

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

**ENGLISH IN INTERNAL COMPANY
COMMUNICATION**

The employees' views, attitudes and competences

A Pro Gradu Thesis

by

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I INTRODUCTION

The importance of English in the world today is indisputable. The rapid development of communication technology, the globalisation of markets and the increased mobility of people contribute to a growing demand for a common lingua franca on an international level. English is the most widely spoken language in the world, with an estimate of a quarter of the world's population being fluent or competent in it. Most of these are non-native speakers, who use English for international means of communication. English is the main language in a wide variety of different domains; international business, diplomacy, tourism and the academic world. The multiple ways English is used in international contexts challenge not only the language users but also the language professionals who tackle with questions concerning the codification, standardisation, nativisation and teaching of English.

International business is a domain where English is increasingly utilized as a means of cross-national communication. Many companies operate on an international level and English plays an important role in their communication. More and more companies are using English, not only for external communication but also for their internal communication between headquarters, affiliates and subsidiaries. Using a common language gives an international company many advantages; communication across borders is easy, employees can work at any location and the need for translation is minimal. However, using English, a language that is not the employees' mother tongue, in internal company communication can also cause problems. The employees' various skills in the English language can cause misunderstandings, lose of information and inequality between employees with different levels of language skills.

The current study examines English in internal company communications. It studies the employees' views on and attitudes towards English as the corporate language, as well as the challenges they face when using English at work. On a broader level, the study aims at understanding the

role English has in a domain of internal company communications. The relationship between good communication and business effectiveness has been widely recognized by communication and language professionals. The rapid internationalisation has brought about a lot of research, in Finland and elsewhere, on business communication as well as on the foreign language needs of business and administration. However, most of these studies concentrate on external communication or foreign language training. There has been hardly any research on English used for internal company communication. One reason for this is that the shift of company language into English is a relatively recent phenomenon. Therefore, the role of English in internal company communication and the challenges the employees face when using a language other than their mother tongue, are worth studying.

Since the focus of this study is on the employees' own views and experiences on using English, a qualitative approach, more specifically, an interview method was adopted. Moreover, a case study of a single company was chosen in order to keep the data material more consistent. The study and the concepts applied in the analysis are sociolinguistic in nature. The role of English in internal communication will be studied utilising the concepts of International English, discourse community and language attitudes. Furthermore, the employees' language abilities will be analysed using the concept of communicative competence.

The analysis has four main themes. First, the extent the employees use English in the company's communication will be described. Second, the challenges the employees face when using English at work will be examined. Moreover, what the employees consider routine English use and how they see English in relation to Finnish will be discussed in this section. Third, the employees' views on what it means to have a good command of English are discussed. Further, the employees' evaluation of their skills in English and how it has developed during their employment are described. Also, the need for improvement in English language skills from the employees' point of view will

be discussed. Fourth, the employees' attitudes towards English as the language for internal communication will be examined.

By analysing the data, the study tries to determine what kind of challenges the employees encounter when using English as the corporate language and how the different components of the employees' communicative competence affect their communication and work efficiency. It aims at finding out what areas of communicative competence are most problematic for the employees and if some competence areas are more relevant for them. Further, the study tries to clarify how the employees view English as the corporate language and what kind of attitudes they have towards it. On a broader level, the study tries to examine the role of English in the special domain of internal company communication.

The research is useful for companies that use, or are planning to use, English in their internal communication. The results will give an insight into the language situation of one company; the challenges the employees face, their views and attitudes. Although the information gained will be most useful for the company studied, it can be interesting and of use to companies in a similar situation as well. It can help the companies to concentrate on the right things when planning for language training and perhaps help them to evaluate their language policies in the light of new information. The research is also hoped to contribute to a better understanding of the different ways English is used internationally by examining its role in one domain; in internal company communication.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Sociolinguistics with an applied reference

Since the present study examines the English language in relation to society and its people, it is sociolinguistic in nature. Sociolinguistic research aims at providing information on the interplay between language and society by, for example, identifying social functions of language (Holmes 1992:1), studying language variation and examining the importance of language to groups of people (Zwicky 2002:6). The different theoretical concepts that are employed in the study and will be discussed in more detail later can all be placed under the more general field of sociolinguistics. The conception of English as an international language and the study of its manifestations and functions intrinsically carry a social aspect. Speech community, or discourse community, is a central unit of sociolinguistic analysis against which the communicative competence and language attitudes of its members can be examined. The development of the concept of communicative competence can be traced to linguistics, psychology, communication theory and anthropology (Savignon 1983:10). Language attitudes, on the other hand, are among the main interests of social psychologists. Further, business communication stems from communication studies.

Since the results of this study might be of use for international companies and their language planning, it has an applied interest. Therefore, the field of applied linguistics is relevant here as well. Applied linguistics studies individuals' and communities' language use and tries to explain and find answers for problems that are related to language in one way or another. Thus, applied linguistic study provides information that is socially relevant in some way. (Sajavaara and Piirainen-Marsh 2000:15).

In the following chapters, the concepts of International English, discourse community, professional communication, communicative competence and language attitudes will be explained and discussed.

2.2 International English

There is no doubt that English is the true lingua franca in the world today. History knows many languages that have been widely spoken and have acted as lingua francas, for example, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Many languages are still spoken across cultural and national borders; French, Arabic and Spanish to mention just a few (Crystal 2003:7). However, as Crystal (2003:189) says: “there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English”. It is estimated that already a quarter of the world’s population is fluent or competent in English. In the early 2000 this meant about 1.5 billion people and the figure is steadily growing. (Crystal 2003:6). Many factors have contributed to and keep fuelling the spread of English as the international means of communication: the rapid development of communication and information technology, the globalisation of markets and business and the increased mobility of people. One of the main contributors to the trend is the United States, an English speaking economic and political superpower of the world today, the same way as the Great Britain before. The use of English is particularly evident in entertainment, the media, science, international business and, of course, the Internet. (Crystal 2003:13). What makes the situation with English interesting and different from other lingua francas of the past or present is that English has a large number of non-native speakers. In fact, the number of people who do not speak English as their mother tongue is much greater than the number of native English speakers. Accurate estimates are difficult to make but it is reasonably safe to say that there is currently at least twice as many non-native speakers of English than

native speakers and the number is steadily rising. (Crystal 2003:61). This massive spread has created an unparalleled linguistic situation for the English language. The diffusion, cultural pluralism and linguistic diversity raise a lot of questions concerning the codification, standardisation, nativisation and teaching of English. Owing to this, in the past twenty years the scholars have taken an increasing interest in studying the English language on a global scale and in the different domains where it is used. (Kachru 1985:11).

2.2.1 Definitions of International English

The language professionals have come up with numerous terms for the English language in its current worldwide state. The following terms, for instance, have been used: English as a lingua franca (e.g. Knapp 2002), English as a global language (e.g. Crystal 2003), English as a world language (e.g. Görlach 1988) and World English (e.g. Brutt-Griffler 2002). All these terms have been used more or less interchangeably with each other in literature. One of the earliest terms, English as an International Language, was provided by Smith (1976, as quoted in Brumfitt 1982:86). The shorthand version for it is International English and abbreviation EIL. Smith suggested EIL as an umbrella term to cover all the functions of English use in different parts of the world. He defines EIL as: “English in all its linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects which is used as a vehicle for communication between non-native speakers as well as between any combination of native and non-native speakers” (Smith 1983:26). Furthermore, Smith emphasizes the use of EIL in professional contexts defining international settings where EIL is used as “international work situations where people of two or more nationalities meet and use English as a medium of communication” (Smith 1983:26). McKay (2002) talks about International English as well. She emphasises the nature of International English as a means of communication across cultural and linguistics boundaries and proposes that

English is used internationally whenever it is “used alongside other languages in multilingual contexts as the unmarked choice for purposes of wider communication” (McKay 2002:38). In other words, EIL is used as a kind of default language in international context where the speakers have no common language available (McKay 2002:38). Both Smith’s and McKay’s definitions are very broad in nature, covering basically every kind of use of English by any kind of speaker possible. This, of course, is what International English is all about. It is a means of communication for a wide range of both native and non-native speakers. It is used in a variety of situations all around the world and more and more in the realm of international business.

A central focus in the study of EIL is the issue of standards. The massive spread and diversity of English has made scholars speculate that the varieties of English spoken in different parts of the world will eventually become mutually unintelligible. The varieties of English are influenced by other languages and can have quite prominent changes on lexical, grammatical and phonological levels. (McKay 2002: 49). There is some dissension among the scholars about the amount and nature of the possible changes to happen, however, the need to study the different varieties of English and their linguistic features is recognized by all. Another area of interest in the EIL field is a pedagogical one. English language teaching has traditionally used a native speaker model. However, many non-native speakers’ motivation to learn English arises from highly instrumental reasons, for example, access to the Internet, travelling or working. Therefore, learners of English do not necessarily feel the need to achieve a native like competence. The teaching of English should take into account the various international settings the learners use it in. In order to answer these questions, research is needed in the roles and functions of English used in different non-native countries. (McKay 2002). Scholars have called for more sociolinguistic research on the aspects of English in international contexts. Referring to the spread of English and the complex

linguistic phenomenon of the different varieties and multitude of uses in multinational contexts, Kachru (1985:15) says:

It is evident that linguists, language planners, and language teachers have never had to confront a question of these dimensions before, with so many theoretical, applied, and attitudinal implications. Answers to such questions are relevant to the description, analysis, and teaching of English.

In the same manner, McKay (2002) and Görlach (1988) state that because of the number of English users and their great diversity it is essential to do more research on the diversified ways individuals use English around the world. It is in this frame that this study is carried out examining the role of English in international professional context, the challenges faced by the employees' when communicating in a non-native language and their views on and attitudes towards English as the corporate language.

2.2.2 EFL and ESL

There is some vagueness in the way English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL), terms distinct from, but related to the concept of EIL, are being used in literature (Campbell et al. 1982:66). These terms are often applied to determine the position the English language has in a given country, placing some countries into the ESL category and others into the EFL category. Some scholars, for example, classify Scandinavian countries, including Finland, along with the EFL countries, whereas others group them together with ESL countries. According to Kachru (1986:19), a second-language variety of English has a long history of adapting itself into a new culture. It has a wide sphere of local functions in law and administration, education and to some extent also in the media (Görlach 1988:1). This kind of institutionalised variety of English is used in great variety of very diverse countries and is spoken as a second language by the bi- or multilingual people

(Kachru 1985:12). In EFL countries, according to Görlach (1988:4), English is almost solely acquired at school, as part of the foreign language education and does not serve such comprehensive functions in the society as an institutionalised second language variety. The use of English in these countries is restricted to certain domains, for example, as the main language of international business and science. It is the use of English in these EFL countries that, according to (Kachru 1985:13), “further strengthens the claims of English as an international or universal language”. These countries do not have a historical foundation for using English, i.e., colonization; however, it is in these countries where the spread of English is currently most rapid (Kachru 1985:13).

Even though this division seems clear to some extent, dividing countries and their speakers into ESL or EFL categories is not so straightforward. Many times language situations are complex; countries might have both EFL and ESL characteristics and categorising them is difficult. Furthermore, language situations are far from stable. The status of English language and countries’ language policies changes; what was once an ESL country may become an EFL country and vice versa. (Kachru 1985:14). Because of the changing situations and the difficulty of clearly stating which is which, the present study will not examine the employees who use English as the internal company language under any predefined category; as ESL speakers or EFL speakers. Instead, the question whether the subjects could or should be placed in one of these categories will be left open. English is increasingly used as the lingua franca of international business and the way its users, the employees, view English in the context of internal company communications, is one of the main interests of this study.

2.2.3 International English and culture

Language and culture are tied together and when talking about language one cannot exclude the aspect of culture. However, the relationship between an international language and culture is a two-sided issue. Here, the way culture is approached in the current study will be briefly discussed.

The concept of English as an international language contains the aspect of culture in itself: English is used for the communication of non-native speakers with other non-native speakers as well as with native speakers of different nationalities. Cross-cultural and cross-linguistic interactions play a role in the use of English as an international language. Therefore, in order to communicate effectively the speakers of EIL have to have knowledge of the different ways, rules and patterns of speaking each culture has. However, as Smith (1983) argues, when a language becomes international in character, it is no longer bound to any one culture. He does not deny the relationship between language and culture but states that the users of EIL do not need to become more like native English speakers or adopt Western ways of thinking to be able to use English effectively for wider communication. In a sense, as Smith says, English as an international language has become “de-nationalized”, i.e., the use of English is no longer linked to native speaker countries (McKay 2002:12). Thus, it has a less and less culture-specific nature. In other words, English belongs now to those who use it (Kachru 1985:20) and has merged or is merging into the culture of the country where it is used (McKay 2002:12). According to McKay (2002:12), one of EIL’s main functions is to enable people to share their ideas and culture with others. In a similar manner Smith (1983:27) states that EIL is a means to communicate ones own “identity, culture, politics, religion, and “way of life”.

In today’s international working environment it is common to have employees from many different countries. Intercultural awareness is important for smooth relationships between the co-workers and for the business to be

conducted efficiently. However, as international companies are ethnically, socially and geographically diverse, the English used in the company is not tied to any particular culture. Employees as members of such a business community have specific occupational goals and learn English to gain these goals. Business community can be seen as a type of discourse community. The concept of discourse community will be defined and discussed in more detail in chapter 2.4. The cultural basis of an international business community, then, is more a shared interest or goal rather than ethnic or geographical and the language used has an instrumental function. (McKay 2002). In other words, the business community creates its own cultural basis and norms for language use. These include for example a lexicon specific for a discourse community, such as a professional jargon, and the style, structure and content of both written and spoken discourse. (McKay 2002:98). In short, “the way things are done” in a company.

In the next chapter, the use of English in professional communication will be discussed. First, previous studies on the area of professional communication, such as business communication and needs analyses will be presented, after which the discussion concentrates on English used in internal communication.

2.3 English in professional communication

Freed (1993:197) describes professional communication as discourse directed to a group or an individual, who is operating as a member of the group with the intention of influencing the group’s function. Freed’s definition covers a lot of ground but it underscores the functional and socially complex nature of professional communication. The present study understands professional communication in a similar broad manner as discourse that takes place in

professional contexts. The more established term *business communication* is understood as a subset of professional communication.

2.3.1 Previous research

There has been a lot of research in the area of business communication and the relationship between good communication and business effectiveness is widely acknowledged by the scholars (Huseman et al. 1981:13). Yet, despite English being overwhelmingly the language of international markets, business communication in English has not attracted as much scholarly interest. In Europe, the research has varied from the languages for specific purposes (LSP) and English for specific purposes (ESP) studies that have traditionally studied professional written texts and terminology for the purposes of business language training, to research on various aspects of spoken business discourse. (Louhiala-Salminen 1995). Firth (1991), for example, has analyzed language in the workplace, namely, negotiation activities in business transactions. Business negotiations have also been studied by Lampi (1986), who examined the linguistic components of strategy in business negotiations in English and Hiukka (1988), who studied the communication problems of Finnish exporters in intercultural business negotiations. An extensive study of written business communication in English has been carried out by Yli-Jokipii (1992), who analyzed the professional discourse in British, American and Finnish business letters. Written business communication was also the focus in Louhiala-Salminen's (1995) research on Finnish business people. She examined the extent and the areas where business people needed written business communication in English. In her research, she noted an increased need for a good command of English of practically all the employees due to the changes in the organizational structure brought up by the growth of the international markets and the development of technology. These changes have created a

demand for mapping the employees' foreign language needs in various international fields.

Several needs analyses have been carried out in varied professional areas in the eighties and especially in the nineties. Needs surveys are used to gain information on the employees' language skills; map present as well as future foreign language needs and measure the effectiveness of language training. In Europe, surveys on language needs have been conducted for example by Hollqvist (1984) who studied the use of the English language in three major Swedish corporations, van Els (1990, as quoted in Sinkkonen 1997:30), whose research mapped the language needs in different parts of the Dutch society and Bausch et al. (1980, as quoted in Sinkkonen 1997:30), who studied the language needs in commerce and industry in Germany. (For a more comprehensive list see Sinkkonen 1997). In Finland, needs analyses have a long tradition and several studies on languages used at work have been conducted. Huhta (1999) studied the language and communication needs and skills in business and industry. She found in her study that, although the employees estimated having a reasonably good command of English in general, one third considered their language skills sufficient and about half partially sufficient; oral communication skills were seen problematic. Difficulties were reported in finding relevant terminology, giving presentations and in general fluency. Similar tendencies were found by Mehtäläinen (1987), who studied the language needs of Helsinki city administrative personnel, Yli-Renko (1988), who assessed the foreign language training needs and skills in the Ministry of the Interior in Finland, Sinkkonen (1997), who examined the language needs and skills of public administrative personnel and Sajavaara (2000) who evaluated the effectiveness of the Finnish state administration personnel's language training. For example, most of Yli-Renko's (1988) subjects' rated their oral language skills in English satisfactory, fair or poor. Less than one fifth estimated it to be good or very good. Sajavaara (2000), Huhta (1999) and Sinkkonen (1997) show that the shyness and reluctance to use foreign

languages common to the Finnish mentality were seen as a drawback and contributed to the lack of oral skills. Some people in Sinkkonen's (1997) study had not even attended language training because they felt their language skills were inadequate. In her study, language skills were also seen to have an influence on one's career at least to some extent; some employees reported losing tasks due to insufficient language skills, whereas some with good language skills reported receiving more tasks and responsibilities.

