How non-native English speaking staff are evaluated in linguistically diverse organizations: A sociolinguistic perspective

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the effects of evaluations of non-native speaking staff's spoken English in international business settings. We adopt a sociolinguistic perspective on power and inequalities in linguistically diverse organizations in an Anglophone environment. The interpretive qualitative study draws on 54 interviews with non-native English speaking staff in 19 UK business schools. We analyze, along the dimensions of status, solidarity and dynamism, the ways in which non-native speakers, on the basis of their spoken English, are evaluated by themselves and by listeners. We show how such evaluations refer to issues beyond the speaker's linguistic fluency, and have consequences for her or his actions. The study contributes to the literature on language and power in international business through offering fine-grained insights into and elucidating how the interconnected evaluative processes impact the formation and perpetuation of organizational power relations and inequalities. It also puts forward implications for managing the officially monolingual, yet linguistically diverse organizations.

INTRODUCTION

At present, many types of organizations build their strategies in relation to the international business environment and are managed according to business principles. Players from sectors previously characterized by a national focus now compete for both markets and staff globally. Higher education (HE) is an example of one such sector. The trend towards corporatization (Kim, 2009) and marketization (Brown & Carasso, 2013; Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011) has led academic institutions to increasingly adhere to international business models of operation. The internationalization of higher education institutions (HEIs) has primarily been driven by the aim of generating income and improving competitiveness within the global HE market. To accomplish this objective, HEIs recruit both staff and students globally. This is especially true of business schools which do not only strive to be financially successful and globally competitive, but are additionally motivated to internationalize through their mission to educate leaders for businesses across the world. Moreover, as part of their internationalization strategies, HEIs establish overseas operations to maximize their international market reach. In Britain, the last decade has been characterized by an increased ‘pressure on universities to pursue commercial opportunities’, especially in relation to overseas student recruitment, which has resulted in HE becoming ‘the UK’s seventh largest export industry’ (Collini, 2013: 6).

The internationalization of HEIs has brought with it the internationalization of their staff’s careers (Kim, 2009; Richardson, 2008; Richardson & Zikic, 2007). In the UK, for example, non-national academics constitute 24% of all faculty (HESA, 2013). An important enabling factor for the international expansion of the British HE labor market is the status of English as the contemporary *lingua franca* of academia (Tietze, 2008). With the key role of language in the production of knowledge and in the delivery of education, language competence has an effect on the career progression of academics (Curry & Lillis 2004; Tietze, 2008). In the case of international academics, therefore, English proficiency is a taken-for-granted competence. Considering the significance of language for HEIs and their faculty, it is surprising that, as Selmer, Lauring and Jonasson (2013) contend, the role of language in an internationalized academic setting is still underexplored.

On the other hand, issues of language and especially the relationship between language and power have received a certain amount of research attention in the broader international business literature, in which various power effects of language in organizations have been established (e.g. Neeley, 2013; Piekkari, Vaara, Tienari & Säntti, 2005; Vaara, Tienari, Piekkari & Säntti, 2005). However, little is known about how, in Anglophone organizations that employ staff from diverse linguistic backgrounds, different ways of English language use, as manifested through speakers' accents, for example, contribute to the formation and perpetuation of organizational power relations and inequalities. It is important to address this gap in extant research, in order to find out, in the first place, how the formation of power differentials in organizations is shaped by the use of English by non-native speakers. It is necessary to analyze the processes through which such unequal power relations are constructed, since their occurrence is likely to have an impact on individuals' prospects of organizational and career progression, and on the potential of organizations to fully benefit from their culturally and linguistically diverse workforce, and hence their ability to build competitiveness. Therefore, understanding this particular aspect of the relationship between language and power has important implications for international business: both in terms of providing a basis from which to develop strategies for making organizations more inclusive, and in relation to helping organizations become more competitive and successful as a result of taking full advantage of their globally recruited talent.

Seen from the perspective of international business research, the combination of an increased proportion of international, linguistically diverse faculty and the trend towards Englishization make HEIs a relevant context in which to explore how the formation of organizational power and inequalities is linked to the way in which English language use by non-native speakers is evaluated in contemporary international business settings. To accomplish this, we draw on sociolinguistics, and in particular on research in the area of *language attitudes*, where evaluations of English language use and their consequences have been discussed in the context of the speaker's status, solidarity and dynamism (Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Garrett, Coupland & Williams, 2003; Giles, 1970; Pantos & Perkins, 2013). We draw on this framework combined with the international business literature on language and power to analyze and theorize about how inequalities, associated with English language use, are manifested and formed in communication between speakers in international business settings. We thus respond to calls for interdisciplinarity in international business research, and especially for extending the interdisciplinarity of the *Journal of International Business Studies* (Cantwell & Brannen, 2011). The interdisciplinary contribution of our paper is also made through the adoption of a reflexive methodological approach applied in accordance with the interpretive tradition.

Specifically, we ask the following research questions:

- What evaluations do non-native speakers make about themselves, and what evaluations do listeners make about the non-native speakers, based on the speakers' spoken English?
- How do these evaluations influence the speakers' actions in an organizational context?
- What insights about the relationship between language, power and inequalities in organizations can be gained from understanding the effects of evaluations of non-native speaking staff's spoken English?
- What are the implications of the effects of evaluations of non-native speaking staff's spoken English for managing the officially monolingual, yet linguistically diverse organizations?

In answering the above questions, our study makes several theoretical and methodological contributions to extant literature on language use and power in international business. To begin with, as stated above, it draws on the sociolinguistic framework of status, solidarity and dynamism to analyze the formation of power and inequalities associated with English language use in international business settings. Being based on an interpretive qualitative approach and a novel methodological design, it offers fine-grained insights into how non-native English speaking staff are being evaluated by themselves and listeners, and how these evaluations affect behavior. Further, the analysis shows how these evaluations give rise to the construction of power differentials and inequalities in organizations between native and non-native speakers, and among non-native speakers of English. With regard to inequalities among non-native English speakers, we point to the specific categories, such as national cultural stereotypes and the economic and political power of a given country, that are mobilized in a way which leads to the hierarchization of non-native English language uses. We show how this hierarchization, in turn, results in the construction of inequalities among non-native speakers beyond linguistic differences, for example those resulting from the assessment of broader professional competences of the speakers, and what consequences this has for organizational power relations.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, we locate our research within the literature on international business and language. We then introduce the sociolinguistic literature on language attitudes as the conceptual framework for our analysis. This is followed by a discussion of our methodological approach and an analysis of the empirical research findings. Furthermore, we discuss the theoretical and methodological insights gained from the research regarding the effects of evaluations of non-native speaking staff's spoken English in Anglophone organizational contexts. Finally, we offer concluding remarks highlighting the key points stemming from the study, as well as its managerial implications.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

The following section comprises two main parts: the positioning of our study in the research on language in an international business context, and the introduction of the sociolinguistic literature on language attitudes. For reasons of presentational clarity, we outline the theoretical framework in advance of data analysis. However, in accordance with the interpretive tradition, the refinement of the framework and the analysis resulted from the process of abduction (Van Maanen, Sørensen & Mitchell, 2007), i.e. repeated alternation between empirically laden theory and theoretically laden empirical material.

