

**ENGLISH PROFICIENCY VS. PROFESSIONALISM.
A CASE STUDY OF PERCEIVED MANAGEMENT OF
LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN AN INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATION.**

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ABSTRACT

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Language Proficiency vs. Professionalism. A case study of perceived management of linguistic diversity in an international organization.	
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<p>The role, complexity and effects of language in international business are greatly acknowledged, but this is yet to show in research (Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 2014: 9). The purpose of the paper is to get an understanding of the extent to which one's English proficiency affects the perceived professionalism and competence in one's job. In addition, this case study looks into the management of linguistic diversity in an international organization, the case company. The research questions are: 1) How do professionals relate language proficiency to perceived professionalism? and 2) How is linguistic diversity approached and managed in a multilingual work place?</p> <p>The data consists of four interviews conducted with employees of an international start-up company located in Finland. The case company aims at the global market and its official language is English. The interviews are semi-structured and follow chosen themes; background information, language at work, language related issues and company's approach to linguistic diversity. The interviewees are aged between 21 and 25, and have different nationalities, native languages and level of English skills. The nationalities are Finnish and Vietnamese, and native languages are Finnish, Vietnamese and Chinese. English skills vary in the interviewees' own words from "close to native" to "kind of fluent". The interviews were recorded and transcribed before further analysis and reflection on the theoretical framework.</p> <p>The results of the study are in line with the hypothesis that one's English proficiency affects the perceptions of professionalism – the evaluations of competence. Language skills can be an indicator of one's level of education and may affect one's position in an organization. The case company has no official language policy, and based on the findings this does not seem to affect language use, communication or management of linguistic diversity. Linguistic diversity, and diversity in general, is managed moderately and action is taken only when an issue arises. Diversity is considered an advantage contributing to the success in global business, which seems to promote the business success.</p> <p>The interviewees' experiences and perceptions enlightened the position of English and the management of linguistic diversity in the case company. Despite the size of the sampling, the findings can be beneficial for the case company and other organizations in understanding the necessity and value of language decisions. Some challenges concerning the study were the lack of resources and thus the limited sampling.</p>	
Key words: Linguistic diversity, language proficiency, diversity management	

TIIVISTELMÄ

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Kielitaito vs. Pätevyys. Tapaustutkimus monikielisyiden johtamisesta kansainvälisessä organisaatiossa.	
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<p>Kielen rooli, monimutkaisuus ja vaikutus kansainvälisessä liiketoiminnassa tiedostetaan laajalti, mutta niiden saama huomio tutkimuksissa on yhä vähäistä (Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 2014: 9). Tämän työn tarkoituksena onkin selvittää, kuinka englannin kielitaito vaikuttaa kanssatyöntekijöiden käsityksiin henkilön pätevydestä. Lisäksi tarkastellaan kielellisen monimuotoisuuden lähestymistapoja ja johtamista kansainvälisessä organisaatiossa, tapausyrityksessä. Tutkimuskysymykset ovat 1) Kuinka ammattilaiset yhdistävät kielitaidon käsitykseen pätevydestä? ja 2) Kuinka kielellistä monimuotoisuutta lähestytään ja hoidetaan kansainvälisessä organisaatiossa?</p> <p>Tutkimusaineisto koostuu neljästä puolistrukturoidusta haastattelusta, joissa edetään valittujen teemojen mukaisesti. Haastateltavat työskentelevät kukin eri tehtävissä Suomessa sijaitsevassa start-up yrityksessä. Tapausyritys tähtää kansainvälisille markkinoille, ja sen virallinen kieli on englanti. Haastateltavat ovat 21-25-vuotiaita suomalaisia ja vietnamilaisia, ja äidinkielenä yhdellä haastateltavista on lisäksi kiina. Haastateltavien englannin kielitaito vaihtelee heidän omien sanojensa mukaan lähes natiivista melko sujuvaan. Haastattelut äänitettiin ja litteroitiin, jonka jälkeen ne analysoitiin peilaten aiempiin tutkimuksiin ja ennalta asetettuihin odotuksiin</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma osoittaa erityisesti suullisen kielitaidon vaikuttavan siihen, kuinka pätevä ja kykenevä henkilö nähdään. Englannin kielitaito määrittelee henkilön osaamista ja koulutustutuneisuutta, ja saattaa vaikuttaa henkilön asemaan organisaatiossa. Tapausyrityksellä ei ole virallista kielipolitiikkaa, ja haastattelutulosten perusteella se ei näytä vaikuttavan kielen käyttöön, viestintään tai monikielisyiden johtamiseen. Monikielisyyttä lähestytään maltillisesti, ja sen katsotaan olevan tärkeä resurssi, avain kansainvälisille markkinoille.</p> <p>Haastateltavat pitävät kielten ja englannin roolia työssään suurena johtuen osittain työnkuvasta. Englanti mainitaan kaiken julkisen viestinnän kieleksi, ja kielitaito käsitetään pääasiassa suullisena kielitaitona. Huolimatta otannan koosta, tulosten voidaan katsoa hyödyttävän tapaus yritystä sekä muita pk-yrityksiä. Tutkimus tarjoaa arvokasta tietoa kielipäästösten tärkeydestä ja välttämättömyydestä. Haasteensa tutkimukseen tuovat resurssien rajallisuus ja siitä johtuva suppea otanta.</p>	
Asiasanat: Monikielisyys, kielitaito, monimuotoisuuden johtaminen	

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BELF	Business English as a Lingua Franca
CoP	Community of Practice
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ENL	English as a Native Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ICC	Intercultural Communication
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
NNS	Non-Native English Speaker
NS	Native English Speaker

1 INTRODUCTION

Having worked and studied in multilingual environments, my interest towards the lingua franca, the way we use it and how it may affect the image of us, has strengthened. I have always been very self-conscious about my own English language skills, and wished to have a native-like accent, but have later learnt to be satisfied with being competent in the global language. Speaking to a native English speaker or someone with better language skills can feel intimidating. There is the feeling of vulnerability due to not being able to fully express oneself, and thus fearing to sound less smart. It surely is easier to sound professional in a language that one is proficient in, but do language skills actually affect the perceptions of professionalism? To what extent do one's English skills define their competence in their job? Studies among intercultural management and communication were a source of inspiration to dig deeper into the topic and as my degree is likely to direct me to work in a multilingual and diverse workplace, it is an important matter to study for the sake of both my own good and the field.

“... The trend of transnational mobility for work purposes means that in many companies, the workforce is made up of employees from a variety of national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.” (Lønsmann, 2014: 94). Workplaces are becoming multinational, multicultural and multilingual and the need for a global, shared language is inevitable, and English is often the solution. English is most widely used in higher education and corporate world globally, and while the use of English as a working language spreads around the world and solves many language-related issues in international organizations, it has its challenges (Neeley, 2012). Using a foreign language, in this case English, may put employees with distinctive linguistic resources in unequal positions by forming a so-called linguistic hierarchy, making one's expertise a secondary matter (Kraft and Lønsmann, 2018: 58). Neeley (2012) poses, that “Many may feel at a disadvantage if their English isn't as good as others', team dynamics and performance can suffer, and national pride can get in the way.”. Thus, language can either be an advantage or a hindrance for a person's career, as proficiency in English adds to competence in professional world. (Kraft & Lønsmann, 2018: 55) This thesis aims at

finding out, if one's level of English affects the perception of professionalism within the work community, and how linguistic diversity and appreciation of expertise despite language skills are managed in an international company.

A simplified and a somewhat outdated way to divide English speakers is to talk about natives and non-natives, but because these terms are going to be used throughout the text, it is necessary to clarify the meanings. Today the definition of a native speaker is less definite and less strictly linked to mother tongue, and to be identified as a native speaker, one can have studied and learned the language later in life. (Davies, 2003: 4) A non-native has learnt English as a second or foreign language (Jenkins, 1996). The standards of English traditionally derive from British English, and are hardly reachable for non-natives, which means that the disadvantage of a non-native stamp is challenging to get rid of. The standard English does not of course equal proficiency, but being a non-native with insufficient English skills, here meaning having difficulty communicating, can put one at disadvantage and lead to a feeling of inferiority (Kraft and Lønsmann, 2018: 58). These differences, and how they are viewed, perceived and managed at the workplace is what this paper aims at illuminating. The focus is on the perceptions and attitudes towards language proficiency, and how it is valued against one's competence in their job. Therefore, language use itself will not be focused on and the group primarily under analysis are the non-natives, those to whom English is not the mother tongue.

To get profound, concrete information on the topic and answers to the research questions, a small-size international company located in Finland was requested to participate in the research in the form of interviews. The working language of the company is English, and the aim of the interviews was to find out the possible effects of the employees' level of English skills. This includes the perception of language proficiency and professionalism, the role of language at work, communicative issues, management of linguistic diversity and other aspects related to the topic that arose during the interviews. Although the participants' diverse backgrounds would have allowed cultural and national comparison, this thesis will mainly focus on the linguistic aspect as it is the foundation of intercultural communication, and often overseen in the studies.

The data consists of four interviews. The aim was to get in-depth descriptions of the interviewees' experiences and thoughts, and thus limiting the interviews to four left more time per interview, which again enabled going beyond the titles of the questions and finding out something relevant in that way. The structure of the interviews is semi-structured. The interview questions are well considered and grouped under themes, but due to distinctive backgrounds of the interviewees', they were expected to have more to say about some topics than others, and therefore there was room for application.

The hypothesis was that English language proficiency has an effect on the perception of professionalism to some extent, so that a high level of English adds to perceived professionalism, and a low level lessens one's overall competence perceived by others. The way a company approaches linguistic diversity plays a crucial role in how employees view language, and treating diversity as a resource and utilizing it contributes to business success. Thus, the research questions are composed as follows:

- 1) How do professionals relate language proficiency to perceived professionalism?
- 2) How is linguistic diversity approached and managed in a multilingual work place?

