

*Hanne Tange**

Global Commitment or Local Grievances? An Assessment of the Grundfos Language Policy

Abstract

This empirical study discusses language workers' involvement with and responses to the introduction of a corporate language policy at the Danish multinational Grundfos in April 2004. The core argument is that a discrepancy exists between language workers' global commitment to language management and respondents' local practices. The analysis explores this differentiation in relation to the themes of language value, language visibility, and the visibility of the corporate language policy, comparing the conflicting views of respondents from management, communications, branding, technical marketing, production, and development units. This leads to the conclusion that the effect of the corporate language initiative is closely related to language attitudes in the different parts of the organisation, which calls for a research perspective that may accommodate local as well as global concerns.

1. Introduction

Recent research on language management has underlined the connection between economic globalisation and multinational corporations' adoption of a corporate policy on language, addressing the question of multilingualism from a strategic perspective (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, 1999b, Dhir 2005, Feely/Harzing 2003). The present examination adopts an alternative approach to corporate language, emphasising the social meaning of organisational policy-making and communication for individual actors' experiences with and attitudes to the implementation of a language policy. Drawing on a series of qualitative research interviews performed with language workers at the Danish headquarters of the multinational Grundfos, the analysis seeks to dem-

* *Hanne Tange*
Aarhus School of Business, University of Aarhus
Department of Language and Business Communication
Fuglesangs Allé 4
DK-8210 Aarhus V
hta@asb.dk

onstrate that a discrepancy exists between respondents' general commitment to the corporate language policy and their assessment of the relevance of this initiative to their everyday routines and relationships. In the present inquiry, the notions of "global" and "local" are used with reference to organisational geography. Accordingly, "global" characterises units or policies that relate to the multinational as a whole (e. g. CEO strategies, the corporate branding manual and central units such communications, branding and technical marketing), whereas "local" describes units or policies operating at the microlevel of organisation.

The investigation was prompted by Grundfos' publication of a corporate language policy, *In other words ...*, in March 2004. This document was authored by a team of language and communication workers, the so-called Language Group, and targeted, as the introduction states, at "all Grundfos employees who write English regularly or often" (Grundfos 2004: 1). Hence, *In other words ...* addresses all English users within the multinational, reflecting a corporate reality in which the writing of English letters, reports and product specifications was no longer the prerogative of specially trained language staff. Twelve months later, in March 2005, I contacted the company in order to conduct a study on the process of developing and implementing a corporate strategy on language.

As the focal point of my inquiry, I chose the group of language workers because of the importance of language to the work functions and routines of these employees. I assumed that language workers would be particularly sensitive to the effects of a corporate language policy and therefore among the first employees to notice a change in language attitudes and quality. For the purpose of the present study, I define a language worker as an employee who has an educational qualification in language (LSP or modern languages) and/or an employee whose work duties include language activities such as technical writing, translation, or proof reading.

The interviews with the language workers uncovered a number of disagreements about the corporate language policy, highlighting a lack of consensus within the group. At the organisational level, a conflict of interests emerged between respondents located in different units, with language workers from the areas of communications, branding and management voicing their enthusiasm about the initiative, whereas rep-

representatives from production and development groups were more sceptical. At the individual level, the opinions expressed by single actors were sometimes self-contradictory, shifting between a general commitment to linguistic quality and the pragmatic acceptance of language as a secondary concern in an engineering culture. The current examination aims to explain such differences, applying an approach to language that takes into consideration language workers' local as well as global concerns.

The article begins with a theoretical section, which reviews previous literature on the subject of corporate language which has contributed to the conceptual framework of the present discussion. This is followed by a section on research methodology and the company, which also outlines aspects of the Grundfos language initiative that are of special relevance to the present inquiry. The analysis discusses the global-local theme in relation to language value, language visibility and language policy, which leads to a final reflection on the social meaning of corporate language.

