

Alike Yet Distinct: The Effect of Language Diversity on Interpersonal Relationships Within National and Multinational Project Teams

Komal Kalra¹ and Mike Szymanski² 

¹Newcastle University Business School, UK, and ²Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO, Russian Federation

ABSTRACT This study examines the impact of language diversity on interpersonal relationships in multinational and national/domestic teams in a multilingual country – India. Specifically, it explores whether and how the influence of language diversity differs in the two types of multilingual project teams. To this end, using direct observations and semi-structured interviews, we conducted a thematic analysis and found that native language-based faultlines and groups exist in both kinds of teams. However, such faultlines and language-based groups can disintegrate into smaller, regional dialect-based subgroups due to the emergence of dialect faultlines. Furthermore, evidence suggests that multilingual managers are more effective as boundary spanners in bridging the faultlines in multinational teams; at the same time, they need to be aware of the distinction between language differences and faultlines. This study provides the required distinction between language diversity and the role of multilingual managers in national and multinational teams in an understudied context, thereby contributing to the literature on language diversity.

KEYWORDS dialects, faultlines, language diversity, multilingual boundary spanners, multilingual teams

ACCEPTED BY Senior Editor Rajiv Krishnan Kozhikode

INTRODUCTION

‘Working together in teams is hard enough. It doesn’t bode well when there are so many languages being spoken around you; it complicates matters even more’. (Interview respondent)

In today’s global business environment, multinational, multicultural, and multilingual teams are among the most valuable resources for obtaining an organizational competitive advantage (Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). Managing diverse teams has recently become a critical topic in organizational research as it is the key to innovation, better decision-making, problem-solving, and accelerating organizational

Corresponding author: Komal Kalra (komal.kalra@ncl.ac.uk)

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The International Association for Chinese Management Research. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

change. Team members may differ in many ways. Some of them, such as age, gender, and race, are easily noticeable; others, such as personality or culture, are more difficult to recognize and analyze.

Diversity management literature has evolved from looking at superficial diversity characteristics based on simple demographics to debating the role of faultlines, that is, hypothetical dividing lines that split a group into an ingroup and outgroup (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). Social identification and self-categorization processes lead to subgroup formations, which can cause conflict, hinder information processing, and negatively affect team performance. Diversity does not always lead to faultline formation as its emergence depends on the relevance of a specific attribute to the team and the task. Since communication is at the core of international business (IB) and language permeates ‘every aspect of organizational life’ (Neeley & Kaplan, 2014: 70), linguistic differences may lead to the formation of language-based faultlines within multinational teams (Dotan-Eliasz, Sommer, & Rubin, 2009; Vigier & Spencer-Oatey, 2017).

Whereas prior research acknowledges language as one aspect of demographic faultlines (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011; Kulkarni, 2015), multiple faultlines can emerge from language diversity in teams. Some may be more salient than others depending upon the nature of the diversity. There seems to be an implicit assumption that language-based faultlines emerge between native and non-native speakers, without much thought given to a more fine-tuned understanding of language and its local dialects. We address this gap by answering the following research question: *How does language diversity influence interpersonal relationships in multinational and national multilingual teams?* To address this question, we conducted a qualitative study that consisted of observations and semi-structured interviews with 12 project teams in national and multinational organizations in India.

We intend to make three key contributions. First, we decouple linguistic diversity from the unconscious assumption of linguistic homogeneity of teams consisting of one country’s nationals. Language-based faultlines are an explicitly acknowledged challenge in a multinational setting, and yet they are by and large ignored in a domestic, single-nation context. We demonstrate how even subtle linguistic differences in regional dialects can lead to faultline formation. Second, this study extends the work on multilingual boundary spanners by demonstrating that multilingual leaders are more effective as boundary spanners in multinational project teams (MPTs) than in national project teams (NPTs) that consist of people from the same country. Third, we answer the call by IB scholars to incorporate ‘intra-national differences’ in research (Peng & Lebedev, 2017: 241; Tung, 2008) by studying project teams in a multilingual context of India.

The article develops as follows: first, we review the existing literature on linguistic diversity and analyze how it can lead to faultline formation. Next, we introduce our methods and discuss the benefits of studying language diversity in the Indian multilingual context. We present our results and then discuss the effects of faultlines caused by linguistic diversity and the role of multilingual managers

in mitigating those. We conclude the article with a call for further research into the part of regional and ethnic dialects in team collaboration.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Linguistic Diversity and Multilingualism

Language diversity refers to not just the multiplicity of languages spoken by individuals but also the variety of ways in which individuals hear and interpret them (Kassis-Henderson, 2005). Acknowledging and understanding the role of language in multinational enterprises (MNEs) is vital, mainly because of the increase in employees who speak and utilize many local languages (Harzing & Feely, 2008). Although language can create and strengthen interpersonal relationships, prior research shows that it can also serve as an exclusion tool and lead to linguistic ostracism, which results in interpersonal deviance and inhibits interpersonal and intergroup information exchange (Fiset & Bhave, 2021). While some scholars such as Aichhorn and Puck (2017) and Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen, and Piekkari (2006) suggest that the development of a common corporate language may reduce some of these challenges, others have analyzed the complexities and language-specific barriers associated with it (Brannen & Doz, 2012; Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze, 2014; Fredriksson et al., 2006; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017; Welch & Welch, 2008). Examples of such barriers include the status loss of non-native speakers of the chosen corporate language (e.g., Gaibrois & Nentwich, 2020; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017), feelings of exclusion and dilution of individual identity because of low proficiency levels (e.g., Kulkarni, 2015), and conflicts in communication processes between the headquarters and subsidiaries and within teams (e.g., Harzing & Feely, 2008; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). A recent qualitative study by Wang, Clegg, Gajewska-De Mattos, and Buckley (2020) showed that language standardization could induce anxiety in both native and non-native speakers of the corporate language, thereby affecting knowledge exchange and organizational functioning. Since language allows for knowledge transfer at work, one's inability to communicate with colleagues could be detrimental to the overall strategic objectives of any organization (Fiset & Bhave, 2021).

Language as a Source of Division in Teams

The complex and multifaceted construct of language is one of the determinants of team success (e.g., Hinds, Neeley, & Cramton, 2014; Kassis-Henderson, 2005; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). In their study, Tenzer, Pudelko, and Zellmer-Bruhn (2021) demonstrated that language diversity could reduce individuals' participation in team communication and thereby inhibit knowledge processing in multinational teams. They found that evident language barriers, that is, barriers related to lexical and syntactical proficiency, and hidden language barriers, that

is, barriers related to pragmatic and prosodic cues, can both lead to ostracization in teams. Language differences can become a potential faultline, that is, a hypothetical dividing line that splits a group into an ingroup and outgroup (Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Vigier & Spencer-Oatey, 2017). Contrary to other diversity measures (e.g., demographics, age), faultlines tend to involve one or more of the diversity characteristics. The same individuals may be aligned with other teammates on one dimension (making them a member of a given subgroup) and crossed on another dimension (making them members of another subgroup). These underlying patterns of group member characteristics lead to subgroup formation through social identification and self-categorization processes (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). Research shows that team faultline creation can lead to conflict, inhibit information processing, and have detrimental effects on key team outcomes such as decision quality, accuracy, and overall performance (Antino, Rico, & Thatcher, 2019; Thatcher & Patel, 2012). It is important to note that team diversity does not always lead to faultline creation; the emergence of a faultline depends on the relevance of a specific attribute (e.g., native language or a regional dialect) to the team and tasks at hand.

Dotan-Eliasz et al. (2009) built on the idea of language-based faultlines within teams and examined the effects of linguistic ostracism. As expected, teams in which some members talk in a language that other members cannot understand reported lower perceived team potency. Other scholars such as Voss, Albert, and Ferring (2014) have studied the relation between the comfort of using a foreign language and the perception of conflicts in multinational teams and stated that the presence of subgroups creates a dynamic that leads to relationship and/or task conflicts. Similar findings have been reported by Tenzer, Pudelko, and Harzing (2014) and Tenzer and Pudelko (2017) who found that linguistic differences often contribute to the perception of high team diversity but create mistrust among team members. Using an inductive approach, Aichhorn and Puck (2017) demonstrated that the use of accommodation approaches, such as translation, by certain bridging individuals within teams could reduce the negative consequences of linguistic differences and lead to clear communication; however, this field of study is still in a nascent stage.

