Multilingualism, Cultural Differences and Their Management in IT Communication within European Union

Irina TANASESCU¹,
Cristina SBIRNECIU²,
Ioana PANAGORET^{3*}

¹ Ph.D. Associate, Valahia
University of Targoviste, Romania,
dtanasescu2212@yahoo.fr

² Manager Goetzfried AG Frankfurt
am Main, Germany,
cristina.sbirneciu@gmail.com

³ Ph.D. Associate, Valahia University
of Targoviste, Romania,
ioana_panagoret@yahoo.com
Corresponding author

Abstract: The goal of this research is to identify the economic value of these processes, both as outlined by studies of experts within European institutions and by good practices of multinationals or some initiatives such as the initiative of “The European Institute for Cultural Routes”.

The methodology used consists of a compared study of literature, European regulations and practical activities conducted within the European Union for valorisation of multilingualism and cultural particularities in the act of IT communication, as culture is the fundamental factor of buying and consumer behaviour.

The research has led us to a series of conclusions:

- the digital single market within the EU is built as an instrument of economic intelligence by integrating and capitalising multilingualism and multiculturalism;
- the networks and the infrastructure developed in the past 20 years in the EU enable users to communicate audio and video in an instant secured system and form a core for most types of business communication;
- IT technologies have to take account of cultural differences since markets and consumer behaviour are part of culture;
- in addition, linguistic policies in communication have to be inevitably elaborated with accuracy. Large multinational corporations seem to manage use of languages in a flexible manner and they do not exclusively focus on English language;
- native speakers of English language neglect learning a second or third foreign language, yet they are underprivileged on the European job market due to their deficiencies in relation to linguistic competencies;
- multilingualism is often associated with individual linguistic components

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1. Introduction

National economies come together under a system of worldwide integrated interdependences. The process is called globalization.

Global expansion generates serious barriers when entering a market. These difficulties are implemented in different nations and cultures, to which external variables such as economic regulations, political instability and lack of technological infrastructure are added.

The current economic model is global and based on transnational communication, cooperation and transactions. Businesses inevitably have to participate to the globalization process so that they can access foreign markets and resources which eventually turn out to be vital for the survival of a company (ITworld staff, 2001).

One often states that globalization undermines national sovereignty and democracy. A more refined version of this popular statement can be found in academic debates on “the political trilemma of the worldwide economy“. According to this concept of Dani Rodrik we are unable to simultaneously follow democracy, national sovereignty and economic globalization (Rodrik, 2011).

Europe has come to a single market after a long integration process. The author J. C. Trichet affirms that European economies have significantly changed since the post-war period. The present time introduces new global actors in the dynamics of economic and political power. Instead of relying on economic measures which proved lucrative throughout the years following the World War II, Europe should start finding “a new type of institutional framework.(Carminati, 2017)

2. Theoretical Background

The main goal of the economic intelligence is to provide a competitive advantage, which is vital in order to be successful in a market economy.

In addition to traditional exploring methods, one also uses a variety of disturbing methods: compromising companies; penetration and misinformation; undermining major contracts; “bridge-building” doctrine.

The penetration and misinformation method is characterized by attempts to put down roots in public or private entities, with the intention to obtain a confidence band for their illicit activities.

Economic differences are mainly the consequence of cultural differences (Sasu, 2012). To satisfy needs and desires and meet human

requirements, one has to understand the culture of the target market. One way to understand culture is to analyze its components and implicitly to elaborate linguistic policies which should satisfy the UE desideratum, the motto “Europe: Unity in diversity”.

The influence of culture on the economic activity has been studied as early as the 20th century. Constantin Sasu (Sasu, 2012) speaks of researchers who have enlarged on the elements of culture and he refers to Weber who has pinpointed the influence of religion, as culture element, on economic performances of the society, and to Inglehard who has studied the influence of numerous factors modifying the system of values on a sample of 65 societies.

In the digital world nowadays the industry of the information and communication technologies (ICT) has become a vital need for the business environment.

The trade literature has already provided numerous arguments on the connection between ICT, trade and economy, the positive impact on aggregated commerce and has therefore reduced the distance-related as well as the linguistic and cultural barriers.

3. IT Communication – Vital Need in a Hypercompetitive Market

The use of ICT (ICT) tools such as the Internet makes it easier to confront the supply and demand on the domestic and worldwide market. Therefore one can see the emergence of the alleged network effects through a multitude of online activities (Freund & Weinhold, 2004).

