

Defining the Presence of Misrecognition in Multilingual Organizations: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Research indicates the multilingual aspects of organizations can create power divisions and rules that drive workplace practices. From an international human resources development perspective, language management is strategic and planned through the headquarters of the organization. Yet the rational ideas of organizational members are what are truly valued in multilingual workplaces. These rational ideas create power struggles and biases that are formed against individuals who possess certain linguistic capabilities, regardless of the individual's other traits or accomplishments. These biases have been labeled the phenomenon of misrecognition. This literature review explores the presence of misrecognition in multilingual organizations. A need to determine how the phenomenon of misrecognition exists in multilingual organizations was discovered.

KEYWORDS

Diversity, Language, Misrecognition, Multilingual, Multinational Corporation, Power

INTRODUCTION

Evidence from multilingual organizations indicates the multilingual aspects of organizations can create the social effect of power divisions and rules that drive workplace practices (Fredriksson et al., 2006; Gaibrois & Steyaert, 2017; Hanks, 2005; Matos, 2009). Although language management is strategic and planned through the headquarters of the organization, the rational ideas of organizational members are what are truly valued in multilingual workplaces (Hanks, 2005; Haynes & Ghosh, 2011). Due to the value of rational ideas in multilingual workplaces, biases are frequently formed against individuals who possess certain linguistic capabilities, regardless of the individual's other traits or accomplishments. These biases have been labeled the phenomenon of misrecognition (Gal & Irvine, 1995; Jaffe, 2003; Matos, 2009; Oakes, 2017). In particular, due to misrecognition, employees of multilingual organizations who do not fluently speak the corporate language of the organization are found to be of lesser caliber in the eyes of employees of multilingual workplaces who do speak the corporate language (Matos, 2009). As a result, employees who do not fluently speak the corporate language in a multilingual workplace often lose out on jobs, professional development, and other career progressing opportunities (Matos, 2009; Offerman et al., 2013).

DOI: 10.4018/IJICTHD.299407

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WHAT IS MISRECOGNITION?

The phenomenon of misrecognition, as found in society as a whole, has been defined as the assumption that individuals who possess certain linguistic traits are of higher social, political, intellectual, and ethical clout than individuals who do not possess the same linguistic traits (Matos, 2009). Misrecognition is related to the theoretical construct of transference, which can have both positive and negative effects on the relationships of individuals in the workplace, depending on the personality and behave (Ritter & Lord, 2007).

Due to transference, the societal effects found within organizations tend toward the human desire of homogeneity, even though homogeneity does not exist within societies (Huang, 2009). Homogeneity in workplaces can become a barrier to knowledge (Huang, 2009). The understanding, recognition, and defining of the phenomenon of misrecognition in multilingual workplaces is critical to breaking down these negative organizational societal effects (Huang, 2009).

The symbolic power of groups is backed by Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power that fuels the particular interests of social relations. In 1995, Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power led researchers to create a definition of misrecognition to recognize the phenomenon in diverse cultures where symbolic power was present (Gal & Irvine, 1995; Hancock, 2008). Within society, this definition has been used to help build legitimacy of minority groups, limiting the power struggles created by misrecognition (Smyth, 2002). Studies of the societal impact of misrecognition (Blackledge, 2005; Ghosh, 2011; Hancock, 2008; Smyth, 2002) indicate that the negative implications and chaos created when misrecognition is not controlled—such as increased crime, increased racism, and negative economic impact—could be mimicked from a business perspective in organizations where misrecognition is present (Matos, 2009).

The purpose of this article is to integrate the literature relating to misrecognition in multilingual workplaces in a matter that readily communicates the criticality of understanding misrecognition as it presents itself in multilingual organizations. This analysis and integration of literature analyzes language policies in organizations as they are exerted as a form of power, misrecognition as the outlier of linguistic theories, and multilingual language policies in multilingual organizations.

METHOD

The term “misrecognition” is still young in its academic and operational use, with Gal and Irvine making the connection between Bourdieu's works and use of the term misrecognition during their research published in 1995. Due to its infancy, “misrecognition” as a single search term returned few results. Therefore, the following four keywords were also used in an initial literature search of primary peer reviewed literature: misrecognition, multilingual, power, and diversity. However, the four-keyword search did not yield any results.

Due to the initial search strategy yielding zero results, parameters were not used to narrow the search, but rather to expand the search. Thereby, a tiered approach was used. The first tier was to use the original four keywords. The second-tier approach was to remove misrecognition and replace it with bias. Tier three was to replace multilingual with language, and tier four was to replace diversity with organization. A few results occurred in tier two and three, but by far the most useful search result was utilizing tier four with the keywords of bias, language, power, and organization. These broad terms produced a sufficient amount of results, allowing the researchers to find articles that had critical pieces of information relating to the topic, even if the study's focus was not entirely in line with the focus of this research study.

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