

English in the French workplace: realism and anxieties

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ABSTRACT: The adoption of English as a corporate language in an increasingly large number of French companies has provoked various reactions ranging from enthusiastic embrace to strong rejection based on anxiety and cultural protectionism. This paper is an attempt to understand these reactions based on a stratified study of the extent to which English has taken root in the French workplace. Results point to a real “English divide” between educated and less educated groups, and between upper management and shop floor workers. While most employees are willing to adopt English to facilitate international trade, they reject the top-down imposition of English that often leads to exclusion and various forms of de-skilling. The paper proposes a model that allows different levels of proficiency to coexist in such a way as to attenuate the perverse effects on power relationships that the adoption of English sometimes results in.

INTRODUCTION

On March 7, 2007, the French General Inspection for General Affairs (IGAS) issued a report concerning a case of over-radiation that led to the death of four patients and to serious injuries in the case of twenty others, all of whom are expected to remain seriously handicapped for life. The report forcefully indicated that one of the main reasons for the incident was the use of the English version of a piece of software for which there is no available translation.

This is probably only one of the most visible signs of the many dysfunctions that occur in the workplace every day all over the world, because of an unreasoned and unreasonable use of English in the workplace. In 2005, an American medical equipment company, General Electric Medical System (GEMS), was condemned because of its attempts to impose English as a corporate language in a French subsidiary. Technicians complained that they had to install sophisticated medical equipment using documentation in English which they did not understand.

These incidents raise the question of the importance of English and of language in general in the information age. Whereas former industrial modes of production relied mainly on docile and silent bodies, the informational economy that came into full swing in the early 1990s mainly relies on computer and communication skills (Castells, 2000: 79–100). Therefore, this “new age” has become a mixed blessing for those who do not master the “right language.” While the general standard of living has continued to grow, the relative status of less educated classes in society has been downgraded and their personal dignity deeply affected one way or another. As early as 1982, John Gumperz pointed to the structural importance of communication skills in modern society:

The role communicative skills play has thus been radically altered in our society. The ability to manage or adapt to diverse communicative situations has become essential and the ability to interact with people

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with whom one has no personal acquaintance is crucial to acquiring even a small measure of personal and social control. We have to talk in order to establish our rights and entitlements. When we are at work we often rely on interactive and persuasive skills to get things done. Communicative resources thus form an integral part of an individual's symbolic and social capital, and in our society this form of capital can be every bit as essential as real property resources were once considered to be. (pp. 4–5)

The global industrial restructuring of the past ten years fully illustrates what Gumperz observed in the early 1980s. Manual work, including highly qualified work, has become extremely “cheap” on the job market as most such jobs are being exported to Third World countries. Conversely, technological and communicative skills have been gaining ground in the market. However, only certain forms of knowledge and of communication skills are in a position to constitute symbolic and linguistic capital, i.e. the forms of language associated with the “authorized language” (Bourdieu, 1991: 107–17). In today's business world, that language is increasingly English.¹

English has indeed become a marketable commodity, one that together with computer skills needs to be acquired through educational institutions that are themselves increasingly part of the market. It is part of what in France is called *les industries de la langue*, together with translation, the knowledge of expert systems, data banks, artificial intelligence, and other information technologies. It is measured through Cambridge examinations, TOEFL and TOEIC scores, or other examinations such as the French DCL and CLES (*Diplôme de compétence en langue* and *Certification en langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur*), each score giving access to further studies and/or serving as a first, weeding-out criterion for specific jobs in international companies.²

In this “New World Order,” an important question is whether and how much the knowledge of English actually pays off. For the language economist François Grin, the answer is clearly “yes.” In Switzerland for example, the premium for knowing English ranges from 12 to 30 per cent (Grin, 2001, 2005).³ Yet Grin insists that other factors, such as the social distribution of income and the symbolic, non-market impact of English on the workplace, need to be taken into account. It is precisely these other factors that we will try to account for in this study.

THE STUDY

Methodology

Two hundred questionnaires were distributed by graduate students participating in a world Englishes seminar and by the author among workers, employees, and middle and upper managers in large, medium-sized, and small companies in the northeast of France as well as in public administration. Students were asked to select people who they thought best represented their own group in socioeconomic and professional terms. Ninety-six questionnaires were completed in full and included in this study. Further, eleven 20-minute interviews conducted among managers, employees, and workers allowed us to gain better insight into the workplace and gave us the necessary tools to interpret our results.

