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The management of everyday English interactions in the Japanese branches of European multinationals

Abstract: English is not only used in business and commercial activities within the borders of Europe, but is also used in the overseas branches of European multinationals, such as those in Japan. This chapter focuses on the everyday use of English in the Japanese subsidiaries of European multinationals, as reported by non-European, non-native English-speaking employees, and will attempt to shed light on some of the issues relating to English use at work. By applying Language Management Theory, the types of English-related problems non-European employees are sensitive to and their attempts to overcome these problems will be highlighted. It will be shown that rather than problematizing just linguistic proficiency-related problems, employees appear to more readily note and negatively evaluate deviations relating to pragmatic and other sociolinguistic (mis-)uses of the language. Although they may note a variety of deviations relating to English, the power constraints of the workplace, however, often deter them from making adjustments to try to remove those problems, resulting in further problems with colleagues and clients that may ultimately negatively affect the business.

Key words: language management, power, English, multinationals, micro-level interactions, plurilingual employees, sociolinguistic issues

1 Introduction

English is not only used in business and commercial activities within the borders of Europe, but is also used in the overseas branches of European multinationals. This is particularly true in Asia, where English is commonly used as a lingua franca in international business. According to Japanese government statistics, there were at least 1400 European-based companies operating in Japan in 2011 (METI 2012) and English has been shown to play a central role in the language policies of many of such businesses (Peltokorpi and Vaara 2012). However, although a good deal of research has focused on the problems occurring in Japanese business executives' interactions in English with native speakers of English overseas (Marriott 1990, 1991a; Fujio 2004; Tanaka 2006), very few studies have focused on interactions occurring in Japan and even less attention has been given to

interactions between Japanese businesspeople and other non-native speakers of English, even though such lingua franca interactions are increasingly common in the workplace in Japan (Aikawa 2015).

This chapter will focus on the everyday use of English in the Japanese subsidiaries of European multinationals as reported by non-European, non-native English-speaking employees and will attempt to shed light on some of the issues relating to English use at work. By applying Language Management Theory (LMT: Jernudd and Neustupný 1987; Neustupný 1994), the types of English-related problems non-European employees are sensitive to and their attempts to overcome these problems will be highlighted. It will be shown that rather than problematizing just linguistic proficiency-related problems relating to grammar, vocabulary and spelling, employees appear to more readily note and negatively evaluate deviations relating to pragmatic and other sociolinguistic (mis-)uses of the language. Yet, although they may note a variety of deviations relating to English, the power constraints of the workplace often deter them from making adjustments to try to remove those problems, resulting in further problems with colleagues and clients that ultimately negatively affect the business. Finally, the issue of whether English use in the Japanese branches of European multinationals should be considered a threat or opportunity will be discussed.

2 Research on English use in multinationals

A number of studies have examined the use of language in multinationals, with a particular focus on the role of English. For example, it has been shown how certain languages can wield power in multinational corporations and knowledge of the company's "home language", English and the local language, can be very beneficial for employees (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999), particularly as employees in multilingual workplaces may be required to switch back and forth between multiple languages (Angouri and Miglbauer 2014). However, blue collar workers without English competence may be excluded from better job opportunities and employees' formerly valued language skills may be devalued if the official company language is changed to English (Vaara et al. 2005). Some companies even prohibit the use of languages other than English (Sakamoto 2008: cited in Nekvapil and Sherman 2009). Indeed, Nekvapil and Sherman (2013) have shown how some managers believe in the "absolute instrumentality" (112) of English and look down on employees who refuse to use it. However, although English is often used as a lingua franca between the German expats and the local employees in multinationals in central Europe, this communication often does

not run smoothly and the local employees tend to be blamed for this (Nekvapil and Sherman 2009).

However, the idea of the overriding dominance of English in multinationals has been challenged. For example, Nekvapil and Sherman (2009) argue that the preference for English over other languages in translation and interpreting is not an issue of the dominance of English but is rather "an efficiency and economic issue" because using English saves time and money (192). Similarly, English is often used as the preferred code, not to dominate others, but to include as many participants in the interaction as possible (Nekvapil and Sherman 2009; Angouri and Miglbauer 2014). Furthermore, English proficiency alone is often not enough and knowledge of the local language can be more beneficial in transmitting important information (Nekvapil and Sherman 2013).

The gap between official policy and actual language practice has also been pointed out (Heller 2002; Roberts 2010; Angouri 2013; Fairbrother 2015) and plurilingual employees' "language practice" is more likely to be "multiform and dynamic" and include elements from other languages, even if the official corporate language is restricted to English (Lüdi, Höchle, and Yanaprasart 2010: 231). In practice, language choice is "negotiated between employees" (Mahili 2014: 117) and often "key actors", such as subsidiary managers, play a pivotal role in determining the use of language(s) (Peltokorpi and Vaara 2012). Amelina (2010) further argues that rather than English, it is the home language of the European corporation and the local host language of the subsidiary, "which are primarily used for network building, personal relationship maintenance and for career development", and in "competing situations", the local host language, *not* English, "is used as an instrument of power imposition and exclusion" (251). Indeed, Lønsmann (2014) has shown how a lack of knowledge of the local language can lead to exclusion from social events and meetings and reduce the chance of promotion. Fairbrother (2015) has argued that not only language proficiency but also knowledge of local communicative norms when using English can lead to exclusion. For example, a non-Japanese employee at a multinational subsidiary in Japan was reportedly fired for not using English in accordance with Japanese communicative norms. Thus, the situated power of English in the overseas subsidiaries of European multinationals needs to be examined carefully.

