Translation activities in MNEs - Case Nordea

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ABSTRACT
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Objectives

This study focuses on studying translation activities that take place in multinational companies in the service industry. As the focus is on the departments of the company outside the translation department, it gives a picture of the additional workload that employees have in their daily routines. The framework is created by using existing literature and interview data to form a picture of translation activities as a phenomenon. The interview data also lead towards finding the main effects of translation activities on the employees.

Research method and data

Various interviews were conducted to form a picture of the work routines of the employees and to see how translation activities are present in them. Three forms of interviews took place, namely individual interviews, a group discussion, and a focus group. These interviews were used as the main source of information. In addition, secondary data were used to form a general picture of language issues in the academic world.

Results

Many translation activities take place outside the translation department. Some employees perceive it as a part of their work that they cannot control, others feel that the additional work coming from translation activities is a burden, and some see it as a welcome addition to their daily routines. Social networking is a way to solve problems related to translation activities in addition to technical tools. Employees are concerned most by the quality of their translations and the time consumption. Multinational companies have to find a way to provide their employees with resources to produce quality translations in a limited time to meet the needs of the banking industry, which is rapidly internationalizing.

Keywords

Language, translation, translation activities, multinational companies, service industry

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Tavoitteet

Tässä tutkimuksessa keskitytään selvittämään palvelusektorilla toimivissa monikansallisissa yrityksissä esiintyvää käännöstyötä. Tutkimus kohdistuu käännösosaston ulkopuoliseen käännöstyöhön ja antaa näin ollen kuvan työntekijöille kasautuvasta ylimääräisestä työstä. Hahmottaaksemme käännöstyön ilmiönä, muodostetaan teoreettinen kehys käyttämällä hyväksi olemassa olevaa kirjallisuutta ja haastatteluaineistoa. Haastatteluaineistoa käytetään myös kartoittamaan työntekijöihin käännöstyöstä kohdistuvia vaikutuksia.

Tutkimusaineisto ja -menetelmät

Primääriaineistona käytettiin haastatteluja, joilla kartoitettiin työntekijöiden työnkuvaa ja kuinka käännöstyö ilmenee päivittäisissä töissä. Haastattelutyyleinä käytettiin yksilöhaastatteluita, ryhmäkeskustelua ja fokusryhmää. Sekundääristä aineistoa käytettiin luomaan kuva kielitieteen olemassa olevasta akateemisesta tutkimuksesta.

Tulokset

Todettiin paljon käännösosaston ulkopuolista käännöstyötä. Osa työntekijöistä kokee käännöstyön osana normaalia työnkuvaa, osa kokee käännöstyön ylimääräisenä taakkana työssään ja osa kokee sen tervetulleena vaihteluna työhön. Verkostoituminen yrityksen sisällä ja tekniset työkalut auttavat käännöstyöhön liittyvien ongelmien ratkaisussa. Työntekijät kokevat suurimpina käännöstyöhön liittyvinä huolina käännösten laadun ja ajankäytön. Monikansallisten yritysten täytyy järjestää työntekijöilleen resurssit tuottaa korkealaatuisia käännöksiä rajoitetussa ajassa, jotta kansainvälistyvän pankkisektorin asiakkaita voidaan palvella korkeatasoisesti jatkossakin.

Avainsanat

Kieli, kääntäminen, käännöstyö, monikansallinen yritys, palvelusektori

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Nowadays, a large part of business is conducted internationally, even globally. Companies are bigger and work in many geographical and linguistic areas. A successful multinational company can already exist on every continent, which means that huge mixes of different languages are spoken inside the same organization.

However, for every company it is important to communicate effectively and so that everybody understands. Very often MNEs have chosen a common corporate language to solve this problem. They train their employees to use one common language and recruit persons who already speak the foreign languages needed in the company. In fact, MNEs nowadays expect that employees are able to work independently in languages other than their mother tongue. So, the situation is totally different than it was just a couple of decades ago, when there were separate correspondents and interpreters for foreign communication in international companies (Virkkula, 2008).

However, in spite of the fact that English is spoken widely in business and the language skills of the employees have also improved a lot, increasing globalization of firms has changed the working environment so much that new kinds of challenges are met in international business communication. In this master's thesis, we explore those challenges from the employees' point of view. When we can understand the situation of employees working in international environment better and find the challenges they meet, it helps us to understand the whole picture of international business communication in more detail, which is beneficial to developing more advanced strategies and processes for making international business.