Language in an international business context

Since being deemed 'the forgotten factor in multinational management' (Marschan, Welch & Welch, 1997) some 16 years ago, subsequent research on communication across cultural, geographical and linguistic boundaries in an international organizational context has firmly put language(s) on the international business research agenda. Analyzing organizations through language (Tietze, 2008; Tietze, Cohen & Musson, 2003; Westwood & Linstead, 2001) offers an understanding of the linguistic production of organizational practices and processes, and in particular it allows for exploring the issues and challenges concerning organizations that operate in the globalized, multicultural environment of international business (Luo & Shenkar, 2006; Piekkari & Tietze, 2011; Piekkari & Zander, 2005). As previously discussed, HEIs constitute no exception in this regard as academia is becoming increasingly internationalized with regard to staff mobility, student recruitment and the establishment of overseas operations. As a result, academic institutions, like many other organizations in the international business environment, have become multilingual entities, operating in transnational education and research networks. The role of language in such organizations is both significant and complex.

To start with, language diversity in the international business context presents challenges in terms of facilitating communication and establishing trust (Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman, 2007; Henderson, 2005; Tenzer, Pudelko & Harzing, 2013). Conceptualizing the management of communication and co-ordination in a multilingual environment has therefore to a significant degree concerned the understanding and overcoming of language barriers (Feely & Harzing, 2003; Harzing & Feely, 2008; Harzing, Köster & Magner, 2011; Lauring & Klitmøller, 2014; Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt & Jonsen, 2010). The introduction of a common corporate language is a frequently adopted solution to the problem (Brannen & Doz, 2012). However, as extensive research shows, this seemingly integrative measure often produces unintended, disintegrative consequences (Piekkari, et al., 2005). The official language is not necessarily shared by all and other languages may continue to be used in parallel (Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2007), creating a ‘cocktail of languages’ which is considered problematic for corporate cohesion and integration.

Further, such strategies for managing multilingual organizations have also been examined through approaches which account for the inherent power dynamics of language. For example, the choice of language might be contested on the basis of practicality, location or history (Piekkari et al., 2005; Steyaert, Ostendorp & Gaibrois, 2011). As such, a corporate language edict can be viewed as a political move which produces organizational realities informed by underlying historical, political and sociocultural conditions (Janssens, Lambert & Steyaert, 2004). Implementations of corporate language policies are also subject to local recontextualization processes, shaped by different dimensions of power (Peltokorpi & Vaara, 2012). Moreover, the introduction of a corporate language creates the hierarchization of languages and competing language uses (Vaara et al., 2005). Privileging one language over another in a multilingual, international business setting, whether by the implementation of an official corporate language or in formal and informal interactions between employees, delineates social positions and power structures. One particular social division is between those for whom the corporate language is their native tongue and those for whom it is a non-native language (Steyaert, Ostendorp & Gaibrois, 2011).

A detailed analysis of how the above mentioned power differentials are constituted in interaction merits further attention, to gain a better understanding of the production of organizational inequalities through language practices. As extant research shows, the adoption of a particular corporate language affects the positioning of staff according to their level of language fluency, be it perceived or actual. Fluency in the dominant language or in multiple languages can constitute a source of power (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 1999b; Piekkari et al., 2005) and asymmetries in language fluency may contribute to the emergence of different organizational factions (Hinds, Neeley & Cramton, 2013). As language fluency often correlates with age, occupational position and organizational level (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011; Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen & Piekkari, 2007; Heikkilä & Smale, 2011), the effects of a shift in the language regime are unequally distributed. Especially in the case of large organizations operating in the international business environment, a high level of fluency in the dominant language bears positive consequences for staff careers, for example in terms of recruitment and selection, promotion, and strategic placements (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 1999a; Piekkari, 2008: Piekkari et al., 2005). On the other hand, a lack of fluency may present an obstacle, in that it may negatively influence judgments about the speaker’s level of intelligence or knowledge (Klitmøller & Lauring, 2013; Taylor, 1991; Yoshihara, 2001). Further, it might lead to marginalization, and emotional and psychological distress through feelings of exclusion or inadequacy in communicating one’s professional competence (Piekkari et al., 2005). Such negative, and potentially severely limiting and damaging effects of language change for an individual can be conceptualized as status loss (Neeley, 2013: 476), that is, ‘the subjective experience of a decreased professional regard’. As Neeley demonstrates, the introduction of English as a corporate language in a French company produced sentiments of inferiority among non-native speakers. However, going beyond the native/non-native speaker divide, Neeley importantly discusses other differential aspects in conjunction with the use of language, such as stereotyped ascribed status characteristics like gender and race, and merit-based achieved status markers such as qualifications and expertise. This link between language use and experienced organizational status warrants further attention. To address this gap in current knowledge, we need a framework that considers language as social practice (Janssens & Steyaert, 2014), allowing for the analysis of speech produced in particular situations. For this purpose, the application of a sociolinguistic perspective on the effects of language use evaluations is particularly useful.

In the context of our research, another pertinent aspect of contemporary organizational language strategies is the prevalent choice of English as the corporate language, indicating its status as the globally dominant *lingua franca* in international business (Ehrenreich, 2010; Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009; Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta, 2005; Rogerson-Revell, 2007, 2008). The purpose of using English is functional, enabling communication in a shared language in a multilingual setting. Important international business contexts for the use of spoken English, which is our primary interest, are negotiations (e.g. Charles, 1996; Planken, 2005; Vuorela, 2005) and meetings (e.g. Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997; Poncini, 2004; Rogerson-Revell, 1999). Extant studies have shown how the particular setting shapes language use and the choice of linguistic strategies. A result of the dominant status of English means that fluency in English is no longer an advantage – it is seen as a compulsory, taken for granted skill. While such studies analyze the consequences of introducing English in an international business context in terms of organizational inclusion and exclusion based on the degree of individuals’ language proficiency, less attention has been paid to a more detailed analysis of how different English accents and speech patterns are perceived and evaluated. We address this gap to contribute to research on how language practices produce organizational inequalities through evaluations made of and by non-native speakers. To do this we adopt a conceptualization of power as relational and situated, and manifested in and through practice (see Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, 2006; Peltokorpi & Vaara, 2012).

