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'we don't speak proper English ourselves'. Language problems in a multinational company

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'we don't speak proper English ourselves'. Language problems in a multinational company

MNCs are linguistically diverse and this diversity is often associated with problems assumed to arise from language barriers and variation in language competence. The position we take in this paper is that language 'problems' are typically ideological indexing power struggles at work. We draw on excerpts from interviews in a multinational company. We focus on how language problems are constructed in talk (i.e. interview events). We take an ethnographic approach combined with an interactional sociolinguistic analysis of our data. Our analysis shows that employees' valuation of language competence is related to organisational activities, contingent on the (perceived) situational and institutional context. Language practices in the data become sites to negotiate power relations. We argue that talk *about* language problems can provide an insight into individuals' ideological positioning and multilingual realities (Angouri and Piekkari, 2017). We close the paper with a discussion of our findings in relation to the institutional and social orders and we provide directions for further research.

Introduction

MNCs are often represented as multilingual communities constituted of languages of the parent company and its sub-units and markets (Luo and Shenkar, 2017:59). In this context, English is often 'mandated as the corporate language' in intra- and inter- organisational communication across geographically dispersed units (Logemann and Piekkari, 2015:31). The linguistically diverse organisation has been associated with problems assumed to arise from language barriers (e.g. Harzing and Feely, 2008, Tenzer et al., 2014) and variation in language competence (e.g. Harzing and Pudelko, 2013, Śliwa and Johansson, 2014).

Perceptions of language problems are related to ideologies about 'how much' language employees should have (Lippi-Green, 2011). Language in this context is often treated as commodity, something one can 'either have it or not' (e.g. Allan, 2013, Urciuoli, 2008, Urciuoli and LaDousa, 2013); and language competence becomes a 'basis for deciding one's worth' as an employee (Heller, 2010b:102). Relatively recent research on multilingualism, however, takes a more dynamic approach to see a language as resources people mobilise, and thus, situated in and contingent on the context of the particular activities and interaction (e.g.Angouri, 2013, 2014, Angouri and Piekkari, 2017, Kramsch and Whiteside, 2008, Roberts, 2010, Wodak et al., 2012). From this perspective, language use is 'becoming part, rather than a cause, of dynamics' (Angouri, 2013:574). Instead of seeing language as a static national language, recent work refers to the multilingual realities of modern organisations, their complex 'linguistic

ecosystem' that also interacts with broader social conditions (Angouri and Piekkari, 2017, forthcoming). To understand more fully multilingualism at work, a holistic approach is necessary to account for social and institutional environment, ideologies and local team practices.

Language use is related to powerful ideologies in ways that the dominant language enforces a linguistic capital, (re)producing the social order (e.g. Heller, 2010a, 2010b, Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010, Pennycook, 2014). Linguistic capital, in Bourdieu's (1991) framework, is defined as 'the capacity to produce expressions *à propos, for* a particular market' in which some linguistic products are valued more than others and their distribution is associated with other forms of capital (e.g. economic, cultural) (p.12). In the global market, languages have varying market value and distinguish between the more/less privileged. Phillipson (2009, 2014, 2016), among many others, critiques the dominance of English and the (re)producing of a social order in the linguistic markets. Drawing on the concept of linguistic imperialism, he points out economic and political forces that underlie English operate 'through structures and ideologies, entailing unequal treatment for groups identified by language' (2016:2). Work on ELF in this regard has reported political implications of the English hegemony on, for example, communicative practices and the (post-colonial) identity of language speakers (e.g. Bhatt, 2010, Mufwene, 2010, Pennycook, 2014). What is particularly relevant to our paper is the link between linguistic ideologies and a nationalistic discourse. For example, Vaara et al.'s (2005) work on a corporation language policy argues that languages are mobilised as 'concrete examples, signifiers and emblems of national identification' (p.598) and, therefore, symbolise one's national identity. In a similar vein, Wodak (2012) argues that 'using language manifests who we are' (p.216), and thus is involved in processes of defining similarities and differences between the social groups, producing social categories and identities. We return to this point in light of our data.

In this paper, we report on employees' talk about language 'problems' at work. We take a discursive approach and look how language is discursively constructed as a problem. The position we take is problem as a negatively marked term is never neutral. We focus here on how employees '*do*' problem talk – how language problems are constructed in and through the here-and-now of interaction, situated in the institutional- and social order – and the individuals' (linguistic) ideological positioning. We draw on narratives from interviews of employees conducted in a British subsidiary of a Korean multinational company, Eco UK. We take an

ethnographic approach combined with discourse analysis, involving observation of language practices and the interaction with employees over an extensive period of time in the company.