2.1 English workplace interactions involving Japanese speakers

A number of studies have examined workplace interactions between native speakers of English and Japanese non-native speakers (Marriott 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1993, 1997, 2012; Fujio 2004; Sunaoshi 2005; Tanaka 2006) and have shown

that there may be different business ideologies at play (Tanaka 2006) and different interpretations of speech events, such as the functions of meetings, the roles of participants and the value placed on written materials (Marriott 1990, 2012). There are cases of pragmatic transfer from Japanese to English (Fujio 2004), or Japanese businesspeople may attempt to adopt English norms (Marriot 1991a). Conversely, English native speakers have been shown to adopt Japanese norms or pidginized forms of those norms concerning the use of business cards (1991b) office settings, gift-giving and entertainment situations (1993).

However, where European companies are concerned, the linguistic resources of employees are unlikely to be limited to just Japanese and English: other European languages will also be present and there will also be interactions where English is used between non-native speakers of English as a lingua franca. Yet, apart from Peltokorpi and Vaara's (2012) investigation of language policy and Du-Babcock and Tanaka's (2013) study of role-plays between Japanese and Hong Kong Chinese businesspeople, little attention has been given to the multilingual workplace in Japan and naturally-occurring interactions between plurilingual non-native speakers of English. Fairbrother (2015) briefly touches on this in her analysis of the micro-level management of corporate language policy in the Japanese subsidiaries of European multinationals, showing how the enforcement or lack of enforcement of official policy can become a source of friction. However, very little is currently known about the daily linguistic practices in the Japanese branches of European multinationals, particularly regarding the use of English as a lingua franca.

2.2 Language management in the workplace

The theoretical framework used in this study is Language Management Theory (LMT), which examines the processes underlying "meta-linguistic activity" (Nekvapil 2009: 2). LMT is useful for research into language use and attitudes in the workplace because the researcher can access the processes that participants undertake when they are confronted with behavior that does not correlate with their own norms and expectations. Specifically, LMT allows the researcher to see if and how these noted deviations from norms are evaluated and, if problematized, whether adjustments will be planned and implemented to remove such problems. Thus, rather than focusing merely on visible language production and other behavior occurring on the surface of the interaction, LMT enables the researcher to access the processes behind the production of such behavior as well as highlight problems that might not normally be visible on the surface of the interaction. Language management can also be "simple", referring to individual

management within the interaction, or "organized", referring to macro- and meso-level management of the whole system (Jernudd and Neustupný 1987), thus enabling the researcher to see the connection between policy and practice as part of the "management cycle" (Nekvapil 2009).

LMT, and its earlier form, "the correction model" (Neustupný 1985), have been applied to a number of studies focusing on interaction in the workplace. For example, Marriott (1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1997, 2012) has focused closely on norms in her extensive work on interactions between Japanese and Australian businessmen in Australia. Problems in such contact situations are numerous but participants are often unaware of the deviations noted and evaluated by their interlocutors (1997) and English native speakers may even misinterpret the presence of different sociocultural norms as language deficiencies (2008). In addition, even though English may be the main linguistic medium of communication, this does not mean that English will be used according to only English native-speaker norms; Japanese norms or pidginized norms were often applied by both the Australian and Japanese participants to sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects of the interactions.

Nekvapil and Nekula (2006) and Nekvapil and Sherman (2009, 2013) also used LMT to examine language problems in multinationals in Central Europe, focusing on both simple and organized management. They found that the language norms of the expats carry more weight than the local language norms (Nekvapil and Sherman 2009), the language skills of local employees are often negatively evaluated (Nekvapil and Nekula 2006; Nekvapil and Sherman 2009) and that adjustments to eradicate language problems, such as using translation services or language training programs, are often very costly (Nekvapil and Nekula 2006). Nekvapil and Sherman (2009) found that new norms may be introduced concerning not only which language(s) may or may not be used but also **how** people should communicate; for example, making it clear when you did not understand. They also found that pre-interaction adjustments, such as designating a particular person to answer the phone, may be implemented to prevent potential deviations from occurring. Language ideologies concerning the home language of the corporation, the local language, English and the languages of immigrant workers have also been shown to underlie many such language management processes (Nekvapil and Sherman 2013).

However, as of yet, no studies using LMT have been conducted on the management of English in European multinationals in Japan, particularly focusing on the local employees' perspectives. This chapter is an extension of Fairbrother's (2015) study of the application of corporate language policy in the Japanese subsidiaries of European multinationals, but with a focus on plurilingual employees' everyday management of English in the workplace.