Most of the research in professional communication in English focuses mainly on external business communication or foreign language training. The several needs analyses conducted in Finland all concentrate on more than one language that are used mainly for external business communication. They also have almost purely a pedagogical point of view from which the use, skills and needs of the employees are examined. Only few studies concentrate on the problems in internal communications of an international company. In Finland, the Helsinki School of Economics is currently carrying out research on this area. The project is called "Finnish, Swedish, or English? Internal communication in recently merged Finnish-Swedish companies" and the objective is to study the language choice, communication flow and communicators' attitudes as well as the written communication in recently emerged Finnish-Swedish companies. (For further information visit the project's [web page: http://www.hkkk.fi/netcomm/venue/venue_index.asp?Level1=4902&lan=FIN](http://www.hkkk.fi/netcomm/venue/venue_index.asp?Level1=4902&lan=FIN)). The language shift in internal company communications and the resulting problems experienced by the companies and the employees have also been studied by Vollstedt (2000). Vollstedt's study will be discussed in the following chapter.

2.3.2 English for internal company communications

Globalisation and the development of information and communication technologies have presented and are presenting companies and organisations with new challenges. If a company wants to benefit from the global markets it has to adjust its organisation to the new situation. An organisation that operates and does business on an international level has subsidiaries, affiliates, subcontractors, customers and business partners in numerous countries. The company has to communicate externally with its customers and partners in different countries but internally between the subsidiaries and affiliates in different countries as well. (Vollstedt 2002: 87).

External and internal company communications are two primary communication systems in an organization and have different, yet interrelated functions. A company communicates externally with relevant individuals and groups outside the organization. Internal communication takes place inside the company and could be defined as the “human interaction that occurs within organizations and among organization members” (Kreps 1990:20). Internal communication can be both formal and informal (Huseman et al. 1981:8). Formal communication channels are used for example to provide employees with instruction and evaluation messages, to co-ordinate tasks and to carry employee feedback to the managerial level. These messages enable the company to carry out important organizational processes. (Kreps 1990:20). Much of the communication during the working day does not go through regular information channels: employees also exchange information informally with each other by telephone, e-mail, in meetings and by chance (Huseman et al. 1981:8).

Instead of using the headquarters’ language, more and more companies are applying English as the lingua franca for their internal company communications. In businesses that represent small speech communities, such as the Scandinavian languages, English has already been used for some time as

the company language. Studies from Hollqvist (1994), Pratt (1996, as quoted in Vollstedt 2002:90) and Engströmer et al. (1994, as quoted in Vollstedt 2002:90) show that in Sweden and Denmark many businesses began using English as the company language already by the beginning of the eighties. (Vollstedt 2002:90). This earlier application of a lingua franca as the company language in Scandinavia can be explained, according to Vollstedt (2002:90), by the practical fact that the languages of small speech communities are seldom learned as foreign languages in other countries and the companies need a lingua franca to be able to find employees in the countries where their subsidiaries are located. However, in the last few years, the language policy in the businesses representing larger speech communities has also changed. For example, English is the most important language today in many companies based in Germany. (Vollstedt 2002: 90).

A common language gives an international company many advantages. Communication across borders is easy, the number and cost of translation services are minimized and employees can work at any location. However, using English for internal communication can also cause problems. Even when using one's own mother tongue, misunderstandings can occur in a communication situation. The chance of having problems in communication is naturally even higher when using a non-native language whose speakers often have very different levels of language knowledge. (Vollstedt 2002:100). According to Vollstedt (2002:100), these difficulties in language use have several consequences. First of all, there are the financial costs caused by the impaired flow of information (delayed, incorrect or inexact information, misunderstandings and poor cooperation among co-workers). Second, establishing social relationships among the employees might be difficult if one does not have a good command of the language. Third, Vollstedt (2002:101) argues that employees who are forced to use a foreign language are often unsure of themselves because "they are lacking those verbal tools of expression available to native speakers". According to Vollstedt (2002:101), even up to 50

percent of the employee input in work groups is lost due to the lack of the employees' foreign language competence or confidence to take part in discussions. This is a very high percentage, especially nowadays when companies use lot of teamwork, suggesting that a great amount of information and professional knowledge is getting lost. Fourth, the employees' potential is underestimated because of insufficient knowledge of the language of communication. Thus, employees who have a good command of English are more likely to be promoted faster than those whose knowledge of English is markedly worse but who are equally or even more qualified. (Vollstedt 2002:101). To sum up, using English, a non-native language for most of the employees, in internal communications presents companies with challenges that can cause a lot of difficulties concerning not only work efficiency. Therefore, it is important to study the problems an international company faces when using English as the corporate language.

Next, we will turn to the concept of discourse community.

2.4 Discourse community

In this chapter the concept of discourse community will be discussed and the relevance of the term for this study will be clarified, after which business community will be examined as a one type of discourse community.

2.4.1 Discourse community versus speech community

The term discourse community derives from the concept of speech community, a fundamental concept in sociolinguistics. Much of sociolinguistic research centres on the study of speech communities and a consequent variety of definitions exist, each one slightly different from the other. Simply put, a speech community refers to a group of people who share the same language

(Brutt-Griffler 2002:141). This definition, however, is too vague and general. It is easy to demonstrate that speech community and language are not congruent, for example, in the case of English. English is spoken around the world, in a variety of ways and in different speech communities distinct from each other. (Wardaugh 1992:118). Many linguists have made an effort to elaborate on speech community, approaching the definition from different angles. Instead of linguistic criteria, Labov (1972b, as quoted in Wardaugh 1992:118) emphasized the members' feeling of belonging to the same speech community and their "participation in a set of shared norms" Fishman (1971, as quoted in Dorian 1982:27), on the other hand, stresses the use of language as well as the norms for its use: "A speech community is one, all of whose members share at least a single speech variety and the norms for its appropriate use". Yet another approach is taken by Dorian (1997:80), who prefers a definition of a speech community that refers neither to the norms nor the use of a language. According to her, a speech community consists of people who "perceive" to be part of the same community.

Different definitions of speech community have helped the scholars to determine the area where they carry out their linguistic studies on the characteristics of different speech communities, for example, the Black American speech community in the United States, the Gaelic speech community in Scotland, the New York speech community and many indigenous speech communities in Africa, Asia and America. These communities are very much uniform either ethnically, geographically and / or socially. However, a new type of speech community has appeared with the expanding global markets and new technology. These communities cross borders and use English as their medium. They include, for example, entertainment industry, diplomacy and international business. (McKay 2002:24). Swales (1990) suggests the term discourse community to describe these new communities and argues for the separation of the two terms on three grounds. First, unlike speech community, which is a sociolinguistic group, discourse community is a "sociorhetorical"

group where “literacy takes away locality and parochiality” and members are more likely to communicate with people in distant places and respond to writings from the past (Swales 1990:24). Second, in most of the speech communities communication serves social needs (McKay 2002:97), such as group solidarity, whereas the communication in a discourse community often has instrumental goals. For example, a major goal of a business community is to make profit and business communication serves that goal. Individuals join such communities to pursue functional goals while members of speech communities are in many cases born into them, for example, into an ethnic group. (Swales 1990:24). Third, Swales alleges that discourse communities are centrifugal in contrast to speech communities that are centripetal. Centrifugal discourse communities “tend to separate people into occupational or speciality-interest groups” recruiting its members by training or qualifications. Centripetal speech communities, on the other hand, “tend to absorb people into... general fabric” and memberships are inherited characteristically by “birth, accident or adoption”. (Swales 1990:24).

2.4.2 Business community as a discourse community

Swales (1990:24) proposes four determining characteristics for identifying a group of people as a discourse community. Next, it will be shortly demonstrated that all of them apply to international companies. Swales’s first defining characteristic for a discourse community is “a broadly agreed set of common public goals”. The goals of a business are obvious; to make profit through selling products. These common goals for the company are usually stated in the form of a business idea, where customer relations and product and organizational development are often mentioned with the financial profitability. Second, according to Swales (1990:25), a discourse community has “mechanics of intercommunication among its members” and “uses participatory

mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback". He mentions meetings, telecommunications, correspondence, newsletters and conversations as examples. In a business these are all part of the company's internal communications that enable information flow between managers, employees and different departments. Good company communications also provide opportunities and channels for feedback. Third, a discourse community possesses one or more genres and has a specific lexis. Genre in a discourse community means the "communicative proceedings and practices" that the community possesses in order to "get things done" (Swales 1990:26). It also refers to the appropriateness of topics, the forms and functions used in the company discourse and the roles texts have in the discourse community. In an international company there is a "way of doing things" that a new employee has to learn to be able to participate fully in the community. These involve, for example, the way documentation is done, the way meetings are carried out and the way business letters and e-mails are written, in other words, the organisational culture. Specific lexis refers to the lexical items that are characteristic to a particular community. International business has specialized terminology depending on the area, where it operates. For example, a company that operates in the field of information technology uses terminology known to a wider information technological community. This special lexis that might be total Hebrew for an outsider makes it possible for the members of the discourse community to communicate efficiently with each other. Last, a discourse community has a certain amount of experts and novices, which enables the survival of the community. A thriving international business has experienced professionals, experts on the fields needed and new employees that make the future of the company possible. (Swales 1990).

The present study will be conducted in the frame of a discourse community, more specifically, a business community. The traditional unit of sociolinguistic analysis, speech community, does not serve the context and aims of the present study. The concept of discourse community, on the other hand,

makes it possible to examine the use of English in an international business context. It enables the observation of the use of English in a community that has certain set of elements and defining characteristics and the analyses of the language use within the community norms and conventions.

In the following chapter, the concept of communicative competence will be discussed and clarified. First, some background information of the birth and formation of the concept will be provided, after which the different components of the communicative competence will be described. Second, communicative competence in a specific discourse community will be discussed.

2.5 Communicative competence

To be able to function in a communicative situation, for example, an occupational situation, and to accomplish the tasks and activities required, users of language utilize a number of competencies (The Common European Framework in its political and educational context: <http://culture2.coe.int/portfolio//documents/0521803136txt.pdf>). The speakers draw upon their knowledge and skills to understand the literal meaning of utterances, to say the appropriate thing in a given context, to produce coherent speech or text, to solve communication problems or to make their communication more effective (Canale 1983). This underlying communicative capability of a person is called his or her communicative competence and can be defined as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in a given language in various situations” (Cziko 1984:23).

There has been a lot of debate and research on the concept of communicative competence and the different components that constitute it. Chomsky (1965) introduced the term linguistic competence defining it as the linguistic system that an ideal native speaker of a given language has internalised. As Widdowson (1989:129) points out, Chomsky’s notion of

competence referred exclusively to a person's knowledge of rules of grammar, not to an ability to do anything. As a reaction to Chomsky's (1965) rather restricted definition of competence, Hymes (1972, as quoted in Canale and Swain 1980:4) proposed a broader notion of competence, that of communicative competence. He argued that it involves more to know a language than knowing how to compose correct sentences. He integrated Chomsky's (1965) idea of linguistic competence with a contextual and sociolinguistic competence and, thus, included the ability to use a language. Since then, many scholars have developed, adapted and interpreted the concept. Canale and Swain (1980) offer one of the most thorough descriptions of the different aspects constituting communicative competence. Their interest in the concept of competence arose from the need to develop tests of language proficiency. Language tests are used to measure one's knowledge of and proficiency in a language. The idea of communicative competence is a theory of such knowledge and proficiency (Spolsky 1989:138), which is, according to Canale and Swain (1980), indirectly observable in actual communicative performance. Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence include grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Later, Canale (1983) revised the model separating discourse competence in its own right from the sociolinguistic one. In her study on expatriate adjustment, Konivuori (2002) combined and adapted the components of communicative competence by Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983), Faerch, Haarstrup and Phillipson (1984) and Binon and Claes (1995). The present study will apply Konivuori's model for it is clear and suits the purpose of examining business people's English language competence as well.

2.5.1 Types of communicative competence

Konivuori (2002) divides communicative competence in three main competence areas: linguistic, pragmatic and strategic competence, further dividing pragmatic competence into discourse and sociolinguistic competence. Linguistic competence includes the knowledge and ability to use the rules of a language such as “vocabulary, word formation, grammar, sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics (Canale and Swain 1980, Canale 1983, Konivuori 2002). This is the restricted sense of Chomsky’s linguistic competence. Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) refer to this as grammatical competence. Linguistic competence is essential for understanding and expressing the literal meaning of utterances and is, therefore, important for any language learning (Canale 1983, Konivuori 2002). Pragmatic competence is composed of pragmatic and discourse knowledge that are combined with linguistic competence forming a link between the speaker’s linguistic competence and actual language use (Faerch, Haarstrup and Phillipson 1994, Konivuori 2002). In other words, pragmatic competence “covers the actual and appropriate language use in specific situations taking into account the speaker’s intentions” (Konivuori 2002:18). Canale and Swain (1980) did not use the notion of pragmatic competence in their model; instead they talked about sociolinguistic competence that included sociocultural rules and rules of discourse. Later, Canale (1983) separated the two components forming two distinct aspects of competence: sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence (Canale and Swain 1980, Canale 1983, Konivuori 2002). In Konivuori’s description, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence are seen as part of pragmatic competence. She states that the distinction helps to “specify what areas of pragmatic competence, be it social or discourse, are relevant to each context” (Konivuori 2002:19). Hence, sociolinguistic competence, as a constituent of pragmatic competence, refers to “the appropriate use and interpretation of language in different sociolinguistic

contexts that can vary in their topics, role of participants, setting, norms, and conventions and so on” (Konivuori 2002:19). Furthermore, it includes the appropriateness of meaning, i.e., the communicative functions (for example, commanding and complaining), attitudes (for example, politeness and formality) and ideas that are considered proper in a particular context (Canale 1983:7). The other component of pragmatic competence, discourse competence, refers to the ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to create unified texts, written or spoken, in varied genres. Unity is acquired by cohesion and coherence. Cohesive text is structurally linked using, for example, pronouns and conjunctions and thereby facilitates the interpretation and understanding of the text by logically grouping the utterances. Coherence means the relationship different meanings have in a given text. They can be literal meanings, communicative functions and attitudes. (Canale 1983:9). Finally, strategic competence is the part of a person’s communicative competence that is used when other areas of competence fail and there is a breakdown in communication. These strategies can be both verbal and non-verbal, and are used, for example, when one is unable to remember a certain expression or grammatical form and needs paraphrasing, or when one is uncertain how to address a stranger. Communicative strategies are also used to increase the effectiveness of communication, for instance, a deliberately slow speech. (Canale and Swain 1980, Canale 1983, Konivuori 2002). According to Canale and Swain (1980), such strategies are especially helpful when learning a language. However, they are more likely to be acquired in real-life situations and not in the classroom.

In an attempt to characterize the way a person’s communicative competence interacts with the context of language use, the shared knowledge of the world and the negotiation of meaning between the interlocutors, an additional aspect of communicative competence, namely, interactional competence will be included here. The recognition of knowledge and context in language use is not a new invention. As discussed previously in this chapter,

already Hymes recognised the importance of context beyond the sentence in language use. His definition of communicative competence included both knowledge of a language and ability to use a language. According to Hymes (1972, as quoted in Savignon 1983:12), a person's performance in a context reflects the interaction between the person's competence, the competence of others and the nature of the event. In the same manner, Savignon (1983:8) stated that communicative competence is a dynamic, context specific, interpersonal concept that depends on the "negotiation of meaning between two or more persons who share to some degree the same symbolic system".

The model of communicative competence described previously in this chapter also includes context as a central element of pragmatic competence: utterances and sentences are expressed in the context of discourse and language is used in different sociocultural contexts. Kramersch (1986) speaks especially strongly for the importance of interaction in the communication situation. She talks about interactional competence and asserts that it is necessary for successful communication. Kramersch (1986:367) sees interaction as a collaborative activity that involves a triangular relationship between the sender, the receiver and the context. For her, successful interaction presupposes shared knowledge of the world, reference to a common external context and the construction of a shared internal context. This shared internal context is constructed by the efforts of the interactional partners with the aim of reducing the uncertainty that each participant has about the other's "intentions, perceptions, and expectations". (Kramersch 1986:367). Thus, according to Kramersch (1986:367):

Interaction always entails negotiating intended meanings, i.e., adjusting one's speech to the effect one intends to have on the listener. It entails anticipating the listener's response and possible misunderstandings, clarifying one's own and the other's intentions and arriving at the closed possible match between intended, perceived and anticipated meanings.