This paper is organised as follows: we start by discussing the discursive approach to researching organisational problems, the concept of language commodification and language ideology. Then we move into the analysis of language problem talk and discuss the linguistic ideologies that emerge in the data and show how language can become an instrument to access organisational activities, and a site to (re)construct the institutional and social orders. We close the paper by arguing that the construction of 'language problems' indexes dominant language ideologies and is related to the power im/balance in any given workplace. We also pay special attention to interactional sociolinguistics and the associated theoretical and methodological tools in order to capture and unpack the complexity of the language 'problem'.

(Language) 'Problems' as discursively constructed

'Problems' have long been studied from a range of non-linguistic perspectives, behaviourist and cognitivist approaches are common, which treat problems as external to the individuals, and thus pay little attention to the way problems are constructed. From a discursive perspective, which we take, 'problems' are understood as not only imposed from outside but also immanently generated and constructed through interaction. We see organisational 'problems' here as 'work-related topics raised by an employee' that are locally constructed in relation to the organisational activities and institutional context (Angouri and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011:211). Situated in the interactional and broader social context, the investigation of language use at work requires understanding of the workplace context encompassing organisational structure, ideologies and local team practices (Roberts, 2010:221).

Problems attributed to language often index deep power struggles and language ideologies. Vaara et al.'s (2005) study in the context of a post-merger corporation delineates language issues and problems which emerged when negotiating particular communication practices at work. The study indicates the language policy that favours one language over another promotes 'superiority-inferiority' relationships between groups of members who share the same language, and further 'national identification and the nationalist ideology' symbolised by the language (p.619). The link between power, language and identity has received attention from (socio-)linguistics scholars (e.g. Angouri and Miglbauer, 2014, De Fina, 2013, Wodak et al., 2012), too. Wodak (2012) argues that 'language itself as part of individual and collective

identity construction' is employed to 'define similarities and differences', creating 'us' and 'others' (p.216-217). Wodak et al.'s (2012) study on multilingual practices in an institutional setting shows participants' language practices (e.g. the choice of language and controls of the interaction flow) are shaped by their ideological positioning and the contextual factors, and power manifested through the practice. What is important for our present analysis is that language practices at work are linked to power, and problems constructed around the language index dominant ideologies in the organisational context. For example, Angouri and Miglbauer's (2014) study on employees' talk about language practices in MNCs shows that local talk does not merely reflect communication difficulties at work but indicates power struggles. In this study, the issues of power im/balance between local and global employees are associated with the enactment of a native speaker ideal. We will revisit the power implication in light of the data. Before that we turn to the commodification of language.

Language as a resource/ site for (im)balancing the power

Language is often seen as socio-economic resource that can (dis)empower organisational actors in the globalised economy (e.g. Brannen et al., 2014, Logemann and Piekkari, 2015, Luo and Shenkar, 2017, Peltokorpi and Vaara, 2017). In line with Bourdieu's (1991) symbolic capital framework, linguistic research has shown how language comes to be treated as a marketplace skill or resource in new economy settings and, consequently, how it creates social hierarchies and social in/exclusion processes (e.g. Cameron, 2012, Del Percio et al., 2017, Heller and Duchêne, 2016, Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010). What is particularly relevant to this paper is the valuation of a particular language (competence) that is legitimised in interaction, and in the given socio-economic and institutional settings (Del Percio et al., 2017, Duchêne and Heller, 2012). The valuation processes indicate one's strong ideological positioning around the language competence in the local/global language/s of an institution (Angouri and Miglbauer, 2014). Language competence in this way is treated as an asset to access organisational activities including decision-making, roles and positions and other critical resources (Heller, 2010b). Local talk around language 'problems' can provide an insight into ideological positioning of individuals in relation to discourses around language-as-commodities.

Recent studies (e.g. Del Percio et al., 2017, Heller, 2010a, 2010b, Martin Rojo, 2017, Roberts, 2010, 2011, Wells, 2013) see language use as a site that regulates individuals' access to material and symbolic resources that include group/ occupational membership status, and thus part of the processes in which the social order is (re) produced. Language use and its role, therefore,

need to be understood in association with organisational activities and practices through which material and symbolic resources are produced, circulated and consumed (Del Percio et al., 2017:59). In other words, the symbolic value/ power attached to specific linguistic resources needs to be understood in the context in which the value is recognised and ratified. From this point of view, we explore how a language situated in organisational activities and practices becomes a site to (re)construct power relations between individuals and between social groups, and the institutional and social order. We return to this point in the light of our findings later in the paper.

