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The micropolitical dynamics of interlingual translation processes in an MNC subsidiary¹

Introduction

Multinational Companies (MNCs) have increasingly been recognised as a dynamic ‘contested terrain’ (e.g. Blazejewski, 2006; Dörrenbächer and Geppert, 2006; 2011; Edwards and Belanger, 2009) that is marked by power games, and shaped by micropolitical processes (Becker-Ritterspach et al., 2016; Becker-Ritterspach and Dörrenbächer, 2011; Geppert, Becker-Ritterspach and Mudambi, 2016). These processes involve interactions between a myriad of actors (Geppert and Dörrenbächer, 2014) operating in multicultural and multilingual environments. Understanding their role is crucial to theory and practice within International Business (IB) and International Management (IM). Moreover, the increasing dominance of the MNC as an organisational form in contemporary global economy adds further urgency to understanding what happens inside MNCs, and how to manage this ‘multi-dimensional organizational form with rich and complex politics’ (Geppert et al., 2016: 1210) effectively. Yet, despite the timeliness and importance of these questions, the micropolitical processes within MNCs, and especially the interactional dynamics in HQ-subsidary relations and within individual subsidiaries, remain under-theorised and empirically under-explored (Dörrenbächer and Geppert, 2017).

Scholars have noted that although HQ-subsidary relations are considered to be ‘constructed in action through negotiations between key managers’ (Geppert et al., 2016: 1214), existing

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research tends simplistically to equate the interests and behaviours of managers, such as those based within subsidiaries, ‘with the organizational units that host them’ (op. cit: 1214) and to consequently downplay the role of intra-unit conflicts (Bjerregaard and Klitmøller, 2016). This is problematic because what happens inside subsidiaries affects the HQ-subsidiary relationship and, as such, the whole MNC. If deeper insights into the shaping of HQ-subsidiary relations are to be gained, it is therefore important to move towards a more complex understanding of the way in which micropolitical processes ‘unfold and happen in action in a bottom up rather than top down fashion’ (Koveshnikov, Ehrnrooth and Vaara, 2017: 238), and to develop approaches for examining ‘a micro-level detail of situated (inter)action’ (Whittle et al., 2016: 1328) within subsidiaries.

The present paper addresses these weaknesses in the existing research through focusing on ‘the language-based underpinnings of micropolitical behaviour in the MNE’ (Piekkari and Tietze, 2014: 259), which itself remains poorly understood. Such a focus is highly appropriate since MNCs are multilingual organisations within which interlingual translation processes occur on a regular basis and constitute ‘a political resource’ (Piekkari and Westney, 2017: 218) that plays a key role in the organisational functioning of MNCs (e.g. Piekkari et al., 2013; Tietze, Tansley and Helienek, 2017). This is because translation not only enables communication and knowledge flows across language barriers, but is a culturally and politically significant activity which involves the enactment of power (Jenssens, Lambert and Steyaert, 2004; Tietze, 2008) and can be used as a form of resistance (Logemann and Piekkari, 2015) and a channel of control (Jenssens et al., 2004).

Being a highly consequential performative activity which affects a range of stakeholders (Holz-Mänttari, 1984), the political role of translation in MNCs needs to be better understood as a constituent element of the micropolitical interactions taking place within MNCs. The present paper consequently also adds to existing research on translation in IB. Conceptually, it draws

on the ‘power turn’ in translation studies, which sees it as a situated process that entails decision-making and negotiation (Tymoczko and Genzler, 2002), both of which are central to the micropolitical perspective in MNCs (e.g. Geppert et al., 2016; Geppert and Dörrenbächer, 2014). Importantly, the ideas developed within the ‘power turn’ further highlight how translators seek to navigate between the potentially conflicting interests of a range of stakeholders, and to invoke particular responses in the recipients of translated texts.

Empirically, the paper is based on a deep single case study conducted in a Polish subsidiary of an American pharmaceutical MNC, where a group of subsidiary managers collectively carried out an interlingual translation, and sheds light on two inevitably inter-related issues: (1) why the managers pursued the particular interests and agendas that they did and (2) how the translation contributed to the unfolding of subsidiary level micropolitics.

The paper contributes to the existing body of work in two interrelated ways. First, we contribute to the study of power and politics in IB by advancing understanding of the interactional and processual dynamics of micropolitics in MNCs. This we do through: (i) highlighting the processes of interlingual translation within subsidiaries, in particular, by proposing an emergent model of the micropolitical dynamics of interlingual translation; (ii) providing new insights into the complexity of corporate policy implementation and hence on the nature of HQ-subsidary relations. Specifically, we demonstrate how subsidiary managers can use interlingual translation to pursue their own objectives, to support *and* oppose the views of both corporate and local managerial colleagues, and influence how HQ level decisions will be received by subsidiary level employees. In doing so, we draw attention to the need for research into micropolitics within MNCs to focus more attention on the dynamics of (collective but hierarchically and functionally diverse) managerial decision-making, and thereby shift the focus away from the actor-centred approach that characterises much existing research on power and politics in IB.

Secondly, we advance understanding of translation in IB. In this regard, our study shows how hitherto largely ignored *processes* of interlingual translation – involving the purposing, reframing, and domesticating of the translated text, and inscribing of desired behaviours within it – contribute to the unfolding of politics and power in MNCs. We demonstrate how interlingual translation can be deliberately used a management tool to pre-empt resistance and promote managerially desired attitudes and behaviours at the subsidiary level, while simultaneously providing an important internal forum for the exercise of power and micropolitics. We therefore also highlight the value of studying such processes through the lens of a political perspective (Jenssens et al., 2004) that accords recognition to how they are informed by the interests and objectives of those engaged in them.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. In the next section we offer a brief overview of research on micropolitics in MNCs to demonstrate the need for more research on micropolitical dynamics within subsidiaries and the relevance of translation studies, and especially ideas developed within the ‘power turn’ strand of translation studies scholarship, to this agenda. We then present the methodology of our study. Following this, the study’s findings are analysed, focusing on the processes of interlingual translation and the interactions between translators they involved. In particular, we show how organisational politics unfolded through four interlinked processes present in translation. Subsequently, in the discussion, we highlight the main findings and contributions of our research to the literature, including the development of a model encompassing the four previously mentioned translation sub-processes. We conclude by outlining the management implications of our study and future research directions.