Kramersch's (1986) notion of context is close to the sociolinguistic competence by Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983) and Konivuori (2002), because sociolinguistic competence includes the appropriate use and interpretation of language in different sociolinguistic contexts. Furthermore, Kramersch's (1986) construction of shared internal context has many similarities with strategic competence as defined by Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983) and Konivuori (2002). Although they emphasize the use of strategic competence when the communication breaks down, these authors also maintain that the communication strategies are used to increase the effectiveness of the communication. This is basically what Kramersch (1986) calls negotiation of meaning. Thus, strategic competence is negotiation of meaning in a narrower sense.

There is some divergence among the scholars about the extent context influences a person's language ability. On one end, for example, there are the co-constructivists who see language performance purely as a joint achievement between the interactants (McNamara 1997). Without going further into discussing the different views on this matter, it will be sufficient to state in the framework of the present study that language performance has a socially constructed aspect. It is not only the speakers' innate language abilities but the speakers' innate language abilities in interaction with their shared knowledge of the world, the context of language use, as well as the construction of the shared internal context of the interactants that affect the language performance. Therefore, the successful outcome of communication does not solely depend on one person's communicative competence, but on other interactants' language abilities and on the context of the situation as well.

2.5.2 Communicative competence in a specific discourse community

A general assumption in traditional language teaching has been that the goal of English language learners is to achieve native-like competence. However, in recent years this native speaker model, based on Chomsky's (1965) notion of the "ideal speaker listener", has been criticized by many researchers and English language teachers who claim that it is both utopian and unrealistic. For example, Alptekin (2002:59) says: "one cannot claim that there is one correct and appropriate way to use English, in the sense that one set of language patterns is somehow inherently superior to all others". The model is particularly constraining in connection to English as an international language. Most of the non-native speakers of English use the language in restricted domains, such as professional or academic domains, and, therefore, do not need to achieve a native like proficiency (McKay 2002). In these domains, or discourse communities (as was discussed in chapter 2.4), English is used in a very instrumental manner, for example, for international business purposes. The function of the language is to serve those goals that are important for the discourse community and its members. As Widdowson (1998, as quoted in Alptekin 2002:61) states: "the language which is real for the native speakers is not likely to be real for non-native speakers. For language to be authentic in its routine pragmatic functioning, it needs to be localized within a particular discourse community". Consequently, the communicative competence of the speakers in a particular discourse community should be viewed and assessed against the instrumental, goal-oriented communicative behaviour that takes place in order to achieve the goals of the community. It is what the speakers need to know in order to operate effectively as members of their discourse community what is important and essential, not what they should know according to the native-speaker model. An employee in an international company that uses English as its internal company language is a member of a business community and uses English to cope with everyday situations and

tasks, such as meetings, telephone calls, writing documents and socializing with colleagues. The emphasis is on the successful outcome of the situations and the tasks performed and, hence, the speaker should not be seen as just a learner or a non-native speaker but, rather, a language user, who is applying his skills and competencies to the needs of the tasks.

The last chapter of the theoretical part of this study will deal with language attitudes.

2.6 Language attitudes

Attitude is a construct that is used to explain and predict the direction and persistence of individual's behaviour. It is an interdisciplinary concept that has been analysed from a variety of perspectives, for example, anthropological, psychological, sociological, educational and, particularly, from the social psychological perspective. In addition to its scientific use, attitude is also a term in common usage, as we talk about having positive or negative attitudes towards things of importance to us. (Baker 1992:9). In science, a variety of definitions exist. Ajzen (1988, as quoted in Baker 1992:11) provides a definition where attitude is regarded as "a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution, or event." Thus, in the case of language attitudes, language can be seen as an object that causes positive or negative reactions in a person.

Language attitudes have been studied from various perspectives. Depending on the interests, the research has focused, for example, on attitudes towards language variation and dialect, attitudes towards language groups, communities and minorities or attitudes towards the uses of a specific language (Baker 1992:29). A considerable amount of research has been done in the area of second language and foreign language learning where the relationship between attitudes and achievement in second or foreign language has been

studied (Gardner 1982:133). Many of these studies have demonstrated a correlation between the individual's attitudes and his or her language achievement (Gardner 1982:135). When attempting to gain information about a community's views on language, its status, importance and value, studying the community members' attitudes has proved beneficial. Studying attitudes provides information on current community thought, beliefs, preferences and desires. (Baker 1992:9-10). This information is especially important when language policies are concerned. Lewis (1981, as quoted in Baker 1992:9) says: "Any policy for language ... has to take account of the attitude of those likely to be affected". According to him, in order to be successful a language policy has to conform to the attitudes of those involved (Baker 1992:10). When an international company adopts English as its corporate language, it is implementing a new language policy in its working environment and on its employees. Thus, knowledge of the employees' attitudes towards the English language, its use and status, is important for the language policy to function well.

Most of the research on language attitude has made a contrast between two principle attitude parts: an instrumental and an integrative orientation. Instrumental orientation refers to pragmatic, utilitarian motives of learning and knowing a language. It is mostly self-oriented and individualistic. For example, a person might want to study English in order to get a good job and succeed in it. An integrative orientation, on the other hand, is social and interpersonal in orientation. It refers to an interest in learning and knowing a language in order to facilitate interaction with another language community. For example, a person who wants to learn English in order to learn about British people and their way of life is expressing an integrative attitude towards English. (Gardner 1982, Baker 1992).

Several methods have been applied to measure language attitudes. They can be either direct or indirect. Most of the studies on language attitudes are indirect and are conducted using the so-called matched guise –technique. The

direct methods include questionnaires and interviews where the subjects are asked directly about their language attitudes. (Ryan, Giles and Sebastian 1982, Baker 1992, Kalaja 1999). The present study uses the latter approach exploring the employees' attitudes towards English with the help of interviews.

In the next section, the methodology used in the present study will be presented.

3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to examine English in internal company communications. In the centre of interest are the employees' views on and attitudes towards English as the corporate language, as well as the challenges they face when using English at work. On a broader level, the aim is to understand the role English has in a domain of internal company communications. Since the intention of this study is to gain in-depth information on the employees' views and real-life experiences of their use of English at work, a qualitative approach was chosen. For gathering the data, a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview was considered the best. Another option would have been a questionnaire distributed for the employees. However, it was predicted that many people might not be motivated in filling out questionnaires and would not necessarily concentrate on completing them. Moreover, questionnaires are mostly consisted of strictly structured themes, questions and answering possibilities that do not allow getting deep into the subject concerned and gaining a broad understanding of it. A semi-structured interview, on the other hand, makes it possible for the employees to express themselves freely and talk about issues that are of particular interest for them. It allows the interviewer to focus the questions and clarify possible misunderstandings. It also gives the interviewer the possibility to observe the interviewee and, thereby, get information on the motivations behind the answers. Thus, a semi-structured interview was seen as the best way to motivate the subjects and encourage the expression of their thoughts and feelings.

A case study of a single company was chosen in order to make sure that the company conditions and the background information of the employees interviewed were consistent. If the subjects interviewed worked in various companies, it would be difficult to make any coherent or even valid conclusions and comparisons on the answers because of the differences in the working

environment. The similarity in the informants' professional environment and working culture makes it possible to analyse the material from the point of view of the company in question and the results are, therefore, more relevant and useful for that particular company. Furthermore, the amount of information is easier to handle when there is some coherency on the informants' backgrounds. This, however, is also the downside of such a case study. When there are a limited number of employees interviewed, all from the same company, one has to be cautious of making any far-reaching conclusions and generalisations based on the results.

The reason for choosing the company in question for the study was that it met the essential criteria: it is a big international company that has offices located all around the world and employees of many nationalities. Most importantly, the company has English as its corporate language.

The interviews dealt with four main themes: 1. the use of the English language in the company, 2. the challenges the employees face when communicating in English at work, 3. the employees' views on what it means to have a good command of English, their evaluation of their own skills in the English language, how it has developed and the need for improvement and, 4. the employees' attitudes towards English as the corporate language. (Please refer to appendix 2 for the interview questions.) The first two themes were treated jointly in the interview to avoid overlapping of the questions and answers. These themes and the associated questions were selected with a view of gaining a comprehensive and thorough picture of the role of English in the company as well as the employees' views on, attitudes towards and competence in English. When planning for the interviews, the questions used in Konivuori's (2002) study were used as examples and were applied to some extent.

In the interview the subjects were asked to fill out a form on background information. (Please refer to appendix 1 for the form on background information.) It included such basic information about the interviewees as age, education and information on their language skills and training. The

background information helps to get a more comprehensive picture of the subjects and, thus, serves the analysis of the results.

The interviewees were chosen to represent a variety of departments and occupational duties in the organization. This way it is possible to get a more comprehensive picture of the language situation in the company. If all the subjects represented only one department or professional area, it would be hard to make conclusions concerning the company on the whole. The subjects also represent both sexes and different ages. Unfortunately, the number of informants is not very high: seven employees were interviewed. The main reason for this was the fact that the present study is not meant to be very extensive in length and the amount of data gathered was planned accordingly. Seven subjects were estimated to be an adequate number of informants for the scope of the current study. This naturally affects the reliability of the results and any inferences and generalizations should be made with caution.

The interviewees were contacted beforehand with an e-mail where the purpose of the study was explained and the main themes of the interview were listed. The list of themes was provided to give the subjects an idea of the upcoming interview and to offer them a possibility to prepare for it. This helped to conduct the interviews smoothly and to keep them within a desired frame. A date and time for each interview was set according to the employees' schedules. The interviews took place in the company where a meeting room was provided for this purpose. They lasted for about an hour each and were recorded with a minidisk recorder. Unfortunately, in two cases the minidisk recorder malfunctioned erasing the whole contents of the minidisks and, thus, those two interviews. Fortunately, most of the things discussed in the interview were written down afterwards by the interviewer and, thus, it was still possible to use the information collected from the two interviews. However, it is not possible to quote these interviews word for word in the analysis.

All the seven interviews proceeded in a similar manner. The themes were covered in the same order as in the planned interview. First, the extent

English was used at work was talked about as well as the challenges and the possible difficulties the interviewees faced using English. Then, the employees evaluated their skills in English, reflected on the development of their English language abilities during the time they had been working in the company and discussed the need for possible future training in the English language. Last, the employees' attitudes towards the English language as the corporate language were discussed.

The interviewees had a positive attitude towards the study and the interview. Although the employees of a large-sized international company have busy schedules and many responsibilities, all of the subjects found the time to take part in the study, expressed an open mind and had a positive attitude towards contributing to the research.

The data material gained from the interviews was transcribed for analysis, after which similar findings were grouped together to find major themes. The data description utilizes the general outline of the themes that were already used in the interviews. First, background information about the informants and the company is given, after which the employees' use of English at work is described. Second, challenging situations as opposed to routine use of English are discussed as well as the employees' use of Finnish versus English at work. Third, the informants' views on their English language skills and their improvement are described. Fourth, the findings are discussed from the viewpoint of communicative competence. Finally, the employees' attitudes towards English as the corporate language are described. The qualitative analysis is done side by side with the description of the data where the description of the findings is followed by the analysis of the possible reasons for these findings. Extracts from the interviews are displayed to give the reader an impression of the employees' real life experiences and thoughts. The extracts are displayed first in the original language of the interview, after which a translation to English is provided.

4 DATA DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 The subjects

Seven employees were interviewed for the study: five men and two women. (When referring to the interviewees in the analysis the masculine form “he” will be used for both the female and male subjects to protect their anonymity.) The subjects were aged between thirty and fifty-four years, most of them being between thirty and forty years old. They worked in various positions in the company and had various tasks and responsibilities. The titles mentioned were technician, project manager, assistant project manager, chief of department and product development controller. The years of employment varied from three years to fifteen years, the average time being seven years. Two of the interviewees had a university education and the rest a vocational schooling. Most of them had a degree in engineering or in some other technical field, except for two, who had degrees in other fields.

Most of the subjects had studied English in school for ten years. One of the interviewees reported having studied no English at all in school. He had also had no language training after school, as was the case with two other subjects. The rest had studied English after school from one to five years, or reported having taken some language courses.

In the background information the informants were enquired if they had spent time abroad, for example, studied, worked or if they had taken part in a language course in another country. Short holiday trips abroad were not taken into account. Only one of the subjects had not spent time abroad. The other interviewees had been abroad from a few weeks to a couple of years. Three of the informants had spent a longer period of time consistently in one country; the rest had been on business trips, language courses or studying for shorter periods of time. Most of the subjects knew other languages than English and English was not the only language used abroad. Depending on the country of stay, some

of the informants had spoken Swedish, Russian or German and, thus, commented on the language they had used abroad. While abroad the interviewees had to use the language quite extensively for working, studying, everyday errands and socializing with the locals. Most challenging when communicating in another language was the comprehension of mainly the spoken language. Other difficulties mentioned were difficult accents and lack of general vocabulary and self-confidence in one's own language abilities when talking with the locals.

The company studied does business in the area of telecommunications. It is a large international company with presence in more than 140 countries worldwide. The head quarters are located in Sweden. The employees interviewed all worked in the company's head office in Finland. English, more specifically, American English has been the corporate language in the company for about five years. It is important to note that there are many Swedish native speakers working in the head office in Finland. Thus, the Swedish language also plays a role in the language situation of the company. In addition to Swedes, employees from many other countries add to the multicultural flavour of the working environment. The company offers its employees the possibility to attend English language courses with different themes and levels. Furthermore, the possibility for self-study is available in the Internet and, in some cases, the employee can take part in an intensive course in England.

4.2 Use of English at work

All the employees interviewed for this study reported using English daily at work. Some of them said that half or even more than half of the working day they used English instead of Finnish. The most common situations where English was used were meetings, sending and receiving e-mail and mostly reading but also writing documentation. More than half said that the majority of

all the meetings they had were held in English. Some of the informants had some meetings in English and some in Finnish. The common rule seemed to be, and was pointed out by one of the subjects, that if there was one person in the meeting who did not know Finnish, the meeting was carried out in English.

Interview extract 1.

“Jos on yksikin, joka ei osaa suomea nii... jos on vaan suomalaisia nii puhutaan suomea ja jos on yksi englanninkielinen ni puhutaan englantia. Se on niinku oletusarvo.”

“If there is one person who doesn't know Finnish... if there're only Finns we speak Finnish and if there is even one English speaker present we speak English. That is a kind of default rule.”

The same thing was applied to project and team work with participants from other countries. Three interviewees reported using English in phone negotiations or conferences that were carried out via phone. Otherwise, the subjects did not need to use English on the phone or used it only rarely during their working day. Only one informant was an exception, as keeping contact with the customers abroad by phone was a part of his job. Other situations mentioned where English was used were, for example, face-to-face conversations, presentations, work related training, business trips and showing around company guests.

Mostly the employees interviewed found it hard to specify what area of communication, speaking, listening, writing or reading, they needed the most. All these areas of language use were needed in different situations and separating them was seen as difficult. Those interviewees who did distinguish between the areas they considered needing the most made a clear cut distinction

between reading, writing and speaking: reading and writing were needed the most and speaking less.

Interview extract 2.

“Lukeminen tietysti ihan ehdoton... ehdoton asia et... koska kaikki dokumentit on... on tuota englanniks ja sit sen jälkeen tulee kirjottaminen ja sit kolmanneks puhuminen.”

“Reading is of course absolutely imperative... imperative thing... because all the documents are... are in English and after that comes writing and third is speaking.”

Only one of the informants reported needing speaking the most. Some of the interviewees also mentioned what they thought was the most important area of communication to master in their work. They found speaking the most essential area of language use to know well even though it was not the area that was needed the most. One subject explained this by mentioning the importance of oral communication and the fast nature of interaction. One can spend more time on reading documents and clearing up difficult points. On the other hand, according to him, misunderstandings are more likely to occur in oral communication situations because of the fast flow of conversation and the unfamiliarity of spoken English.

The use of English language communication in the company seems to be in line with Louhiala-Salminen's (1995) estimate that the amount of writing is increasing in business communication. In her study on the written business communication both spoken and written communication in English were needed equally as much. At the time of her study, the most frequently used medium for written communication was the telefax but she estimated that the use of e-mail would increase. In the present study, none of the employees

interviewed mentioned using telefax as means of written communication but e-mail was used by everyone for sending and receiving English language messages as a part of the daily routine.

When asked if they used languages other than English (and Finnish) at work, not surprisingly, more than half of the interviewees said they use Swedish occasionally. However, Swedish was only used rarely and most of the subjects said that English was clearly their strongest language. It was expressed by many that the Swedish colleagues do not expect to be addressed in Swedish anymore. One interviewee was of the opinion that Finns' command of Swedish was also poor.

