The Heteroglossic Linguistic Identity of Modern Companies

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to make the reader acquainted with the linguistic identity of modern companies, taking into account its complexity and the multiplicity of factors creating its character. The author presents the theoretical aspects associated with linguistic heteroglossia in companies of the 21st century as well as the practical possibilities of using organizational multilingualism, showing the opportunities and challenges associated with the dialogism of organizations.

Methodology: The issue of heteroglossia in the business environment is discussed to show the various aspects determining the linguistic dimension of organizational identity, paying special attention to corporate polyphony at the individual and group level as well as its implications for creating the linguistic performance of modern companies. In terms of the theoretical dimension of this paper, based on the postmodern and systemic traditions in management, it presents the relation "language-individual-organization". The practical part of the paper presents the challenges associated with managing a heteroglossic organization.

Findings: The conducted discussion on the issue of heteroglossia characterizing linguistic identity allows to show the various aspects and factors of the investigated phenomenon, which are present on both the individual and social level. The described issues associated with organizational multilingualism point to effective ways of managing linguistically diversified organizations.

Practical implications: The investigated topic can be interesting not only for those involved scientifically in management, linguistics and widely-understood social sciences, but also for practitioners working in companies with a complex cultural and linguistic structure. The described theory followed by the discussion help understand how heteroglossia may influence the development of organizations as well as its potential and how to avoid mistakes in managing organizations with a multidimensional linguistic capital.

Originality: Taking into account the already-conducted investigations on corporate linguistic identity, the paper offers an approach that has not yet been investigated.

Keywords: heteroglossia, linguistic identity, organizational identity

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| Introduction

The material world is made up of things that are in motion (Potter, 2011), which causes both individuals and organizations to be subject to different alternations. The motion itself, however, concerns the use of force, which changes the current state of affairs and causes certain deviations, tensions and disharmonies (Lichtarski, 2008). One of the most important factors determining the volatility of our times is the increasing role of technology and the high dynamics of the flows of people and goods (Woodward, 2010). Organizations, as part of a complex and dynamic economic life (Mruk, 2004) as well as being a place of contradictions and paradoxes (Pocztowski, 2007), must cope with changes of a continuous as well as abrupt nature, through the creation of new traits, behaviors and attitudes (Nogalski, 2008). Thus, when analyzing modern organizations, *a picture emerges of a multi-stakeholder community of varying configurations, based on a network of fragile compromises that are subject to never-ending negotiations, tenders and gameplay* (Koźmiński and Latusek-Jurczak, 2011, p. 11). Volatility and uncertainty also apply to the individual employee or stakeholder, as he/she remains in a permanent state of trial, *and is required to implement plans, which quickly become irrelevant, to adapt to changing conditions, to improvise and to fend off attacks, in order to stay in the game* (Simone, 2009, p. 19). Nowadays, both at the individual and group level, we are dealing with a virtual distance, as the virtual world (the immaterial world of communication, knowledge, information) and the material world (tangible, executive, productive) are moving away from each other, making cooperation between the two realities rather difficult. On the borderline of these spaces, there are also psychological, time and personal distances (Perechuda, 2008) which affect the functioning of individuals and organizations. As an outcome of the mentioned volatility of a dominant kaleidic nature resulting from the inability to fully predict the situation (Selgin, 1988), identity becomes particularly important, giving individuals a sense of social anchorage (e.g. Czarnota-Bojarska, 2010; Cheney and Christensen, 2000), while giving groups the possibility to create and maintain a sense of community. When narrowing down the discussion to the corporate environment, it should be noted that corporate identity makes employees understand the rules of the organization and enables them to feel part of it, while giving the companies the opportunity to develop labor standards and to interact and stand out in a competitive market (e.g. Zarębska, 2009). Regardless of whether the collective or individual personality within a given organization is discussed, the key role is played by communication, which creates and shapes the widely understood organizational identity. For example, observation of the mode of communication allows for a diagnosis of the organizational culture (Koźmiński, Jemielniak and Latusek, 2009) and affects the implementation of corporate governance, enabling the creation of a shared value for those involved in the activities of the organization (Mesjasz, 2011). Considering the role of communication in creating and maintaining the organizational identity, the subject of analysis will be the linguistic organizational identity, the complexity and multifacetedness of its characteristics, all of which are determined by the participants of corporate dialogism.