Research has identified the problems related to communication and knowledge transfers that arise due to the formation of subgroups along the faultlines of a shared native tongue and nationality. With emerging economies being home to a vast multilingual workforce (Jiménez & Bayraktar, 2021), it is possible for employees to form subgroups around regional languages; however, this has not been analyzed in depth.

The Role of Language in Project Teams

This study was focused on understanding the impact of language diversity in project teams – temporary teams that are assembled to accomplish short-term projects with a duration of 6–12 months. Short-term project teams are prevalent in all

spheres of the global business environment, and their members are required to collaborate and complete tasks at a fast pace (Vigier & Spencer-Oatey, 2017); thus, effective and efficient interactions among team members are critical for success (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Oosterhof, Van der Vegt, Van de Vliert, & Sanders, 2009). Tenzer et al. (2014) found language diversity to affect the levels of intra-team trust; therefore, communication and intra-team trust building are of paramount importance, especially in project teams where members may not have previous experience of working with each other (Langfred, 2007). Interestingly enough, while a significant body of research has dealt with *cultural diversity* (e.g., Mach & Baruch, 2015), language diversity has received much less scholarly attention (for more detail, see Shemla, Meyer, Greer, & Jehn, 2016). This literature gap can be attributed to two reasons: (1) language being considered an element of the larger construct of culture and the assumption that cultural characteristics play a greater role within a multicultural (multinational) team (Wang et al., 2020) and (2) the assumption that team members who come from the same country all speak the same native language. In the context of linguistically diverse economies such as India, these assumptions do not hold, as team members may, by and large, share similar cultural characteristics and yet differ in native language (Jiménez & Bayraktar, 2021). Faultlines may be less likely to emerge in situations with high levels of linguistic diversity, since subgroup divisions are unclear (because of the shared cultural background), yet they tend to be deeper when subgroup members share similar (linguistic) attributes (Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Vigier & Spencer-Oatey, 2017). Such a research context allows for the examination of language diversity and the confounding effects of multicultural interactions. Accordingly, in the current study, we aimed to determine the similarities and differences in the impact of language diversity on NPTs and MPTs in India (Table 1 highlights the differences between the present study and previous studies on language diversity in the Indian context). In doing so, this study incorporates both inter-lingual (i.e., national languages) and intra-lingual (i.e., regional languages and dialects) conceptualizations of language (Tenzer et al., 2014).

METHODS

A qualitative research design was adopted for this exploratory study (Plakoyiannaki, Wei, & Prashantham, 2019), as it is suitable when the core concepts of the study are *immature* due to a clear lack of theory and previous research (Creswell, 2007; Pratt, 2009). Specifically, a case study design (Stake, 1995) consisting of in-depth interviews (level of analysis = individual) and observations (level of analysis = team) was employed, with a focus on theory elaboration, that is, to fill gaps in the existing research on language diversity in teams (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablinski, 1999; Pratt, 2009). Utilizing two methods of data collection also facilitated methodological triangulation (Stake, 1995).

Table 1. Key studies focusing on language diversity in India

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Key focus and findings</i>
Kulkarni (2015)	Using interviews, the author studied the impact of language-based diversity on the daily organizational life of employees in both national and multinational organizations. The study highlights that language diversity can create feelings of suspicion and exclusion among individuals. However, the author does not delve into the specific similarities and differences between the two types of organizations. The author briefly discusses the impact of language diversity on the creation of faultlines in work groups based on individual-level interviews, due to which there is a mismatch of levels of analysis.
Boussebaa, Sinha, and Gabriel (2014)	Using interviews, observations, and document analysis, the authors studied the role of corporate Englishization in call center units by drawing on postcolonial theory. The study highlights that corporate Englishization can deteriorate transnational communication and cause a colonial-style power imbalance between Anglo-speakers and other employees, thus creating a language-based hierarchy of power and privilege.
Jiménez and Bayraktar (2021)	Using secondary data, the authors studied the impact of within-country language diversity on the performance of private participation infrastructure projects in seven Asian countries, including India. They found that higher linguistic diversity is negatively related to project success.
This study	Using interviews and observations, the authors conducted a multilevel study to analyze the impact of language diversity on interpersonal (group) relationships in national and multinational organizations by using individual- and group-level data. They found evidence of two different kinds of faultlines in national and multinational teams as well as the role and influence of multilingual leaders varying in the two types of teams.

Rationale for Selecting India as the Country Context

India is rapidly becoming an investment hub for large global organizations such as The Alphabet Inc., Apple, and Foxconn (S&P Market Intelligence, 2020). As India is ranked fourth in the world in linguistic diversity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), it provides a fascinating and rich empirical context for studying the implications of language diversity (Kulkarni, 2015). Twenty-two official languages and 30 languages are spoken by more than one million people in the country. According to the data on bilingualism and trilingualism in India, 255 million people speak at least two languages, and 90 million people speak three or more languages (Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). It has been argued that multilingualism in India is a ‘natural phenomenon’ and the multiplicity of languages and linguistic identities is a ‘defining (feature) of Indian bilingualism’ (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2004: 795). India is thus an interesting, yet understudied, context for analyzing the effects of language diversity.

Case Selection Criteria

When selecting project teams for this study, intentional, theoretical sampling (Stake, 1995) was employed; data sources (e.g., organizations and multilingual project teams) were purposefully selected based on their relevance to the research question at hand. The case was selected based on its ability to contribute to the existing literature by filling important conceptual categories. Specifically, a domestic and a multinational organization, wherein most tasks are accomplished via the division of employees into teams, was chosen so that the internal workings, that is, the languages spoken during team meetings and patterns of interactions between team members, could be observed.

Multilingual teams were intentionally selected for the study, which was not a difficult task as many of the teams in the chosen organizations were multilingual. Furthermore, the research setting was limited to one industry (management consulting) so that other macro environmental factors could be kept constant while the impact of language diversity was studied. All the MPTs considered for this study were located in India and consisted of individuals from different countries, including Brazil, China, India, Denmark, France, USA, and UK. NPTs consisted of individuals from various regions of India. In addition to English, an average of two regional languages were spoken within each team. Notably, in both multinational and national teams, team members vary in terms of their age (24–46 years), experience (2–16 years), and managerial responsibilities as well as employment duration in their current organization (1–15 years). This variation helped make the sampling more purposeful (Lee et al., 1999). Tables 2 and 3 provide information related to the project teams and interview respondents, respectively.

Data Collection Approach

Semi-structured interviews and direct observations were used for the purpose of this study, that is, to understand the complexities at play within project teams.

Direct observations. All 12 project teams (6 multinational and 6 national) were observed to experience and understand the nature of the work and social interactions (e.g., team meetings, managerial interactions with team members), and the reactions and behaviors of those team members who could not be interviewed due to organizational restrictions were noted down. The primary goal was to observe the pattern of interactions among members: who was the contact person for clarifications, which languages were being used, when individuals switched between languages, whether there were any language-based subgroups, and what was the role of team managers/leaders during the meetings as well as whether clarification questions were asked in the corporate language (English) or a different language, whether the manager answered questions in English or in a local language, and the manager's reaction when team-members interacted in

Table 2. Project team information

<i>Team</i>	<i>Project duration (months)</i>	<i>Number of members (excluding team leader/manager)</i>	<i>Languages spoken</i>	<i>Number of language subgroups</i>	<i>Number of dialect subgroups</i>
NPT1	12	4	3 (English, Hindi, Tamil)	2	2
NPT2	10	7	3 (English, Hindi, Marathi)	2	2
NPT3	10	6	4 (English, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil)	3	3
NPT4	8	5	3 (English, Hindi, Punjabi)	2	2
NPT5	6	5	3 (English, Tamil, Telugu)	2	2
NPT6	6	3	3 (English, Hindi, Telugu)	3	3
MPT1	7	5	2 (English, Hindi)	0	0
MPT2	6	5	3 (English, Hindi, French)	2	0
MPT4	11	5	3 (English, French, Tamil)	3	0
MPT5	11	4	3 (English, Tamil, Portuguese)	2	0
MPT6	7	5	4 (English, Bengali, Spanish, Hindi)	3	0
MPT7	8	5	3 (English, Punjabi, Hindi, Danish)	2	0

their native languages. The intention was to understand the role of language diversity at the team level. Overall, 35 hours of observation data were collected. Direct observations were conducted before individual interviews for two reasons: to identify individuals for the interviews and to follow up on specific events/interactions during the semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews. Thirty-six interviews were conducted with three persons from each project team^[1], and each interview ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. Twenty interviews were conducted in person, and 16 were conducted via Skype. The interviews helped us elaborate on existing theory by focusing on the specific experiences of respondents in linguistically diverse teams. Semi-structured interviews assure a certain extent of consistency in the questions so that the responses of interviewees can be compared; at the same time, this approach is flexible enough to enable the discussion of important, unanticipated topics. For instance, when we learned about the role of boundary spanners, we edited our interview structure to include questions related to this issue.

