English means business! And sometimes other languages do too

an analysis of managers' language ideologies in a Danish context

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Outline

- Language in a European business context
- Theory: language ideologies
- Methods and data
- Analysis
  - Analytical framework
  - Language ideologies
- Conclusion

Language in European business and commerce

- English is *the* international language (Lønsmann 2011, under review)

- English as enough in all situations: "the ideology of the absolute instrumentality of English" (Nekvapil and Sherman 2013: 111)

- English as the 'safest option' (Angouri 2013: 578)

Language in European business and commerce

- English skills seen as natural (Millar et al. 2013: 116)

- Other languages seen as "not work-related" (Lønsmann, under review)

- Other languages hold local functions (Angouri 2013)

Research questions

- How do Danish managers present the roles of different languages in international companies?

    - Which languages are used strategically and which are not?

    - How are they represented in a context of internal and external communication?

Language ideologies are …

- sets of beliefs about language (Silverstein 1979)

- a framework with which to understand linguistic variation

- linked with a specific social and cultural context

- multiple and in contradiction (Kroskrity 2004)

- found both in explicit metalinguistic talk and in implicit background assumptions (Woolard 1998)

Data collection

- 13 interviews with executives and managers (HR, communications, mobility)
- 11 international companies in Denmark
- 9 large, 2 SMEs
- Shipping, production, IT, food and beverage, engineering, biotech and publishing.

Data analysis

- Audio recordings
- Coding in ELAN
- Transcription in CLAN
- Analysed using grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998)
  - Looking for categories and concepts
  - Properties and dimensions
  - Finding *the* central category = a new theory which can explain all cases in the data

Framework

Categories
- Workplace Community
  - Social >< Task
- Market Adaptation
  - Intl. >< Local
- Power and Distance

ternal

No

External

Languages
- English
- Danish
- Other
- Scandinavian

English: Language of strategy

"Vi er jo alle sammen blevet enige om at engelsk var koncernsproget. Skulle jeg så også forsøge mig på russisk med mine russere eller spansk med mine spaniolere?"

When everything is in English, "it is the complete and utter transformation" from local to international.
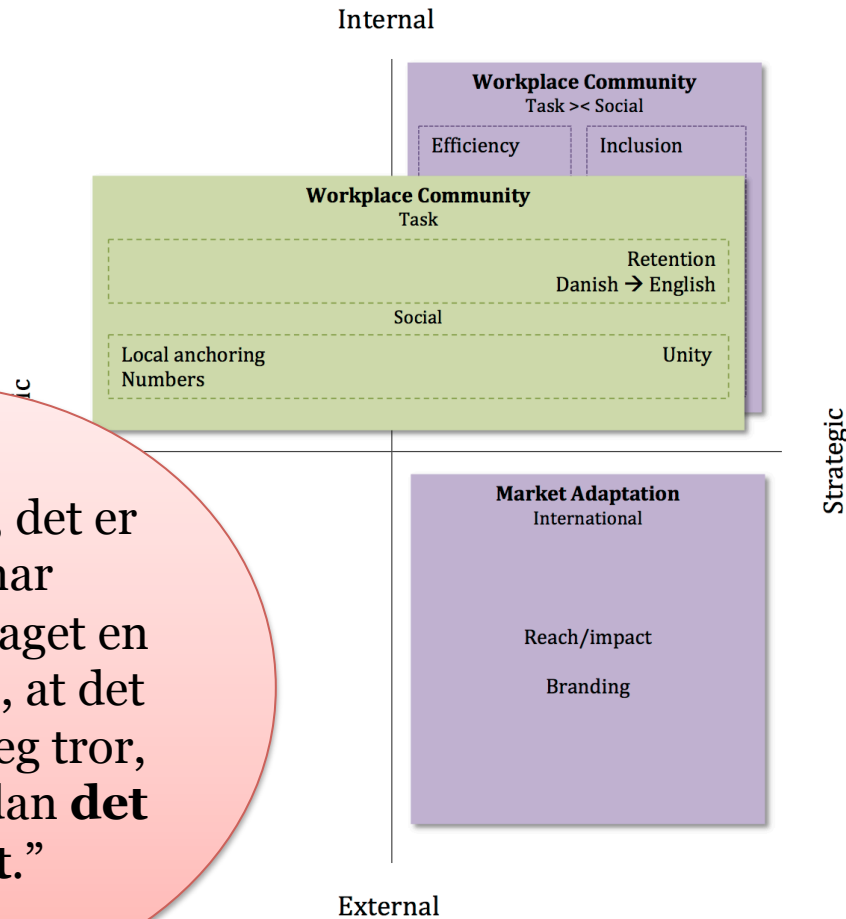
Internal