To research our topic we chose an international bank, Nordea Bank Ab. Nordea was established by numerous Scandinavian mergers and acquisitions, and it still has its strategic business units in different locations in different countries. It has one common corporate language, English, but other Nordic languages, especially its previous common corporate language Swedish, are still widely used within the organization.

In addition, Nordea was currently criticized in the media because of its language decision concerning the translation of its new share issue documents (HS, 25.3.2009 and HS, 27.3.2009). Nordea announced the share issue documents only in two languages, namely Swedish and English, although they had 190,000 Finnish shareowners and only 90,000 Swedish shareowners and 25 % of them spoke English (HS, 27.3.2009). These issues made Nordea very interesting for our research problem accompanied by the fact that Nordea seemed effective in explaining the communication challenges of its employees. This was mostly due to previous research done by Louhiala-Salminen, 2002 on Nordea as well as our own experience of the company.

1.2. Research gap and research problem

In the current academic literature, many strategies and ways for companies to manage languages and language diversity are presented (Krishna & Abiodun, 2002). Different language policies for different uses are established (Jensen et al. 2004), advices for guiding the choice of a common corporate language is introduced (Marschan et al. 1997 b), and even the meaning of language in a merger situation has been researched (Louhiala-

Salminen 2002; Vaara et al. 2005). Not only is the academic research aware of the importance of language, companies also intentionally use and develop their language strategies (Jensen et al 2004). Language is no longer a forgotten factor as Marschan et al. in 1997 (a) stated, but is seen as an important part of the strategy of a multinational corporation.

However, at least Janssens et al. (2004) have noticed that the long-term effects of language decisions in MNEs are unknown and even ignored. Multinational companies are continuously changing and even the number of languages that they are using changes all the time (look at the figure from Master Thesis of Ulla Palo, 1997). As Janssen et al. (2004) presented:

> *"They (international companies) may decide on a common company language but in order to counterbalance the dominance of this language, they may allow multiple languages in face-to-face meetings to respect cultural nuances and/or reduce the language hierarchy."* (Janssens et al. (2004, 427)

Thus, there still exist numerous languages within one multinational company. And in addition, the common trend is that employees even from the lower hierarchy levels have to be able to work individually by using foreign languages without help from language experts (Virkkula, 2008).

If employees do not have the language skill themselves, they have to get the translated message using various different means. Marschan et al. (1997a) introduced five different ways to gather the information in that kind of situation. However, all those ways limit or at least decelerate information transfer and employees have to do extra work. What are the costs of that extra work or how big a problem is it? The current academic literature does not answer these questions. In fact, real translation work and its impact are explored in a very limited manner in current academic literature or not at all. Especially studies of employees' own experiences and feelings on using language and translating it in different branches of business and in different vocations are needed. This presents us with the fact that translation work is an invisible factor within companies and with the research in this thesis our aim is to make that translation work more visible.

To specify even more, this thesis will be focusing on the service industry sector, in this case being retail banking, while previous research has been focusing mainly on manufacturing industry (See for example Marschan 1997, Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004). The problem of having sufficient skills in translation is vital in the service industry where the retailer deals directly with the customer. Hence, it is important to tackle this yet to be researched area.

1.3. Objective and Research Questions

The main objective of the study is to understand and identify the meaning of translation activities in MNEs and to clarify the true extent of the issue. First we have to become familiar with the unexplored topic and get a clear picture of the translation work done by employees themselves. Thus, the target in the beginning is to illuminate what kind of tasks the translation activities in MNEs are and recognize the situations where they are done most.

After acquiring an in-depth understanding of the topic, we will concentrate on determining the significance of the issues that come up with translation activities in MNEs. It is also important to know who does the translation work and why.

The managerial mandate of the study is to address how MNEs should take translation activities into account. The aim is to find ways for limiting the negative impact of the phenomena and to find advice for better organizational behavior.

The following are our research questions:

1. What kinds of translation activities take place in MNEs outside the translation department?

2. How are translation activities perceived by employees?

3. What are the consequences of employees having to deal with translation activities?

1.4. The context of the study and limitations

This thesis focuses on employees outside the translation department who have to deal with translation activities. We seek to explore the impact of translation activities from the employees' point of view. The thesis used a major international bank as a research area and is therefore concentrating on the feelings and experiences of the employees working in the banking field. Various organizational levels are included in the study and differences between them are analyzed.

