

“Kyl me ollaan enkulla pärjätty”:
Understanding the importance of corporate language
policies – the context of a local Finnish company with a
strategy to become international by learning English

Bachelor’s thesis
Jasu Nieminen

University of Jyväskylä
Department of Language and Communication Studies
English
May 2022

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos
Tekijä – Author Jasu Nieminen	
Työn nimi – Title “Kyl me ollaan enkulla pärjätty”: Understanding the importance of corporate language policies – the context of a local Finnish company with a strategy to become international by learning English	
Oppiaine – Subject Englanti	Työn laji – Level Kandidaatin tutkielma
Aika – Month and year Toukokuu 2022	Sivumäärä – Number of pages
<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Englannin kielen käyttö <i>lingua francana</i> eli yleisenä yhteisenä kielenä on lisääntynyt ympäri maailmaa. Englannin kielen taitoa pidetään työelämässä ja työpaikoilla merkittävänä taitona niin yksittäisten henkilöiden kuin organisaatioidenkin tasolla. Monikansallisuus ja monikielisyys on useille yrityksille ehto toiminnan jatkuvuuden kannalta.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen päämääränä on selvittää, kuinka erityisesti englannin kielen asema <i>lingua francana</i> on otettu huomioon yrityksen organisaatorakenteessa ja strategioissa. Työpaikan edustajan kertoman mukaan selvitän, minkälaisia kielellisiä ratkaisuja on tehty tai jätetty tekemättä yrityksessä. Lisäksi tarkastelen syitä, jotka ovat johtaneet kielellisten ratkaisujen luomiseen tai luomatta jättämiseen. Tarkoitukseni on selvittää, kuinka suuri rooli huolellisella kielellisellä suunnittelulla on yrityksen toiminnan kannalta. Aineisto kerättiin haastattelulla, jossa yrityksen toiminnasta tietävä henkilö vastasi kysymyksiin. Haastattelu äänitettiin ja äänitteet litteroitiin jälkikäteen.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa kävi ilmi, että englannin kielen käyttö nähtiin välttämättömänä yrityksen toiminnan ja kehittyvyyden kannalta. Johtoporras oli tehnyt useita ratkaisuja kielellisten haasteiden korjaamiseksi: yritys oli omaksunut englannin viralliseksi yrityskielekseen, hallinnoinut kieliosaamista rekrytoinnin aikana sekä järjestänyt kielikoulutusta henkilökunnalleen. Kielen vaikutus yrityksen organisaatorakenteeseen ja käytänteisiin oli siis merkittävä. Erilaisten kielipoliittisten valintojen vaikutusta yritysten toimintaan verrattuna pystyttäisiin tutkimaan laajemmin, erityisesti kun kyseessä oleva yritys aktiivisesti pyrkii muuttamaan statustaan kansainvälisemmäksi.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Business English as Lingua Franca, language policy, language planning, globalization, international workplace, interview study	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

Table of contents

Table of contents.....	2
1 Introduction.....	3
2 Theoretical background	4
2.1 Language policies	4
2.1.1 Language policies in Finland	5
2.2 Globalized economy and corporate language policies	6
2.2.1 Language and corporate communication	7
2.2.2 Managers as policy makers.....	8
2.2.3 Options for managing language related problems	9
2.3 English as a lingua franca	10
3 Present study	11
3.1 Research questions and aims.....	11
3.2 Research method and data collection	12
3.3 Method of analysis.....	13
3.4 Ethical questions	14
4 Findings / analysis.....	14
4.1. Adopting a single corporate language in the workplace	15
4.2. Language assessment during recruiting	17
4.3. Personnel development and external language resources in the company	19
4.4. Language policies as a part of the organizational structure	21
5 Conclusion	24
6 Bibliography	27

1 Introduction

The world of business nowadays is a product of globalization – a phenomenon that has defined the modern civilization, constructing political, economic and social situations in the world (Zora 2014: 315-316). According to Zora (2014: 316) companies that wish to remain competitive have had to change their structural and operational nature in accordance with the new world order. Creating multinational contacts and expanding as companies brings forth new challenges: managing these linguistically diverse networks requires coordination and effective communication. Andersen and Rasmussen (2004: 240-241) have further elaborated how firms have to be aware of the problems that language competence can invoke for an international company. English has become a *lingua franca* in internal and external communication in several companies, which is why English language competence is considered even a necessity when it comes to many work fields (Andersen and Rasmussen 2004: 233-235).

As Barakos (2020: 35-42) states, language policies are ideologically invested and also socially and discursively positioned in particular contexts. They are created based on the ideologies of the socially situated authorities in order to shape the language ideologies of others. Barakos (2020: 37) also mention how the world around us is shaped by “linguistic, ethnic, social and cultural diversity, transnational identities, mobility and migration”, which is what also shapes these regulations concerning language. It can be concluded that when creating strategic business plans within a company, language needs to be taken into consideration: before implementing them, decisions must be examined for their language consequences (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999: 436-438). In this context, managers’ perceptions about the need for a language policy in their company show a lack of awareness of the benefits of having one.

This study examines the overt and covert language policies enacted at an international workplace in Finland. Two research questions are introduced in the present study chapter. I will discuss the reasons to creating the aforementioned regulations in this particular workplace and also consider the status of English as a *lingua franca* in them. This study attempts to shed light on the significance of language planning when it comes to a company’s business strategies. The data were collected by interviewing a representative of said workplace. I analysed the data using content analysis as a method of analysis; both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data were used.

My study consists of four sections. First, I will present previous research on the topic and the theoretical framework in the following chapter, theoretical background. Relevant terms such as a language policy and English as a lingua franca are introduced. Second, in the present study section, I will introduce my research aim and research questions along with the method used for data collection and the method of analysis. Ethical questions are also taken into consideration. In the third section, findings/analysis I will elaborate what I discovered in the study. The thesis is concluded in the fourth section conclusion, where the findings are summarized. Additionally, the overall scope of the study is recognized and potential future refinements are presented.

2 Theoretical background

I will introduce the theoretical framework of my study in this chapter. Key concepts of the study, i.e. language policy, English as a lingua franca and multinational management are presented and elaborated. The Finnish context and the role of the globalized economy are taken into consideration. I will additionally elaborate the role of managers in the decision making process. I will also introduce relevant previous research.