All participants were given the option to communicate in their native language during the interviews, however they opted to do the interviews in English. They explicitly stated that they were comfortable speaking in English, and the authors found them to have excellent command of the language (lexicon, syntax, and sentence structure), negating the need for translators. Third parties, such as translators, have the potential to create disturbances and hinder the flow of communication during interviews (Usunier, 1998), due to which we did not want the presence of a third party to inhibit the process of trust formation

Table 3. Interview respondent information

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Designation</i>	<i>Languages spoken</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Overall years of work experience</i>	<i>Duration in their current organization</i>	<i>Interview duration (minutes)</i>
NT1	Project Lead	Hindi (n), English	45	Female	15	15	55
NT2	Project Lead	Hindi (n), Telugu, English	40	Female	14	5	45
NT3	Senior Analyst	Punjabi (n), Hindi, English	30	Female	10	4	51
NT4	Junior Analyst	Tamil (n), English, Hindi	27	Male	6	2	60
NT5	Junior Analyst	Hindi (n), English, Punjabi	26	Male	6	5	53
NT6	Associate	Bengali (n), English, Hindi	24	Male	5	1	47
NT7	Associate	Telugu (n), English, Tamil	24	Male	6	6	45
NT8	Project Lead	Hindi (n), English	44	Male	14	10	60
NT9	Senior Analyst	Tamil (n), English, Telugu	40	Male	10	7	60
NT10	Associate	Telugu (n), English	25	Male	2	2	48
NT11	Senior Analyst	Tamil (n), English	30	Female	11	10	54
NT12	Senior Analyst	Hindi (n), English	32	Female	12	6	50
NT13	Project Lead	Bengali (n), English, Hindi	41	Male	14	4	45
NT14	Associate	Punjabi (n), Hindi, English	25	Female	3	2	56
NT15	Senior Analyst	Tamil (n), Telugu (n), English	32	Male	8	5	51
NT16	Associate	Tamil (n), English	26	Male	2	1	50
NT17	Project Lead	Punjabi (n), Hindi (n), English	39	Male	13.5	10.5	50
NT18	Senior Analyst	Tamil (n), English	34	Female	9.5	6.5	45
MT1	Junior Analyst	English (n)	25	Male	2.5	2.5	50
MT2	Associate	Portuguese (n), English, Spanish	27	Male	2	2	45
MT3	Senior Analyst	Hindi (n), English	35	Female	6.5	5	58
MT4	Associate	English (n)	28	Male	7	7	45
MT5	Junior Analyst	English (n), French	30	Male	3	2	47
MT6	Project Lead	Punjabi (n), English, Hindi	44	Female	14.5	11	47
MT7	Project Lead	French (n), English	46	Male	15.5	14	50
MT8	Junior Analyst	Tamil (n), English	28	Male	4	4	55
MT9	Senior Analyst	Telugu (n), English, Tamil	31	Female	7.5	6	54
MT10	Associate	Tamil (n), English, Hindi	25	Male	2	2	45

Table 3. Continued

<i>Respondent</i>	<i>Designation</i>	<i>Languages spoken</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Overall years of work experience</i>	<i>Duration in their current organization</i>	<i>Interview duration (minutes)</i>
MT11	Associate	Danish (n), English	27	Female	2.5	1	60
MT12	Junior Analyst	English (n), Hindi	29	Female	5	3	45
MT13	Senior Analyst	Hindi (n), English, Punjabi	32	Female	8.5	6.5	56
MT14	Senior Analyst	Bengali (n), English, Hindi	36	Male	9	9	45
MT15	Associate	Hindi (n), English	28	Male	3	2	60
MT16	Project Lead	Telugu (n), English	48	Female	13	12	47
MT17	Associate	Bengali (n), English, Hindi	27	Female	2	1	50
MT18	Project Lead	English (n)	44	Male	16	12	49

Notes: n, native; NT, member of NPT; MT, member of MPT.

between the interviewer and interviewee. The interviews focused on the informants' experiences within their current teams and thoughts concerning language diversity. The interview structure consisted of questions related to themes discussed in prior research – specifically, research on language diversity and identities was used to form questions related to language-based subgroups and faultlines within organizations. Additionally, the notes taken during direct observations also guided the framing of questions. The initial set of interview questions was modified after a pilot study with five respondents. The results of the pilot study were used to refine the research design and ensure that the respondents were able to understand and answer the questions clearly (Kim, 2011). The pilot study also helped enhance the credibility of our qualitative study.

After the pilot study, questions related to the role of team managers in multilingual teams were added. The following are some of the categories of questions that were asked: the notion of linguistic identity and subgroups (e.g., describe the relationship between team members who speak the same language(s), describe the relationship between people who speak different native languages); the relationship between language diversity and team interactions (e.g., describe an instance where you encountered a situation in your team where people spoke multiple languages; what were the challenges/opportunities associated with that?); positive and/or negative outcomes of such diversity (e.g., can you elaborate on a situation where the language differences positively/negatively impacted the team interactions and functioning?); and the role of team manager and leader (e.g., how can one ensure that the subgroup formation does not hinder the team functioning? How can the manager help run the process smoothly?).

It should be noted that the questions asked of each interviewee varied based on their responses as well as behaviors during the observations. For instance, if an interviewee stated that language diversity created opportunities in their team, they were then asked to elaborate on its positive impacts on team interactions. On the other hand, if someone noted that language diversity created challenges, they were asked to elaborate on the negative effects. Many of the questions were purposefully created to be open-ended and thereby provide insights into the participants' opinions on the current workings of their respective teams as well as their involvement in other activities within their organizations. The aim of the study was to understand the role of language diversity at the individual level.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify key initial themes/first-order codes in the data based on their recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). We intended for the themes to emerge from the data rather than any *a priori* assumptions. Initial themes or first-order codes were noted when three criteria were present: (1) recurrence, (2) repetition, and (3) forcefulness (Owen, 1984: 275). Recurrence is observed when two or more parts of a response have a similar

meaning, even when different words are used. Repetition, on the other hand, refers to the use of key terms multiple times, and forcefulness refers to ‘vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses which stress and subordinate some utterances from locutions in oral reports’ (Owen, 1984: 275). The data collection and analysis followed an iterative process of cycling between the data, existing literature, and emergent theory until saturation was reached (Locke, 2001; Tenzer & Pudelko, 2017). Through this process, relationships were found between the data gathered, which were finally integrated into a set of three core findings after theoretical saturation was reached. Tables 4 and 5 provide an example of the data analysis process. Themes were determined based on the theoretical categories indicated by prior research as well as emergent categories. Categories based on prior research include exclusion, power imbalance, and faultlines (e.g., Harzing & Feely, 2008; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999). Other categories, such as the role of multilingual managers in gaining trust and reducing language-based subgroups, were recognized as emergent. The generated data was repeatedly compared with emerging categories and themes until no new information emerged (Creswell, 2007), and only findings that were triangulated through both interviews and observations were finally considered.

RESULTS

The three broad themes (language-based faultlines, dialect-based faultlines, and multinational managers as better boundary spanners) that emerged from data analysis were grouped into two main findings; these are discussed below.

