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LANGUAGE AS POWER: SHAPING INFLUENCE IN GLOBAL BUSINESS

LIMBAJUL CA PUTERE: MODELAREA INFLUENȚEI ÎN AFACERI GLOBALE

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Abstract: *În contextul globalizării și al dezvoltării accelerate a afacerilor internaționale, limbajul devine un factor esențial în exercitarea influenței și a puterii. Actualitatea temei este determinată de rolul tot mai important al comunicării strategice în cadrul companiilor multinaționale, unde modul de utilizare a limbajului poate influența procesele decizionale, negocierile și relațiile profesionale. Scopul cercetării constă în evidențierea modului în care stăpânirea limbajului funcționează ca un instrument strategic în dobândirea și menținerea autorității în mediul de afaceri global. Lucrarea analizează concepte precum puterea discursivă, controlul narativului și capitalul lingvistic, evidențiind impactul acestora asupra dinamicii organizaționale. Rezultatele obținute arată că persoanele cu competențe lingvistice superioare dispun de un avantaj competitiv semnificativ, reușind să influențeze mai eficient opiniile, să negocieze cu succes și să își consolideze poziția în cadrul organizațiilor, fenomen ce poate fi definit ca „filtrare lingvistică".*
Cuvinte-cheie:*catalizator pentru influență globală, controlul narativului, filtrare lingvistică, influențarea opiniei publice.*
JEL CLASSIFICATION: Z10

INTRODUCTION

It is confident to state that, in the 21st century, words do more than just carry information; they are the invisible architecture of influence. In the fundamental areas of corporate diplomacy and global business, a single sentence can become a call for action, while only one linguistic error can ruin a billion-dollar deal.

After all, language is the currency of power. It is the instrument used to shape reality, to succeed in negotiations, and to command loyalty worldwide. Whether it's about a manager using strategic ambiguity to stimulate staff's productivity or a CEO changing a brand's story to conquer a new market, the mastery of language always makes a difference between those who write the script and those who follow it, which demonstrates the **importance** of understanding its value.

The primary **objective** of this article is to determine how linguistic mastery functions as a strategic asset in the acquisition and maintenance of authority. It aims to reveal the specific rhetorical mechanisms that allow leaders to steer public sentiment and secure commercial advantages. Ultimately, it seeks to provide an explanation for understanding how the deliberate choice of words acts as a catalyst for global leverage, transforming communication from a mere exchange of data into a sophisticated instrument of control and negotiation.

CORE CONTENT

In order to analyse the aforementioned aspects, it is important to consider the **fundamental theories and research methods**, which help us understand the way language shapes the direction of the business.

Fairclough (2001) offers the theoretical base, establishing the "Critical Discourse Analysis" framework to show how social power is reproduced through everyday speech. This is complemented

by Vaara et al. (2005), who shifts the focus to the boardroom and multinational teams, illustrating how language proficiency creates new hierarchies and "linguistic boundaries" during daily operations. Afterwards, these ideas are exemplified by Tenzer & Pudelko (2017), who conducted a study on how language policies and proficiency gaps reshape who can actually exercise power, even when formal hierarchy or expertise favours someone else.

This research utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how social power is perpetuated via discourse. It considers the implications of discursive power, linguistic friction, narrative control, and linguistic capital on organisational behavior. The included study, conducted by Tenzer and Pudelko, is based on data derived from 90 interviews conducted within 15 multinational teams, illustrating how disparities in language proficiency reshape professional hierarchies. In the end, this research assesses how these "linguistic borders" and a conscious style are tactical means of global dominance.

Essentially, **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)** helps us understand how the concept of power is dynamic and revolves around daily communication, when we study how dominant groups in the society, for example - transnational corporations, present their agenda as something that is "common sense". It is safe to affirm that ideological control is achieved through language skills, from which also derives the mastery of conviction. This leads to the conclusion that, in the case of high-stake environments, the power to control the debate is equivalent to having the authority itself, as language is the instrument through which social and institutional power is both exercised and naturalized (Fairclough, 2001). Therefore, for those dealing with complex global systems, discourse is not only a depiction of the situation, but also a tool to actively change it.