3 Method

The data for this study comes from in-depth interviews with three locally-hired employees working at the Japanese subsidiaries of three different European multinationals, supplemented with follow-up emails and samples of in-house email communications. Company A is a Swedish retailer, Company B is a French food producer and Company C is a German logistics corporation. The three interviewees, on whom this chapter will focus, were all plurilingual non-native speakers of English in lower level managerial or specialist positions, introduced to the researcher via her personal networks. General information about each interviewee's background and their companies are included in Table 6.1.

Because of the difficulty in gaining official permission to access the workplace for research purposes and the difficulty involved in trying to get employees to talk frankly about work-related issues while physically at work, the participants were interviewed outside of their places of work. MM (a Mexican male), CM (a Chinese male) and JF (a Japanese female) participated in semi-structured interviews to gain information about their use of English at work and their general views towards it, and then later in the session, interaction interviews (Neustupný 2003) were conducted, whereby the interviewees recounted their experiences during the last twenty-four hours at work in detail. Follow-up questions were asked via email and CM and JF also gave the researcher samples of

Table 6.1 : Participant profiles.

Interviewee	MM	JF	CM
Gender	Male	Female	Male
Age	40s	30s	30s
Nationality	Mexican	Japanese	Chinese
Languages (in order of proficiency)	Spanish, English, Japanese, French	Japanese, English, Swedish, French	Local Chinese dialect, Mandarin, Japanese, English, German
Languages used at work (in order of frequency)	Japanese, English, Spanish	English, Japanese, French	Japanese, English, Mandarin
Company	A	B	C
Main business	Retail	Food production	Logistics
Company base	Sweden	France	Germany
Official corporate language(s)	English	French	English
Interviewee's position	Section manager	Marketing manager	Specialist team leader

anonymized work emails that they deemed non-sensitive in content. The interviews with MM and CM were conducted in English, while the interview with JF was conducted in Japanese.

The three interviewees had chosen to work at their current workplaces for a variety of reasons. MM, who used to work for a Japanese company, had specifically sought out work opportunities at a European company because of the better working hours, holiday provisions and chances of promotion. In addition to his specialized business knowledge, he was reportedly hired because of his strong English and Japanese language skills and Company A's policy of encouraging diversity. Similarly, in addition to his technical skills, CM claimed he was hired for his language skills in English, Japanese, Chinese and the home language of the corporation, German. He also joined his company for better pay and working hours compared with his previous Japanese company. JF, who had worked for an agency for a number of years moving around a number of Japanese and European companies, moved to Company B because she was offered better pay and a permanent contract. Although in the past Company B had only ever hired Japanese staff with strong French skills, she reportedly got her job because of her extensive business experience and her strong English skills.

The interview data was analyzed according to LMT and based on the interviewees' accounts, their norms, noted deviations, evaluations and adjustments were pinpointed. The cases of management were then classified into linguistic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural categories and examples of each are presented below.

4 Everyday issues relating to English

4.1 Linguistic issues

The participants reported a number of deviations relating to basic English language proficiency and they explained how they made adjustments to remove problems. For example, MM reported how he sometimes feels that his immediate Japanese manager doesn't understand what he says in English.

> MM: *sometimes she doesn't get my point ... so I have to change it into Japanese*

Thus, MM code-switches from English to Japanese to get his point across more effectively.

CM also reported how he had had difficulties communicating in English with one of his female Japanese colleagues because she found it difficult to understand his emails if he wrote in long complex sentences. In the following excerpt he explains how he now uses a pre-adjustment strategy to avoid potential deviations from occurring by writing in much shorter simple sentences:

> CM: *so the girl always asks me, "what does [it] mean, what does it mean?"... I don't know if the Japanese speak like this, [connecting] many [shorter] sentences together, so she doesn't know what is [the] subject for what. So sometimes she is confused ... so I try to split the sentences like [a] three or five years old, you just tell [them] clearly – my purpose is not on the language study for them, [it's] just [to] make them to understand what I want, what I hope, what they have to do. So sometimes [my sentences are] very short.*

In this excerpt, CM explains how his junior Japanese female colleague, whom he refers to as "the girl", had difficulties decoding longer complex English sentences in the past. His pre-adjustment to avoid this kind of decoding issue is to simplify his English into much shorter units so that he can get his point across "clearly". Although this seems to be a successful strategy, his explanation of trying to "split the sentences like [a] three or five years old" and his reference to her as "the girl" suggests that he looks down on his colleague and her language ability. Communication problems are often perceived as personality defects (Gass and Varonis 1991) and this seems to be the case in CM's perception of his colleague.