In digital terms, the buyers nowadays are considerably younger and more agile than they have ever been. At one end of the spectrum are the digital native buyers who do not know how a mobile phone-free world looks like. At the opposite end of the spectrum are the buyers who have witnessed the recent digital evolution and who have adapted to the new technologies.

It is the communicators' responsibility to admit that the customer's experience equals the importance of the products and services of the organisations which provide customers with initiative, attractive services, efficient electronic trading platforms and customer intensive research as to accurately predict future preferences and needs of buyers.

Clear communication, both internally and with partners, combined with technologies which bring new content channels and strategies, are the recipe for success. The communication activity changes and it is essential that Public Relations and professional marketing should not only keep up but try to be one step ahead (Clark, 2016).

Even the newest technologies such as “cloud computing” are used to enable companies to operate globally and not to have to sacrifice or limit their users’ safety or access.

Cloud computing allows communication in real time and instant interaction, with globally extensive access. Cloud computing removes lost data due to system accidents, avoids network malfunction issues and offers the possibility to update the software at network level. Google Docs is an example of cloud computing where several users may interact in real time with document generation and processing.

No strategy or industrial policy, no commercial, investment or research work policy will be successful without a thorough research on world-leading forces: technology, economy and politics. And currently, the better informed entity will have a decisive advantage in the worldwide economic war.

The main characteristic of the economic “war” is the economic intelligence.

The economic intelligence analyses and uses valuable information:

- the complex game among nations called “cooperation-competition”, which actively engages nearly 500 of the largest international industrial groups;
- negotiations and confrontations among the main economic blocs;
- national interests of different countries, almost with no attempt to have a dialogue;
- inter-regional strategy which is more or less free of Central Council’s guardianship;
- the linguistic area of influence and the Diaspora.

Of the highest interest for the economic intelligence are the research papers and design works, the characteristics of the technological process following research, production organisation, financial transaction companies or project financing companies, investment policies, marketing, list of customers, market conditions and transaction-related information, sales and products reports, and, last but not least, the trading philosophy of the strategy of the competition’s leaders.

The economic intelligence covers all sectors of a market economy, due to the scope of the clandestine activities meant to collect, analyse, store and use confidential information. Losses of economic information in the banking sector represent, for example, 30% of all losses taken by (European Commission, 2017). In January 2017 the European Commission (Bartoki-Gonczy, 2014) adopted a communication on “Building a European Data Economy” (Oettinger, 2016) accompanied by a Staff Working Document,

where it analyses the rules and regulations which constrain the free movement of data and current options to eliminate unjustified or disproportionate restrictions of location data.

To achieve free flow of data the European Commission will collect several proofs on location-related restrictions so as to assess their impact on enterprises, especially on SMEs and start-up companies, as well as public sector organisations (***, Digital Single Market).

Exploring emergent issues relating to the data economy is work in progress. The concept of a single European market free of trading barriers has had a significant impact on the product and service key markets and stimulated the legislative competition among member states (leading to liberalisation of rigid regulations), and has brought to the fore the cross-border economic competition, supporting innovation. Still dominated by previous state monopolies, the telecommunication markets in Europe are strikingly segregated at the level of end users.

The vision of a digital single market was introduced in 2013 by the former European Commissioner for Digital Agenda, Neelie Kroes; the first regulation variant in 2013 mainly targeted the telecommunication companies.

The Juncker Commission significantly expanded the scope of the digital single market both towards regulation on telecommunication and radio wave management and in the sector of copyrights and data protection legislation, for which there was a proposal for unification at European level.

As for the future of Europe as a technology market, the successful reforms should significantly reduce its complexity.

4. Multilingualism in Europe – Concept, Interactions and Communication Barriers

In the European Union, all official languages are equal – at least in theory. Nevertheless every day practice is very different, especially due to languages such as English, Spanish, French or German which are used more often than languages such as Romanian, Bulgarian or Estonian. Moreover, national policies on immigration do not obviously treat all languages equally and perceive multilingualism as an active obstacle for social cohesion. While multilingualism is often proclaimed as a valuable asset in official documents, in reality there is only one type of multilingualism that is valued, whereas others are seen as an issue.

Despite the various assessments made, the concept of multilingualism itself is vague to a large group of people – including the decision-making factors within the EU – as they understand and use the term differently. To some people multilingualism represents education policies, to others it stand for protection of minority languages, while to the rest it constitutes the capacity of professional insertion and international competition. The term of “multilingualism” is mainly associated to two types of discourse: first in relation to human rights and protection of minorities, and second in relation to the economic value of multilingualism. While the discourse on human rights approaches all languages equally, the economic pragmatism promotes use of individual languages or combinations of preferred languages so as to increase the economic success.