The interviews are the most important piece of data utilized in answering the first research question. Although the expectation is that one's language proficiency has an impact on how competent they are considered for their job, the aim is to present previous works that both for and against the argument. The more specific assumption is that an employee who has trouble communicating in English is seen less competent and the person may experience inequality and inferiority, as their English skills are seen as a hindrance to fulfil given tasks and perform to their full potential. In addition, a person who has English skills better than the average, meaning the person is fluent or close to native, is likely to be seen as intimidating to approach and their skills can put them higher on the hierarchy of the company despite their qualification or competence in their job. The emphasis is primarily on spoken English, as it was predicted to be central in the interviews, and appear in the interviewees' ideas of language proficiency.

The second research question focuses on a broader aspect and it will be discussed in the light of previous studies, research and findings as well as the interview conducted for this paper. To answer the question, areas of linguistic diversity and intercultural are first discussed in the following chapters. The function of language policies was chosen as a crucial part to be included in the theoretical framework, and it is compared to the case company's policies in the analysis and findings chapter. Additionally, the theoretical work is combined with the information gained from the interviews in the analysis. As the interview consists of interviews from members of one company, excerpts of the interviews are presented as examples to either support or argue against the theoretical work.

Professionalism is a crucial part of the paper, but it is treated as a familiar concept, and thus it will be discussed as a part of the analysis. Professionalism is in this thesis viewed as "a set of institutions which permit the members of an occupation to make a living while controlling their own work" (Freidson, 2001: 22). More specifically, it refers to field-specific knowledge and skills, behaviour and qualities that enable working in a specific position. Because the company whose employees are interviewed is Finnish, and it is based in Finland, the Finnish aspect is likely to appear salient in the text, but the position of English in Finland will not be discussed separately. This thesis utilizes carefully chosen and relevant studies and research previously done.

The study aims at filling a gap in the field, as culture related studies often oversee linguistic questions. Roshid and Raqib (2013: 69) state, that several studies have analyzed the effect of English proficiency on labor market performance and advantages and failures. Schellekens (2001: 18) found in her study, that English language deficiency results in being employed in jobs below one's qualifications. It is evident, that the relation between language proficiency and employability is broadly studied, but there are few papers touching on the relation between language proficiency and professionalism. This study offers useful information for both employers and employees, as it offers insight into the position English in international workplaces, realization of the importance of language decisions and language proficiency, finding the balance in a multitude of languages and the management of linguistic diversity.

This thesis is structured followingly. First, there will be theoretical framework, which includes language proficiency, linguistic diversity and business English. Chapter three introduces the research design, before moving on to the fourth chapter, the analysis and findings. Analysis and findings will focus on presenting the findings of the interviews conducted for the study. The fifth and final chapter binds together the discussion and conclusion chapters.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the main areas crucial in forming a picture of the topic will be introduced, these being language proficiency, linguistic diversity and English as a business language. Language proficiency is divided into sub-chapters about defining and assessing language proficiency. Linguistic diversity includes chapters about intercultural communication and tools for management. Finally, the third section, English as the language of business will introduce the concept of BELF and discuss the use of language policies. These areas will be discussed in separate chapters, which will include previous studies, research and theories. The theoretical work will be utilized in the analysis and findings chapter together with the interview material.

2.1 Language proficiency

Today a growing number of organizations list English as one of the criterion in job advertisements and it has become an important employability skill around the world. The level of English required for the job is usually something along the lines of “good command in English”. The organization can have a general level of English required overall in the company or specific criteria for each position depending on one’s job description. There is variation in testing the skills too, as it can be anything from standardized tests to informal questions as a part of a job interview. In general, language proficiency could be simply put as the ability to speak standard English clearly and effectively, and in order to do that one needs broad knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. In this chapter some theoretical approaches to English proficiency and language assessment will be introduced, from a viewpoint of international organizations. Although proficiency is viewed in the paper as an individual perception, it is important to take a look at some formal definitions and assessment tools.

2.1.1 Defining language proficiency

A common categorization of English speakers is Kachru's three circles of English, which divides the speakers into inner circle, outer circle and expanding circle. The inner circle speaks English as a mother tongue (L1), outer circle as a second language (ESL) and expanding circle as a foreign language (EFL). (Martins, 2017: 61-62) As can be derived from the name of the latter circle, the number of people speaking English as a foreign language is continuously growing, and so increases the variation among the speakers. The definition and standard of language proficiency presumably differs in each above mentioned circle, and although one's proficiency cannot be defined based on the circle they belong to, language proficiency is here viewed from the viewpoint of the expanding circle.

According to Oxford English Dictionary, the definition of proficiency refers to "A skill, a talent; (now frequently) a certain standard of skill acquired after a period of education or training" (Oxford University Press, 2019). To separate proficiency from professionalism, professionalism refers to professional practices, and Clark and Kasar (2000: 4) state that "The formal definitions speak to advanced learning, personal responsibility, enhanced prestige, high standards of performance and behaviour, and self-regulation.". Language skills consist of reading, writing, speaking and listening, and thus language proficiency requires skills on all four. More specifically, language proficiency includes literacy-oriented proficiency, grammatical proficiency, vocabulary knowledge and discourse abilities. (Marian, Blumenfeld & Kaushanskaya, 2007: 943) Hereby, these definitions suggest that language proficiency is a combination of the previously mentioned areas of language proficiency acquired from education.

Accents and pronunciation have an inevitable effect on communication. Pronunciation is the element of language that forms the first impression of one's language skills in interaction, and it is a crucial part of language skills and fluency. Poor pronunciation may lead to ambiguity as a single mistakenly pronounced phoneme can change the meaning of a word, causing ambiguity and loss of information. At the same time, phonetically perfect pronunciation does not equal proficiency, because some speech sounds melt

together when speaking fluently. Hereby, intelligibility is a combination of precision and fluency. (Pietilä & Lintunen 2014: 166)

British English is often presented as the correct and desired accent, and the speakers of EFL tend to compare themselves to the speakers of the inner circle, L1, despite the unrealistic goal of ever acquiring a native-like accent despite years of studying. Sounding like a NNS is often considered a sign of incompetence, and a NNS may find communicating with a native as something unpleasant due to the feeling of inferiority (Kraft and Lønsmann, 2018: 58). Foreign language studies often carry the message, that spoken English should be as grammatically correct as written. For instance, Finns think that the reasons behind their poor speaking skills can be found in the school system, which focuses on teaching how to produce error-free text. (Paakki, 2016) This raises a question of what is more valuable, correctness or communicative efficiency? According to Gilakjani (2012: 1):

“Learners with good English pronunciation are likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas, whereas learners with bad pronunciation will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect. Such learners may avoid speaking in English, and experience social isolation, employment difficulties and limited opportunities for further study. We judge people by the way they speak, and so learners with poor pronunciation may be judged as incompetent, uneducated or lacking in knowledge.”

Despite the citation referring to learners, it can be applied to all speakers of EFL. It has been argued that a non-native should not strive to reach the native-level of English skills, as the primary audience is non-natives, and the level of English should be in line with the audience's (Jenkins, 1996). This of course depends on the nature of one's work too. The attitudes towards different accents vary as well, and they are thought to carry different perceptions and messages of one's skills. EFL, English as a lingua franca, usually refers to the use of English among non-natives, and thus there is a great amount of variation among the users. In interaction held in EFL, a NS can even be viewed in a negative light (Motschenbacher, 2013: 91).

2.1.2 Assessing language proficiency

Languages are assessed for several reasons, most commonly for educational purposes but for entering a job as well (Hyltenstam, 2016: 2). International organizations using English as a working language seem to require knowledge of the language of their employees, but the required level of proficiency and how it is assessed is often vague. A wide range of language proficiencies can become problematic in the long run, as it can affect the performance of both an individual and the team. As the effects are not always direct and obvious, language proficiency is often overlooked and given insufficient attention. To avoid the language problems deriving from language proficiency levels, a multilingual organization can minimize the chance by testing the applicants' language skills prior to recruiting or offer language training. (Piekkari et al. 2014: 11)

The assessment helps in finding the suitable candidates for a particular position, but also in mapping the current level of language skills within the company, as the testing of language proficiency level can from time to time concern the current employees too. An organization should outline the desired level of language proficiency required of its employees, and larger organizations usually utilize official tests to chart the proficiency. In small and medium-size businesses the lack of resources can mean having to rely on more informal ways of measuring the skills. There are multiple options, more or less formal, for testing and assessing language skills. A company can test the applicant's language skills orally or in writing, depending on the primary function of language in a particular position. A simple way to get an understanding on one's language competence is to make them speak it. Speaking skills do not always equal good overall skills, but can be an approximate indicator.

Assessing language skills, competence and proficiency requires guidelines. The area of language skills most commonly tested for work purposes are the speaking skills, and it can be anything between assessing the ability to answer a few questions and structured speaking tasks that are carefully analyzed. The nature of the testing depends on the role of language in the position. The following citation from Connor-Linton and Wander

Amoroso (2014: 54) describes the process of performance assessment and assessing speaking skills:

“Performance assessments usually involve an expert judge who subjectively assesses the quality of the performance. Whenever subjective judgments are involved, an immediate influence on the observed score can obscure the picture of candidate ability. An examination of oral proficiency interview ratings should illustrate this point. In interactive oral proficiency interviews, discrete speaking tasks are formulated by interviewers to test base levels of proficiency and to probe to higher ranges until the candidate shows evidence of his limits in proficiency.”

A common method used in job interviews is a sudden change of language to the one that is being tested, leaving no time for the interviewee to carefully choose their words. The aim of such testing is to find out the level of proficiency and readiness of the interviewee, as a proficient speaker is likely to be able to react promptly to an unexpected switch. Such testing relies heavily on the interviewers, as it is their idea of language proficiency that is reflected on the assessment of the candidate's level of skills.