Most people who had no competence in English turned our request down.⁴ On the basis of the 1999 French census (socioeconomic profiles), I divided the sample using two criteria: socioeconomic group and the division between private and public sectors (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sampling distribution by socioeconomic group and by sector

Socioeconomic group	Sector	No.	%
Lower (LSEG)	Public	11	11.46
	Private	12	12.50
Medium (MSEG)	Public	9	9.37
	Private	12	12.50
Higher (HSEG)	Public	9	9.36
	Private	43	44.79
Total		96	100

The variable socioeconomic group is based on professional occupation.⁵ The lower socioeconomic group (LSEG) includes individuals who occupy the lower rank in the public sector (Category C), as well as employees and workers who have a yearly renewable contract, and mainly manual workers in the private sector. The medium group (MSEG) includes employees in the public sector (Category B) and employees, technicians, nurses, etc. in the private sector. Finally, the higher group (HSEG) includes public servants with managerial functions (Category A) in the public sector and managers, mainly business managers and engineers, in the private sector. Two categories seem to be over-represented in our sample: the public sector as a whole, which represents 5 million out of a 25-million workforce,⁶ and the higher socioeconomic group in the private sector. However, this distribution reflects the knowledge of English in the global workforce, where most upper managers hold university degrees and work internationally and where the public sector employs more “educated” individuals and fewer workers than the private sector (Pouget, 2006). Finally, the nature of our sample explains the male/female distribution (59.4 per cent male and 40.6 per cent female) as well as the global distribution, where males are more likely to be in managerial positions.

Results

General competence in English. In our sample, 38 per cent claim to be functional in English (my rephrasing of *courant* or “fluent”). Forty-six per cent describe their English as “hesitant,” and 16 per cent say that they know “a few words” in English. Considering our previous estimate concerning the English-knowing population (44 per cent), this means that about 15 per cent of the French population is “functional” in English.⁷ This figure, based on self-report, seems to be in agreement with other studies that empirically tested English proficiency. For example, on the basis of reading comprehension tests in Switzerland, Belgium, and France, Claude Piron rated at 10–14 per cent the number of people who can comprehend simple texts written in everyday language (personal communication:⁸ I will further discuss these figures later in the paper). When looking at the distribution of English proficiency in our sample (Figure 1), we further note major differences in the distribution across categories.

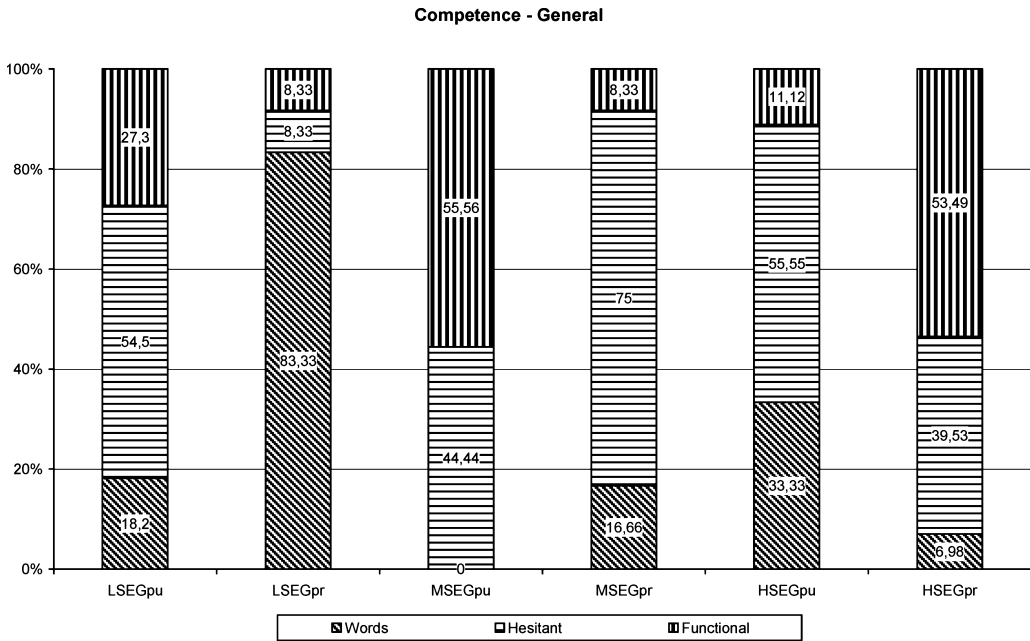


Figure 1. General English proficiency by socioeconomic category

When we look at the public sector (columns 1, 3, and 5) we note that proficiency is fairly evenly distributed. However, it is remarkably high for the lowest and medium groups in the public sector (LSEgpu and MSEGpu) for two reasons: first, because of the generally higher educational level required for public-sector workers, and second because this category includes a high number of highly educated underemployed individuals, either because they have not passed the highly competitive examinations to enter the administration or because they accepted a lower position at a time when the job market in the public sector was rapidly shrinking (Pouget, 2006). Surprisingly, it is in the highest group (column 5) that proficiency seems to be the lowest. The age factor probably explains part of these results, as well as the fact that English is not usually used in the workplace, at least in our sample. As a result, managers progressively “forget” the English they learned during their school years.⁹

Differences are much more striking in the private sector, where only a small part of the lowest category, mainly manual workers, is functional in English, whereas the highest category displays medium or high proficiency, with the medium category in-between. Results seem to display an “English divide” in the private sector. This is a point we will further elaborate in our discussion.