2.1 Language policies

According to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: 3-8), language planning is “a body of ideas, laws and regulations (language policy), change rules, beliefs, and practices intended to achieve a planned change (or to stop from happening) in the language use in one or more communities”. On the other hand, the study of language policy is perceived as an interdisciplinary field of study that is very closely related to language planning but not completely equivalent; researchers do not always agree about which one subsumes the other. Johnson (2013: 3-25) argues that the fundamental distinction between the two concerns the original purposes of the plans intended to influence language and whether they are intentional or not. However, he also mentions that even though it is not characteristic for language policy, there are several examples of unplanned policies that have ended up affecting language use. The goal of a language policy is to sustain, reinforce or discourage the use of a language: someone with authority attempts to manipulate the language ideologies or practices of others (Johnson 2013: 3-25). It is important to note that by creating language policies the behaviours among individuals are altered because situated norms

and expectations for interaction actively influence one's behaviour (Johnson 2013: 3-25). Language planning and policies, like any social actions, are surrounded by numerous discourses. Lo Bianco (2005: 255-263) states that some discourses are more relevant than others: texts of policy contain content aimed at setting out action. According to them, the question of who are selected to take part in the negotiation and decision-making progress is an important discourse because it might affect how different languages, for example, are reflected in policy documents. It can be concluded that ideologies (and with them for example prejudices or misunderstandings) can be further transmitted via policy documents, which might lead into development of various ideological views or practices. Therefore studying the aforementioned discourses revolving around the enacted language policies might be beneficial.

The field of language planning and policy has evolved quite significantly over the past few decades: there is still no prospect for a holistic theory of the subject (Ricento and Hornberger 1996: 402). As Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: 3-8) argue, language policy may focus on quite limited issues concerning language, such as small or large-scale marketing. The need and recognition for these policies is heavily context-bound and the desired or unrecognized language changes in a community can derive from different motives. These covert and overt goals of language policies have certain effects in certain contexts, as Ricento and Hornberger (1996: 402) have elaborated. For the purposes of my research, I will refer to all of the language-related regulations as language policies whether the administrative decisions are planned or unplanned. The regulations or rules born out of for example ignorance or lack of information nevertheless shape the language environment and should be taken into consideration. Policies developed to influence language use within the company are called corporate language policies in this context

2.1.1 Language policies in Finland

Several Finnish laws affect languages and their use in Finland. These regulations are governed by language policy institutions, institute for the Languages of Finland, Ministry of Justice, the Swedish Assembly of Finland, the Sámi Parliament and the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs. Finland has two official languages, but the constitutional law takes into account the rights of three more language groups; Sámi, Roma and users of Finnish sign language. Numerous official publications (such as the National language strategy 'Kansalliskielistrategia') and projects are formed to support the language policies and aim to mainly reinforce the status of the

two national languages in Finland. According to the Language Strategy the strong knowledge of languages has for long been “one of the key elements of Finland’s international success”, when it comes to for example finance and the superior level of education – Finland’s education system is internationally recognised as being very successful.

For a small, open market economy like Finland external commerce is important. As stated in a report published by Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto called *Ulkomaankauppa* (2019), in the year 2018 Germany was the largest trading partner in terms of goods and Sweden in terms of services. According to the publication, as companies grow to be more international, a greater part of external commerce becomes internal between certain companies, which means that a great part of a country’s external business turns into collaboration between large companies. Discussions and negotiations are significant for these companies: employers demand the knowledge of certain languages based on the markets in which they operate. Some future programs are planned in order to even further amplify the interaction between Finnish and Swedish markets: Finland is for example planning to launch a project called Global Innovation Partnership Program (GIPP) that promotes Finnish innovation and investments towards Finland, with a goal of developing business collaboration especially between Finland and the United Kingdom, France, Sweden and the United States. Based on these remarks and the future plans for Finland’s economy, it can be concluded that the process of “internationalisation” has already begun in Finland, creating possibilities for new language policies. This can also be seen in the topic of my interest, within organisations.

2.2 Globalized economy and corporate language policies

As Duchene (2008: 29) acknowledges, the increasing overall mobility of the human population and the circulation of goods in the globalized market create more language needs such as the need for translators and workers with multilingual competence. New language practices such as computer-mediated communication are also mentioned in his text, which I find extremely relevant during recent times. As these language needs and practices have developed over the years, it has become apparent that language has become a key tool in economy. Duchene theorizes that language can be seen as both a selling point and a practical necessity; interacting with clients is a highly important marketing factor in international markets.

Former research shows that language can also be seen as a financial advantage in recruiting. Individuals who are able to work in more than one language are practical and cost less for a company (Duchene 2008: 30). The social processes in already existing research that are linked to this transformation in the new economy, highly important as they are, I believe can be further investigated by looking into the language policies enacted. Companies use various strategies and ideologies when marketing their products: by choosing which languages are used for which markets or which clients, companies participate in the so-called internationalization process. As Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999: 437) have summarized, not only does language need to be included when it comes to a company's strategic plans, but decisions should be examined for their language consequences before any new strategies are implemented.

The importance of multilingualism is in particular well recognized in recent studies. Tenzen et al. (2017) acknowledge that corporate decision makers' language skills influence their international opportunity recognition, which means that their knowledge of a foreign language and international experience is correlated into their business strategies. How do companies actually create the "new economy" via their authoritative decisions when it comes to language? The link between the actual managerial practices and the already existing research is what this paper aims to explore.

2.2.1 Language and corporate communication

According to Feely and Harzing (2003: 50), if linguistic fragmentation is not professionally managed, it will have detrimental consequences for the business. They realize however that different companies have different context-bound language problems that might require unique solutions. Sometimes even understanding or issuing these problems might be a challenge, which is why, according to them, companies with multinational relationships should conduct linguistic audits. In the present study, the theoretical and practical relevance of language in international business is seen as a key element (Tenzen et al. 2017). As Andersen and Rasmussen (2004: 240) state, language is in addition to being a tool for communication a "determinant for the establishment of relations in both small and large organisations".

The lack of language competence might lead to slow or misleading communication, which can be crucial to the business. As researchers have focused on effective leadership strategies and

skills and communication challenges in interactions, it is also important to consider issues of language competence and interactional norms prevalent in the organization when it comes to effective management (Lahti and Valo 2017). Even though language problems that might occur to international firms need to be evidently taken into account, as seen in Andersen and Rasmussen's (2004: 240) research, it can be difficult for the business' involved to see the relation between disregarding language-related problems and for example low market share. Acknowledging why exactly it is so difficult has to be researched more in the future, which is what I intend to examine by interviewing managers in an international firm.

2.2.2 Managers as policy makers

In the context of language policies in business, Barakos (2020) theorizes that managers are socially constituted policy actors in powerful positions who produce and transfer knowledge within their business. According to their studies, companies constitute both individual and company-collective identities by making language choices on a daily basis. These choices, ranging from HR management and recruitment to various marketing strategies and individual linguistic choices, are shaped by the market-driven principles of internationalisation (Duchêne 2009, 30). Managers' understandings of internationalisation in relation to their company's language needs might vary based on their knowledge and/or assumptions. Especially in the context of trying to change from being a local to becoming an international company, those understandings must evolve as well.