Conflict mitigation seems to pay fruit in the tourism industry: initiatives such as the European Institute of Cultural Routes appear to be successful in the European history within the meaning of “Unity in Diversity” and they may change perceptions among indigenous populations.

Some languages are “more equal” than others. English, Spanish and French are extensively used worldwide.

Whereas all official EU documents should be translated into all official languages of the EU member states, the EU institutions have

internally agreed upon using in practice two to three working languages – English, French and German.

Even some EU officials who are responsible for linguistic policies consider that multilingualism is a fashionable term used to put forward the idea of an integrated Europe which is yet unable to approach fundamental tensions and real issues.

Europe is not united in a perfect harmony. “Europe: Unity in Diversity“ is the EU motto – a simple, positive and optimistic idiom which is suitable for the efforts pursued towards promoting it. This idiom is however less appropriate for making political decisions and reality-related decisions. Despite the echo of the motto, the statements of the EU officials and the official documents do not approach European issues such as power relations among member states, the past of colonial Europe, the role of the English language in Europe, the migration inside and outside Europe or conflicts between national states.

The European initiative “The European Institute for Cultural Routes” supports creation of a tourist industry which promotes “Unity in Diversity”. The Institute has a number of experts to “cool down” the past and attaches a great importance to what unifies rather than to what separates Europe. The initiative seems to have a considerable impact on tourism in Istria (Croatia), Poznań and Gdańsk (Poland): the sights are marketed as unique assets both in the country or region and as part of Europe. As part of Europe, the diversity in tourism seems to function as an “added value“. This presentation of Europe may change the perception among natives who constantly hear the same stories about their own history as they are presented to tourists.

Although the term “multilingualism“ is often used in documents on European policies, its meaning is unclear even to human decision-making factors within the European institutions for linguistic planning or the monitoring institutions. When requested to define multilingualism, most of them answered vaguely or used institutionalized, pre-formulated answers. Multilingualism has often been associated with individual linguistic competencies, the EU obligation to use its official languages when in contact with citizens of the member states as well as the use of the language within the European Union itself. (European Commission, 2014). None of these sectors has benefited from a precise use of multilingualism and no potential management mode has been found.

For example, from a purely economic perspective, the minority languages are of small international importance whereas in a speech on

human rights all languages are equal – irrespective of the number of people who speak them.

The parties concerned and the decision-making factors seem to find it difficult to reconcile the contradiction between the speeches on human rights and economic value, and they tend to focus on one or the other, never on both of them. Their argument is bound to fail when the special request is to blend these two meanings. The situation becomes even more complex when terms such as “pluri-lingualism“ or “linguistic diversity“ are taken into consideration, in the attempt to emphasize the difference between multilingualism and these concepts.

The controversial role of the English language is the greatest challenge for the multilingualism policy. For practical purposes, the EU institutions could not function simultaneously in all these languages; therefore a common language – namely English – was opportune. Nevertheless, English language was not favourable in cultural and ideological terms, as it reduces the linguistic diversity to a single language and it generates negative feelings among the member states.

In the other hand, multinational companies have not insisted on using a specific language, except for reporting purposes. Many have a corporate language which is most times English, but the employees seem to have the liberty to express themselves in other languages if this makes them feel more comfortable. When companies choose a language or implement language training they take account of the languages spoken by their potential customers and want to use the languages that their potential employees speak the best. English language is important for international communication, as many people understand it. But as soon as companies communicate with customers or regional government who use other languages at work, such languages are also used within companies. To conclude, multinational companies seem to manage use of languages flexibly and they do not concentrate exclusively on English.

5. Cultural Differences and Their Implications in the Communication Act

Culture and cultural differences are the most important elements to consider in relation to an international marketing activity. Although there are differences between various countries and markets, they are somehow quantifiable. The commercial regulations and laws are clearly enunciated, the technological possibilities or infrastructure may be easily observed and analyzed. On the other hand, to understand *culture, the whole heritage of the*

society conveyed by speech, the literature or other means of communication, the culture which includes traditions, customs, religion, art and language, one has to analyse and know it in all its forms and means of expression.

Culture includes both conscious and unconscious values, ideas, attitudes and symbols which model the human behaviour and are conveyed from generation to generation (Heegan W., 1984) culture is everything that people have, think and do as members of the society (Ferraro, 1990).