English for Specific Purposes. Respondents were asked to rate their level of proficiency “in their own field” (*dans votre domaine de spécialité*) (Figure 2).

Most respondents, with the exception of managers in the private sector (HSEgpr), claimed to have low or no proficiency in their own fields, probably because they do not use English in their workplace at all or/and because they have received no instruction in English for Specific Purposes. This is particularly true in the public sector. As one respondent

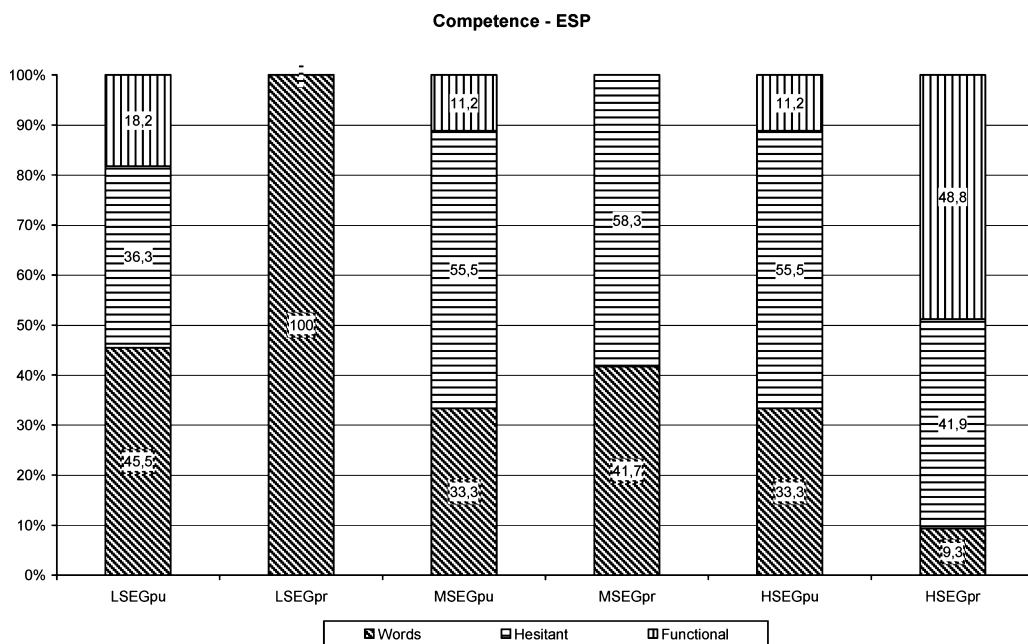


Figure 2. Competence in English for Specific Purposes per socioeconomic group

wrote in his comments: “You don’t need much English to design Excel sheets.” Because of their high level of education, most public-sector employees use English for leisure rather than in the workplace. Indeed, a full 38 per cent said they used English during their leisure time only, 19 per cent said they used it for work, 40 per cent reported using it for both work and leisure, and 3 per cent did not use English at all.

As a result, it is rather difficult to correlate a specific job or even a type of job with English proficiency. Rather, it is the level of education that determines competence and the actual degree of English language use, even later in life.¹⁰ Figure 3 clearly shows that correlation.

Previous studies (Bodier, 1998) also show that the less time individuals spend learning a language, the less they remember it. For example, 10 years after leaving school, 48 per cent of the people who did not obtain a high-school diploma said that they didn’t remember anything of the language they had learned; the figure is 31 per cent for those with a high-school diploma, and only 10 per cent for those with a degree from higher education.