Interlingual translation and micropolitics in MNCs

The importance of micropolitical dynamics within MNC subsidiaries

The evolving literature on micropolitics within MNCs, with its central focus on contextually embedded interests and power relations, has undoubtedly done much to enrich our understandings of organisational life in such corporations (Becker-Ritterspach et al., 2016; Becker-Ritterspach and Dörrenbächer, 2011; Ferner, Quintanilla and Sanchez-Runde, 2006; Geppert et al., 2016). The current empirical base shedding light on their nature and role, however, remains relatively limited, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The existing studies tend to concentrate on the interactions between HQs and subsidiaries in relation to such matters as mandate related issues and the downward transfer of corporate policies and practices (see e.g. Birkenshaw and Lingblad, 2005; Bjerregaard and Klitmøller, 2016; Clark and Geppert, 2011), and typically only focus attention on the exploration of those occurring between senior managers. While such studies point to the way in which the actions of managers are informed by contextually based rationalities, as well as individual biographical and career factors (Clark and Geppert, 2011), only limited attention is paid to the role that various internal and external stakeholders, including other managers, employees and unions, play in shaping their actions (Becker-Ritterspach and Dörrenbächer, 2009; Geppert, Williams and Matten, 2003).

The dynamics involved in, and underlying, the interactions occurring between subsidiaries and their parent companies – as well as within the former – have consequently only rarely been directly studied. For example, Clark and Geppert (2011) researched the processes of construction and institution building involved in the integration of post-socialist acquisitions by Western multinationals but only via a focus on actors, namely ‘head office’ and ‘local’ managers forming part of the acquisitions management team. Similarly, Dörrenbächer and Gammelgaard (2016) investigated the political maneuvering that accompanied initiative taking by French subsidiaries of six German MNCs through a reliance on interviews with their CEOs. In this sense, the available research base echoes that on the translation of macro-level strategies and policies more generally, in relation to which it has been highlighted how little detailed

attention has been paid to the micro-interactional processes through which it occurs (Mueller and Whittle, 2011). For example, it has been observed that while there is an extensive literature describing different aspects of HQ-subsidary relations, we still need to understand better the ‘socio- and micro-political nature of internal processes they encompass’. It has been noted that nearly all ‘existing contributions dealing with power games in MNCs are conceptual works’ (Delmestri and Brumana, 2017: 332), with the result that little attention has been paid to the processes of negotiation that they encompass.

Together these features mean that we continue to have little detailed understanding of the ‘how’ of micropolitical processes *within* subsidiaries, as well as ‘why’ they take the forms they do and have the effects attributable to them. In particular, existing studies tend, as shown, to focus on the experiences and views of individual managers. There is, however, a marked absence of studies providing insights into the collective management interactions and processes through which subsidiary managers reach decisions that have implications for HQ-subsidary relations regarding such matters as the subsidiary’s role and the implementation of centrally promulgated corporate policies. This is despite the fact that, as discussed below, several recent studies have amply demonstrated how such an ‘intra-unit’ focus can generate important new insights into both subsidiary-level behaviour and HQ-subsidary relationships.

Whittle et al.’s (2016) discussion of intra-organisational sensemaking in relation to power and politics in MNCs is a case in point. The authors ask specifically ‘*why* [do] subsidiaries in MNCs fail to voice their opinions, fail to resist seemingly misplaced central policies and fail to share their local knowledge with headquarters?’ (Whittle et al., 2016: 1324). Their findings indicate that the answer to these three interrelated ‘why’ questions lies in the subsidiary managers’ anticipation of negative ‘reactions or counter-actions’ (Whittle et al., 2016: 1323) by global headquarters and their consequent engagement in sense-censoring. Meanwhile, Bjerregaard and Klitmøller (2016) have recently put forward a theory of practice agenda to explore a

number of ‘how’ questions pertaining to intra-subsidary politics. For example, through this focus they explore *how* subsidiary actors’ situatedness in a specific societal context shapes intra-unit conflicts and the way in which various processes contribute to our understanding of the dynamics surrounding power asymmetries and structures in HQ-subsidary relations. Our study both addresses these limitations, while also demonstrating how insights from translation studies can be helpful in carrying out the type of ‘situated’ micro-studies of MNC subsidiary politics advocated by Whittle and colleagues (Whittle et al., 2016).

Insights from translation studies for the understanding of micropolitics in MNCs

Translation studies scholars consider interlingual translation as encompassing ‘both written and oral modes of transposition across languages and semiotic codes’ (Tymoczko, 2013: 2). Rather than being narrowly understood in terms of simply following the source text, translation is conceptualised as a dynamic, situated and political process (Risku, 2002; Vermeer, 1996), or, to use Holz-Mänttari’s (1984) term, translatorial action (*translatorisches Handeln*) that is influenced by the goals and roles of a range of stakeholders and comprises a range of activities. Such understandings of translation view it as a ‘purpose-driven, outcome-oriented human interaction’ which aims at the creation of a translated text that is ‘functionally communicative for the receiver’ (Munday, 2016: 124-125), albeit one whose function does not necessarily fully correspond to the function of its source text.

The political nature of translation, and the investigation of the interests of those involved in it, form the focus of the literature developed within the ‘power turn’ (Tymoczko and Gentzler, 2002) strand of translation studies. Scholars investigating the power dimension of translation have drawn attention to the changes in meanings that are made in the process of translation (Hermans, 1985/2014). Thus, Tymoczko and Gentzler (2002: xxi) argue that translators do not simply passively receive the surrounding cultural, social and aesthetic contexts. Rather, they

use these contexts selectively as a strategic resource, while also potentially acting to define them. Judgements about how to convey particular meanings are informed by the translator's subjectivity, as well as a range of social and cultural practices and factors, including the objectives and interests of those commissioning translations (Venuti, 2008). Moreover, since all translations serve 'a purpose and therefore an interest' (Hermans, 2000: 15), translators need to strike a balance between the competing interests of the authors of a text and a translation's intended audience (Schleirmacher, 1992). In light of this, it becomes particularly important to develop an understanding of 'whom the translation best serves' (Tymoczko and Gentzler, 2002: xx) and to examine the actions, interactions and interrelations between translators and other agents in the process of translation (Chesterman, 2006).

