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## **DIVERSITY IN A SINO-FRENCH COMPANY<sup>23</sup> IN BEIJING: HOW DO EMPLOYEES MANAGE THEIR MULTILINGUAL PRACTICES?**

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**Summary.** Sometimes the idea of multilingualism is connected to understanding problems that can potentially slow down the progress of professional activity in international workplaces. However, social actors often find solutions locally to cope with issues associated with multicultural contexts. Keeping in mind the management of cultural and linguistic diversity, I set out to study how social actors organize talk-in-interaction and coordinate participation in multilingual work meetings. To allow mutual understanding and carry out their work, social actors use various resources such as ad hoc interpreting practices during professional interactions. Drawing on my conversational analysis (CA) background, I will examine how members of a Sino-French company in Beijing use ad hoc interpreting practices and English as a lingua franca (ELF) as methods to resolve the linguistic asymmetries present in a multicultural context where ELF is not always taken for granted. Through analysis of several naturally occurring conversations, I will examine the methods, and verbal and multimodal resources used by ad hoc translators to keep work going and manage each member's participation.

**Keywords:** multilingual interaction; professional settings; translation, ad hoc interpreting; conversation analysis.

### **Introduction**

Increasing internationalization of professional contexts leads social actors to use 'language for communication' (vs. 'language for identification', House, 2003), which enables them to achieve interaction within work groups. Through the present analysis I will highlight some solutions found by participants to achieve mutual understanding in work situations. To deal with obvious linguistic and cultural diversity participants may adopt a number of local solutions to achieve their professional goals. Sometimes the issues relating to professional communication lie beyond the common language used by all participants. Issues of linguistic asymmetry or preference for employing one language rather than another may also lead speakers to look for other ways of communicating. This paper reports on a study that examines ad hoc translation practices for managing the diversity issue in a Sino-French company in Beijing.

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<sup>23</sup> Paper presented at International Conference on Applied Linguistics (APLX 2013), Taipei Tech campus, Nov. 14–15, 2013, Taiwan.

Taking into account previous studies of English as a Lingua Franca<sup>24</sup> (hereafter ELF) and the theoretical and methodological framework of Conversation Analysis, I will outline how interpreting practices become a solution for communication in a work meeting. I will also examine how interpreting practices emerge in professional interaction and how they operate in the sequence of organization and participation. In this paper I will also look into the way the multimodal dimension of interaction is made relevant and accountable by social actors in specific events of participation and ongoing action. Through analysis of several naturally occurring professional conversations, I will analyze the 'methods' (Garfinkel, 1967) employed by non-professional translators to take the floor and to develop English or Mandarin translations as solutions that enable them to accomplish their shared professional tasks.

### **The context of international companies in Beijing**

China has never before experienced such a growth in international companies based throughout the country. China's rapid rise has been described by analysts "as one of the greatest economic success stories in the modern times" (Morrison, 2015). However, the emergence of China as an important base for foreign companies operating in the fields of finance, energy and engineering has raised concerns among scholars working on language impacts for multinational teams and international human resource management (see Piekkari for a review, 2006). Despite this spectacular rise in the Chinese economy, the current state of affairs in China makes it imperative to face issues relating to linguistic diversity and other problems associated with the linguistic competence of individuals not sharing a common language. The current international and professional situation in China is giving rise to a variety of linguistic and practical solutions to cope not only with the problem of language barriers, but also with the barriers to cross-cultural communication that can exist between employees. Although English is usually considered the "linguistic

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<sup>24</sup> As understood here ELF is "a 'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication" (Firth, 1996, p. 240).

bridge between speakers from different linguistic backgrounds” (Tietze 2008, p. 85), this does not mean that speakers have the same level of linguistic skills, or that they have the necessary socio-cultural background to understand certain linguistic and interactional behaviors in conversation.

International companies in China often come up against the fact that employees do not share various linguistic repertoires and that it is very challenging for foreign managers and employees to learn Mandarin. This situation gives rise to a variety of linguistic and practical solutions to cope with the problem of linguistic asymmetries and misunderstandings caused by a lack of linguistic competence in both groups. Although ELF is considered an ‘international language’ (Widdowson, 1994) this does not mean that speakers always have the same level of linguistic skill.

Scholars such as Feely and Harzing (2003) have identified common options used by multinational companies to manage language problems. After examining problems and their consequences within multinational corporations (hereafter MNCs), they summarize eleven options that can alleviate the issues caused by language barriers. The first option is the use of a lingua franca, generally English. The second option is “functional multilingualism” (Hagen, 1999) and is described as a “mix of languages, pidgins and gestures to communicate by whatever means the parties have at their disposal” (Feely & Harzing, 2003, p. 12). This option, of course, has the disadvantage of causing more “cognitive divergences” than monolingual communication does. In other words, members engaged in communication must have the ability to carry on a conversation in a foreign language or in a mixture of languages. Because of this, there is a rational solution multinational companies can adopt: the use of external language resources, which is perhaps one of most expensive solutions for companies, but which is likely to be a “rational and obvious response to the language barrier” (*idem.*). Asking for external translators or interpreters in a specialized company is not always the solution that managers prefer, either due to the cost of hiring a full-time translator, or because of possible problems relating to the confidentiality of certain topics, as well as translation challenges relating to the technical complexity of the matter being discussed. For this reason, other practical alternatives are adopted in multinational and international companies.