In the context of international higher education, the Englishization of knowledge production is noticeable in the imperative to educate students and generate research publications in English in order to build a global reputation within the academic community (Lillis & Curry, 2010; Tietze, 2008; Tsuneyoshi, 2005). It is therefore necessary for HEI faculty to be proficient in spoken and written English regardless of their native linguistic background. At the same time, the growing proportion of international faculty means that linguistic diversity has to be addressed and managed (Lauring & Selmer, 2012). Beyond language fluency, the academics' positioning in linguistically diverse HEIs is also dependent on the degree to which 'university staff accept each other's varying language proficiency, speech styles, vocabulary and accents' (Selmer, Lauring & Jonasson, 2013: 138), an aspect that we specifically address.

Focusing on HEIs based in the UK enables us to examine the use of English by non-native speakers within an Anglophone environment. In such an environment, the official language is a given and there are no explicit strategies for managing language diversity. Moreover, there are commonly weak or non-existent support structures for non-native speakers in terms of training or other forms of language competence development. However, research shows that the sense of professional achievement and integration of a linguistically diverse academic faculty in the UK is closely linked to the level of linguistic competence (Jiang, Di Napoli, Borg, Maunder, Fry & Walsh, 2010; Luxon & Peelo, 2009; Pherali, 2012). To construct a framework for analyzing organizational power and inequalities associated with English language use, we now turn to sociolinguistics.

Effects of attitudes towards spoken English: insights from sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistic analyses are rooted in the assumption that language practices, in general, are a medium through which social similarity and difference are articulated. More specifically, language practices play a role in the processes of transforming and negotiating relations of power in linguistically diverse settings (Chand, 2009; Coupland, 2010). We are interested in a particular example of such processes, as manifested in the evaluations of the ways non-native speakers speak English.

Attitudes towards spoken English

The phenomenon of evaluating certain linguistic practices as superior and others as inferior has been widely recognized in studies of language attitudes, where it has been framed in relation to accent, representing one's manner of pronunciation (Giles, 1970). In the context of different varieties of English, language attitudes have been studied especially by scholars interested in 'world Englishes' (e.g. Jenkins, 2007; Kachru, 1982; McKenzie, 2008; Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011). Judgments about spoken varieties of English, as Tokumoto and Shibata (2011) explain, are connected to the often made categorization of English users into 'native speakers' (whose accent is described as 'standard) and 'non-native speakers' (considered to speak with a 'non-standard' accent). Notwithstanding the global spread of English and the diversity of its users, 'proper' English is still seen as the prerogative of the UK and US (Jenkins, 2007). Within these two countries, respectively, the so called 'Received Pronunciation' (RP) and 'American Network' accented speech attract the highest evaluations (Fuertes, Gottdiener, Martin, Gilbert & Giles, 2012). As a result, those for whom English is their native language, and especially those whose pronunciation is characterized by the most highly valued accent in a given context, 'are automatically in a position of power as compared with those who have to learn it as a second or foreign language' (Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011: 392).

This position of power is linked to the specific ways in which standard versus non-standard accents influence judgments made about speakers (Cargile & Bradac, 2001; Fuertes et al., 2012; Giles & Powesland, 1975). To begin with, standard accents are of predominant use in the media in a given country, and tend to be associated with the educated upper classes, power and high economic status. By contrast, non-standard accents are those used by foreigners or minority groups, and invoke connotations of lower socioeconomic status (Giles & Billings, 2004). As a result, standard accents are considered, both by standard and non-standard speakers, as more desirable, pleasant to listen to and prestigious than non-standard ones (Bayard & Green, 2005; Cargile, Giles, Ryan & Bradac, 1994;

Edwards, 1999; Lippi-Green, 1997). Moreover, the evaluation of non-standard accents indicates the existence of a ‘hierarchy of prestige’. For example, within the US, more prestige is attributed to accents associated with other English speaking countries and Western European countries, and less with accents associated with the rest of the world (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Lindemann, 2005). A similar hierarchization of varieties of English can be observed in other countries, as documented by studies conducted in Australia (Nesdale & Rooney, 1996), the UK (Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Giles, 1970) and Sweden (Boyd, 2003).

Effects of evaluations by listeners

When evaluating accents, the listener makes a variety of judgments about the speaker and the entire social group she or he represents, and adjusts the communication and impression management strategies applied towards that speaker accordingly (Berger & Bradac, 1982). Based on the accent, the listener evaluates not only the speaker’s linguistic competence, but also her or his competence understood more broadly (Coupland & Bishop, 2007). Accent serves as a basis for evaluating speakers’ social identities (i.e. social categorization) and subsequently, for attributing traits which the listener associates with a given social category (Lambert, 1967; Robinson, 2003). As Lippi-Green (1997: 30) argues, in encounters with speakers using particular ways of expression, individuals ‘perceive variation in the speech of others and... use it to structure (their) knowledge about that person’.

Extant research points to the existence of three main dimensions along which listeners evaluate speakers of different accents: status, solidarity and dynamism (Giles & Billings, 2004). It is in relation to these dimensions that we analyze our empirical material. These three dimensions can be further broken down into evaluations of the following:

- Status: ambition, confidence, competence, education, intelligence, success, and social class;
- Solidarity: attractiveness, benevolence, the speaker’s similarity to the listener, and trustworthiness;

- Dynamism: the speaker's level of activity, enthusiasm, liveliness and talkativeness (e.g. Giles & Billings, 2004; Mulac, Hanley & Prigge, 1974; Zahn & Hopper, 1985).

A recent meta-analysis of extant language attitude studies (Fuertes et al., 2012) suggests that across all of the above dimensions, standard speakers are evaluated more positively than non-standard speakers, which creates a significant advantage for the former group and a disadvantage for the latter. For example, non-standard speakers tend to be perceived as less competent (Boyd, 2003), less intelligent (Lindemann, 2005) and less loyal (Edwards, 1982) than standard speakers, and as speaking the language poorly (Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Walter, 2007). The stronger the non-standard accent perceived, the more negative social evaluations it gives rise to (Gluszek, Newheiser & Dovidio, 2011; Ryan, Carranza & Moffie, 1977).

Of particular importance to international business is the fact that the strongest effects privileging standard ways of speaking are generated within formal, 'high stakes' settings, such as corporations and other employment organizations (Fuertes et al., 2012). For example, as Creese and Kambere (2003) argue, judgments made – primarily by native speakers – in job interview or promotion settings in relation to candidates speaking English with particular accents or in non-standard ways, can be racialized and discriminatory. A number of studies have shown that, due to negative evaluations associated with the spoken language, non-standard accented speakers face discrimination in the workplace (Matsuda, 1991; Nguyen, 1993). Employers tend to assign speakers with non-standard accents to lower status positions than those to which they assign standard speakers, which results in lower earnings for the former (Bradac & Wisegarver, 1984; de la Zerda & Hopper, 1979). What is also crucial, in particular for consideration in an international business context, is that accents have been shown to affect the assessed level of quality of the message communicated by the speaker, and the behavioral reactions of the listener towards the speaker, for example with respect to compliance-gaining and decision making (Giles & Billings, 2004; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Research has also evidenced the connection between accent evaluations on the one hand, and stereotyping and discrimination against speakers with non-standard accents on the other (Derwing & Munro, 2009; Ryan, Giles & Sebastian, 1982).