That translation should not be viewed purely from a 'mechanical perspective' but from a 'political' one (Janssens et al., 2004) has also been acknowledged by researchers interested in interlingual translation in IB contexts. In particular, studies of interlingual translation processes within MNCs show how these processes constitute a potentially important influence on intra-organisational relations, both between, and within, multinational units (e.g. Janssens et al., 2004; Logemann and Piekkari, 2015; Piekkari et al., 2013; Piekkari et al., 2014; Steyaert and Janssens, 1997; Tietze, 2008; Usunier, 2011). For example, Piekkari et al. (2014: 45) have noted that subsidiary staff 'can change the content and intent of the information [generated in the headquarters] in a deliberate way through the translation process', and can use it to alter as well as withhold elements of the content of the translated text. This 'filtering', it is observed, may serve the purpose of making the message conveyed from the HQ to the subsidiary staff more 'culturally appropriate' for local employees, but at the same time may also lead to it being 'compromised' from the perspective of HQ management. Logemann and Piekkari (2015: 32) further demonstrate how translation, seen as enactment of power over meaning, 'can be used to define and redefine power positions in headquarter-subsidary relationships'. The authors

introduce the concept of ‘self-interested translation’ (op. cit: 42) to illustrate how a corporate text localised by the subsidiary country manager can act as a form of resistance to the shifting HQ-subsidiary power relations and be deployed to protect the interests of the subsidiary. In a similar vein, Ciuk and James (2015: 567) demonstrate how, in carrying out interlingual translation, subsidiary managers can search for ‘appropriate and productive accommodations between local and extra-local pressures’. However, while existing research draws attention to the ‘potential for considerable distortion’ (Piekkari et al., 2014: 46) arising from translation within MNCs, it gives only limited insights into *why* and *how* those translating an HQ-originated text might distort it. In effect, there is still considerable scope for developing the ‘political perspective’ (Janssens et al., 2004) on language and translation in IB through in-depth examinations of the interactional dynamics of translation processes as they unfold.

In the case of interlingual translation accomplished collectively by local managers in a subsidiary of an MNC, the political dimension of translation arguably becomes particularly pronounced. Those engaging in the translation process are embedded in organisational power structures which are ‘the result of continuously socially constructed dynamic relationships among key actors’ (Geppert and Dörrenbächer, 2014: 237). Because of this, they can be expected to pursue their own interests and agendas, and to actively influence the internal power relationships. Collective translation processes are therefore likely to be infused with organisational politics and power.

Following from the above, we do not consider interlingual translations in MNCs to comprise ‘neutral’ processes of transposition, but rather political acts that are always ‘engaged and committed, either implicitly or explicitly’ (Tymoczko and Gentzler, 2002: xviii). In the remainder of this paper, we examine why the stakeholders in the observed translation pursued particular interests and agendas, and how the interests and actions of, and interactions between, the stakeholders shaped the interlingual translation’s processes and outcomes.

Methodology

Data collection

The empirical material underpinning this interpretive study (Hatch and Yanow, 2008; Prasad and Prasad, 2002) comes from a deep single case study (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; Stake, 2000) undertaken by the first author of a values-based change programme in the Polish subsidiary of Pharmacia (a pseudonym), access to which was secured thanks to personal contacts. While the current paper is concerned with examining a ‘micro-level detail of situated (inter)action’ (Whittle et al., 2016: 1328), the wider study provided in-depth knowledge of the surrounding context. This design was deemed highly suitable to address our research questions. Case studies are well known for their potential to offer rich contextual insights (e.g. Ghauri, 2004; Stake, 2000; Yin, 1994), in particular when utilising qualitative methods, and are well suited to “‘exposing” generative mechanisms’ (Welch et al., 2011: 748-9). The values-based change programme consequently offered a unique opportunity for an exploration and contextual explanation of micropolitical processes in the organisation.

To develop a comprehensive understanding of the studied processes (Ghauri, 2004), we used different sources of data collection: 65 in-depth interviews with 47 purposefully selected participants from different echelons of the organisation (out of around 230 staff employed at the subsidiary), a range of company documents and non-participant observation (see Table 1). Forty interviews were conducted during the first stages of the change project. This enabled us to identify 18 key participants for a follow up study whom we re-interviewed after the official completion of the project, a process which directed our attention to a further seven organisation members, all of whom agreed to participate in the study.

	Interviews	Company documents	Formal observations
Complete dataset used for building deep contextual understanding of the case study	65 interviews:	a) Results from 2 staff opinion surveys	a) Translation event 6h
	40 interviews at the outset of the culture project	b) 3 Internal newsletters presenting corporate values	b) Presentation of values to staff and introduction of the consultants' culture audit 2,5h
	25 interviews at the end of the culture project	c) 4 Internal presentations pertaining to the values project	c) Consultants' presentation of their culture audit at the outset of the values project 2h
	47 participants interviewed, out of which 18 were interviewed twice (at the beginning and after the completion of the culture project)	d) 2 Consultants' reports at the outset and end of the values project	
		e) HR analysis of 'current organisational problems' based on exit interviews	
		f) Company website	
		g) Source corporate values text	
		h) Target corporate values text	
		i) Annual performance reviews from 2 years	
		j) Internal presentation on staff motivation system	
		k) Internal documents and presentations pertaining to the newly introduced leadership model	
Data sub-set used for deep analysis	14 interviews with 8 participants of the translation event and a consultant	c; g; h	a, b

Table 1: Dataset

In this paper we draw extensively on a fine-grained analysis of a crucial micro-event: a six hour interlingual corporate values translation session and its supporting documentation, and on 14 interviews with eight managers who participated in the session (see Table 2), as well as one of the consultants assigned to assist Pharmacia's managers in their values project. The translated text of corporate values and insights generated in the process of the translation informed the subsequent values implementation work.