There are various options for testing overall foreign language proficiency, such as the standardized, internationally used TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and IELTS (International English Language Testing System). In addition, there are different scales per continents, such as the CEFRL (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), which has the widely accepted six-level grading that goes from A (Basic user) to C (Mastery), and each level has its sublevels one and two. These tests assess all parts of language skills, which are reading, listening, speaking and writing. (Hyltenstam, 2016: 2-3) Next, there will be a concise look at the IELTS, as an example of an internationally recognized test for foreign language assessment.

The IELTS is a standardized test meant for world-wide use, and it tests all four areas of language skills, speaking module being a key component (Priyanti, 2017: 1). Thus, unlike in many other tests the person's ability to produce speech, to express themselves and to hold a two-way discussion is tested as well, which enables a greater overall picture. The criteria for assessing speaking in the test includes lexical resources, grammar range and accuracy, fluency and pronunciation. The first two are included in the criteria for writing

too, alongside task achievement and response and coherence and cohesion. The overall score is on a scale of one to nine. (IELTS, 2018)

IELTS is most commonly used for immigration purposes or to enter a university, but it is also common in recruiting international employees. With such test the potential candidates' English skills can be mapped before moving on with the recruitment process or the existing employees' skills can be regularly tested to monitor the development. The IELTS is a paid test, and therefore it requires resources of the company or the job applicants. If an organization wishes to have concrete prove of one's proficiency, IELTS can be a suitable option as it takes all the areas of language skills into account. Additionally, it helps in charting the level of skills within the organization or how well candidates aiming to enter the organization sit in the chart. Such tests have their issues, which applies to all assessing, and the results of the IELTS have been found somewhat inconsistent. (Priyanti, 2017: 2) Again, as in all testing, the test itself puts pressure on a person, which can affect the score, but regardless, it gives an approximate picture of one's knowledge of English and can be considered a potential tool to be used in organizations.

2.3 Making the most out of linguistic diversity

Linguistic diversity is today a common phenomenon, and although it can bring about communicative issues, when efficiently managed it can just as well be an enriching resource. It is necessary for an international company filled with various nationalities and languages to make language decisions that benefit both the company and its employees. In this chapter, there will first be discussion about the complexity of intercultural communication, its pros and cons, and the second part focuses on managing linguistic diversity. These topics, including their subheadings, were thought to best answer many linguistic and communicative questions faced in international and multilingual organizations. CoP and MBI-model are presented as theories relating to management of diverse teams. This chapter aims at presenting the tools for managing linguistic diversity and overcoming the linguistic differences and variation of English skills within an organization and its teams.

2.3.1 The complexity of intercultural communication

Discussing intercultural communication requires understanding of cultures and what they are in this sense. Definitions and interpretations of culture vary, as it can be religion, language, food or anything that the members of one culture share. The focus of this paper is on the interpretations and perceptions, and how they vary among the employees of the case company. In the interviews, when asked about culture all would ask to specify before answering, and would have distinctive answers to “What kind of impact does culture have on the atmosphere?”. The answers centred around languages and communication, which could be due to knowing that the thesis focuses on the linguistic aspect. Nevertheless, the communicative and linguistic viewpoints are what this paper primarily focuses on despite there being many other aspects relating to cultures and multiculturalism.

Some issues concerning intercultural interaction are prejudices, transferring knowledge, adjusting and developing relationships. (Thomas& Inkson, 2009: 9, 12) These issues do not only concern the foreigners, but the locals too, although foreign employee, who represents the minority, is more likely to face all of the above mentioned issues. A local

employee with inadequate English skills may have trouble transferring information or developing relationships with those with different native languages. Both parties are required to adapt to a change. In a multicultural work environment gaining intercultural intelligence plays a crucial role too. According to Thomas and Inkson (2009: 16) cultural intelligence refers to:

“[...] being skilled and flexible about understanding a culture, learning more about it from your ongoing interactions with it, and gradually reshaping your thinking to be more sympathetic to the culture and developing your behavior to be more skilled an appropriate when interacting with others from the culture.”

Language diversity is studied to have various impacts on the company and its employees. Language clustering refers to the habit of those sharing a common language gathering, while excluding those with no skills in the language. This lack of local language skills may mean exclusion from informal interactions, work activities and social events. According to Lønsmann (2014: 108), “Knowing the local language has been linked with power and status, and lacking the skills can result in exclusion and disconnectedness from implicit power structures.”. The lack of common language can lead to thin communication, meaning that there is less informal small talk. Thus the importance of local language shows on a personal level. Lønsmann (2014: 91) points out, that “Using English as a corporate language could result in a decrease in the amount of communication in the company, because NNS’ withdraw from non-essential exchanges in English” and thus informal knowledge-sharing can diminish.

The position of English has been seen as a threat for the local languages, and the concern is that it could replace the local languages, at least in higher education and businesses. This is referred to as domain loss, which can affect the attitudes towards the use of English negatively (Lønsmann, 2014: 94). These negative attitudes can reflect on the atmosphere, quality of work and overall satisfaction, and the organization should ensure that the language choices are well-argued and implemented so that such conflicts can be avoided.

In spite of one’s position in an organization, language forms its own so-called hierarchy based on variation from NS standards. This hierarchy views native and highly proficient speakers positively and others that do not reach the standards, negatively. Lønsmann

(2014: 103) found in her research that "The positive evaluations of native-speaker English are frequent among very proficient speakers, less frequent among less proficient speakers and not mentioned at all by the English-have-nots. Thus it appears that a certain level of English proficiency is required for this topic to come up in discussions." Additionally, proficiency can result in being more accepting towards English as a corporate language. (Lønsmann, 2014: 102-103,109)

2.3.2 Tools for managing linguistic diversity

In this chapter, two concepts, that can promote the benefits of linguistic diversity, will be introduced and linked to the thesis topic. These concepts are CoP and MBI model. The concept of communities of practice, CoP, ties learning to interactional context, and enhances the origin of social learning. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002: 4) define communities of practice as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis." CoP underlines learning in practice through construction and internalization of meaning and construction of identities within the group. According to Kalocsai (2014: 13-14):

"Within communities of practice, then, the shared goals, the shared repertoire of practices, and even the forms of mutual engagement, are under constant negotiation, meaning they are being "defined" and "redefined" in practice by the members. The process in which the members coordinate their actions and views with those of the other members necessarily involves learning."

The concept has been applied to linguistic research and EFL context before and it has been suggested that investing resources in it can contribute to the success of an organization (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002: 7). Motschenbacher (2013: 38) suggests, that language is learnt outside classrooms, in social interaction. This mind-set is partially adapted to this study, as the members of the case company are expected to prevent linguistic problems and to fill the gaps in language skills with the shared knowledge and learning from another, especially as the company offers no language training for its employees. The present study focuses on one particular community of

practice, the case company, which is viewed as a speech community as they share a communication network (Spolsky, 2009: 2). It is a small-size company, and due to its size, regular meetings, outside work activities and communication as well common goal, it represents a great example of the concept of communities of practice. The common goal requires cooperation and utilization and sharing of skills and knowledge, which is likely to promote social learning. The concept will be linked to the interviews in the analysis and findings chapter. The assumption is that the members of the company utilize social learning for both language learning and learning of other work-related skills, although the thesis will only be focusing on the language aspect.

Motchenbacher (2013: 39) poses, that

“The community of practice approach offers a micro-level tool that enables the researcher to study the local linguistic practices of ELF as they become typically manifest among interactants who do not share a common geographical origin but use English as a shared medium of intercultural communication.”

In addition, the thesis focuses on social interaction and how the varying levels of English showing in interaction effect the interactants' perceived competence. English in this sense is only a tool of communication, which the community requires in order to function, to reach the shared goals. The concept of CoP is utilized in viewing the methods the members of the community, the employees interviewed for the current study use to communicate over the cultural differences and distinctive levels of English language skills.

Diversity offers the greatest benefit for a team that allows or requires creativity and questioning in their tasks, as then new perspectives and backgrounds can be utilized and put to use. According to Lane (2009), teams can be grouped into creators (effective use of diversity, new solutions and better products), destroyers (letting differences lead to conflicts, poor solutions) or equalizers (pretending the differences do not exist), depending on their approach to managing the interactions. The latter is a neutral approach, and meanwhile the aim is to avoid conflicts and focus on what is common, the potential and resources of a diverse team are not used. Additionally, the members of the team may feel the need to fit the team and thus adapt their personality, which in the long run can show in frustration and disengagement. (Lane, 2009: 65-66)

Constructive management of multicultural teams is crucial in getting the full potential and resources to use. The Map-Bridge-Integrate model has been found to be “the basic set of interactions” (Lane, 2009: 66) for managing diverse teams. This model, MBI, created by DiStefano and Maznevski, is a tool for effective management of a diverse workforce. “M” stands for understanding the differences, “B” for effective communication across differences and “I” for managing the differences and availing them. It highlights the use of diversity as a key to effectiveness and productivity. The statement and the aim of the model is that diverse groups can create value that non-diverse groups could not. As the study focuses on the cultural aspect, mapping in this sense means understanding the cultural differences without stereotypes. Bridging covers communicating across cultural differences, meaning that the differences should be acknowledged while adapting, finding a common ground and planning. Lastly, integrating is defined as valuing the found differences, by involving everyone, dealing with possible conflicts and building on the differences. (Hogan, 2007: 118-120) The three skills rely on one another. Mapping must be done thoroughly in order to successfully move on to Bridging, which if well done can naturally be followed by Integration. According to Lane (2009: 66): “When there three skills are executed well, interactions between individuals or among team members result in high performance”.