As Andersen and Rasmussen (2004: 231-242) mention, the role of language in the corporate context is more than just being a tool of communication. It is also a means to establishing new relations in both small and large organizations. According to them, these relations can be vital for the given organization's day-to-day business and disregarding the language competences might lead to disqualification of the relations. This is just one of the examples of why small organizations have to also be aware of their language planning, which leads us to the importance of having company guidelines or policies. If a company is in fact seeking for a change in its organizational structure and strategies, it should also consider updating their language policies. As Feely and Harzing (2003: 50) state "it is difficult to see how any company can contemplate going multinational without going multilingual at the same time".

2.2.3 Options for managing language related problems

Feely and Harzing (2003: 37-52) have summarized some of the options used to resolve language obstacles in different contexts in their research. As Lahti et al. (2017) conclude in their article, people solve local problems by creatively drawing on their various linguistic resources in ways that challenge the traditional concepts of language and linguistic competence. It is worthwhile mentioning that these approaches to language barrier solutions are not exclusive and should not be considered the right or only ways to act in certain situations. A company can choose to simply use a *lingua franca*, but by doing that they might fail to recognize the increasing vitality of other languages. Barakos (2020: 6) has also acknowledged the power struggles *lingua francas* might create in their research.

To rely on *functional multilingualism* is to communicate with whatever means the communicating parties have at their disposal, such as a mix of different languages or gestures. As a basis for business negotiations this method seems very unreliable, as it increases the probability of cognitive divergence between the people communicating. Employing *external language resources* such as translators and interpreters require resources by being rather expensive and time by being thorough. Using an interpreter creates room for misunderstandings and sometimes mistrust between parties; a third party might cause loss of rhetorical power when it comes to negotiations. *Personnel development* is considered an understandable reaction to lack of language competence, as language skills are assessed when it comes to for example suitability for a work post (Barakos 2020: 91). According to Feely and Harzing, this option requires commitment from the deployer.

Adopting a *single corporate language* to be used in a company will result in a simple focus: recruitment and personnel development can fully concentrate on required standards in a chosen language. The decision-making process and context might make using a single language complicated; explicit language policies might have controversial results (Barakos 2020: 111-114). Easy access to and maintenance of technical literature, policies and documents and for example facilitation of informal communications are mentioned as benefits of corporate languages, but it can be effectively impossible to find a single language for all circumstances. Companies become very dependent on their linguistically skilled personnel when they do not have the time or finances to adopt a training or corporate language approach and lack language

competence. These personnel become *language nodes*, who act as communication channels between participants in negotiations. This places very much responsibility on the people serving as language nodes (who might not be experts in the field), and it might impair their other abilities working in their duties. *Selective recruitment* can be perceived as the easiest and cheapest way to approach problems concerning language competence. By hiring people already possessing certain skills companies save resources in training for example. The right level of language skills might not always be available however, which is why this approach can be used quite selectively.

2.3 English as a lingua franca

As Wright (2012: 75-79) has acknowledged in their research, the concept of a national language is no longer sufficient as it is in its current state. The development of technology permits real-time communication and access to information almost limitlessly, which is why the younger generation forms its opinions affected by a wide range of influences. This can also be perceived in the linguistic repertoires of people because linguistic boundaries are more often crossed recently. As Wright puts it, people are presented with two choices: supposing that interactions taken in the future can be foreseen, one can learn the national language of those one wishes to interact with. The other option is to learn a lingua franca that is accepted by many as an auxiliary language.

When discussing the context of international business, English is the most common choice for communication (Zora 2014). In general English seems to be considered a neutral language that allows people from different linguistic backgrounds to take part in expressing their views and opinions in an efficient way. As it is the second most widely spoken language in the world, English can be used to signal the international characteristics of a company. Many language regulations are perceived to be related to being able/unable to communicate in English, which is why it is important to recognize the company's language needs in their strategies, especially when it comes to English.

English can be seen as an additional language spoken by many, 'English as a lingua franca'. Research shows that changes in for example the political landscape have always had linguistic consequences in communities in very broad contexts. Examining how actual experiences

concerning language and language diversity are dealt with in a workplace environment in Finland will provide concrete examples of the magnitude of the spreading use of English.

3 Present study

The intent of this section is to introduce the present study. First, I will introduce the research questions and aims. Then I will discuss how I have conducted the data collection process and the method of analysis.

3.1 Research questions and aims

According to the preliminary discussion that I had with the company that I am doing my BA thesis for, if a smaller company (with a head count of 40 people) does not have other than Finnish speaking employees, they do not have to take language into consideration in their corporate planning or organizational strategies. When asked about language restrictions or regulations within the company, there are however multiple instances of the managers either encouraging or discouraging the use of English. There were indeed quite a few language policies conducted without proper preparation: as Ricento and Hornberger (1996: 404) acknowledge, language policies can be a result of the absence of planning as well as the presence of it. As Lahti et al. (2017) mention, workplace interactions can serve as excellent opportunities for developing one's language proficiencies. I believe these language proficiency opportunities and therefore the overall competences of the company are connected to the corporate language policies.

I am interested in finding out how a company's language policies (or a lack thereof) affect the other aspects of its strategies, such as business growth. Based on Siiskonen (2015), multinational organizations should enact language policies and language guidelines in order to develop their internal communication in a multinational workplace. My focus is on a company that is not yet multinational but planning to be. I would like to shed more light on the processes of language policy formation in a business setting. I feel that regulations concerning language use within companies are often invisible and disregarded, even though they might have significant effects on the company's operations. As Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999: 432-440) have acknowledged, studying language as a source of power and language in relation to organizational structure in greater depth would seem appropriate.

My research questions are purposefully broad. This is justified by the scope of the interview format.

Research questions:

1. *How do non-linguistically trained professionals take language competence in consideration when managing their business? Does it play a role in the company's organizational structure?*

2. *How has the status of ELF affected the company's organizational practices?*

3.2 Research method and data collection

The research I have conducted is both qualitative and quantitative. I constructed an interview and used the topics discussed as data for my research. The participants of the interviews were of authoritative status, as I wanted to study how different language policies and regulations are conducted in the workplace. The location of the workplace or the nationalities of the participants are not mentioned because of anonymity, which is why they are not considered. The workplace was chosen on the basis of finding a multilingual and multicultural workplace, preferably with international organizational functions. Finding a workplace that would allow me to interview the decision-makers was somewhat difficult, as most of the recipients of my inquiries never contacted me. After finding a suitable organization willing to take part in this research, I conducted some unofficial preliminary meetings in which I further elaborated my goals for the thesis.

The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner. The guidelines provided by Denscombes (2014: 186) were followed, as I wanted there to be room for flexibility: based on the guide, even though the interviewer has a set list of questions and/or topics to be discussed, the so-called blueprint might change during the interview. With this approach, I believed the interviewee would have the ability to discuss the topics with more depth than originally planned by the researcher. As the complex nature of language policies and their effects on organizational structures might vary in different contexts, I tried not to presuppose information regarding the issues when it came to conducting the interview questions. Furthermore, elaborating to the

interviewee why each question is meaningful for the research might be beneficial according to Galletta (2013). By doing so, I believed the interviewee would be comfortable discussing the topics. The interview was conducted online in a neutral environment, recorded and transcribed afterwards.