Methods and data

We draw on data from an ongoing research project on problem (-solving) talk at work. The data was collected at a British subsidiary of a Korean multinational company, Eco UK. In Eco UK, there was neither an official language nor a language policy, and English as a lingua franca was used in general organisational activities. British employees did not speak Korean. Korean language was used mainly between Korean employees within the subsidiary and between the subsidiary and the headquarters.

The project takes an ethnographic approach combined with interaction analysis to provide insights into participants' understandings of the reality and linguistic resources that form part of participants' daily communication (Angouri and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011, De Fina, 2013). The data collection methods include: observations, (in) formal interviews, and audio-recording of (in) formal interactions in the company. The ethnographic understandings contextualise problem talk under scrutiny and help our interpretation of the ways language problems are constructed. We understand interviews to be co-constructed events involving the researcher and the participants. This foregrounds the central role of the interviewer in the process and the subjective nature of research activity (on epistemological issues see Elliott, 2005). The first author carried out the interviews in the context of a PhD project. While in the field, she self-positioned as a Korean research student. This unavoidably mobilised particular performances of Korean-ness in the data. We consider this a normal process of negotiating common ground between the interlocutors in an interview event and do not see the interviewer as an objective or detached actor in the encounter.

In this paper, we draw on narratives taken from a corpus of 20 hours of interviews on language use and relevant issues (e.g. workplace practices, challenges and difficulties encountered at

work) and conversations took place in the field, written in the fieldnotes. The interviews were conducted with 17 employees (see Figure 1) over two periods of fieldwork. The languages used for the interviews were: English with British employees and a Hungarian employee, and Korean with Korean employees, as the interviewer shares her mother tongue with them. We put in parentheses English name of Korean employees used in Eco UK. The excerpts in this paper are taken from interviews with Kelly, Rita, Jihoon (Josh) and Ted and the fieldnotes on conversations that the researcher had with Minsu (Max) and Soobin. The excerpts in the discussion are used to illustrate the core themes that emerged from our data analysis.

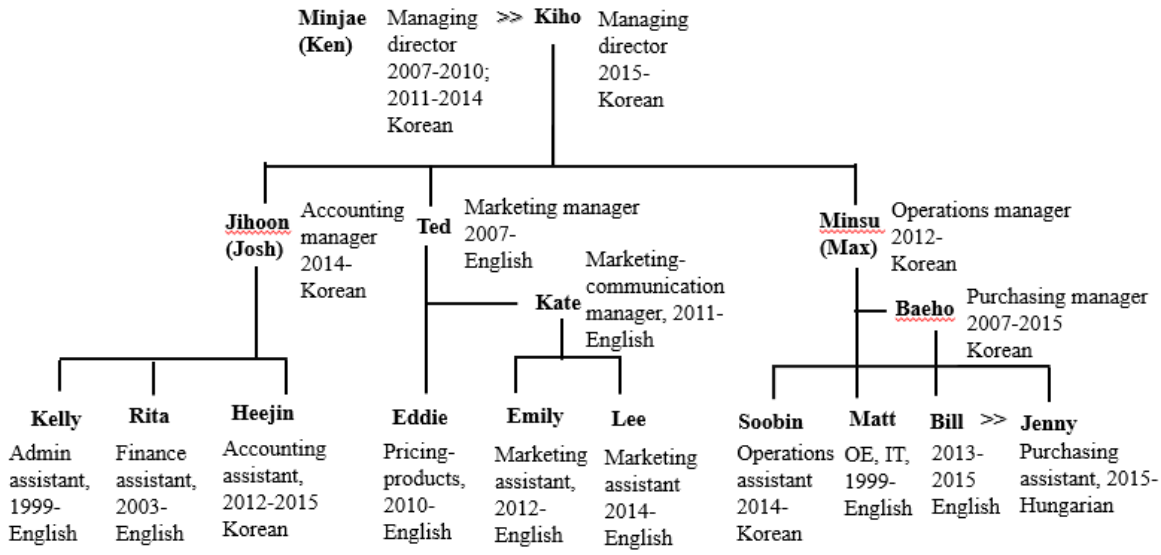

Figure 1. Key participants (roles, job tenure, mother tongue) and the organisational structure