A well-known fact is that the need for international management skills has grown and the idea of a global mindset is thought to be an important characteristic of an international manager. It refers to the ability to change the way of thinking, to adapt and work effectively in new situations. According to Lane, Maznevski, DiStefano and Dietz (2009) “A global mindset is the capacity to develop and interpret criteria for personal and business performance that are independent from the assumptions of a single context; and so implement those criteria appropriately in different contexts.”. Cultural intelligence, CQ, a crucial part of global mindset, is a term used for describing the effective acting in a multicultural environment, which includes knowledge and skills and knowing how to speak, behave and react accordingly. It consists of general and specific knowledge, the first being more general understanding on what culture means and vary, whereas the latter is knowledge on specific culture. (Lane, W. Henry, Martha L. Maznevski, Joseph J. DiStefano & Joerg Dietz, 2009: 14)

2.4 English as the language of business

People are moving around the world, and so is business. Companies are moving their offices, functions and employees to countries of lower costs and talented employees are being hunted worldwide. Since foreign labour is entering a growing number of workplaces and businesses are globalizing, it is timely to bring language decisions up to date and to review the existing policy and principles. These decisions are not as straightforward and secondary as one could think, and Sanden (2015: 1100) addresses the question as follows:

“Considering the importance of efficient communication for successful collaboration and productivity, especially in multinational companies where employees must find a way to communicate despite their different language backgrounds, a company’s approach to language may be a more strategically important decision than one might initially think.”

Internationalization, globalization and increasingly connected world have increased the value and benefits of using English instead of the local language. It used to be the giant businesses that operated internationally that chose English as a corporate language, but today a growing number of small and medium-size companies are entering the global market and prefer using English as well. The use of English as a working language and a business language has become generalized, and it is referred to as Business English as a *Lingua Franca*, BELF. BELF serves as a common ground, and it is mostly used in communication among people that have no knowledge of each other’s native language (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta, 2005: 403).

When an international company changes the language to English, some procedures follow. The following chapter first introduces BELF in more detail, which will be followed by discussion of language policies. Language policies were chosen to be looked into and included in the interviews, as it regulates and defines language use, and its necessity has been argued. The implementation of the language change itself will not be discussed, despite it being a crucial part of the process. In further research, language training and courses offered by organizations could be discussed, but this study will only touch upon these in the analysis.

2.4.1 BELF

English is spoken around the world as a first or native language (L1, ENL), as a second language (ESL) and as a foreign language (EFL). These speakers can also be grouped to inner, outer and expanding –groups, which present the distribution of English. The group speaking English as a foreign language is rising. NSs cover 25 per cent of all English users. BELF is used between all three groups as a common language around the world. Martins (2017: 62) explains the purpose of BELF as follows: “BELF mostly focuses on achieving fruitful and effective communication so as to reach communicative goals based on mutual intelligibility in a multicultural situation.”. This highlights the fact, that BELF is not about reaching the standards of language, but about having a shared language that enables communication and understanding of another. (Martins, 2017: 61-62)

BELF differs from terms such as world English and English as an international language, which aim at describing the shared ground of communication, due to its three features: neutrality, practicability and cultural diversity. It is similarly a shared communication system, but its foundation is on neutrality. The focus is not on nativeness and competence or fluency are not measured in comparison to NSs. Instead, the focus is on communication strategies, which are also examples of measuring tools, such as accuracy and knowledge of terms. BELF highlights practicality, and the communication should be efficient and relevant, and “Since the core objective of BELF is to enable operative and congruent communication between NNSs for successful communication, it does not focus on error and nativeness but rather understanding”. (Martins, 2017: 63)

Since BELF is based on the idea of non-nativeness and using a shared language, it is obvious that the target audience or the users come from all over the world. Using English neutralizes the interaction, as especially in cases where both parties have another native language, neither is being used, and they are in an equal position (Martins, 2017: 63). Culture can be more present in communication in one’s native language, and thus cultural differences are less likely to be on the way of smooth interaction. In a situation, where one or more participants are NSs, the positioning may change to unequal.

BELF is obviously not trouble-free. Whenever people communicate in a language foreign to both, the chance of language barrier, ambiguity and loss of information among others is present. Another factor affecting interaction is the grown use of information and communication technology, which has moved parts of communication online. Business environments are more dynamic, complex and uncertain. Meetings and signing contracts no longer require face-to-face meetings, which has its effect on communication. BELF is of course used in this kind of interaction too, but online communication can take away from the creation of relationships, atmosphere, feeling of belonging and such. (Thomas & Inkson, 2009: 7-8)

2.4.2 Language policies

Language management is an inseparable part of management of linguistic diversity, and one integral part of language management is language policy. A language policy can regulate, direct and limit the use of languages in an organization. Sanden (2015: 1100) poses a few questions about the existing definitions of language policy: “What kind of policies are we talking about, i.e. how formalised are they? Are we looking at loosely defined guidelines or rigid language laws?” The existing definitions have not yet answered these questions, which suggests that a language policy can vary on its formality and strictness. Language policy refers to the planning and managing of language use most commonly on a societal level, but increasingly on an organizational level too. There is yet to be a catch-all resolution whether a language policy is a necessity or beneficial for an organization, but according to Neeley (2012), “There’s no question that unrestricted multilingualism is inefficient and can prevent important interactions from taking place and get in the way of achieving key goals.”, which speaks for language policies and decisions.

A corporate language policy is a guideline for internal and external communication, and it is created based on the current position and future view of the company (Sanden, 2015: 1099). There is a growing need to reconsider and reshape the use of language on a

corporation level too in both heterogeneous and homogeneous organizations of all sizes. As the purpose of language policies is to improve communication and harmonize language use, English, due to its global status, is found an efficient choice. The overriding power of English has been questioned, and Sherman and Nekvapil (2018: 151) approach the matter as follows: “English is often used as the preferred code, not to dominate others, but to include as many participants in the interaction as possible”.

The extent to which English is used in international organizations varies, and using solely English in all communication, formal and informal, is a rarity. There are different options for a language policy for companies that already are or are planning on entering the global market in hunt for customers or employees. An organization that has several foreign employees, or employees that lack the local language skills, is likely to choose English as a working language, at least to be used alongside the local and national languages. All services are available in English and people are allowed to speak their shared language, but are encouraged to use English. A multinational company can choose English as a corporate language or mandate English as the common corporate language, when the local language can still be used as a working language in the offices. This change would mostly contribute to the cooperation with the organization’s other offices across borders and allows hiring skilful employees that have poor or no skills on the local language.

A complete switch to a one-language policy, using English-only would mean that all public speaking, material and events would be held in English, and the use of other languages during breaks for example would be defined in the language policy. But, there are numerous companies of all sizes that still today have no official language policy, which can be either a strategic solution or due to lack of resources. An international company does not of course require a language policy to function, as there are other ways to regulate the language use. Besides, language policy is often considered “just another bureaucratic document”. Having a language policy could lessen the ambiguity, stress and confusion of which language to use and when. Despite the lack of language policy, decisions about language use are still being made, and it can be a knowingly made decision not to have one, as a language policy can make one language seem more relevant and valuable than the other. (Piekkari, 2010)

Language policies aim at removing language barriers and improving communication, and there are two options: the organization can decide to use the global language only, which encourages linguistic homogeneity or allow and impose the use of other foreign languages, which encourages heterogeneity. Using a common corporate language signals global corporate culture but may result in language barrier and restricted access to information for those with limited proficiency. Using the local language highlights the local culture and could improve communication within the NSs while limiting the communication with international employees and increasing the chance of cultural conflicts. (Thomas, 2007: 85)

Language policy and language decisions are complex matters. The choice of a corporate language affects all members of a company, and a change from a local language to English requires thorough consideration and implementation. Sudden change of the official language can cause resistance, inequality and devaluation among the employees (Davies & Ziegler, 2015: 186). One-language policy can reduce the chance of miscommunication, promote coherence in information sharing and contribute to corporate culture in a sense of belonging. Although using English as a corporate language aims at removing the language barrier, it can sometimes create it too, as the speakers are often non-natives, and the decision to use English as a working language does not serve everyone. Variance in language skills can decrease one's self-confidence and experienced worth, which again can result in poorer performance. Furthermore, linguistic diversity that was once a resource becomes a hindrance, as those resistant or less sufficient can cut their input.

Neeley's (2012) research on the implementation of an English-only policy showed that a majority of the employees interviewed for the study were frustrated with the change and half of the medium and low-fluency speakers worried about job advancement. According to Neeley (2012), "Such feelings are common when companies merely announce the new policy and offer language classes rather than implement the shift in a systematic way. It's worth noting that employees often underestimate their own abilities or overestimate the challenge of developing sufficient fluency."

It is not only the company that must adapt to a changing labour, structure and culture. When new, foreign employees are introduced to the company, and language decisions are made, the existing employees must comply as well. If a company reforms their language policy, and working language is changed to English, the employees are required to use the language too. In case they lack the skills, they can either self-study, or the company may offer training. Language training profits both the employees and the company, as the employees feel more capable, useful and competent, which will result in efficiency and quality of work.

There are varying levels of competence in English in multilingual companies. Companies can offer language training for their employees to improve their input and to help them adopt. Language training can be offered as voluntary courses that each employee can attend if wished or it can also mean mandatory courses for all or those in need of improvement, but in both options it requires resources of the company and thus it is often overlooked. A company that has recently or is planning on changing the corporate language to English must weigh whether language training benefits the company and its employees enough to make the investment profitable. If the employees' competence in English varies to an extent where it affects the quality of work and causes communicative issues, offering English courses can indeed be profitable.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter, the data gathering methodology of the study will be described. The primary aim of the study was to gather information about the effect of English proficiency on perceptions of professionalism. Second aim was to find out the ways an international company approaches and manages linguistic diversity. The first one required gaining information about the ideologies, opinions and thoughts on using English, and the effect one's level of English has in a work environment. The second aim consists of bureaucratic matters, such as language policy, training and procedures relating to language use, and thus information relating to these was collected.