In a follow-up email, JF reported a deviation she noted concerning the negotiation she had with her French manager about a suitable translation for a type of cheesecake. In a rehearsal for a presentation with a client she used the English term "no baked cheesecake" to refer to an American style cheesecake that is not cooked. In Japan the term chiizukeiki (lit. 'cheesecake') usually refers to a baked cake that contains cheese so the type of non-baked cake that JF was referring to is called rea-chiizukeiki (lit. 'rare cheesecake', meaning 'raw' or 'uncooked') in Japanese. Her French manager corrected her English to "rare cheesecake", a quasi-transliteration of the Japanese term, but she evaluated this correction negatively as a form of "wasei eigo", or 'Japan-made English' (Miller 1997). As the more common term used in the USA would actually be "no-bake cheesecake", both parties' suggestions deviated from the English standard, but JF's management of this dispute is interesting. She implemented an adjustment strategy by first checking in the dictionary and discovering that she had been correct about the inadequacy of the term "rare cheesecake". She then explained that she planned to change the English in the final report without confronting her manager because she knows he usually will not check it carefully. Thus she has a plan to implement an adjustment surreptitiously without having to engage in the kind of "open conflict" commonly avoided by Japanese speakers (Szatrowski 2004).

4.2 Sociolinguistic issues

The sociolinguistic elements of English use relate to *how* English is used and organized for communication in particular contexts and the following examples from the interviews are organized according to Neustupný's (1997) categorization derived from Hymes' (1972) model of the ethnography of communication. The participants reported language issues relating predominantly to content rules, which govern what is communicated, variety rules, which govern code selection, and participant rules, which govern who should communicate with whom.

4.2.1 Content rules

Content rules govern what is contextually appropriate to communicate in a certain interaction and, as such, relate not only to the choice of topic but also to the choice of speech acts and the level of politeness attached to the transmitted content (Neustupný 1987). The noted deviations relating to English content rules deal with the level of politeness expressed in a request, the content of particular speech acts and topic choice.

Politeness
In the first example relating to the politeness of the content conveyed, CM reports how one of his senior female colleagues was chastised by the Australian senior manager of another section because of her reminder emails to members of his team.

> CM: *I remember in her mail it is kind really kind of like stronger "Hey we have to do this, can you tell [us] when you can do it?!" like one or two days just send two or three emails, so the solution manager, project manager, the Australian he was angry, and he replied to her to everyone, "Hey you watch out your language, this is not your members, we are helping you, we know this but we are busy, so you cannot just push." She wrote in English but the emotion make people ... just like order, "You have to [do] this! When are you going to do this!" ... so that annoy[s] ... you know make[s] people uncomfortable*

CM explains that the directness and frequency of his colleague's emails in English were perceived as orders, leaving the Australian manager feeling pressured and annoyed. The direct content and frequency of her emails were noted and negatively evaluated as a deviation from the Australian's norms concerning the tone and appropriate amount of pressure to put on fellow colleagues, resulting in an adjustment informing her publicly to be more careful about her language use. CM

seems to share the Australian manager's norm and he explained how he felt it was important to keep on the good side of one's colleagues in order to get them to be as cooperative as possible.

However, CM's female colleague's emails contradict the findings from Takano's (2004) study that suggest that Japanese professional women tend to use "polite and deferential" language along with "indirect framing" in their directives (657). It, therefore, needs to be asked why the Japanese female manager chose to communicate directly. One possible explanation is her lack of control over her production of English (Neustupný 1987), resulting in a loss of the ability to formulate emails in the same tone that she would have used in Japanese. Another possible explanation is that she had an "incomplete" (Neustupný: 203) understanding of English and had assumed that it was the English norm to make requests in a much more direct manner than in Japanese. However, a more likely explanation is a transfer of Japanese managerial style. As she is a senior manager and was originally sending emails to lower-ranked members of the Australian's team, she may just have been implementing the frequently applied 'Ho-ren-so' (frequently report, communicate, consult) Japanese managerial strategy used to push lower-level employees (Hakubishobo 2012).

Of particular interest is how the female manager reacts to being chastised by the senior Australian manager.

> CM: *and since then she stopped contact with them, I was shocked. So any problem [s]he got [s]he asked me to [contact them] …Yeah, even now, she just avoid[s] talking with them, so [I] think [to her it's] like it doesn't exist, so strange*

As Jones (1990) argues, Japanese speakers often avoid any form of open confrontation and any form of disagreement can be perceived as conflict. In this respect, the Australian manager's public chastisement of her emails must have been taken as a serious threat to her face. Her way of dealing with this deviation from her norms, and preventing any similar incidents from happening, is simply to avoid any contact with the Australian manager's team, as if "it doesn't exist". CM finds her behavior "so strange" but no doubt she has been so humiliated that she can no longer have a normal relationship with the Australian's team.

Another example of a noted deviation relating to politeness relates to the content of a series of English emails sent by JF's French manager to a Japanese client. The Japanese client, who had had a long relationship with the Japanese branch office, had urgently needed to get an estimate about a certain product late at night but instead of waiting to contact the Japanese branch early the next morning, the client had contacted the French headquarters directly. When the French manager heard about this he sent the client an email in English, including

the following excerpt expressing his disappointment that the client had not contacted the Japan office first.