3.3 Method of analysis

After I had transcribed the interview I used content analysis to analyse the answers provided by it. This method of analysis is often used when analysing textual data, including transcripts (Neuendorf, 2016: 1-4). According to Brinkmann (2013: 42-43) the main focus of content analysis is on the meaning of the information being said, in contrast to discourse analysis, which is more concentrated on the nature of the interview interaction. The qualitative analysis is done as experience-focused interviewing in order to elicit reports of the interviewee's experiences (Brinkmann 2013: 43).

Content analysis as a method can be used with qualitative or quantitative data; in my research I have done both. When coding the quantitative data, I had to decide between using the analysis in an inductive or deductive way. Like Elo and Kyngäs (2008: 107-109) have theorized, deductive content analysis is used when the analysis is based on former knowledge and research; in this case, I structured the codes with themes that revolve around the research in language policy research. As I chose these predefined codes, I had to be careful not to be biased as to what the answers would be like. I included all the important themes discussed in the interview and counted how many times the relevant themes came up during the discussion. I did this in order to shed light on how meaningful the topics are in the interviewee's point of view.

As I only had one data set and not too many segments of topics, I chose to illustrate the data to the reader as three pie charts. As Denscombe (2014: 269-271) mentions, a pie chart is a visually strong way to present data: the charts however should have less than seven segments in order for them to be simple enough. The number of times the aforementioned data segments were discussed during the interview is visible in the charts. Even though some remarks can be drawn from the quantitative part of my research it is worth mentioning that as my research focused on certain aspects of language policies, the interviewee might have thought that possible other topics were irrelevant and therefore did not present them.

3.4 Ethical questions

As I have involved human participants and their experiences as my research data, some ethical questions need to be taken into account. When it comes to the responsible conduct of research, my research is conducted within the framework provided by the Jyväskylä University Human Sciences Ethics Committee.

The data was gathered and handled in a respectful manner, to be used for academic purposes only. According to the mutual agreement between the researcher and the workplace, the name of the workplace and the names of the participants were anonymized. Consent forms that included permissions for the interview and a privacy notice were distributed to the participant before the interview, which were then later signed and discussed through. As the processing of personal data is based on consent, the interviewee had the right to cancel their participation at any given time during the process.

The name or any other identifying information was not included when analysing the data or writing down the findings as it served no purpose; the basic personal information such as age or nationality was irrelevant for my research. The only purposeful discourse was the position of power within the workplace itself, as I only interviewed people of authoritative status. Due to the anonymization of the workplace itself, these people are completely unidentifiable.

The audio-recorded interviews were stored in a cloud service provided by Jyväskylä University, to which only the researcher had access. The data was stored for the time the research was ongoing, to be either destroyed or given to the workplace for their own use. We went through the progress of my thesis step by step with the research subjects and they were informed about the completion of the whole thesis.

4 Findings / analysis

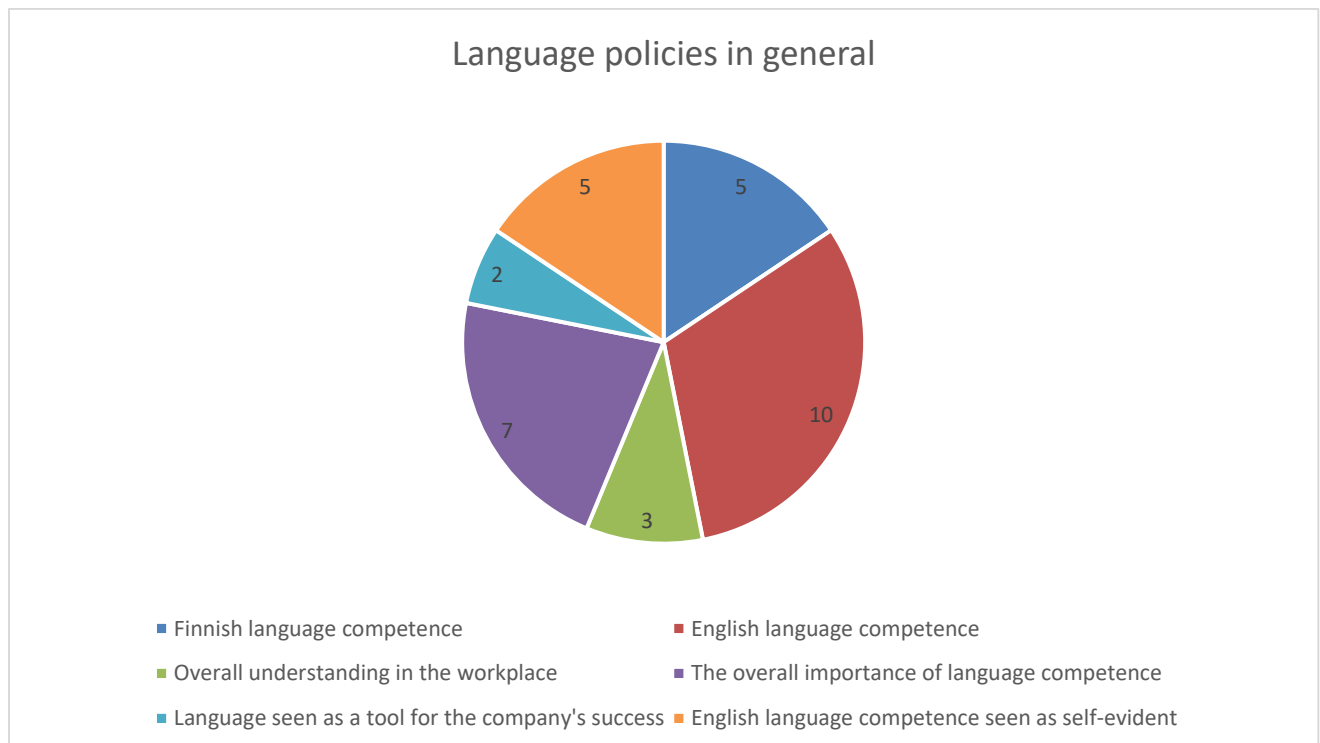
In this chapter the findings of the study are presented and analysed. I will introduce the present and past language policies in this specific workplace and on what grounds they are enacted. Then I will discuss the effect they have had on the company's recruiting practices. In the third section I will look into the personnel development in the company and discuss the language training programs that they have offered for their employees. In the last section the overall effects and

importance of these language policies are considered in the context of organizational structure. Three charts and eight interview extracts are included to add insight on the interviewee's narration. The translations from Finnish to English are made by me.