On the basis of my experience in the field, and of the data I will show in this article, members of a professional team can become translators or interpreters. This solution seems to suit many managers and employees because it not only creates fewer financial problems for companies, but also helps team members to improvise and work together in a more cooperative and fluid way. Another option stressed by Feely and Harzing (2003) is that of personal development based on language training. However, companies cannot provide language training if they are not doing well. Like many other solutions, this one has a disadvantage. According to Feely and Harzing, it cannot be considered a "quick fix". Companies offering language training must be aware of how long training will take, and whether it will meet their expectations. They need to support employees on language courses for at least three years. However, alternatives such as the use of a corporate language or of language nodes are less costly, and more attainable in terms of the time spent in achieving linguistic goals. The first of these options involves choosing a common language for communication. This language should be easy to master in order to facilitate informal and formal communication. The second option uses internal employees to make a bridge between "the company and the external world". In this way, companies attempt to exploit the linguistic skills of their personnel. Selective recruitment is also envisaged by some MNCs hiring employees who already have the language competence required by the company. Although that seems an easy and practical solution in terms of cost, it is suitable only in three specific situations: a) "to fill critical areas of language exposure; b) to create a language node; c) to develop expatriate managers" (Feely & Harzing, 2003, p. 17). Expatriate management also becomes a common solution to deal with language barriers. The benefit of this option is that it continues to facilitate the exchange between parent and subsidiary operations. However, this does not mean that it is the most appropriate solution for multinational companies. Expatriate management also has an impact on company costs, which greatly increases when a manager is posted abroad. In addition, language barriers are not immediately broken down. In fact, managers should be willing to learn the language of the host country in order to manage local and expatriate employees. This situation can obviously result in misunderstandings and incomprehension in work teams using different languages. According to these scholars, another option currently being

developed in MNCs is “inatriation”, which means the transfer of subsidiary employees to the headquarter country. Adopting this option offers benefits such as “[injecting] cultural diversity into HQ operations [by providing] communication links to the operations and institutions countries from which [expatriates] came” (Feely and Harzing, 2003, p. 19). But that doesn’t occur without negative consequences for the team working internally, or even for inatriate employees who sometimes don’t speak the language of HQ country fluently. In these cases, relocation could be more costly for the company because the inatriate employee needs to follow appropriate language and cultural training during his/her socialization and acculturation process. The two last approaches used by MNCs to solve their internal linguistic issues are the use of machine translation, and the use of controlled language. The first option has a wide range of forms. They range from the exclusive use of sophisticated translation programs to the simplest use of the most common internet translation programs. Some managers adopt strategies to facilitate the use of these translation practices and to avoid all kinds of misunderstandings linked to face-to-face conversation. During my research in China I had the opportunity to observe how, in some small international companies, the exchange of emails is highly recommended for those team workers that have a low level of English. Communication by email allows Chinese employees to translate, understand and provide “almost proper answers” to Western managers. In this way, they not only ensure that information is received and understood, but also avoid embarrassing situations resulting in a loss of face for Chinese employees. Finally, the approach known as controlled language aims to facilitate comprehension within MNCs. It requires native speakers of the language used as a lingua franca or language of communication to employ a limited vocabulary, and simple syntactic structures, in order to make things clearer for non-native speakers. Obviously, that means there must be a selection of vocabulary and terminology to be shared by all employees.

Various solutions are also identified as *in situ* or local options that individuals use to carry out their work in multicultural and multilingual contexts. This approach is taken by a number of scholars working on the European project *Dynamics of Languages and Management of Diversity* (Dylan, 2006–2011). The most important findings highlight functional multilingualism as one resource among others to make intercommunication possible, and show

how available resources are used at a particular moment in the work process. Some studies have distinguished three kinds of options that participants commonly use to perform their tasks: a) the use of code-switching (a word, phrase or an exchange in another language, depending on the interactional problem); b) momentary or permanent use of a lingua franca, usually English; c) informal or ad hoc translation by non-professional translators when one or several participants have trouble understanding or speaking English (Mondada, 2012; Traverso, 2012).

Recent empirical research focused on the importance of language fluency for the development of social dynamics in multinational corporations (MNCs) leads me to consider language as a strong indicator for the formation of groups, and the sense of belonging in workplaces (see Barner-Rasmussen & Bjorkman, 2007). The behavior of individuals in professional meetings and discussions reveals the existence of opposing groups identified by their language and their way of doing things. This research therefore takes into account the solutions individuals use to solve the knotty problem of linguistic diversity at work. Solutions such as the use of informal or ad hoc translators become an alternative option for removing differences due to “languages and accents” and their influence in the formation of in- and out-groups (*idem*).

By focusing on microanalysis of a number of interactions between Chinese employees and French team leaders and/or managers in an international company, this article sets out to shed light on the management of linguistic diversity, and its consequences for inter-personal relationships and the chances to participate in the decision-making process.

## **Theoretical and methodological framework**

### **Recent studies of ELF**

Recent studies have noted the scant attention researchers have paid to interaction between non-native speakers of the same language (Meierkord, 2000). This is even more significant when we look at the phenomenon of ELF as a resource often used in international workplaces. Nevertheless, some authors have published articles about interaction between nonnative speakers

from an interactional analytical perspective. Some of them have focused on the way participants contribute to progressing the activity they are engaged in. Taking this analytical perspective, Firth (1990; 1996) has examined the collaborative and negotiable character of ELF. From a praxeological and interactional perspective, House (2003) points out the 'vehicular' and 'instrumental' dimension of ELF. She highlights the fact that ELF mainly develops as needed for good communication. This means that speakers focus more on what they are doing than on how they accomplish communication in terms of efficiency in the use of linguistic rules. These authors agree on approaching ELF as a process, a language in use, which is created in interaction itself. ELF does not exist outside the interaction where it is used, it is an emergent, situated and "made up" practice (Mondada, 2012). The interactional approach developed, for instance, by Mondada has stressed the way ELF becomes a situated resource in the course of an activity. In her research on ELF in work meetings she emphasizes the embodied character of mobilized resources. The local mobilization of linguistic and multimodal resources, such as gestures, shows the way participants orient towards the 'progressivity' (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) and the 'intersubjectivity' (Schegloff et al., 1977; Schegloff, 1992) of social interaction. This particular orientation is very significant in interactions using ELF where the consensual aspect of this resource is used for specific purposes, such as allowing understanding among international teams and companies anywhere in the world.