| Linguistic Organizational Identity

Identity is a concept that has many definitions. One of the reasons for the lack of a homologous classification of the term is the occurrence of identity in various aspects of life (Humboldt, 2002), in both the individual and social dimension. Another reason for the typological difficulties is the diverse understanding of identity depending on the adopted research approach, which is different in, for example, the romantic, modern and postmodern perspective (e.g. Gergen, 2000). In this paper, identity is understood as the social positioning of oneself and others (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005), which helps the individual understand his/her place in society (Mole, 2007). In terms of the analyzed organizational environment, the afore-mentioned positioning concerns the widely understood sense of belonging to a given organization, while giving the organization itself the opportunity to understand its position in the world of business and in social life. However, it needs to be emphasized that social anchoring does not have a fixed nature, for its dynamism results from the identity aspect; people are not permanently attached to their social roles, but, living in a world of elective identities (Magala, 2003), they have the opportunity to create their own personality (Woodward, 2010), also in the corporate environment. In addition, organizational identity is dichotomous in nature; it is a product in itself and at the same time it consists of individual and group identities (Blader, Wrzesniewski and Bartel, 2007). This feature causes the dynamism to occur both at the level of the organization as a whole and within the framework of its constituent elements. This two-facetedness of organizational identity will be discussed later in this paper.

One of the most important factors in creating, maintaining and changing identities is language. It should be noted that the relationship between identity and language is a two-way relationship. Language reflects the user's identity (Melucci, 1996), as phrases, sentences and the way in which information is transmitted depend on a person's character traits, his or her profession and social function, while at the same time identity is determined by language (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2003), because the social personality, e.g. professional or family-oriented, determines the choice of the means of communication. Moreover, through communication, identity is perfected. Traditional organizational resources are subject to wear and tear when used, while, similarly to knowledge potential, which increases with its use (Herman, 2008), the identity of an organization becomes more mature and more effective with intensified language contacts within the organization. Therefore, one can speak of a linguistic organizational identity, which is created, enriched and unfortunately sometimes also destroyed by language contacts taking place both within the organization and in the widely understood corporate environment.

Linguistic identity can be studied both in the case when the elements determining it are taken into consideration and also in the situation when the factors affected by it are being assessed. First, words can be highlighted expressing identity, knowledge systems and beliefs affecting it, as well as stories, history and scripts that express individuality (Bracher, 2009). Second, identity can be analyzed through the prism of the people that participate in its formation as well

as those whose activity is simultaneously determined by the influence of linguistic identity. People create their own linguistic identity while making language choices, taking into account the linguistic varieties of the social environments in which they reside (Risager, 2006). This multifacetedness and dynamism of factors and people also affects the way of analysis of linguistic identity. One way to demonstrate the complexity and enhanced interactions that take place within the framework of linguistic organizational identity is the use of the concept of heteroglossia.

| Heteroglossia – An Introduction

The term heteroglossia, which comes from the Greek words hetero (different) and glossa (language), was introduced by the Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin for, among other things, determining the plurality of the types of speech and the multilayeredness of meaning (Bakhtin, 1986; Bakhtin, 2000). This term has gained great popularity and has been used in scientific research since the 1980s, particularly in the work of literary scholars and anthropologists (Ivanov, 2000). However, it should be noted that the term itself, which is supposed to emphasize the multiple meanings and the multilayeredness of the studied phenomenon, is actually understood in various ways. For example, another poststructuralist, Victor Turner, understood heteroglossia as the polyphony of symbols. Heteroglossia is most commonly associated with the simultaneous use of different types of speech acts or characters (Ivanov, 2001) and with the coexistence in a given social context of many types of communication, such as languages, dialects and registers (Ahearn, 2011). Heteroglossia, being the opposite of monoglossia and polyglossia (Ivanov, 2001), is seen as a social stratification of language (Pujolar, 2000) and is, therefore, used in research studies dealing with the linguistic aspect of the complex social life. One of the applications of this concept can be an analysis of modern organizations through the prism of their communication behaviors.

| Heteroglossia in the Study of Organizations

Given the methodological positioning of multilingualism within the theories that affect the way modern organizations are perceived, the use of heteroglossia in management is associated with its systemic approach in presenting the world as systems in systems which influence each other (e.g. Calvino, 1988). Systemic research studies are then used in works on the processuality of organizations (Bugdol, 2006; Konecki and Chomczyński, 2007; Koźmiński and Latusek-Jurczak, 2011) and the organization itself is analyzed as a system operating in an environment of other systems and subject to their influence (e.g. Ackoff, 1999; Bielenia-Grajewska, 2012; Yolles, Fink and Dauber, 2011; Krupski, 2010; Laszlo, 2001; Szahaj, 2004).