4.1. Adopting a single corporate language in the workplace

When discussing the context of global economy, the process of globalization has affected the individual companies significantly; companies that wish to remain in the competition have had to seek changes in their structural and operational nature in these modern circumstances (Zora 2014: 316). They also acknowledge that the need for effective communication has become a part of almost all business functions instead of only small dedicated specialist groups. Such is the case in this context. As seen in the Chart 4.1.2. below, the overall importance of language competence and English language competence were discussed the most during the interview. During the interview, when discussing language-related issues and the company's present language policies, topics revolve around the use of English: the status of English as a lingua franca can be perceived in the language policies enacted in this Finnish company.

Chart 4.1.2. When discussing language policies in general, certain topics emerged in the discussion



The most prominent language policy enacted in this workplace is the use of a corporate language in all official communication purposes. As Zora (2014: 316-318) points out, most companies have reduced the costs related to language competence by choosing only one or two common corporate languages. According to the interviewee, prior to the year 2022, Finnish was the most used language in the workplace and most of the company meetings were held in Finnish. As the company gained new opportunities abroad and developed, so did the demand for new and updated language policies. Because of its global presence in international business, by using English as a corporate language companies can signal their international character (Zora 2014: 318-320). The need for English as a corporate language in this company derived from the will to become more international, as illustrated in Example 1 (see also Chart 4.1.2.):

Example 1

“kyllä se varmasti se juurisyy on se että me halutaan kansainvälistyä yrityksenä ja tota saaha asiakkaita kansainvälisiltä markkinoilta”

”it certainly is the main reason that we wish to be more international as a company and to acquire customers from international market”

The process of internationalization is viewed as a positive development in this company. Interacting with clients abroad requires English language competence so it can be seen as a practical necessity. According to Sanden G.R. (2020), language policies are often enacted to provide a shared linguistic framework within the workplace, with the goal of minimizing loss of information through for example translation, as is the case in this context as well. The perception of English equal to being more international manipulates the organizational policies and procedures in this context consequently. As of the beginning of the year 2022, the company decided to adopt English as a single corporate language to be used in all official communication. As illustrated in Example 2, the written documents, notifications and all official joint company meetings are to be conducted in English.

Example 2

“tän vuoden alusta asti on ollut silleen että kaikki öö viralliset niinku kirjalliset materiaalit tai släppiviestit ja muut tällaset niinku viralliset tai koko yhtiötä koskevat tai osaa koskevat mutta viralliset viestit kirjoitetaan englanniksi ja samoin kaikki yhteiset viralliset palaverit pidetään englanniksi”

”from the beginning of this year it has been so that all official written material or notifications and other kind of official or messages concerning the whole company or parts of it but official ones are written in English and also all joint official meetings are held in English”

One of the most interesting points of this research was the link between internationalization and the use of English in the workplace in relation to business growth: as pointed out by the interviewee, company authorities will not be able expand their business opportunities only by learning English, but it can be a very effective tool. Being able to join the global market, to be truly international as a company, and because of that, to be able to recruit diverse personnel are mentioned as motives for this particular language policy. English can be seen as one of the key factors in the process of this change, however in some cases during the interview English language competence was considered self-evident. Nevertheless the demand for it exists in this content, which is why the language competences of the personnel are taken into consideration during recruiting.

4.2. Language assessment during recruiting

By recruiting employees who already possess the required language competence, companies are able to save resources in language training. In this context, the company has decided to post the recruiting ads completely in English, along with their social media presence. Their approach is quite straightforward: if the person is able to read the English text and apply, they have sufficient knowledge of English in order to participate in possible job interviews and therefore work in the company, as illustrated in Example 3.

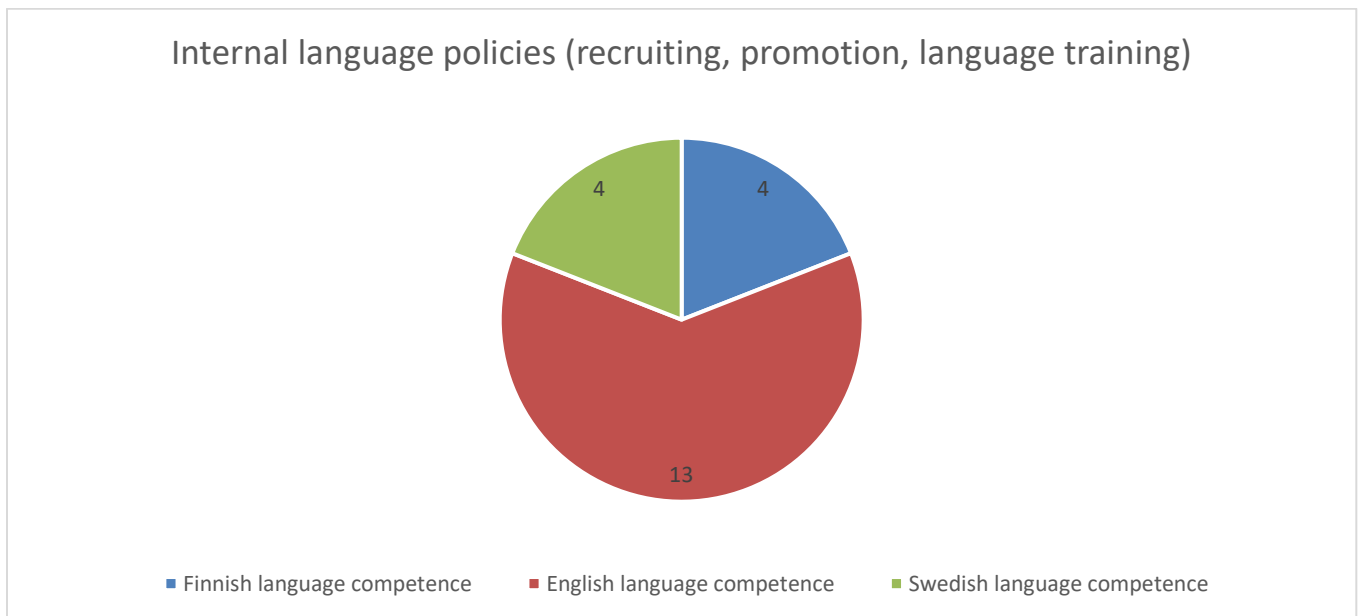
Example 3

”haastattelussa tottakai nähään se(kielen osaamisen taso).. nähään se myös mutta ainakin meillä täällä tähän asti se on toiminu ihan automaattisesti niin että ihmiset ketä on tullu vaikka haastatteluihin ni on puhunu ihan riittävän hyvää englantia”

”it (language competence level) can be seen during the interview.. it can be seen as well but in our experience so far it automatically functions so that the people who come to for example job interviews have spoken good enough English”

During the interview it was also mentioned that some of the salesperson job interviews are still conducted in Finnish, as they mainly speak Finnish in their field of work. Some people might feel uncertain when speaking English in a job interview, which is why the company managers feel like this creates more possibilities for the people applying for the job. When discussing recruiting, promotion and language training in the company, English language competence can be considered a main topic, as seen in the Chart 4.2.1.