All ELF definitions have developed mainly from a functional point of view. This means that researchers have considered its use in intercultural communication, rather than its formal characteristics linked to native-speaker norms (Hülmbauer et al., 2008). In order to describe the singularity of ELF as a legitimate linguistic practice which emerges in specific intercultural contexts, these researchers have focused on describing its formal aspects. This field of research examines the phonological and lexicogrammatical aspects of ELF, and its results make it possible to pinpoint the differences between ELF and other varieties of English. For instance, Jenkins (2000) examines the phonological features of ELF as an important element in understanding mutual intelligibility among ELF speakers. Other research findings show the specificity of ELF use. Dewey (2007) has pointed out an array of innovating processes developing in lingua franca use and has analyzed their implications for the grammatical and

lexical dimensions of ELF. Similarly, Ranta (2006) claims a particular vision of ELF and explores the frequent tendency to use the progressive form. She also examines the various functions of this grammatical form in different lingua franca contexts. Barbara Seidlhofer (2001, 2005, 2007) who developed the VOICE project, a compilation of ELF corpora, summarizes the most important aspects of ELF by identifying the grammatical features of this variety of English spoken by nonnative speakers. These features include: the use of the third-person singular present tense without the s ending; the omission of "definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory [or the insertion of] them where they do not occur in Standard English"; the pluralization of certain nouns, e.g. *informations*, *knowledges* and *advices*; the "use of demonstrative this with both singular and plural nouns (this country, this countries)" (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 92).

This paper will add to our understanding of translation practices as a tool for solving local issues and as a means for the development of professional activity, its progression, and the meeting of goals. However, my focus is not on describing ELF itself, but on shedding light on how social actors develop solutions that make communication possible, and on how these solutions appear in specific multilingual contexts.

### **Conversation analysis**

The present study adopts the theoretical and methodological framework of conversation analysis (CA) and draws on a complementary background in ethnomethodology.

Conversation analysis is a phenomenological discipline that allows for common-sense methods of reasoning. CA describes and explains the methods used by members of society "to participate in intelligible, socially organized interaction" (Heritage & Atkinson, 1984, p. 1). Indeed, it focuses on the production and interpretation of interaction as an ordered accomplishment made accountable by participants themselves. The orderliness of interaction is considered "the product of the systematic deployment of specifiable interactional methods – 'devices', 'systems', an 'apparatus' – that are used by members as solutions to specifiable organizational problems in social



interaction" (Ten Haven, 1990, p. 28).

The social order of interaction must be described in terms of two main dimensions that are interconnected: 'temporality' and 'sequentiality'. Temporality is seen through successive projections of actions ensuring mutual understanding during interaction. Each action entails a sequential organization: achieved actions show retrospectively the understanding of previous actions and prospectively the projection of following actions. The sequential dimension of CA is closely related to the organization of talk-in-interaction, which is based on turn-taking distribution. Turn-taking machinery is governed by two main turn-allocation techniques depending on the way speakers manage turn-taking and the way they interpret the transition-relevant place (TRP). The first technique is accomplished by a next turn allocation. The current speaker selects the next speaker to complete successive actions. The second technique is to be seen when the next turn is allocated by self-selection. Thus 'turn-taking' is defined as a system "in terms of two components and a set of rules" (Schegloff et al., 1974, p. 702) which "governs turn construction, provides for the allocation of a next turn to one party, and coordinates transfer so as to minimize gap and overlap" (*idem*, p. 704).

These preliminary descriptions of the turn-taking system enable me to introduce certain sequential features of ad hoc translation that I have noticed in the data. Translation episodes are preceded by long or short turns which indicate when the turn ends and when translation will be necessary. This paper examines two particular kinds of professional interactions:

- a) Systematic and bilateral translation expected at every second turn at talk,
- b) Occasional translation often initiated by a request. Both cases display a particular organization of turn-taking by the 'translator' and 'speaker' who cooperate to bring about the translation instance.

Some examples in my data show that the systematicity of translation could be justified by a significant difference in the linguistic repertoires of participants. Ad hoc translation is not a sporadic option to resolve specific problems of misunderstanding, but a frequent solution to resolve typical issues in 'exolingual' situations. The absence of official or certified interpreters that might be hired by international companies, and issues regarding social actors' skills in English lead to improvisation and recourse to local solutions to enable

professional activity to be carried out. This has obvious consequences for the way activities are organized and for the coordination of participation in a multi-participant situation.

The 'participation framework' concept draws on Goffman (1981) and M. & C. Goodwin (1981, 1984, 1990, 2004). In Goffman's studies participation is defined as follows: "When a word is spoken, all those who happen to be in the perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status relative to it" (Goffman, 1981, p. 3). Marjorie and Charles Goodwin offer a more dynamic and reflexive overview of participation, thus contributing to an emergent vision of participation which considers it a process embodied in the detailed organization of utterances, turn-taking and action (Mondada & Nussbaum, 2012).