Pseudonym	Rank	Function	Length of service	Age	Gender	Interview	Formal role in values project
Filip	MD	General management	6m	40s	M	Yes	No
Alicja	Exec.	Commercial	15m	40s	F	Yes	No

Przemek	Exec.	Commercial	6m	40s	M	Yes	No
Iwona	Exec.	HR	3y	40s	F	Yes	Champion for the 'care' value
Irek	Exec.	Quality assurance	9y	50s	M	Yes	No
Marek	Exec.	Finance	2y	30s	M	Yes	No
Emil	Exec.	PR	5m	50s	M	Yes	Project leader
Czarek	Manager	Accounting	2y	40s	M	No	Champion for the 'endurance' value
Natalia	Manager	Finance	10y	40s	F	No	No
Kamil	Manager	Marketing	6m	30s	M	Yes	Champion for the 'pioneering' value
Adam	Manager	Sales	8y	30s	M	No	Champion for the 'achieving' value
Ela		Consultant (Cons.)		50s	F	No	Consultant
Szymon		Cons.		60s	M	No	Consultant

Table 2: Participants of the interlingual translation session

The observation of the values translation session was carried out by the first author. It enabled a focus on naturally occurring talk (Silverman, 2006) and micropolitical processes in real-time which cannot be directly captured in interview-based studies (Piekkari and Tietze, 2014). As a native Polish speaker, the researcher was able to engage in the context-sensitive interpretation of the unfolding events. The session was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. During the translation event the researcher took extensive notes.

Data analysis

The data analysis was an iterative process (Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009) interwoven with data collection, as is recommended in case study research (e.g. Ghauri, 2004). An explicit focus on translation as a distinctive set of micro-processes crystallised after we had developed an in-depth contextual understanding of the wider change project. Aware of the considerable cultural and political significance of the translation event for the organisational actors, we realised that if we wanted to provide a contextualised explanation (Welch et al., 2011) of 'the situated

(inter)action[s]' (Whittle et al., 2016: 1328) occurring during the event, we would have to draw on insights from linguistics and translation studies. In particular, ideas developed by scholars within the 'power turn' in translation studies enabled us to move away from our inductive approach towards abduction (see e.g. Locke, Golden-Biddle and Feldman, 2008).

We began with multiple readings of the transcript of the translation event noting down our initial observations while simultaneously open coding passages for emerging themes. At this stage we captured the various reasons given in support of a particular translation and rejection of others. After we refocused our attention towards the purpose of the translation, as informed by insights from translation studies, we started to notice more distinctive subsets of activities that characterised the event. We noted down all instances in the translation session which referred to the declared intentions behind the activity and the wider expectations of the values project and did the same with interview transcripts. While doing so, we also focused on (a) data aimed at reconstructing the series of events – how the purpose of the translation event was formulated and agreed on, and (b) how this stated purpose related to other themes emerging from the interviews. This procedure generated insights into the first process we identified – 'purposing', which directed our attention towards a search for clues as to 'how' the actors were trying to achieve the translation's intended outcomes. The search for overarching patterns in the observed interactions revealed a preoccupation with the intended target recipients of the translated text, an observation which allowed us to identify another three processes within the interlingual translation: reframing, domesticating, and inscribing. Further rounds of re-readings of the transcript exposed mechanisms through which the four identified micro-processes were dynamically interrelated and how they manifested themselves.

Mindful of the fact that the language in which the research was reported was different from the language of data collection, we sought to periodically remind the reader of our own translation. We have, for example, selected Polish pseudonyms for our participants, retained the original

Polish expressions in our manuscripts – the ‘holus-bolus’ strategy (Steyaert and Janssens, 2013) – and highlighted some linguistic choices in our own translation.

Micropolitical dynamics of translation

Below we discuss how interlingual translation was used in the studied organisation as a forum for the exercise of power and micropolitics and a management tool aimed at promoting desired behaviours and attitudes among staff, and pre-empting resistance. We illustrate how power was enacted, and interests pursued, through four distinct, but inter-related, processes – ‘purposing’, ‘reframing’, ‘domesticating’ and ‘inscribing’.

Purposing

Our studied translation needs to be seen within the framework of the corporate initiative to reinvigorate its long-standing values, and the subsequent decision of the new – externally appointed – Polish Managing Director (MD) to turn it into a major year-long local project. According to the company documents, the purpose of the corporate initiative was twofold: a better integration of the values into the various subsidiaries, and a strengthening of the MNC’s image as a socially responsible corporation. Contrary to the customarily controlling approach of the HQ towards subsidiaries, national MDs were given considerable discretion regarding their approach to the local implementation of the corporate project.

In Poland, the corporate values initiative was discussed in the context of local priorities. The MD stressed that there was ‘a strong need to launch this project *in Poland*’, and that it was ‘very important for *our* business’ [emphasis added]. This was echoed by other managers who, while admitting to reservations about the initiative, saw it as having ‘considerable potential’ as

a means to introduce changes in the subsidiary. A long-standing employee summarised this instrumental sentiment as follows:

I don't know if this company [i.e. subsidiary] really needs this project.... The headquarters ask us to do it and we do it... I hope that we will be able to do many things under the banner of this project. (Katarzyna, Manager, operations)

The company documents, insights from interviews with top management and the observation of the translation event, all indicate that the primary objective of the values project was to use it as a tool to improve the Polish subsidiary's effectiveness. It was perceived to have the potential to trigger attitudinal and behavioural changes among the employees, signalling to them 'which attitudes are valued and which are not', and to make them 'more skilled in [certain] behaviours' (Filip, MD). Simultaneously, interviews conducted at the outset of the project with staff from across the subsidiary, and data obtained at that time through an internal staff survey, indicated that the company's operational effectiveness required substantial improvements. The subsidiary, under the previous MD, had missed its performance targets and interview data consistently pointed to a widespread fear about its future if this negative performance trend continued.