Chart 4.2.1. When discussing internal language policies in the company, certain topics emerged in the discussion



English language competence might be taken for granted when creating language policies in recruiting. As seen in the Chart 4.1.2., the self-evident state of English language competence in Finland and in this company was discussed during the interview. The connection between English and internationalization is also evident in this context; English language competence is seen as a necessity for applying for a job. As exemplified in Example 4, when asked about the possibilities that language use might have provided for the company, it is mentioned that a certain level of English language competence is something considered self-evident in Finland.

Example 4

”että kuitenkin kaikki perustajat ja avainhenkilöt on korkeakoulutettuja ihmisiä ni se on silleen kuitenkin jonkinlainen itsestänselvyys että sitä englantia tietyllä tasolla osataan ja ollaan valmiita opettelamaan matkan varrella lisää”

”that after all the founding members and key personnel are have higher education degrees so it is taken for granted that they know English in a certain level and they are prepared to learn more along the way”

According to the interviewee, language competence does not have a role in the internal promotion in the company. It is however pointed out that in the future there might be some new languages or language competences to be taken into consideration when it comes to recruiting new employees, as the company becomes more and more international.

The managers’ perceptions of language competence are directly related to the language policies in the company’s recruiting operations. As English language competence is one of the most relevant themes in the company’s internal language policies (see Chart 4.1.2.) it might be useful to consider it closely. The actual required level of competence, the “good enough English” can be quite ambiguous: if a company has a single corporate language, does it set a higher standard of competence for the given language? And if so, I believe it would be interesting to explore the ways in which non-linguistically trained company professionals assess language competence in practice. As language competence is taken into account during recruiting, I believe it would be useful for companies to take these issues as a part of their language policies. In future research, it would be interesting to see how significant these perceptions of certain levels of language competence are in recruiting and therefore in the operations of the whole company.

4.3. Personnel development and external language resources in the company

By participating in the decision-making concerning languages, the managers actively participate in transforming the norms for interaction in the workplace. As the (possible) clients of the company mostly communicate in English, the need to reinforce the English skills of the personnel arises. According to the interviewee, by choosing to offer language courses to the employees they will feel more comfortable and self-assured in their work assignments, especially as the company gains more linguistically diverse clients abroad.

According to Marschan et.al. (1997) language can be a facilitator to communication within the multinational market and within the company, because by for example learning the company language communicative barriers between the participants diminish. As the company adopted a

single corporate language quite recently, the language competences within the existing personnel needed to be taken into consideration. In the managers' view it is appropriate for the workplace to offer these possibilities for self-development, especially if the company itself begins to require a certain level of language competence (which it has not previously required). The company offered language courses in English and Swedish in co-operation with Jyväskylä University. The main goal was to encourage and activate the employees who already possessed varying levels of English and Swedish language competence in language use.

Sudden changes in language policies require solutions in order for them to be successful. In this case, the managers' sought to enhance the language competences of the employees who had previously used Finnish as their work language. As demonstrated in Example 5, even though the employees had existing English language expertise, the language courses were needed in order for the single corporate language policy to become valid in the workplace.

Example 5

”kyl siitä (kielikurssit) tuli hyvää palautetta ja tota.. se silleen rohkas että ne ihmiset pääs ennen puhumaan keskenään ja joutu tavallaan.. voi olla kuitenkin jännittävää jos ei sitä (englannin kieli) oo käyttäny ni ihan työkavereittenki kanssa käyttää sitä ni sitte se oli niinku hyvä semmonen ensimmäinen rohkasu”

”it (the language courses) received some good feedback and well.. it sort of encouraged the people to talk amongst themselves and sort of... it can be exciting if you have not used English so you first speak it with your co-workers, so it was a good first push towards being encouraged”

Another very fascinating point was mentioned in the interview concerning personnel development via external resources. After receiving a considerable funding and gaining a more international status as a company, personal English language tutors were provided for personnel above middle-management level. Managers discuss relevant themes concerning their business with the tutors in order to gain enhanced vocabulary and to prepare for the conversations with future investors. For this particular purpose, the language tutors were an absolute success, according to the interviewee. By only engaging in English dialogue with each other, the colleagues were able to take shortcuts by for example using Finnish instead if the other person did not understand. As stated in the Example 6, the call for executive-level English competence

was met with these hired personal tutors.

Example 6

”ulkopuolista apua myös sinne suuntaan on tarvittu ja se on koettu silleen erityisen hyvänä että .. et kun siellä on ulkopuolinen ihminen.. ei voida oikasta suomen kautta tai tota esim toinen ymmärtää puolesta sanasta mitä toinen tarkoittaa et se on ollut tosi hyödyllistä nimenomaan et se on ollu ulkopuolinen”

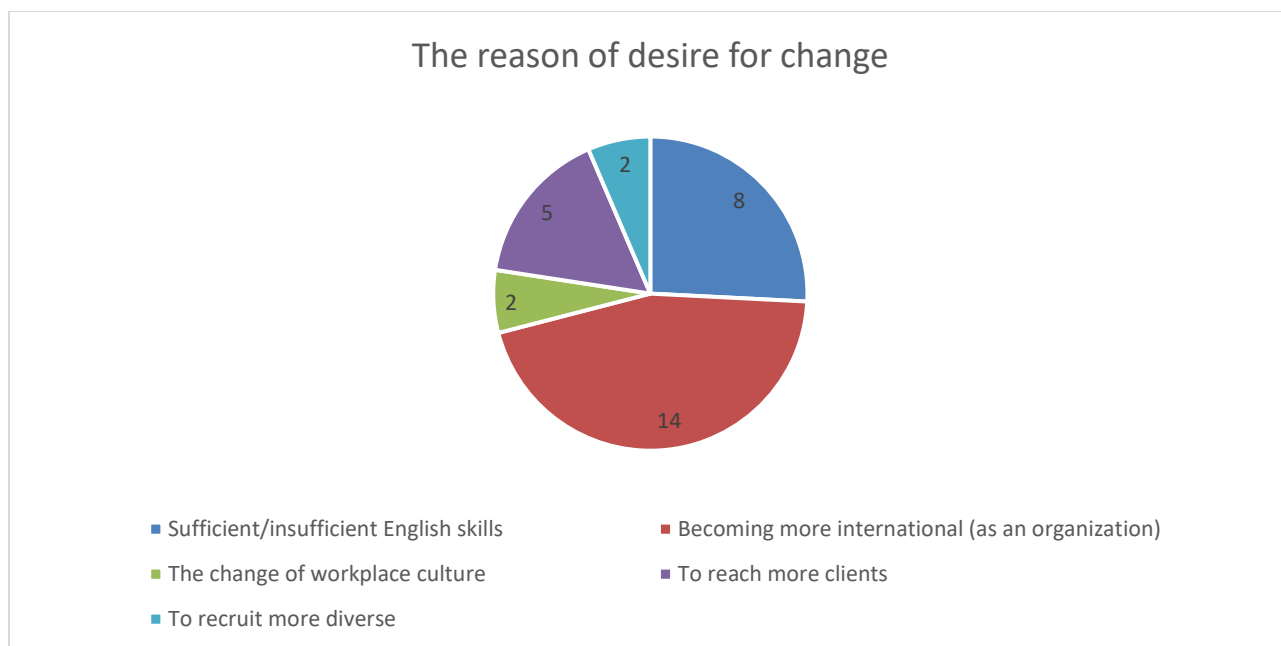
”we have required some external assistance in that direction as well, and in our experience it has been extremely good... when there is someone from the outside... you can not use Finnish instead of English or if for example someone understands what you mean without you finishing the sentence, so it has been extremely useful that the person is particularly not from the company”

