks English (the most efficient language choice) to the Spanish sales agent, but:

In some moments where the conversation tends to become more private, I often automatically switch to Spanish (*subject*). This is in fact a domain that is much easier for me in Spanish.

This happens because the sales manager learned his Spanish “*on the street*”, as he puts it, and has a much better competence in this language for private purposes than for business subjects.

Subject/persons present

Here is another example of language choice depending on the subject factor, told by a Key account manager at company B:

In the XY Poland company (note: subsidiary of an Italian group), my contact person is a Polish native speaker who also speaks good Italian. With her I like to speak either Italian or Polish. Well, if it is about hard facts, then we rather speak English, but for the small talk we’d rather choose Italian or Polish.

This is a good example to show that language choice between two given persons does not necessarily have to be a constant (so the factor “person” does not explain it all), as these two partners vary between no less than three languages according to the topic of conversation and their likings.

Medium

It happens quite often that written and oral communication take place in two different languages. In many companies the written communication, especially e-mails, are linguistically standardised and are (or should be) all done in English, while face-to-face meetings give way to a negotiation process concerning the common language choice.

The telephone is a difficult medium par excellence, since it combines the speed of oral communication with the lack of visual hints and immediate feedback mechanisms that are usually associated only with writing.

I must admit I myself had a problem with Spanish dialects when I first started to work on the Spanish market. Then, I often had to deal with a Spanish gentleman who, by the way, is still working in our Spanish subsidiary. He is now 78 years of age and he still insists on speaking only his Andalusian dialect. When I was there in Spain and speaking to him directly it was o.k. because I could understand him through his gestures. But on the phone, I hardly ever understood what he was saying. It was so difficult for me in the beginning to communicate with him on the phone ... (Deputy sales manager, company A)

Time/subject

The sales manager of company A provides a good example for the time factor. He admits having linguistic difficulties late in the evening when concentration drops due

to tiredness; these problems become worse when speaking about difficult subjects like health, medicine, etc.

Under the heading “time” we must also mention that language competences are subject to change in the course of time, which might affect each of our three levels: at the macro-level, by a good or a bad language policy in a given country; at the meso-level, by more or less skilful recruitment and formation of staff, and at the micro-level, by an employee either taking a language course or travelling abroad, or on the contrary doing nothing and forgetting by and by what he had formerly known.

Feedback effects

A language choice or a language policy, once it is made or implemented, has definite feedback effects at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels. For instance, a successful language choice strategy will have a positive influence on the degree of internationalisation of the company concerned. Vandermeeren (1998, p. 240) gives statistical evidence for a reciprocal interaction between the use of foreign languages in a company and the intensity of its relationships with foreign markets, e.g., in business relationships between Germany and France.

What results do (Romance) language skills effectively yield? Foreign language competence and success in business life

The positive effect of foreign language skills on business achievement and prosperity is an intuitive evidence. Nevertheless, considerable problems arise as soon as it comes to measuring this influence. In effect, the successful selling of a product to an international clientele is influenced by a whole range of different factors, among which the contribution of a single factor, such as foreign language competence, is nearly impossible to quantify. To some extent, a high degree of internationalisation and a good market position in a certain country allow one to conclude that the question of languages must have been addressed successfully in that case. On the other hand, there are very concrete and quantifiable costs involved in translations, language training and the recruitment of employees with special language skills. These costs can – alas – be defined with perfect accuracy by the accounting department.¹⁷

The profit drawn from foreign language skills is neither operational nor quantifiable, and it must bear the comparison with very concrete and perfectly quantifiable costs.¹⁸

In addition, there is the problem of time spans, as it is a fact that a good language policy will only give concrete results after a certain period of time. No wonder then that despite euphoric declarations in favour of foreign language competence, a very simple language investment into a certain market area might very well be the victim of harsh cuts, as its marginal utility is questioned. The present study understands itself, among others, as a support in the context of such *language utility trade-offs*, a support which is very much directed towards illustrating the utility and profitability of *Romance languages* in particular.

To this aim, we shall cite now a series of statements by our interview partners, showing that a linguistic adaptation strategy certainly pays in terms of business success when directed towards a market in Romance language speaking areas. Most of our partners have had permanent business contacts with Romance language

countries for many years. They can certainly be trusted as to knowing perfectly well the needs, particularly the language needs, of their French, Spanish/Latino American and Italian customers.