Interview extract 3.

“Ruotsalaiset on ottanu lusikan kauniiseen käteen ja ne puhuu englantia meidän kanssa. Ei se sujuis se suomalaisten ruotsi oik ein...”

“Swedes have done as one is told and speak English with us. Finns' Swedish wouldn't really...”

Only one subject said he spoke better Swedish than English and, therefore, preferred using it with his Swedish colleagues. No languages other than English and Swedish were used even though most of the informants reported knowing either Russian or German in addition to Swedish and English.

This situation is somewhat contradicting with Huhta's (1999) findings on language and communication skills of employees in Finnish business and industry. Although she did acknowledge an increase in the role of English at the expense of other languages, she argued for a need for Finns to start learning other languages besides English. According to her, the role of other languages will increase in the future as well and she called for the diversification of

language programs into more languages right from the school level. This proposition seems unsound when observed against the language situation in the present company. It can be inferred from the employees' reports that the role of English is dominant in the company and the need for other languages is minimal. English seems to be more and more the default language that is used when there is no common language. However, it must be noted that Huhta's (1999) study had a different approach from the present one. Her study concentrated on the language situation in the companies on the whole, not solely on English and only some of the companies in her study had English as their corporate language. Furthermore, her research included a wide range of companies in business and industry. The contradicting findings in the present study are interesting but since these findings are based on one company's situation, further research is needed on a larger scale to see whether this trend of the dominant role of English in business is more wide spread and whether it concerns only companies that use English in their internal communications. Moreover, as Huhta (1999:65) points out, those employees who need more languages in their work are usually working in sales departments, marketing or customer service, a point also mentioned by some of the subjects in this study. However, none of the employees interviewed for this study worked in the above-mentioned positions.

The English language is a natural and everyday part of the employees' work in the company where a large proportion of the daily communication is in English. The most common situations where English was used were meetings, sending and receiving e-mail and mostly reading but also writing documents. The employees reported needing all the areas of language use, however, there was an emphasis on reading and writing English. Oral communication, speaking and listening, was needed less by most of the informants. Other languages, except occasionally Swedish, were not needed or used by the subjects.

4.3 Communicating at work

4.3.1 Challenging situations in English use

Different situations that involved oral communication, i.e., speaking and listening were clearly the most challenging in the use of English language for the interviewees. Oral communication in English was not considered a routine since most of the employees said they did not need it so much. The most challenging communication situations were meetings. One of the subjects said that meetings were on the whole the most difficult thing in English at work. As was expressed by many of the informants, the conversation usually moves rapidly from one subject to another in the meetings and the people participate in the discussion and take turns quite randomly. This kind of fast interaction was considered difficult to follow in a language that is not one's mother tongue.

Interview extract 4.

“Asiat vaihtelee kokouksissa niinku asiat menee vähän niinku välillä silleen nopeesti mennään laidasta laitaan puhutaan asioita ni sen seuraaminen ni se se on vaikeeta.”

“Topics change in meetings so that things go sometimes a bit fast from one topic to another and there's discussion about things and following it is difficult.”

Understanding the discussion when the command of English is not necessarily that good and picking the main idea from the information flow was not seen as an easy task. In such situations spontaneous reaction to the discussion was considered difficult. Especially difficult was, according to one subject, participating in meetings when the topic discussed was unfamiliar and the

participants possessed a large vocabulary. When asked what was difficult in the oral communication situations, one interviewee said:

Interview extract 5.

“No se että sä saat sillä vieraalla kielellä poimituu sen asian ytimen sinne että ei tuu saat vältettyä väärinkäsitykset ja ymmärrät mistä on kysymys ja osaat vielä toimia sen perusteella.”

“Well, that that you are able to pick the main point of the discussion in a foreign language so that there’s no you’re are able to avoid misunderstandings and understand what is going on and are able to work accordingly afterwards.”

According to this employee, the challenge in using English at work is to understand the main point of the conversation clearly so that misunderstandings are avoided and work can be done correctly. It seems that, for him, it is not essential to understand everything word for word but the ability to grasp the main idea and function accordingly is the most important thing. However, this might be difficult when knowledge of English and vocabulary are not comprehensive.

Another informant mentioned that talking about complicated technical issues demands a strong basis on language skills.

Interview extract 6.

”No, se on tekniikasta kun puhutaan nii siinä pitäis yrittää saada kaikki... toiselle selvä eksakti käsitys siitä mitä mä haluan sanoa ja se ei oo niin yksinkertasta monimutkasissa asioissa. Se vaatii aika kovaa kielitaitoo että sä pystyt sen niinku... niinku sanomaan tarkasti sen asian minkä toisen pitää tajuta ja sitte sen jälkeen lähtee töihin ja saattaa tehdä päivätoimilla töitä sen ohjeen mukaan.”

“Well, when you talk about technical things you should try to get everything across... the other person a clear exact idea about what I want to say and that is not so straightforward when talking about complicated issues. It requires quite strong language abilities to be able to... to say clearly what the other person needs to understand and after that go to work and he might work for days according to that instruction”

As pointed out in the interview extracts five and six and by some other subjects as well, it was considered important that the message is conveyed clearly and exactly so that misunderstandings are avoided. When one has to work for days following given instructions it is essential that the message has been understood accurately. Thus, the employees interviewed are aware of the importance of effective communication and the costs of impaired flow of information, such as misunderstandings, as emphasized by the communication professionals.

These observations on the difficulty of oral communication are consistent with the findings of previous studies. Oral communication was similarly found to be most challenging in work-place communication in studies by Sajavaara (2000), Huhta (1999), Sinkkonen (1997), Yli-Renko (1989) and Mehtäläinen (1987). Sajavaara (2000) and Huhta (1999) reported meetings and negotiations as the most difficult communication situations for the same reasons as in the present study: language skills of the employees are deficient and speaking is not practiced and, therefore, fast paced conversations are difficult to follow and react to. In their studies on city and public administrative personnel Sajavaara (2000) and Sinkkonen (1997) found that one of the most difficult things for the employees was mastering the field specific terminology whereas informal oral communication situations did not cause major problems. In contrast to this, many of the employees in this study held an opposite view. According to them, it is in fact more challenging to talk about things not related to work for the simple reason that technical terms are used in everyday work and are part of the employees' routine vocabulary. When talking informally,

one has to step from the technical field into more general field and vocabulary, which causes difficulties. One interviewee described the English used at work as follows:

Interview extract 7.

“...se on hyvin tekniikkapohjasta eli mulla tulis varmaan ongelmaa jos me ruvettais puhuu jostain shakespeareista tai jostain muusta ku en muista niitä sanoja. Ne alkaa unohtuu. Se menee hyvin tekniseks aina mitä me puhutaan.”

“...it’s very technical in nature so I would probably have problems if we started talking about Shakespeare or something because I can’t remember the words. You start forgetting. It tends to be very technical always what we talk about.”

The studies mentioned above were, however, conducted on employees in different fields of expertise, public administration and engineering. Comparisons between the employees’ knowledge of the professional terminology of their field would be hard if not impossible to make. In engineering, as will be discussed later in chapter 4.4.3, relevant terminology is learnt in school and all the technical terms are in English from the start. Employees in engineering are, therefore, used to working with professional foreign language terminology from early on. Louhiala-Salminen (1995) made a similar remark in her study on business communication in English. In her study, technical or business terminology was not found to be a major problem for engineers and business people but “their difficulties to cope in ordinary social situations indicate a lack of general conversation skills” (Louhiala-Salminen 1995:61). Further, in her study on engineering undergraduates, Koh Moy Yin (1988) found that most of the engineering undergraduates already have adequate English skills in professional and technical terminology, but lack appropriate interactive communication skills in English. She suggests that the

conventional ESP, i.e., English for special purposes courses aimed at engineers should focus more on general communication skills and especially oral skills. Similar ideas were put forward by the subjects of this study as will be discussed later in chapter 4.4.3.

The Finnish mentality that was discussed in Sajavaara (2000) and Sinkkonen (1997) came up in this study as well. Small talk was seen by the interviewees as something that was not a natural part of the Finnish culture. Many referred to their personalities saying that they are less talkative and prefer to stay in the background. Similar views were expressed by the employees in Sinkkonen's (1997) study where the Finns were described as quiet and passive participants who rather take the role of the listener. In general, the subjects in this study saw small talk as unfamiliar to the Finnish mentality.

Interview extract 8.

"Mä en oikeestaan tiää sujuuks se [small talk] multa millään kielellä. Emmä mitenkään... emmä mitenkään... kauheen paljon käytä ja mä en oo vaan hyvä hyvä tässä asiassa että... kyl se tahtoo mieluummin painottuu sit asiapuolelle että..."

"I don't know really if I can manage small talk in any language. I don't... I don't... use it very much and I'm just not good at it... it tends to be business..."

As stated in the interview extract above, the things discussed tend to centre on work related issues. The employees in Sajavaara's (2000) study thought of traditional Finnish frankness and direct way of expressing oneself a virtue and said that Finns should not try to imitate Central-European style of communication. A similar attitude towards small talk was reflected in this study. Many of the subjects said they lacked small talk skills but at the same time lacked interest in small talk, explaining that it was just not part of their

personality. One of the subjects described it as straining and irritating having to talk about irrelevant things with the English people before finally getting down to business.

Many of the challenging situations mentioned by the interviewees involved communicating with people from other countries. Most of the interviewees mentioned having daily contacts with foreigners who worked with them in projects and / or in the same department. Swedes were the majority but many different nationalities worked in the company: Indians, Hungarians, French, Brits and Irish to mention just a few. The difficulties that were mentioned had to do with the different and unfamiliar accents the foreigners had. For example, Indians and French were mentioned as hard to understand since their accent and way of speaking English was so different from what the interviewees were used to. French people were said to pronounce English, as it was French. Indians were reported to have a very distinctively different accent that was described by some as sounding “funny” to the Finnish ear. The informants reported that in order to understand the Indian accent one has to listen very carefully and with time one gets used to the way they pronounce and understanding is easier.

One of the most challenging situations in communicating with foreigners involved phone-mediated communication. Talking on the phone, phone negotiations or phone conferences were mentioned by more than half as difficult interacting situations where it was hard to sometimes understand what was said, especially if the line was bad and the accent of the speaker was particularly difficult to understand.

Interview extract 9.

”Sitte eri maista ku ihmiset puhuu englantia niillä on oma aksentti ja oma tyyli puhua ja joskus vaikee vähä ymmärtää... lähinnä vaikeinta niinku puhelinkonferensseissa ehkä ku on erilaiset linjat siellä et joillain on vähän huonompi linja ei kuulu oikein muutenkaan ja taustakohina ja sit jos puhuu vähän epäselvästi ni ni sillo se on vaikeempaa.”

“When people from different countries speak English they have their own accent and their own way of speaking and sometimes it’s a little hard to understand... it’s most difficult in phone conferences maybe because there’re different lines and some have lines that are worse and you can’t hear otherwise either and there’s background noise and if you talk a little bit unclear then it’s more difficult.”

The closer the pronunciation of English was to the Finns’ pronunciation of English and way of speaking the easier it seems to be for the employees to understand. One interviewee said that the Swedes’ English was very easy to understand since they speak with a clear accent and pronounce English the same way as Finns. The same thing was said about Hungarians, who, according to two subjects, use short and to the point communication familiar to Finns and whose pronunciation was similar to that of Finns.

Interestingly, some of the employees said that the most difficult thing was to understand native English speakers. Americans were reported the most difficult to understand after whom came the British. Some thought the Irish accent was the trickiest to follow. The employees explained that native speakers of English spoke English so fast and with an accent that was not easy to follow. When asked what was difficult in understanding native English speakers, one interviewee said:

Interview extract 10.

”...ne puhuu nopeesti ja sitte tuota aksentti on vielä erilainen. Sanotaan muutenkin niinku mun englannin kieli ei oo mikään hyvä ja jos toinen puhuu nopeesti elikkä jos toinen osapuoli osaa hyvin englantia ni mul on heti vaikeuksia.”

“...they speak fast and the accent is different. Let’s say otherwise too my English is not that good and if the other person speaks fast in other words if the other person can speak English well then I have difficulties right away.”

Non-native speakers, on the other hand, were reported easier to follow since non-native speakers in general speak English slower, simpler and use smaller vocabulary.

Interview extract 11.

“...siis yheskityheksän prosenttia ympäristössä puhuu ei puhu äidinkielenään englantia elikkä ne puhuu paljon yksinkertasempaa englantia. Ne lausuu sen suoraviivaisemmin ja ei kikkaile minkään painotusten kanssa eikä muuta.”

“...ninety-nine percent in the environment speak don’t speak English as their mother tongue in other words they speak English in a lot simpler way. They pronounce it more to the point and don’t play with emphasis or other things.”

In other words, communicating with other non-native English speakers was considered easier by some informants since, like Finns, they use simple vocabulary and sentence structure and do not speak so fast. According to one of the interviewees, even Finns were hard to understand if they spoke English fast

and used a large vocabulary. Thus, according to him, it was difficult to follow fast speech in English no matter where the speaker was from.

4.3.2 Routine situations in English use

It is easy to see from the interviews that the communication situations and tasks where English is used everyday become a routine for the employees. When the interviewees were asked what situations they found to be routine-like in the use of English, all of the subjects mentioned something they did every day or regularly. Depending on the employees' position and nature of work in the company, the routine situations varied greatly. Reading documentation and e-mails in English was part of most of the employees' workday and was considered a routine. Sometimes the language of the document was said to be difficult to comprehend; the writer had used words unfamiliar to the reader or the sentence structure was complicated. However, this was not seen as a big problem; when reading documents one has more time go over the text and try to figure out the meaning. Moreover, if one understands the overall idea of the text, skipping over one word or a sentence was not considered serious. Writing was less a routine than reading because the employees interviewed needed to write less documents than they had to read. However, in general writing was not considered challenging. When writing a document, one has more time to think through how to express oneself.

Interview extract 12.

“Kirjottaessa on se hyvä puol, et kukaan ei niinku odota sitä sun tekstin pätkää ulos. Sä voit kirjottaa sen rauhassa ja sit kattoo et okei tää on hyvä.”

“When writing you have the advantage that no-one is expecting to get your text. You can write without hurry and then check that it's good.”

As mentioned before, most of the interviewees found speaking English a challenge. It was something that was not considered a routine since spoken English was not needed and practised frequently. However, not all the subjects considered speaking challenging. For some, meetings or talking about work-related things in English was a routine since they had to do it so often. Thus, it seems to follow naturally that the more exposure an employee has to the English language and the more he or she speaks and hears English, the easier and more routine-like it becomes. It was also mentioned by some that even difficult accents, for example the Indian accent and fast delivery of native speakers become easier to understand in time. When there is more frequent contact with other nationalities, either on the phone or face-to-face, one gets used to the way the foreigners speak. One of the subjects explained that after some time he got use to hearing Indian English on the phone:

Interview extract 13.

“Se on semmonen tottuminen et oppii ymmärtämään et miten se lausuminen menee siellä.”

“It’s sort of getting used to it so that you learn to understand how they pronounce there.”

One reason for the perceived difficulty in oral communication in English appears to be the lack of practice, as was also mentioned by the interviewees. Even though English is used daily in meetings, e-mails and documents, most of the employees reported that they do not need to *speak* English regularly. The company’s language policy requires English to be used in in-house communication, which takes place largely in written form. An employee faces a need to *speak* English only when communicating face-to-face or on the phone

with a foreigner. Most of the time the employees communicate face-to-face and orally with other Finns and, therefore, do not develop a routine in oral communication the same way as in reading and to some extent also in writing English. Another reason for the difficulty in oral communication might be the language training in schools. Huhta (1999) reported a similar difficulty in oral skills among the employees in her study and explained it by the lack of oral skills training in schools. She argued that the teaching of oral language skills is not given enough space in language training. (Huhta 1999:158). Her claim is supported by some of the employees in this study who reported having had practically no experience of speaking English prior to their employment.

4.3.3 English versus Finnish

In a company where the corporate language is English, the majority or large part of the internal communications, documents and meetings are in English. The interviewees were, therefore, asked if they would prefer to receive some information in Finnish, if they wished Finnish would be sometimes used instead of English and if they felt that they would sometimes participate more actively if the language used was Finnish.

All of the subjects were of the opinion that it did not matter whether the information they received was in English or in Finnish. The same information was received no matter what the language was. A lot of times the information they received was actually both in English and Finnish and sometimes only in Finnish. One of the subjects was wondering why information was still distributed only in Finnish when the corporate language of the company was English. According to him, it caused inconvenience for the foreign employees since somebody had to translate the messages for them. Moreover, he said that if everything was in English, it would be a good opportunity for the Finns to

learn practical English. He pointed out, though, that he was not sure what the practice was in other departments.