2. Literature review

Within the field of corporate language research one may distinguish between a linguistic (e.g. Bergenholtz et al. 2003, Nickerson 2000), a strategic (e.g. Feely/Harzing 2003, Dhir 2005), a "business lingua franca" (Louhiala-Salminen 2003, Charles 2007), and a practice-oriented perspective (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, 1999b, Park et al. 1996). The present argument builds on this previous research, seeking to combine the more theoretical perspectives on the linguistic and/or strategic value of corporate language with empirical, practice-oriented studies of language as a social practice (Bourdieu 1991, 1993). In the literature, these two ways of looking at corporate language have inspired very different interpretations of the effect that an act of language management has on linguistic behaviour within multinationals. Yet the Grundfos data indicate that both attitudes are part of respondents' social experience, which has prompted the current attempt to bring them together.

The strategic approach to corporate language often relies on a mechanical perception of language which suggests that communication be measured in terms of its speed, efficiency and accuracy (Jannsens et al. 2004). Research seeks to identify the obstacles that multilingualism cre-

ates for cross-cultural communication, coordination and management, presenting language policy-making as a strategic solution to problems arising from linguistic diversity (e.g. Feely/Harzing 2003, Dhir/Gòkè-Paríolá 2002). The literature on corporate language names a number of organisational activities affected by language differences. They include company-customer relations (Czerniawska 1997), information flow and knowledge sharing (Dhir/Savage 2002), external and internal communication (Feely/Harzing 2003), employees' sense of corporate membership, and their ability to overcome linguistic and/or cultural distances within the corporation (Dhir/Gòkè-Paríolá 2002). Because of the potential disruption caused by multilingualism, it is recommended that multinationals pursue a policy of monolingualism:

Having a monolingual corporate environment means that we share the same fundamental preconceptions about the world: whatever our individual differences, we have a common outlook. This engenders a sense of trust – we only need to think of how uncomfortable we can feel when two people in front of us converse in a language we do not understand to see how true this is. It also promotes a sense of equality. While we may not all have access to the same information, sharing a common language means that in theory we could access it. (Czerniawska 1997: 126)

The rhetoric of language management resembles the strategic discourse surrounding corporate change initiatives (e.g. Finnie/Norris 1997). Against this background, one may conclude that a consensus exists between management theorists and corporate planners with regard to the relevance of a language policy to international companies. In relation to the implementation process, management theorists tend to regard corporate language as a strategic decision to be taken at the top of the multinational, which means that they focus their attention on the macro level of organisation. As a result, the research outlines the reasons why corporations should adopt a common medium, but contains only little information on what a language policy might include and how it is transformed from an ideological commitment into linguistic practice.

For a pragmatic insight into the workings of existing language policies on cross-cultural communication, one will have to consult empirical, practice-oriented studies of corporate language. This type of inquiry is less concerned with the management arguments behind the adoption of a corporate language, focusing instead on the impact that stra-

tegic moves towards language standardisation have on organisational members' communicative competence, job performance and satisfaction. Unlike the strategic approach, which primarily discusses monolingualism as a theoretical option, a practice-oriented perspective involves a case study of linguistic behaviours and attitudes, which allows researchers to draw a picture of corporate language usage grounded in actors' social practice. The most significant example is Marschan-Piekkari et al.'s examination of the Finnish multinational Kone, which shows how the introduction of English as a corporate medium does not necessarily remove existing language barriers, but may indeed cause alternative power structures to emerge within the organisation (Marschan et al. 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b). In other words, the Kone investigation suggests that corporate language may have added to cultural and linguistic distances within this particular company because certain members lack the fluency required to perform their everyday routines in English. In comparison, employees with strong language skills occupy a powerful position as language nodes, (i.e. facilitators of communication between the Finnish HQ and any non-Finnish subsidiary), which enables them to obtain a disproportionate amount of influence and privileges (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, Welch et al. 2005). Park et al. report a similar result with regard to language usage by Korean managers in American-owned subsidiaries in South Korea (1996). The core argument is that American managers' choice of English as the preferred executive medium creates an asymmetrical communication situation, which privileges local managers with strong language skills at the expense of those who lack fluency in the corporate language. In short, practice-oriented research into corporate language has demonstrated how language barriers prevail in spite of attempted homogenisation, explaining this persistence with reference to individual actors' language skills as well as their physical location within the local and global organisation.