In analysing the data, we firstly conducted an inductive qualitative analysis by using MAXQDA software programme to develop our understanding of the language the participants used to conceptualise problems (first-order concepts) and aggregate the similar concepts into the second-order themes, which then can be categorised into the third-order concepts. We then applied interactional sociolinguistics as an analytic framework to unpack indexical processes by examining linguistic choices that index individuals' positioning, 'presuppositions' signalled, mobilised and interpreted in interactions (Gumperz, 2015:219). With focus on interviewees' ideological positioning, we refer to Angouri and Piekkari's (2017) analytic model of multilingualism at workplace (see Figure 2). The model allows to connect the local talk with the institutional- and social order by relating language choices made in the here-and-now of interaction with 'the language resources available in the broader institutional- and social

context. The framework therefore is useful for our analysis of local talk about language problems, and the dynamics of the ways interactants operate at the interface of these three orders. To capture linguistic resources (e.g. categories and shared assumptions) available to and mobilised by participants, we pay close attention to recurring discourse patterns within and across the interviews, which were also observed in the ethnographic fieldwork (De Fina, 2013). In the next section, we discuss our findings on the construction of language problems.

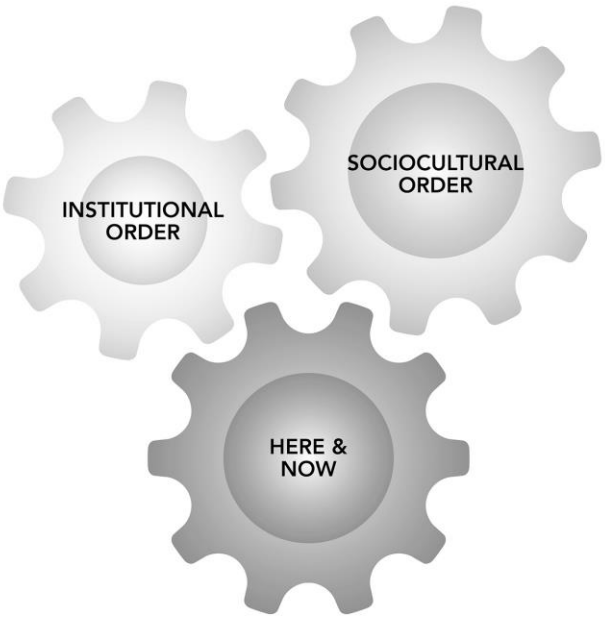

Figure 2. Unpacking multilingualism in the modern workplace (Angouri and Piekkari, 2017)

Findings

Language in Eco UK is often framed as a 'problem'. This is discursively constructed in relation to linguistic competence of individuals and certain groups, and language practices at work. Language problems are portrayed as taken-for-granted reality as part of the organisational practices within the subsidiary and between the subsidiary and the headquarters. In participants' problem talk, two core themes emerged: *Valuation of (English) language competence* and *The Us vs. Them dichotomy: the non-English speaking 'Korean' and 'HQ'*. We discuss them in turn and then relate back to the discussion on language ideology.

Valuation of (English) language competence

The discourses around language-as-commodity along with the valuation of English language competence is prominent in participants' accounts of language issues and problems. English language competence is portrayed and ratified as an instrument that allows/ regulates access to critical resources that include organisational activities (Angouri & Miglbauer, 2014).

In Excerpt 1 from an interview with Jihoon, an expatriate accounting team manager, we will show how linguistic competence emerges as his main concern in relation to his language ideologies and perception of the local and institutional context. The excerpt is taken from the part in which Jihoon was asked to elaborate on his concerns at work:

Excerpt 1.

1	IR	What's your main concern in working in the team?
2	Jihoon	The top priority is to master my job tasks. […] When somebody
3		mentions something… you know… when they ask their manager
4		something and the manager doesn't know the basic stuff, they tend to
5		look down on their manager. So I tried to learn them in details and
6		relevant knowledge. And I should be more able to understand English
7		language. It is one of my main concerns. In practice, if I can
8		communicate with my staff members in English a hundred percent
9		fluently, I can shorten the process and I don't need to request
10		someone for anything. I can just make phone calls and confirm, then I
11		can get immediate response. This has improved gradually, but
12		still this is the most difficult.
		[11 lines omitted]
24	IR	You said your language skills have improved…?
25	Jihoon	Yes. My language skills have improved. In the beginning, when I was
26		in a meeting, it was very difficult because I had no idea about what
27		they were talking about. Meetings were very difficult. Everyone
28		spoke English… like a listening test… I needed to understand
29		everything discussed in the meeting… […]