The study goes deep into written foreign communication, but does not include verbal or non-verbal communication. Neither do we focus attention on the ability of the individual's communication skills or analyze or estimate the characteristics of individual employees as communicators.

We assume that communication in a foreign language is a challenge and that there are problems because of inadequate language skills in international communication, as the existing academic literature suggests (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari 2002, 26). However, we do not suppose that all the problems are caused by limited language skills alone, and we keep in mind that there are lots of different factors affecting international communication. Especially the strong impact of different cultures and different ways of thinking between different countries can be seen as a disturbing aspect even though communicators have sufficient language proficiency (Piekkari & Zander 2005).

The translation activities that we are studying in this thesis are also limited to the translation work that can be found outside the official translation departments or translation services. However, the translation department's point of view has been added to the research to provide a perspective on the translation activities occurring in the case company. We researched only those ordinary translation tasks that employees have to handle themselves without any professional guidance. However, no other limitations were made, and all kinds of situations where employees have interaction in a foreign language in working matters could be included in the study.

1.5. Definitions

A multinational enterprise (MNE) is defined as a company that is "operating in several or many countries." (Oxford English dictionary, 2009, retrieved 17.3.2009). To elaborate on that we can add that it is also "…an enterprise that controls and manages production establishments…located in at least two countries" (Caves, 1996, 1) and it has "…substantial financial interest in more than one country" (Cross, 1995).

Translation is defined as "The action or process of turning from one language into another; also, the product of this; a version in a different language." (Oxford English dictionary, 2009, retrieved 17.3.2009). To refine on that it is also "…rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text" (Newmark, 1988, 5). A **translator** on the other hand is "One who translates or renders from one language into another; the author of a translation" (Oxford English dictionary, 2009, retrieved 17.3.2009).

Common corporate language is defined as "a tool" that is used in multination companies to run global operations. By using a common corporate language all the international business units have a common ground for communication and therefore efficiency increases. In addition a common corporate language decreases misunderstandings, costs, and need for translations. (Fredriksson et al. 2006)

Language barrier is defined by Large (1990) as the obstacle that prevents communication between different parties. Communication is mostly done in either written or spoken form and expressed in a certain language. When both the sender and receiver use the same language then communication can occur successfully. When a common language is not shared then the dialogue is prevented, and this forms a language barrier. This is also defined as "a barrier to communication between people resulting from their being unable to speak a common language" (Oxford English dictionary, 2009 retrieved 17.3.2009).

Lingua Franca is defined as common language that various parties can use to efficiently communicate with one another (Fox, 2006). When people originally have different native languages they can share a lingua franca in communication. (MultiLingual Computing & Technology, 2005; Charles, 2006).

1.6. Structure of the study

In this thesis we will first look at relevant literature. The literature has been divided into two parts. First we study multinational corporations as a multilingual community touching issues of language management, language barriers, common corporate language, and lingua franca. The second part is dedicated to literature related to translation activities. Here we will be looking at the roles of translators in multinational enterprises, translation quality, and finding out what is the need for translation in companies. Based on the literature we will form a theoretical framework that will guide us in making our findings.

In the second part of this study we will tell about the methodology that we have used. We will also introduce our research design and the different methods that we have used in our data collection.

In the third part we will be delivering the findings of this study based on both the literature that we have reviewed and the data that we have collected. In the beginning of our findings we will introduce our case company and more specifically also the translation department to create a clearer view of what we have used as the grounds for our study.
In the last part we will be giving our conclusions and also suggesting managerial implications that the case company and also other companies in a similar situation might find useful. Here we will also summarize the main questions why this study has been made and the results that we ended up with.

2. Literature review

2.1. Multilingual Multinational Corporations

2.1.1. Language management

Language management begins with finding out how many languages the company has to manage, then looking at the number of functions and the layers in those functions that are related to cross-lingual communication, and finally finding out how complex language skills are required for the activities of the company. The number of functions that include crossing linguistic boundaries determines the level of language penetration. It is clear that not everyone in the organization has to be a multilingual person, but it varies between different positions. However important language management is for a company, it is often left out because of costs, and because it is not seen as an issue important enough for the management to consider. (Feely & Harzing, 2003)

2.1.2. Language barriers

Language barriers exist in multinational companies no matter how the management feels about the issue. A language barrier can harm the relationships in the company for example between the headquarters and the subsidiaries. These two should be able to communicate on equal terms, and a language barrier can have an effect on for example cross-cultural knowledge sharing, dialogue, relationship building, and networking (Lauring, 2007). It can also arouse uncertainty and suspicion, contribute to the formation of separate groups and reduce the trust level (Feely & Harzing, 2003). There are several methods in getting past the language barriers in a company, a few of which are introduced next.