The current paper seeks to bring together the strategic and practice-oriented approaches, emphasising that a common medium has symbolic as well as practical value to the language workers. On the one hand, respondents are inspired by the management rhetoric on corporate language, which comes across as a support for a change initiative aiming to improve the standards of written and spoken English across the multinational. Accordingly, they use personal anecdotes about miscommuni-

cation to stress the relevance of linguistic quality to organisational communication and coordination. On the other hand, the interviews reveal a lack of consensus with regard to the actual impact of the corporate policy on individual language workers' everyday experiences and relationships. While some claim to have witnessed a growing demand for language services such as proof reading since the launch of *In other words ...*, others state that the corporate guidelines have made little difference, and this has prompted them to shelve the language policy. The analysis will bring out this dual orientation, underlining how respondents may be caught in a constant wavering between a general commitment to and a local scepticism about the act of language policy-making.

To recapitulate, the discussion has examined the strategic and practice-oriented perspectives on corporate language in order to propose an analytical framework that brings the two together. This provides the conceptual foundation for the analysis, offering a possible explanation for the discrepancies encountered in the interviews. Prior to this, however, I should like to provide more information on the company, the corporate language initiative, as well as my research methodology and data collection.

3. Data and methodology

The current section consists of three parts. Part one and two contain a company profile and a presentation of the corporate language initiative. Part three provides information on research methodology, as well as the process of data collection.

3.1. Company profile

With a workforce of around 11 000 and companies in 43 countries, Grundfos represents a major player in the Danish economy. The main production area is pumps, and a large proportion of the employees are engineers or other technical staff. The corporate headquarters is located in Bjerringbro, which is a small town (pop. 3 000) in the western part of the country. Although Grundfos actively pursues a policy of diversity with regard to gender, ethnicity, ability and nationality, the majority of the employees at the Bjerringbro site are Danish-speaking. This means that the national language can be used as the primary means of communication at the lower levels of organisation, and that many of the

respondents' routine interactions are performed in Danish rather than English.

3.2. The language initiative

In its mission statement, the CEO emphasises a corporate commitment to employee involvement, decentralisation and value-based management, which reflects on the language policy. The Grundfos language policy was thus initiated by language workers from the organisational units of communications, branding, corporate management, and technical marketing. With the rise of new media such as e-mail and the internet, they had seen an increase in the number of non-professional language users involved in communication activities (e. g. engineers, line managers and marketers), and feared that the quality of language might deteriorate as a consequence thereof. In response, they formed the Language Group, which in 2003 published the Danish language policy *Med andre ord ...* in an attempt to highlight to their colleagues the value of good language. The CEO responded to the initiative by requesting a similar guide to English, which functions as the official corporate medium for communication activities involving individuals or units from more than one country. Such recognition by the corporate management was important to the project as it resulted in an allocation of resources to the Language Group, while sending out the signal to all employees that the CEO regarded language as a significant part of the company image.

The motivation behind the Grundfos language policy may be characterised in linguistic, pragmatic, or strategic terms. With regard to language, the members of the Language Group first met on the assumption that something needed to be done to improve the standards of written communication within the organisation. Their aim was to change the attitude to language within the multinational, inviting non-specialists to use the services of trained language staff as proof readers or coaches. In comparison, language workers outside the Language Group tended to regard the language policy as an answer to pragmatic questions. The lack of a standardised corporate terminology meant that a single component had different names across the organisation, which caused misunderstandings in internal as well as external communication. A corporate language policy would resolve this issue, providing a common

point of reference in linguistic matters. Finally, the corporate management may have supported the language initiative on strategic grounds (Dhir/Gòkè-Pariolá 2002: 246). By promoting the corporate language of English, the CEO sought to strengthen employees' formal and informal networks, allowing for a more effective and rapid exchange of information within the multinational.