Jihoon talks about his linguistic competence in relation to his institutional roles and perceived institutional environment. From line 2, Jihoon brings to the fore his institutional role and

position as a manager that requires knowledge (lines 2-6) as well as language ability (lines 6-12). This is foregrounded by his ideology about language regulates one's access to organisational activities, occupational status and institutional roles (Roberts, 2010). The statement '*I should be more able to understand English*' (lines 6-7) positions English in the company as something that one '*should*' have in accessing the institutional roles. This indicates values attached to English are constructed in association with participants' perceived professional roles and business activities. We discuss elsewhere (Kim and Angouri, 2017, in preparation) how roles and role performance is constructed in workplace events. His comment on what he can (not) do and the importance placed on language put forward a strong ideal of linguistic competence (lines 7-11). Through this ideology positioning, Jihoon constructs himself as being responsible for his own 'linguistic marginality' (Del Percio et al., 2017) and affirms the superiority/inferiority relationship between English as the dominant language and Korean.

The hegemonic status of English vis-à-vis linguistic competence of Jihoon are constructed through the framing of the institutional environment. From line 25, he frames the institutional environment in terms of meetings in which English is mandated. He portrays meetings with the lexical choice '*a listening test'* (lines 28) in which '*Everyone spoke English'* (lines 27-28) and he '*needed to understand everything*' (lines 28-29). His framing of the institutional environment legitimises the hegemonic status of English and, thus, the valuation of the English competence in the workplace. This indicates the significance and impact of language ideologies on organisational activities, including meetings and other decision-making processes.

The valuation of English language is also observed in casual conversation between the researcher and Minsu, a Korean expatriate manager, where he brought to the fore English competence of the local Korean employees. The following is extracted from the fieldnotes:

> According to Minsu: he had an expectation of the Korean local employees to be highly competent in English and have local knowledge. That's the reason why they (Eco UK) hire Korea local employees. He had been disappointed with his previous Korean local employees, who were not fluent in English (FN, 10072015)

Minsu's expectation of 'the Korean local' indicates Minsu's language ideology that creates a direct link between language competence and 'one's worth as an employee' (Heller,

2010b:102). This is further supported by comments from Heejin and Soobin, Korean local employees on a job vacancy in the operations team that the company needs to hire a Korean local employee to support the expatriate managers (FN, 08072015). This exemplifies the valuation of language situated in the particular institutional setting in which the value is recognised. Hence, how English is valuated requires understandings of the institutional role expectation and structure that are embedded in the given socio-economic setting (Duchêne and Heller, 2012).

In relation to the dominant ideologies about language as commodity, in the next section, we look closely into ideological representation of social groups (i.e. language communities) and how the "Us" vs. "Them" dichotomy is constructed within the company and between the companies.

The Us vs. Them dichotomy: The non-English speaking '*Korean*' and 'HQ'

Participants' ideologies about language and differences underpin the language problems and creates the Us-Them dichotomy within the subsidiary and between the subsidiary and the headquarters. Participants' mobilisation of labels, categories and assumptions characterise how *'we'/ 'they' (don't) speak*, defining who *'we'/ 'they'* are (Wodak, 2012).

We firstly discuss the way certain groups are discursively constructed within Eco UK through the findings of Excerpt 2 and 3 then, move onto the one between the subsidiary and the headquarters through the findings of Excerpt 4.

The following excerpt is taken from an interview with Kelly where she talked with about her experience of working for her previous and current '*Korean'* managers in Eco UK:

Excerpt 2.

1	IR	What practices have you found difficult to adjust?
2	Kelly	Usually… when I first came over, we had a language barrier problem
3		and… Not similar to Ken (Minjae), who speaks to everybody, George
4		(Taeho) when he first came, the one before Josh (Jihoon), he didn't
5		speak very good English at all at the beginning. And that was really
6		quite hard to get…. […]
7	IR	How did you deal with this issue?
8	Kelly	Very frustrated…(laughter) very frustrated…. (laughter)

9	IR	So…just…?
10	Kelly	Just keep going and going and going… or walk away… because we've
11		got frustrated…. And then we go back again and try to explain… and
12		eventually they understand. It's only really… I would say…. in the
13		beginning of the first six months. They are trying to adjust… because
14		we don't speak proper English ourselves. We speak slang so it's hard
15		for them sometimes to even understand what we are saying.
16	IR	Do you tend to speak to them slowly sometimes?
17	Kelly	I forget. But yes I'm supposed to. But I don't wanna speak too slowly
18		so they think I think they are stupid or anything. I think they all speak
19		pretty good English. We probably speak fast. We have accents so
20		sometimes it's harder for them to understand. I think…. Mainly that's
21		probably the beginning… language barrier.