Workplace Community
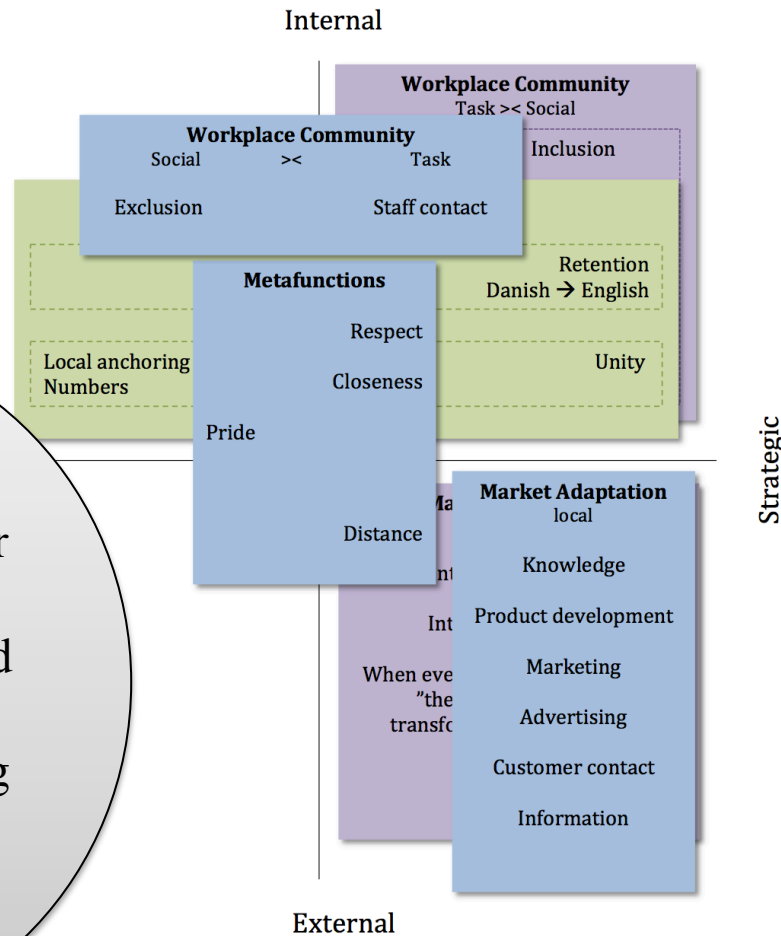Task >< Social

Efficiency	Inclusion
Common factor	Exclusion
Int. mindset	Unity
Challenges	Equality
Relevance	Courtesy

Strategic

Market adaptation
International

Reach/impact

Branding

External

Danish: Laissez-faire language

Internal

Workplace Community
Task >< Social

| Efficiency | Inclusion |

Workplace Community
Task

Retention
Danish → English

Social

Local anchoring
Numbers   Unity

Strategic

Market Adaptation
International

Reach/impact

Branding

External

"Jeg tror ikke, det er noget, vi har diskuteret og taget en beslutning om, at det er det, vi vil. Jeg tror, det er bare sådan **det er blevet**."

Other: Market, distance and power

Internal

Workplace Community
Task >< Social

Inclusion

Workplace Community
Social >< Task

Exclusion   Staff contact

Metafunctions

Retention
Danish → English

Respect

Local anchoring
Numbers

Closeness   Unity

Pride

Distance

Strategic

Market Adaptation
local

Knowledge

Product development

Marketing

Advertising

Customer contact

Information

External

"Det handler om at have **respekt** for hinanden, så derfor er det jo også **kedeligt**, hvis der sidder et hold polakker og taler polsk over frokost, og der sidder et hold danskere og taler dansk osv."