Linguistic auditing is an important part of language management and getting past the language barriers a company might face. The term linguistic auditing refers to the process where a company evaluates their foreign language requirements and benchmarks them against their capabilities. This enables them to discover the strengths and weaknesses that the company possesses language-wise. They can thereby determine the amount of language and recruitment needed. In the end, the company will be able to find out what language skills are needed to fulfill its strategic goals. However, this usually means the need for outside experts that can be very pricey and who might not be familiar with the context, which also means that the rhetorical meanings might change. (Reeves & Wright, 1996 in Feely & Harzing, 2003)

Since linguistic auditing is rather expensive and time-consuming with a need for external expertise, it has not been widely adopted. Language check-ups are another less expensive process similar to that of language auditing. This method looks into several issues that include evaluating the status of implementing a common corporate language, what IT-systems are available, what information is provided in multiple languages, and what methods are used for translation. Language check-ups differ from linguistic auditing in that they are administered from within the company so no outside language experts are needed, and therefore the expenses are not as high. In contrast to linguistic auditing, language check-ups provide fast results and put more emphasis on more language issues. (Reeves & Feely, 2001 in Feely & Harzing, 2003)

With joint ventures, language barriers can overcome to some extent. It is likely that joint ventures are used as a form of international operations when language barriers exist. If only one of the parties uses an international language, and the other one has a very local language, then the international language will most probably be used in business activities. However, this might create conflict and mistrust, and also slow down collaborative processes such as knowledge sharing. This is the situation not only in joint ventures, but also in all situations where the subsidiaries of a company are located abroad in countries with different languages than that of the parent company. In addition, contracts, rules, and legislation have to be in the local language, which means that if a company cannot operate in a foreign language then operations in that country are difficult. (Feely & Harzing, 2003)

Companies can also use functional multilingualism, which refers to a situation where a company uses various languages or a mix of languages, to get through situations so that all the parties can best understand them. The downside is that this kind of transaction can pull the parties further apart on a cognitive level in addition to the physical, lingual separation. (Hagen, 1999 in Feely & Harzing, 2003)

Another means of overcoming the language barrier is to use language nodes. This term refers to personnel within the company who have high linguistic skills and who take the role of translator either voluntarily or involuntarily (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1997). The problems pointed out with this method include the burden that is placed on certain individuals, thereby decreasing their capability to perform their actual duties in the company, the risk of information changing along the way as the node might not be familiar with the particular field, and the potential arousal of conflicts as the formal reporting chain is being interfered. Language nodes can also be created by recruiting a person with the required language skills. Recruitment is therefore also seen as one means of overcoming the language barrier. (Feely & Harzing, 2003) The decisions about investing in employee language competency are usually based on a particular need or by simply looking at the benefits and costs (Krishna, 2005).

2.1.3. Using a common corporate language in a MNE

Language is needed everywhere for effective communication. Language is used to build relationships and share knowledge between groups and individuals (Lauring, 2007). In addition, language is an important factor that in its part helps form an individual's personal culture (Krishna, 2005). In companies language is critical in the process of creating organizational culture since language is the means to knowledge creation and application, information flow, and the overall functioning of the company. Language as part of a communication process is also needed in informing outside parties, in addition to internal parties such as stakeholders about the culture, tradition, and customs of the company. (Krishna, 2005) Since language plays such an important part in the basic functions in a company, problems have started to arise with the formation of multinational companies, MNEs, as they have to deal with employees from several different cultures where several different languages are spoken. And even with all this cultural variety all the employees need to strive towards the same organizational goals (Krishna, 2005).

The number of different languages in a company depends on how widely the company has spread its activities across the globe (Feely & Harzing, 2003). For the managerial processes, the decision regarding the choice of common corporate language can therefore become a hard one to make (Lauring, 2007). The use of an appropriate language can help in gaining competitive advantage (Krishna, 2005), which is something that all multinational companies should strive for in today's globalizing markets. Although English has been widely recognized as a common corporate language in many multinational companies, employees do not necessarily adopt this language for their everyday use, but rather use their native tongue in everyday actions (Fredriksson et al. 2006). The language choice should be based on at least the extent to which the language is used in the company's strategic environment, how strategically “fit” the language is for the company, and how much the language has already been used in the company (Krishna, 2003).