Kelly in this interaction draws on '*a language barrier problem'* (line 2) in accounting for her difficulties in communicating with her managers (lines 2-15). The language problem here is foregrounded by her assessment of language competence of her managers (lines 3-6). Mobilised with the collective pronouns, '*we*' and '*they*', the assessment produces the ideological representation of her managers characterised as, for example, not speaking *'very good English at all'* (line 5) and '*hard to get'* (line 6) but also *"they all speak pretty good English"* (line 19). Kelly mobilises native speaker symbols of competence such as 'slang', 'speak fast' and 'accent'. The representation of linguistic features of (groups of) employees symbolises and constructs linguistic communities or group memberships (De Fina, 2013:55) and, hence, essentialises the linguitisc features of certain groups of individuals (Coupland, 2010:242) as examplified in Kelly's assessment of her managers' linguistic competence (lines 3-5). Her ideological representation of 'the managers' explains away Ken (Minjae)'s English competence, '*who speaks to everybody*' (line 3), as it does 'not fit' her 'interpretive structure' (Irvine and Gal, 2000:37-38).

Language competence, in the interview, is mobilised and associated with group membership and legitimisation of 'us' and 'others', in- and out- groups (Gal, 2009:32). Her elaboration of the situation in which '*we've got frustrated'* and '*they are trying to adjust… because we don't speak propoer English ourselves'* (lines 13-14) creates the dichotomy of '*we*' versus '*they*', and denotes an issue of 'who is supposed to fit in' (Roberts, 2010). This is further supported

by her expression of the timeline '*the beginning of the first six months*' (line 13) for the managers to '*adjust*' to the local (linguistic) practices, and possibly to become the 'member' to participate in the practices.

In Excerpt 3, the similar patterns to the Excerpt 2 emerge: the categorisation and the assessment of linguistic competence. The excerpt below, however, delineates how the categorisation processes are entangled with nationalistic discourse and ideologies about differences (Vaara et al., 2005, Wodak, 2012). This excerpt is taken from an interview with Rita in which she brought up differences in practices between her previous workplaces and Eco UK.

Excerpt 3.

1	IR	What differences have you found?
2	Rita	I suppose it's just different. I work for the Korean managers. So, of
3		course, it's very hard. Before… I always used to work for English
4		managers. And of course, since I've been in Eco, I've always reported
5		to Koreans… I suppose it's different in every way… you know….
6		the way you communicate and you talk… you know that sort of
7		things... the language… […] You know (when) Josh's arrived, his
8		English wasn't very good in the beginning… When George
9		worked, his predecessor, when George arrived, he hardly spoke
10		any English. But I think it's a confidence thing with the Korean staff
11		when they have first arrived because they have to use it constantly.
12		Then every time George got really good … And Josh puts himself
13		down a little bit because he says "My English isn't too good"
14		"Yeah… It's fine. We understand what you are saying." You tend to
15		speak for them. You know what they want to say. You tend to
16		speak for them really…
17	IR	Do you have any strategies to communicate better…?
18	Rita	No… […] If somebody asks…say Kate came over and asked him a
19		question. And he may look a bit confused… I would notice that….So
20		I would talk like and say to him "Look Josh, she wants…" I try to
21		break it down more for him. […] George as well. So you sort of get to
22		know…Especially when they first come, we all talk very quickly…

23 you know… you have to tend to slow it down a little bit, you have to
24 try to understand them to begin with… being a mother to
25 them…really, looking after them. That's all. Bless them. (laughter)