Effects of evaluations by speakers

While the majority of language attitude studies have considered evaluations made by the listeners, Gluszek and Dovidio (2010) urge researchers to also address language attitudes from the perspective of the speakers. We respond to this call through our analysis. To date, little is known about how non-standard speakers interpret the listener's behavior, shape their own behavior, and interpret the outcomes of the interaction. The so far limited research in this area suggests a potential influence of the speaker's perceptions of her or his use of language on her or his behavior (Cargile et al., 1994; Vorauer, Hunter, Main & Roy, 2000; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001). In particular, non-standard speakers may experience anxiety in verbal interactions (Stephan & Stephan, 1985), and in a workplace context, a high level of stress (Wated & Sanchez, 2006). In a study of non-standard speakers conducted by Derwing (2003), the majority of the participants expressed the belief that, if their speech were not characterized by a foreign accent, they would receive more respect. At the same time, one third of the participants reported that they had actually experienced discrimination due to their accents.

As a way of addressing the expectation of negative evaluations associated with their spoken language, non-standard speakers have been found to adopt the following strategies: avoiding situations in which such negative evaluations might occur, not initiating communication, and blaming the listener's prejudice for any communication problems (Derwing, 2003). On the other hand, it is also possible for non-standard speakers to consider their accents as a source of positively understood uniqueness in comparison with standard speakers (Brewer, 1991; Moyer, 2007). Where this happens, non-standard speakers may adopt a more proactive and assertive approach in communication (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Including this perspective into our framework, according to which the effects of communication are varied and dependent on the situation at hand, is also in line with the view on power as situated and relational adopted in this paper.

Having thus established our theoretical framework we next discuss the adopted methodology.

METHODOLOGY

Studies of language attitudes have applied *indirect* (mainly experiments) and, to a lesser extent, *direct* (interviews and questionnaires) methodological approaches (Speelman, Spruyt, Impe & Geeraerts, 2013). In constructing the research design, we chose the latter, following Giles and Marlow's (2011) call to pay greater attention to sense-making and interpretive processes involved in evaluations of spoken language. Our analysis, therefore, shows not only how non-native speakers evaluate themselves and are evaluated by listeners solely in relation to accent, but also how accent evaluations are intertwined with evaluations of other aspects of the speaker's spoken language (Fuertes et al., 2012). Additionally, we respond to Gluszek and Dovidio's (2010) call for including the speaker's perspective in language attitude-related studies and to Blommaert's (2003) suggestion that sociolinguistic phenomena should be studied as interconnected. Our data analysis thus draws on two data sources: semi-structured interviews and notes taken after the interviews to reflect on the process.

Semi-structured Interviews

The interview data originate from a larger study of foreign academics in UK business schools. In total, 54 semi-structured interviews were conducted between March 2010 and September 2012 with foreign academics employed at 19 business schools across the UK. Participants were identified through university websites and the researchers' personal contacts. The interviews were shared equally between the authors with only one interviewer present in each interview. In selecting the participants, we employed the following criteria: being non-UK born, not having English as a first language, and being in full-time academic employment. The sample consisted of participants from 22 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America and represented all academic levels from lecturer to professor. The interviews lasted between 46 minutes and two hours, were recorded and transcribed. For the purposes of anonymity, participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms, and where interview excerpts are quoted, no references to the interviewee's academic institution or nationality have been made. The decision to use English pseudonyms rather than names commonly associated with particular nationalities was made in order to avoid inadvertently revealing too much participant information. Interview questions covered a range of topics related to the participants' professional experiences in the UK, with one section of the interview focusing on experiences and implications of working in English as a non-native language.

[insert Table 1 approx. here]

In our study, all participants possessed a relatively high level of fluency in English due to the organizational and cultural context. However, depending on the individuals' cultural and linguistic background, time spent in the UK, and the extent to which English is used in social relations outside work, different degrees of comfort in using English existed.

We approached the data as inter-relational (Kvale, 1996) and contextually grounded (Mishler, 1986), produced jointly by the participant and researcher during the interview. In preparing for the interviews, we paid attention to linguistic issues surrounding the interview process, especially as the interviews were conducted in a setting where both researchers and participants communicated in a second or third language. A situation of this kind can be framed as presenting a 'mutual linguistic challenge' (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004: 227). To address it, we made sure that both researchers had the same understanding regarding the meaning of the interview questions. We were also conscious of other potential impacts on preparing, carrying out and interpreting the interviews. These included, for example, the influences of our linguistic backgrounds on the design of the interview structure, content and interpretation, increased interviewer and response biases, misunderstandings, neglect of information provided through non-verbal communication, and the 'coloring' of both the interviewers' questions and the respondents' statements by the cultural values associated with the language in which they were given (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004; Punnett & Shenkar, 1994; Ryen, 2002; Wright, 1996). We tried to minimize these impacts through rephrasing questions where they seemed to be misunderstood and asking for clarification in situations where we were unsure about the accuracy of our understanding of the answers. We also used the notes produced after the interviews as a means to reflect on our own position as listeners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and how this informed our evaluations of the interviewee's spoken English. Engaging in reflexivity and being aware of the linguistic specificities of research setting is also important for addressing the ‘silence’ on language matters that Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki and Welch (2014) state has characterized qualitative international business research.

Reflections on Evaluations of Interviewees’ Spoken English

In including the researchers’ reflections on the interviewees’ spoken language, we were inspired by extant language attitudes research involving the study of listeners’ responses to different speakers’ ways of speaking English (e.g. Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Garrett, Coupland & Williams, 2003; Giles, 1970; Pantos & Perkins, 2013; Zahn & Hopper, 1985). To examine how the speaker’s use of English is evaluated by the listener we noted our impressions after the interviews as a basis for a reflexive analysis. This constituted an opportunity for conducting first-person action research to question the assumptions, attitudes and evaluations related to the interviewees in order to reflexively improve our practice (Marshall, 2011; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Engagement in this kind of inquiry necessitated giving attention to values (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), exhibiting contextual sensitivity, and reflecting on issues of power within the research setting (Marshall, 2011). In doing so, we followed Garg’s (2005) call for examining the researchers’ assumptions and evaluations of respondents in research interview contexts where participants vary in terms of their linguistic proficiency. Being non-native English speaking academics working in the UK ourselves, we acknowledge our personal and professional interest in the subject and take our cue from Holvino’s (2010: 249, citing Bannerji, 1992) view that ‘there is no better point of entry into a critique or reflection than one’s own experience’.