> French Manager: *Do you not trust [the Japanese branch]? Do you think you could get other information from France that the ones you get from [the Japanese branch]? Frankly I am extremely disappointed in your action ... Your action really makes me want to ask you to do all your communication from now on directly to the HQ, and not bother calling [the Japanese branch] for any matter or information whatsoever. I am waiting for detailed explanation on your action and your proposal for the near future of our partnership.*

The Japanese client responded in Japanese explaining his reasons, apologizing three times and explicitly promising to go through the Japanese branch in future. The French manager then sent another email to the Japanese client explicitly stating his dissatisfaction.

> French manager: *By ignoring [the Japanese branch] and contacting directly France, you are being rude to the whole [Global Group] by not accepting its communication process and organization. Next time I strongly recommend that you think twice before taking any mistaken actions ... Thank you in advance for your understanding and behavior.*

JF notes and negatively evaluates the content of her manager's emails as a deviation from her norms concerning the appropriate way to communicate with a Japanese client. In her interview she emphasized that "he never apologies" and implied that when dealing with Japanese clients it is important to apologize even if the client is at fault. In this case it would be expected that the manager apologize at least for the inconvenience to the client in making him have to follow the French company's rules and procedures and it would definitely be highly unusual for a company to reprimand a client for their "mistaken actions", "behavior" or for "being rude". Interestingly, although he does sometimes write emails to this client in Japanese, the French manager's emails concerning this issue were all written in English. This suggests that he may have deliberately avoided writing such content in Japanese but chose English in order to be more direct about the problem.

Missing content
It is not only the content of what *is* said that may trigger language management. Deviations may also be noted regarding content that the interviewees consider *should have been* included. In the following excerpt JF explains a deviation noted by her French manager concerning her own comment that she might be late.

> JF: *This week people from the [French] head office came and we had some meetings ... I had a separate meeting with the marketing director and [my French manager] had a different meeting and we were to meet up altogether later. I was asked [by my French manager] at what time I could come [to the joint meeting] and I knew the time but, I didn't know [exactly], [so I said] I might be late. The reason I said that [I might be late] is because we both have separate meetings and we might have been late. I knew that the [earlier] meeting might go a little over time and there was a chance we might not be finished in time for the [joint] meeting but [my French manager] asked me "why?". I felt that he was getting angry at me again. I was told, "If you say that you might be late you have to explain the reason. Speak properly."... If it were in Japanese, we wouldn't say the reason why, right? Because if [there's an indefinite possibility] we might be late, we can't say [the reason] why. That's **why** we say we might be late. At that time what he asked was whether I could be there at that time, as if it was a Yes/No question about whether I could or could not be there, and then why ... When you say it in English it has to be longer, you say [because of] this, [because of] that. I think you say things in English that you don't say in Japanese. It's probably a difference in the language itself.*

In this example, JF recounts how she was scolded by her French manager for saying that she might be late for their meeting. In Japanese business it is customary to apologize well in advance if there is even a slight chance of being late (CrossMedia 2014) so JF's saying that she "might be late" was a typical strategy to cover any possible delays caused by the first meeting running a little over time. Thus, saying she "might be late" implied *not* that she would be definitely or considerably late, but that she wanted to be considerate to her boss in case the first meeting went over time. However, JF's French manager evaluates her suggestion that she might be late negatively and the adjustment he implements is to teach her how to add a reason when she says she will be late and to "speak properly". Although it appears that the Japanese and French speakers of English have different norms regarding their orientations towards time and their use of politeness strategies to mitigate their possible tardiness, only the person in the position of power, in this case JF's French manager, has the power to push their norms through. This further highlights the problems with what MacKenzie (2014) terms "angelic accounts of ELF", whereby interactions in English as a lingua franca are often interpreted by researchers as being collaborative and harmonious. In workplace ELF interactions, however, power relationships cannot be overlooked.

Topics

Topic choice can also cause problems relating to content rules because the topic of conversation can have adverse effects on interpersonal relationships. CM cites topic choice as one reason why he finds it hard to interact socially with his Japanese colleagues.

CM: *The topics are quite childish I think ... just uh, what food do I eat ... "I really like this tea" uh, "first of all, I have a coffee" like this. They don't talk so much, really, really private things ... [they are] very nice but you cannot go on, not like you know, "I have a friend," or "what I am doing," ... So if we just sit here like a strangers, basically [we] have nothing to talk [about], so if I ask "how about your children?" they say "oh they are okay." You try to make conversation [but they] stop right, [if] you don't want people to listen to the, your private things, sometimes you can just stop the conversation. So, mostly they are just talking just like this.*

CM finds it hard to connect with his colleagues on a personal level because of their choice of small talk topics and he feels that when he tries to take the conversation to a more personal level, i.e. by asking about his colleagues' children, they don't develop the topic. He is left with the negative feeling that they are just behaving like strangers with nothing to talk about. Thus, it is not language proficiency but rather the content of their small talk that is an obstacle to CM feeling like he can develop a close relationship with his colleagues in the office setting.