If you want to act as an international seller today, language is the first issue to be addressed. To be able to communicate as effectively as possible, that is the first thing. Only then can you proceed to make any further sales decisions. (Sales manager, company C)

An adaptation, not a standardisation, strategy seems to be of particular importance with Romance language clients, more so than with other areas like e.g. Central and Eastern Europe:

To go to France without being able to speak French is an enterprise bound to fail. The same is true eventually of Spain and also of Italy.

It is different in Central and Eastern European markets; there my experience is that English or German can function very well. The more eastwards one goes, the more people are ready to learn foreign languages. (Sales manager, company C)

One further essential factor to be mentioned, beyond the simple understanding and being understood, is the *sympathy bonus* one definitely gains by adapting linguistically to one's interaction partner. This is a matter of politeness and of good will (Vandermeeren, 1998, p. 15), but also of simple basic salesmanship.

It gives you some kind of basic advantage with your business partner, if you show your interest in his person, his country and his culture. It creates sympathy, which is a value per se, and is very useful for the whole of the conversation as well as the business contact. It is, as they say in English, an asset in relationship management. (Key account manager, company B)

For me the supplier's capacity to act and to present himself and the product in the language of the client is an essential factor to succeed in business. As far as corporate language policy is concerned, I shall always see that we hold on to this ability, at least towards our most important clients. (Sales manager, company A)

Which language finally wins the race? An unexpected, but intelligent solution

At the end of this contribution, we come back to the fictive situation described in the introduction, of a fire engine deal between an Austrian and their Portuguese business partner. In which language do the Austrian sales manager and his Portuguese colleague actually choose to communicate? Well, as opposed to comparable situations with French, Italian or Spanish partners, and due to (language) political macro-factors, the probability that one of the two has acquired a sufficient command of the other's mother tongue tends to be very low. But, at the meso-level, the Austrian company has recruited and chosen precisely the kind of person to whom such important business can be entrusted. It is a sales executive that boasts at least a certain affinity to, and a certain experience with, Ibero-European markets. So what does that mean at the micro-level of that one single negotiation exchange?

In the actual case of the fire engine deal taken obviously from our case study A, the two business partners admit always writing their e-mails in English, i.e., in a lingua franca that reduces the danger of misunderstandings. But whenever the two happen to meet personally, they choose a language they both give the name of "Portuñol", i.e., a mixture of Portuguese and Spanish (or Español). This functions as

follows: the Austrian man tries, as far as possible, to speak Portuguese, a language he only has some notions of, and falls back into Spanish every time he lacks a word or an expression. The Portuguese man, whose Spanish is not so good, shows compliance on the phonetic level¹⁹ and tries to pronounce his Portuguese “a la Española”.²⁰ Both of them confirm that this is a language choice that really works for them, at least in a face-to-face situation with its rich possibilities for feedback, correction and further inquiry.

This example of the mixed code “Portuñol” shows that language choices in export-import contexts can still give us many a surprise. “Portuñol”, however, is far from being a completely unexpected language choice.

The reason why it makes sense lies in the close kinship between the two Ibero-European languages Spanish and Portuguese, in the scarce presence of Portuguese in contrast to the frequent teaching of Spanish in Austrian schools, and in the poor German language skills that can be found in Portugal. Needless to say, these are all macro-factors in the three-level-model of language choices.

These are completed by an Austrian company which, in the case of our fire engine deal, concentrates on the Spanish market (*meso-level*) and therefore has to hand a sales executive who speaks very good Spanish and a little Portuguese (*micro-factors, dispositional*). This businessman, for his part, tries his best to comply with his Portuguese speaking client (*motivational factors*). So for their face-to-face oral communication (*situational factors*), the two resort to a language choice perfectly adapted to their particular situation, motivation and needs, namely, to their mixed language “Portuñol”.