In this paper I focus on participation actions in translation episodes. My observations led me to describe translator participation in a specific way. We will observe that translation episodes occur in a controlled fashion very similar to the turn-by-turn interpreting other researchers have described (Wadensjö 1998), but quite different if we address our attention to how ad hoc translators deal with the recognition of transition points to take the floor and carry out the translation episode. The excerpts will show the way the main speaker monitors and explicitly provides the opportunity to move interpretation forward. Through these actions the main speaker also makes accountable certain categories such as project manager, auditor and ad hoc translator. Nevertheless, this expected way of incorporating interpreting and facilitating communication is constantly adjusted according to the embodied organization of activity, and it responds to the emergence of interactional problems that must be solved locally.

## **Data**

The multilingual corpus used in this chapter was collected during my postdoctoral project on *language practices within international workplaces* in Beijing. The interactions I will analyze are part of a corpus of 13 hours of naturally occurring conversations in a professional context. All participants were informed about my research before the recording began. However, this

had no effect on the research findings. Participants' interactions were recorded without interruption or disturbance from the researcher.

The meetings recorded took place within a social-professional network based in Beijing. These interactions consist of updates regarding how employees are making progress in their ongoing projects. These meetings generally involve about ten participants from China and France. I focus on two meetings held in two different conference rooms. All participants are aware of the linguistic background of their colleagues. Discussions are mainly led by the main speaker (project manager) and the non-professional interpreter who is one of the groups. While the speaker talks, the non-professional interpreter may take some notes and prepare his turn. The main speaker begins the meeting in English, and at regular intervals indicates when the ad hoc translator must take the floor. The role of interpreter is not assigned in advance, but in an empirical and implicit way participants know who will provide the translation. Participants orient to him, recognizing the category of interpreter as well as the linguistic competence that allows him to carry out the interpreter role.

The present analysis focuses on two meetings mostly conducted in Mandarin and English. In this company neither of these languages is considered official. However, participants use English because they do not share a single linguistic background, so English becomes the only option for working together. English and Mandarin are used most frequently, although French is also often used in local linguistic events as a "byplay" (Goodwin, 1990, p. 156) form, for instance, to search for a word or in brief interactions between French native speakers.

### **Findings: Transition to ad hoc translation**

The analysis presented here will show the sequential organization of multilingual interaction. For instance, it will demonstrate how in a collaborative and coordinated way participants make movements toward translation moments, and how this is often marked by transitional regularities which are imbricated in the temporality of the actions in progress.

The transition to ad hoc translations happens in two main ways in our corpus. On the one hand, the speaker leading the discussion signals the transition to translation into Mandarin (Extracts 1, 2, 3 and 4). Through the use of multimodal and verbal resources the speaker orients to the next turn and to the start of interpreting. In this case interpreting in Mandarin or English is expected after each turn to ensure understanding by all linguistic groups. On the other hand, translation appears in a “smooth organized way” (Traverso, 2012, p. 160). The main speaker takes English for granted and takes the translator’s participation less into account (Extract 5).

### **Recognition of the transition moment in translation episodes**

In the first extracts (from 1 to 3) Gaspard (GAS), the project manager, presents the agenda for the meeting. Gaspard, who is in the center of a rectangular table, often conducts exchanges with Wong (WON) in the middle of the left side of the table (see Image 1). The exchanges between Gaspard and Wong are organized into two consecutive turns. Gaspard speaks in English, and Wong translates the previous turn in English into Mandarin.

#### **Extract (1) OKAY, 200513SPNC<sup>25</sup>**

**1 GAS >>what we have to do in an (.)**  
**operation point of view (.) so it's**  
im >>-----im.1-----  
----->



Image 1

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<sup>25</sup> Mandarin transcriptions by Sheng Wenjing, student at the English School of Beijing Foreign Studies University.

2                    **Henry's team (.) everyday for the**  
**normandy project (.) and just**  
3                    **be sure/ (1s) we know (.) what to do**  
**and how to do °it° (.) OKAY/**  
4                    **WON okay\+ \*((snap of tongue)) suo yi zhe**  
**ge hui ne shi wei rao**  
so for this meeting is about  
----->+ \*.....im.2-----  
----->



Image 2

5                    **normandy xiang mu de yun ying kai de jiu shi**  
**zhu qu zhe bian mei**  
the operation of normandy project and Zhu Qu  
team  
6                    **tian dou hui #kai zhe yang yi ge hui yao zhi**  
will have meeting everyday so that  
ver                    #turns twrd GAS, speaks very low in Fr.-->  
7                    **dao wo men# yao zuo shen me zen me zuo\***  
**\*(2s) °yeah°\**  
we could know what to do and how to do  
----->#  
im/won                -----end of im.2-->\* \*gaze twdr  
GAS-->  
8                    **GAS +OKAY/**  
9                    **WON °hum°**  
10                    **(1s)**  
11                    **GAS so (.) if we start I have one**  
+turns his gaze twrd WON-->  
won                    -->>

The extract begins when Gaspard announces the tasks that are to be carried out by his team. The ongoing English turn includes the use of several multimodal resources which make intelligible Gaspard's orientation toward his ratified interlocutor (Wong). Gaspard's gaze is almost always fixed on Wong (see Image 1), who collaboratively also orients to him. Gaspard includes summarizing utterances in his turn (end of l. 2 and l. 3) to show that he is approaching the end of the unit of talk. He says "okay" (l. 3), as a question, which requires a responsive action from Wong. In an imbricated way, orientation gaze and verbal resources work as an invitation for Wong's turn.