Cateora (Cateora, Gilly, & Graham, 2012) says that there are two types of knowledge about culture: factual knowledge, which is obvious and has to be learnt (different meanings and colours, different tastes) – things and actions that the marketing man may foresee, study and absorb. The other type is the interpretative and interpretable knowledge, the ability to fully understand and appreciate the nuances of cultural characteristics and patterns (Cateora et al., 2012) In addition, the claim is made that the landmark for a marketing person should be the sentence "markets are not (static), they become (change) they expand and scale down as responses to marketing efforts, economic conditions and other cultural influences, because markets and consumer's behaviour form part of the culture".

Culture has some important characteristics: it is complete (comprehensive) – all its elements combine in a system of logic relations; culture is learned and not innate; it manifests itself within the borders of a generally accepted behaviour; the consciousness of cultural standards is limited; cultures form part of a static-dynamic continuum and depend on how rapidly it accepts the change.

However, how relevant is culture to the marketing activity? According to Kotler, the consumer buying behaviour is influenced by four essential categories of characteristics: cultural, social, personal and psychological. He perceives culture as the fundamental determining factor of a person's desires and behaviour (Kotler & Armstrong, 2003).

Our understanding of corporate communication in a multicultural environment is mainly in line with what Appelbaum and Belmuth define as long-term planning of the strategic way to deal with other countries' public relations (Appelbaum & Belmuth, 2007).

6. Conclusions

We consider that linguistic abilities and international experience are extremely important in today's business environment and they even represent a prerequisite to recruit staff. In addition to sound knowledge of

English, it is often useful (or mandatory, in some cases) that potential employees should have competencies in other languages;

We also consider that an individual who does not have the capacity to create interpersonal relations and networks will never succeed in achieving corporate goals even though he or she has the best aptitudes and linguistic and general knowledge. This highlights the very importance of communication in corporate and organisational terms. Finally, individual communicators are seen as part of the whole, as members of staff and contributors to the success of the organization; they keep the reputation within a preset framework of corporate communication;

One of the keys to successful business communication may consist in high quality support materials which employees can use at all times, having therefore the capacity to react rapidly and creatively whenever they need to communicate in a multicultural environment;

Linguistic competences and cultural *know-how* are considered to be minimum professional requirements for employers to consider. Individuals' linguistic and cultural competencies grow and develop with international experience, and these abilities may be further shared within teams. Many international organizations recommend exchange periods with employees working abroad or courses which should bring together workforce from different countries;

Organisations generally cope with a situation in which processes of both internal and external communication should be organized and coordinated better than before in order to build and maintain a favourable worldwide reputation. There has to be a good balance between the standard operation modes and the solutions adapted to local needs;

Special emphasis should be laid on issues such as crisis communication, corporate social responsibility and media relations in multicultural settings. In renowned multinational organisations, even though English is used as common language, all important conferences, decisions, official documents are translated into all European languages so that all and any "loss" of information should be avoided;

"Without an excellent internal communication, beyond frontiers and cultures, it is difficult to convey a consistent, efficient message to the external parties concerned. Since each employee is a potential worldwide brand ambassador, the outstanding internal communication is essential" (Appelbaum & Belmuth, 2007).

In a multicultural environment, English plays a central part in relation to ***internal communication***. Only one linguistic competency in English with no personal abilities of cultural adaptation falls short of what is

needed. To guarantee a successful internal communication in a multicultural environment each employee also needs to have a sound understanding of how the organisation works and of the impact it may have on internal communication processes;

Multicultural tasks often take shape of projects carried out in teams. Some challenges of multicultural corporate communication have been discussed in relation to *teamwork*, in its different forms. Communication-related challenges are connected to issues which require complex and advanced forms of cooperation, such as team management, project management, as well as material documentation management;

Employees who work in multicultural business environments need:

- linguistic competencies (mandatory competencies in English language and other European languages);
- cultural awareness and sensitivity (often acquired through training and with experience);
- creativity, flexibility and adaptability in finding practical manners to be successful at work, in spite of cultural multiplicity;
- capacity to see the corporate image and the organisation reputation as a whole.

Even though an individual may have the capacity to establish excellent relations and inter-personal networks, on the one hand, and good linguistic knowledge on the other hand, he or she may still fail in communication;

Persons with relatively limited linguistic and cultural abilities may however cope with the mission and reach the corporate objectives by efficiently using different support networks in communication and management.

We plead for the term *multicultural* instead of *intercultural*, which is so frequently used in literature;

In all organisations communication will continue to be the “central nervous system” which is worth investigating further, in light of the new technologies available and from the perspective of globalisation and the new type of target audience.

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