For the values project to become a viable tool for improving the subsidiary's effectiveness, the managers believed that the English text of the values needed to be 'adjusted' through a purpose-driven translation. To this end, the MD commissioned a local management consulting company which claimed expertise in organisational culture. As one of the consultants explained, their client 'had realised that they wanted to consciously impact the culture of their company' (Michał, Cons.), whereas another one observed that the implementation of these values 'was to support [the managers'] and the employees' effectiveness'. Interlingual translation of the text of corporate values was considered 'a cornerstone of the values project' (Filip, MD). It

was agreed that translation would be accomplished collectively by a team of executives – direct reports to the MD – and selected middle managers, and facilitated by the consultants (see Table 2). As the project leader explained:

The values that [the MNC] is trying to implement across its international subsidiaries can be very broadly interpreted... These are values that one can adjust to the situation in a given country. (Emil, Exec.)

As shall be seen, this background context of underperformance and resultant pressure to tackle it were used by the translating managers as an important motivator which provided a general orientation and purpose for the subsequent process of translation. The purpose of the translation was often invoked in interactions (e.g. ‘If we want the values to work’) while negotiating the preferred meanings that were to be incorporated into the target text.

Reframing

At the beginning of the translation event, the MD, the project leader and the consultants reiterated the earlier agreed purpose of the interlingual translation: producing a target text which could be used as a tool for improving the company’s effectiveness through influencing employees’ attitudes, as well as defining and motivating desirable behaviours. In doing so, they set out to reframe the corporate values to suit the subsidiary management’s objectives. The MD’s introduction drew attention to this emphasis on effectiveness:

The attitudes we want to focus our attention on [are]: ...effectiveness of our distribution channels... effectiveness of our recruitment... efficiency and good co-operation in the marketing department... Business development... [and] operational effectiveness. (Filip, MD)

An overarching pattern in the translation efforts was a preoccupation with the creation of a stronger fit between the Polish phrasing of the value labels and definitions and the prioritisation of effectiveness, although the latter was at times differently operationalised by the participating managers and required negotiating. Linguistic equivalence, i.e. staying close to, and faithfully conveying, the original meaning was rarely voiced, overshadowed by the perceived suitability of the new labels, as illustrated below (Appendix, Reframing example 1):

Ela (Cons.) Enduring. [in English]

Alicja (Exec.) This is simply lasting, lasting in good results, and constant ones.

Przemek (Exec.) We already have lasting.

Alicja (Exec.) Ensuring long-term

Przemek (Exec.) This sounds nice.

Ela (Cons.) Here is a dictionary, you can look up what this means.

Alicja (Exec.) Persistence in pursuing goals. Persistence in achieving goals.

Kamil (Man.) Persistence and patience.

Filip (MD): Pursuit of excellence.

Emil (Exec.) Respect for tradition.

Przemek (Exec.) To outlive everyone.

[Laughter]

Szymon (Cons.) Do you like ‘lasting’?

[Together] No!

Przemek (Exec.) But persistence is a continuation of a set direction.

Szymon (Cons.) This is about longevity, right?

Alicja (Exec.) For me, this is persistence in achieving goals. Persistence and achieving goals.

Irek (Exec.) Lasting has a passive element in it.

Emil (Exec.) Lasting is quite passive.

[A longer discussion about the need for constant organisational change to survive.]

Natalia (Man.) We are looking for an expression which will encompass both lasting and these positive changes.

Alicja (Exec.) Maybe long-term development?... I think that we should also find an expression which says that this company should last but this means the achievement of long-term goals.

Filip (MD) Persistence. [‘Wyttrwałość’ which could also be translated back into English as perseverance.]

Alicja (Exec.) This is what I mean.

The process of reframing of the endurance value aimed at the articulation, clarification and agreement of the preferred meanings. As the above example shows, several different suggestions were made, such as patience, respect for tradition or long term development, that received little traction. In contrast, one of the new executives responsible for the commercial side of the business, Alicja, managed to get her suggestion accepted by making repeated references to goals as a crucial aspect of the value. Other voices in the discussion appear sympathetic to the focus advocated by her. Her explanation, a call for an expression which

conveys a particular sense of ‘lasting’ – one linked to ‘the achievement of long-term goals’ – prompts the MD to suggest ‘wytrwałość’ (‘persistence’), which Alicja endorses as an expression she was looking for. The translation resulted in a move away from the corporate value of ‘enduring’, perceived as not capturing the locally desired dynamism, towards a label that fitted better with the adopted (re)framing around a concern for effectiveness.

Other examples (see Appendix) point to the same underlying efforts to arrive at Polish expressions which reflect local managers’ priorities. This, however, does not mean that the managers were always in agreement about these priorities, or that each manager was able to influence the translation in equal measure. From the analysis of the interactions, the MD’s voice, typically supported by two Commercial Executives, emerges as often having the greatest impact on the outcomes of the translation. To him, effectiveness was the key objective and he ensured that the target text provided a frame for its accomplishment. The excerpt below demonstrates how the MD rejected a consultant’s suggestion, and how this resulted in participants agreeing on a Polish term ‘skuteczność’ (‘effectiveness’) replacing the English word ‘achieving’:

Szymon (Cons.) A value is supposed to be an inner strength. This is goal-orientation.

Filip (MD) So I will give you an example. A real estate agent... is working on 50 cases and they do not close them off for some reason, even though they have a goal-orientation... But it turns out that out of those 50 they close off fewer, say, 10. This is a slightly different approach, because a different person might be choosing cases that have a bigger chance of success.

Emil (Exec.) Then the effectiveness drops.

Filip (MD) This is effectiveness.

Szymon (Cons.) I think that the word effectiveness fits our discussion best.

Overall, the corporate values document was reframed and translated in a way that reflected the interests and objectives of the local managers, rather than the meaning of the source text. Below we discuss how the translation was though not only focused on accommodating the managers' preferred meanings, but also guided by concerns about the recipients of the target text – other organisational actors.