A distinctive trait of the Grundfos language policy is the function of language ambassador. *In other words* ... defines language ambassadors as:

[Local] promoters of the Grundfos language guide. Language ambassadors may have a language background, but this is not a requirement; the best qualification is to have an active interest in promoting the good language as an important part of Grundfos' image." (Grundfos 2004: 76)

The image of language ambassadors introducing the corporate language guide to their respective units fits in neatly with the company principle of decentralisation. Accordingly, the Language Group made use of existing informal and formal networks in their attempt to change members' linguistic practice, which is interesting in the light of language management theory, which suggests a top-down process of implementation. Yet the interviews indicate that the language ambassadors may be at the heart of the global-local divide over corporate language. By relying on this group of intermediaries to spread the corporate policy, the Language Group appear to have compromised their global message, exposing the change initiative to the disruptive influences of local discontent and micro geography.

3.3. Research methodology

The Grundfos interviews present a picture of language workers' attitudes to the corporate language twelve months after the publication of a written language handbook. In the interviews respondents were asked to assess the effect of the language initiative on their respective parts of the organisation, indicating to what extent they found that a written document on language had made a difference to their routines and relationships. The responses highlight the diversity with regard to language attitudes across the organisation. Hence, the analysis of the data underlines differences as well as similarities among the language work-

ers, revealing a gap between an ideological pledge to language quality and a practical ability to translate this engagement into a working social practice.

The choice of Bjerringbro as the locus for the research was prompted by the fact that this is the principal Danish site, which in addition to the corporate headquarters hosts a range of administrative, marketing, production, and development functions. At the Bjerringbro site, it was therefore possible to obtain an adequate distribution in terms of organisational activities (e.g. management, communications, production & development) and specific language worker functions (e.g. secretary, technical writer, communication worker). The selection of respondents was made with the assistance of organisational gatekeepers in the Grundfos Language Group, who helped identify language workers interested in partaking in this type of investigation. During the interview stage, a total of eleven in-depth interviews were carried out, each lasting between forty and sixty minutes. I have since revisited the company in order to verify my findings with key actors in the process.

The respondents were all Danish, which meant that interviews were conducted in the respondents' native language rather than English. With one exception, they were women, which may influence the way they experience social interaction with the engineers, who are mostly male. Ten respondents had an educational background in modern languages, while the eleventh had become involved in language activities because of a personal interest in language quality. In terms of organisational activities, the respondents represented the units of corporate management (one), communications (one), branding (two), technical marketing (two), and production & development (five). With regard to organisational functions, the sample counted two communication workers, one proof reader, two technical writers, and six secretaries and/or personal assistants.

The data collection was designed according to Kvale's seven-stage model for qualitative research interviews (1997: 95). The theme of the inquiry was developed in co-operation with the members of the Language Group, taking into consideration the interests of the company as well as the researcher. The interview guide was composed of open-ended questions structured around four central themes: respondent's work functions, communication within the organisation, language attitudes,

and language policy. The inquiry was exploratory in nature, seeking to pursue the topics that respondents raised in the course of our conversations. Accordingly, initial data processing was carried out simultaneously with the collection of information, which allowed for a continuous integration of emergent themes into the interview guide (Spradley 1979). The analysis relied on taxonomy trees, which organise respondent statements thematically (Spradley 1979, Gregory 1983). This highlighted the importance of the global/local dichotomy, which was consequently identified as the core theme of the discussion.

The choice of a qualitative research method has certain limitations. First, the examination builds on a relatively small sample, which means that the experiences conveyed in the interviews cannot be regarded as representative of all language workers at Grundfos. Against that background, it is important that the experiences conveyed in the analysis be read as personal statements and not as an objective account of language usage and attitudes across the global organisation. Second, the focus on a single Danish site means that the findings do not necessarily apply to the communicative situation in Grundfos companies outside Denmark. To make a cross-cultural study, new research is requested, involving the performance of interviews with international language workers representing functions similar to the Danes'. In spite of such weaknesses, the employment of a qualitative method contributes to the understanding of corporate language as a social practice. While quantitative research tools mainly cater for macrolevel analysis and cross-cultural comparison, a qualitative approach allows for contextualised inquiries on individual actors' social practice and relationships. Hence, qualitative research interviews are oriented towards the micro level of organisation, which is my motivation for adopting this as the principal technique of the present study.