Limitations of the Research Design

While our methodological approach is novel and innovative, we also acknowledge its limitations. The research design would have been more complete through including native speakers’ evaluations as a source of data. This would have enabled us to discuss the judgments about non-native speakers’ use of language made by ‘standard’ speakers. Further, it would have been valuable to have the opportunity to register speakers’ and listeners’ evaluations made in relation to interactions in which the same speakers and listeners participated. However, access to this kind of data was beyond the scope of the present study.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data we adapted the previously outlined framework, which considers evaluations of speakers' accents along the dimensions of status, solidarity and dynamism. In our adaptation of this framework, in addition to accent, we included other aspects of the spoken language, such as vocabulary and grammar. Within our empirical material, the effects of evaluations of these aspects were inseparable from the effects of accent evaluations.

We analyzed the material in a reflexive manner, engaging in dialogue and debate (Maclean, Harvey & Chia, 2012). Having agreed on a thematic coding framework, we started by reading and coding our respective transcripts, paying attention to the ways in which the participants accounted for events and emotions related to the use of English. Such instances included examples of the participants' own use of English as well as situations in which language was seen to have a more indirect effect on a situation. We then shared the transcripts and discussed them for corroboration and consistency. During these discussions we decided that we needed a framework which would account for not only the non-native speakers' use of English, but also evaluations thereof, including the speakers' evaluations of their own linguistic performances. Having familiarized ourselves with sociolinguistics in the course of the research, we subsequently settled on the framework presented in this paper. The analysis and interpretation process thus involved successive and iterative rounds of alternating between the 'raw' empirical data, the thematized material and the theoretical concepts used (Silverman, 2001).

FINDINGS

Few of the 54 participants consider their use of English purely as 'some kind of a technical problem [which] can be fixed' (Sam, Lecturer, Asia). Instead, the use of English is seen as encompassing a number of aspects that go beyond functionality. Both in the interviews and in the researchers' reflective comments, the evaluations of accents and other aspects of spoken

English are most strongly connected to judgments made about the status of the speakers. For the purposes of analytical clarity, we present evaluations regarding status, solidarity and dynamism separately. However, these need to be seen as interrelated, since especially status tends to be interlinked with evaluations of both solidarity and dynamism.

Status

As outlined before, evaluations of 'status' refer to judgments about factors such as ambition, confidence, competence, education, intelligence, prestige, success, and social class of the speaker. One illustration of how the evaluation of a non-native speaker's status based on her or his accent plays a role in the construction of power differentials between native and non-native staff (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 1999b), refers to representing the organization in the outside world, in particular in the public media. In the extract below, Catherine explains how, because of her negative self-evaluation of her accent, she opted out of the opportunity to participate in a radio programme on behalf of her institution:

> The Director [of the business school] asked me to go on the radio with him… and I was thinking I couldn't do that when he asked me... I said 'no, I'm sorry', I didn't feel like doing that… He could have gone for someone else, who had a better accent. That's what I thought [about] going on the radio. And it didn't even cross his mind: he asked me, wanted me, and he would have loved me to go with him on this round table on the radio. (Catherine, Senior Lecturer, Southern Europe)

The invitation Catherine received shows that the top management of her organization did not consider her spoken English as inferior to that of native-speaking staff. Catherine, however, did not have the confidence to represent the institution in the media – a forum commonly associated with a standard way of speaking (Giles & Billings, 2004) – because of her metaperception about how her way of speaking would be evaluated by the listeners (Vorauer, 2006). This, in turn, influenced her action: in a situation where she could have gained a more powerful position in the organization, through accompanying the Director at a prestigious external engagement, she self-excluded from participating in it.

A negative self-evaluation of the speaker's spoken English can also occur in relation to interactions with other audiences. A number of our participants expressed concerns about teaching overseas students who, in the participants' view, tended to be negative about being taught by lecturers with non-British accents: 'they think to come to a UK university, and they expect everything to be in the English standard. Pronunciation and everything' (Sandy, Lecturer, Southern Europe). The academic's way of speaking English was at times mentioned as the reason behind students' negative performance evaluations of that academic as a lecturer:

> [My] accent… has improved, but still [I don't speak] like a native British speaker. When I started working… and students filled in the feedback of the module, some of them commented on my language, how I pronounced a particular word.... And they would comment on just the one word that I had pronounced wrong... Which is really funny, because you are not a native English speaker… but they expect you, because you are the teacher, to go in there with perfect language. And, funny enough, sometimes teachers are from Scotland, and they have a very strong accent, and sometimes people don't understand them, but students wouldn't really comment, because they see them as British and they wouldn't dare comment on the language. (Sophia, Lecturer, North Africa)

Sophia's reflection suggests that international students coming to the UK have particular expectations regarding the quality of their education. Language use – that is, the native speaker's variant of English (Shuck, 2004) – forms an implicit part of these expectations. As a consequence, native speakers are, by default, seen as using the language in a 'proper' way, while the use of English by non-native lecturers is considered inferior and in need of correcting, regardless of the actual level of comprehensibility of both native and non-native lecturers.

Similarly to the speakers' self-evaluations expressed in the interviews, the researchers' reflective notes also point to judgments made regarding the speakers' status in the organizational context, based on their spoken language. The extract below refers to an interview with a participant whose first language was Greek:

> His speech was fluent but the vocabulary not very extensive. He made a lot of general, 'folk wisdom'-like assertions. There was something slightly annoying about the rhetorical questions he'd pose in response to mine: 'Do you really wanna know this?', or the way he'd end his statements with 'that's it'. He often used colloquialisms, and every now and then a 'soft' swear word, like 'bullshit'. Perhaps this 'cool' way of talking appeals to undergraduates, but do people in meetings and at conferences take him seriously? Combined with his accent, this felt less like an interview with an academic, and more like a 'bar chat' with a local person met on holidays in Greece.

This interviewee's way of speaking was characterized by a colloquial use of vocabulary and a low level of precision of expression. Coupled with the Greek accent featuring in his speech, this evoked in the researcher a judgment based on the stereotype of a 'local person met on holidays', which she used in articulating her evaluation of the interviewee's perceived 'prestige' (Coupland & Bishop, 2007) within his organization and the professional community.

While the majority of speakers' evaluations pointed to the negative effects of their spoken English, a few positive outcomes were also recognized. The following notes produced by one of the researchers after an interview with an accomplished scholar illustrate this:

> Funny how after all these years he's spent in the UK, his accent still shows that he comes from a German-speaking country, but somehow this adds to the impression of him being a serious scholar. He was incredibly precise… No wonder he's a senior academic – if he writes in the same way he talks, he must be really successful with his publications.

The interviewee's use of language influenced the researcher's assessment of the interview itself, and of the interviewee's academic competence. In this case, the Germanic accent of the speaker was taken as a marker of the academic's 'seriousness' and intellectual gravity. As previous research has pointed out, the listener tends to extrapolate the assessment of the linguistic competence of the speaker over the speaker's competence more broadly (e.g. Chand, 2009; Lippi-Green, 1997), including her or his intelligence and knowledge (Taylor, 1991; Yoshihara, 2001). Moreover, when compared with the comments above made about the Greek interviewee, the positive evaluation of the German speaker confirms the view of sociolinguists that, amongst non-native English accents, Western European accents such as German tend to be valued more highly than accents from other, economically less developed, regions (Coupland & Bishop, 2007; Giles, 1970; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010).