Domesticating

Translation efforts took into account and were affected by the anticipated reactions of the recipients of the translated text. This was done through three types of micropolitical processes: 'pre-empting resistance', 'increasing relatability' and 'cultural censoring'. These microprocesses, which were aimed at domesticating the foreign source text and thus increasing the chances of its acceptance by the employees, supplemented the earlier described reframing process by providing a 'recipients' orientation. The following exchange offers insights into how this process (see Appendix, Domesticating example 1 for a longer quote) unfolded in interactions:

Filip (MD) I would personally like the Polish word 'nowatorskość' [which can be back translated into English as innovativeness] better because innovation [innowacja] is too blasé.

Emil (Exec.) It carries too strong associations with drugs. [i.e. is irrelevant to employees from support departments such as IT whose work is not directly connected to drugs and patients.]

Filip (MD) And we would have innovativeness ['nowatorstwo'] in our everyday work.

Alicja (Exec.) I like the word ‘innowacyjność’ [which can also be back translated into English as innovativeness]... ‘Innowacyjność’ is safer for me in terms of a buy in of the phrase.

Filip (MD) For me, innovativeness (‘nowatorstwo’) is a constant search for new opportunities.

Natalia (Man.) Remember that, additionally, innovation (‘innowacyjność’) is one of our core competences which we have in our tests. Innovation and initiative. So that this does not get confused, let’s put something else here.

[Longer discussion]

Iwona (Exec.) It seems to me that [this definition] conveys a lot... but for me, a people-focus is missing – a reference to people and their needs... Here in this description there is a lot of focus only on clients [‘klienci’ – in Polish the same word denotes ‘clients’ and ‘customers’] but maybe [the broader people focus] is worth repeating.

Filip (MD) I am not sure. If we add this here, people might start confusing the values. Personally, I like a clear message. When we talk about innovativeness, then we talk about innovativeness. This can be innovativeness in relation to our internal as well as external clients.

This interaction illustrates the emergence of a coalition to support the possible labels of ‘nowatorskość’ and ‘nowatorstwo’, used interchangeably by the MD and translatable into English as ‘innovativeness’. Both labels are discussed in opposition to ‘innowacyjność’, which is closer phonetically, but not necessarily semantically, to the English word ‘innovation’ and was supported by one of the executives responsible for the commercial side of the business. The evoked ‘Polishness’ of the phonetically distinctive Polish equivalents is used by the MD

to justify his preference. This move is seconded by the project manager who dismisses the plausible alternative – ‘innowacyjność’ [translated by us as innovation], as bearing connotations with drugs and as such less readily relatable to Polish employees, especially from the support departments (for further illustrations, see Appendix, Domesticating examples 8 and 9). An indirect reference to employees as the intended recipients of the target text is also made by the advocate of ‘innovation’, as she presents it as a ‘safer’ label with a higher potential for future ‘buy in’. This demonstrates how an appeal to the underlying concern of the ‘domesticating process’ – the employees’ envisaged reactions to the target text – was used in interactions to support or reject a particular interpretation in the negotiations of meaning. For example, one of the longer serving employees warns against the dangers of confusion among staff if the values become too similar to already existing competences. Likewise, the MD evokes the threat of confusion when he rejects the HR executive’s effort to introduce a ‘people-focus’ into the definition.

Pre-empting potential resistance and increasing the relatability of the target text (see Appendix, Domesticating examples 6 and 7) were also closely intertwined with ‘cultural censoring’ activities. These activities were aimed at ensuring that the translated text did not evoke culturally unappealing or inappropriate connotations which could undermine its functionality.

Consider the following two short dialogues (Appendix, Domesticating examples 3 and 4):

(1)

Natalia (Man.) And how about ‘pioneering’?

Irek (Exec.) This carries associations with scouts [from soviet times].

Alicja (Exec.) A bit like a ‘red’ camp. [laughter; in Poland, this reference to youth holiday camps during the soviet era has a mocking overtone as well as connotations with communist indoctrination of the USSR youth]

Szymon (Cons.) –A [soviet] pioneer, right?

(2)

Irek (Exec.) I have an observation... At corporate fora this normally appears as a number one or two [priority], namely care for shareholders.

Szymon (Cons.) But this is not very gripping.

Przemek (Exec.) [It’s about] commercialisation which sounds dreadful in Poland. Commercialisation in the Polish reality means rotten capitalism. This is the same story as if we said that we are here to deliver results for the shareholders. This is an American philosophy.

Szymon (Cons.) This is the goal but not a gripping one.

The empirical material draws attention to the way in which the translators modified the target text in line with their cultural expectations regarding its recipients. They viewed them according to the stereotype of a Polish person’s resistance towards propaganda, be it reminiscent of the soviet era’s regime or the free-market ideology with its emphasis on shareholder value as the ultimate objective of organisations. The translatorial actions involved a pattern of ‘cultural censoring’ to remove the possibility of the target text invoking culturally unpalatable connotations. The interview data also provide references to similar concerns. Thus, those interviewed expressed reservations about ‘putting all people under a banner’ (Paulina, MM, regulatory), observed that for ‘Poles who were tortured with all those values during the communist times... all such slogans... do not mean anything’ (Jakub, Manager, governance),

and ‘reminded people of Amway [in Poland, a reference to Amway has a connotation with brainwashing of individuals by corporations]’ (Sandra, Manager, marketing).

Inscribing

The translators paid attention to the directiveness of the target text, fearing that unless desired behaviours are ‘inscribed’ within it, ‘there is no translation into actions’ (Irek, Exec., quality assurance). In particular, the MD and the two new Commercial Executives ensured that the text provided concrete guidelines for staff through a process of *inscribing*. The excerpt below illustrates this preoccupation with the production of a text containing attitudinal and behavioural directions for staff:

Przemek (Exec.) It is very important to keep focusing [English word used] people, to keep telling them that it is the company’s value to satisfy clients’ needs and to do so in accordance with our code of conduct.

Alicja (Exec.) I would like to [rethink] these needs. This will always be easy to challenge as these needs can be understood differently. When you say during training: ‘satisfying clients’ needs’, ‘clients are of utmost importance for us’ – this is something different. I am for ‘providing [clients] with knowledge, medical solutions, innovative solutions’, something like this.