A fact considered important by many was that general information concerning cooperation negotiations, collective agreements, option issues, annual leaves and salaries was in Finnish. As was mentioned, this kind of information contains tricky terms and legal vocabulary and would be difficult to comprehend in English. One interviewee mentioned that he would also prefer to have the employee satisfaction inquiries in Finnish instead of English. Since they are in English, he often leaves them unreturned because completing them in English consumes more time.

In contrast to written information, most of the interviewees expressed a wish that sometimes Finnish would be used instead of English in spoken interactions. It was mentioned that when English is used, whether in the meetings or with foreigners, one has to concentrate more carefully and the conversation is not as fluent due to insufficient vocabulary. In English it is also harder to react spontaneously to the ongoing discussion. As was said, using Finnish speeds up the discussion and handling of topics and makes it easier to comprehend the issues discussed. Misunderstandings are also less likely to occur.

Interview extract 14.

”Kyllä se ehkä niinku mulle helpottaa sen asian... kokonaisuuden ja asian hahmottamista jos tavallaan ehkä vähän nopeuttaa sitä et on suomenkielinen tilanne kun se että se ois vieraalla kielellä että siinä ehkä saattaa tulla joskus just jotain väärinymmärryksiä jotain sellasia sitte että saattaa joutua kyseleen et mitäs sä täs meinasit oikein. Se ei aina oo niin selkeetä se asia.”

“Yes it maybe makes it easier for me to... perceive the issue as a whole. In a way it maybe makes it a little bit faster when it’s in Finnish instead of English. Sometimes there might be some kinds of misunderstandings or something and you have to ask what you mean by this. It’s not always so clear.”

One of the interviewees said he would prefer the meetings where the superior speaks about more general issues to be in Finnish since the language used is, accordingly, more general than work-related terms and can cause problems.

Another subject said that since his English is not so fluent he would prefer to do the presentations in Finnish because it is simply a lot easier. Interestingly, one of the subjects said that, in his view, the meetings were shorter when they were held in English.

Interview extract 15.

“Mä luulen että kokoukset jos pidetään englanniks ne on lyhkäsemiä ku suomeks. Elikkä siellä ei niinkun hirveesti se juttu siellä rönsyile. ... Siinä ei olla niin aktiivisesti mukana, et kyl siinä niinkun kyl siinä ero on. ... Jos mennään englanninkieliseen kokoukseen sä valmistelet asiat niinku paremmin mut ku mennään suomenkieliseen kokoukseen sä voit sit vaan niinku mennä sinne.”

“I think that if the meetings are held in English they are shorter than if they were in Finnish. The discussion doesn’t meander. ... The people are not as active in participating so yes, there is a difference. ... If you go to a meeting that is held in English you prepare yourself better but when you go to a meeting in Finnish you can just go there.”

Thus, according to this subject, meetings held in English are shorter because the conversation does not meander in English as much as it would in Finnish due to less active participation. The subject also reported that, in his opinion, people

prepare for the meetings better when it is going to be in English. This implies that the meetings in English take less time because the participants are better prepared. When a meeting is in Finnish, people are less prepared and, thus, it takes more time to talk things over. In short, according to him, people are more prepared but less active in meetings that are in English and less prepared but more active in meetings that are in Finnish.

However, even those subjects who preferred Finnish to be used on some occasions, such as meetings and giving presentations, said that problems in communication arise also when using Finnish. Using one's mother tongue does not guarantee that there will be no misunderstandings. Furthermore, as one informant emphasized, whether in English or Finnish, the message still contains the same information. Of the same opinion were those interviewees for whom it did not make a difference whether English or Finnish was used in spoken interactions as well. Sometimes it was even considered difficult to write in Finnish since everything, especially the technical terms, were in English.

Interview extract 16.

“Se on mennyt siihen, että niinkun tavallaan kaikki tekninen asia tapahtuu englanniksi ja sitä on jopa kohta vaikeaa kirjoittaa suomeksi. Sinne lipsuu englannin kielen sanoja ja muuta koska ne on niinku kaikki osaa.”

“It has gone to that that in a way all technical things take place in English so that soon it's even hard to write it in Finnish. English words slip into the text and so on because everybody knows them.”

When asked if the interviewees themselves would be more active if Finnish was used instead of English, most thought, as could be expected, that this would be the case. As some of the interviewees pointed out, it is easier to be more spontaneous in one's mother tongue and, thus, participate more actively in the

conversation. If the discussion is in English it is more difficult to follow the conversation and react when needed. Something might be unclear but, as many of the employees expressed, if the conversation was fast, they were hesitant to ask for clarification. Furthermore, the employees mentioned having a higher threshold to say something in English, especially if surrounded by a lot of people, because of the uncertainty over correctness. These were seen as difficulties especially if native English speakers were participating in the meeting:

Interview extract 17.

“...jos on äidinkielenään puhuvia englantia... et se käy niin vilkaasti se keskustelu et siihen väliin ei... sitä saattaa jättää sanomatta jotain just sen takia koska se käy niin nopeesti se englanninkielinen keskustelu et semmosta sanosko tiedonhävikkiä voi sattua kokouksissa et jos se ois suomeks ni siihen möläyttäs jotain.”

“...if there are people who speak English as their mother tongue... so that the conversation is very active and in the middle you don't... you might leave something unsaid just because of the English language conversation is so fast so that sort of loss of information can happen in meetings. If it was in Finnish you would just blurt out something.”

As stated in this interview extract and was mentioned also by some other subjects, there might be some loss of information when English is used instead of Finnish. This finding appears to be in line with Vollstedt's (2002) estimate that a large proportion of employee input in project teams and work groups is lost due to the lack of foreign language competence or self-confidence to take part in discussions. However, although it is clear that some information is certainly lost, one has to be wary of making generalizations on the frequency

and the exact amount of information lost based on the data of this study. Furthermore, as the employee in the extract above implies, participation in discussions in Finnish might be more active but the information is not necessarily better in quality. According to the interviewee, when talking in English one concentrates better on the conversation and thinks through what he or she wants to say. In Finnish one blurts out things easier without too much thinking. Also, as another subject pointed out, personality has a lot to do with how actively one participates in a conversation. He said that he is not very active in meetings but it has nothing to do with the language but rather his personality. More research is, therefore, needed to find out the exact nature and amount of the information lost and the reasons behind it.

These findings are in line with the results reported in the previous chapter on the communication situations: the employees considered oral communication the most challenging whereas especially reading and also writing to some extent were more like a routine. Similarly, the interviewees did not have any problem receiving information in English (and most of the information received by the employees is written) but in spoken interaction situations many of the employees preferred Finnish. Sending and especially receiving information in English is such an everyday routine that, as one of the subjects said, it is sometimes even hard to write in Finnish. However, as was discussed in chapter 4.3.1, the employees reported having a good command of the work-related terminology but more general vocabulary caused them problems. When the information received contains vocabulary that is less technical and less related to work, the employees said to prefer Finnish, especially when the information contains difficult terminology from another specialty field such as legal terms. On the other hand, oral communication was not considered a routine by most of the interviewees and many employees mentioned they would prefer Finnish. Moreover, the language used affects the nature of the communication and the communication situation. Meetings were said to be shorter in English than in Finnish and participation less active. On the

other hand, people tend to be more prepared when the meeting is held in English.

These findings suggest that written English is closer to being a “second language” of a “bilingual speaker” for the employees, or, in this case, a reader and a writer. As the employees said, reading and writing are routine and they feel comfortable writing and especially reading in both Finnish and English. In fact, the subjects considered it irrelevant which language was used in written information. On the other hand, spoken English appears to be more like a “foreign language” to the employees since it does make a difference whether one speaks Finnish or English. Finnish was preferred for the simple fact that, for the employees, it was a lot easier to speak and listen in Finnish. When making the distinction between the skills and nature of written and spoken English, one has to take into account the level of command in English reported by the interviewee. Some subjects considered having a good command of and a routine for both spoken and written English and, for them, it did not make a difference whether English or Finnish was used both in written and spoken interaction. Perhaps those employees who use both Finnish and English fluently at work could be viewed as bilingual using English as a second language. More research could be done to find out about the changing nature of English and how the members of business communities view themselves as speakers of English.

The most challenging area of the use of English for the employees was oral communication, speaking and listening. The employees said they lacked practice and routine for speaking English. Meetings were said to be especially demanding communication situations because of the fast tempo of incoherent discussion. Different accents were also considered difficult to understand, especially if the conversation took place on the phone. Talking about technical things and other work related issues were considered easier and more routine than discussing about things on a more general level. The employees were familiar with the technical terms and used them everyday whereas more general

vocabulary caused difficulties. Moreover, the employees preferred talking about work and small talk was considered less important and not part of the Finnish culture. Unlike oral communication, written communication in English, especially reading, was considered a routine by the employees. Sometimes the employees reported having difficulties with texts written in a complicated manner. However, this was not seen as a big obstacle. When reading or writing, the employees have more time to go through the text. However, what is challenging for one can be routine for another. Some employees considered speaking English easy because they needed spoken communication frequently every day. All of the employees were of the opinion that it did not matter whether the information they received was in English or in Finnish. However, cooperation negotiations, collective agreements, option issues and other such information that contains tricky legal terminology was received in Finnish, which was considered important by the employees. In contrast to written information, most of the employees said that they would prefer using Finnish instead of English in spoken interaction. According to the employees, the discussion is less fluent in English due to the insufficient vocabulary and, therefore, misunderstandings are more likely to occur. Most employees said they participate more actively and spontaneously if the conversation is in Finnish. Moreover, the threshold to say something or ask for clarification is lower in Finnish.

4.4 English language skills

4.4.1 Employees' views on "good command of English"

When the interviewees were asked what a good command of English meant for them in their work, the goal-directed function of the communication and the instrumental manner of language use in a business community were expressed

clearly. As was stated by Swales (1990), individuals join discourse communities to pursue functional goals and the communication is used to serve this goal. Similarly, English language knowledge has a very practical relevance for the employees. The essential thing for the employees interviewed was that knowing English enabled them to do their work. Most importantly one has to have a good command of the technical terminology and other vocabulary relevant for the profession. As one subject said, the meaning of English has changed for him in this current job: it is a means to do one's job and does not have inherent value in itself.

Interview extract 18.

“Se on muuttunu näissä hommissa niinku siihen tyyliin et se kieli on väline eikä itsetarkoitus.”

“It has changed in this work so that the language is an instrument not an end in itself.”

He continues by saying that he does not practice his English to become better at it because he already knows enough to do his job. For him, language is an instrument with the purpose of coping in relevant situations at work.

A good knowledge of the English language was given very practical definitions as can be seen, for example, in the next interview extract.

Interview extract 19.

“...että pystyy kuuntelemaan aktiivisesti ja pystyy niinku sit myös vastaamaan sen ihmisen kysymykseen loogisesti selvästi ja niinkun ytimekkäästi niin et se asia oikeesti tulee selvitettyä siinä hetkessä. Se on niinkun se on työn kannalta ja oikeestaan kaikkien niin et se asiat etenee niin mun mielestä oleellisin asia.”

“...so that you are able to listen actively and also answer the other person’s questions logically and clearly and in an exact manner so that the business is truly resolved in that moment. It’s the most essential thing in regard to the work and really for everybody that things are kept going.”

Other definitions given were the ability to understand and be understood in English and the ability to read, write, listen and speak so that one copes. Thus, the ability to communicate effectively and to minimize misunderstandings was seen as a central part of good English language proficiency. Naturally, efficient communication contributes to a job well done.

Small talk skills were seen as something extra and not a relevant skill by most of the subjects. Thus, the difficulty of establishing social relationships among the employees stated by Vollstedt (2002) was not seen as a problem. However, this was not the case because the employees would consider having a very good command of English but because small talk abilities and socializing skills were not seen as that essential.

Interview extract 20.

“Tärkeintä on tietysti et niinkun... on niinkun tekniset asiat ni... et ne tulee... ymmärretyks oikein ja... sit siihen ulkopuolelle liittyvät että miten sä sen ulkopuolella tavallaan... pystyt kommunikoimaan ni... mun mielest se tulee vähän niinku siinä toisarvosena asiana. Tärkeintä on et saat sen asian hoidettuu. Se on ehkä aika työkeskeistä et sit sellanen small talkki seurustelu se tulee sit päälle...”

“Most important is of course that... technical things... are understood correctly... and things outside that how you are able to communicate outside that is in a way I think secondary. Most important is that things get done. It is perhaps quite work centred so that the kind of small talk is extra then...”

The employees themselves explained that small talk is not part of the Finnish mentality and, therefore, small talk skills in English are less emphasized. One could also assume that a business community possesses values and norms that place emphasis on the work and efficiency whereas the ability to fluently socialize with foreign colleagues is seen as less important.

However, the same interviewee contradicted himself later by saying that small talk skills in English are in fact important as well:

Interview extract 21.

“Kyl sekin [small talk] on tärkeä itse asiassa. Kuitenkin tavataan paljon uusia ihmisiä että pitäis kuitenkin saaha saaha tota semmonen seurusteluenglanti sanotaan kohtuulliselle tasolle...”

“Small talk is important too in fact. At any rate we meet a lot of new people so that you should be able to have a reasonably good level of conversational English...”

Thus, as was stated by the interviewee above and by some other subjects, the value of informal small talk was acknowledged as well. According to one employee, working in the company often demands long-term relationships with other project members and the ability to talk about general things makes work easier in that it helps to form and uphold good relationships. Thus, the function of small talk in constructing, maintaining and reinforcing interpersonal relationships (Holmes 2000:133) was also recognized by some.

4.4.2 Employees' English language skills

The interviewees were asked to evaluate their English language skills against the views they expressed in the previous chapter. The main theme that came up was that the employees' English language skills are limited but, nevertheless, sufficient for the work they are doing. This is in accordance with many previous studies on language needs and skills conducted in Finland; the findings of these studies could be roughly summarized to state that the employees in various business and administrative fields have sufficient English language skills. In the present study, many employees evaluated their English language ability good or satisfactory and said they cope with their daily tasks well. Sometimes English flows smoother than at other times but the work gets done nevertheless. Even though the language skills were seen as adequate for coping at work, more than half said that they were not satisfied with their level of English knowledge and would like to improve it, especially the general vocabulary and oral communication.

Interview extract 22.

“Et tota sanotaan et asiat saa yleensä hoidetuks tavalla tai toisella joskus ne menee paremmin ja joskus joutuu vähän enemmän tekee työtä mut sit ois tietysti kiva olla pikkasen laajempi tää yleisasioiden hoito että ois... vähän laajemmat varastot sanastoa...”

“So let's say that things get usually done one way or another sometimes they go better and sometimes you have to do a little more work but then it would be nice naturally to have a little bit broader ability to take care of general things so that...a little bit larger stock of vocabulary...”

Most of the interviewees did not consider it easy to speak in English and the delivery was regarded as slow, halting and not so beautiful. The fact that English is mainly written and not spoken was seen to contribute to the difficulty in speech production. As was discussed in chapter 4.3.1, the English language used in the company is specialized in the technical field; the subjects considered having a good command of the professional terminology of their field, i.e., the technical vocabulary but talking about more general topics, i.e., the more general vocabulary, caused problems. Thus, talking about technical issues is more fluent than discussing about more general things. All the technical terms are in English from the beginning and, as was mentioned, it would be difficult to even talk about technical issues solely in Finnish. Furthermore, it was reported that even though the knowledge of English was limited to the technical field, it could also contribute to the quality of expression:

Interview extract 23.

“Se on spesifikoitunu tähän työalueeseen... se kapea-alaistuu koko ajan... Toisaalta mä oon miettiny sitä ittekseni aikasemminki se on aika hyväki. Sillon sulle tulee hyvin sellanen täsmällinen jämpä tapa ilmasta asiat niinku teknisesti.”

“It is specialised into this professional field... it becomes narrower all the time... On the other hand, I have thought about it already before that it's a good thing too. Then you get a kind of very exact and precise way of expressing things in technical contexts.”

Writing skills were generally evaluated as good or “OK”. Writing in English, such as documents and e-mail, is an everyday task and is, therefore, routine work for most. The written language used at work was described as generally very simple, to the point, and impersonal technical language. Those subjects,

who did not consider writing in English a routine or an easy task stated that they were not very literate people no matter what the language was and that writing in general was arduous. Grammar was considered as decent on the whole. Prepositions and articles were not always correct but it was not seen as a problem. Most important is that the idea is clearly expressed and that grammar is clear enough so that there are no misunderstandings.

The instrumental nature of the English language used by the employees was reflected in their evaluation of their language skills as well. Even though the employees interviewed did not regard the level of their English skills as very good, all said that their language abilities enable them to do their work and that was seen as the main point. Many emphasised that, most importantly, the message has to be conveyed without misunderstandings and it is irrelevant whether the grammar is perfectly correct.