3.1 Methodology and data

This is a qualitative study, and the primary source of data are the interviews conducted for the study. Focusing on a compact number of interviews was thought to leave room for individual interpretations and perceptions, deliberation and mutuality. This is a case study, which presents the case company as an example of approaching and managing linguistic diversity. Instead of numbers and generalization, the aim was to get detailed descriptions of the participants' perceptions, interpretations and experiences, which can be compared to the theoretical work presented in the previous chapter. Although language proficiency and professionalism are crucial terms in the study, it was decided early on that no evaluation or assessment, apart from the participants self-assessment, was to be conducted, as these would be 1) demanding to assess and 2) non-value adding to the research. Each respondent was asked to give a description of their English language skills, including the four areas, reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The case company is a small-size international company located in Finland. It has employees from Finland, Vietnam and Iran, and there is a multitude of native languages within the company. At present, the key markets of the case company are Finland and Vietnam, but they are currently seeking international growth by going global, and the language question is therefore extremely current, although the working language has been

English since the beginning. The company has no official language policy, but there are unwritten rules and regulations regarding language. These rules apply to both internal and external communication, including language use at the work place and within teams both face-to-face and online, public communication on website and social media as well as language use with clients. The core of the unwritten rules is to use English, but for instance, with certain groups the choice of language is the one of the participants' native language.

The interview is semi-structured and constructed around themes. It is divided into four sections; background information, language use at work, language related issues and company's approach to language. Each section consists of 5 to 9 questions, 28 in total, however some questions were skipped due to them being answered already or having become irrelevant based on previous answers, and follow-up questions are posed, in case the questions are not fully answered, the answer goes beyond the title of the question, or something interesting related to the subject arises from previous answers. The interviewees are encouraged to interrupt and to add or ask anything during the interview.

The above presented themes and their questions aim at gaining as much information, experiences and perceptions on the thesis topic, and answering the research questions 1) How do professionals relate language proficiency to perceived professionalism? And 2) How is linguistic diversity approached and managed in a multilingual work place? The interview questions were formed with the thought of being limited enough to receive detailed and descriptive answers on the outlined thesis topic. Background information aims at providing descriptions of each respondent, including relevant characteristics regarding the topic, such as nationality, native language(s) and position in the company. Language use at work consist of questions relating to perceptions of language skills of oneself and others and thoughts on using English as a working language. The second theme, language related issues focuses on communicative problems, such as exclusion and language barrier. Company's approach to language has questions about formalities relating to language use, such as language policy, language training and managing linguistic diversity.

To ensure the company's and the interviewees' privacy, neither the name of the company of the interviewees' are not used in the thesis. In addition, some material gained from the interviews will be knowingly left out as they are considered personal information or non-value adding. Some questions asked during the interviews were considered more sensitive, as they include evaluation of colleagues or the company. Conducting the interviews anonymously may have resulted in more honest and in-depth reflection of the interview's experiences and thoughts. Also, in the beginning of each interview, the interviewees were notified that the interview will be recorded, some material will be used in the thesis and each respondent was offered the chance to read the transcription of the interview before excerpts of it were used in the thesis. This again allowed the interviewees to speak more freely, as nothing would be published without their approval.

3.1.1 Interviewees' background

The interviewees are aged between 21 and 24 years and three of them are male and one is female. Two of the interviewees are Finnish and two are Vietnamese, and the Vietnamese have originally come to Finland to study. They work in different roles within the company and have varying educational backgrounds but all currently study or have previously studied in higher education. All four interviewees speak English as a foreign language and belong to the expanding circle (Martins, 2017: 61). Based on the interviewees' own valuations on their English language skills, two described themselves as fluent, and two as native or close to native. The interviewees' backgrounds have had a considerable effect on their English language skills, as time abroad or in contact with particular cultures has led to high-proficiency. All the participants are non-native English speakers, and therefore they are suitable examples of the users of both ELF and BELF. The interviewees are referred to as numbers for ethical reasons, to keep their identities hidden.

Interviewee 1 is a Vietnamese, who speaks Vietnamese as a native language, little Finnish and English in his own words on a "close to native level". He works in user communication. Interviewee 2 is a Finn, whose native languages are Chinese and Finnish,

and who is in his own words “kind of fluent” in English. He works as a user experience designer. Interviewee 3 is a Finn, whose native language is Finnish, but whose English is on a native level. She is the head of marketing. Interviewee 4 is a Vietnamese, whose native language is Vietnamese, and who knows only items of Finnish. To describe his skills, he referred to test result, C1. He works as a clinical lead. These characteristics are displayed in the table below for the sake of clarity.

	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4
<i>Age</i>	21	21	24	21
<i>Gender</i>	Male	Male	Female	Male
<i>Nationality</i>	Vietnamese	Finnish	Finnish	Vietnamese
<i>Native language</i>	Vietnamese	Chinese, Finnish	Finnish	Vietnamese
<i>Position</i>	Communications manager	User experience designer	Head of marketing	Frontend team lead
<i>Length of employment</i>	15 months	9-10 months	11 months	1 year 3 months
<i>Level of English, self-assessment</i>	“Close to native”	“Kind of fluent”	“Native”	“C1 in IELTS, has improved since”

Table 2. Interviewees’ background information.

3.2 Analytic framework

Due to being international and using English as a working language, the case company was found a suitable example to be presented in the study. The aim was never to find the typical international company, and the case company represents a somewhat unusual but modern international company, which may have promoted finding out matters usually overlooked. Additionally, it was important that the case company showed willingness to discuss the thesis topic and relating questions, some of them being sensitive. The case company was approached via email, and asked to participate in the study. They expressed their interest as the study was found useful for the company too. Employees willing to participate were contacted and a suitable slot was scheduled with each participant, all the

interviews being conducted in February 2019. Due to tight schedules of the interviewees, the interview structure was kept concise and the estimated duration was 30 minutes. To minimize the impact on the case company and the employees' work, the interviews were conducted via Skype. The interviews were recorded, and notes were made during the interviews to help in transcribing. The interviews took approximately 25 to 40 minutes, depending on the interviewees' wishes and the length of their answers. The interviews were transcribed in detail into text-files, but later edited so, that some meaningless expletives and pauses were removed. A micropause is marked as two dots and longer pauses with three dots.

Despite the interviewees nationality, all four interviews were conducted in English. The choice of language was made in the beginning of each interview. With those whose native language is other than Finnish, the obvious choice was English. One Finnish participant preferred English, and another did not mind either, and therefore English was chosen. The decision was made based on the fact, that the company's working language is English, and that all the interviews could be done in one language, which would then make using the material easier, and the use in this paper more coherent. In addition, it gave an idea of the participants' language skills. This choice was supported by the interviewees', which of one pointed out that discussing profound matters is more comfortable in a foreign language.

The main function of the interviews was to give practical insight into the perceptions from employees working in an international company. Once the data was collected and transcribed, it was summarised and categorised into a table according to the interview questions as arguments (Table 1). These arguments were used in outlining the final content of the thesis and allowed taking a broader view of the findings. The next stage was to find the key points, and compare the findings with the theoretical framework. These key points will be displayed in the analysis chapter as excerpts. The principle focus point of the analysing process was on the research questions, and the aim was to draw conclusions on how the answers align with the theoretical work and hypothesis. Special attention was paid on the perceived effect of one's own and co-workers' level of English skills. In addition, the aim was to offer useful perspective and conclusions for the case

company regarding the management of linguistic diversity and other aspects. It was acknowledged throughout the process, that the sample of four interviews was limited, but it was found to provide a fair picture of the company. Through all stages, the findings were grouped according to the structure and themes of the interview.

	Interviewee 1	Interviewee 2	Interviewee 3	Interviewee 4
<i>Language is important in one's job</i>	X	X	X	X
<i>Positive towards using English at work</i>	X	X	X	X
<i>Recognises a link between language proficiency and professionalism</i>	X	X		X
<i>Views native-level English speakers negatively</i>				
<i>Finds a low level of English problematic</i>	X	X		
<i>Has experienced language related issues at work</i>		X		X
<i>Has been evaluated based on language skills in working life</i>	X	X	X	
<i>Finds the use of other languages at the workplace problematic</i>		X		
<i>Voiced a concern about the lack of language policy, regulations and/or language training</i>				
<i>Expect a communicative ability from co-workers</i>	X	X	X	X

Table 1. Summed up interview answers.

As the company is small in size, the participants had all been in close contact with one another, and were likely to share experiences of similar situations, thus offering different perspectives and interpretations on these situations. The nature of the interviews was very conversation like, and the intention was not to rush through questions, but to give each participant enough time to consider their answers.

4 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter the findings of the interviews conducted for the study will be presented and discussed in the light of the theoretical framework. The interviewees' responses will be analyzed in separate chapters according to the themes of the interview, these themes being language at work, language related issues and company's approach to language. Excerpts of the interviews are included to allow greater understanding of the nature of the interviews.

Some questions differ from the original interview structure (see Appendix 1.) as they were rephrased to be less ambiguous and to enable more detailed answers. Additionally, some terms were explained and examples given in case the respondent appeared unsure, admitted not following the question or asked to repeat. Not all these changes and additions are shown in the following excerpts of the interviews.

4.1 Language at work

The first bunch of questions focused on language use at work, with the aim of finding out the attitudes, experiences and opinions on using English as a working language. First, the interviewees were asked about the role of language in their job to find out the importance of communication at work and the perceived function of language in each participants' position. Language was not defined as a particular language, unless asked by the respondent and then specified as English. According to the respondents, language plays a crucial role in their jobs, and they all reportedly use English on a daily basis. All the respondents reasoned their language use by their position in the company. The communication is either computer-mediated or direct, with co-workers, clients or in public channels. Hence all four basic language skills are employed on a daily basis.

Interview extract 1:

Interviewee 3: Obviously it's quite a bit part of my job because I'm kind of in charge of communications and obviously I've studied in the UK and lived there for nine years altogether so it's usually me who proofreads everything that's send out and obviously like meetings and everything, so I'd say it's a very large part of my job

Interview extract 2:

Interviewee 1: Yeah .. well I think it's probably for me one the most important thing because I do communication and it's actually in both languages my native and English as well. English I communicate with my colleagues and in the Finland market whereas Vietnamese is to bridge between the company and the Vietnam market. Finland and Vietnam are two key markets at the moment.