The demand for English. Ambient discourse sometimes gives the impression that English proficiency is absolutely necessary to find a job in France. This position now also seems to be shared by educational institutions which were typically resistant to the “invasion of English” only a few years ago. To investigate the “real” demand for English in the workplace, we looked at job advertisements in the newspaper *Le Monde*¹¹ as well as on the site of the French National Employment Agency, ANPE (*Agence Nationale pour l’Emploi*). The job ads section of *Le Monde* contains two subsections: one for jobs in the public sector and one for jobs in the private sector. Most jobs are upper-management jobs. Out of the 171 jobs advertised in the course of one month, 46 per cent in the private sector required

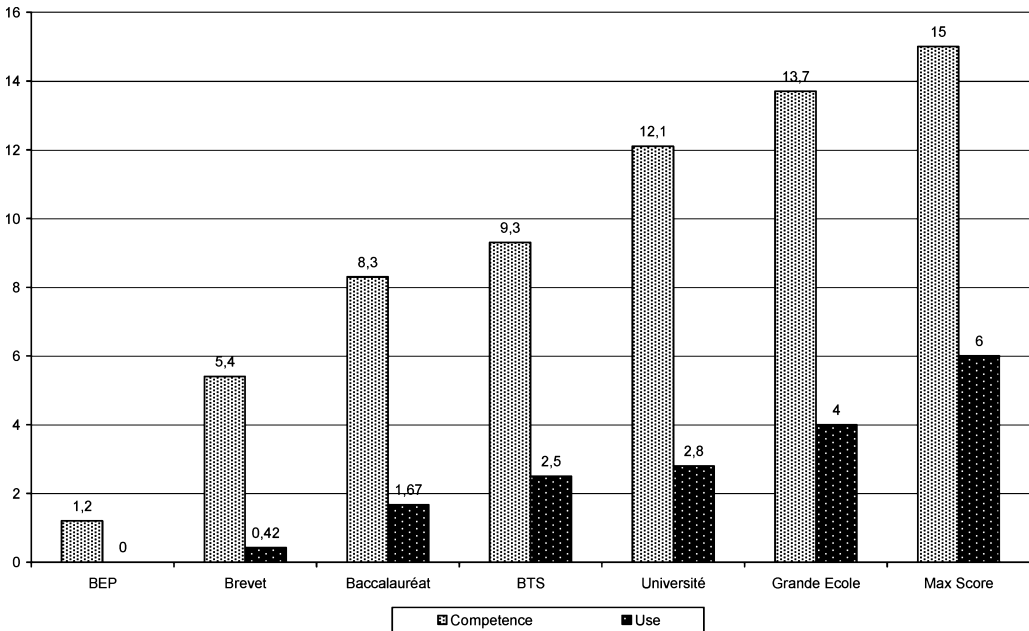


Figure 3. English competence and use by level and years of education (BEP = vocational middle-school diploma: 4 years of secondary education; Brevet = middle-school diploma: 4 years of secondary education; Baccalauréat = high school diploma; BTS = *Brevet de technicien supérieur* = high-school diploma + 2 years of study; Université = University; Grande Ecole = elite school of higher education). Note: Of the entire population, 31.6 per cent has no degree at all, 27 per cent has a BEP or Brevet level of education, 12.3 per cent a Baccalauréat level, 8.4 per cent a BTS level, and 9.3 per cent a university or Grande Ecole.

or “desired” proficiency in English. These include the ads written in English. However, in the public sector, only 10.3 per cent required some knowledge of English. Table 2 shows the percentages we found on the ANPE site for other jobs on the basis of at least 20 ads per category.

In short, English is only required for managers and employees working in import/export departments and in the tourist industry. Interestingly, it is not very often required for the many employees in the import/export sector when they do not have contact with customers. Of course, job ads do not tell us who was actually hired. Advertisers may expect students from management schools to know English, and therefore may not feel the need to include it in their ads. At the same time, the mention “English desired” rather than “required” indicates that proficiency in English is not always available for some jobs and that employers might recruit managers and employees whose English is poor or nonexistent. Thus the figures may be underestimated for upper managers, but slightly underestimated for other categories.

DISCUSSION

Material from interviews, observation, and reactions in the press allow us to qualify these quantitative results. In our discussion, we will focus on people’s responses concerning

Table 2. English proficiency requirements by job type in ANPE advertisements

Job type advertised	% requiring or desiring proficiency in English
Business upper manager (<i>ingénieur commercial</i>)	60
Import/export employee (<i>acheteur/euse import/export</i>)	59
Import/export financial upper managers (<i>cadres financiers</i>)	50
Import/export technician (accountants, human resources, etc.)	20
Manager in the public services (<i>cadres administratifs</i>)	0
Secretary (both private and public sectors)	20
Librarian/bookseller (<i>bibliothécaire/libraire</i>)	20
Manual workers (e.g. bakers, butchers, hairdressers)	0
Host/ess in the tourist industry	40

English proficiency, intercultural communication, and the anxiety sometimes caused by the introduction of English.