The new management team saw the employees, especially the middle managers, as lack(ing) strategic thinking’ (Alicja, Exec.) and poor at displaying desired behaviours, such as being ‘feisty’ and demonstrating ‘drive’ (Przemek, Exec.). As a remedy to this, they wished for the target text to be internalised by the employees and reflected in their everyday actions:

Alicja (Exec.) There are some people who are persistent but we want the whole organisation to understand that if somebody is persistent in doing something, they do

not become boring [and a pain]. [To understand that] they are pursuing a goal. If I come to [the Finance Director] and ask him ten times about something, he will tell me: ok. You are persistent, here you go. And he won't tell me: 'Leave me alone. I can't stand you'.

[Laughter]

This wish led to the production of more directive definitions compared to those included in the source text. It also resulted in the introduction of a number of additions to the Polish definitions that were not present in the source text but related to managerial objectives and behavioural expectations outlined by the MD and the Commercial Executives who supported each other's voices:

Filip (MD) But now we have moved away from caring in the business context... Can't we include this?

Przemek (Exec.) We need to improve certain behaviours towards greater client-orientation and we have to put this in somewhere.

Moreover, the translators produced within the target text a number of more general 'tips for staff', as the MD half-jokingly observed, instructing that staff should be 'open to new ideas and their implementation in the workplace', 'actively look for new solutions', 'care for the organisation', and 'improve what we have been doing'. These prescriptions resonated with the agenda of improving organisational effectiveness. Altogether, the translation process served as a vehicle for generating a 'script' for desired attitudes and behaviours among the employees.

Discussion

We have drawn on a case study of a collective interlingual translation, performed by managers in an MNC subsidiary, to examine the interests and agendas that it encompassed and the ways in which it served as a forum for the exercise of organisational power and politics. The analysis contributes to existing research in the following ways.

Firstly, contributing to the study of power and politics in IB, we advance understanding of the interactional and processual dynamics of micropolitics in MNCs. Through focusing on the processual, interactional aspect of translation-related decision-making, we have been able to show *why* subsidiary management decided to ‘change the content and intent’ (Piekkari et al., 2014: 45) of the HQ-generated source text in the process of translation, and *how* ‘considerable distortion’ of the source text occurred (op. cit: 46). The process of collective translation served to not only confirm that subsidiary level management decision-making can involve the resolving of differing opinions, but to reveal how some actors’ voices can become reinforced by those of others, resulting in the emergence of outcomes that suit their, in this case the MD’s and two new executives’, preferences and agendas. Our research therefore complements current knowledge of micropolitics in MNCs (e.g. Clark and Geppert, 2011; Whittle et al., 2016) through shifting the focus from actors exercising power onto processes through which power unfolds and manifests in interactions.

On the basis of our analysis, we, secondly, put forward a model explaining why and how actors, through their collective engagement in the processes of interlingual translation, pursue certain political interests and agendas. This model consists of four processes – ‘purposing’, ‘reframing’, ‘domesticating’ and ‘inscribing’ – through which interactional dynamics unfold during collective interlingual translations (see Figure 1 and Table 3).

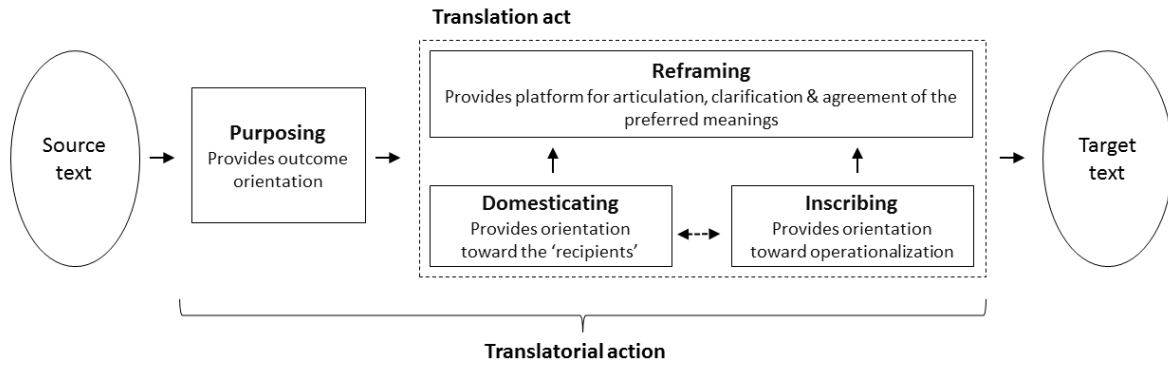


Figure 1: Micropolitical dynamics of interlingual translation

These four processes are conceptually distinct but logically interrelated. The initial process - ‘purposing’ – which involves attributing a new purpose to the source text – highlights, in common with the ‘power turn’ in translation studies literature (e.g. Tymoczko, 2010), that translatorial work goes beyond text work and can start well before words are put on paper. This realisation adds to previous studies in IB which discuss translation primarily in the context of its outcome (e.g. Logemann and Piekkari, 2015) and as a distinct activity performed by individuals (Piekkari et al., 2013). In our research, local managers, in pursuing their own ‘purpose and interest’ (Hermans, 2000: 15), were found to use the translated text as a vehicle for improving the subsidiary’s effectiveness. This they did by modifying, through a micropolitical process of ‘reframing’, the translated text to ensure conformance of its content with the new purpose.

Further, our analysis shows how modification of meaning continued via a process of ‘domestication’ involving the collective production of a target text that would pre-empt resistance by local staff, increase the text’s relatability and culturally censor its content to avoid culturally unacceptable connotations. The analysis of interactions between the translators showed how they collectively attempted to anticipate employees’ reactions to different wordings in the target text, and made choices as to the expressions to be used. Meanwhile,

through the process of ‘inscribing’ an attempt was made to engineer desirable responses among subsidiary staff. In this, the explicit behavioural prescriptions included in the translated text can be seen not only as evidence of the translators’ concern with making the text ‘functionally communicative’ (Munday, 2016: 125) but as ‘powerful acts’ (Tymoczko and Gentzler, 2002: xxi) focused on purposefully shaping the organisational culture. Table 3 further defines the four processes comprising the proposed model, explains the motivations driving them, and discusses how they are interrelated, and what role they play in both the processual and interactional dynamics of translation.