Dual Faultlines in NPTs Compared with MPTs

Language-based faultlines were found to exist in both NPTs and MPTs. However, evidence of regional dialect-based faultlines was found only in NPTs. Conversations within both teams frequently drifted from English to the employees’ native languages. During one direct observation session of team NPT#3, some members were constantly switching between English and their local language, and no one was translating for other team members. Three of the team members were visibly uncomfortable, and there were smirks on their faces. We inferred from this observation that there were two different language subgroups conversing among themselves.

When probed further during an interview, a participant (NT18) conveyed the following:

‘Not a single conversation happens entirely in English, which is the official language here. I do not understand much Hindi, so I don’t understand these insider jokes. I feel like an outsider, and sometimes, I just pretend to laugh at those jokes to avoid feeling embarrassed’.

Table 4. Deduction of first-order categories from data

<i>Example of quote</i>	<i>Example of first-order categories</i>
<i>Yes, I interact more with those who speak my language. It is easier to exchange work-related information and communicate in my mother tongue.</i>	Preference for shared native language speakers
<i>It is difficult for me to understand when someone from a different state speaks a different variety of Hindi. There are words I don't understand ... and yes, grammar and sentence formation sounds a little weird to me.</i>	Grammar and geographical differences within same language
<i>Our [multinational] manager constantly reminds us to speak in English and not Telugu during meetings. He is multilingual and speaks languages spoken by team-members, so we trust him, but he is very particular about how we communicate in a formal setting.</i>	Multinational managers' awareness of language diversity and differences; Multinational managers' ability to gain trust
<i>Language is not a big deal. What is important is that all of us [national team members] follow the organization's values. And sometimes, it is ok to talk in our native language. It helps to let go of formalities.</i>	National team managers' ignorance of language diversity and differences

Another interviewee (MT5) who worked in a MPT conveyed the following:

'Of course, people interact more with those who share their language – isn't language like a part of culture? We were told this in our MBA, but I think we never talk about such stuff here at the office. I find it easier to work with people who speak my language; I don't have to explain everything to them in English ... plus I am more comfortable with them'.

Thus, the above interviewees indicated that language is a strong part of their identity, and that language diversity can often lead to feelings of exclusion, discomfort, and anger among the team members, which leads to the creation of language-based subgroups and divisions (i.e., faultlines). Furthermore, language is closely related to one's emotions, and individuals feel more comfortable sharing information with those who speak their language. The interviewees from both types of teams further mentioned that such divisions could delay project completion by hindering team-level communication, particularly because employees might withhold essential task-related knowledge from those who are perceived as outsiders or members of other language subgroups.

Additionally, regional dialect-based divisions were seen within the native language-based subgroups in NPTs, as faultlines and language-based groups can disintegrate into smaller regional dialect-based subgroups due to the emergence of dialect faultlines (refer to Table 6 for the differences between language- and dialect-based divisions and faultlines). A regional dialect refers to 'a variety of language which differs grammatically, phonologically and lexically from other varieties, and which is associated with a particular geographical area' (Trudgill, 2003: 35). This implies that some of the vocabulary used by an individual speaking in their regional dialect is unique to their region or state. For example, Hindi is the native language of people living in several Indian states; however, the vocabulary,

Table 5. Deduction of final conceptual dimensions from first-order themes

<i>Example of first-order categories</i>	<i>Sorting first-order categories into second-order themes</i>	<i>Conceptualizing dimensions of second-order themes</i>
Preference for shared native language speakers Divisions based on different regional languages	Language subgroups and divisions	Language-based faultlines
Grammar and geographical differences within same language	Dialect-based fissures and divisions	Dialect-based faultlines in native teams
Multinational managers' awareness of language diversity and differences	Multinational managers successful in bridging language divisions	Multinational team managers as better boundary spanners
National team managers' ignorance of language diversity and differences	National team managers unsuccessful in bridging language divisions	

grammar, and sentence structures employed by Hindi speakers can vary depending upon their geographical locations. A few examples of dialects of Hindi include Haryanvi (associated with the state of Haryana), Marwari (associated with the state of Rajasthan), and Bhojpuri (associated with certain cities in the state of Bihar). Similar variations can be found in other languages such as Tamil, Punjabi, and Telugu. During the observations, it was noted that not all individuals who speak Hindi were comfortable with communicating with each other – it was clear that faultlines existed within those groups as well. For instance, during an observation of team NPT#6, we noted that the conversation had abruptly shifted from English to Telugu and members were speaking in two different dialects of Telugu. We learned that A and S were talking in a dialect that H and D could not completely understand, which made the latter visibly uncomfortable and frustrated.

Subsequently, we followed up on this finding during the interviews. Of the 18 interviewees who work in national organizations, 14 noted that the regional dialects of their colleagues constitute an important distinguishing factor that can influence communication. Our interviewees from NPTs mentioned that regional dialect is a strong attribute of their identity and that further divisions along regional dialects often formed within the linguistic subgroups. For instance, one interviewee (NT8) stated the following:

‘The same language can be spoken in numerous different ways, and sometimes, the grammar or vocabulary is so different that it is difficult to understand all the words. To me, it signifies that the other person has a different background, and I don’t always feel at ease with them’.

This interviewee hails from Chennai and speaks an urban (city) dialect of Tamil; he experiences emotional and processing difficulties when interacting with those who use a different lexicon. The other interviews revealed that

Table 6. Differences between language- and regional dialect-based faultlines

<i>Language-based faultlines</i>	<i>Regional dialect-based faultlines</i>
Present in both MPT and NPT.	Present in only NPT.
Focus on identities attributed to one's native language (can be a regional/state-level language such as Tamil or country-level language such as English).	Focus on identities attributed to the status associated with varieties of a native language that can differ in terms of grammar, lexicon, and/or sentence structures.
Linguistic identities are often associated with wider geographical boundaries attached to countries, states (provinces), or nationalities, e.g., English in USA, French in France, and Tamil in Tamil Nadu.	Regional dialect identities are associated with much smaller geographical boundaries such as cities or a combination of two to three cities. For example, Marwari, Mewati, and Jaipuri dialects of Hindi are spoken in different villages and cities in the Indian state of Rajasthan; however, they all fall under the broad umbrella of the native language Hindi.

processing difficulties are generally experienced by speakers of both urban and rural dialects. Furthermore, being part of dialect-based subgroups is a source of support for NPT members. Notably, regional dialects are closely associated with one's regional identity and caste in the Indian context (Chen, Chittoor, & Vissa, 2015), resulting in social stigma being attached to certain dialects. One's verbal speech can easily indicate one's (presumed) status and hierarchy in the social environment, which is one reason why dialect-based faultlines and conflicts emerge in NPTs.

Dialects did not emerge as an important communication factor in MPTs during the direct observations; to verify this result, the participants from MPTs were probed regarding the role of dialects during their semi-structured interviews. As the multinational teams consist of people from different countries, the participants did not distinguish between people based on their regions within India. Respondent MT4, who is originally from the UK, noted,

'I am comfortable as long as someone speaks English properly. I have good relationships with people who keep the interactions limited to English. It does not matter where they are from'.

In multinational teams, there are many visible artifacts – such as easily identifiable nationality, race, or ethnic accents – that make it relatively easy to observe social categorizations. However, in domestic teams, nationality is not a differentiator because all team members hail from the same country, resulting in a greater emphasis on dialect-based categorizations for creating social categorizations and faultlines. Prior research notes that the presence of faultlines can negatively impact group processes, such as by reducing cohesion and creating conflicts, which can further reduce overall group and organizational performance (Choi & Sy, 2010; Lau & Murnighan, 2005; Thatcher & Patel, 2012). Therefore, organizations need to consider the impact of both language and dialect while developing language management strategies (Tang, Zheng, & Chen, 2017).