Rita in this interaction portrays working for '*the Korean managers'* as '*very hard'* (lines 2-3); and her expression, '*of course'* (lines 2-3) preceding the portrayal may indicate the difficulties in working for Korean managers are shared assumption. Her accounts of working for the Korean managers here are directly linked to her ideology of difference (Dhamoon, 2010), indexed by her repeated statements, *It's just different* (2) and *It's different in every way* (5). This is supported by her previous talk in the same interview about different practices between her previous and current workplaces. Given her following description that assesses her managers' English competence (lines 7-16), the ideology about differences '*in every way'* including '*the way you communicate and you talk'* and '*the language' (lines 5-7)* comes down to the linguistic competence, echoing the findings of Excerpt 2. The language serves here a salient means for the ideology of differences intertwined with the national identification (Gal, 2009), as indicated by her mobilisation of '*the Korean*' (lines 2, 10). The labelling of '*the Korean*' (e.g. *the Korean managers, Korean colleagues*) is commonly observed across employees' accounts of language problems in Eco UK. The ideology of difference circulated in the local discourse actively constructs the meanings of *the Korean* as well as (language) problems; and the problems, in turn, reinforce the ideology of differences.

The assessment of linguistic competence of *the Korean* (lines 7-16) is underpinned by the native speaker ideal, against which the manager's lack of English competence is claimed (Angouri and Miglbauer, 2014:163). Through the acts of the assessment, Rita positions herself as a 'legitimate owner' of English who has the right to 'put a price on' other's linguistic competence (Del Percio et al., 2017:63). Her positioning continues in her illustration of a situation in which Jihoon needs linguistic support from Rita (lines 18-25). Rita's lexical choices '*a mother to them*' (line 24) and '*looking after them*' (line 25) indicate her positioning as 'powerful', being capable to exercise controls in language practices (Angouri and Miglbauer, 2014:164) and Jihoon as well as '*the Korean managers*' (line 2) as 'powerless' being unable to access the practices. The linguistic authority operates here as a means of creating superiority-inferiority relationships between the languages and speakers of the language (Vaara et al., 2005:602). Through the positioning, she may challenge or balance the power relations between herself and the Korean managers, and language practices become a site to (re)create power

relations, and the institutional order. Rita's discursive positioning herself and her managers in the illustration of language practices at work resonates how language becomes a site through which the power (im)balance is achieved (Bourdieu, 1991), and the institutional order is (re)constructed.

In Excerpt 4, we look into the way the '*global*' head office is constructed through the illustration of language practices between the headquarters and the subsidiary, and how the institutional order can be (re)constructed through the practices. This excerpt is taken from an interview with Ted, a marketing manager, in which he portrays the way he communicates with employees in the headquarters:

Excerpt 4.

1	Ted	Eco, I think, likes that (emails) as an organisation anyway.
2		They like to communicate via electronically rather than voice to voice
3		Well, from an English point of view to a Korean point of view, I
4		actually, it's sometimes easier to read an email I suppose for… We
5		are lucky. English is the global language. So we are lazy.
6	IR	((laughter))
7	Ted	We are…But… So it's probably easier for certain people if you
8		communicate via email or via messenger or whatever. They can
9		perhaps read the email or even put it into a translator to try to
10		gather what you are trying to say. Sometime when you're
11		speaking to someone and.... sometimes even it gets lost in translation
12		as well. And the only reason I say that is recently I have two or three
13		occasions where I've tried to explain something ((laughter)) and they
14		just got lost and I ended up with having an email to the person.
15	IR	The Korean personnel in European head office…?
16	Ted	Oh that's actually the global head office but ((laughter)) yeah…

Ted in this excerpt portrays language practices between the headquarters and the subsidiary. By drawing on the headquarters' preference for emails (line 1) and his interpretation of the preference (lines 3-5, 7-10), he essentialises the linguistic competence of the headquarters employees, described as '*put it into a translator'* (line 9) and *'got lost*' (line 14), and simultaneously constructs his linguistic authority. His statements, '*We are lucky. English is the global language. So we are lazy*' (lines 4-5) index his native speaker ideology along with the

ideology about English as global commodity (Cameron, 2012). The same wording has emerged in an interview with the same team member Emily who also said '*we are lucky because English is the language people speak*'. The discourses and ideology circulated here ratifies English as 'functional and statusful practices' (Roberts, 2010:221), and naturalise the valuation of English skills and the hierarchical (superiority-inferiority) relation between the speakers of the language (Heller, 2010b).