The use of 'okay' becomes a device to manage prior and consecutive action. It marks the closing of prior action while also eliciting a responsive action from the next speaker (Beach, 1993). Wong's ratification – "okay\" (l. 4), expressed in English and accompanied by his gaze addressed to Gaspard – marks the end of the ELF exchange and the transition to Mandarin translation. At the beginning of the translation, Wong slightly orients to the Chinese participants (see Image 2) and offers, by this action, the possibility of developing another participation frame. But the new participation frame is only held until line 6 when Veronique (VER) turns toward Gaspard and quickly talks to him in French (l. 6). At this moment two interactions occur at the same time. This means that, during the interpreting episode, other members of the group who do not speak Mandarin can have extra time to think, make comments or address certain points in the discussion.

The transition to Gaspard's turn begins to be of significance when Wong switches to English after a brief transitional pause "(0.2)" and closes his turn with a quiet "°yeah°" token (l. 7). When the pause is produced Wong's gaze and body orient once again to Gaspard who requests ratification (l. 8). An adjacency pair is thus opened and followed by Wong's response in line 9 ("°hum°"). This prepares the opening for a new topic and the projection to consecutive action. Gaspard takes the floor once again and uses English in his turn-taking chance (l. 11).

## **Extract (2) EASY, 200513SPNC**

The next extract begins a few seconds after Wong's translation has already begun. During the Mandarin translation a brief parallel conversation happens between French group members who are at the end of the table (see Image 1).

<b>1</b>	<b>WON</b>	<b>ru guo ta men de zi liao bu hao</b>
		if their information are not good
<b>2</b>		<b>gei chu de zhao pian bu hao de hua</b>
		the photos are not good
<b>3</b>		<b>wo men jiu ba ta gei \$(2s) zhuang tai zhi wei</b>
<b>fu yi</b>		we should give a negative one to his or her status
	im	\$----im.1----->



up and down and from right to left, (see Image 2) giving meaning to his explanation in Mandarin (l. 4). But before the close of his turn another participant (Fong) repeatedly ratifies Wong's utterance in overlap (l. 5). While Fong produces these successive ratifications "hum hum hum hum", his body leans back and his gaze rapidly orients to Gaspard. The multimodal resources used by Fong during the ratification signals the end of the translation episode, and leads to a return to the main floor activity. Gaspard then takes the floor using the 'okay' token (l. 6) as a question. Then Fong, using an 'okay' token as an answer accompanied by gestural and visual resources, (l. 7) reveals his understanding of the prior translation and indicates the possibility of proceeding to the next turn. Once again, Gaspard takes the floor and expresses, in English, his concern about task completion (l. 8).

Both examples show a specific verbal resource occurring in the transition between Mandarin and English turn-taking. This transitional regularity indicates different functions of the 'okay' token: it is used for opening, closing or confirming the understanding of an interpreting episode. The examination of a set of regularities of 'okay' usage strongly resembles Beach's conclusion that recipients and current speakers alike can employ this token, and that its use is meaningfully oriented to prior and next turns (Beach, 1993). When analyzing these bilingual extracts, I centered attention on the specific actions the 'okay' tokens develop, and the kind of consequences for participation they involve. Two examples enable one to explore each usage of 'okay' as a 'change-of-state token' (Heritage, 1984) of bilingual interaction. 'Okay' frequently indicates a change of topic which leads the activity toward its progression or a short request for confirmation of understanding so that the activity can be continued.

### **Illustration of particular orientation to all participants**

In the next extract another type of recognition of transition moments to translation will be examined. This extract shows a discussion about website design. The head of the company (Dimitri) asks some questions about the information in Mandarin visible on the 'screen housing' (see Images 1 and 2). This information was drawn from member profiles of a Chinese social network



(Tianji.com). Dimitri, who has some difficulties speaking Mandarin, tries to understand the website template designed by the other members of the group.

**Extract (3) MY FRIEND, 290513SPNC**

- 1       **DIM**     and +what's that/ (2s) it means (3s) going  
back  
                  +stands up, walks toward the screen housing-->  
2                to the pk page/=
- 3       **LIA**     =y[es  
4       **XIE**    [yes  
5                (2s)  
6       **DIM** okay\ so i change my mind (1s) i want to play again\  
7       **LIA** °yeah°  
8       **DIM** okay\ +(and if i go back) +i go back with my friend/  
          im           +----im.1----->+---im.2----->>



Image 1



Image 2

- 9       (1s)  
10   **LIA** %ta hui qu zhi [hou hai shi zai ta pengyou na yi ye  
ma/  
          put him on his friend's page after he goes back/  
          %turns her gaze toward XIE-->  
11    **ZHO**           [a::h  
12    **keyi%**  
          sure  
          ---->%  
13    **LIA**     [%°dan zhei ge°%  
          %nods her head, turns toward DIM%  
          but this  
14    **DIM**[keyi+ okay\ good  
          we can  
          im           end of im.2->+

The extract starts with Dimitri's question about the website's interface (l. 1–2). Immediately Lia responds with a 'yes' token which is overlapped by Xie's answer (l. 3–4). After a short pause, Lia and Xie's collaborative answer is followed by Dimitri's ratification "okay", as well as by his English request (l. 6). From line 1 to line 7 the turn-taking event continues, alternating question and

response. But in line 8 a question concerning a more complex aspect of the website template appears (see Image 2). After a short pause showing the transition to translation, Lia orients toward Xie and asks her a question in Mandarin (l. 10). This question triggers a collective response to Dimitri's request. Xie fails to answer Lia's question (l. 10), and then Zhong, before Lia's turn finishes, prepares his answer in overlap (l. 11). This is followed by his ratification, to which Lia and Dimitri align (l. 13–14). Zhong's affirmative response "keyi" thus becomes a 'go-ahead response' (Schegloff 2007) which has two features. First it provides the response to his request that Dimitri expects; second it is oriented to what is in progress within the interactional activity. Repeating the "keyi" utterance (l. 14) shows Dimitri's understanding of Zhong's response in Mandarin. The 'okay' in line 14 has a very pivotal character: it indicates both an affirmation of problem resolution and a projection toward continuity of sequence.