Speaking Nordic

- Scandinavian vs. Nordic communication
- The Finns are the problem

What does it mean to speak Nordic?

"and my children confirm this but mum you are not speaking Swedish no I know that but I am not speaking Danish either it is a good in-between you speak something Nordic you know which words the Swedes don't understand and you try to pronounce some of the words in Swedish and you use the Swedish numbers and things like that"

- Receptive multilingualism
- Accommodation is key

English as the last resort

- English is also frequently used, but this practice always seems to require an explanation:

"and we can see that the more time they spend together the better they understand each other so the better they also understand to stay in their own language and not switch into English"


"there may be a salesperson that you choose to communicate with in English in order to avoid misunderstandings or because it becomes too difficult for him or her to understand"

Can we understand each other?

- background assumption about Danes, Swedes and Norwegians are able to understand each other – at least given time

- especially strong with regard to people living in border regions

"and even if you are from Copenhagen or the area around here a lot of people actually have difficulties understanding Swedish"

Speaking Nordic
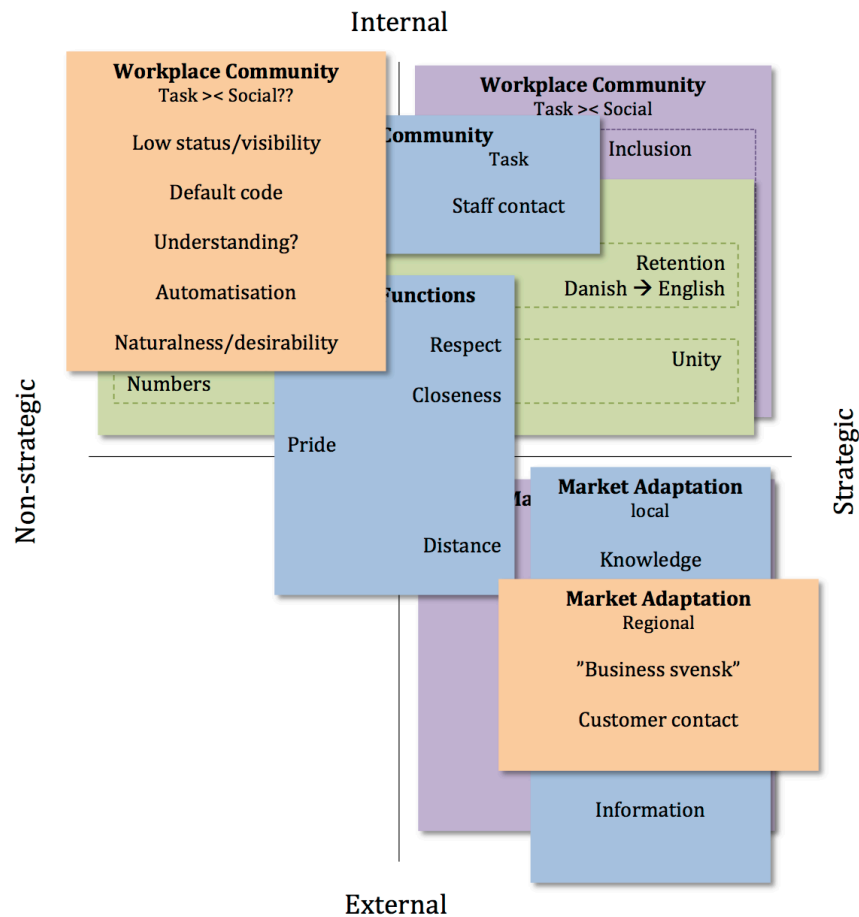
Conclusions

- – Strategic English
  - Internal: efficiency, equality, integration and inclusion
  - External: international reach and branding
- – Laissez-faire Danish
  - Internal: strong though changing position as local language
- – Market, power and distance languages
  - Internal: social exclusion
  - External: local impact, relations; the more the merrier
- – Speaking Nordic
  - Internal: informal learning, non-strategic use, accommodation
  - External: regional customer contact

Discussion points

- Do the dimensions make sense?
- Problems with the internal/external dimension
- Ideas for further development and publication?

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