English proficiency

It is rather difficult to interpret competence in English when data are based on self-report.¹² For example, a respondent who claimed to be “fluent” in all of the skills admitted that her English was not good enough to function in an English-speaking country; but she added: “the English I know enables me to communicate with foreigners within the limits of what I am required to know in my professional environment.” Another person claimed to be fluent on the basis of high TOEIC results, but said that she would not be able to function in a meeting conducted in English. She also found articles from *The Economist* too difficult for her. Conversely, a technical writer who reads specialized literature in English and writes instructions and users’ manuals said that she was “hesitant” because she did not speak like a British or American “native speaker.” Thus, respondents assessed their level of proficiency on the basis of their needs, and only exceptionally according to academic or other external criteria. This may explain why, in our sample, 69 per cent were satisfied with their level of English, while only 19 per cent were “more or less” satisfied, and only 12 per cent not satisfied at all. Most respondents to the questionnaire thought that “it would be a good idea” to improve their English, but in the interviews they came over as unwilling to spend much time and effort to doing so. In our sample, we did not find any negative reactions toward the spread of English. Rather, people saw English as a tool to reach markets that would otherwise be unreachable. English is seen as an important capital that companies need to acquire, especially at a time when intelligence and knowledge are perceived as essential for competitiveness. However, the perceived need for the acquisition of English was not very strong, either for individuals or for the management, which often has “other priorities.” Beyond our sample, this seems to be the case in other parts of France. Indeed, in a survey conducted by the Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry among 500 French companies (Foly and Maratier-Decléty, 2006), 76 per cent claimed that language was not a barrier to their activities and that there was therefore no need to worry about the “language question,” either because they had bilingual individuals among their employees or because freelance translators were readily available.

In most companies, especially of small and medium size, this principle of realism applies. Most internal communication takes place in French (94 per cent, according to the CCIP survey), and communication in English lies on the shoulders of a few individuals and/or translators. However, the situation is changing rapidly in large multinational companies, which are increasingly adopting English following mergers and takeovers. For example, when the German multinational Hoechst (pharmacy, chemistry) merged with its French counterpart Rhône-Poulenc to form a new company (Aventis), the new company adopted English as a company language, even though both companies had actively promoted their respective languages in the past (Truchot, 2000). When Alcatel's CEO, Serge Tchuruk, tried to take over the American company, he pushed to make English a corporate language, even in his Paris headquarters, in an effort to attract the favors of his American counterparts, claiming: "We are not really a French company any more."¹³ The idea that English has become the only international business language is now widely accepted in business circles (Tietze, 2004; Gratiant, 2006: 12), even though it often causes uproar in the political world.¹⁴ In a study led by ETS (English Testing Services) among 26 French companies (AEF, 2005), 17 declared English as their corporate language and 6 English and French. Yet the study indicates that the level of English remains "globally unsatisfactory." Indeed, the adoption of English as a corporate language in terms of image does not much change the proficiency level of most employees and workers.¹⁵ It does, on the other hand, seem to create a language divide between an English-speaking management and a French-speaking workforce. In our interviews, we detected two types of resistance to the penetration of English in large companies: one linked to the imposition of an "American management model" and one that relates to the anxiety experienced by people whose professional competence is suddenly questioned.

Intercultural communication and the American model

Most scholars agree that there is no such thing as a "cultureless business culture" (Gimenez, 2001; Nickerson, 2005). Even when companies from closely related cultures start working together in English, accommodation to the other culture may lead to more misunderstanding and take a longer time than the acquisition of English (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, and Kankaanranta, 2005). When American companies settle in France, there seems to be little mutual accommodation, the expectation being that the French workforce will adapt to American models of management. Large-scale studies conducted in France indicate that English plays an important role in the process. For example, many legal departments consider that the English version of a text must serve as a reference, even when it was first written in France (Gratiant, 2006). In our study, managers at a large company pointed to the fact that "English never comes alone"; it often comes with the introduction of management software (SAP and SCM: Systems, Applications, Products; Supply Chain Management) and high-tech IT architectures that profoundly modify management structures and modes of operating. In this way, monochronic approaches (Hall and Hall, 1990: 13–16) to management have been introduced, through highly centralized information systems, to overcome the problem of duplication of resources and information retention. The breakdown and control of every step of management and of financial processes is often seen as a disguised form of power. As a result, when introduced in a culture that is based on polychronic modes of operation and relations of trust, most of the crucial information may never appear on the system at all. Indeed, many people try to avoid using a system

which they do not fully understand. In this way the introduction of communication systems and of English, which was supposed to ease communication and make relations smoother, sometimes ends up worsening communication and leading to conflict.