As I just showed, this last extract does not present the same type of translation as the earlier ones. In the third extract the speaker's orientation is focused on all participants rather than on the one with the role of 'translator'. This orientation of using English as a lingua franca implies that the speaker expects a high level of competence. This presumption of the use of English for communication perhaps makes the transition to episodes of translation less abrupt. Nevertheless, these transitions are not marked or 'tag-positioned' (Beach, 1993) by "okay", as was seen in the preceding extracts. Indeed, this absence of tag-positioned expressions and marked intonations in specific sequential placements has consequences for the organization of sequentiality and participation. In this kind of interpreting event the translator must be attentive to when interactive or linguistic issues may disturb the continuity of activity. It is also the translator's responsibility to know who is best placed to provide a response to requests during the meeting.

### **Illustration of specific orientation to ad hoc translator**

In Extract 4 we can see one speaker's orientation to English, and the Mandarin translator's skills more overtly displayed. The extract begins when Xie is talking about the users' pictures shown on the website.

## Extract (4) VOTE, 290513SPNC

20 XIEo:::/ na wo jue de ying gai gen ta de na ge pengyou  
o:::h/ then I think it should be together with his  
21 bu shi a/ de tou/ you shang ce de na ge tou an zhe shi  
friend's head the head of upper right side right/  
22 ((laughs))  
23 ZHO xxx xxx xxx  
24 DIM +°xxx xxx°  
im +im.3--->



Image 3

25 LIAhum e::h (1s) +vote [for  
im ---end im.3--->+,,,turns twrd the screen housing--  
>  
26 ??? [xxx+  
dim -->+  
27 DIM +°ah/°=  
im +im.4



Image 4

28 XIE=(v)ote for the:: [vote for your frIEND  
29 LIA [vote for (.)+ for your friends  
im -----end im.4-->+  
30 who:: is the voting for your friends=  
31 DIM =a:h/ [wh-  
32 XIE [true ranking is [really here  
33 DIM [WHO voted for this [friend/  
34 LIA [yes  
35 ??? [°yeah°=  
36 XIE=true ranking is really here  
37 DIM and this what's this/  
38 XIE((laughs))

The comments in Mandarin in lines 20–21 do not seem to concern Dimitri who, in line 24, turns his gaze toward Lia and very quietly starts a request (inaudible, see image 3). Lia's answer appears in a delayed fashion, first produced by the discourse markers "hum e::h", and then by a transitional pause (l. 25) preceding Lia's translation. But the utterance by Lia does not help Dimitri. At the same time he orients toward Xie (see Image 4) and produces a receipt-token with a question intonation showing his failure to understand (l. 27). The "ah/" token signals a problem of unresolved understanding which triggers a collective orientation to its resolution. First Xie engages, by self-repair, in problem solving. Then Lia completes, in overlap, Xie's turn (l. 29). In lines 28–30 Lia and Xie develop a 'collaborative utterance' (Lerner, 1996) marked by repeats and self-repairs. After Lia and Xie's utterances, Dimitri produces a 'change-of-state token' (Heritage, 1984) with which he indicates a change in his understanding (l. 31). This progression from Dimitri's failure to understanding occurs thanks to Lia's clarification "who:: is the voting for your friends" in line 30. Dimitri pursues his turn by producing a request for ratification in overlap as well as other-repair (l. 33). Before Dimitri finishes his turn, Lia and another participant (l. 35) collaboratively intervene to ratify Dimitri's request. At this sequential moment, Dimitri seems ready to proceed with his request concerning his failure to understand some parts of template website (l. 37).

In this particular extract I have shown a different instance of managing a problem in understanding. Pointing to the 'screen housing' (see Image 3) and the verbal resource that makes the speaker's incomprehension apparent (l. 24) are treated collectively as a problem to be solved. This becomes the "local focus of attention in the group" (Traverso, 2012, p. 159), and modifies the participation framework by asking for individual or collective contributions to deal with the declared problem in understanding.

These extracts have showed a particular use of ELF as a solution to manage linguistic diversity in international work meetings. English was expected to facilitate the communicative and professional goals of the meeting. However, during the interaction this did not occur in a stable and predictable way. The use of improvised interpreting after each English turn does not seem taken for granted Even when the participants know in advance who will take on the translator role, the main speaker, by using particular linguistic and

multimodal resources, takes on the coordinator role and distributes interpreting participation. He also engages in the management of interaction organization, as well as ensuring adequate progression toward expected goals. ELF becomes a linguistic choice mainly adopted by the speaker, rather than by group members who would rather orient to the Mandarin language. Participants therefore choose one of two practices: either they react in Mandarin after translation episodes, or they join the English discussion individually or collaboratively.

In this professional context translation is the most frequently used practice to deal with linguistic differences. Translation episodes appear regularly. They shape the activity by making it accessible to everyone. The present analysis reveals two particular treatments of diversity in this work group:

- The frequent use of ad hoc translations
- The occasional use of ad hoc translations when a linguistic problem appears. In the latter case activity alternates between interaction using ELF and interaction with ad hoc translation.