Solidarity

The evaluation of solidarity involves judgments regarding such traits as the social attractiveness of the speaker, her or his benevolence and trustworthiness, and the speaker's similarity to the listener. This presents an interesting dimension for international business research, to which issues of coordination and cohesion can be related (e.g. Henderson, 2005). According to our participants, interactions with peers and superiors are typical situations in which organizational inequalities between native and non-native speakers can occur and be perpetuated. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this can be partly attributed to a lack of solidarity between native and non-native English speakers. This absence of solidarity, manifested through different language practices applied by the interacting parties help explain why, especially in conflict situations, non-native speakers can find themselves in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis a native speaker. When this happens, language emerges as a medium through which organizational power is exercised, as illustrated in Tracy's (Lecturer, Southern Europe) following comment on a performance appraisal meeting with her native English-speaking, Cambridge-educated line manager:

> I didn't understand what the guy was talking to me. I could understand his English, but there was a lot of coding behind what he was saying. I did not respond well to it… When I came out of the meeting, I felt very upset. Because of more or less what he did, with his fantastic English... Language becomes a weapon. It's not any more a communication tool… I went there to ask him a question, to communicate a message, but he used the language to put me in my

> place. And he succeeded... But if I knew the code a bit better, I wouldn't have allowed him to do that.

Tracy's account of what happened during her appraisal meeting exemplifies how the lack of solidarity between speakers, which is represented by their deployment of very different linguistic practices during the interaction and which, in turn, enables the native speaker to exercise power through language, results in the reinforcement of organizational inequalities associated with, for example, differences in organizational position, gender and nationality.

By contrast to a situation where the lack of linguistic solidarity between speakers leads to negative evaluations of non-native speakers and to the construction and perpetuation of organizational inequalities, where linguistic similarities are perceived, such negative evaluations do not arise. As a consequence, speakers do not adjust their behavior in the way they would if they expected to be evaluated stereotypically or with prejudice based on their spoken language (Derwing, 2003; Derwing & Munro, 2009). Some participants, while recognizing that the way they speak English, mainly because of their accent, might differ from the 'dominant standard' (Silverstein, 1996), evaluate its effects in the organizational domain as neutral. As the excerpt below illustrates, this might be, in the first place, because of the perceived linguistic similarities between oneself and other staff in the linguistically diverse organization:

> It's a pretty multicultural audience here, so everybody more or less doesn't have English as a first language… so it's not that I'm worse than everyone else in terms of speaking English. (Andrew, Lecturer, Southern Europe)

Second, it is also possible for an individual to feel solidarity with other staff, whether native or non-native speakers, by the virtue of being 'colleagues'. One interviewee, who has worked for many years for the same organization, explains in the following why she does not consider her accent to be a relevant factor in work-related interactions:

> Obviously at work I am well known, and people don't question my identity beyond that of a colleague who does things… I don't feel in any way different, or I don't feel I have to explain

or justify myself in any way. People don't usually engage with my foreign accent, they just talk to me. (Beatrice, Professor, Eastern Europe)

From the listener's perspective, perceived solidarity with the speaker, based on her or his spoken English enhances the highly positive assessment of the content of the speech. The following extract from the researcher's commentary on the interview with an accomplished academic illustrates this point:

> What an insightful interview! It felt like a dance: either we have a really well thought through set of questions, or Steve's logic of thinking was totally synchronous with mine. He gave his answers without hesitation and delivered them in perfectly formed, sophisticated sentences.

As the above quote shows, the researcher was highly satisfied with her interaction with the participant, to the point where she used the metaphor of a 'dance' to describe the smooth flow of the interview. The similarity between her own and the interviewee's logic of reasoning further strengthened her positive evaluation of the interview content.

Dynamism

The assessment of 'dynamism' refers to evaluations made regarding the speaker's level of activity, enthusiasm, liveliness and talkativeness. Compared to status- and solidarity- related judgments, participants make few evaluations of dynamism in relation to their spoken English. An example of a speaker's evaluation of her level of dynamism in organizational interactions, and its explanations in the context of the metaperceptions she holds about how others might evaluate her (Vorauer, 2006) is given below:

> I don't think there is a big problem with me writing in English… Sometimes, I do get the odd mistake, but I think everybody does, even British people, in terms of grammar… But if I go to meetings at Faculty or University level, I usually find myself at first... sitting just listening, and I don't feel like I want to speak up, or say anything. [Because] if I comment on anything, everybody will think, oh, that's a stupid comment… oh, this stupid woman, she didn't

> understand what we are saying. I feel I'm gonna be seen as stupid. (Sophia, Lecturer, North Africa)

While the organization recognizes her as sufficiently senior and competent to attend high-level meetings, Sophia exhibits a low level of activity and talkativeness during such meetings. Similarly to Catherine, she excludes herself from making a contribution in situations which could potentially result in the enhancement of her status within the organization. Sophia's self-evaluation of her spoken English as inferior to that of her native-speaking colleagues leads her to adopting the strategy of not initiating communication (Derwing, 2003) so that not to be negatively evaluated by the predominantly native-speaking, senior staff. At the same time, in a meeting context where active participation is expected, and where the act of voicing an opinion asserts the status of the speaker, Sophia's low level of dynamism might produce precisely the effect of negative evaluations she seeks to avoid. It is also an instance where the interlinked evaluations of language and competence (Piekkari et al., 2005) influence the actions of the individual. In this way, language-related evaluations yet again have an impact on organizational power relations, as they contribute to the reproduction of organizational inequalities along the lines of native and non-native language use.

While scarce, evaluations related to the speakers' dynamism in interactions can also be found in the researchers' commentaries on the interviews. The following reflective note written after an interview with a Chinese academic illustrates the presence of judgments about dynamism and how these are connected to evaluations of solidarity between the listener and the speaker, as well as the speaker's professional competence:

> This interview was hard work! I kept getting such short answers, and I'm not sure she always understood what I was saying, simply due to not always understanding the words I used. I felt I couldn't get through to her, like there was no common ground to establish which would allow the conversation to develop. Hesitations, long pauses and 'how to say' interjections interrupted the flow of the interview... She said teaching is no problem due to only needing a narrow vocabulary, but I wonder how she does in other areas of her work, such as writing papers...

> How she'll manage in academia long-term I really don't know, and I definitely can't see a promotion happening.