Anxiety and legal issues

The discrepancy between corporate language policy¹⁶ and real competence may cause dysfunction, especially when sensitive technology is involved. In our introduction we mentioned the extreme case that led to four casualties and twenty other victims. This follows another high-profile case involving GEMS (General Electric Medical Systems) near Paris. Trade unions reacted against the imposition of English on technicians who, as a result of the lack of translated documentation, did not understand the instructions accompanying the medical equipment they were installing (scanners, mammography devices, etc.) They went to court on June 2004 and won their case in January 2005 on the basis of an article of the 1994 Toubon Law that stipulates: "All documents that include obligations for workers or instructions that workers need to know for the execution of their job need to be made available in French."¹⁷ As a result, GE was forced (1) to make the (existing) French version of their software (MS Office) available to their workers, (2) to provide French versions for all documents related to training, hygiene, and safety, and (3) to translate all documents related to the products that GEMS produces. GEMS appealed the case, but the Court of Appeals confirmed the condemnation, ordering the company to pay €580,000, and €20,000 for any document that remained untranslated after three months following the trial. Similar demands have been introduced at Alcatel, Euro-Disney, AXA (an insurance company), and Europ Assistance, among others.

Beyond the obvious safety issue, trade unions argue in favor of "the right to work in French in France,"¹⁸ and point to the "discriminating effects of the supremacy of English in the workplace."¹⁹ The comments around the GEMS case help us understand the concrete situation of people who suddenly feel out of place because of the imposition of English. For example, a 50-year-old documentation officer suddenly had to function in English when her company was bought out by GEMS. She reacts: "I know my job perfectly well, but I cannot express myself. It's as if I were gagged. The words, I need to decipher them . . . It makes me mad . . . the anxiety and the humiliation that many workers and employees endure because of the dictatorship of one language over the other." She also denounces "all these middle management smart alecs [*petits chefs*] who pretend to understand what is being said in meetings with the general management. But when they are asked *what* they have understood, they never come up with the same version."²⁰ This reaction is fairly common among highly qualified middle and upper managers who say that they feel anxious, humiliated, incompetent, and tongue-tied following the introduction of English as a corporate language in their company.

Many older managers put considerable effort into the learning of English, but have the impression that their English will never be good enough to "compete" with their younger colleagues and with "native speakers" of English. This leads to considerable levels of linguistic insecurity. As a result, they often prefer to remain silent, which often leads to frustration and resistance,²¹ and to a waste of unique experience and expertise for the company. Unfortunately this situation is not likely to change in the near future. Indeed, in the words of an ELT instructor:

companies tend to hire managers and high level technicians who know English already, and as a result, they cut costs related to ELT. In some cases, classes that used to be taken during working hours now need to be taken outside working hours. This is more and more the case following the introduction of a shorter work week, which means that many people and workers no longer attend.²² Finally, most companies have suppressed any classes that yield no immediate results. In the past, English was not just seen as the corporate language, but also as a tool for traveling and a passport to international communication. It represented a certain status and cultural enrichment . . . [Today,] immediate acquisition and application of skills is required . . . As English is integrated into technical training, it has become a means rather than an end. As a result, the ELT instructor also needs to be a technician, and technicians who know no English at all are progressively disqualified . . . and later fired.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our study shows that the introduction and development of English in the workplace is accepted by most French managers and employees if it happens in a “reasonable” way, i.e. if it is introduced to ease international communication and allows the expansion or survival of their company, and if new forms²³ of English are allowed to develop internally for specific purposes. On the other hand, people resist English when it is imposed from above, especially when and where the use of French is more efficient, i.e. in internal, intranational situations, and when the use of English displaces or silences a well-qualified workforce. Both middle managers and employees also resist it when it is packaged with Anglo-American modes of corporate governance and culture. Our results demonstrate that these fears are justified. Indeed, as we have seen, both quantitative and qualitative data illustrate an “English divide,” in the private sector at least, along the lines of other types of fracture due to the change of paradigm in modes of production from an industrial to an information-based society where the mastery of language is becoming increasingly important. This divide contributes to a widening gap between the educated and the less educated, the computer-literate and the computer-illiterate, between the young and the old, and between lower and upper socioeconomic groups.²⁴ In short, it creates linguistic inequality.

The solution might come from globalization, or more precisely, from successful globalization: from the search for a harmonious articulation between global and local needs for English. Indeed, as more and more offshore outsourcing takes place, both in the US and in Europe, Europeans are likely to communicate in English with non-native speakers more and more, a situation which they find “normal” and in which they feel much more comfortable as long as they are allowed to develop a language that fits their needs. If management allows this to happen, more multilingual, multicultural modes of operation may take place in the future. It is also possible that more products, including IT technology, will be engineered by people belonging to different cultures, thereby making such products more culture-sensitive.

As a result, users might develop several concentric circles of influence in developing their English language competencies.