Heteroglossic elements can also be found in strategic management, which is situated between strategies based solely on knowledge (hyper-rational) and strategies based solely on faith

(hyper-emotional). Considering the latter, i.e. the emotional strategy, the organization is conceived through the prism of the environment in which it is located (Sułkowski, 2008). The heteroglossic approach allows also the environment to be included in the analysis of the organization, as heteroglossia makes the context more important than the text, and meaning can move from context to context (Little, Jordens and Sayers, 2003). Furthermore, heteroglossia is also associated with the organization of the future, which cannot be easily defined on account of the multiplicity of factors affecting its shape, even such as the type of business activity, social environment or internal culture (Płoszański, 2005).

Heteroglossia has a common denominator of multiplicity with the heterarchical nature of modern organizations, which determines the resources and competencies that can be found in different places of the organization, not just at its top (Wall and van der Knaap, 2012), because they are created by staff members at various levels and available not only to selected employees. Heterarchical organizations are characterized by the absence of one dominant element, while the system is controlled by a group of component impacts (Płoszajski and Mierzejewska, 2004). Heteroglossia also has features in common with the postmodern approach to management (e.g. Czarniawska, 2002; Kostera, 1996; Morgan, 2006), which draws attention to the social dimension of the organization, and, in particular, values, emotions and attitudes. Postmodernism is also characterized by the fact that there is no clear answer to every question, and we are living among many points of view and many options. Moreover, postmodernism is characterized by the praise of *pluralism, dispersion, multiplicity, difference* (Szahaj, 2004, p. 40) or, in other words, the affirmation of heteroglossia. Identity in postmodern studies can be negotiated, constructed, and even questioned and acquired (Niño-Murcia, 2011), which is especially important in a diversified corporate environment. Such an approach allows for an analysis of the factors and effects associated with the changes occurring in the organizational identity and enables an evaluation of their impact on the development of the competitive advantage of the organization.

The occurrence of heteroglossia in organizations is also associated with its linguistic nature. Complex speech genres are formed in more complicated and more sophisticated or educated means of communication, which mostly concern the artistic, scientific, political and social spheres of life (Bakhtin, 1986). Considering the previously conducted research on the use of the heteroglossic approach in the study of organizations, the concept of heteroglossia has been used, for example, in the analysis of financial reports, seeing the accounting documents as texts (Norman, Macintosh and Baker, 2002). When narrowing down the discussion to the issue of the identity of modern companies, the author has, in an earlier paper, discussed the polyphonic aspect of organizational culture from the perspective of creating competitive advantage (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2011). However, the linguistic identity of modern organizations has not yet been described more widely in the literature on the subject from the heteroglossic perspective. The undertaken discussion on the role of heteroglossia in creating and maintaining the linguistic identity of organizations concerns the individual dimension as well as the collective dimension of the studied phenomenon.

| The Individual Dimension of Organizational Heteroglossia

Heteroglossia is inextricably linked to the linguistic dimension of the social life of every person; we are all multilingual, as we use more than one language within our mother tongue, such as dialect, which is used by the inhabitants of a given region, the standard language that is taught in school and specialized language, which we use in professional situations (Wandruszka, 1979). Buitenhuis expresses a similar opinion, stating that heteroglossia is a naturally chaotic state of the languages used in the world (Halasek, 1999). Heteroglossia is also a temporal and hierarchical phenomenon. According to Bakhtin, all people are heteroglossic, since they use language in various historical and social contexts, creating dialects associated with age, social class and profession (Farrell, 1995). This discourse is synchronously constituted by modern languages and diachronically formed by historical roles and expected future functions (Vice, 1997). The words that are used by people allow us to define their profession, occupation and age group (Bakhtin, 2000). Apart from the historical and anthropological aspects, heteroglossia also consists of many social, cultural, cognitive and biological factors. These are also associated with Bakhtin's concept of conflict between centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal forces are supposed to make language users adopt a common linguistic identity, whereas centrifugal forces make communicating people strive to achieve linguistic diversity (Duranti, 1997). In terms of creating a common linguistic identity of an organization, the actions of the employees are important: they are supposed to cultivate their own and unique linguistic identity, while striving to create and adapt the existing rules and principles of communication, which are supposed to enable quick and efficient communication with other employees and stakeholders. Another type of heteroglossia, at the level of individual linguistic identity, refers to the relationship between heteroglossia and dialogism, specifying the relations between statements, the polyphony of a single expression or the link between different intentions, values and ideologies (Pollard, 2008), which may create a situation in which heteroglossia can also be perceived in terms of linguistic layers. Heteroglossia is used to determine the nature of the mode of communication of a given user of a single language (e.g. the national language), manifested in the stratification of different languages (Hayward, 2001). This accumulation may take on various forms, from the explicit, sourced quotation of others' voices within a text or speech to the subtle hints of their origins that words continue to carry with them (Goodman and Graddol 2005). In the case of organizational communication, stratification is seen, for example, in the use of the sayings of other employees or words specific to a given profession or workplace.