Top managers have the idea that once a common corporate language such as English is introduced, employees will start to use it (Fredriksson et al. 2006), and there is a definite need for corporate language policies (Krishna, 2005). As the term “multinational company” already implies, the employees come from various nationalities and cultures, and therefore these different languages are likely to remain in the company, even if a common corporate language is introduced (Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004; Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b; Soresen, 2005 in Fredriksson et al. 2006). It takes time for employees to internalize the common corporate language throughout the (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a).

The main reason for having a common corporate language is to make information flow more efficient within companies in for example formal reporting, information systems and cross-national interaction (Feely & Harzing, 2003). Cost reductions, time advantages by avoiding translations, less misunderstanding, and unification of employees justify adopting a common corporate language (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a; Sorensen, 2005 in Fredriksson et al. 2006; Krishna, 2005). The problems related to having one language in the corporation are for example that it is a long-term process, the adoption of only one language might be impossible, and personnel might resist the change if the corporate language is not their native tongue (Feely & Harzing, 2003). It has also been noted that sometimes using one common corporate language might mean problems for the information flow, knowledge transfer, and communication (Krishna, 2005). Some companies have had the policy of adopting two or more corporate languages, or use different languages in different communication situations (Bruntse, 2003 in Fredriksson et al. 2006).

2.1.4. Lingua Franca

English has become the language that is used for business transactions throughout the world. Lingua franca refers to "a language used as a means of communication by speakers who do not have a native language in common" (Beach, 2008) or "any mixed jargon formed as a medium of intercourse between people speaking different languages" (Oxford English dictionary, 2009 retrieved 17.3.2009). Business English lingua franca, BELF, refers to a situation when "English (is) used as a 'neutral' and shared communication code" (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005, 403-404). Since many business transactions are cross-cultural, it is only natural that the parties do not share a common language. English has taken the place of Lingua Franca, which means that corporate level documents, reporting, and communication between different units are in English (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005).

Although English is widely used in business, it is still a rather recent development in the Nordic countries as Swedish has had the role of business language (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005). Although people in the Nordic countries typically have a good knowledge of English, employees still face pressure in their work as English is a foreign language to them (Louhiala-Salminen et al. 2005). Louhiala-Salminen et al. have conducted a study of two Nordic companies merging that first used Swedish as their corporate language but then changed it to lingua franca, English. This study shows the struggle that the employees went through to be able to use English as a corporate language. That struggle is still going on in the case company.

2.2. Translation activities

2.2.1. The role of a translator in a MNE

When a company becomes multinational it naturally comes in touch with various languages. This means more transactions and communication take place between people who do not share the same mother tongue. Due to the use of multiple languages, companies tend to have translation departments where official documentation is being translated (Maclean, 2006).

The translation process has three basic steps according to Ahmad et al. (1992 in Domas White et al. 2008). The first step is called input: the translation department or translator receives a document that has to be translated. The second step is processing: the translator studies the document, the content and context of it, and uses the support provided to do the actual task of translating. The third and final step is output: the document is delivered back to the original source or other given final destination.

The processing phase might take a long time depending on the nature of the document. The grammatical structure, cultural context and communication situation among other things affect the complexity of the translation process and therefore the amount of time that it takes (Larson, 1991 in Domas White et al. 2008). It is up to the translator to decide the effort that needs to be put into the translation to be able to reach the best possible outcome (Domas White et al. 2008).

Translators are mainly used when machine translation cannot be completed or the quality of the text requires human input. It is typical for a translator to specialize in one subject area therefore not repeating the translation of the same documents but repeating the translation of documents of a certain theme. Also translators tend to focus on translating a certain language. (Domas White et al. 2008)

Translators in companies have numerous aids for their translation process. The need for dictionary use depends on the amount of knowledge that the translator has of the subject. This knowledge is usually acquired though a combination of education and experience (Domas White et al. 2008). Traditional dictionaries are starting to lose ground to more advanced technological translation programs (Nkwenti-Azeh, 1994).