The first level would consist of exchanges with international colleagues in English. As a result, societies of NNS English speakers would create new optimized language entities adapted to their specific needs. English would constantly undergo modifications based on ever-changing and relatively unpredictable forms of interconnectedness. Although documents from headquarters may be influenced by NS practices and international constraints

of legibility, local exchanges often deviate from what we now consider as “good English.” Cross-cultural structures and communication patterns would be adopted to meet the corporate needs of best business practices. As the goal is to respect cultural differences while maintaining a coherent core of back-office practices to optimize corporate resources and encourage internal growth, an inevitable development of satellite-system Englishes would probably be observed. Each group would decide on its local priorities and synergies while adhering to the common core through “globish” jargon and globalized business practices. Official documents from corporate headquarters would act as a template.

A second circle would be formed by “laptop managers” who often travel and would be influenced by internal satellite groups as well as clients, customers, and partners. This would create a combined NS/NNS group where higher levels of competence would be expected, especially in their adaptability to cross-cultural features. In the near future, adaptability to Asian English accents and discourse in emerging markets such as China will add to the complexity of globalization.

Finally, a third circle would be formed by language and communication specialists who are in charge of guaranteeing the flow of information, for example by providing templates when needed, translation whenever necessary, and by proposing a terminology that is consistent with the industry at large.

This may be an optimistic view; but at a time when many American companies are bought out by or merge with European and Asian companies, and in a period when many countries strongly resent America’s unilateral modes of operation, it will probably be the market that determines not only the language that predominates but also the many forms that it takes.

NOTES

1. It is important to note that not all sectors of the economy are being globalized, i.e. sectors “with the capacity to work as a unit in real time, or chosen time, on a planetary scale” (Castells, 2000: 101–3). In fact most governments make considerable efforts to protect some sectors – such as transportation, postal services, education – against globalization. Yet they seem to be losing ground, as global institutions such as the European Union tend to qualify as “protectionist” many of the sectors that states consider to be of “national interest.”
2. Note that employers seem to be better acquainted with “commercial” tests such as the TOEIC than with the French tests or even with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is currently used by most test makers in Europe.
3. From a business perspective, a recent report by the UK National Centre for Languages (CILT) indicates that 13 per cent of the French SMEs missed opportunities of winning exports contracts due to lack of foreign language skills (available at: <http://www.cilt.org.uk/research/projects/employment/elan.htm>).
4. According to the most recent Eurobarometer report, this represents 66 per cent of the French population (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_237.en.pdf).
5. The nomenclature used by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) seemed to be both too detailed and too imprecise to be adopted here. For example, elementary school teachers and secondary school teachers belong to two different categories (*catégories intermédiaires* and *cadres*), even though they require the same level of education and have very similar job profiles.
6. That is, 20 per cent of the population, but 30.2 per cent of our sample.
7. Much has been written concerning the poor level of English proficiency in France when compared to other European countries. Yet one should be careful not to overrate proficiency in other countries. Even in Scandinavian countries, people may be excluded from meetings because of their lack of communicative proficiency in English (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, and Kankaanranta, 2005: 417). Similarly, Erling and Walton (2007: 36) note that in English some employees “avoid situations where English is used because of their poor level in English.”
8. Claude Piron is a retired Swiss psychologist who taught at the University of Geneva and worked as an interpreter for the United Nations and the World Health Organization. He is well known in the linguistic community as an Esperantist and as the author of the book *Le Défi des langues*.
9. All respondents in this category claim to have learned some English in school. However, the language training they received was usually less communicatively oriented than it is today. Our sample is, admittedly, too small to make