4. Analysis of the Grundfos data

For reasons of clarity, the analysis has been divided into sections on the value of language, the visibility of language activities, and the visibility of the corporate language policy. Within each part, examples of global and local viewpoints are examined in an attempt to underline the divided loyalties of the Grundfos language workers.

4.1. The value of language

A central issue in relation to corporate language is the value of a common medium. Unlike labour and production costs, linguistic worth is hard to measure in economic terms, which explains why it has been named the “forgotten” aspect of multinational management (Marschan et al. 1997). In an attempt to resolve the matter, Dhir (2005: 371) compares an economist/decision analyst perception of language as a means to “maximize the organization’s competitive advantage” to the socio-linguistic mission to “maximize the quality and the quantity of the social interactions”, arguing for a possible resemblance of language to currency. Yet the majority of the literature on corporate language ignores the value question, which is understandable given the problems that it raises.

The Grundfos data offer an insight into how employees assess the value of language. First of all, language workers distinguish between linguistic (high standards of written and/or oral language) and economic value (profitability). With regard to the former, there appears to be a consensus that language quality needs to be acknowledged as an asset to the multinational, and that poor linguistic standards reflect badly on the corporate brand. As one respondent puts it:

I think [language] is important. Very important. This has something to do with our external image If I spot fifteen spelling errors in a leaflet, then I cannot believe that these people are capable of manufacturing a quality product. (proof reader, branding).

At the same time, language workers have to accept that they represent a minority within the organisation, and that not all colleagues share their linguistic concerns:

Language is not very important in a company where most employees are engineers, and [engineering activities] are what we make our money from. It is a way of talking to your colleagues and you will encounter people writing e-mails, etc. – you’d be surprised to see what is sent out, the kinds of errors and strange expressions, but this is of secondary importance. In situations when things get really busy, language is not conceived of as a priority. (technical writer, technical marketing)

The contrast between language workers’ and engineers’ attitudes to linguistic value suggests a possible conflict of interests between the two professional communities. Against that background, one might expect

language workers to support an ideological commitment to corporate language, which will justify or indeed strengthen their position within the organisation.

However, the interviews reveal divisions within the group of language workers. For when respondents are asked to assess linguistic value within the context of their immediate work environment, it becomes evident that language is perceived differently across the organisation. On the one hand, employees from the management, communications, and branding units express a strong, ideological commitment to language quality, stressing that they find linguistic worth to be recognised by their colleagues regardless of their professional memberships. Accordingly, one respondent observes with reference to the corporate management:

I sincerely believe that our chief executives are very capable of spotting the difference between something presented in good English and something presented badly. They know very well how important it is for us to have high linguistic standards. (secretary, management)

On the other hand, respondents working in production and development units are less enthusiastic. Language ambassadors underline how time pressure, indifference, or indeed a lack of awareness prompt many non-professional language users to ignore the CEO request for language quality, continuing in the same way as always. One member of the Language Group ascribes this tendency to local managers' behaviour:

Really, what I find to be the scariest thing is how a lack of acceptance spreads within the organisation. For if a local manager refuses to acknowledge [his/her linguistic weaknesses], then the rest of the group will typically follow [his/her] lead. So when the manager does not recognise that s/he might require linguistic support, then his/her subordinates will not see a need for assistance either. (secretary, management)

In other words, different language attitudes seem to inspire divergent practices across the organisation, which underlines the gap between an overall commitment to language management and reality on the shop floor.

4.2. The visibility of language activities

The extent to which managers and members perceive language as a company asset is crucial to language visibility because it influences the amount of resources allocated to linguistic activities. Marschan-Piekkari et al. has identified language as the great unknown in multinational management, suggesting that international managers are not necessarily aware of language as a factor in global business (Marschan et al. 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b). Frequently, managers will take for granted employees' ability to cope in English, and a group of very dedicated language enthusiasts may be required to convince top managers of the need for a language policy. This is what happened in the Grundfos example where the Language Group had to demonstrate the relevance of their work through the publication of a Danish handbook before the corporate management decided to invest in a written language policy. For individual language workers, the visibility of language tasks influences the amount of recognition received from local managers and colleagues. In relation to this, one may distinguish between respondents performing very visible language tasks and respondents whose language work is more implicit.