Kulkarni (2015) studied the influence of linguistic diversity and identities on routine activities in organizations in India and found that language is often used as a tool to define social boundaries; however, the author only followed the inter-lingual approach to language conceptualization (Tenzer et al., 2014). The present study's findings highlight the importance of both inter-lingual and intra-lingual conceptualization of language by incorporating both national-level languages and regional dialects. There is a key gap in the current literature on language diversity, with scholarly work assuming the presence of only a few language-based faultlines in multilingual teams, whereas our results suggest that a larger number of faultlines based on both native language and regional dialect differences are active (Meyer & Glenz, 2013; Thatcher & Patel, 2012) in NPTs. Certain regional dialects carry a negative connotation and signal a status divide between the speakers (e.g., Khazzoom, 2003), and such a division could deepen the existing faultlines created by national language differences. This rift could be hazardous for the long-term success of teams not only because it is considered trivial by current scholarly work but also because most team managers are unaware of its existence. Furthermore, prior studies have criticized the research on faultlines for its limited focus on inter- and intra-subgroup processes and for discounting the role of management and leadership (e.g., Meyer, Shemla, Li, & Wegge, 2015). Therefore, the present study contributes to the literature by exploring the role of multilingual boundary spanners. This is discussed in the next section.

Effectiveness of Multilingual Managers as Boundary Spanners: National Team Managers Versus Multinational Team Members

Boundary spanners can be defined as those 'individuals who are perceived by other members of both their own ingroup and/or relevant outgroups to engage in and facilitate significant interactions between the two groups' (Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä, 2014: 887). Essentially, boundary spanners possess a particular set of characteristics, abilities, and skills that enables them to associate and communicate with multiple (linguistic) groups/subgroups and act as gatekeepers of information transfers between ingroup and outgroup members, both within teams and across organizational units/boundaries (Kane & Levina, 2017). Overall, 28 participants (15 from multinational and 13 from national teams) emphasized the importance of multilingual managers in facilitating boundary spanning activities in multilingual teams and reducing the faultlines that frequently emerge in such teams; however, our analysis shows that multilingual managers were able to perform boundary spanning roles effectively only in MPTs. During observations of NPTs, the team members frequently shifted to their native/regional language while sharing information with their colleagues, which created confusion and frustration among those who did not understand that language. We noted that several NPT managers were oblivious to the conflicts caused by such behaviors. For instance, during one of the observations of NPT, two

of the five team members switched to Hindi while explaining tasks to each other, and the manager did not pay attention to this switch. A, a non-native Hindi speaker, was noticeably angry as she was continuously shaking her head, but the manager did not notice this. We probed the team manager regarding the above observation during an interview, and he said,

‘There are absolutely no problems in our team. Everyone gets along and most work-related tasks are discussed in English. If anyone had problems, I am sure they would let myself or the management know’.

When probed further on the details of phrase ‘most work-related tasks’, the interviewee said, ‘by most, I mean 70–75%’. Another manager (interviewee NT17) stated the following:

‘Look, we have this rule that everyone has to speak in English here. And they can always ask me questions and clarifications in Hindi; Hindi is our national language, and everyone understands it. I have never seen any problems—language is not a big deal’.

Interestingly, India does not have a national language. The interviews led to the inference that NPT managers were aware of the diversity of their team members but not the resultant divisions. In the abovementioned instance, the interviewee spoke with an urban dialect of Hindi, and on probing further, we found that the manager had previously worked in a small organization where Hindi was the only spoken language, with no diversity, and thus had not experienced such divisions.

Interestingly, managers from MPTs were aware of language-based faultlines and actively worked to resolve the resultant problems, thereby performing boundary spanning activities effectively. During an observation of an MPT, the manager was actively engaging with everyone in the team and reminding everyone to be respectful of the diversity and differences. When K tried to initiate conversations in Hindi, the manager immediately called her out and asked her to speak English. He also reiterated that a constant back and forth between native languages and English could cause communication problems and delay meaningful discussions. The direct observations revealed that the multilingual managers in the MPTs actively engaged with their multilingual team members and talked to them about the role of language in accomplishing projects on time.

During an interview, interviewee MT6, who is a team leader, noted,

‘I have lived in multiple countries as an expatriate; thus, I am aware of the issues caused by differences in cultures and languages. I keep them in mind while working with my team here’.

Interviewee MT9 mentioned the following:

‘I am fortunate that R is our team lead. He obviously knows that communicating in a multitude of languages can create confusion and delays in project deliveries. In my other team, these communication problems and frustrations are very common, but in this one, it’s different. R has a

good rapport with all of us, speaks both Hindi and English well, and we joke around in our native languages. But he always makes it a point to remind us to speak English during meetings, and he can be quite firm?

The interviewees also mentioned the importance of organizational culture in creating such awareness. Multinational managers often interact with colleagues from other parts of the world, and are, therefore, required to undergo sensitivity training to ensure their knowledge of the problems associated with managing a diverse workforce. Several interviewees also highlighted that acculturation activities and social events initiated by team leaders/managers during initial meetings helped build trust within their multinational teams. During one observation of MPT6, we learned that the team lead frequently planned drinks after work and we heard some of the team members discussing food options and joking about their time at the bar from a previous get-together two weeks prior. We inferred that such get-togethers had helped build comradery in MPT6.

Barner-Rasmussen et al. (2014) have demonstrated that multilingual individuals can play boundary spanning roles and reduce the faultlines created by language diversity by understanding all the sides of a story and acting as a bridge that helps the members of different linguistic groups and subgroups appreciate each other's perspectives and concerns. The present research replicates these findings in the Indian context. Additionally, a key point that emerged during the interviews was that multilingual managers need to be *aware* of the faultlines caused by language diversity in order to be effective boundary spanners. This finding is significant because current research on multilingual boundary spanners is sparse, and to the extent of our knowledge, assumes that multilingual individuals are aware of the conflicts caused by language diversity and can, therefore, rely on their bridging skills or use certain accommodation strategies to reduce the associated negative effects (e.g., Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). Furthermore, prior research suggests that a multilingual manager who speaks the languages of both ingroup and outgroup members within a workgroup can cultivate a sense of belonging among the team members (Woo & Giles, 2017), whereas our findings suggest that such assumptions cannot be generalized to heterogeneous country contexts, such as India, as they do not hold true within national teams.

DISCUSSION

The Existence of Faultlines

There is a large body of literature on language diversity and multilingualism that discusses the role of language in creating faultlines in teams and organizations (e.g., Kassis-Henderson, 2005). However, the role of dialects in the creation of subgroups has not been discussed in depth in the literature on language in management and organization studies, mainly because language research is still a nascent field and attention has mostly been given to the differences between the

national languages of employees working in multinational organizations (Karhunen, Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen, & Piekkari, 2018). Our study contributes to this domain by showing that dialects trigger faultlines and create subgroups in NPTs but not in MPTs. Within the Indian context, dialects are closely tied to one's social class and status, which can significantly impact business relationships (Chen et al., 2015). Thus, team members might be biased toward individuals or groups that are perceived to be inferior or different, and stigmas are attached to people who speak in a certain dialect, even when they are proficient in the corporate language of their organization (i.e., English). Prior research recognizes that a shared dialect can be used as a common ground for establishing personal relationships and that individuals can use their regional dialect to identify their fit with an organization; this can further impact their decision to stay or leave an organization, thus affecting turnover (Gong, Chow, & Ahlstrom, 2011).

This study shows that dialects are a strong source of one's identity and are associated with one's status within a team. Based on the present findings as well as arguments from prior research, it is clear that status differences create divisions and trigger faultlines in NPTs, that is, creating a situation that could turn a formerly dormant dialect faultline into an active one (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, Weber, & Ernst, 2009). Theoretically, there are two prerequisites/assumptions for the formation of strong faultlines: (1) a moderate level of diversity (Lau & Murnighan, 1998, 2005) and (2) a small number of subgroups divided along a specific number of attributes. Our findings align with the former but contradict the latter. Prior studies have argued that a higher number of subgroups within a team is likely to lead to weaker faultlines (e.g., Nishii & Goncalo, 2008). In fact, Polzer, Crisp, Jarvenpaa, and Kim (2006) found that groups divided across two geographic locations tend to have the highest levels of conflict; groups divided across three locations have moderate levels of conflict; and groups divided across six locations display the lowest levels of conflict. In the present study, MPTs demonstrated a moderate level of diversity whereas the number of subgroups was higher in NPTs, yet they were able to sustain faultlines and maintain conflict. It is plausible that such strong faultlines were sustained in NPTs because of weak leadership compared with MPTs. We elaborate on this in the following section.