The interviewees were asked about their thoughts on using English as a working language to find out the attitudes towards using a foreign language. All of the respondents showed positive attitudes but for distinctive reasons. Two explained that it is because they are fluent in the language and it comes naturally, one thinks English is the only language everyone in the company can speak and one says that it is an opportunity to develop one's language skills. Interviewee 1 added that lacking the skills on the local language affects the communication at work, as things get lost in translation.

Interview extract 3:

Interviewee 1: It's a bit context specific, because in Finland I'd actually rather or I'd prefer that I can also do Finnish because I feel like there's always .. it's much better if you can understand your colleagues, because when it comes to communication I think like there's a little bit of subtlety and nuance when it comes to communication. When you don't hear something first hand, like for example like your colleagues speak in Finnish and you ask them to translate it, then it's often the brief version and then that cuts away the more nuanced .. like some of the subtle things that I'd like to know.

Special attention was paid of the Finnish interviewees' answers, as it has been found in previous research, that local employees can resist the use of a foreign language, which is referred to as domain loss (Lønsmann, 2014: 94). Such phenomenon or negative attitudes were not found in the answers. Of course, it must be taken into account, that the case company has used English since the beginning, and the respondents were aware of the company's working language prior to being recruited. Additionally, the interviewees have sufficient English skills, which is likely to affect the attitudes as well.

The next question, “Why do you think the working language is English in the company?”, received an unambiguous line of answers. The interviewees were unanimous - it is more convenient to use a universal language due to the nature of the business and the international workforce. The responses reaffirm the idea, that today a small-size, international business that aiming to globalize is likely to choose English as a working language.

Interview extract 4:

Interviewee 1: I think, because of nature of the company which is finance technology, like money is pretty universal so I think it would be a smart decision if we start from English because then it's easier to scale. That would be my opinion.

The interview continued with the interviewees self-assessment of their English language skills, including speaking, listening, reading and writing. These self-assessments were included in the background information chapter, but will be presented here in more detail. Interviewee 1 described himself as “close to native” or “half notch below native”. Interviewee 2 considered himself “kind of fluent”, as he sometimes has some trouble with the language. Interviewee 3 assessed herself native and “fully capable of producing professional English”. Interviewee 4 referred to an IELTS test result, his score being C1. Interviewees 1 and 3 explained their high level of English with links to native speaking countries.

The interviewees were then asked to describe the level of English language skills overall in the company. English skills were described as quite decent and good. One respondent brought up issues with vocabulary and variation between nationalities, and one described that there are a few exceptions from almost native to a bit limited, who stand out. The excerpt below presents an example of one's perception on fluency, as being able to work in the language, although the level of fluency vary among teams. Overall, the answers showed positive attitudes towards English and the choice of using it as a working language despite one's own level of English skills.

Interview extract 5:

Interviewee 3: I'd say like overall everyone's able to work in English obviously so everyone's fluent. Obviously there are like different levels so for example within our marketing team, because it's communications, it's very fluent and

very good, and then again for example within coding which is our tech team it's not necessarily quite as high but still everyone's able to communicate.

This notion, which showed throughout the interviews, has links to BELF, which highlights the ability to communicate and understand one another through a shared language. The focus of BELF is on fruitful and effective communication, which seems to be lacking in the case company at times. (Martins, 2017: 62)

The next question, “How do you think your co-workers English proficiency affects your perception of their professionalism?”, is arguably the most crucial one regarding the study. Thus, all four answers are included below. Proficiency was not defined by the interviewer, and the respondents reflected their own idea of proficiency in their answers. Three of the respondents acknowledged the link between English proficiency and professionalism, and one said it depends on one's title and the role of language in one's job. An additional question was posed for the interviewee 2 to clarify the question: “So if they speak good English do you see them as more professional and the other way around?”.

Interview extract 6:

Interviewer: How do you think your co-workers' language proficiency affects your perception of their professionalism?

Interviewee 1: I think this varies from an individual to individual of course. But I would say that it has some effect on in. Because for example, if I ... because the only way we can communicate is basically through English so if they can't express their thoughts coherently, precisely, in English you'd understand sometimes it can be a hindrance because no matter how smart they sound or no matter how smart they actually are, if they can't convey it properly then it's going to be more time-consuming, it's going to be more mentally tasking for the listener to understand and that can be quite problematic I think like in the professional business world I think communication is really important. People need to understand each other not like 70 per cent or 80 per cent but I feel like 100 per cent. So the problem when it comes to communicating with someone who is not fully proficient is that you have to take more effort to understand the same thing as they would have if they had spoken it in their native language, which sucks.

Interview extract 7:

Interviewee 2: Yes, definitely, my colleague ... she's Finnish and she's been living in UK like long time and her British accent is like amazing. So yes, definitely.

Interview extract 8:

Interviewee 3: I think it depends on what your title is as well. So .. I think for example something like tech or like development .. product development it doesn't matter quite as much because you've got like a tangible product by the end of it, so you can see what they're producing something so you can see what they're producing. But then again, if it's communications then obviously if you struggle to speak English then I'd be worried about what you're going to write and publish on our channels.

Interview extract 9:

Interviewee 4: I perceive professionalism and skills as two different things so even if their skills are good but they can't communicate, that means they didn't invest their own time on improving their language skills because language is just skills.

Interviewee 1 argues, that "People need to understand each other not like 70 per cent or 80 per cent but I feel like 100 per cent". Thus, being proficient enough to be understood and to understand appears to be crucial. This also indicates, that ambiguity and misapprehensions are pressing disadvantages of insufficient language skills. Hereby, proficiency is not perceived as broad vocabulary or British accent, but as the ability to comprehend and convey meanings. On the contrary, interviewee 2 contrasts proficiency with a co-worker who has a British accent. This is a commonly found notion, where non-natives compare themselves with the natives, especially British, and find the accent desirable. The respondent does not name other qualities of the co-worker other than the accent, which suggests that the native-like accent alone could compensate a lack of knowledge and skills in other areas. According to interviewee 3, the effect depends on one's title and the role of language and communication that comes with the title. Thus, one's level of proficiency is crucial when language is a part of the person's end product.

The interviewees were asked how they feel about someone who speaks English on a native level and on a low level. All the interviewees thought that talking to someone with a native-level English is easier or preferable, again despite their own level of English, which was predicted to affect the answers to some extent. Interviewee 1, whose English is close to native, answered to the question from the perspective of others, based on his observations.

Interview extract 10:

- Interviewer: How do you feel about co-workers who speak English at native level? Do you seem as approachable, intimidating or something else? Of course your English is on a native level so this might feel silly.
- Interviewee 1: Yeah but I can speak for others as well, I don't know if that counts in your thesis?
- Interviewer: Sure, yes.
- Interviewee 1: But I will say this that in general people do ... because I'm not intimidated by native speakers but I've noticed people are intimidated when it comes to speaking to me or speaking to other native speakers when I was observing. So it does have an effect on it and it actually .. it has a negative effect I would say at the beginning or if the native speaker hasn't expressed clearly how friendly they are. Umm it does send a .. because people are quite self-conscious I think. Especially when it comes to language because they can sound very smart in their own language but if they struggle to find a word in another language then they know that they'll sound dumb and people don't want to be dumb. So it's .. it can be problematic.

The respondent had taken notice that communicating with a person with high proficiency in English can make others feel intimidated. He suggests that the effect depends on the parties' nature of acquaintance. The interviewee brings up self-consciousness, saying that "[...] they can sound very smart in their own language but if they struggle to find a word in another language then they know that they'll sound dumb and people don't want to be dumb". The feeling of inferiority as a common phenomenon was discussed in the theoretical framework. This comment could also be linked to the formation of hierarchy based on the level of English skills. This hierarchy does not necessarily actualize physically, but on a mental level among the employees.

When asked how they feel about communicating with a person that speaks English on a low-level, one said that it is less compelling to speak to that person and one found some accents combined with poor language skills uncomfortable to hear. The difficulty of bringing across one's personality was brought up as well. This question appeared to be the most difficult to answer, and the majority of respondents took the most time to form their answers, conceivably due to trying not to offend anyone. In two of the interviews the question was rephrased so that the answer would not directly concern co-workers, but people in general, and in all four it was clarified, that the question is hypothetical and not directed to current co-workers. A clarification "Do you think that affects how you see them as employees?" was added to the question with the interviewee 2.

Interview extract 11:

Interviewee 1: In general, I would be more intrigued in an interesting conversation and an interesting conversation would entail a good flow, exchange of useful ideas, something that adds values to you and if a person takes too long to form a sentence or uses the wrong word or makes it confusing for you then of course you would be less compelled to speak to that person.

Interview extract 12:

Interviewee 2: Yes I would say that. Actually that affects ... I guess many people would answer ... would lie in this question, but like really .. yes. I would say that many people think that also.

Interviewee 1 sees low level of English skills as an hindrance to having a conversation and interviewee 2 acknowledges the effect and proposes that it is a common stand, although many would not admit it. These questions revealed that all the respondents preferred interacting with those speaking English on a native level. Native-speakers were viewed positively, whereas those speaking English on a low level were found less pleasant to communicate with. These answers were independent on the respondents' own level of proficiency.

4.2 Language related issues

The following questions were chosen to get insight into the current issues of a linguistically diverse workplace. The questions were based on the previous works presented in the theoretical framework, more or less directly. The interviewees were asked, if they had experienced problems because of their nationality, culture or language skills, as an opening for the more detailed questions. This question revealed, that the only type of problems any of the participants had encountered were communication related, which were caused by one's own or the other party's insufficient language skills. The focus point alternated with each respondent, the result still being the same. Some interviews began to discuss cultural issues, but would actually end up describing situations such as language barrier and language clustering, which again have to do with language. Two of the interviewees had felt excluded from conversations held in other

languages but English. The interviewees were asked if they felt like cultural differences play a role at work, but none of the respondents thought so. Some respondents took more time to ponder around the question, but could not think of an example, where cultures would have shown in a negative light at the workplace. This indicates, that the company's approach to multiculturalism is accepting and the diversity has been managed successfully.