One type of aid has been used for a long period of time and that is terminological banks. They were first created already in the 60s and 70s by translation departments in large organizations. These term banks were designed to support the traditional printed dictionaries as well as make sure that the translators had the most up-to-date terminology in use. With the help of these term banks translations can be done more efficiently, and rapidly, and made more available for the entire organization. (Nkwenti-Azeh, 1994)

2.2.2. Translation quality

Machine translation has been widely used for translating, and research on it has been wide (see for example Hutchins, 1978; Cynkin, 1992; Reager, 2008). However, it has also been noted that high quality of translation is important and to achieve quality human translators have to take part in the translation process (Domas White et al. 2008). Machine translation might ignore the context in which the documents are being translated and the meaning of the text is just as important as the individual words when making a high quality translation (Nkwenti-Azeh, 1994; Domas White et al. 2008).

In addition to understanding the context it is also relevant to understand the subject of the text (Nkwenti-Azeh, 1994; Domas White et al., 2008). Domas White et al. (2008) mention in their article that it takes a lot of time for translators to consult with different subject specialists when making a translation. If the translator is not familiar with the subject then additional aids are required. Sometimes, however, the quality of the translation may decrease if the vocabulary and technicalities are unknown to the translator.

Sometimes translators need to move to translating another language that is not their strongest. The reasons might be for example that the two languages are somewhat similar and the translator is expected to be able to translate the document. However, this raises the complexity of the translation task and creates uncertainty and therefore decreases the quality level. (Domas White et al. 2008)

The main difficulties that a translator faces are the movement out of the comfort zone of the few familiar languages and subject areas. Also a translator might be asked to switch to other types of documents, which might confuse the translator and lead to decreased quality. Different industries also use a lot of slang and jargon that might be unfamiliar to the translator. (Domas White et al. 2008)

Also Ferreira-Alves (2009) brings a very interesting point into the discussion of translation quality. As he founded out the amount of translations is increased dramatically because of the globalization and at the same time the translation professionalism has changed. There is so much data to translate but there are not more professional translators, although lots of translation work is not done by professionals according to the findings of Ferreira-Alves (2009).

2.2.3. Need for translation in MNEs

In chapter 2.1. "Using a Common Corporate Language" we have noticed that English has a role as a lingua franca of the world and most business can be conducted in English, too. So, do we really have a problem of translation in MNEs?

Although English is spoken effectively all over the world, many studies in the academic literature show that the communication in English is not always as easy as we think it is. For example Louhiala-Salminen (2002) shows that communication in English between different cultures is quite challenging and difficult.

The role of the consumer is also crucial in deciding which language to use. Holmqvist studied in this doctoral thesis (2009) the importance of language in service encounters and found out that customers prefer to be served in their first language. They were even willing to pay a price premium for this service. On the other hand, customers were found to want a price reduction if they were not served in their own language. Overall, Holmqvist found that customers want to have the same rights as other customers and therefore be able to use their first language.

In addition, the world is changing all the time and the situation of English as a lingua franca is by no means as unambiguous. Janssens et al. (2004) collected together the current trends of international business detected by different academic researchers from different international universities and that affect the increasing need for international communication in multiple languages and hence the increasing need for translation activities in MNEs:

- O’Hara-Devereaux & Johansen (1994 in Janssens et al., 2004) pointed out the increased commonness of international communication because of more developed technology. They noticed in their study that through information technology and increasing mobility, managers communicate on an almost daily basis with colleagues speaking different native languages.

- Charles & Marschan-Piekkari (2002 in Janssens et al., 2004) in turn explained the impact of new organizational forms on communication. They argued that not only managers of the organization frequently communicate in multiple languages, but also personnel at multiple organizational levels.

- Tayeb (2000 in Janssens et al., 2004) has noticed that even though English has an important role in international communication, the consumers still expect information and support in their local language, as will their business partners.

- Huntington (1996 in Janssens et al., 2004) emphasized the social change and its impacts on international communication. The development process of non-western countries and their fast economical growth has encouraged people to study other major languages than English and the expectation to use just English is not so strong anymore.

Thus, although the role of English is persistent, it seems that the number of languages is increasing instead that English would override other languages. In addition, it seems that foreign languages are used more often and there are more and more employees in contact with foreign languages.

In addition, Virkkula mentioned in her doctoral thesis that one trend seems to be that companies expect that employees will manage to work individually in a foreign language without any additional professional help (Virkkula, 2008) and Ferreira-Alves (2009) found out in his study that because of the globalization, "we are translating more than ever".