The Role of Multilingual Managers as Boundary Spanners

Scholars in language research have used terminologies such as 'bridging individuals' or 'linguistic intermediaries' to highlight the ability of multilingual individuals as boundary spanners (e.g., Aichhorn & Puck, 2017; Feely & Harzing, 2003). However, the contexts that are conducive to honing their bridging activities remain unclear. There seems to be a universal assumption about the success of such persons as it is widely believed that they can neutralize the detrimental effects of language diversity by gaining the trust of their team members (Barner-Rasmussen et al., 2014). However, to bridge language barriers, such

persons must have not only the capability but also the willingness to do so (Kane & Levina, 2017). We argue that the willingness will not occur if multilingual managers are not cognizant of the impacts of language diversity and the issues related to subgroup formation and faultlines. Organizational culture and training programs could generate cognizance among employees. For example, in the multinational organizations considered for the present research, sensitivity training helped generate more empathetic responses from MPT managers, whereas no such training was mandated in the national organizations. Consequently, some managers' ignorance and encouragement of the use of native languages in NPTs triggered the division of individuals into subgroups.

Table 7 compares the MPT and NPT managers' characteristics. The literature suggests that sharing a common attribute with members of other subgroups may lead to cross-categorization and influence perceived faultline strength, and scholars have analyzed the effects of leadership-based moderators such as leadership role and task structure (e.g., Benet-Martínez, 2012; Gratton, Voigt, & Erickson, 2007). The present study, in contrast, reveals that attributes such as awareness and acknowledgement of differences, which are often considered trivial, can help reduce faultline strength and subgroup formation. Awareness of language differences and the willingness to actively address linguistic faultlines could motivate multilingual managers to employ ice-breaking strategies. In the present study, some managers actively encouraged social contact and dinners to improve the levels of trust among their team and divert attention away from language (and dialect) differences. In teams led by such boundary spanners, the mistrust and conflict between subgroups was replaced with trust stimulated by a positive perception of language diversity.

Theoretical Implications

One of the most significant contributions of this study is the focus on individual-level multilingualism along with team-level language diversity. Individual-level data was collected through interviews and team-level data through observations of team interactions and meetings, and the findings highlight a more nuanced view of individual-level multilingualism. Furthermore, by targeting organizations in India, this study brings attention to the phenomenon of language diversity in an emerging economy and moves beyond the traditional focus of linguistic diversity research on the US and Western Europe. Thus, this study answers the call to study language diversity in emerging economies (Tenzer, Terjesen, & Harzing, 2017). Dialects can enhance the communication and interactions between individuals, enabling the formation of groups (Gong, Chow & Ahlstrom, 2011; Du, 2019). Prior research has also found that dialects play a strong role in emerging countries such as China (e.g., Gong et al., 2011). Regional dialects can affect the choice of foreign location during internationalization processes, and dialect differences can have negative effects on intra-national

Table 7. Effectiveness of multilingual managers as boundary spanners in linguistically diverse teams

<i>Multilingual manager</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Team interactions</i>	<i>Team outcomes</i>
National team	Manager can communicate in more than one language (in addition to the official corporate language) but is ineffective as boundary spanner; interacts with some team members in their native language; unaware of and/or unwilling to actively address linguistic diversity.	Formation of subgroups; alienation of certain team members; communication barriers	Language-based divisions and faultlines that lead to the creation of subgroups
Multinational team	Manager can communicate in more than one language (in addition to the official corporate language) and is an effective boundary spanner; shares the languages with the team members; uses their multilingualism to build rapport with team; aware of and actively addresses linguistic diversity; a unique feature of Indian context as it is difficult to employ a monolingual manager in a company that uses English for official purposes.	Manager serves as an intermediary and encourages communication in the common language	Reduced faultlines; More cohesion

trade (Wang & Ruan, 2019). Du (2019) found that CEO–auditor dialect sharing can create a positive bias and impact the quality of audits. The findings of these studies signify the importance of dialects in managerial decision making in other contexts such as China. However, the impact of dialects on interactions and trust building within an organization’s internal environments requires further study. Researchers could test the findings of the present study in the Chinese context to further the understanding of this phenomenon.

The current study further adds to the research on faultlines and team interactions in four ways. First, the interview and observation data show that the ‘us versus them’ dynamic (Hinds et al., 2014) exists not only in globally distributed teams but also in local teams that are thought to be linguistically homogenous. Language and dialect differences can both affect intragroup communications and cause strained interpersonal relationships. The present study’s findings suggest that perceived inequalities related to regional dialects create a need for NPT members to form subgroups that can support the ingroup members. Second, prior research suggests that a higher number of subgroups in a team

would lead to weaker faultlines (e.g., Lau & Murnighan, 1998), whereas the current study shows that faultline strength is not directly associated with the subgroup numbers. NPTs have a larger number of subgroups than MPTs because of the activation of both language and dialect-related faultlines; however, there is no evidence of weaker faultlines or higher levels of inter-subgroup trust in NPTs. Third, research on faultline theory suggests that group history can influence the strength and number of faultlines in workgroups as the salience of various attributes can change over time (Meister, Thatcher, Park, & Maltarich, 2020). However, project teams are formed for a relatively short duration, and they are dismissed once the project is completed, making it difficult to analyze the temporal element in project teams. One way to manage the diversity in such teams is by following the suggestions of linguists Woo and Giles (2017), who noted the importance of speech accommodation training. Organizations could offer training programs on intergroup communication practices, thereby reducing anxiety and frustration among employees and facilitating quality contact between multilingual individuals and managers. Finally, individuals who speak multiple languages can act as linguistic boundary spanners to facilitate smooth working between the subgroups of a team. We know that leaders of teams tend to have higher power and influence over their team members and, therefore, play a significant role of activation or deactivation of faultlines (Meyer et al., 2015), and research has suggested that multilingual boundary spanning individuals can be valuable employees in organizations due to their skills and abilities in translation and accommodation (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). Similarly, research on faultline theory indicates that shared attributes can help leaders reduce subgroup bias and enhance levels of intergroup trust (Benet-Martínez, 2012; Meyer et al., 2015). However, based on the present study's results, we argue that a cross-categorization of attributes with team-members is not sufficient and that multilingual managers need to (1) understand the diversity and differences that lead to the creation of faultlines and (2) actively employ team diversity management strategies such as ice-breaking and acculturation to take employees' attention away from language and dialect differences, thereby deterring the emergence of faultlines. This finding contributes to the work of van der Kamp, Tjemkes, and Jehn (2015), who introduced the concept of faultline deactivation, and Schölmerich, Schermuly, and Deller (2016), who argued that leaders' diversity beliefs can moderate the activation and functioning of faultlines. As noted in our findings, multilingual boundary spanners have the potential to increase team efficiency by improving communications, promoting intragroup relationships, building rapport, and reducing faultlines. Nevertheless, the role of boundary spanning is not limited to managers; bilingual or multilingual individuals within teams can also act as boundary spanners. This warrants the attention of language diversity researchers.

The present research also highlights the role of language-based diversity in an understudied context. Indian society is highly multilingual, with over 121 languages spoken across the country (Registrar General & Census Commissioner,

India, 2011). Language is intimately connected to regional culture, traditions, and ethnic identities. The different languages can be further divided into numerous dialects, both rural and urban, with class and status distinctions (Chen et al., 2015; Finegan & Rickford, 2004). Our study shows that distinct regional languages can create communication barriers between subgroups by creating faultlines and inhibiting interpersonal relationships, and, contrary to popular belief, the use of English as a corporate language does not lower these barriers. Our findings in the Indian context not only highlight the influence of social status and class of dialect speakers but also provide a foundation for future studies on language diversity in other multilingual countries, such as the USA, where one's dialect is often associated with their class (Finegan & Rickford, 2004). It is plausible that individuals make value judgment of others based on their dialect and associated social class, thereby creating faultlines that are invisible to the management because they speak the corporate language fluently.

A practical implication of our findings is the acknowledgement of linguistic differences within one-nation teams that outwardly seem linguistically homogeneous. Even when all teammates have a strong grasp of the common language, managers must address the potential faultlines caused by various native tongues and/or distinct regional dialects, which may potentially lead to mistrust and bias and hinder efficient team functioning. It is imperative for managers to understand and acknowledge the distinction and relationship between language diversity and language/dialect-based faultlines (Lau & Murnighan, 2005; Thatcher & Patel, 2012) to address the conflicts and tensions brewing among the various subgroups.