Language workers who enjoy a high degree of visibility, include respondents representing the corporate activities of management, branding, communications, and technical marketing. Among their principal responsibilities are product specifications, PR materials, user instructions, and employee magazines, which are all very noticeable parts of the company's internal and external image. This motivates respondents to stress the explicit character of language within the multinational, describing work environments where the performance of oral and written communication constitutes a core activity. Central to these language workers' experience is their colleagues' acceptance of linguistic expertise as a competence equivalent to technical or management proficiencies. As one respondent observes, it is essential that cooperation across professional boundaries builds on the strengths of each occupational community:

As linguists, we will have to accept that the engineers have the technical knowledge and represent an expertise within that area. So when a team of experts have chosen a specific name for a component, we may have to accept this as the technical term even if our linguistic knowl-

edge tells us that this is not quite right. (technical writer, technical marketing)

However, individual members' ability to negotiate a compromise between linguistic and technical demands depend on their organisational position. While language workers in visible functions have few difficulties raising the question of language quality with colleagues from other professional communities, respondents from development and production groups have a different story to tell. As a secretary from a production unit explains:

[One] thing that is frequently discussed is that engineers today – they can do anything. They use their computers when writing in English, and this is so easy. That the result may not always be worth their effort – well, that is something we focus on. We hear from the management how people should use the secretaries for proof reading purposes and avoid sending out anything that has not been checked Yet we very much leave it to the individual employee to decide whether something needs to be checked or it can be sent out as it is.

The statement reveals a lack of concern with language in the respondent's part of the multinational, implying that linguistic skills represent a hidden competence that is not acknowledged by local managers and colleagues. The interviews offer three explanations for the apparent invisibility of language. First, respondents from this group have been employed to perform various secretarial duties, which means that language is not necessarily their main responsibility. Unlike the specialists from communications or technical marketing, they may have few opportunities to develop their professional knowledge, which makes their expertise less visible. Second, respondents emphasise that resources for language activities are scarce in production and development. This may be due to the fact that communication is mostly internal, but language workers also point to time pressure and financial restraints. Finally, respondents complain about a lack of support from colleagues outside the group of language workers. They explain how the promotion of corporate language is mostly met with indifference within their local work environment, and this has prompted them to exchange a global view on language for a more pragmatic approach. As one secretary puts it: "If you read what we receive from the Japanese or the Italians, they will

understand each other even if the writing is not correct. And you see, that is the main thing” (production).

4.3. The visibility of the language policy

From an ideological perspective, the Grundfos language initiative can be seen as an attempt to increase the visibility of language across the organisation. A member of the Language Group explains how the format of *In Other Words* ... was copied from the corporate branding handbook in order to signal that the two texts were part of the same campaign to heighten employees’ awareness of quality as part of the Grundfos image. The decision to publish a written language handbook is interesting because it adds to the symbolic value of the corporate language. Unlike the Kone case where the decision to use English was mainly strategic (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b, Welch et al. 2001), the Grundfos language initiative involves a physical manifestation of the corporate language through the written language handbook and the appointment of local ambassadors across the organisation. Against that background, the corporate policy and the language ambassadors may be perceived as equally important to the change process.

With regard to the global impact of the language initiative, there is a general consensus among the respondents that the act of language management has been worth the effort in the sense that a written document on language quality has increased the visibility of linguistic issues within the multinational. The involvement of the corporate management in the launch of the language policy has added to the strength of project, sending out the message to all professional communities that language should be regarded as a priority area. The Group President (Grundfos 2004: 1) writes in his introduction to *In Other Words* ...:

Grundfos’ state-of-the-art products, our processes and services as well as our striving towards world class in Business Excellence are the result of teamwork. Similarly, the best way we can achieve excellence in communication and writing is by working closely together, by strengthening cross-functional cooperation and by utilising each other’s competence in this field.