So, if we put everything together, it seems that more international communication is done by a bigger number of employees using a bigger number of languages and without additional official translation support.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, we summarize the most important current academic literature for this master's thesis, point out the connection of the theories and provide a theoretical frame for our study. As we stated language is an important factor in international business and its significance for MNEs is well recognized nowadays. The most important thing is to communicate by using the existing language skill capacity so that everybody understands. In addition, the current trend is that more and more employees are in touch with foreign languages and more and more different languages are used in the globalizing business environment.

In the figure below, we define the environment of translation activities under the existing theories and academic findings. Two main groups of issues that affect translation work within an MNE were established to explain the situation: *language support* offered by the MNE and the *language skills capacity* of a translator or an employee.

According to the existing literature, translation success is highly dependent on the individual capacity of the translator. The most important capacity is the language and cultural skills of the translator. If the translator understands the language and the culture, it makes it easy to overcome the obstacles of the translation task. In addition, in the current academic literature the social network was found to have an important role when doing translation work. Especially in the situation where there was a lack of language skills the meaning of social networks was seem to be high (Marschan et al. 1997).

Not only do the translation skills of individual translators or employees matter nowadays, the supportive tools that the MNE offers to its employees also have a huge role. The current international business literature points out the meaning of language policy and language management. On the other hand, much more concrete tools have also been found. For example, digital dictionaries or databases are available for employees and even language courses are arranged within many MNEs. We call all the supportive actions and tools that are built by the MNE itself *language support* in our figure and include in it both the strategic part, like language management as well as the technical support, like dictionaries.

Thus, according to the existing academic literature we have established the environment of translation activities. It consists of two different parts: the *language skills capacity* of the translator himself and the *language support* offered by the MNE. With the help of that tool we will further explore and analyze our empirical phenomena, translation activities in MNE.

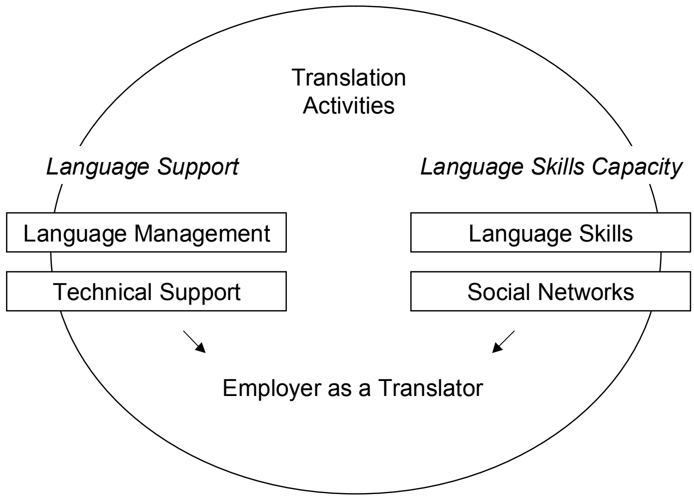

Figure 1. Theoretical framework

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Method

The research problem was first to identify and become familiar with the issue of translation in multinational companies and then to explore and determine the impact of translation on employees and directly on the company itself. Because the phenomenon of translation work has been researched in a very limited manner and hardly any data are directly available, a qualitative research method was chosen.

For achieving a deeper understanding of the unexplored subject of the thesis we decided to combine various methods of collecting data. The aim is to obtain a holistic picture of the effect of translation work on employees and on companies.

Essential data sources were two focus group discussions that were held in the case company. The main purpose of the focus groups was to understand the phenomenon of translation richer and collect personal experiences and beliefs on concrete translation work. This method is traditionally used to get personal points of views from individuals (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

In addition individual interviews were held for strengthening and backfilling the interpretations. Also, due to the working relationship of one researcher, observing the employees of the case company during the normal working day and discussing unofficially with them about the topics of the research helped us to better understand and familiarize ourselves with the phenomenon studied – the impact of translation work.

3.1.1. Choice of the case company

According to Yin (2003, 1-2), a case study approach is a preferred research strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the researcher has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context. All those criteria were fulfilled in the beginning of the research, when the picture of the unexplored phenomenon – the characteristics and impacts of translation activities – was being built. Thus, the case study was chosen as the research strategy.

A multinational company, where the employees are challenged by foreign languages during their working days and have to do translation work to succeed in their work, was needed. Nordea Bank, which operates mainly in Nordic markets and which has English as a common corporate language seemed an excellent choice for the study.