Limitations and Future Research

Although it significantly contributes to the field of language diversity and multilingualism, this study is by no means free of limitations. First, due to restrictions related to data access, the study sample consisted of teams from two different organizations, one domestic and one multinational, and macro-organizational factors, such as organizational culture, that influence the emergence of faultlines in national and MPTs could not be controlled. To address this gap, future research could analyze the intragroup dynamics of the two types of teams within the same organization. Second, our study did not take into consideration the role of other demographic attributes of the team members, such as gender, age, and experience, while exploring the role of language diversity. Further research could study the intersection between these attributes and one's native language. Third, we focused on only one country, and it is possible that the relationship between diversity, faultlines, and subgroup formation is more complex or different in other emerging economies, such as China, where regional dialects could strongly affect interpersonal relationships. Therefore, future research can test the present findings in other country contexts. Finally, we did not examine longitudinal effects of language diversity. The interviewees shared their experiences with

functioning in multilingual project teams, but little was learned about the long-term effects of such diversity.

Despite its limitations, the present work provides a starting point for the further examination of numerous language-related issues in organizations. First, the study findings stem from an analysis of interviews with individuals who work in organizations that have a formal corporate language policy of using English as the lingua franca; future research can test the models on organizations that do not have a formal corporate language policy but, rather, a de-facto lingua franca that is spoken by majority of employees. Furthermore, we call for more research on multilingualism and language-based faultlines. Vigier and Spencer-Oatey (2017) showed that the number and strength of cultural faultlines in organizations determines the mechanisms of rule development and implementation and, in turn, team attitude and atmosphere. Therefore, we suppose analogous mechanisms might exist when language diversity is analyzed. Research on the same could potentially be conducted in other multilingual countries such as Canada, China, or Switzerland, where fewer languages are widely spoken, leading to fewer faultlines. Furthermore, in this study, we controlled for certain respondent-related macro factors, such as individual's education background by only interviewing individuals who received their MBAs from top-tier schools in India or their respective countries. However, it is possible that the process of subgroup formation is different in teams wherein individuals are not only from different socio-economic status and speak in various regional dialects but also have different educational backgrounds. Therefore, future research could analyze the interaction, if any, between the dialects and educational backgrounds of the respondents.

CONCLUSION

Language diversity matters because language is a significant element of one's social identity; individuals tend to identify with their native language and give social significance to the groups they associate with. Such associations and beliefs related to social categorizations can have significant effects on the outcomes of work groups and organizations. This is especially noteworthy as workforces become more diverse with each passing year due to factors such as mass migration and the increased representation of minorities in the workplace. However, the contexts in which such diversity research is conducted are not so diverse; most scholarly research has focused on the global North or Western cultures. The present study's data showed that language diversity can be as much of an issue *within* a domestic or a national project team as it is in multinational teams and that multilingual managers in national teams are less aware of the detrimental effects of the resultant faultline and subgroup formations. Furthermore, contrary to current scholarly assumptions, not all multilingual managers are successful as boundary spanners in multilingual teams, and leaders' awareness and willingness to reduce

tensions and divisions and improve team camaraderie can help them navigate language faultlines and address the associated conflicts. Researchers can engage with the results and limitations of this study to further the understanding of the causes and consequences of language diversity in organizations across diverse national contexts.

NOTE

[1] Due to organizational restrictions, all the members of some teams could not be interviewed.

REFERENCES

- Aichhorn, N., & Puck, J. 2017. Bridging the language gap in multinational companies: Language strategies and the notion of company-speak. *Journal of World Business*, 52(3): 386–403.
- Antino, M., Rico, R., & Thatcher, S. M. 2019. Structuring reality through the faultlines lens: The effects of structure, fairness, and status conflict on the activated faultlines–performance relationship. *Academy of Management Journal*, 62(5): 1444–1470.
- Barner-Rasmussen, W., & Aarnio, C. 2011. Shifting the faultlines of language: A quantitative functional-level exploration of language use in MNC subsidiaries. *Journal of World Business*, 46(3): 288–295.
- Barner-Rasmussen, W., Ehrnrooth, M., Koveshnikov, A., & Mäkelä, K. 2014. Cultural and language skills as resources for boundary spanning within the MNC. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45: 886–905.
- Benet-Martínez, V. 2012. Multiculturalism: Cultural, social, and personality processes. In K. Deaux & M. Snyder (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of personality and social psychology*: 623–648. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bhatia, T. K., & Ritchie, W. C. 2004. Bilingualism in South Asia. In T. K. Bhatia & W. C. Ritchie (Eds.), *The handbook of bilingualism*: 780–807. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Boussebaa, M., Sinha, S., & Gabriel, Y. 2014. Englishization in offshore call centers: A postcolonial perspective. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45(9): 1152–1169.
- Brannen, M. Y., & Doz, Y. L. 2012. Corporate languages and strategic agility: Trapped in your jargon or lost in translation? *California Management Review*, 54(3): 77–97.
- Brannen, M. Y., Piekkari, R., & Tietze, S. 2014. The multifaceted role of language in international business: Unpacking the forms, functions and features of a critical challenge to MNC theory and performance. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45: 495–507.
- Chen, G., Chittoor, R., & Vissa, B. 2015. Modernizing without westernizing: Social structure and economic action in the Indian financial sector. *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(2): 511–537.
- Choi, J. N., & Sy, T. 2010. Group-level organizational citizenship behavior: Effects of demographic faultlines and conflict in small work groups. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31: 1032–1054.
- Chrobot-Mason, D., Ruderman, M. N., Weber, T. J., & Ernst, C. 2009. The challenge of leading on unstable ground: Triggers that activate social identity faultlines. *Human Relations*, 62(11): 1763–1794.
- Creswell, J. 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dotan-Eliaz, O., Sommer, K., & Rubin, Y. 2009. Multilingual groups: Effects of linguistic ostracism on felt rejection and anger, coworker attraction, perceived team potency, and creative performance. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 31: 363–75.
- Du, X. 2019. Does CEO-auditor dialect sharing impair pre-IPO audit quality? Evidence from China. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 156: 699–735.
- Feely, A. J., & Harzing, A.-W. 2003. Language management in multinational companies. *Cross-Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 10(2): 37–52.
- Finegan, E., & Rickford, J. R. (Eds.). 2004. *Language in the USA: Themes for the twenty-first century*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