This leads us to another idea that has to be taken into account - the concept of language as **the "operating system" of global commerce,** as it facilitates the continuous conducting of commercial relationships between business partners. Nonetheless, the proficiency in a language is not the only element that is to be considered, due to the importance of the way it is used. This is further explained through the perspective of the **"language friction"** phenomenon, defined as a minor, yet very significant loss of subtlety and cultural intelligence, that occurs when people have to communicate in a foreign language (Global Focus Magazine, 2025). As a result, with English being the main corporate language used internationally, people with the highest **"linguistic capital"** get the power unintentionally, overcoming individuals with the most creative ideas. This suggests that language standardization in business concentrates the authority within corporations that invest into communicational trainings in English, eventually filtering out some local insights that might be critical for navigating in a multipolar global market.

Moreover, it is necessary to outline a current tendency worldwide – employers make less of a distinction between linguistic abilities and job skills. As a result, professionals lacking efficient communication are seen as incompetent workers, and their opinion is usually not considered, because they are perceived as of little value. Instead, flawless language usage is slowly becoming a fundamental job skill itself. This kind of **"linguistic gatekeeping"** empowers specific groups within an organisation, while disempowering others (Vaara et al., 2005). Therefore, such a dilemma as "language question" is about asking who gets to decide the future of the company, with it being sorted out by asserting candidates according to their art of speech, and not by comparing strategy efficiency.

These ideas are further developed through a study, conducted by Tenzer & Pudelko (2017) regarding the relationship between corporate hierarchy and linguistic skills of employees inside 15 multinational teams, 90 of them being interviewed about the way language shapes the leadership in their companies.

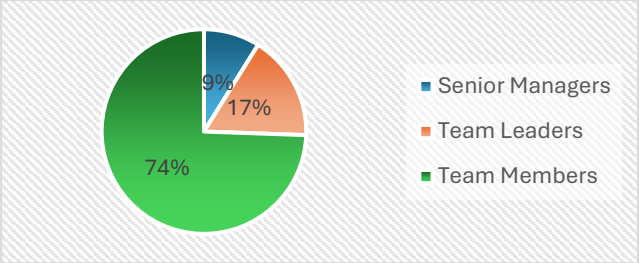


Figure 1. Distribution of employees' roles inside various MNTs (Multinational Teams)
Source: Tenzer & Pudelko (2017)

The distribution of the interrogated employees reflects the structural complexity of the study, with data coming from a total of 90 people in 15 international teams. By collecting a variety of opinions not only from senior managers, who are the top-ranking officials and are responsible for setting strategic direction, but also team leaders and ordinary team members, the study obtains a complete picture of the role of language barriers in career advancement opportunities. The inclusion of high-ranking executives is particularly significant: it outlines the fact that differences in team members' relative language proficiency, influences power dynamics more profoundly than their absolute skill levels. Individuals only experience a linguistic boost in exercising positional or expert-based power sources if they dispose of superior language proficiency compared to their colleagues (Tenzel & Pudenko, 2017). Consequently, this pie chart represents a top-down and bottom-up consensus, which reinforces the argument that language is **an influential force that reshapes authority and influence** at every level of the global firm.

CONCLUSION

Language is not just a tool for communication in global business, but a source of power that shapes authority, influence, and decision-making. The article shows that those with stronger linguistic skills often gain more control in multinational companies, even beyond formal hierarchy, because they can manage narratives, negotiate effectively, and reduce misunderstandings.

Ultimately, linguistic mastery has become a strategic asset in corporate diplomacy and international commerce. It can create competitive advantage, but it can also lead to exclusion through linguistic gatekeeping. Therefore, in today's global business environment, the careful use of language is essential for leadership, trust, and long-term success.

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