

Communicative practices in the multilingual workplace in Sweden: Lay categorisations of languages

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Contemporary workplaces are characterized by diversity, involving participants from multiple linguistic and cultural traditions. In such settings, translanguaging is considered a common practice in which multilinguals “create an apparently seamless flow between languages and language varieties and to transcend the boundaries between named languages and/or language varieties as well as the boundaries between language and other semiotic systems” (Hua et al., 2022, p. 315). Little research, however, exists on such practices in multilingual workplaces (Du & Zhou, 2022), and even less on the linguistically diverse Swedish workplace. To gain greater insight into the seamlessness, transcendence, and boundaries such language users create and perceive, we explore the communication practices of employees in different Swedish workplaces. As an initial departure point, five employees in managerial positions were interviewed in the pilot study. We adopt a critical intercultural communication approach, seeing “culture” as a dynamic concept, which employees may attribute to self and others, and (dis-)align with in different ways. Findings show that categorisations of languages are prevalent, with participants applying a scale of linguistic sophistication or complexity and ranking formality conventions on a strong-to-weak scale. When categorising people and groups, participants foreground identity and face, and group dynamics is a recurring theme, with distinctions made between groups and orientations. This presentation focuses on participants’ descriptions of L1 and L2 identities and their perceived effects on workplace communication. Findings suggest that translanguaging has yet to be commonplace in the workplaces we investigated and shed light on lay perspectives on (trans)languaging in the workplace.

References

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