| The Social Dimension of Linguistic Organizational Identity

The identity of the individual is often of secondary importance in organizations, because organizations define themselves in terms of a group of roles, not people, since that perception makes it possible to introduce a certain sustainability to the organization through substitutability and availability (Jemielniak, 2005). Considering the metaphor of the machine, an important aspect of

the organization is its standardization and the substitutability of the respective elements (Miller, 2012). Therefore, the supra-individual identity becomes particularly important, making it easier to identify with the organization, also for new employees. Most large organizations have one dominant culture and many subcultures (Shapiro, 2004). This feature can also be discussed in terms of heteroglossia, considering all the present cultures and the dependencies that characterize them. Moreover, heteroglossia can also be used to describe the multiplicity of languages used in a given company (Rhodes, 2001). Multilingualism is particularly evident in organizations that employ expatriates, whose linguistic actions are determined by both the individual and social linguistic dimension. Within the personal domain, we can observe such factors as the attitude towards the host culture, the characteristic features of the job (phase of stay, time, place and its cultural aspect, as well as occupation). The linguistic social reality is created by language aspects that determine the relationship between the organization and its subsidiaries, the language policy in companies, corporate communication and the social hierarchy (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2010).

Organizational heteroglossia can also be considered in the analysis of the distribution of power, privilege and opportunity. Modern organizations are also a *reified society*, being a system of a variety of roles and classes, the members of which do not have equal rights (Moscovici, 2000). Heteroglossia in this context can be understood as both a differentiated access to information and the possibility of creating and spreading it. Heteroglossic communication constitutes a substantiation of broader, social heteroglossic relations (Thibault, 1991), as each text is always produced and articulated within a wider system of social heteroglossia, which operates in a given community in a given historical period (Thibault, 2006). As a result, the way of communication and the used means are a kind of reflection of the social relations within organizations and in their immediate environment.

| The Opportunities and Challenges Concerning Linguistic Heteroglossia in Organizations

Given the earlier-mentioned aspects associated with organizational heteroglossia, it is important to indicate the areas of organizational functioning that are particularly determined by linguistic heteroglossia and which require undertaking action associated with an appropriate management of organizational polyphony and the related challenges. These areas include the management of relationships within the organization both at the internal and external level, as linguistic and paralinguistic elements form contacts with a broad range of stakeholders. When analyzing the internal dimension of the organization, one should emphasize the role of polyphony in creating the means of communication between employees. In this regard, heteroglossia can be perceived in several ways. One of them is the multilingualism of employees and the need to develop communication strategies that enable active participation of all the employees involved in the company's life. The language policy of a company should not divide the employees on account of

their mother tongue, favoring certain language groups and offering them better pay or promotion opportunities than the persons using other languages. On account of the fact that international companies have been introducing the policy of using one language as the corporate language (e.g. English) and the requirement to communicate in that language (regardless of the employee's mother tongue), corporations should offer training to people with lower language competence in order to improve their communication skills in the official language used in the company. A negative example of an approach to organizational linguistic heteroglossia is introducing an absolute prohibition on using the mother tongue among employees in the workplace, also in situations not related to the performance of professional activities and not involving the users of other languages. A prohibition on using the mother tongue, even in a conversation during a lunch break between two users of the same language and without the presence of other people, does not have a positive impact on the creation of inter-organizational relationships. On the contrary, such an approach to linguistic heteroglossia in organizations causes negative emotions among employees and a lack of identification with the company. Heteroglossia in organizations also applies to diversification at the level of vocabulary and syntax depending on profession or function. Very often, experts in a given field use specialized vocabulary that is specific to their area of expertise and that can be incomprehensible to colleagues from other departments. Therefore, efforts should be made so that documents, correspondence and meetings in groups of varying technical and business skills are not elaborated in technolects and specialized lingo known only to a small group of specialists, but should use commonly known words and phrases. Often this form of heteroglossia is used in organizations to highlight the distinctiveness of a given group or its superiority compared to another community. Employees that use specialized jargon can also change the perception of their field of expertise, which to an outsider may seem difficult and inaccessible, and the people representing it qualified personnel with unique skills. However, it should be emphasized that professional heteroglossia in organizations also has positive sides, because it is based on selected specialized vocabulary that is characterized by unambiguous notions, and quick and effective communication within a group becomes possible. Given the challenges associated with organizational linguistic heteroglossia, managers should strive to make sure that communication barriers (due to different education, specialization and the specificity of given positions) do not affect the joint ventures of a diversified project team. Heteroglossia is also important when dealing with companies at the exterior level. Modern organizations operate in a diversified environment, also in terms of language. Due to modern technology, geographical distance becomes less significant and organizations can offer their products and services to customers in various countries. Moreover, this wide range of activities means that the group of stakeholders that are interested in the activities of a given organization in the field of, for example, corporate responsibility, is also relatively large and diversified. Therefore, organizations should also take into account the linguistic diversity of their customers and the widely understood society in creating and maintaining communication strategies. Adequate measures should, therefore, include creating effective tools for communication with multilingual stakeholders, such as the creation of websites in various languages and publishing marketing materials in several languages. However, it should be noted that the content offered in foreign languages