4.2.2 Variety rules

The choice of linguistic code is governed by variety rules, which concern "which type of language is used" (Neustupný 1987: 79). The use of particular language varieties may make communication more efficient or reinforce social relationships (Lüdi, Höchle and Yanaprasart 2010) and here CM recounts his selection of English in order to prevent misunderstandings.

CM: *it's hard to explain for this technique part, especially when you get the solution, how it works, in the beginning, so this time I prefer in English. Because if it's in Japanese maybe my Japanese is not so well(sic), sometimes it causes misunderstanding, so this time I prefer [to explain]in English, to tell them what the solution we have and what is the best solution we could have with the lowest cost.*

CM explains how he prefers to use English when he is explaining important technical matters because he feels he can convey his meaning more accurately in English than in Japanese. Thus to avoid conveying an incorrect message to his colleagues in Japanese, he applies pre-interaction management (Nekvapil and Sherman 2009) and switches to English to avoid any potential problems from occurring. Thus his code selection is used to facilitate communication.

Another example from CM shows how his ability to understand and reproduce a professional register of English has resulted in him being designated as the person to communicate with the Asia regional team, headed by an Italian.

> CM: *[My Japanese female colleague] cannot understand the region manager's email, because his email is kind of like, not like simple sentences [such as] 'I want to do this, I really do this, I hope you can do that, I need this, that', no [rather it's] like really complicated structures, one sentence is like, [it] use[s] some words ... that make it more complicated, so you can immediately tell, but if you learn from that, read their email [and] you try to write like that, you [become] more close to ... the native English. It is maybe easier to understand ... [when I email the Italian regional manager] first I try to write as best as I can, but also [I]avoid the, try to write more like, how to say, different than the Japanese, more a little bit better ... Like, uh, I will use ... words [that are] a little bit different and [the] structure will be a little bit different ... I will make [it] more professional, easy to read*

CM explains how he uses a "more complicated" form of English when emailing the Italian regional manager because he considers this to sound more "professional" and easier for his European counterpart to understand. In contrast, he finds that his Japanese colleague finds it difficult to understand and produce more complex English sentence structure, which has resulted in him being designated as the main communicator with the Asia region team.

However, MM's choice of English with some of his Japanese colleagues is not for instrumental purposes, but rather to change the dynamics of his relationship with his Japanese colleagues.

> MM: *If you speak to them in English, yeah they are a little more respectful ... they try to understand what you wanted to say.*

To MM, the use of English is a way to gain more respect from his Japanese colleagues. His choice of English can also be seen as a pre-interaction management strategy; a means to avoid deviations that could be potentially face-threatening. For MM, selecting the English code changes the power balance in the interactions with his Japanese colleagues from a Japanese native speaker/non-native-speaker situation, where he is in the less powerful position, to a lingua franca situation where no-one is a native speaker. When he speaks in English he feels that his Japanese colleagues are more able to accommodate to him.

On the other hand, JF recounted a deviation she noted and negatively evaluated concerning the exclusionary effects of code-switching from English to Japanese during her visit to the French head office.

> JF: *At the head office I was talking to the marketing director ... then [my French manager from the Japan branch] came over to talk. At that time because there were other [French] people there, he should have spoken to me in English, don't you think? Especially for me, because I speak to everyone in English. But it was really weird because [the language he used] was*

Japanese … Even though there were many other people there. It was really weird … like he was showing off … In some sense it's rude, isn't it? Three or four people [were] there [and we were] talking so that everyone could understand and then suddenly [he starts] speaking in a language they don't understand. And the content wasn't even important. (translated from Japanese)

JF criticizes her French manager for switching to Japanese in front of their non-Japanese-speaking colleagues, behavior that she considers both "really weird" and "rude" because of the exclusionary effects of code-switching. She interprets her manager's behavior as unnecessarily "showing off" but in fact she could not resist this code-switch and responded to him in Japanese. Thus, even though she strongly disagreed with her manager's switch she felt she had to accommodate to her superior's language choice.

4.2.3 Participant rules

Certain communities of practice have rules governing who should directly communicate with whom and in Japan the hierarchical relationship among participants will govern how they interact with each other (Neustupný 1987). This can be seen in an incident reported by MM concerning his initiation of communication with the global CEO of his company.

MM: *they were doing this kind of like a store tour … So I just went and start[ed] asking questions to him [the world CEO]. And I remember that XX [the Japanese branch manager] and XX [my Japanese division manager] were very shocked that I was … talking to him because maybe I was not respecting the hierarchy … But he [the world CEO] was saying 'OK. Your point was very good' … but I noticed that maybe also the Japanese CEO or, was also a little bit nervous.*

In this example, MM recounts how his Japanese senior colleagues were giving him nonverbal signals, through their facial expressions and body movements, that he should not have approached the global CEO because of their different statuses. The reactions of his colleagues let MM know that they had noted a deviation in his behavior and evaluated it negatively and MM attributed their negative reactions to his failure to respect "the hierarchy". The global CEO, however, appeared to react positively to MM's initiative, which no doubt reflects the CEO's different norms concerning hierarchy. Even so, MM feels pressure to conform to the norms of the local Japanese context despite his use of English to interact with the European CEO.

