

## **Translation as a means of communication in Multinational Companies**

**Noureddine BENMEHDI**  
**Abu Bekr BELKAID University - Tlemcen -**

### **Introduction:**

Nowdays, a large part of business is conducted internationally, even globally. Companies are bigger and work in many geographical and linguistic areas.

A successful multinational company can already exist on every continent. Which means that huge mixes of different language are spoken inside the same organization.

However, for every company it is important to communicate effectively and so that every body understands. Very often multinational companies have chosen a common corporate language to solve this problem. They train their employees to use one common language and recruit persons who already speak the foreign languages needed in the company.

In fact, Multinational enterprises nowadays expect that employees are able to work independently in languages other their mother tongue. So, the situa-

tion is totally different thant it was just a couple of decades ago, when there were correspondents and interpreters for foreign communication in international companies (Ballenç C, 2006).

However, in spite of the fact that English is spoken widely in business and the language skills of the employees have also improved a lot, increasing globalization of firms has changed the working environment so much that new kinds of challenges are met in international business communication.

The main objective of this research paper is to understand the whole picture of international business communication, which is beneficial for developing more advanced strategies and process for conducting international business.

So, the following are our research questions :

- what are the communication challenges for Multinational Companies?
- Is there a need for translation in Multinational Companies?
- Do language barriers prevent communication in Multinational Companies?
- Is translation a means of overcoming language barriers in Multinational Companies?
- What are the problems of translation activities in Multinational Companies?

## Translation as a means of communication in Multinational Companies

---

### Definitions:

**A Multinational Company:** is defined as a company that is "operating in several or many countries" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). It is also "an enterprise that controls and manages production establishments located in at least two countries" (Caves, 1996,1).

**Translation:** is defined as "the action or process of turning from one language into another, also the product of this, a version in a different language" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). It is also "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the other intended the text" (Newmark, 1988,5). A translator on the other hand is "One who translates or renders from one language into another, the author of a translation" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009).

**Language barrier:** is defined by Large (1990) as the obstacle that prevents communication between parties. Communication is mostly done in either written or spoken form and expressed in a certain language. When both the Sender and receiver use the same language then communication can occur successfully. When a common language is not shared then the dialogue is prevented, and this forms a language barrier. This is also defined as "a barrier to

communication between people resulting from their being unable to speak a common language" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009).

**Common Corporate language:** is defined as a "tool" that is used in multinational companies to run global operations. By using a common corporate language. All the international business units have a common ground for communication and therefore efficiency increases. In addition a common corporate language decreases misunderstandings, costs and need for translation. (Fredriksson, 2006).

### **Language Management in Multinational Companies:**

Language is needed everywhere for effective communication. It is used to build relationships and share between groups and individuals (Lauring 2007). In addition language is an important factor that in its part helps form an individual's personal culture (Krishna, 2005). In companies language is critical in the process of creating organizational culture.

Since language is the means to knowledge creation and application, information flow, and a verall functioning of the company. Language part of a communication process is also needed in informing outside parties, in addition to internal parties

## Translation as a means of communication in Multinational Companies

---

such as (stakeholders) about the culture, tradition, and customs of the company.

Since language plays such an important role in the basic functions in a company, problems have started to arise with the formation of multinational companies, as they have to deal with employees from several different cultures where several different languages are spoken. And even with this cultural variety all the employees need to strive towards the same goals of the organization.

Although English has been widely recognized as a common corporate language in many multinational companies, employees do not necessarily adopt this language for their every day use, but rather use their native tongue in every day actions. The language choice should be based on the how strategically "fit" the language is for the company, and how much the language has already been used in the company (Krishna, 2003).

The main for having a common corporate language is to make information flow more efficient within companies in for example for mail reports. Information systems and cross-national interactions. Cost reductions reduction, time advantages by avoiding less misunderstanding, and unification of the

employees justify adopting a common corporate language.

The problems related to having one language in the corporation are for example that it is a long-term process and the personnel might resist the change if the corporate language is not their native language. It has also been noted that using one common corporate language might mean language barriers for the information flow, knowledge transfer and communication this situation shows the struggle that the employees go through to be able to use a common corporate language in multinational companies.

### **Need for Translation in Multinational companies:**

We have previously noticed that English has a role as a common corporate language of the world and most business can be conducted in this language. So, Is there really a need for Translation in multinational companies.

Although English is spoken effectively all over the world, many studies in the academic literature show that communication in English is not always as easy as we think it is. For example (Lonhiala Salminen, 2002) shows the communication in English between different cultures is quite challenging and difficult.

## **Translation as a means of communication in Multinational Companies**

---

The role of the consumer is also crucial in deciding which language to use. For example some customers prefer to be served in their first language. They are even willing to pay a price premium for this service. On the other hand, other customers want a price reduction if they are not served in their own language. So customers of the world want to have the same linguistic rights.