Process	Definition	Motivation	Role in the processual dynamics	Role in interactional dynamics
Purposing	The process of defining and agreeing the purpose and intended outcome of the translation.	Increasing the instrumental value of the translation.	Provides direction and orients the translation efforts towards the desired agreed outcome.	Used in negotiations of meaning to propose, support, modify or block a given translation.
Reframing	The process of changing the meaning of the source corporate text with the aim of imbuing the target text with meanings preferred by the key local actors because of their alignment with the translation's intended outcome.	Achieving alignment of the translated text with the preferred meanings of the translators.	Provides a platform for the articulation, clarification and agreement of the preferred meanings.	Negotiation of preferred meanings.
Domesticating a) Pre-empting resistance b) Increasing relatability c) Cultural-censoring	The process of changing the meaning of the source corporate text through linguistic choices aimed at increasing the likelihood of its acceptance by its recipients. It involves (a) anticipating possible unfavourable interpretations of the recipients of the target text and making linguistic choices which are designed to avoid them; (b) making linguistic choices aimed at increasing the appeal of the target text for its recipients; (c) phrasing the target text in a way which is seen by the translators as being socially and culturally acceptable for its recipients.	Decreasing the likelihood and strength of resistance and increasing the likelihood of acceptance of the translated text by its intended recipients.	Directs attention to the recipients of the translated text and thereby orients the translation efforts towards their anticipated meanings, preferences and reactions. Serves as an anticipated recipients' validation/ acceptance check.	Used in negotiations of meaning to propose, support, modify or block a given translation.
Inscribing	The process of changing the meaning of the source text through making linguistic choices so that the target text is imbued with the desirable attitudinal and behavioural guidelines for its recipients.	Providing clear guidance to staff as to which attitudes and behaviours are expected from them and valued in the subsidiary.	Orients the efforts towards securing the instructive function of the text.	Used in negotiations of meaning to propose, support, modify or block a given translation.

Table 3: Four constitutive micropolitical processes of collective interlingual translation

Our analysis also contributes to existing literature on HQ-subsidary relations by providing insights into the micropolitical complexity of corporate policy implementation at the subsidiary level. In doing so, it addresses the lack of empirical attention hitherto paid to directly observing and analysing the dynamics involved in, and underlying, the interactions occurring between subsidiaries and their parent companies. The study, more specifically, demonstrates the importance of understanding the intra-unit decision-making dynamics in subsidiaries (Whittle et al., 2016). While current research on the micropolitics of HQ-subsidary relations tends to focus on the actions (and relationships) of senior managers, our study shows that this focus needs to be counterbalanced by paying greater attention to the more local interactional dynamics that inform them. Thus, the study points to the way in which the actions of subsidiary level managers emerge from collective processes of decision-making that involve the careful and considered balancing of HQ demands and interests with senior managers' own perceptions and objectives, as well as those of managerial colleagues, and the members of the wider workforce. In the case of the studied translation, it was clear that while the subsidiary managers mobilised translation as 'a political resource' (Piekkari and Westney, 2017: 219) to change the corporate text in important respects, the distortions they introduced were in large part driven by a locally determined focus on 'effectiveness' that itself reflected pressures from the HQ to improve subsidiary performance. Paradoxically then, the subsidiary managers were simultaneously subverting the corporate initiative and complying with the HQ's broader business strategy and objectives. In this sense, they did not depart from prevailing corporate scripts of 'rationality, efficiency and profit-seeking' but instead sought to contextually align them to local (subjective and objective) conditions (Walgenbach, Drori and Hollerer, 2017: 106).

Finally, our research also advances the ‘political perspective’ (Janssens et al., 2004) on translation in IB which argues that translation cannot be viewed as merely a technical or mechanical activity, but rather one that embodies complex ‘situated’ political processes (e.g. Chidlow et al., 2014; Janssens et al., 2004; Logemann and Piekkari, 2015; Piekkari and Tietze, 2011). Considering the observed translation through the lens of ideas articulated within the ‘power turn’ strand of translation studies literature allowed us to contribute to the political view of translation in IB by putting forward an understanding of interlingual translation in MNC subsidiaries not only as a process leading to ‘distortion’ (Piekkari et al., 2014: 46) of the initial text, but as a deliberately applied *management tool* which subsidiary managers can use to pursue a range of objectives. Through an in-depth examination of the interactional dynamics of unfolding processes of translation, we have also shown (as elaborated in Table 3) why and how this management tool was used in practice. Specifically, we have given insights into subsidiary managers’ efforts to increase the instrumental value of the translation by using it to achieve alignment of the translated texts with the managers’ preferred meanings, to provide guidance to staff as to which attitudes and behaviours are expected of them, and to decrease the likelihood and strength of envisaged resistance to the text by staff, while at the same time trying to increase the likelihood of its acceptance.

Conclusion

The study points to the significance of interlingual translation processes in MNCs as ‘powerful acts’ (Tymoczko and Gentzler, 2002: xxi) and serves to caution both HQ and subsidiary managers against viewing interlingual translation of crucial texts as a technical activity. Processes of interlingual translation can bring to the fore differing interests and objectives, which will impact the translation’s outcomes, especially in the case of key strategic and

sensitive texts. MNC leaders need as a result to consider carefully how to approach the translation of such texts, while recognising the managerial potential of translation as an important management tool.

We encourage scholars to further explore translation within MNCs as micropolitical processes, rather than single activities, shaped by local actors in different contexts, including those characterised by greater HQ control. There is also scope for ‘inquiry from the inside’ (Piekkari and Tietze, 2016: 213), using longitudinal designs and combining interviews and documentary analysis with real-time observations, to facilitate the exploration of interactions and power relations among different internal stakeholders. In this way, stronger linkages could be established with the literature centred on the goals, objectives and identities of subsidiary managers, and the way in which they inform the political dynamics surrounding the implementation of corporate policies (see e.g. Becker-Ritterspach et al., 2016; Dörrenbächer and Geppert, 2009; Geppert and Dörrenbächer, 2014).

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