4.3 Sociocultural issues

The use of English in the offices of European multinationals in Japan not only reveals language issues but also highlights deeper sociocultural norms relating to working practices. For example, CM noted a deviation from his norms concerning the sharing of information within the company. He complains about his Japanese manager's reluctance to share information that is crucial to carrying out his work.

> CM: *I think, the Japanese really, sometimes … try to hide something … try to cut information, so maybe you don't know this, and uh, if you don't know, they don't give … like my boss. I really don't know him, but he is always laughing but I think it's really fake, because I ask some of this questions, he's really like, flee[ing] or something … he will not answer your question … What I really don't like is they try to hide some information, they don't want to help me, they are two peoples who know, and once they cannot fix it, they open everything to me, so I can read from the email from the bottom to the end, the long story, so that's okay, but I think this [is] their … kind of culture*

CM negatively evaluates a deviation that he notes regarding the sharing of information with colleagues. He feels that his manager will not divulge important information for him to complete his job until they absolutely need to and because of this CM feels he cannot trust his boss, calling him "really fake" and lamenting that he does not "know him". Although it would be difficult to argue that all non-Japanese companies are transparent and that the clear transmission of information is common, it appears that in many Japan organizations lower-level workers are sometimes only exposed to partial information and the rationale for certain decisions is not explained to them. Although CM works in the subsidiary of a German-based company and English is the main language used, because the middle management is Japanese the everyday working practices appear to follow Japanese norms rather than European norms (Fairbrother 2015).

Furthermore, CM and MM also reported how some of their non-Japanese colleagues chose to quit their jobs because of what they considered to be the effects of Japanese hierarchy within their workplaces. In the following excerpt, MM describes how two Swedish expat managers decided to leave Japan.

> MM: *They felt very dissatisfied with the management in Japan … they compare the situation here and in Sweden and they say for example that Sweden is more open, so you have this good feedback all the time, like you can give your ideas and things change and happen. But here in Japan, I think some people felt they were getting more hierarchy so … that it was difficult just to get better jobs[within the subsidiary] or it isn't very clear what was going to happen, [like concerning] promotions*

MM attributes the expats' choice to leave Japan to their dissatisfaction with the hierarchy within the organization of the Japanese subsidiaries. They noted and negatively evaluated deviations concerning the hierarchical management style of the Japanese branches in contrast to their norms of Swedish management style, where ideas can be exchanged openly between employees of different rank and subordinates can see very clearly when changes are being made. In comparison they criticized the lack of transparency in the Japanese subsidiaries, particularly when it affects them acutely, such as in the competition for promotions.

In both of these examples there seems to be a disparity between the expectations that non-Japanese employees have of what working in a European company should be like and the reality of how their workplaces are actually run. There seems to be an expectation that working for a European company in Japan will be like working for a company in Europe and that the management style will also follow a predominantly European style. However, as the majority of employees in the subsidiaries are Japanese, including many of the managers, the management in these workplaces naturally incorporates elements of Japanese management style. Nevertheless, sociocultural differences regarding management style, particularly relating to the transparency of communication and the hierarchical system in the Japanese subsidiaries clearly can be seen to affect some non-Japanese employees' work satisfaction, leading some of them to quit.

5 Discussion

In this study, a wide variety of grammatical, sociolinguistic and sociocultural deviations relating to English use were noted and the problems that were reported by employees did not merely relate to proficiency or language choice issues, but were often related to the local power structure, and human relationships within the workplace.

Although English is the official language of many European multinationals based in Japan, the norms governing the actual use of English are often not based on a standard variety of English but rather reflect the norms of the speakers of English as a lingua franca in each specific interaction. As such, English may be used according to the norms of the local language, in this case Japanese, or the norms of the corporation's home European language, for example French. Although Nekvapil and Nekula (2006) and Nekvapil and Sherman (2009) found that in multinationals based in central Europe the English-language skills of some local employees were often negatively evaluated,

the local norms of Japanese interaction can have considerable power and may govern the use of English in certain contexts (Fairbrother 2015). As Amelina (2010) has pointed out, the local language can play a significant role in the local power structure and relationships, and work and economic factors in the local context may play an important role. Indeed, two of the participants reported that the Japanese branches were the most profitable subsidiaries of their corporations' entire global enterprises so if the local context is producing large profits the local style of communication and business practices may be tolerated, or even welcomed.

In everyday English interactions at work, the norms regarding how English should be used are influenced not only by corporate language policy but more significantly by an employee's immediate superiors (Lüdi, Höchle, and Yanaprasart 2010). Some Japanese managers, such as those of CM and MM may want to maintain a typical Japanese hierarchical framework and follow Japanese communicative conventions even if the language of communication is English (Fairbrother 2015). Alternatively, as the examples of JF and CM showed, if the worker's immediate superiors are European or English native speakers, employees may be expected to communicate in English in a more pragmatically French or Anglo-Australian manner.