Notes

1. Although one could argue that it would be better to speak of a linguistic variety instead of a code, I will use the term “code” because the relevant compounds “code switching” and “code choice” are largely accepted in the scientific community. Changing the terminology would make the contribution much less easily traceable.
2. This article draws largely on the results of Bäck’s PhD thesis (2004), which is itself based on former studies by Lavric (2000, 2001, 2003). The qualitative case study approach to business code choices has since been applied in some more studies related to the same research group, see Mrázová (2005) and Lavric, 2008a, b, c as well as, Lavric, forthcoming a, b, c, d.
3. The figure shows only Austrian export to Europe, which makes up for about 85% of the whole export volume.
4. Italy, France, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Romania, and Switzerland. In the cases of Belgium and Switzerland, exports were statistically weighed in relation to the share of the Romance language speaking population.
5. One qualitative study conducted in a large chemical company in Basel, Switzerland, is Bürkli (1999). However, Bürkli only concentrates on the shift between dialect and standard language. Very recently, her method of “language diary” was applied by Mrázová (2005) in a study of external and internal code choices in a French trading company in Paris.
6. Because of the geographic proximity, the contribution of Esmann, Lintner, and Hagen (1999) on Southern German companies is of great interest for this study.
7. Each of these Master’s theses studies the language needs of Austrian companies in a certain Romance language: Daublebsky (2000), French; Rheindt (1997), Spanish; Kubista-Nugent (1996) and Seeböck (1999), Italian. The method employed was an inquiry through questionnaires sent to the alumni of the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration (“Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien”).

More recently even, a Master’s thesis by Leeb (2007) studied the language needs created by the merger of an Austrian and an Italian banking company (which, by the way,

- revealed language needs above all in English, as English was the language chosen for the merger).
8. Greensmith (1997, p. 100) and Rheindt (1997, p. 237) studied which company departments show the biggest demand for foreign languages (e.g. marketing, distribution, technical support, management, ...).
 9. As regards European languages, there exists the following ranking (in terms of the cumulative GDP of a certain language area according to our own calculations): 1. English, 2. German, 3. French, 4. Spanish, 5. Italian and 6. Portuguese. Thus, among the top 6, there are four Romance languages. See Bäck (2004, p. 141).
 10. Eschenbach (2002, p. 24, 34) examined the relevance of this practice in business communication and came to the conclusion that companies have reservations against this model because it does not allow them to show compliance with the customer.
 11. All translations of quoted passages, be it from EU-texts or from interviews, have been carried out by ourselves, B.B. and E.L. We would like to thank Alfonso Merello-Astigarraga and Carmen Konzett for further corrections. All remaining shortcomings are of course ours.
 12. The didactic concept related to these projects is the famous "Mehrsprachigkeitsdidaktik", see Meißner and Reinfried (1998).
 13. For different methods to cover a company's language needs, see Greensmith, (1997, p. 96); Schöpfer-Grabe and Weiß (2000, p. 260ss).
 14. In this context, an important factor is certainly the degree of difficulty of a certain language, as well as the location of the company (because, e.g., migrants with a specific mother tongue might be easier to find in an urban environment than in the country).
 15. Lavric (2000, 2001, 2003) still wrote: the sum of their language competences. But actually (see Bäck, 2004, p. 120) it must be the product and not the sum, as only this formula can explain why it is not possible to compensate a very poor competence level on the part of one of the interlocutors by a very high level on the part of the other.
 16. For a qualitative description of language choices in a big business meeting with several nationalities present, see Poncini (2003), one of the very scarce publications with an approach comparable to the present one.
 17. See Coulmas (1992, p. 165s), who insists on the fact that loss or failed profit due to the lack of language competence can easily amount to much more than the costs of language courses for sales employees. Recently, the ELAN study of the EU (ELAN, 2006) revealed that European small and medium-sized companies were losing more than 100 million euros every year due to the lack of language competences.
 18. But Grin (1997) shows, from an economics perspective, how it could be possible to evaluate the costs and benefits of multilingualism for a whole society, e.g. the EU. And in later research (see Grin, 2007), he shifts his approach and quantifies the benefits of plurilingualism for the individual, in terms of higher salaries (which gives results between 10 and 18% for an important language like English in Switzerland). For the terms "multilingualism" (on a society level) and "plurilingualism" (on an individual level), see the definitions by the Council of Europe (2008) and the comment by Byram (2007).
 19. This evokes the title of a well-known article about code switching: "I'll meet you halfway with language" (Finlayson & Slabbert, 1997).
 20. This is not so different from the way the Romance competitors of company A solve their language problems: "Look at the Italians coming to Spain, they are doing just the same thing as we do with Portuguese. They speak something that is a kind of mixture: a little bit of Italian, and a little bit of Spanish, and the funny thing is that it works". (Deputy sales manager, company A).

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