By understanding changes in the organizational structures, the managers are able to take into account the requirements for changes in the language practices. Consequently, as the need for language consultancy and varying levels of language courses becomes more relevant, it would be interesting to investigate how the status of English as a lingua franca will manipulate the already existing language policies in companies in the future.

4.4. Language policies as a part of the organizational structure

As stated by Sanden and Kankaanranta (2018: 552-553) topics that revolve around language and communication can sometimes be perceived as not essential, as they do not directly have an effect on sales performance. However, in their research they found out that the target companies rely heavily on English as the language of global communication and have constructed either non-formalized or strict formalized language policies to regulate language use. Such increased interconnectedness has led to the creation of global market economy in which international trade challenges the companies to continually adapt to global market conditions.

Chart 4.1.2. When discussing the reason behind the language policies in this company, certain topics emerged in the discussion



Changes in organizational structure are inevitable for a company that wishes to become more international. Because of the current state of such increased interconnectedness, companies have to constantly adapt to global market conditions (Zora 2014: 321-322). As authoritative decisions are made concerning for example business opportunities, changes in organizational practices need to be taken into account: therefore changes in language policies might be relevant. As the Chart 4.1.2. suggests, the most notable reason for language policy creation in this context is the will to become more international as an organization. Sufficient/insufficient English skills were also considered along with reaching more clients and employees. It was also mentioned that the language policies would possible change the workplace culture as a whole to the better. According to the company manager, when they had previously opened an office in another North-European country, the lack of language planning was a considerable factor in business growth. The person in charge of the office lacked the native language competence and therefore could not participate in the development of the company with full proficiency.

Example 7

”voidaan ajatella myös niin että se kielen osaamattomuus aiheutti sen että se markkina sit lopulta meidän osalta niinku toistaseks sulkeutui. Se ei ollu se syy miks lopetettiin siellä mutta se syy oli se että ei niinku ikinä lähteny kunnolla lentoon ja mä uskon et siihen eniten vaikutti se startti jolloin siellä pitää olla tosi motivoitunut ihminen joka meillä oli mut sen ois pitäny myös puhua sitä kieltä”

”one could think that because they did not have the required language proficiency the

markets there closed from our behalf for now. It was not the de facto reason for the withdrawal but it was that the business never really took off there and I believe that it was influenced by the start there that requires a highly motivated person working there which we had but they should have also been able to speak in that language”

Example 7 clarifies how in this context the lack of language planning and policies resulted in undesired consequences. According to the interviewee’s point of view, by not meeting with the language needs of the target market in question, the company lost its ability to operate. Insufficient language planning and management can cause challenges that hinder the overall performance of a company or limit the company’s internationalization strategies, especially when it comes to market expansion (Sanden G.R., 2020). In this scenario, the role of language policies in the company’s organizational structure was quite considerable.

The importance of language policies and regulation in the company’s current organizational structure can also be depicted in the policies enacted. Because of the single corporate language policy and personnel development, the company was able to develop its market opportunities, which is unmistakably linked to business growth and profit. The relation between the language policy enacted and the will to increase market opportunities is visible in the Chart 4.1.2. as the company managers sought to affect the language competences and the overall international status of the company with their decisions. As pointed out by the interviewee, as the company’s employees become more experienced with working in English, their job descriptions expand: for example salespersons in the Finnish organization do not only serve Finnish customers. Example 8 highlights how in this context language competence might directly affect the possible commerce of the company.

Example 8

”jos me saadaan liidi jenkeistä ni kuka tahansa meiän myyjistä vaikka Suomestakin voi hoitaa sitä eteenpäin. Ja sitä kautta voi olla että saahaan enemmän kauppaa tulevaisuudessa”

”if we get a lead from the United States any one of our salespersons from Finland can carry it out further. By being able to do that it might lead us having more commerce in the future”

In the manager's point of view, as the corporate language changed from Finnish to English, the whole mindset of the company was altered. They could expand their whole recruiting process: the company was able to hire from around the globe and it became more effortless for the people beginning their service to settle in and to be a part of the work community. According to the interviewee, by creating these language policies the company had more wide-ranging possibilities to find good employees. It was also discussed how choosing a single language makes the formal meetings in the company have a more efficient framework, even if for example someone struggles to find the appropriate term in English. These findings in my opinion indicate that the management has considered the strategic goal of the policy and its practical implementation in their workplace. New language policies in business organizations are more likely to be resisted when their immediate need in the life of employees is not recognized (Lønsmann, D. 2017): in this context to be able to communicate properly with the clients and possible investors serves as a short-term goal rather than a strategic goal, which is why I believe no resistance to the language policies will be encountered.

5 Conclusion

In this concluding section of my research I will discuss the main findings. The limitations of the present study and possible future research topics are also acknowledged.

The aim of the present thesis was to analyze via a semi-structured interview how language competence is viewed in the context of organizational management and structure. The status of English as a lingua franca was also considered in these language policies. The findings of the study indicate that the significance of proper language planning has indeed increased because of the globalization processes, which conforms to several other studies (Andersson and Rasmussen 2004: 240-241; Barakos 2020; Duchene 2008: 47-49; Feely and Harzing 2003: 50; Sanden and Kankaanranta 2018: 558).

As the overall scope of this research is very broad, it would have been beneficial to interview many more representatives of other companies with a similar organizational structure. With the resources at hand, I could only interview one company's representative. The findings reported in this article are therefore based on a single case company. It is recognized that this limits the generalizability of the conclusions that may be drawn significantly, as summarized by

Brinkmann (2013: 144). Further research in similar contexts is required in order to establish a more extensive look at how language policies influence a company's operations, decision-making and therefore overall performance. It would be extremely interesting to research the changes over time, particularly after a single corporate language is adopted officially.