The next question, "What kind of evaluation based on your language skills have you experienced if you have?", received varying answers. For the sake of clarity, the question was rephrased after the first interview to the form presented in the excerpt below. The underlying idea of the question was to find out if the interviewees' had experienced evaluation, positive or negative, formal or informal, based on their language skills. Interviewee 3 had noticed that sometimes the tasks directed to her do not equal her knowledge and know-how, but as her language skills are at the top end, it seems to compensate the lack of knowledge on the subject matter. Interviewee 2 mentioned about not always understanding the given tasks, but as he is Finnish the tasks will be translated to Finnish, which is not a problem. This suggests that insufficient English skills can be compensated with knowledge of the local language to some extent, which is the advantage of the Finns working in the case company. Interviewee 1 acknowledged the benefit of working in a non-English speaking country, where his near native-level English stands out, and points out that this would not necessarily be the case in an English speaking country.

Interview extract 13:

Interviewer: Do you think that your level of English affects how you are evaluated what comes to being competent in your job?"

Interviewee 1: I would definitely say yes. But this also might be impostor syndrome speaking so I don't know but I do feel ... just because if I was to be put in an English speaking country I don't know if I would have the benefit of a doubt or the privilege that I have here. Or like in non-English speaking countries in general.

Next question touched on the effect of using English on atmosphere, relationships and communication at the work place, which were in most of the interviews asked in separate questions. This question was based on previous studies, as Lønsmann (2014: 108) found

that lacking the skills in the local language can cause exclusions and difficulty in building relationships, and the lack of common language can decrease the amount of communication. None of the respondents had noticed a negative effect on atmosphere or difficulty in building relationships, but two of the interviewees acknowledged that those insufficient in English can feel excluded. Interviewee 1 explained that he had not noticed a difference due to him knowing all three languages used in the company. Interviewee 2 discussed the limitations of lacking the common language:

Interview extract 14:

Interviewer: Then about communication, has using English as a working language affected communication? Do you think you'd be talking more to one another if you were all speaking Finnish or the other way around?

Interviewee 2: Yeah, sometimes I would say - if everyone spoke Finnish I would say that our conversations would be much different and ... and I would say when doing stuff where something new is like needed to be created, for example in a brainstorming session, we could probably get more out of it if we had like language which like everyone can speak like fluently for example if everyone were like native Finnish people we would get more out of that brainstorming session. Same applies to English, if we were all English speakers.

Interviewee 2 states that more would be gotten out of brainstorming sessions if all the employees had the same native language, which indicates that the use of English limits creativity and effectiveness although all members of the company, according to the interviewees, were described as fluent. Simonova (1994: 73) studied this question in her master's thesis resulting in similar findings, as it was found that limited language competence inhibited one's ability to express their knowledge.

When asked about attitudes towards using other languages at work, in this case Finnish and Vietnamese, all the respondents outlined that English is used in public communication, and informal communication can happen in a language of one's choice. Interviewee 1 pointed out the difficulty of situations when others are having a conversation in a language he does not know, which is presented in the excerpt below.

Interview extract 15:

Interviewer: What are the attitudes towards using other languages at the work place?

Interviewee 1: I would say ... well when they're with each other they speak Finnish, which I guess is fine. If they have a conversation with each other yeah they would speak Finnish mostly but if they see that a conversation is necessary for other

nationalities involved, then they will switch to English. But the problem with that is ... I guess in terms of privacy .. it's fine but when you're in the office for example like someone who doesn't speak Finnish basically lose the proactivity to join the conversation because you just simply don't know if they're speaking about personal things or if they're speaking about business things ... so it's hard. So you're kind of at their mercy in a sense .. if you don't want to be rude.

Interviewee 1 refers to Finnish co-workers, who tend to use Finnish with each other in informal communication at the workplace. It causes insecurity and results in exclusion, as joining the conversation is harder due to not knowing the nature of conversation. Yet a common manner, a somewhat unspoken rule within the company is that a language is rapidly switched to English when an employee with no knowledge of the language enters the room. The use of other languages, by and large, is not considered a problem, as long as English is used in public communication and in situations where everyone should be included in the conversation.

4.3 Case company's approach to language

Company's approach to language is the fourth and final section of questions. The questions focus on linguistic diversity, including bureaucratic matters, such as language policy, language training and other procedures relating to language use. These questions are linked to the second research question, and aim at answering how linguistic diversity is approached and managed in the company. The following questions give insight into the perceived and experienced management, as the respondents are not in charge of these policies and have limited knowledge on the factual, strategic side of management.

It was known beforehand that the case company does not have an official language policy, but the interviewees were still asked what they know about the company's language policy and how the language use is regulated, if it is. All the interviewees answered, as expected, that no official language policy exists, but they are supposed to use English. One respondent said that English and Finnish are the official business languages and one

specified that there are other, more specific rules for communicating with certain groups, such as foreign clients.

Interview extract 16:

Interviewer: What do you know about the company's language policy? I know that there isn't an official one, but are there some kind of rules or regulations?

Interviewee 3: I don't really know. There are unwritten rules like our mode of communication within the company is slack and obviously the majority of the communication inside is through public channels and it's like an unwritten rule that all that communication is in English. Other than that I've got different rules for like for communicating with customers and whether it's like each channel will be in different language but that's mostly to do with marketing than our company.

The lack of language policy and formal regulations did not seem to bother the interviewees, which could imply that the informal and unspoken rules have been adequate in avoiding major issues. This also suggests that the company may avoid pure linguistic homogeneity, but encourage heterogeneity instead (Thomas, 2007: 85).

In addition, it was asked if the case company offers language training, and all the answers were in line, admitting that it does not. Half of the respondents are currently studying and told about the universities' language courses, both Finnish and English. Two explained that the lack of language training is due to the size and resources of the company, one of them specifying that the aim is to be certain about the adequacy of one's language skills before recruiting. One respondent mentioned about free options available online for those who are motivated to learn a language. One said, that he has improved his English language skills by watching videos and reading works of the field. Brainstorming sessions were also mentioned as a way of practising English.

Interview extract 17:

Interviewer: Does the language offer some kind of language training, official or unofficial?

Interviewee 2: Actually no. Most of like foreign speaking people study in universities in Finland which actually provides like the language courses.

Interviewer: Yeah. You already said that you've learnt English .. or improved your English, have you improved it through your job?

Interviewee 2: It's probably, for example watching some videos of the industry and reading of the industry and like all brainstorming sessions with people and research made. So, by that.

The answers revealed that the two interviewees who described themselves as “close to native” and “native” were neutral about the lack of training, while the other two, who according to their own self-assessment were not quite as sufficient, were the ones who would have appreciated language training. These two brought up the language courses offered by their university as well as online courses.

As the company relies heavily on the common language, English, it was asked if and how English language skills are assessed before recruiting. One interviewee said that they are not assessed, because the company hires mostly acquaintances of existing employees, and therefore there is no need to chart the skills. The other three explained that the assessment happens during the interviews by asking questions in English, and the ability to understand and answer the questions displays adequate knowledge. One of the interviewees has attended another candidate's interview, and told that the person being interviewed was not hired due to inadequate English language skills, as he was unable to answer the questions asked during the interview. One shared a story about his own job interview, which is presented in the excerpt below.

Interview extract 18:

Interviewer: So how are language skills assessed before recruiting?

Interviewee 3: During the interview they just answer certain questions. But for example we had a designer from Vietnam who was working remotely in Vietnam and that became a problem because his communication wasn't quite good enough in English. The head of the team wasn't able to communicate with him because of the language barrier and it had to go through another Vietnamese guy and that ended up like us .. him not continuing with the company because it just didn't work out.

Interview extract 19:

Interviewee 2: Yeah, yeah. The job interview was like, I was at the interview then we just ... we just discussed normally in Finnish with the people who were about to hire me. Then, I don't know if it was planned or not, one of our Vietnamese co-workers just like crashed to the interview. He just like sit next to me and then just start asking questions in English like roasting. I was like okay cool, it's no problem, I can handle this. That was like hard test.

The company has employees with various native languages, and thus the interviewees were asked, how the company approaches linguistic diversity. One respondent commented that language is just a way to communicate, but its role is not big. Two answered that it is acknowledged to be an important resource to have diverse nationalities and languages.

Interview extract 20:

- Interviewer: How is linguistic diversity approached in the company? What would you say?
- Interviewee 3: Do you mean like in general or how we view it or?
- Interviewer: Well maybe like ... is it somehow emphasized that people have different native languages or is it just one thing among others, we have one common language and that's enough?
- Interviewee 3: No I think it's like cause obviously we are in several different markets and our app is translated to few different languages so ... it is something that we really appreciate and because we're looking at the global market and the fact that we have different cultures and different languages within our team is definitely something that we see as very positive.

According to the respondents, linguistic diversity and multiculturalism are seen as advantages and they are greatly appreciated, especially as the company is “looking at the global market”, as the interviewee 3 points out in the above excerpt. The answers indicate that linguistic diversity is approached positively, as a key resource to globalizing and sustaining the existing markets, Finland and Vietnam. Based on the interviews, the company has adapted the culture-interactional approach, as cultures are hardly noted and problems or conflicts are not blamed on cultural differences (Poutiainen, 2014: 32). What comes to the MBI model discussed in theoretical framework, the case company has understood the differences, effectively communicates across these differences and manages the differences. It is evident, that the company has created additional value from the diversity, that a non-diverse group could not.

When asked, how problems related to language skills are approached and handled, no interviewee recalled a problematic situation. Two of them said that there is no official policy for that. One explained that in a situation where someone has difficulty communicating other employees come to help. It was also brought up, that people usually shift to English when others come around so it has not been an issue. In case there were to be problems, they would be brought up in a weekly lunch, where question related to

working culture are discussed. One answered, that they mostly use direct feedback. This question links to the MBI model, as the letter I refers to integrating, “dealing with possible conflicts and building on the differences”. This can be found in the company’s procedures, as possible conflicts are dealt promptly, and the differences are considered a strength that are unlikely to cause conflicts in the first place. In the following excerpt the interviewee states that appropriate language use is linked to professionalism.