Nevertheless, when problems relating to English were noted, relatively few adjustments were made. Adjustments that were made in response to problems predominantly involved code choice or strategies to avoid communication or conflict. These included making surreptitious changes to documents, avoiding communication with potentially face-threatening interlocutors, or choosing to communicate via a third party, in order to avoid potential threats to their own face. This reflects the power structure at the workplace which appears to prevent employees from attempting to rectify problems, particularly when their superiors are involved. Even if there is a serious communicative issue in the workplace that could have detrimental effects on the business, such as the tone of communications sent to clients, it is very difficult for employees lower down in the hierarchy to implement adjustments to remove such deviations, particularly if those deviations have been suggested by one's manager. In such cases, implementing an adjustment could be seen as challenging one's manager and thus could potentially lead to open conflict and damage to one's own working environment and even job security (cf. Fairbrother 2015). On the other hand, it seemed easier to implement pre-interaction adjustments (Nekvapil and Sherman 2009) to prevent potential future deviations from occurring, such as choosing to communicate in English or in different styles of English in order to avoid communication problems.

6 The role of English in the Japanese branches of European multinationals

Although the limited scope of this study makes it impossible to make broad generalizations, the examination of accounts of everyday English interactions in the Japanese branches of European multinationals presented here does provide some insights into the type of issues that European businesses face outside the borders of the EU. The majority of research conducted within the EU tends to focus on Europeans using English as a lingua franca with other Europeans, without taking into account the complex issues surrounding the use of English by speakers of languages with very different communicative and sociocultural norms. In the Japanese context, the question of whose norms should form the basis of English use can become a site of conflict (Fairbrother 2015) and lead to elaborate negotiations between employees, all within a stricter hierarchical framework than might be seen in some European contexts. Thus, outside Europe it is not just an issue of whether to use English or not, but ***how*** to use English that becomes contentious.

Considering the language abilities of local clients and the fact that there are not enough skilled business professionals fluent in continental European languages, the use of English and Japanese, rather than continental European languages, appears to be a necessity. The adoption of English has advantages because it enables businesses to employ locally from a wider pool of human resources, to interact with some local and regional clients, and to facilitate smooth communication with the other branches of the corporation, which may also be staffed by employees of various language backgrounds. Additionally, the very use of English in such settings automatically creates a multicultural and multilingual working environment making it hard to preserve a distinctly European business style, as the local linguistic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural norms become salient in day-to-day business practices. Thus, in the Japanese context at least, it is difficult to argue that the languages of the European ex-patriates are overwhelmingly powerful. On the other hand, the economic benefits that European corporations can gain by setting up branches in Japan adopting English must clearly outweigh the linguistic disadvantages, as can be seen by the number of European companies choosing to set up business there (METI 2012).

On the other hand, for local Japanese employees at the Japanese branches of European multinationals, using English can be face-threatening because of different communicative norms and also because Japanese hierarchical constraints make it difficult for lower-level employees to make adjustments to incorrect language usage or pragmatically inappropriate content sent to local clients.

They may have better English than their superiors but the local power structure may make it impossible for them to use their English to full effect. Alternatively, local Japanese employees with weaker English skills may be looked down on by non-Japanese employees. Thus, an examination of the use of English in this type of workplace also questions the myth of "angelic ELF" interactions, particularly when an employee is chastised for their English use by a lingua franca speaker of a higher rank.

However, the use of English in the workplace in Japan does offer considerable opportunities for non-Europeans employed in the Japanese subsidiaries. Although JF, MM and CM all expressed disappointment that their workplaces did not seem European enough and they all noted problems with the use of English in the workplace, their English skills had contributed to their gaining access to the multinational workplace and the financial gains associated with it. Indeed, in contrast to many Japanese companies based in Japan, multinationals may offer more attractive employment opportunities to traditionally marginalized groups, such as Japanese women, and immigrants. For the interviewees in this study at least, proficiency in English was an opportunity for financial and social gain. As opposed to their interactions in other languages which positioned them as non-native speakers communicating with native speakers, the use of English in the workplace put them on a more equal, or even superior, footing with other non-native-speaking colleagues of a similar status within their respective organizations. Thus, despite the language problems reported by the interviewees, being able to use English at work gave them some definite advantages.

The experiences of the interviewees in this study suggest that knowledge of English is crucially important in some work contexts and that overall it can provide benefits for both the multinationals, in terms of profit and access to a wider pool of local human resources, and for local employees, considering the financial, social and interpersonal benefits working in English provides. Supporting the findings of European-based research, depending on the dynamics of the local context, English can be used to include and exclude certain employees. However, English users in Japanese subsidiaries are required to manage their use of English within a strict power hierarchy, the examination of which can highlight some clear insensitivity to local usage of English and the pragmatic needs of both local employees and local clients. Thus, examining the use of English in European multinationals outside the boundaries of the EU can help to highlight issues relating to the sociolinguistic and sociocultural aspects of workplace interaction, particularly in relation to the workplace power structure, that might tend to be overlooked in some European contexts.

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