- broad generalizations. Yet it seems to reflect the situation we experience everyday in most sectors of the French administration.
10. As has been shown by sociologists (e.g. Bourdieu, 1984; d'Iribarne, 2006: 202–5), in France, it is often the type of diploma and its (school of) origin, rather than experience, that determines the job. D'Iribarne compares the “school titles” with the former nobility titles which opened the doors to certain careers and positions in society.
 11. *Le Monde* was chosen because it is the daily newspaper that has the most extended readership among the upper middle classes and upper classes (the French *cadres*; see: <http://www.media-poche.com/chapitres/chap10/p21001.htm>), a readership that is most likely to look for jobs that require English proficiency. In a similar study by APEC (*Association pour l'Emploi des Cadres*) in 2006, 34 per cent of the job offers in the association's database mentioned the mastery of one or several languages. In 97 per cent of the cases, that language was English.
 12. Some studies have tried to be more specific and asked questions about particular skills, but these are also based on self-report. In a 1996 survey by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), 74.6 per cent of the participants responded that they would not be able to participate in a conversation in English, 63.2 per cent that they could not read a newspaper, 63.1 that they could not write a letter, and 69.7 per cent that they could not hold a conversation over the phone (Bodier 1998).
 13. *Business Week*, June 4, 2001.
 14. In March 2006 Ernest-Antoine Seillière, then President of the French *Mouvement des Entreprises de France* (MEDEF) and leader of the European business lobby UNICE, addressed the 25 EU leaders in English. When President Chirac interrupted him to ask him why he was speaking English, Seillière explained: “I'm going to speak in English because that is the language of business.” Chirac then stormed out of the room, followed by his team of three ministers, and returned when Seillière had finished speaking (Times, March 24, 2006).
 15. A 2003 OFEM report (*Observatoire de la Formation de l'Emploi et des Métiers*) indicates that English is the working language of 7 per cent of French companies (based on a 501 companies survey).
 16. In the CICLT report, 40 per cent of the SMEs declared that they had a language strategy. However, as noted by Truchot (2000), these policies are often a question of image and rarely translate into concrete measures.
 17. The 1994 Toubon Law does not impose the use of French in the workplace, but it stipulates that a number of documents need to be available in French; these include work contracts, internal regulations, hygiene and safety standards, collective conventions and agreements, and all documents related to employees' duties and obligations. These obligations need to be complemented with a 1998 EU machines directive that enjoins manufacturers to make instructions available in the language of the countries where machines are used (Foulon, 2005).
 18. www.voxlatina.com, March 2, 2006.
 19. AEF, February 9, 2007.
 20. *Le Parisien*, June 4, 2005.
 21. In one of the rare studies on the importance of silence in organizations, Milliken and Morrison (2003: 1563) analyse how failure to speak up often affects the lives of individuals and may lead to dysfunctional organizations. “Over time, the feeling of being unable to speak up about issues and concerns may result in a sense of helplessness as well as reduced job satisfaction, turnover, and other more long-lasting personal consequences.”
 22. Gail Taillefer (2007) also indicates that many people now have to take classes through continuing education programs on their own time, and often pay for such classes themselves.
 23. We might use the term “English as a lingua franca” (ELF; see Jenkins, 2007) as long as the concept is not understood as characterizing a new fixed variety, but rather as a dynamic process that allows situational factors to shape these new forms of English.
 24. See Bredoux (2006), as well as the website of the *Observatoire des inégalités* for illustrations of these inequalities (<http://www.inegalites.fr/>). Studies in intercultural communication show that middle managers also express a high level of dissatisfaction concerning the power distance that this divide contributes to creating (Castel, Deneire, Kurc, Lacassagne, and Leeds, 2007).

APPENDIX

Questionnaire: English use in the professional world: a survey*

As part of an extended survey concerning the use of English in the professional world, I am collecting data and opinions on that topic among technical and administrative employees in your company/workplace. Thank you for your contribution.

Sex: M/F

Year of birth:

Profession:

Last diploma: Brevet/BEP/BAC/BTS/Diplôme Universitaire/Grandes Ecoles

You studied English: as a first foreign language/as a second foreign language/through continuing education/in your company/on your own

What is your level of English proficiency in everyday life situations?

Oral production: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

Reading: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

Listening comprehension with NS of English: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

Listening comprehension with NNS of English: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

Writing: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

What is your level of English proficiency in your own field?

Oral production: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

Reading: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

Listening comprehension with NS of English: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

Listening comprehension with NNS of English: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

Writing: fluent/hesitant/a few words/none

You hold conversations in English: every day/once a week/never

You read English: every day/once a week/never

You write in English: every day/once a week/never

In what way(s) do you use English?

Leisure: _____

Workplace: _____

You understand the English spoken by:

An American person: yes/no/more or less/I don't know

A British person: yes/no/more or less/I don't know

Another European person: yes/no/more or less/I don't know

An Asian person: yes/no/more or less/I don't know

An African person: yes/no/more or less/I don't know

Do you believe that your level of English proficiency is high enough for your job?

How many hours per week are you willing to spend for the study of English?

In your place of work, who are the people who need to have a good mastery of English?

Are any English classes organized in your place of work?

Do you believe that it is important to learn English for your profession? If so, why?

In your workplace, do you use other languages such as German, Italian, or Spanish?

Considering the geographical situation of France, do you believe that:

learning German is profitable? necessary?
 learning Italian is profitable? necessary?
 learning Spanish is profitable? necessary?

What do you think about the predominance of English in international exchanges?

Is it necessary to speak a grammatically correct English to be understood? Yes/No
 If your answer is No, do you [still] believe that it is necessary to speak a grammatically correct English? Why (not)?

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