The instrumental function of language was similarly emphasized when the interviewees were asked to evaluate the level of English language skills that should be required from the new employees. Basic English knowledge that is learned in school was seen to be sufficient.

Interview extract 24.

“Mulla on varmaan sellanen välttävä peruskielitaito ni kyl mä oon aika monista asioista selviän että emmä oo ollu mitenkään erityisen... erityisen mielestäni erityisen hyvä täs asiassa... Kyl mun mielestä normaalilla suomalaisella... kouluenglannilla pärjää aika pitkälle että...”

“I probably have kind of satisfactory basic language skills and with that I manage with a lot of things. I haven't been in any way particularly good in this matter... I think you can go pretty far with normal Finnish... school English...”

The main thing is that one is able to do his job and function in English. One has to cope with everyday tasks in English and understand as well as be understood. One's knowledge of English should enable him to read and write in English reasonable fluently. The ability to speak English was not given as much emphasis; fairly good English speaking skills were seen as adequate. Professional terminology is learned at work through practice and experience.

4.4.3 Development of English language skills

All of the interviewees said their knowledge and skills in the English language had improved during their employment in the company and more than half reported that it had improved significantly. One interviewee described the level of his English language skills at the moment in comparison with the level of skills he had in the beginning of his employment as follows:

Interview extract 25.

“Sehän on siihen nähden ihan briljanttia. Eihän se mitään hyvää mutta ihan vaivatonta siihen nähden...”

“In comparison to that it's brilliant. It's not good, but it's quite effortless compared to that...”

The improvement was seen as a natural progress due to the daily use of English in different situations and tasks. Although there was development in all the aspects of language knowledge, the employees noted the most obvious improvement in spoken interaction. Before starting to work in the present company most of the interviewees had had no chance to speak English. As is stated by, for example, Huhta (1997:158), oral communication skills are

neglected by the traditional language training. Furthermore, most of the subjects' previous work experience did not include such extensive use of English as the contemporary work. Some of the interviewees mentioned that the threshold to speak in English has diminished significantly.

Interview extract 26.

“Edellinen firmaki oli kansainvälinen firma mutta... ei ollu sellasta... ei ollu niin paljon sellasta... päivittäistä kontaktia ku tääl on että... kyl se siinä pakosti vähän muuttuu ja kehitty. ... Puhuminen ja kuunteleminen ... ne varmaan eniten.”

“My previous firm was also an international firm but... there wasn't... there wasn't as much that kind of... daily contact as there is here... it is bound to change and improve a little. ... Speaking and listening... those probably the most.”

More than half of the subjects had been in some English language course or courses offered by the employer. In general, the courses were found useful. The courses attended had taught oral communication skills such as presentation and conversation skills and written communication such as documentation. These are things that the employees said they were able to apply later in their work. Courses also activated their English language skills and helped the participants to speak without a fear of saying something, for example, grammatically wrong. Not all of the informants, however, were of the same opinion about the language courses. Some thought that the courses they had attended were not as useful as they had hoped, the level of training was too basic and the courses not intensive enough. One subject talked about the course he had attended:

Interview extract 27.

“Se ei ollu niin intensiivinen ja et siel välil tuli sellasii taukoja että ei niissä luennoissa niin sanotusti että se vähä jäi niinku taka-alalle sitten. ... Mä en kokenu... että nää kaikki asiat ois ollu mulle et siin oli vähä semmostaki semmosta vähä perusluontosempaa asiaaki että ei välttämättä ois ollu mutta...”

“It wasn’t so intensive and occasionally there were breaks in the lecturing so that it was left kind of in the background then. ... I didn’t feel... that all the things would have been for me because there were also more basic things...”

When asked whether the interviewees thought it useful to attend an English language course in the future, almost all said yes, and most had also considered attending one. Practising speaking skills came up as the aspect of language skills that was most desired. The subjects hoped to improve their general communication skills, namely, speaking and vocabulary. Technical terminology was considered something so specific to the particular professional field varying even between companies that it cannot be taught but only learned through experience and practical work.

Interview extract 28.

“Kyl mä tykkään että toi... sais olla parempi tollanen keskustelutaito et siinä on varmasti aina parannettavaa ja sit jotain teknisiä asioita niitä sä voit aina itekki jauhaa...”

“I think that... conversational skills could be better and there is certainly always room for improvement. Technical things you can always go over by yourself...”

The employees' desire to practice their oral communication skills has also been reported in previous studies on employees' language needs and skills in business and public administration in Finland. As noted earlier, the traditional language teaching in schools does not seem to prepare the future employees for the diverse English speaking situations they encounter at work. In the present study, some subjects suggested that classes where one could have relaxed conversation would be of use in activating and expanding one's foreign language skills.

Interview extract 29.

“Jos ajattelis miten kielitaitoa aktivois ni pitäis enemmänki tämmösiä muista asioista puhuvia porukoita missä sais rennosti puhua jostain ihan muista ku työasioista. Mutta tätä ei yleensä tapahdu. Ei meillä oo sellaseen aikaa.”

“If you think how you could activate your language skills there should be groups where you could talk about completely different things than work in a relaxed atmosphere. But usually this doesn't happen. We don't have time for that.”

According to another subject, activating one's language skills would be very useful in the beginning of the employment so that the threshold of speaking would be lowered right from the start. Some said it would also be important to teach how to write documentation; technical format, phrases and so forth, so that the style of the documents would be uniform. One of the interviewees, in fact, hoped for more English language courses with more specific goals, such as communication in specific situations. It could be inferred that employees who consider their English skills good would find more specific English courses useful and the employees whose knowledge of English is less good would find it more useful to learn more general communication. The difficulty of combining a busy work schedule with a language course was the main reason

why some of the subjects did not plan to attend an English language course. Learning a language was seen as a long-term activity but there was no time to attend an intensive long-term course, as was also stated in the previous interview extract.

These findings suggest that writing skills and grammar are learned in school and they form a sound basis for the employees to work in the English language. Oral skills, on the other hand, are learned more on the job through everyday situations. Even though oral communication was seen as the most challenging and the least used aspect of language skills at work, it was also the skill where the employees experienced the most improvement. This could be explained by the fact that although most of the interviewees stated that they did not need to speak English so frequently at work, they still used it a lot more now than before their employment. Moreover, it seems that the employees are not expected or required by the surrounding working community to have excellent language skills. The only requirement is that the employee is able to do his job and function in English. However, the interviewees recognized the importance of English language skills in their work and planned on improving them. As all the employees considered their language skills sufficient, they still felt there was room for improvement, especially in the area of oral skills.

The interviewees were asked if they used English in their free time and whether they practiced their language skills outside their work to determine what role English had in their lives. The main theme was that the interviewees had very little opportunities to speak English in their free time, however, as one of the interviewees pointed out, nowadays it is hard, if not impossible to avoid English language in daily life, mainly on the television and the Internet or when travelling.

None of the interviews made any particular effort in practising their English language skills in their free time. Some mentioned that when they watch English language programs on television they sometimes try not to read the subtitles or try to learn new ways of saying things. Reading books in

English was also mentioned but that was said to be more for the enjoyment than for the purpose of improving one's language skills. Thus, although the passive input of English is almost unavoidable and persistent in the present Finnish society, the employees rarely speak English outside their work. The employees' active use of English is restricted almost solely to their working environment. They use English as members of their business community but outside the community it does not play the same kind of important role as a means of communication for them. The employees' language knowledge has been shaped by the demands of the community they work in: they are familiar and fluent with the relevant terminology, but more general vocabulary causes problems. One of the fundamental goals of the business community, to get the business done, is, of course, one of the main goals of the communication that takes place in the community as well. Similarly, the employees considered it most important that their English language knowledge enables them to do their work.

English language knowledge has a very practical relevance for the employees. Most importantly, one has to be able to do one's work and have a good command of the technical terminology as well as other vocabulary relevant for the profession. Small talk skills were seen as something extra and not a relevant skill by the majority. However, the value of informal small talk was acknowledged by some in constructing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. The employees evaluated their English language skills limited but, nevertheless, sufficient for the work they are doing. Many evaluated their English language abilities good or satisfactory so that they cope well with their daily tasks. However, most of the informants said that they were not satisfied with their level of English knowledge and would like to improve it, especially the general vocabulary and oral communication. Moreover, the subjects considered their command of the professional terminology and vocabulary good but general topics, i.e., the more general vocabulary, caused problems. Writing skills were generally evaluated good or "OK" and grammar decent: clear expression of ideas was considered most important and, thus, minor grammar

mistakes were not seen as dangerous. Similarly, basic knowledge of English learned in school was considered a sufficient language requirement for the new employees. According to the employees, the main thing was that a new employee is able to do his or her work in English. The employees were of the opinion that their knowledge and skills in the English language had improved during their employment and most reported that it had improved significantly. The most obvious improvement had happened in spoken interaction. Most of the informants had attended an English language course offered by the employer and considered them useful. Most of the informants had considered attending an English course in the future and hoped to practice mainly their oral communication skills. The employees rarely needed English outside work and did not particularly try to practice their language skills in their free time.

4.5 Communicative competence of the employees

In this section the employees' English language knowledge and skills discussed in the previous chapters will be examined in reference to the concept of communicative competence and its different components.

The employees reported that oral communication, especially in meetings, was the most challenging area of their English language use. Meetings can be demanding communication situations also in one's native language and can be especially difficult when using a language other than one's mother tongue. The participant's whole communicative competence is put into use. The employees identified those areas of communication that have to do with discourse competence as especially challenging in meetings. Discourse competence, as part of the pragmatic competence that forms a link between a speaker's linguistic competence and actual language use, plays a role in the ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to create unified texts, written or spoken, in varied genres. The employees' discourse

competence can be seen for example in their ability to produce coherent and cohesive text and recognize and interpret patterns and themes in a text. The flow of information in meetings is often incoherent and themes and topics change fast. Efficient communication in such interactions demand spontaneous reaction and a clear and exact way of expressing oneself. One has to concentrate carefully on the discussion and plan one's output and that takes time. Many informants said their speech is slow and halting. Some said that picking out the main point from such incoherent discussion was one of the most challenging things in English use at work. Thus, the employees reported difficulties in their English language use in the area of discourse competence.

Naturally, in order to have the tools to participate efficiently in the interaction in a meeting an employee has to have a strong basis in second language linguistic competence as well. Linguistic competence includes the knowledge and the ability to use the rules of a language such as vocabulary, word and sentence formation, grammar and pronunciation. When one has a good basis in linguistic competence it is easier to follow the discussion in a meeting and take part in it. As some of the employees reported, they might leave something unsaid if they did not know how to say it. Moreover, listening to a speaker who possesses a large vocabulary was also seen as demanding by one subject.

Understanding the different accents, especially on the phone, was reported by the informants to be among the most challenging situations in English use. As Pihko (1994) says, language learners tend to depend more on the physical shape of the speech for its intelligibility, and deviations from the familiar accent cause difficulties in comprehension. The employees noted that the closer the pronunciation was to the "Finnish way" of pronouncing; the easier it was to understand. For example, Swedes' and Hungarians' pronunciation of English was, according to some subjects, close to the Finnish way of pronouncing English and, therefore, there were no difficulties in understanding them. Indians, on the other hand, were reportedly difficult to

comprehend. However, as was pointed out, one gets used to the accent and, therefore, understanding becomes easier with time. Some interviewees mentioned that it was the native English speakers who were the most difficult to understand. Possibly, such situations demand an extra effort from the listener. Unlike a language learner who uses a restricted vocabulary and needs time in forming sentences, a native speaker possesses a large vocabulary, speaks fast and possibly also with a difficult accent.

Whereas the work related technical terminology did not cause problems for the employees, the more general vocabulary was challenging. The interviewees lacked the vocabulary to talk fluently about topics not related to their work. This can be seen as the result of the linguistic competence that eventually gets modified to the needs of the environment, which, in this case, is a business community. Command of the technical terminology is a necessity and part of the daily routine for the employees, whereas there is no need for a more general vocabulary on a daily basis. However, the employees did not put that much emphasis on their linguistics competency: ability to talk about more general things that were not related to work was not even seen as that important. Furthermore, not understanding some words or making some grammar mistakes were similarly considered irrelevant. All the refinements of the linguistics competence seemed to be unessential for the employees, whose main goal was to get the job done.

Interactional competence plays a major role in the employees' communication. According to Kramsch (1986), successful interaction presupposes shared knowledge of the world. The employees share knowledge of the company and their professional field, which enables them to interact successfully. If there were no shared knowledge between the interactants, it would be difficult to follow and take part in the communication of the company. This is best seen by the comments of one of the employees who did not have technical background. Unlike the other interviewees, who considered technical terminology and other work related vocabulary easy and routine, he

said it caused him problems since he was not familiar with the technical field of the profession. When asked what he considered challenging in English use, he said:

Interview extract 30.

“Ehkä se niinku kokonaisuutena se että tää on vaikea ala ja sitten kun ite ei oo... teknisesti koulutettu... mutta että se kun niitten asioitten... sen kokonaisuuden hallitseminen ja käsittäminen niinkun englannin kielellä... ehkä just tämmöset tekniset kokoukset ja niihin osallistuminen ni se on haastavaa.”

“Maybe in its entirety this is a difficult field and then when you yourself are not... technically educated...and grasping the things... in their entirety and understanding them in English... maybe participating in these technical meetings that is challenging.”

As he later pointed out, he would be unfamiliar with the field in Finnish as well. However, according to him, the fact that it was in English made it even more challenging. As could be expected, he had noted improvement in his knowledge of the technical field and terminology during his time in the company. Thus, the more shared knowledge an employee has with other community members, the easier it is to communicate efficiently in the community. Successful participation in the communication from the beginning is easier for those employees who have technical education since they already possess relevant knowledge of the community.

Another presupposition for successful interaction by Kramersch (1986) is reference to a common external context. This comes close to what is called the sociolinguistic component of the communicative competence by, for example, Canale (1983). Sociolinguistic competence, as part of the pragmatic competence, refers to the appropriate use and interpretation of language in

different sociolinguistic contexts. In the case of a business community this could refer to the norms and conventions that determine how language is used for example in meetings, in company documents or when addressing a colleague or a superior, for example. New employees have to get familiar with the way things are done in the company. An international organisation where the corporate language is English, a non-native language for the majority of the local employees, creates an interesting situation. As Konivuori (2002) states, it is important for an employee who moves abroad to work in a foreign company to learn the culturally determined communication behaviours, such as politeness, degree of formality and small talk conventions. Such employees, for example expatriates, live in another country and are surrounded by different cultural conventions and customs. Learning the local customs and ways of interacting is essential for successful communication and feeling comfortable in the new culture. On the contrary, the employees interviewed for the present study work in a company located in their home country. The employees do not need to learn new ways of doing things; they just have to adjust their language use. This was most apparent in reference to small talk. Even though small talk is commonly associated with native English speaking cultures, especially with British and American, it was not seen as a part of Finnish culture. Many of the subjects said they lack the vocabulary for small talk, but even more stated that they do not see it as part of their personality as Finns. Small talk skills in English were, thus, seen as something extra and less relevant than more concretely work related English skills. The fact that the employees were using English does not change their culturally based customs. English was seen as a means to achieve a goal that is the same no matter what the language. As McKay (2002) says, one of the main functions of International English is to allow people to communicate their own culture, ideas and way of life. For the employees, English seems to be a means to communicate their ideas. They use English because it allows them to do their job, not because they want to be more British or American themselves. It could be even predicted that if

someone did apply the cultural behaviours that are associated with the English speaking cultures, it would be seen as strange. An interesting point made by one subject had to do with the pronunciation of English. He said that sounding too much like a native English speaker appears snobbish and even ridiculous. He seems to suggest that it would be better not to strive for a perfect native like competence in the English language. Savignon (1983:37) calls this the appearance of incompetence, i.e., a non-native speaker might not want to sound like a native speaker for a fear of appearing disloyal from the perspective of the speaker's own mother tongue community.

The common external context can also be seen in the style of discourse. The company has a certain format and style of discourse that helps producing and interpreting company documents. The preferred style in the company, as mentioned by some subjects is clear, exact, and simple text that goes straight to the point. As Savignon (1983:38) points out, organizational patterns of discourse play an important role in the interpretation and expression of meaning. The same way, discourse competence plays an important part in producing and interpreting written text. For the most part, the employees considered reading documents as an everyday and routine task that did not cause difficulties. However, as was pointed out by some of the interviewees, occasionally the language of the document was difficult to comprehend because of the complex structure of the text, unfamiliar vocabulary and complicated sentence forms. It appears that the clear and exact style preferred in the company documents facilitates the comprehension of the text. If the document is written in an unnecessarily complicated manner, reading the text challenges some of the employees' discourse and linguistic competences.