The interviewee had a recognizable Chinese accent and speech pattern, which reaffirmed the researcher's anticipation of what interviewing a person of a Chinese background might 'sound' like (Henry, 2010). It can also be seen as an instance where an ascribed stereotype is drawn on to position the speaker (Neeley, 2013). The low level of enthusiasm and talkativeness of the speaker triggered frustration in the interviewer and her dissatisfaction with the interview process which she described as 'hard work'. The 'non-standard' variation of English used (Silverstein, 1996), although not constituting a hindrance for understanding the interviewee, in this case acted as a reason to question her professional capabilities. There were no substantive grounds on which to judge the interviewee's subject knowledge, as she did not talk about her research. Nevertheless, the lack of linguistic fluency became, to the interviewer, an indicator of the interviewee's low level of professional competence (Boyd, 2003). This, in turn, gave rise to judgment about the participant's position within the organizational power structures as a junior member of staff with minimal chances of securing a promotion.

DISCUSSION

In previous studies, the effects of language in terms of fluency or lack thereof in an international business context have to a large extent been conceptualized in terms of the status of individuals, whether regarding their career advancement prospects because they are fluent, or as marginalization and loss of status if they are not fluent. Our research contributes to such studies of power and language, in that we include the analytical categories of solidarity and dynamism to analyze how status formations are underpinned by other intersecting processes. The concept of solidarity is useful for developing an understanding of important aspects of integration, such as a particular linguistic dynamic through which social cohesion is created as a part of using a 'shared language'. Dynamism is an aspect that previously has received little attention. While some research has focused on how cultural backgrounds provide different manners of phrasing and communication (e.g. Klitmøller &

Lauring, 2013; Stahl et al., 2010), the concept of dynamism aims to capture less visible and therefore easily overlooked aspects of spoken communication. Integrating these two dimensions into examinations of the power effects of language use is therefore valuable.

The main theoretical contribution of the study refers to the introduction of the sociolinguistic framework of status, solidarity and dynamism as a way of theorizing about and analyzing organizational power and inequalities in international business settings. In particular, the insights emerging from the above analysis concern the effects of evaluations of non-native staff's spoken English. As has been demonstrated, such evaluations refer to issues beyond the speaker's linguistic fluency, which in turn has consequences for the speakers' actions and for the construction and perpetuation of power relations and inequalities within the organization.

Organizational power differentials stemming from judgments of status and professional competence

Due to the dominance of the native speaker's standard of linguistic expression within the organization, the use of language by native speaking staff is considered superior to that of non-native speakers. As sociolinguists have argued, in culturally and linguistically diverse organizational contexts that employ speakers who vary in their use of English, 'standard' English speakers tend to be deemed to speak 'good English' (Silverstein, 1996), while the use of English by those whose English differs from the native speaker-defined norm is judged to be the cause of 'miscommunications and poor service' (Chand, 2009: 400). Our study has demonstrated that such unequal value judgements might not necessarily be based on the actual level of the speaker's comprehensibility: when occurring in the context of a native speaker incomprehensibility is not challenged. This gives insight into two important aspects of the mechanisms through which power and language use in organizations are interconnected. First, the ascribed status given to the non-native speaker based on her or his accent means that her or his achieved professional status becomes devalued (see also Neeley, 2013). Second, the ascribed characteristic of a native English speaker who is by virtue of that position deemed to possess a 'correct' linguistic capability (Wassink & Curzan, 2004), means that even when an individual's accent is difficult to understand, her or his status does not suffer.

Previous literature has suggested that, within organizational contexts, negative evaluations of employees' linguistic competence against the dominant norm are carried out by others, especially the organizational decision makers (Creese & Kambere, 2003; Piller & Takahashi, 2011). Through including the speakers' perspective in the methodological design, our study has generated a new insight in this respect: such negative evaluations can also be made by the non-native speakers themselves, as a result of their internalization of the dominant norm, whereby non-native speakers often see their own accent as carrying a 'stigma' (Derwing, 2003), and their verbal language use as inferior to that of their native-speaking colleagues. Such self-perception, in turn, might lead the individual to avoid situations in which her or his accent would be exposed, and to self-exclude from participating in various communicative processes. This results not only in creating the impression of the non-native speaker being less able to contribute to the organization than native speakers, but also in making more space for the native speakers to strengthen their organizational position. Whether externally or self-attributed, a lower degree of *status* – as manifested through negative evaluations – associated with non-native varieties of language use, impacts the *dynamism* exhibited by the speakers. As a consequence, non-native speakers become cast as professionally less competent members of the organization than the native speakers, which perpetuates a spiral of negative evaluation. This, in turn, brings about power differentials between non-native and native speakers in a way that goes beyond linguistic inequalities.

Hierarchization of non-native language uses and inequalities among non-native speakers

While previous literature has pointed to the construction of inequalities along the distinction between native and non-native speakers (Matsuda, 1991; Nguyen, 1993; Steyaert, Ostendorp & Gaibrois, 2011), another novel insight emerging from our study refers to how unequal organizational power relations are not only constructed between native and non-native speakers, but also among non-native speakers. Complementing extant research on the hierarchization of languages in multilingual organizations (e.g. Steyaert, Ostendorp & Gaibrois, 2011), our study has demonstrated that hierarchization of English language uses also occurs in Anglophone organizations that employ speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. Understanding how and on what grounds the hiearchization of Englishes happens is important in an international business context.

In attributing different degrees of status to different ways of using English and in evaluating broader professional competences of individuals based on their accents, categories such as the economic and political power of a given country, and stereotypes regarding the representatives of different nations are mobilized (e.g. Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Lindemann, 2003). In consequence, a non-native speaker who speaks English with, for example, a Greek accent is more likely to be perceived as someone who is not very well organized, competent and disciplined, compared to a speaker with German-accented speech, who, by contrast, is more likely to be evaluated as respectable, serious and hardworking. While the way in which stereotypes affect judgment in organizational settings would have been difficult to unveil had a different methodological approach been adopted, in our study this has been possible through incorporating a reflexive methodology with the aid of which listeners' evaluations of non-native speakers' spoken English have been examined.

Construction of organizational power relations during interactions

The study also points to the link between power and linguistic *solidarity* (or the absence thereof), as well as power and linguistic *dynamism* manifest in interactions between speakers. Sociolinguistic research has previously asserted that the speaker's accent influences the listener's assessment of the quality of the message communicated by the speaker, and the likelihood that the decision articulated in the interaction is going to be obeyed by the listener. (Giles & Billings, 2004; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Our research additionally shows that a perceived *similarity* between the listener's and the speaker's logic of reasoning, as expressed verbally, and a construction of sentences which resonate with the listener's own preferred way of formulating thoughts, positively affect the listener's evaluation of the message conveyed by the speaker, who thus becomes a powerful party to the interaction as someone whose words deserve attention. On the other hand, where the listener perceives the speaker as non-dynamic, for example in situations where the latter says little and her or his speech lacks enthusiasm, as can be the case with non-native speakers who have not yet developed a strong command of the language or come from a linguistic background where talkativeness is not highly valued, the overall evaluation of the speaker's professional competence is negatively affected. What this also shows is that, when listeners evaluate the speakers' use of language on the basis of actual interactions with them and in more naturally occurring settings than the laboratory-like conditions created in many studies of language attitudes (see Garrett, Coupland & Williams, 2003; Giles & Coupland, 1994), evaluations of the speakers' accent cannot be disentangled from those of other linguistic traits, such as vocabulary and grammar. These evaluations are then generalized to, for example, the professional competences of the speaker, her or his status within the organization, and her or his career progression prospects.