### **Unacknowledged transition moment in translation episodes**

As noted earlier, a variety of translation episodes are initiated with particular movements before being accomplished by speakers. At other times they can be delayed by lack of identification of the transition moment.

In Extract 5, Gaspard gives some instructions to improve the website that they are working on. The guidelines provided by Gaspard take the form of a list of tasks. This listing is inserted through the deployment of multimodal resources which make the purpose of Gaspard's presentation intelligible (see Image 2). As I will show, sometimes the transition to interpreting does not appear smoothly, and there is a certain delay in its organization.

## Delayed translation

### Extract (5) FIRST THING, 200513SPNC

1   **GAS**>>what we have to do on day-to-day basis  
 is+ +(2s) check the

          im   >>-----im.1----->+  
 +.....im.2--->

2                   **new candidates**  
 3                   **(1s)**



Image 1



Image 2

4   **WON**           \*uhm\  
           im        \*im. 3-->



Image 3

5   **GAS**you know/

6   ???   °uhm°+  
           im   im.2-->+

7   **GAS**to be sure (if) some pictures are (it's) okay  
 and (.) if's

8                   **good and\* if not (.) you know**  
 disqualified

                  im       im.3--->\*  
 9   **WON**           **uhm uhm**

10   **GAS**           **put the minus one status**

11   **WON**           **uhm**

12   **GAS**           **+so that is a first thing\+**  
                   +-----im.4----->+



Image 4

**13 WON**      **+uhm (.) suo yi n:::e\ ri chang**  
**gongzuo**      so:::\ the routine work  
gas      +looking at WON----->>

At the start of this extract, while Gaspard presents the tasks, his gaze orients toward Wong, who has been designated as translator (see Image 1). During Gaspard's English presentation he uses specific gestural devices which pertain to the type of action he is developing: offering a list of tasks. Multimodal and linguistic resources make Gaspard's action meaningful and affect subsequent actions. In fact, the deployment of Gaspard's gestures (see Image 2) marks the beginning of a listing that Wong treats as a moment for note taking. When Gaspard initiates the listing of instructions, Wong stops to orient his gaze toward Gaspard and then starts to take notes, focusing his gaze on the computer (see Image 3). At the end of Gaspard's turn (l. 8), the transition to the next speaker does not become signaled. Wong uses a continuer "uhm uhm" (l. 9) which allows Gaspard to continue with his instructions and to keep the floor. In line 11, another continuer "uhm" shows that the 'transition-relevance place' (RTP) does not occur at this moment. The continuer works as an information-receiving device which does not have consequences for the speaker's change-of-state. Wong again fails to take the floor to start interpreting into Mandarin. Gaspard's utterance "so that is a first thing" (l. 12) inserted as a multimodal deployment marks the completion of his turn-constructive-unit (TCU) and signals the transition to the next turn. In a similar gesture to that in image 1 (see Image 4) Gaspard, shifts his gaze toward Wong, and uses a falling intonation at the end of his turn (l. 12) to signal movement toward the next action. Wong takes it as a clear transitional opportunity for beginning the translation episode in Mandarin. Wong's turn

begins with the continuer “uhm” on which he relies to progress toward making the Mandarin translation (l. 13). Wong thus pursues his turn, orienting to Chinese members of the group.

In this last extract we have seen how the ad hoc translator fails to recognize the ‘transition-relevance place’ (TRP). This failure to recognize a transitional moment leads to a delay in the appearance of the translation episode. In fact, the speaker engages in the interactional activity, and ensures the progression of the activity by means of incremental syntax, organized step-by-step. The speaker who is taking the floor identifies the moment when the translation episode should appear. However, opportunities to progress toward the development of activity in two languages are sometimes delayed, and this does not always mean inactivity on the part of translator. These transitional moments often lead to the translation episode in another way. The translator takes the opportunity to take notes or to reflect on the subjects under discussion. The translator performs a double role – as translator and full participant in the meeting.

## **Conclusion**

Because this paper focuses on only one company, I was not able to present every type of sequence in which the transition to an improvised translation could be displayed. I have therefore presented a preliminary overview of the different methods used to solve linguistic issues in international work situations.

As this paper has demonstrated, there is one way in particular to solve the problem of language barriers and make teamwork possible. Translation by ad hoc rather than professional translators is undoubtedly less costly for international companies with a significant number of non-English speakers. Even when employees seem to be able to use English as a communication language for professional purposes, translation becomes a safer and more reliable option whose use is encouraged by managers in some companies. This paper does not of course suggest that ad hoc translation practices are the only option, but observation of their practical effectiveness lends support for them as an “informal day-to-day solution” (Feely & Harzing, 2003, p. 6). On the



other hand, in the business interactions analyzed, translations by ad hoc translators have not been free of misunderstanding or conflict connected with the linguistic skills of participants. It is clear that these language issues can have serious consequences for relationships in individual teams, and for the homogenization of the company. These issues can be obstacles to achieving more effective results within international companies that, despite their efforts, continue to face the problems brought by about the constant movements in the business world.