In addition to the sociolinguistic context of the communication, the language abilities of the other interactants influence the communication as well. As in all communication situations, the successful outcome of the communication does not solely depend on one person's communicative competence but also on the other interactants' competencies. The smooth flow

and successful outcome of a meeting, then, depend on all the participants' language abilities. However, as no two persons' competence levels and knowledge of the world are exactly the same, they need to try to construct what Kramsch (1986) calls shared internal context, the third presupposition for successful interaction. This negotiation of meaning is close to what is called strategic competence by Canale (1983), for example. Strategic competence is used when the other areas of a person's language competence fail and there is a breakdown in communication. Using various strategies to convey the message is essential when the knowledge of English is not perfect and avoidance of misunderstandings is important. When the employees encountered communication problems and breakdowns, they reported using many compensatory strategies to make sure that the messages were understood. According to the interviewees, the most common strategy, as could be expected, was to ask the speakers to repeat or rephrase what was said. Some people were said to only repeat the sentence word for word, others were able to rephrase and explain the problematic issue in a way that was easier to understand. This was seen a better way to get the message through than simply repeating. Understanding the message depended, therefore, on the other person and his language skills and interactive competence as well. According to some informants, the threshold to express that something was not understood was higher in the meetings because of the reluctance to interrupt the discussion. If the matter discussed was important and essential for ones work, somebody could be approached afterwards and asked for the information that was missed. Sometimes, if there was information given on some specific topic in a meeting, the material was available afterwards. Phone conferences and negotiations were said to be often tricky because of the accent of the foreign counterpart as well as bad lines. The practice was to ask for written information with the main points to be sent later to minimize the possibility of misunderstandings. Many mentioned using a dictionary when reading documents. Usually one had more time to read a document and, therefore, more time to go over and try to

comprehend the text. Some said that a colleague could be asked for help if the text was very tricky. However, if the idea was understood, it was not seen dangerous if one did not understand every single word and sentence. Furthermore, when writing something, it was normal for a few people to go over the text and say if it made sense and possibly correct something. Reading and writing company documentation could also be seen as an interactive situation where the successful comprehension of the text depends both on the reader and the writer, their level of discourse competence and the ability to produce and interpret coherent text appropriate in the context. (Savignon 1983:40). Thus, it could be thought that an interactively competent writer is able to produce the kind of text that is easily read and understood by the other employees.

If something was too difficult to explain, non-linguistic means, such as drawing, were used along with background documents to get the message through. The following extract demonstrates how means other than speaking are used to convey the message.

Interview extract 31.

“...yleensä se on se jos on joku tärkeä asia joka vaikuttaa jonkun ihmisen töihin niin kyllähän se tapahtuu jollain muulla tavalla ku tosta eks temporee heittämällä. Et sit katellaan molemmin puolin piirrellään puhutaan. Ei semmosia... yleensä se kieli on vähän niinku toisarvonen asia tämmösissä vakavissa asioissa. Sitä haetaan jotain taustadokumentaatiota ja muuta ja näytetään että lue tästä ja jutellaan siitä...”

“...usually if it’s something important that has an influence on somebody’s work it happens in some way else than just ex tempore saying something. Then you both look and draw and talk. You don’t... usually the language is a bit secondary thing in this kind of serious business. You go and get some background documentation and so forth and show that read here and we’ll talk...”

Thus, language is a means to get the message through and the work done and if it is not sufficient, other ways to communicate are used. Strategies depend on the person too; some said they try to get the message through by talking, some reported resorting more easily on drawing. Attending the meetings well prepared makes it easier to follow the discussion in the meetings and helps the meetings to proceed smoothly. One subject said that if he knows there is a difficult meeting coming up, he contacts the people beforehand to discuss the issues so that in the meetings it is easier to go through the topics.

It seems that, for the employees, linguistic competence is secondary to interactional and discourse competence. In the above interview extract, the employee described the language used in the company as secondary. Other means of communicating, such as drawing and background material, are used to get the message through. The English language functions as a means of gaining the company goals for the employees. If their linguistic competence fails, the employees use their interactive competence to get the message through. As was mentioned by most of the employees, there is always a way to communicate the information and the message is always passed one way or another. It looks like the employees are well aware of the shortcomings of their English language skills, but at the same time they use their interactive and strategic competencies to compensate for the insufficiency of their linguistic competence. It is obvious that native like competence of English is not essential for or required from the employees. The essential thing is to work towards the common goal of the community, get business done efficiently, and language is a tool that is utilized to get there. The employees do not feel they need to have native like competence to achieve that goal.

Taking the discussion on a broader level, one could say that the use of English as international language requires the speakers to be most of all interactively and strategically competent. Naturally, an efficient use of a language asks for all the areas of communicative competence. However, in an international context, the speakers of English are of many nationalities and

posses varying levels of language skills. No matter how competent someone is linguistically, he still has to communicate with others around him with less competence. To be able to communicate successfully with less competent speakers of English, one has to be interactively competent. Also, since a language learner is rarely a fully competent language user, strategic competence is needed to compensate for the lack of other competence areas. Although interactive and strategic competences are of particular importance in international contexts, to be able to communicate efficiently in International English used in a certain domain, knowledge of the special terminology of the field is needed. As was mentioned by the employees, to be able to do anything in the company, one has to know the special terminology used. Knowledge of more general vocabulary was not seen as so essential. Thus, when it comes to sharing knowledge of the special lexis in the community, linguistic competence plays a role as well.

4.6 Attitudes towards English as the corporate language of the company

The interviewees were asked for their opinion on English being the corporate language in the company. All the subjects expressed very similar views. Two main themes were that it is something that is necessary and something that is a good and a positive thing. First, according to the interviewees, it is necessary because the company does international business and has affiliates and business partners all over the world. There has to be a common language that makes smooth cooperation between the different sides possible. In fact, the employees were of the opinion that there are no other real choices than having English as a corporate language common for all. Second, the interviewees saw it as a good thing because there is no need for extensive and expensive translation anymore.

Interview extract 32.

“Se on tavallaan pakko. Ei me löydettäis muuten yhteistä kieltä ei. ... Jos sä käytät jotain muuta kieltä ku englantia ni sehän on se rumba ku kakskyt vuotta sitten et piti olla kielenkääntäjiä talo täynnä mitkä käänsi dokumentaation. Ikävä sanoa mutta sehän on kallista. Ei siihen oo paluuta enää.”

“It’s kind of a necessity. We wouldn’t find a common language otherwise. ... If you use some other language than English it’s the same thing as twenty years ago when there was a house full of translators who translated the documents. Sad to say but it’s expensive. There’s no going back to that.”

The opportunity to improve the English language skills was considered a merit when applying for a job in the future. Furthermore, English was seen as practical because all the computer programs use English. It appeared to be such an obvious thing to have English as the corporate language that the interviewees did not go into analysing the subject further.

Interview extract 33.

“Emmä näkis muita vaihtoehtoja. Ei mulla oo sillä lailla oikeestaan mitään vahvaa mielipidettä joo tai ei. Se on vaan niinkun näin se on.”

“I wouldn’t see any other possibilities. I don’t have really that strong opinion yes or no. It’s like that’s the way it is.”

It was mentioned by some that using a foreign language at work could be sometimes somewhat challenging and cause extra work but, on the other hand, this was seen as an opportunity to develop one’s personal skills and qualities. One of the subjects expressed a view based on a larger societal and cultural

level that is especially of interest to linguistics. He pointed out that it might be worrying to some people that languages with relatively few speakers, such as Finnish, are in a way abandoned. Foreigners do not have to learn it anymore since they can manage in English in Finland.

The employees interviewed considered the surrounding work community to hold similar positive attitudes towards English as the corporate language. The use of English was something that was accepted and viewed positively. It was considered a natural part of the work community giving it an international flavour.

Interview extract 34.

“Ni se on semmonen niinku se on niin sisään kasvanu tähän hommaan... Se on niinku se on osa sitä työyhteisöä.”

“It’s like it’s grown into this job... It’s like a part of the work community.”

One of the subjects expressed a concern for the older employees. According to him, using English at work can be uncomfortable for senior workers since they have not learned it at school, as has the younger generation. The use of English could create problems for the older employees and they might avoid some situations where English is used, speaking it only when absolutely necessary. This avoidance tactic is, as he pointed out, only possible if one’s role in the company does not demand daily use of English.

Interview extract 35.

“Se voi niinkun joillekin vanhemmille ihmisille jotka on niinkun ehkä ehkä ei oo niinkun sitä kielitaitoo kehittyny ei oo niinkun koulussa luettu eikä nii niille se voi tai onkin kauhistus että he ei niinkun sitte todellakaan käytä englantia muuten ku ihan pakollisissa tilanteissa...”

“It can be for older people who don’t have that kind of language skills and haven’t perhaps studied languages at school for them it can be frightening and they really use English only when absolutely necessary...”

Sinkkonen’s (1997) and Huhta’s (1999) findings support this observation. Both reported that younger generation’s English language skills are better than older generations. No other subjects in the present study than the one above, however, mentioned a similar difference in language skills between older and younger employees. One interviewee mentioned, without reference to age, that it is obvious that some of the employees have a less good command of English but, in those cases, things can always be explained in Finnish as well.

It seems that the employees have adopted English as the corporate language readily and with ease. The business community appears to have adapted itself for the demands of the international communication without too much trouble. The use of English in internal communication is seen as an obvious result of the international markets and a necessity when a company desires to be active on a global scale. In general, the employees could be said to have a very positive attitude towards English as the corporate language.

The atmosphere in the work community towards speakers of English with varied levels of competence and some with less good language skills was described as good and tolerant. Many expressed that they had never encountered or seen any problems or discriminatory behaviour towards employees whose English skills were not that good. It was seen as natural that

not everybody had a good command of languages. The general atmosphere was considered understanding and patient and those who were slower in expressing themselves in English were given time. The most important thing, according to the employees, was that the information was delivered one way or another without misunderstandings. Further, speaking was seen only as one aspect of communication.

Interview extract 36.

“Tavallaan ymmärretään että kaikki ei puhu sitä kieltä niin hyvin. ... Kielellä puhuminen se on vaan kommunikoinnin yks osa. Niin se ei oo sitä se ei oo asian ymmärtämisen kannalta kokonaisuus vielä. ... Et se ilmapiiri on mun mielestä tosi hyvä et ymmärretään joka suuntaan.”

“There is a kind of understanding that not everybody speaks the language so well. ... Speaking is just one aspect of communication and doesn't count for understanding the whole communication. ... I think the atmosphere is really good and we understand in every direction.”

The interviewees were asked whether they thought that the employees with a better command of English than others could have an advantage over their colleagues with less language skills. Most of the subjects were of the opinion that that was not the case. The average command of English among the employees was considered good and the ability to cope with tasks in English was seen as equal. One informant said that if somebody is an expert or competent in a particular field, insufficient English language skills are nowadays very rarely the reason for a missed job opportunity. Another subject said that as long as the job gets done it does not matter how one expresses oneself. However, it was mentioned by one interviewee that an employee also has to exercise common sense and not take tasks that demand, for example,

writing a long document in English. Thus, one should be aware of the limitations of his or her language abilities. However, some subjects said that having a good command of English sets some employees in an advantage since good language skills make it easier to communicate with other people, make contacts and handle everyday tasks and the flow of information. Those who are able to communicate fluently and persuasively in English were seen by one of the interviewees to have a better chance to move forward in their careers.

Interview extract 37.

“Mä luulen et se joka niinku pystyy itteensä niinku sujuvammin... kommunikoimaan englanniks... vakuuttavasti niin niin kyl mä luulen et sil on niinkun paremmat mahikset edetä tavallaan urallaan täällä.”

“I believe that a person who is able to communicate more fluently in English... and convincingly... I think that that person has better chances to advance in his or her career here.”

However, how an individual communicates has largely to do with his or her character as well, as was pointed out later by the same subject. The relationship between career advancement and language skills was also investigated by Sinkkonen (1997). In her study on public administrative personnel, she found that although the employees' language skills did not have a direct effect on their career success, language abilities did play a role in their careers. In her study, employees with better language skills were given assignments and duties that others with less language skills were not able to do. Good language skills could, according to her, direct an employee's career towards more international assignments and duties. Nowadays, however, as Sinkkonen (1997) says, all the assignments in public administration are international in one way or another and knowing languages, especially English, is no more a special skill but rather

a basic requirement. This view was also expressed by some subjects in the present study. English language skills were seen as part of a person's basic skills and people who do not have a sufficient command of English were not believed to even apply for jobs in international companies where English is used all the time. There might also be a difference in the role of English used in public administration on the other hand and in engineering on the other. As some of the employees interviewed for this study mentioned, in technical issues limited language skills can be and are compensated with other ways of communicating, for example, drawing. In public administration oral communication and specific expressions might have a more important function due to the nature of work that is different from technical engineering. The effect of language skills to career advancement was also examined by Vollstedt (2002), who studied four international companies and their use of English in internal communications. She reported that employees with an advanced knowledge of English are often evaluated better and promoted faster than their colleagues who are equally qualified or even more so but whose knowledge of English is evidently worse. (Vollstedt 2002:102). The findings of the present study suggest that good language skills might have some influence over the employees' careers, as argued by Sinkkonen (1997) and Vollstedt (2002), but in the same way as would other qualities and competences, such as professional knowledge. More research is needed on the matter to find out the extent and way English language skills influence an employee's success in his or her work and career.

When the interviewees were asked what kind of English should be used at work and whether for example the way which English was pronounced mattered, the answer was very clear: the most important thing is that the messages are understood.

Interview extract 38.

“Ymmärrettävää niin niin emmä muuta oikein voi sanoa et viestin tarvis mennä perille. Et se ei tarvii olla mitenkään niinkun hirveen oikeeoppista edes vaan se että se viesti menee perille. Se on tärkein.”

“I can’t really say anything else than that the message has to be understandable and the message should go through. It doesn’t even have to be very correct but the message should go through. That’s the most important thing.”

The way English was pronounced was not seen as important. Interestingly, according to one subject, it was even seen snobbish and funny if someone pronounced English with for example a British accent. Sridhar and Sridhar (1994, as quoted in McKay 2002) have similarly pointed out that a native-like way of speaking English can be seen as pedantic and snobbish among a non-native English speaker community and many English learners may therefore even reject a close to native target (McKay 2002:40). As mentioned in the interview extract above, correctness was not considered essential either as long as the understanding did not suffer. Most importantly the job has to be done and the language is the means to do it. Everything else, i.e., the ability to discuss things not related to work with colleagues was seen as extra. Naturally, there is a limit to what can be understood when pronunciation is very bad, as was pointed out by one interviewee. It was also mentioned by some that the role of language and the language requirements for employees who make decisions and communicate them further are different from that of technical engineers. They need to have good and clear communication. One subject explained what kind of English ought to be used at work.

Interview extract 39.

“Must se on riittävää et se on ymmärrettävää mutta täs tulee niinku taas sit se että missä tehtävissä toimii et niille jotka satunnaisesti osallistuu vaikka kokouksiin joitten roolissa ei oo niin merkittävänä se että niitten täytyy niinkun viestiä ni se on niinkun se et se on ymmärrettävällä tasolla. Se on musta ihan ok. Mut ne jotka sitte tekee päätöksiä ja kommunikoi niitä eteenpäin ni must se täytyy niinku olla sit hyvää.”

“I think it’s enough that it’s understandable but it depends on what kind of work you do. Those people who only occasionally attend for example meetings and in whose role communication doesn’t play such a significant part, for them it’s enough that their English is understandable. I think that’s ok. But those who make decisions and communicate them further their English has to be good.”

The employees seem to have an attitude towards the English language that Baker (1992) and Gardner (1982) call an instrumental attitude. According to Baker (1992) and Gardner (1982), instrumental orientation refers to pragmatic, utilitarian motives of learning and knowing a language. As the interviewees described, the most important function in using English is that the job gets done. The way it is pronounced and whether the grammar is perfectly correct does not matter for the employees.

The subjects were inquired whether they were aware of the fact that the corporate language of the company was specifically American English. There seemed to be some confusion over the issue; some said they used British English, some that they used American English and some had not paid attention to the issue and had, therefore, not noticed which one is used. The main viewpoint was, however, that it was a minor issue and did not make much of a difference. As one informant said, American English might be the official variety used in the company but in practice it was not so. Both British English

and American English varieties were used in spelling and writing depending on the preference of the individual.

It appears that the employees do not see themselves as using any particular native variety of English, such as British English or American English. Even though American English is officially named as the variety to be used in the internal communication of the company, not all the employees were aware of it and those who were, did not see it as something to think about. The only time when the employees reported noticing the status of the American English was when they used spelling checkers on their computer. Perhaps the English they use could be seen as an expression of International English. It is English used in a special domain, in a business community, for special purposes. It seems to be, using Smith's (1983) term "de-nationalized" to some extent. The employees do not seem to link it to any native speaker country. The English language has a less culture specific nature for them; they do not learn the language in order to understand American or British people and their culture better but to be able to achieve their communicative goals as members of the business community. In a way, the English used could be said to have merged into the culture of the business community. English functions as the employees' means of expressing themselves in the community and as their means of working towards the common goals of the community.