Language practices between the headquarters and the subsidiary in this context come into play in challenging and (re) creating the institutional orders, while constructing identities that are individual and collective. Similar to Excerpt 2 and 3, the (linguistic) group identification is observed. Underpinned by his native speaker ideology, Ted's mobilisation of '*we*' (lines 4-5) and '*they*' (lines 2, 8, 13) along with the expression, '*from an English point of view to a Korean point of view'* (line 3) politicises the difference between the speakers of the language, leading to the hierarchical relations between them. It is worth noting that the group identification here is not necessarily nationalistic but rather specific, given his use of '*global*' (line 16) with reference to the headquarters in correcting the interviewer's use of '*the Korean'* (line 15). This suggests 'relational' and 'shifting' understandings of 'group difference' that are contingent on the context in which comparisons are made, and employed to represent positive attributes of certain groups and individuals in relative to others (Young, 2011:171).

The non-English speaking 'global' head office is reflected in the following data extracted from the fieldnotes on a conversation with Soobin, a Korean local operations assistant. Along the lines of Korean linguistic group identification, the talk further illustrates how the symbolic value attached to Korean language emerges in the practices between the headquarters and the subsidiary:

> According to Soobin: the headquarters has "massive power" and so do the expatriate managers, and language is one of the major issues in the company. From her point of view, Korean employees are necessary for this company because their ability to report to HQ in Korean is crucial. This is because all the emails and information from the headquarters are communicated in Korean. It seems to her that the expatriate managers' ability to report in Korean is more important than their English competence. She said "this is problematic. […] Also, local employee's reports should be submitted after being translated in Korean. So it becomes her job to translate all the reports in Korean […] Given that it is

> the multinational company, Soobin found this "inefficient" […] Eco as a global company should communicate in English with subsidiaries all over the world so that any employees can get access to information (FN, 07082015).

In this talk, Soobin focuses on the headquarters' dominant usage of Korean in its communication with the subsidiary, which she considers to be '*inefficient'*. This further leads to the point where the valuation of Korean language becomes '*problematic*'; and this clearly indexes her ideological positioning in relation to English as global commodity. Despite the dominant ideology that ratifies English as 'functional and statusful practices' (Roberts, 2010), the problem constructed here shows a link between the institutional structure power and the use of language. Korean language in context the headquarters favours Korean over English comes to be an asset through which the critical resource is produced, circulated and consumed between the subsidiary and the headquarters. It further enables its speakers to be linked to the headquarters through the roles and institutional positions – the expatriate managers. This resonates the point made earlier the valuation of language is contingent on the context and organisational activities. In other words, the symbolic value attached to language is not something that is transferable across different contexts but is legitimised in the particular context in which the values of the language emerge (Del Percio et al., 2017:56); and the language, in turn, reifies the structure of domination by regulating access to a range of resources (Vaara et al., 2005).

Concluding remarks

In this paper, we have identified language problems constructed in relation to the dominant language ideologies, and how the language problems and issues index individuals' ideological positioning and (re)constructing power relations. The dominant ideology is about English language as global commodity, and this legitimises the valuation of English language in a range of organisational activities and contexts. While English language competence is portrayed as a critical means to access organisational activities and institutional roles and status in the local subsidiary setting, Korean language was portrayed as an asset for communicating information between the headquarters and the subsidiary. However the valuation of Korean language was rarely observed in our data.

With the representation of the language communities (i.e. the linguistic group identification), '*the Korean*' as a label and a category is largely mobilised in our data. The representation

processes are foregrounded by native speaker ideal and involve the assessment of linguistic competence of individuals and groups, essentialising linguistic features of certain groups and defining who '*we*' or '*they*' are. Mobilised with the language use, '*we*' and '*they*', the us versus them dichotomy is often intertwined and conflated with national identification, but also mobilised in referring to specific social group (e.g. '*the global'* head office). The social groups discursively constructed as sharing common linguistic features produce the superior-inferior relations between the groups. Such relations manifest through language practices, as individuals position themselves and others as more or less 'powerful' having linguistic authority. Language practices in this regard become a site for employees to challenge or (im)balance power relations, (re)constructing the institutional- and social orders.

In unpacking the problem talk, we have shown how the interactional analysis supported by contextual information can expand our understanding of language problems constructed in an interview event and bring insights into the social processes. The analysis involved a close examination of the linguistic resources (e.g. presumption, person reference, lexical choices) participants mobilised in interview settings, and available in the institutional discourses. The multiple levels of analysis employed in this paper allows us to capture the complexity in the (co-)construction of meanings in contexts and dynamicity in the linguistic ecology of modern workplaces.

We hope future research will continue exploring the dynamics of language use and problematise the affordances and limitations of current theoretical and methodological frameworks.

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