Interview extract 21:

Interviewer: This is actually the last question, so how are problems related to language skills umm approached and handled? For instance, if some feel like they are excluded in the conversation or something like that

Interviewee 4: I’m not sure I followed the question

Interviewer: Okay, so if there would be problems that for instance you Vietnamese would be speaking Vietnamese only leaving others who don’t speak Vietnamese out, how would that be handled by the manager or someone?

Interviewee 4: Well ... if the .. if the feedback about speaking too much native language in a work place is not during the pastime you know like a break ... or something then of course we need to do some rules or you know just remind them. And of course we need to approach it if they still don’t do it .. because it’s professionalism. But if it’s their own break and they want to speak in their language then yes of course. They can do whatever they want as long as they don’t make it too loud for example.

As it had come up that there is variation among the employees what comes to level of English language skills, it was asked, how the company ensures the appreciation of expertise despite the level of language skills. One interviewee explained that the company recruits per role, meaning that the required level of English varies and each must have sufficient proficiency for their role. For instance, IT workers should primary have field-specific knowledge and language is a secondary criterion. In addition, the kind of language skills required differ. Those working in communication must be able to produce both text and speech, whereas the IT workers should know be familiar with the vocabulary and jargon of the field. Another interviewee said that language is an imperative part of the job, and it is thus expected, but for some teams it is more about what they build than how they communicate. According to one interviewee, expertise is emphasized more than language.

In the end of each interview the interviewees were asked if they had anything to add, and three of them told about a case, where a freelancer working remotely for the company

struggled to communicate and thus could not continue working for the company. The freelancer had no knowledge of English, and thus the communication happened via middle-man. It was found arduous and time consuming, and the case company was not satisfied with the results. This case demonstrates the importance of common language and communication skills, as although the person was not working in communication but in design and was otherwise qualified for the job, his language skills were limited and therefore he was unable to fulfil the tasks requested of him.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this master's thesis the focus was on the effect one's level of English skills may have on how professional they are seen. Another focus point was on approaching and managing linguistic diversity in international organizations. This was effectuated as a case study, which focused on one particular international company, the case company. The main source of data were the interviews conducted for the study. Both proficiency and professionalism were viewed as individual perceptions, and were not defined during the interviews, allowing each respondent to form the idea themselves. The study looked into the global position of English, the points of focus being on business. Although the thesis studied the management of linguistic diversity, the interviews were conducted with employees, and thus the findings reveal the experienced management, not necessarily the strategic and factual side of management. This chapter aims at compiling the most important and useful findings of the study.

The first research question concerned the link between one's level of English proficiency and perceived professionalism, and it was a major part of the interviews. The interviewees were not directly asked to define proficiency, but based on their answers it was seen as the ability to fluently communicate and hold a conversation. Moreover, one respondent told about a co-worker's "amazing accent", which suggests that the focus was primarily on speaking skills. The interviewees were then asked: "How do you think your co-workers' language proficiency affects your perception of their professionalism?". Three of the respondents acknowledged the effect and one proposed that it depend on the title. It was stated that people should be able to fully understand each other and that insufficient language skills show the disinterest towards learning the language. It was also asked, how the interviewees feel about co-workers who speak English on both native and low level. The answers revealed that native speakers were viewed more positively and considered more pleasant to interact with, whereas someone with low level of English was found a less compelling to talk to and even a less competent employee.

The study introduces a company that has no official language policy, offers no language training and relies on informal procedures in managing linguistic diversity and emerging conflicts. Not only is there a multitude of languages, but nationalities and cultures too. Still, the case company has succeeded in managing the diversity, which is likely to have contributed to the business success. Diversity is not emphasized on a daily basis, but the respondents discussed having a diverse team in a positive manner, which suggests that the laid-back approach has worked for the company's advantage. Diversity is utilized in many ways, as for instance, Finland and Vietnam were named the key markets of the company, and the majority of employees are originally from these two countries.

The interview material suggests that the company and its employees are somewhere in the middle of creators and equalizers of the MBI model. Creators make effective use of the diversity, which shows in creative solutions and better products, while equalizers pretend the differences do not exist (Lane, 2009). As stated above, the company's approach towards diversity is appreciative and they have succeeded in creating additional value from the varying backgrounds. Yet, as these differences do not seem to be addressed, although surely acknowledged, the company cannot fully be categorized as creators. The interviewees all had previous international experience, as they had all either studied or worked abroad, which could explain the little attention paid to diversity.

The case company was also viewed as a community of practice from the linguistic viewpoint. The respondents are all considerably young and have little previous work experience, and thus the value of peer support is greater and much is learnt from one another. Additionally, as the case company is a start-up, the concept of CoP was expected to be employed in the company, although not necessarily deliberately. While it was not directly asked in the interviews, it was brought up by the respondents, that those less sufficient in English are helped by those proficient. Language learning was considered to happen in interaction with co-workers, in formal brainstorming sessions but in informal small-talk too.

The case company has no official language policy partially due to the size and resources. The necessity of language policies has been discussed in previous studies, but based on

the interviews, the lack of language policy does not seem to affect the atmosphere, communication or quality of work. None of the participants recalled a situation where formal procedures for wrongful language use or conflicts would have been needed, but it was brought up, that in case of a conflict, the case would be handled promptly face to face. Additionally, all the respondents agreed on the unwritten rules to use English in all public speaking and language of one's choice during breaks and when discussing personal matters. As long as the company does not substantially grow in size, there appears to be no need for a language policy, although it could benefit the company in its existing shape. The variation in language skills has led to ambiguity, language barrier and exclusion, which are some of the issues likely to be lessened. Furthermore, the interviewees gave slightly distinctive answers when asked about the regulations and rules concerning language use, so even though the case company would not employ a formal language policy, written rules could benefit the team.

Based on the findings, the case company places little value on language skills among the existing employees. The overall English skills were described as fluent, but the level of fluency varies among the employees. It was stated, that as long as one is able to communicate, the skills are adequate. The lack of skills had been found to affect some areas of work, such as creativity in brainstorming sessions. Language skills are not a primary criteria in recruiting, and English proficiency is tested with a few questions during interviews. This raised a question, why not conduct the job interviews using English only, especially when the working language of the company is English? Although the level of English required in the case company was described as the ability to communicate, a few questions asked during an interview is unlikely to give a solid picture of one's language skills.

The trend of globalizations adds to the need to deal with questions arising as a result. This thesis took language questions and decisions under a closer look, and their necessity was critically viewed. Although this paper focuses mainly on the linguistic aspect, diversity is of course a broader concept and all the areas of diversity come into play when organizations become international, which should be taken into account in further research.

Previous studies also cited in this paper had looked proficiency, language management, linguistic diversity and all the areas present in the paper separately. Thus the theoretical framework was compiled from various works that touched on each topic. Despite thorough search, no research was found to have directly studied the effect language proficiency may have on perceived professionalism. Furthermore, previous research showed a lack of focus on the linguistic aspect in the field of intercultural communication, diversity and culture in general. Therefore, the aim of this study was to fill a piece of this gap by focusing primarily on language use. More specifically, the chosen gap was to find out the extent to which one's level of English skills define them as professionals, and how this is managed in the case company. This study gives insight into one company's management of diversity, and functions as an didactic example. Due to the size of the sample no generalization or implications can be made based on the interviews, but together with the theoretical framework, the study can help in understanding the importance of language management and decisions.

The findings of this study are useful for international organizations, both employers and employees. Additionally, companies considering to change their corporate or working language to English can benefit from the study, and get perspective on the benefits and issues of using English. This study succeeded in enlightening the link between language proficiency and professionalism, as well as the importance of English language skills in the globalizing work places. Profound conclusions cannot be drawn from the data of four interviews, but the study provides indications and points the way for further research. In the future, the study should be done with more resources and a larger sampling, which together with previous studies would allow making more solid conclusions.

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APPENDIX 1: Interviews questions

Participating in the interview is voluntary, the interview will be recorded and parts of the interview will be included in the thesis, but anonymously, so neither your name or the company's name will be used. You can contact me anytime concerning the thesis, and ask questions during the interview. The thesis topic is "English proficiency and professionalism. Managing linguistic diversity in an international workplace." The thesis will be published in May/June online. This interview will take roughly 30 minutes. If you want, I can send the final report of the interview to you before using it in the thesis, so that you can see it through.

- 1) Background information:
 - a. Age?
 - b. Nationality?
 - c. Native language(s)
 - d. Education?
 - e. Position?
 - f. Time in the company?

- 2) Language at work
 - a. What kind of role does language have in your job?
 - b. What are your thoughts on using English as a working language (positive, neutral, negative)?
 - c. Why do you think the working language is English in the company/in companies in Finland?
 - d. How would you describe your own language skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing)?
 - e. How do you think your language proficiency is perceived?
 - f. How good are the English language skills overall in the company?
 - g. How do you think your co-workers' language proficiency affects your perception of their professionalism?
 - h. How do you feel about co-workers who speak English at native level?
 - i. Do you see them as approachable, intimidating or something else?
 - i. What about low level?

- 3) Language related issues
 - a. Have you experienced problems because of your nationality, culture of language skills? (Exclusion, stereotyping, language clustering)
 - b. What kind of evaluation based on your language skills have you experienced (if you have)?
 - c. How would you describe the effect of using English on atmosphere, work environment, relationships and communication at work?
 - d. What are the attitudes towards using other languages at the workplace? (Finns speaking Finnish with each other etc.)
 - e. Cultural differences?

- 4) Language in the company

- a. What do you know about the company's language policy?
- b. How is language use regulated?
- c. Does the company offer language training? What kind?
- d. Are language skills assessed before recruiting?
- e. How is linguistic diversity approached in the company?
- f. How are problems related to language skills, language clustering and exclusion (etc.) approached and handled?
- g. How does the management level (HR) ensure efficiency and appreciation of expertise?