The practice of ad hoc translation is the most marked feature in my extracts, although its use in interaction is not fixed. This illustrates the fact that the choice of solution often depends on the contingencies of local situations, as well as on the indeterminacy of the here-and-now. Solutions are not previously defined or calculated to take place during interactions. They are locally created, depending on the resources available, the activity taking place, and the particular problems that arise. Contrary to what might be expected from a meeting in which the participation of a translator has been planned, the translator may not to perform the roles of 'coordinator' or 'mediator' (Wadensjö 1998). In my extracts, the ad hoc translator seems to wait for directions from the main speaker to take the floor. That does not mean he or she is not able to coordinate the translation activity, but the excerpts do display rather strong monitoring and orchestration by the main speaker. Hence the conducting of meeting in two languages (Mandarin and English) is remarkably slow and unidirectional, as if it was a one-to-one conversation between the main speaker and the ad hoc translator. From a categorization point of view, requests for interpreting highlight the occasional character of ad hoc translation and the bilingual character of the work situations. In fact, the orientation to both ad hoc translation and bilingualism also has consequences for the organization of activity. The importance of either one of these orientations will depend on the way the main speaker manages turn-taking distribution among all participants.

All of my extracts have displayed organized, one-by-one, turn-taking translation practices, more individual than collaborative, which correspond to those identified by recent research (Traverso, 2012). In fact, the main speaker signals his mediator role by using multimodal and linguistic resources which indicate when translation episodes are necessary. Even though translation instances make it possible for interactions between two or more work groups

to develop, the ad hoc translator is not in total control of the encounter. He also has to carry out his tasks as a participant. In these examples we have seen a strong preference for beginning translation episodes with a linguistic token indicating their necessity. This could mean that the main speaker, more than the ad hoc translator, has responsibility for leading the meeting in two ways. On the one hand, he oversees the proper organization of the meeting and its constituent parts, and on the other hand, he must ensure that both linguistic groups reach a proper understanding of the information provided in two languages.

To sum up my conclusions regarding ELF and the environment for its development, I can say that the data suggests the instability or vulnerability of English as the only solution for international exchanges in work situations. ELF is an alternative as long as participants are oriented to a common linguistic background, rather than to their linguistic asymmetries, which stem from wide differences between two very diverse languages. Thus, this paper has approached ELF communication in work contexts as one option among others, which can facilitate understanding between speaker and translator, and guarantee cooperation between different work groups.

Concerning ELF use I have identified two salient consequences for the management of participation within ongoing activity. ELF can produce: (a) closed participation (bilateral) which gives rise to a restricted exchange between the speaker and the improvised translator, and (b) open participation which enables there to be collective intervention in the resolution of interactional problems. This last case can lead to collaborative or multiple translations (Traverso 2012), while the first accounts for a particular formatting of the structure of the exchange centered on a single participant (Greco et al., 2012).

The translation episodes examined, far from being an obstacle to interaction between the two parties, give more time for reflection, understanding and feedback. Nevertheless, further research looking in particular at sequentiality and temporality would make it possible to examine how these linguistic events have repercussions on the achievement of professional goals.

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## **Appendix**

### **Key of transcription symbols (ICOR – Interaction CORpus, 2007)**

#### **Verbal**

[ ] mark the beginning and the end of overlap between two speakers

= marks a quick move between two turns (latching)  
& marks the continuation of the turn by the same speaker  
(0.6) marks the length of the pause, with an accuracy of tenths of seconds  
::: mark the syllabic lengthening  
nou- the hyphen indicates sound 'cut-off'  
i ` marks an unstandardized elision  
/ and \ mark the up and down of intonations  
° ° encloses talk which is produced quietly  
underline marks words or syllables which are given special emphasis  
(a::h ; the::) alternative hearings  
(it's) parenthesis indicate transcriber doubt

### Multimodal

\* \* delimit the gestures and the description of actions  
\*----> mark the continuation of the gesture or the action after the end of the transcript line  
\*-->> mark the continuation of the gesture or the action after the end of the extract  
---->\* mark the continuation of the gesture or the action until reaching the next symbol  
>---- mark the beginning of the gesture or the action before the beginning of the extract  
..... mark the preparation of the gesture  
----- mark the outcome and the maintenance of the apex of the gesture  
,,,,,,, mark the retraction of the gesture

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## ĮVAIROVĖ KINŲ–PRANCŪZŲ KOMPANIJOJE PEKINE: KAIP DARBUOTOJAI DIRBA DAUGIAKALBĖJE APLINKOJE?

**Santrauka.** Kartais daugiakalbystė yra siejama su problemomis, kurios gali potencialiai sulėtinti profesinę veiklą tarptautinėse kompanijose. Tačiau socialiniai veikėjai dažnai randa vidinius problemų sprendimo būdus daugiakultūriniame kontekste. Atsižvelgiant į darbo pobūdį kultūrų ir kalbų įvairovėje šiame tyrime yra analizuojama, kaip socialiniai veikėjai organizuoja pokalbius ir koordinuoja dalyvavimą daugiakalbiuose darbo susitikimuose. Siekdami tarpusavio supratimo ir profesionalumo, socialiniai veikėjai pasitelkia įvairius išteklius, pavyzdžiui, ad hoc vertimo žodžių praktiką profesinių susitikimų metu. Remiantis pokalbio analizės (CA) duomenimis nagrinėjama, kaip kinų-prancūzų bendrovės Pekine nariai naudoja ad hoc vertimo žodžių metodus ir anglų kalbą kaip lingua franca (ELF) sprendžiant kalbines problemas, išskylančias daugiakultūrėje aplinkoje, kurioje ELF ne visada laikoma savaime suprantamu dalyku. Analizuojant keletą pokalbių natūralioje aplinkoje, nagrinėjami metodai, žodiniai ir daugiarūšiai ištekliai, pasitelkiami ad hoc vertėjų norint tęsti darbą ir stebėti kiekvieno nario dalyvavimą.

**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** daugiakalbė sąveika; profesionali aplinka; vertimas; ad hoc vertimas žodžiu; pokalbio analizė.