- Fiset, J., & Bhawe, D. P. 2021. Mind your language: The effects of linguistic ostracism on interpersonal work behaviors. *Journal of Management*, 47(2): 430–455.
- Fredriksson, R., Barner-Rasmussen, W., & Piekkari, R. 2006. The multinational corporation as a multilingual organization: The notion of a common corporate language. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 11: 406–423.
- Gaibrois, C., & Nentwich, J. 2020. The dynamics of privilege: How employees of a multinational corporation construct and contest the privileging effects of English proficiency. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences/Revue Canadienne des Sciences de l'Administration*, 37(4): 468–482.
- Gong, Y., Chow, I. H. S., & Ahlstrom, D. 2011. Cultural diversity in China: Dialect, job embeddedness, and turnover. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 28(2): 221–238.
- Gratton, L., Voigt, A., & Erickson, T. J. 2007. Bridging faultlines in diverse teams. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 48(4): 22.
- Harzing, A. W., & Feely, A. J. 2008. The language barrier and its implications for HQ-subsidiary relationships. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 15: 49–61.
- Hinds, P. J., Neeley, T. B., & Cramton, C. D. 2014. Language as a lightning rod: Power contests, emotion regulation, and subgroup dynamics in global teams. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45: 536–61.
- Jiménez, A., & Bayraktar, S. 2021. Hello! Namaste? Within-country linguistic diversity and infrastructure projects in emerging markets. *Journal of Business Research*, 130: 86–97.
- Kane, A. A., & Levina, N. 2017. 'Am I still one of them?': Bicultural immigrant managers navigating social identity threats when spanning global boundaries. *Journal of Management Studies*, 130: 1–38.
- Karhunen, P., Kankaanranta, A., Louhiala-Salminen, L., & Piekkari, R. 2018. Let's talk about language: A review of language-sensitive research in international management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 55(6): 980–1013.
- Kassis-Henderson, J. 2005. Language diversity in international management teams. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 35: 66–82.
- Khazzoom, A. 2003. The great chain of orientalism: Jewish identity, stigma management, and ethnic exclusion in Israel. *American Sociological Review*, 68: 481–510.
- Kim, Y. 2011. The pilot study in qualitative inquiry: Identifying issues and learning lessons for culturally competent research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 10(2): 190–206.
- Kozlowski, S. W., & Ilgen, D. R. 2006. Enhancing the effectiveness of work groups and teams. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 7(3): 77–124.
- Kulkarni, M. 2015. Language-based diversity and faultlines in organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36: 128–46.
- Langfred, C. W. 2007. The downside of self-management: A longitudinal study of the effects of conflict on trust, autonomy, and task interdependence in self-managing teams. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(4): 885–900.
- Lau, D. C., & Murnighan, J. K. 1998. Demographic diversity and faultlines: The compositional dynamics of organizational groups. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(2): 325–340.
- Lau, D. C., & Murnighan, J. K. 2005. Interactions within groups and subgroups: The effects of demographic faultlines. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(4): 645–659.
- Lee, T. W., Mitchell, T. R., & Sablinski, C. J. 1999. Qualitative research in organizational and vocational psychology, 1979–1999. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 55: 161–87.
- Locke, K. 2001. *Grounded theory in management research*. London: Sage.
- Mach, M., & Baruch, Y. 2015. Team performance in cross cultural project teams: The moderated mediation role of consensus, heterogeneity, faultlines and trust. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 22(3): 464–486.
- Marschan-Piekkari, R., Welch, D., & Welch, L. 1999. In the shadow: The impact of language on structure, power and communication in the multinational. *International Business Review*, 8: 421–40.
- Meister, A., Thatcher, S. M., Park, J., & Maltarich, M. 2020. Toward a temporal theory of faultlines and subgroup entrenchment. *Journal of Management Studies*, 57(8): 1473–1501.
- Meyer, B., & Glenz, A. 2013. Team faultline measures: A computational comparison and a new approach to multiple subgroups. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(3): 393–424.
- Meyer, B., Shemla, M., Li, J., & Wegge, J. 2015. On the same side of the faultline: Inclusion in the leader's subgroup and employee performance. *Journal of Management Studies*, 52(3): 354–380.

- Neeley, T., & Kaplan, R. S. 2014. What's your language strategy? *Harvard Business Review*, 92(9): 70–76.
- Nishii, L. H., & Goncalo, J. A. 2008. Demographic faultlines and creativity in diverse groups. In K. W. Phillips (Ed.), *Diversity and groups: Research on Managing groups and teams*, 1–26. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Oosterhof, A., Van der Vegt, G. S., Van de Vliert, E., & Sanders, K. 2009. Valuing skill differences: Perceived skill complementarity and dyadic helping behavior in teams. *Group and Organization Management*, 34(5): 536–562.
- Owen, W. F. 1984. Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70(3): 274–287.
- Peng, M. W., & Lebedev, S. 2017. Intra-national business (IB). *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 34: 241–245.
- Plakoyiannaki, E., Wei, T., & Prashantham, S. 2019. Rethinking qualitative scholarship in emerging markets: Researching, theorizing, and reporting. *Management and Organization Review*, 15(2): 217–234.
- Polzer, J. T., Crisp, C. B., Jarvenpaa, S. L., & Kim, J. W. 2006. Extending the faultline model to geographically dispersed teams: How colocated subgroups can impair group functioning. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4): 679–692.
- Pratt, M. G. 2009. From the editors: For the lack of a boilerplate: Tips on writing up (and reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52: 856–862.
- Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. 2011. *Census of India*. New Delhi, India: Office of the Registrar General, India. [Cited 18 November 2017]. Available from URL: http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language_MTs.html
- Schölmerich, F., Schermuly, C. C., & Deller, J. 2016. How leaders' diversity beliefs alter the impact of faultlines on team functioning. *Small Group Research*, 47(2): 177–206.
- Shemla, M., Meyer, B., Greer, L., & Jehn, K. A. 2016. A review of perceived diversity in teams: Does how members perceive their team's composition affect team processes and outcomes? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 37: 89–106.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. 2000. *Linguistic genocide in education — or worldwide diversity and human rights?*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- S&P Global Market Intelligence. 2020. *Google to invest US\$10B in India; Foxconn to pump US\$1B into India plant*. [Cited 19 July 2020]. Available from URL: <https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/latest-news-headlines/google-to-invest-us-10b-in-india-foxconn-to-pump-us-1b-into-india-plant-59412101>
- Stake, R. E. 1995. *The art of case study research*. London: Sage.
- Tang, N., Zheng, X., & Chen, C. 2017. Managing Chinese diverse workforce: Toward a theory of organizational inclusion. *Nankai Business Review International*, 8(1): 39–56.
- Tenzer, H., & Pudelko, M. 2017. The influence of language differences on power dynamics in multinational teams. *Journal of World Business*, 52: 45–61.
- Tenzer, H., Pudelko, M., & Harzing, A. W. 2014. The impact of language barriers on trust formation in multinational teams. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45: 508–535.
- Tenzer, H., Pudelko, M., & Zellmer-Bruhn, M. 2021. The impact of language barriers on knowledge processing in multinational teams. *Journal of World Business*, 56(2): 101184.
- Tenzer, H., Terjesen, S., & Harzing, A. W. 2017. Language in international business: A review and agenda for future research. *MIR: Management International Review*, 57: 815–54.
- Thatcher, S. M., & Patel, P. C. 2012. Group faultlines: A review, integration, and guide to future research. *Journal of Management*, 38(4): 969–1009.
- Trudgill, P. 2003. *A glossary of sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press on Demand.
- Tung, R. L. 2008. The cross-cultural research imperative: The need to balance cross-national and intra-national diversity. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39: 41–46.
- Usunier, J. C. 1998. *International and cross-cultural management research*. London, UK: Sage.
- van der Kamp, M., Tjemkes, B. V., & Jehn, K. A. 2015. Faultline deactivation: Dealing with activated faultlines and conflicts in global teams. In J. Wildman, & R. Griffith (Eds.), *Leading Global Teams*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Vigier, M., & Spencer-Oatey, H. 2017. The interplay of rules, asymmetries in language fluency, and team dynamics in culturally diverse teams: Case study insights. *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management*, 25: 157–82.

- Voss, J., Albert, I., & Ferring, D. 2014. Language use and value orientations in multinational work teams in Luxembourg: Conflict or harmony? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 41: 192–196.
- Wang, L., & Ruan, J. 2019. Dialect, transaction cost and intra-national trade: Evidence from China. *Applied Economics*, 51(57): 6113–6126.
- Wang, Q., Clegg, J., Gajewska-De Mattos, H., & Buckley, P. 2020. The role of emotions in intercultural business communication: Language standardization in the context of international knowledge transfer. *Journal of World Business*, 55(6): 100973.
- Welch, D. E., & Welch, L. S. 2008. The importance of language in international knowledge transfer. *MIR: Management International Review*, 48: 339–360.
- Woo, D., & Giles, H. 2017. Language attitudes and intergroup dynamics in multilingual organizations. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 17(1): 39–52.

Komal Kalra (komal@uvic.ca) is a Lecturer in International Management at the Newcastle University Business School. She received her PhD in International Management and Organization from the Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria, Canada in 2020. She is passionate about helping organizations recognize and comprehend the strengths of diversity, particularly in emerging economies. Komal's research interests include language and gender diversity in international management, multilingualism, multinational teams, and leadership.

Mike Szymanski (mszymanski@skolkovo.ru) is an Associate Professor of Strategy at the MSM SKOLKOVO. The ultimate goal of his research is to understand how organizations can take full advantage of multilinguals and multiculturalists. In 2020, he received (together with Komal Kalra and Carlo Brighi) the Alan M. Rugman Young Scholar Award by the Academy of International Business for their study on the role of linguistic diversity and boundary spanners in multicultural teams in MNCs in Latin America.

Manuscript received: December 16, 2020

Final version accepted: December 6, 2022 (number of revisions – 3)