Moreover, the study shows how language becomes a medium through which organizational power is exercised in interactions between native and non-native speakers in situations where there is an absence of linguistic solidarity. For the non-native speaker, such interactions can be emotionally distressing and trigger in them feelings of inadequacy in professional communications (Piekkari et al., 2005). Native speakers, on the other hand, may exploit the linguistic difference to their advantage through dominating and undermining non-native speakers during interactions in meetings. As Vaara et al. (2005) have argued in a different context, language mobilizes underlying sociocultural and political power relations. It is, of course, difficult to attribute the power dynamics that are manifested in communication between speakers solely to the lack of linguistic solidarity between them, since the behaviors of individuals will also be influenced by the formal differences in organizational positions they hold, whereby, for example, the native speaker might be the line manager of the non-native speaker. Nevertheless, as our research has shown, in an organizational context such as higher education, where the most valued variety of English is that of an elite university-educated native speaker, the power relation between a junior non-native speaking employee and a senior manager who uses the most highly valued language variety becomes more unequal than if the two parties used the same variety of English.

In this sense, similarly to situations where non-native speakers self-exclude from organizational processes through avoiding interactions, the actual interactions between native and non-native speakers, when taking place in the absence of linguistic solidarity, contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of organizational hierarchies. Within those hierarchies, in general, senior positions are taken and important decisions made by the native-speaking staff, while non-native speakers remain on more junior positions, thus having less input into the management and decision-making in the organizations.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been to address research questions concerning how evaluations are made of speakers in a non-native spoken English language context; what actions are performed by the speakers as a result; what can be said about the relationship between English language use, power and organizational inequalities as a result of understanding such evaluations; and what are the implications for practice in officially monolingual, yet linguistically diverse organizations.

Our study contributes to the growing stream of research within the international business literature which offers a critical reflection on language and power in organizations, by focusing on verbal language use in a particular type of culturally and linguistically diverse organizations, ones that operate in an Anglophone national context and use English as their official language, and yet are composed of linguistically diverse staff. These organizations, while conducting their operations in one country setting, compete globally with organizations based in different countries, recruit talent from a global labor market, and generate a large part of their revenues from attracting customers from across the globe and providing them with – in this case, educational – services. Through adopting the sociolinguistic framework of status, solidarity and dynamism, we extend the interdisciplinarity of international business research and demonstrate how concepts and ideas developed by sociolinguistic research can help us understand phenomena occurring in contemporary multicultural and multilingual organizations. Methodologically, we contribute to the body of qualitative work in international business, specifically by applying an interpretive approach. Through offering a reflexive analysis of the researchers' responses to the participants' spoken English, we enrich the extant methodological repertoire of international business research. Moreover, through including the speaker's perspective, we contribute to research on how non-standard speakers interpret the listener's behavior, shape their own behavior, and interpret the outcomes of the interaction (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010).

Our study has several practical implications. First, it is necessary for managers to understand the relationship between English language use by native and non-native speakers and organizational power and inequalities. Non-native speakers' language use in speech, whether manifested through accent or through vocabulary and grammar, leads to evaluations by both the listeners and the speakers. These evaluations extend far beyond language-related factors. They can lead to the deepening of inequalities among staff, and can result in conflicts and (self-)exclusions from certain organizational activities, with a possible disadvantage to the organization. In this context it is important for managers to also understand how other ascribed characteristics such as gender, class and race (see Neeley, 2013) are mobilized in conjunction with language to produce evaluations. Managing multilingual diversity through a focus on finding a common language does not, as research has shown (see Piekkari et al., 2005), necessarily bring about an integrative outcome. Instead, understanding how particular linguistic practices – in this case expressions of spoken English – are linked to underlying sociocultural and political assumptions is imperative for creating an inclusive organizational climate of equal opportunity. In this context, we recommend the development of corporate policies and processes which overtly address language attitudes and the use of language towards the creation of linguistically inclusive organizational cultures. For example, with regard to managing meetings where both native and non-native speaking staff are present, processes could be put in place to ensure equitability of contributions from all participants. In relation to managing individual staff members, both native and non-native speakers should be encouraged to pay attention to the level of dynamism they exhibit in interactions with other staff, and to the amount of space they give to others to articulate their views.

Moreover, it is necessary for managers to recognize that the global spread of English as the *lingua franca* of international business has taken place through many varieties of the English language, with differences in accents and vocabulary amongst speakers all over the world. Therefore, the internationalization of an organization should trigger a deliberate action on the part of management to promote and value most highly those linguistic practices which enable the greatest level of comprehensibility and participation, so that all employees' expertise and creative input can be captured. This would involve an openness to changing the linguistic norms and practices not only of the non-native speaking staff, but of native English speakers as well, possibly including the managers themselves.

Managers should also be aware that, as with any stereotyping and prejudice, linguistic stereotyping can occur in a subtle way, whereby neither the native nor non-native speakers are conscious of it occurring and of what its potential discriminatory effects might be. At present, there are no formal requirements placed upon organizations to deliver staff training addressing the effects of language in a similar manner to anti-discrimination training relating to other aspects of diversity, such as gender, race and ability. In multilingual organizations, holding training sessions for staff aimed at raising awareness of language-related issues, challenging linguistic stereotypes and prejudice, and supporting the development of organizationally desirable linguistic practices could be of paramount importance for turning such organizations into linguistically inclusive spaces.

We close our discussion with suggestions for further research. First, while our study has been situated in an Anglophone context with a focus on the use of English, we encourage studies with a similar approach to be carried out in non-Anglophone linguistic contexts, which in effect constitute the greatest part of the global economy. Insights thus generated would broaden the scope of understanding of evaluations of languages, and would as such be of use to a broader field of the international business community.

Second, we issue a call for international business researchers to conduct further studies of the relationship between language use, power and inequalities in organizations. As has been argued throughout this paper, the effects of evaluations of non-native speaking staff's spoken language is an important research area to focus on. While in the present paper, we have analyzed the effects of language-related issues in isolation, we see the potential for future studies of language and power in international business to address the intersections of language with, for example, gender, class, ethnicity and race. Understanding the meaning and dynamics of such categories of diversity has significant implications for managing power relations and inequalities in organizations operating in the international business environment.

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