Respondents interpret this gesture in different ways. While one proof reader sees the corporate policy as her justification for pursuing an active campaign against poor writing, other language ambassadors adopt

a passive stance, expecting colleagues to approach them if requiring language assistance. Yet they agree that *In Other Words ...* is a nice tool for non-professional language users, neatly presented and very accessible, which is intriguing in the light of the following comment by one of the authors: “this is no reference book. It is more about attitudes. We have probably regarded it as a tool for the ambassadors who would then influence their colleagues” (communication worker, communications).

Language ambassadors’ conflicting views on their role in the change process have implications for the way they assess the effect of the language initiative on the local level of organisation. Respondents who have chosen a proactive stance tend to overestimate the impact of the language project, stressing that more language work is now performed, whereas respondents opting for a detached position, hardly seem to have observed a change. As one language ambassador puts it:

I think this has made a difference to the language ambassadors. I think we have become more aware of these matters. But no – I do not think this has made any difference to our engineers or technicians. We had a launch of the language handbook, and that was it. It was handed out to those who wanted it. I do not think I have ever seen anyone consult the language handbook from where I am sitting. (secretary, production)

Language workers’ evaluation of the language policy provides an interesting perspective on the global-local dichotomy in the sense that it consolidates the divisions identified in the previous parts of the analysis. Accordingly, respondents who are sceptical about the local effects of the language initiative, predominantly represent the functions of production and development, while the enthusiasts come from communications, branding, and technical marketing. This suggests that the split within the group of language workers lies very deep, and that the present investigation of corporate language may have served as a mere outlet for grievances motivated by other circumstances. However, a substantiation of this point will require more research on the community of language workers, which is beyond the scope of the present discussion.

5. Conclusion

The current inquiry has highlighted the polyvocality of organisational experiences (Bate 1997: 1166), underlining the different perceptions of a corporate language initiative that one may encounter within the group

of language workers at the Danish multinational Grundfos. Drawing on a series of qualitative research interviews, the analysis has examined the core themes of language value, language visibility, and the visibility of the corporate policy, highlighting to what extent respondents' different language activities and work contexts explain their assessment of and attitude to a corporate language initiative. This leads to the identification of a gap within the group of language workers, underlining the contrast between the global orientation of respondents from communications, branding, management, and technical marketing and the local views voiced by language workers in production and development units.

The investigation has added to the existing knowledge on corporate language through its application of a research perspective capable of presenting global and local perceptions of corporate language as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Accordingly, the analysis relies on a strategic perspective to explain the motivation behind and development of the Grundfos language policy, whereas a practice-oriented approach is used to account for respondents' responses to the change initiative. The advantage is that this allows for a comprehensive view on the act of corporate policy-making. While an understanding of the development stage of language planning demands a concern with the ideological arguments behind language management, the later phases of implementation and dissemination relate closely to the respondents' practice, requesting a locally oriented approach. In consequence, a dual orientation is a significant part of the language workers' experiences, which is why theories on corporate language will need to incorporate local as well as global viewpoints.

The Grundfos research has two main implications for the practice of language management. First of all, it consolidates the findings of Marschan-Piekkari et al.'s Kone study, challenging the common misconception that the adoption of a corporate policy on language inevitably eases knowledge-sharing and information flows within the multinational. The interviews show how the same language initiative is perceived very differently across the organisation, which suggests to managers that they take organisational diversity into consideration when planning a corporate policy. The second theme relates more specifically to the language workers. For, indirectly, respondents' conflicting statements reveal the differentiation within the professional com-

munity, causing some members to disengage themselves from a project that they perceive to have little relevance to their everyday routines. In the analysis, language visibility and value are discussed as possible reasons for this behaviour, which indicates that the corporate language policy might have spread more evenly across the multinational, had these factors been addressed at the beginning of the process. To conclude, the Grundfos example demonstrates the importance of involving language workers throughout the process of developing and implementing a corporate policy, accepting their local grievances as a pragmatic antidote to language planners' global commitment.

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