As Sanden (2020) has pointed out, language policies that try to overcome language barriers might have several negative consequences on a company's organizational outcomes. According to their article, inadequate language management can lead to challenges that affect the overall productivity and performance of business organizations. I think it would be interesting to research how these inadequate language policies due to awareness or unresponsiveness might still have positive outcomes in future language planning. Perhaps only acknowledging the extremely context-bound language needs of a company is beneficial for its operations and looking for the solutions is a process with unique steps.

Lønsmann (2017) has shed some light on the employees' responses to corporate language policies. According to their case study, one language does not always fit all communication needs: even if the management considers English as the language needed for their company, employees might position other languages as ones they use to communicate with others on a daily basis. It is worth mentioning that the implementation of a single corporate language policy might evoke resistance in similar contexts. Lønsmann (2017) suggests that organizations have to consider these policies carefully before implementing them.

As language policies are human created constructs, regulations made to alter other people's language use, by researching them one has to research the people who have generated them. As Brinkmann (2013: 143) states, qualitative interviewing as a method of analysis might lack reliability because of its involvement with human judgment; the human factor in this context is all there is to consider however. Without human interaction there would not be language policies within organizations. Nevertheless, for example by investing in independent coders who code the same data it would be possible to investigate the inter-coder-reliability (Brinkmann 2013: 143) and therefore the research could be more reliable. As Neuendorf (2016) has acknowledged, content-analytic measures could be combined with other types of measurement. This data could have been more broadly combined with for example a survey in order to gain a more holistic picture of the topics discussed.

If the data were analyzed with the grounded theory approach, the analysis could have derived a more accurate concept that captures the meanings contained within the data (Denscombe 2014: 285). The aim of this research was to exemplify a phenomenon rather than use the findings as the basis for developing solutions that would apply at a more general level. With more than one set of data it would have been possible to develop a more thorough hierarchy of codes and categories. As Denscombe (2014: 288) also states, grounded theory analysis uses these codes to find identifying key concepts within the data in order to provide some new understanding on the topic. For general conclusions to emerge from the research this particular theory would have been more appropriate.

The findings of the study also correspond to Barakos' (2020: 150-155) theory that businesses are not only isolated entities; they are structured and manipulated by wider societal norms and policies. These norms and regulations are woven into the authoritative decisions enacted within companies: in this context the managers' view of the power relations and ideologies concerning English language shape its market potential and the norms and values within the workplace. The findings of this study also suggest that language competence and diversity can provide employers with competitive advantages. Investing in for example language training can be perceived to be investing in intercultural communication and multinationalism in organizations. Future discursive, ethnographic and sociolinguistic research on the Finnish context is needed in order to understand the present and future language policies and their relation to economy.

6 Bibliography

- Andersen, H. & Rasmussen, E. S. (2004). The role of language skills in corporate communication. *Corporate communications*, 9(3), 231-242.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280410551150>
- Barakos, E. (2020). *Language policy in business: Discourse, ideology and practice*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Brinkmann. (2013). *Qualitative Interviewing*. Oxford University Press, Incorporated.
- Denscombe, M. (2014). *The good research guide: For small-scale research projects (Fifth edition.)*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, 184
- Duchene, A. (2008). Marketing, management and performance: Multilingualism as commodity in a tourism call centre. *Language policy*, 8(1), 27-50. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-008-9115-6>
- Elinkeinoelämän Keskusliitto (2019). *Ulkomaankauppa*. Online bulletin. Accessed 16.04.2022
<https://ek.fi/mita-teemme/talous/perustietoja-suomen-taloudesta/ulkomaankauppa/>
- Elo, S. & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 62(1), 107-115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x>
- Feely, A. J. & Harzing, A. (2003). Language management in multinational companies. *Cross cultural management*, 10(2), 37-52. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13527600310797586>
- Galletta, A. & Cross, W. E. (2013). *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*. New York: New York University Press, 51-54
- Johnson D.C. (2013) What is language policy?. In: *Language Policy. Research and Practice in Applied Linguistics*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. 3-25
- Kansalliskielistrategia / The National Language Strategy. Accessed 10.04.2022
http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/79375/J0412_Kansalliskielistrategia.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Kaplan, R. B., Baldauf, R. B. (1997). *Language planning from practice to theory*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 3-28

- Lahti, M., Valo, M., Iaitos, K. J. V., Keskus, M. A. V., Studies, D. O. L. A. C., Communication, C. F. M. A., . . . Communication. (2017). *Intercultural Workplace Communication*. Oxford University Press.
- Lo Bianco, J. (2005). Including discourse in language planning theory. In Paul Bruthiaux, Dwight Atkinson, William G. Eggington, William Grabe & Vaidehi Ramanathan (eds.), *Directions in applied linguistics*, 255–263. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Lønsmann, D. (2017). Embrace it or resist it? Employees' reception of corporate language policies. *International journal of cross cultural management : CCM*, 17(1), 101-123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595817694658>
- Marschan, R., Welch, D. & Welch, L. (1997). Language: The forgotten factor in multinational management. *European management journal*, 15(5), 591-598. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-2373\(97\)00038-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-2373(97)00038-8)
- Marschan-Piekkari, R., Welch, D. & Welch, L. (1999). In the shadow: The impact of language on structure, power and communication in the multinational. *International business review*, 8(4), 421-440. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0969-5931\(99\)00015-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0969-5931(99)00015-3)
- Neuendorf. (2016). *The Content Analysis Guidebook (Second Edition)*. SAGE Publications, Inc
- Ricento, T. K. & Hornberger, N. H. (1996). Unpeeling the Onion: Language Planning and Policy and the ELT Professional. *TESOL quarterly*, 30(3), 401-427. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587691>
- Sanden, G. R. (2020). Ten reasons why corporate language policies can create more problems than they solve. *Current issues in language planning*, 21(1), 22-44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2018.1553914>
- Sanden, G. R. & Kankaanranta, A. (2018). English is an unwritten rule here: Non-formalised language policies in multinational corporations. *Corporate communications*, 23(4), 544-566. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-02-2018-0026>
- Siiskonen, A. (2015). *The other at the workplace: Power and Language in a Multicultural Workplace*. BA thesis. <https://jyx.jyu.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/46435/URN%3aNBN%3afi%3ajyu-201506302472.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

- Spolsky, B. (2012). *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tenzer, H., Terjesen, S. & Harzing, A. (2017). Language in International Business: A Review and Agenda for Future Research. *Management international review*, 57(6), 815-854.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-017-0319-x>
- Wright, Sue. 2012. Language policy, the nation and nationalism. In B. Spolsky (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 59-79.
- Zora, T. (2014). The use of English as a common corporate language in international business. *Anali - Ekonomski fakultet u Subotici*, 2014(31), 315-323.