

## ABSTRACT

*Multilingual perspectives on professional discourse in Europe*

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### **The notion of BELF in the multilingual reality of multinational companies**

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Along with globalization, the use of English has become everyday practice in multinational companies (MNC), which represent inherently multilingual and multicultural communities. Sometimes English has an official status as a corporate language, other times it represents a pragmatic choice among multilingual employees with no other shared language. Although practitioners typically talk about 'English' in both cases, researchers in applied linguistics make a distinction between the two. The pragmatic choice is not conceptualized as a native language (ENL) but as a shared *resource* – business lingua franca (BELF) – used by speakers of different mother tongues to get the job done. As communication would be impossible without such a shared resource, its mere existence can be assessed as critical for the operations of the MNC.

However, the shared resource is not omnipotent alone. It can be viewed as representing only part of an individual's communicative repertoire, which refers to a collection of accessible resources to accomplish communicative tasks and interact (Blommaert, 2010; Virkkula-Räsänen, 2010). Thus, it can be argued that BELF needs support from other – both linguistic and non-linguistic – resources: e.g. other languages, gestures, visuals and artifacts. In the business context, multilingual competence and knowledge of only 'bits of languages' – for instance, greetings in the mother tongue of the recipient – can play a crucial role in creating rapport and getting the job done. Multilingual competence is also closely intertwined with intercultural competence, which in the ELF paradigm emphasizes the non-essentialist view of culture which has a complex, emergent relationship with language (Baker, 2015). This complex view of culture is also reflected in the notion of Global Communicative Competence (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011), in which multicultural competence is closely intertwined with business knowledge and BELF competence.

In today's highly turbulent environment, BELF represents a truly mobile resource, which can be exploited, localized and appropriated to get the job done together with speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. This paper will discuss the notion of BELF in the multilingual reality of MNCs.

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Virkkula-Räsänen, T. (2010). Linguistic repertoires and semiotic resources in interaction: a Finnish manager as a mediator in a multilingual meeting. *Journal of Business Communication*, 47(4), 505–531.

## BIO

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