should not only be well and carefully translated, but should also undergo the necessary local-ization process, which takes into account the linguistic and cultural differences of (potential) customers. A name or slogan can be incomprehensible when translated literally, it may even offend a potential user or ridicule a company offering the given product or service. Moreover, blatant grammatical errors in company materials may discourage potential customers to use the services of the given company or even cause financial losses due to an incorrect interpretation of rules, agreements or orders in a foreign language. The content placed in online or offline materi-als should also be regularly updated, and virtual communication tools in an organization, such as social media, should be managed by an assigned staff member. A common error in the com-munication conducted by organizations is giving their contact information in several languages without the ability to conduct correspondence or conversation in these languages due to the lack of staff with the appropriate language skills. Heteroglossia can also be perceived through the prism of communication channels. The multitude of available means of communication makes it necessary for the offered information to be adapted to the selected method of communication. For example, the discourse offered by social media is characterized by dialogism and the possibility to actively participate in creating and receiving information. Therefore, organizations should be prepared to respond quickly to questions, suggestions and uncertainties posted online by stake-holders. Furthermore, the form of virtual communication also requires a relatively compact form of expression and the selection of appropriate words and meanings in order to reach a relatively wide range of stakeholders.

According to Kuhn and Porter (2011), heteroglossia of knowledge and forms of action can gener-ate both stability and change, so it can be used to maintain the status quo or to introduce alter-nations. It is particularly important in times of crisis, which require the heterogeneous skills of employees and diversified methods of dealing with the new, unusual situations. Linguistic heteroglossia can actively help in locating risk and in taking appropriate measures to prevent the spread of crisis. In the case of communication risk management and communication cri-sis management, heteroglossia also applies to diversified communication channels that enable communication with many stakeholders, taking into account their communication preferences and technical possibilities of receiving information. For example, tourists or people on business trips may have limited possibilities to obtain information based on traditional forms of com-munication, so organizations should use mobile communication tools in order to quickly inform stakeholders about difficulties or changes affecting the tasks performed by them. At the same time, it should be noted that the inclusion of heteroglossia in the communication possibilities of employees, clients and people interested in the activities of the company should be reflected in the daily multitude of available methods of communication with a wide range of stakeholders, preferring either virtual or traditional methods of participation in the organizational discourse.

The multiple layers and elements that make up the relations creating the organizational iden-tity can also lead to the occurrence of crisis and conflict situations. One of the reasons for this phenomenon could be the earlier-mentioned unequal access to information or unclear language

relations occurring in a given company. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the management and the employees to manage the organization in such a way that the occurring heteroglossia is a source of the success rather than the failure of the company.

| Conclusion

Modern organizations operate in an unstable and changing reality, both economic and social, so they must have the ability to adapt relatively easily to their environment and to respond to its needs. One of the essential elements for effective functioning in a dynamic business environment is to create and maintain an efficient linguistic identity, which allows for good communication at the internal and external level. Based on the multifacetedness of the linguistic dimension of the identity of a given company, it can be studied in terms of heteroglossia.

When considering the basic use of heteroglossia in management, it can, for example, be compared to playing with a kaleidoscope, where with every twist of the tube several elements create a new figure. In other words, heteroglossia can be compared to a broken mirror, where all the parts reflect the same object, but in a different perspective (Mladenov, 2006). The paper discusses a view selected by the author on the linguistic issue of organizational heteroglossia, which is one of the many images that can be seen while observing the changing patterns of the "kaleidoscope" of organizational behaviors. The communication aspect has been presented in order to demonstrate the linguistic factors affecting organizational identity from the perspective of the individual and the group. Whereas the examples of positive and negative use of heteroglossia demonstrate how correctly or incorrectly conducted internal and external communication in an organization can determine the company's position in the competitive market of the 21st century.

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