In addition the social change and its impact on international communication and, the development process of non-western countries and their fast economic growth has encouraged people to study other major language and the expectation to use just English is not so strong anymore.

This situation has effected the increasing need for international communication in multiple languages and hence the increasing need for translation activities in Multinational companies. "Because of the globalization of business, we are translating more than ever" (Ferreira-Alves, 2008).

### **Translation work in Multinational Companies:**

When a company becomes multinational it naturally comes in touch with various language. This means more transactions and communication take place between people who do not share the same

mother tongue. Due to the use of multiple languages, companies tend to have translation departments where official documentation are being translated.

The translations that are done in the translation departments are mostly official and legal documents there is a priority order for the translations so that all out going and legal documents come first while in-house translations can wait.

The translation policy of Multinational Companies is based on the following principles :

- 1- Communicating with the customer in mind.
- 2- Using plain language so that our information is easily read and understood.
- 3- Using consistent terminology across national boundaries and fields of business.
- 4- Promoting clear and consistent communication.
- 5- Promoting cross-cultural understanding.

The translation process has three basic steps. The first step is called: input: the translation department or translator receives a document that has to be translated. The second step is processing; the translator studies the document, the content and context of it and uses the support provided to do the actual task of translating. The third and final step is output: the document is delivered back to the original source or other given final destination.



## **Translation as a means of communication in Multinational Companies**

---

The processing phase might take a long time depending on the nature of the document. The grammatical structure. Cultural context of it and communication situation among other things affect the complexity of the translation process and therefore the time that it takes.

Tranlators are mainly used when mashine translation ca not be completed or the quality of the text requires human input. It is typical for a translator to specialize in one subject area. Translators in companies have numerous aids for their translation process. The need for dictionary use depends on the amount of knowledge that the translator has of the subject. This knowledge is usually a quired though a combination of education and experience (Domas White, 2008). But, traditional dictionaries are starting to lose ground to more advanced technological translation programs.

One type of aid has been used for a long periode of time and that is Terminological Banks. They were first created in the 60s and the 70s by translation departments in major organizations as well as make sure that translators had the most up -to- date terminology in use with the help of these term banks translations can be done efficiently, and rapidly and made more available for the entire organization.

### **Problems related to translation work in MNCs:**

Mashine translation has been widely used for translating, and research on it has been wide. However, it has also been noted that high quality of translation process is important and to achieve quality human translators have to take part in the translation process. Mashine translation might ignore the context in which the documents are being translated and; the meaning of the text is just as important as the individual words when making high quality translation.

In addition to understanding the context it is also relevant to understand the subject of the source text that why it takes a lot of time for translators to consult with different subject specialists when making a translation. If the translator is not familiar with the subject then additional aids are required, however, the quality of the translation may decrease if the vocabulary and terminology are unknown to the translator.

Sometimes translators need to move to translating another language that is not their strongest. The reason might be for example that two languages are some what similar and the translator is expected to be able to translate the document. However, this raises the complexity of the translation task and

## **Translation as a means of communication in Multinational Companies**

---

creates uncertainty and therefore decreases the quality level.

The main difficulty that a translator faces is that some industries use a lot of slang and jargon that might be unfamiliar to the translator, this might confuse the translator and lead to decreased quality.

### **Conclusion:**

According to what we stated before, we can conclude here that:

Language is an important factor international business and its significance for multinational companies is well recognized nowadays.

Even though English has an important role in international communication, the employees still expect information and support in their local language as will their business partners.

The current trend is that more international communication is done by a bigger number of companies using a bigger number of languages.

Translation situations are increased in multinational companies because of the globalizing business environment therefore they (MNCs) have to

find a strategy to avoid the difficulties of translation activities and to provide them with the supportive tools and resources to produce quality translation in a limited time.

### References:

- ANDERSON H. (2004), **The Role of language**, in Corporate Communication, An International Journal, N°03, P.31.
- BALLANCE C. (2006), **Effective Multinational Communication**, Journal of Economics, N°07, P.122.
- CAVES R. (1996) **Multinational Enterprise and Economic Analysis**, Second Edition, Cambridge University Press.
- DOMAS WHITE M. (2008), **Beyond Dictionaries**, Edward Elgar Publishing. UK.
- FREDERIKSSON R. (2006) **The Multinational Corporation as a Multilingual Organization**, in Corporate Communication, An International Journal, N°4, P.77.
- KRISHNA S.D. **The Value of language in Business**, in Corporate Communication, An International Journal, N°04, P.89.
- NEWMARK P. (1988), **A text book of translation**, Prentice Hall. New york.
- Oxford University Press (2009), **Oxford English Dictionary**