The employees considered it a necessary and a good thing that English was the corporate language of the company. An international company was said to need a common language for operating with its subsidiaries and affiliates. A common language makes expensive translation services unnecessary and also gives the employees an opportunity to improve their language skills. Only some of the interviewees mentioned that using English could sometimes cause extra work. The working community was considered to have a positive attitude towards English as the corporate language; it was seen as a natural part of the employees' work. The atmosphere in the work community towards speakers of English with varied levels of competence was also described as understanding

and tolerant. In general, employees with better language skills than others were not thought to have an advantage in the company. The employees' ability to cope with the tasks in English was considered equal. Most important for the employees was that the job gets done; less emphasis was put on how one expresses him- or herself. However, some were of the opinion that good English language skills place an employee in an advantage over others since he or she is able to communicate fluently, handle the flow of information easier and make contacts easily. The way English was used, for example, pronounced, did not matter to the employees, as long as it was understandable. This was, however, considered to depend on the kind of tasks one has in a company, for example sales people were thought to need better language skills. The fact that the official language of the company is American English was not known to all the employees and, in any case, it was considered irrelevant what English was used.

In the concluding chapter, the main findings as well as their relevance for the business community will be further discussed. Finally, suggestions for further research will be made.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to study English in internal company communications. The aim was to examine the employees' views on and attitudes towards English used for internal communications, as well as to find out challenges the employees face when communicating in English at work. On a broader level, the aim was to observe the role of English in a special domain of internal company communications. The data material consisted of seven employee interviews.

The employees reported using English daily at work. The most common situations where English was used were meetings, sending and receiving e-mail and mostly reading but also writing documentation. The common rule seems to be that if there is one person in a meeting or team who does not speak Finnish, English is used as the medium for communication. The employees reported needing both spoken and written communication in English, with the emphasis on the latter. However, this depended on the employee and his area of work. Some employees said they needed to speak English more often than write it.

Overall, the employees had a very positive view of English as the corporate language. They considered English a natural and obvious part of their business community and viewed themselves as members of a wider international business community. English was seen as essential for the company to be able to function and compete efficiently on an international level. Two main themes concerning the role of English in internal company communication emerged from the interviews: the instrumental function and less culture specific nature of English. English has a very practical relevance for the employees. It does not have an inherent value in itself since they do not learn it to understand the British or the Americans better but to achieve their goals as members of the business community. They have a pragmatic motive for learning it because it enables them to do their job. These two, functional objective for learning English and its "culture-free" nature, are precisely what

Swales (1990) argued as two of the fundamental characteristics of discourse communities.

The employees considered their English language skills sufficient describing the level of their skills as good or satisfactory. In general, the employees were of the opinion that their command of English was not very good but adequate for the purpose it was serving. As in previous studies on employee language skills, different situations that involved oral communication were clearly the most challenging in the use of English language for the employees. This was mainly due to the lack of practice and routine in speaking and listening English. Meetings were said to be the most demanding oral communication situations where the employees reported difficulties relating especially to the discourse aspect of communicative competence. Discussions in meetings usually flow fast and topics and themes change rapidly and incoherently. Following and taking part in such interaction was seen as challenging. Difficulties in the area of linguistic competence were expressed particularly in relation to different accents and ways of pronouncing, especially if the conversation took place on the phone. The closer the accent was to the Finnish way of pronouncing English, the easier it was to comprehend. Unlike oral communication, written communication in English, especially reading, was considered a routine by the employees. The preferred company style for documents was said to be clear, exact and to the point. Sometimes the employees reported having problems with texts written in a complicated manner and, therefore, challenging their linguistic and discourse competencies. However, this was not seen as a problem. When reading or writing, the employees have more time to go through the text. However, what is challenging for one can be routine for another. Some employees considered speaking English easy because they needed spoken communication frequently everyday.

The employees' English skills are specified in technical terminology that is essential in their work. Talking about more general things and using general vocabulary were considered to be more challenging. Thus, the

employees' linguistic competence gets modified to the needs of the community. The fact that the employees' use of English is restricted to their work contributes to this specification. The employees reported needing to speak English very rarely outside their work. However, the employees did not see this restricted command of English as a big problem. Knowledge of work related terms was said to be most important. Missing some words and minor grammar mistakes were not considered a problem. Thus, the employees did not feel they needed or were required to have a native like competence in English. As one of the employees said, with his English skills he cannot read Shakespeare but he is able to do his tasks at work. Most importantly, one has to be able to do one's work and have a good command of the technical terminology as well as other vocabulary relevant for the profession. The majority saw small talk skills as something extra and not a relevant skill.

The atmosphere in the work community towards speakers of English with varied levels of competence was also described as understanding and tolerant. In general, employees with better language skills than others were not thought to have an advantage in the company. The employees' ability to cope with the tasks in English was considered equal. The subjects emphasized the outcome of the work being done; less emphasis was put on how an employee expresses him- or herself. However, some were of the opinion that good English language skills place some employees in an advantage over others since they are able to communicate fluently, handle the flow of information and make contacts easily. The way English was used or pronounced did not matter to the employees, as long as it was understandable. This was, however, considered to depend on the kind of tasks one has in a company, for example, sales people were thought to need better language skills. The fact that the official language of the company is American English was not known to all the employees and, in any case, it was considered irrelevant which English was used. This reflects the instrumental nature English has for the employees. It is irrelevant what kind of English is used if it serves the purpose of carrying out the tasks.

Even though the employees did not consider a good command of the general vocabulary important for the work they are doing, most employees wanted to improve their skills and especially their oral communication skills. This could be interpreted as a desire to be more fluent in spoken English. Although excellent English skills are not required from the employees, the better the skills, the easier it is to function in English. Moreover, as the employees pointed out, technical terminology is learned through the job. On the basis of this study, it seems beneficial for the company to provide English courses that teach the employees general English language skills, especially oral communication skills. The desired form of instruction would be a small group where the employees could practice their spoken English in a relaxed atmosphere. This kind of training would be especially useful for the new employees. Basic English skills were considered an adequate requirement for the new employees. Mostly, however, new employees have not had the chance to speak English and courses where they could activate their language skills and lower their threshold of speaking English right from the beginning would be useful. On the other hand, for the employees who already have a good command of spoken English, language courses with some specific purpose, such as presentation skills or writing documentation would be more beneficial.

It seems, however, that the employees do not put so much emphasis on their linguistic competence. To compensate for the lack of linguistic competence, the employees used various strategies to avoid misunderstandings. Well aware of the shortcomings in their English skills, the employees attended meetings well prepared, asked for additional information, used background documents and so forth. Language was seen as just one way of communicating and, for example, drawing was also used to get the message through. Interactional competence plays a major role in the employees' communication and it appears that interactive and strategic competences are as important as other competences for the employees to communicate successfully in the business community with members of various competence levels.

Another thing the companies with English as their company language should be aware of is the employees' opinions on which language, English and / or Finnish, should be used and in what contexts and situations. Mostly the employees in this study were satisfied with the information flow and it did not make a difference whether the information was in Finnish or English. However, the employees saw it as important to receive important legal texts in Finnish. Furthermore, a wish to have the questionnaires on employee satisfaction and meetings where general information is distributed in Finnish was expressed. On the other hand, some information received could have been in English so that the foreign employees would also understand it. It is important for the company to know how the employees experience the use of English in internal communication.

Apart from English, the employees reported using only Swedish occasionally. The role of English in the company, therefore, seems to be dominant in relation to other languages. Even the Swedish colleagues did not expect to be addressed in Swedish anymore. This finding is contradictory to Huhta's (1999) argument that, in addition to English, the role of other languages will increase in the future. In the light of the present study it could be suggested that the role and use of English is increasing at the expense of other languages. English appears to be more and more the default language used in international contexts.

It should be pointed out once more that the present study is small in scale, only seven employees were interviewed and, therefore, the results should be viewed with caution. Preferably, the findings of this study should be regarded as guiding the direction of further research on English in internal communication of a company. More research could be done in other companies to see how different companies experience the use of English as their corporate language. The results could then be compared to find out similarities and differences in the way English is used in the companies' communication. More research could be done to find out whether the role of English in business is

indeed increasing considerably at the expense of other languages. The research could concentrate in more detail on the different aspects of the employees' use of English at work and gather information by means of observation, written text and recording real life situations. For companies it would be interesting and beneficial to examine if and how much information gets lost when the employees use English instead of Finnish at work. Further, more research could be done on the use and role of English in other special domains, such as various professional fields and see how it differs from the business domain. The list of possible topics for research in this area is endless. As the internalization of the world accelerates, the topicality and importance of studying the uses of International English around the world is certainly not fading.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Questionnaire on background information

TAUSTATIETOJA

Henkilötiedot

- Ikä:
- Koulutus, tutkintoala ja valmistumisvuosi:

Työ

- Kuinka kauan olet ollut töissä Ericssonilla Jorvaksessa:
- Työnkuvasi lyhyesti:

Kielitaito

- Kuinka monta vuotta olet opiskellut englantia:
Koulussa:
Opiskeluaikanaasi:
- Oletko oleskellut ulkomailla (opiskellut, kielikurssi, työskennellyt):
Milloin ja kuinka kauan:

Mitä kieltä / kieliä pääasiallisesti käytit ja kuinka paljon:

Mihin tarkoituksiin:

Mitä pidit kielen / kielten käytössä vaikeimpana asiana ulkomailla oleskelun aikana:

- Oletko käynyt Ericssonin tarjoamilla englannin kielikursseilla työpaikallasi:
Milloin:
Minkälaisella kurssilla:
- Oletko ollut jonkinlaisella englannin kielikurssilla työpaikkasi ulkopuolella:
Milloin:
Minkälaisella kurssilla:
- Muu kielitaito:

Kiitos osallistumisestasi!

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Appendix 2. Theme interview structure

ENGLANNIN KIELEN ASEMA TYÖSSÄ JA SEN HAASTEET TYÖPAIKAN VIESTINNÄSSÄ

- ❖ Kuinka paljon tarvitset / usein käytät englantia työssäsi? (kaikkea käyttöä, ei vain puhumista)
 - Mihin tarkoituksiin / missä tilanteissa? Kuinka paljon missäkin tilanteessa?
 - Missä tilanteissa tai asioissa eniten / vähiten? Miksi?
- ❖ Mitä kielitaidon osa-aluetta tarvitset eniten työssäsi: englanniksi puhumista, kuuntelemista, kirjoittamista, lukemista? Mihin tarkoitukseen kutakin?
 - Mikä näistä alueista on mielestäsi tärkeintä työssäsi hallita?
- ❖ Tarvitsetko työssäsi ns. small talkia? Millaisissa tilanteissa enimmäkseen?
 - Miten sujuu small talk?
- ❖ Mitkä asiat tai tilanteet koet haastavina englannin kielen käytön kannalta? Miksi?
 - Puhumisen / kirjoittamisen kannalta? Miksi?
- ❖ Mitkä asiat tai tilanteet ovat rutiinia englannin kielen käytön kannalta? Miksi?
- ❖ Onko sinulla ollut ymmärtämisvaikeuksia? (Esimerkiksi neuvottelutilanteissa, kokouksissa, puhelimessa, englannin kielistä tekstiä luettaessa, jne.)
 - Missä tilanteissa tai asioissa?
 - Mitä teet tai miten toimit, jos et ole ymmärtänyt jotain?
- ❖ Oletko kokenut, että joissakin asioissa tai tilanteissa sinua ei ole ymmärretty tai olet tullut väärinymmärretyksi englannin kielen takia?
 - Missä tilanteissa? Miksi?
 - Mitä teet tai miten toimit, jos koet, että sinua ei ole ymmärretty?
- ❖ Kuinka usein / paljon käytät työssäsi englantia eri kansallisuuksiin kuuluvien ihmisten kanssa? Minkä kansallisuuksien kanssa? Missä asioissa / tilanteissa enimmäkseen?
 - Miten koet englannin kielellä viestinnän eri kansallisuuksien kanssa? Onko eroja? Minkälaisia?
 - Onko joidenkin kansallisuuksien kanssa helpompi tai vaikeampi viestiä? Miksi? Ovatko jotkut murteet tai aksentit erityisen hankalia ymmärtää?

- ❖ Käytätkö muita vieraita kieliä työssäsi? (esim. ruotsia) Kuinka paljon ja missä tilanteissa?
 - Käytätkö tai tarvitsetko työssäsi jotakin muuta vierasta kieltä enemmän kuin englantia
- ❖ Toivoisitko, että joissakin asioissa tai tilanteissa käytettäisiin suomen kieltä englannin kielen sijasta? Missä asioissa tai tilanteissa? Miksi?
- ❖ Koetko, että osallistumisesi keskusteluun olisi ollut aktiivisempaa joissakin tilanteissa, jos olisi käytetty suomea englannin sijasta? Missä tilanteissa? Miksi?
- ❖ Toivoisitko saavasi joistakin asioista tiedon myös suomen kielellä? Mistä? Miksi?

OMAN KIELITAIDON ARVIOINTIA JA SEN KEHITTÄMISESTÄ

- ❖ Mitä mielestäsi tarkoittaa ”hyvä englannin kielen taito” työsi kannalta? Mitä se pitää sisällään?
- ❖ Miten arvioisit omaa kielitaitoasi suhteessa tähän näkemykseesi? Oletko tyytyväinen omaan englannin kielen taitoosi?
- ❖ Pystytkö mielestäsi ilmaisemaan itseäsi englannin kielellä vaivattomasti?
 - Koetko oman englannin kielen taitosi työssäsi riittäväksi, siten, että pystyt suoriutumaan työtehtävistäsi niin tehokkaasti ja sujuvasti kuin haluat?
 - Pystytkö mielestäsi tuomaan omat mielipiteesi esille ja puolustamaan niitä englannin kielellä tehokkaasti?
- ❖ Kuinka hyvin hallitset mielestäsi:
 - englannin kielen käyttösanan?
 - työhösi liittyvän englannin kielen ammattisanaston?
 - englannin kieliopin?
 - englannin kielen kirjoittamisen?
 - englannin kielen puhumisen ja ääntämisen?
- ❖ Jos vertaat tämän hetken englannin kielen taitoasi ja kielitaitoasi silloin, kun aloitit nykyisessä työpaikassa, koetko sen kehittyneen? Missä asioissa ja missä määrin?

- ❖ Jos olet osallistunut työpaikkasi tarjoamalle englannin kielen kurssille / tarjoamille englannin kielen kursseille, koetko niistä olleen sinulle hyötyä?
 - Missä asioissa ja missä määrin? Muuta palautetta?
- ❖ Koetko, että lisäkoulutus englannin kielessä olisi sinulle hyödyllistä tai tarpeellista?
 - Millä kielitaidon alueilla haluaisit kehittyä?
 - Oletko suunnitellut osallistuvasi työpaikkasi tarjoamille tai jollekin muulle englannin kielen kursseille?
- ❖ Pitäisikö mielestäsi yrityksen englannin kielen koulutuksessa kiinnittää erityistä huomiota johonkin kielitaidon tai kielen käytön osa-alueeseen?
- ❖ Käytätkö englannin kieltä vapaa-aikanasi? Missä määrin ja mitä varten?
 - Pyritkö vapaa-ajallasi kehittämään tai harjoittamaan englannin kielen taitoasi? Miten?

ENGLANNIN KIELI TYÖPAIKAN KIELENÄ: ASENTEET

- ❖ Mitä mieltä olet henkilökohtaisesti siitä, että työpaikkasi virallinen kieli on englanti?
 - Mitkä ovat sen edut ja hyvät puolet / ongelmat ja huonot puolet?
- ❖ Minkälainen vaikutus sillä, että työpaikkasi virallinen kieli on englanti, on mielestäsi sinua ympäröivään työyhteisöön?
 - Minkälainen on mielestäsi työpaikkasi yleinen ilmapiiri eritasoisia englannin kielen käyttäjiä kohtaan?
 - Koetko, että joillakin työntekijöillä on tai voisi olla etulyöntiasema tai paremmat mahdollisuudet suoriutua joistakin työtehtävistä, koska he hallitsevat englannin kielen paremmin kuin toiset? Miksi? Missä asioissa ja tilanteissa?
- ❖ Minkälaista englantia tulisi mielestäsi työpaikalla käyttää? Onko asialla merkitystä?
 - Tulisiko esimerkiksi ääntämiseen kiinnittää mielestäsi huomiota? Riittääkö ymmärrettävän englannin puhuminen?
- ❖ Minkälainen / minkätasoinen englannin kielen taito pitäisi mielestäsi uusilla työntekijöillä olla?
- ❖ Tiedätkö, että työpaikasi virallinen kieli on amerikkalainen englanti? Missä se näkyy?