Inside Nordea different working units are often international in nature including employees located in different countries, which means communication is conducted in various foreign languages and this would seem to create more translation work. Swedish is still very strong and commonly used, although the official common corporate language is English. Furthermore, Nordea has a centralized in-house translation department, which helps to separate the translation work made outside and inside the departments.

In addition the choice of Nordea as a case company was justified because both the researchers have already previous experience and knowledge of the company from the perspective of customers, employees and researchers.

3.2. Research Design

In the beginning of the research process we familiarized ourselves with the current academic literature on the topic. Academic translation literature and linguistic theories in particular were unknown to us in the beginning.

After thorough research on the current academic literature we searched the case company and contacted the translation department in the case organization.

The first data gathering started in the end of December 2008, when we sent an email to randomly chosen departments within the company. The email contained a few questions to direct us towards the departments and people who are dealing with translation activities in their day-to-day work. The purpose of this preliminary research was to find suitable persons for the interviews, focus groups and group discussions.

We contacted the chosen interviewees in the beginning of the year 2009. Not all the people contacted were able to attend the interviews due to schedule-related issues. The first interviews were held in February 2009. Data analyzing was a long and difficult process including interview analyzing as well as categorizing the relevant topics for the study. Additional and supplementary material from the literature was also collected during the analyzing phase. Various quotes from the interviews were selected for the findings section. Various similar quotes were bundled together to present the relevant issues.

3.3. Data Collection

The data for the case study were collected only in greater Helsinki by randomly choosing the interviewees inside the case company. Finland was chosen as the research ground because of its bilingualism and its central role in the case company. From the researchers' point of view, by limiting the research ground to Finland and more precisely to greater Helsinki, it was possible to save lots of resources, as traveling was not needed.

The interviewees were selected with a preliminary questionnaire that was sent to 348 people from 10 different departments randomly chosen from within the company (See appendix A). The email was sent in Finnish. This email formed questionnaire was sent from within the company with an internal response address to build trust between the employees and the researchers. The response rate for the questionnaire was 10.6 % with 37 answers and we found it to be satisfactory to our research and no further questionnaire was therefore needed. We examined all the answers and chose the best candidates for the interviews based on the information the people provided us with in their answers.

We decided to have a focus group and a group discussion with people who were actively involved with various languages and could therefore provide us with information that was directly linked to our research questions. On the other hand we decided to have personal interviews with people who did not know languages so much and who could give us insight about the problems that exist in using various languages. All interviews were made in Finnish.

3.3.1. Focus groups

The primary source of data in this thesis was a focus group discussion, which was held on the 6th of February 2009 in a branch office of the case company. There were a total of six employees from four different departments present at the focus group discussion.

The focus group is by nature more of a conversation on a given topic than an interview. Our role as researchers was to be discussion moderators who facilitate the conversation further and control what topics were discussed during the conversation (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

The focus group that we had was quite coherent due to the choices made based on the preliminary questionnaire. All the participants were from approximately the same hierarchical levels and they worked in tasks where they deal with foreign languages regularly. Although the participants did not all knew each other personally, they were able to express their ideas and feelings freely. Also, the main elements of a good conversation mentioned by Catteral & Maclaran (1997) were met: participants told jokes, laughed, disagreed, agreed and interrupted each others during the conversation.

To provide a more efficient and practical way for the researchers to go over the interview the focus group discussion was recorded on video. Afterwards it was revised and transferred to written form. In the analyzing phase the video helped us to consider the real meanings of the message provided by the participants to us, as we were able to see the facial expressions and body movements in addition to merely hearing the voices of the interviewees.

3.3.2. Group Discussion

Another smaller group discussion was held on the same day as the focus group discussion (6.2.2009) in another branch office of the case company with three employees from two departments. They were all from lower hierarchical levels than in the first discussion group and two of the participants were young employees at the beginning of their career and one participant was older with a long career behind her. In addition to having a wider age dispersion we found that by including various departments we could get as many points of views and as creative discussion from the employees as possible.

The group discussion was quite similar in nature with the focus group arranged and our role remained more like a moderator than an interviewer. We let the participants express their thoughts and feelings about the issues by giving them some guidelines on how the discussion should develop and which topics should be touched. Different stories, agreements, disagreement and expression of feelings were met also in this group discussion.

The main purpose of this group discussion was to get ideas and impressions of employees from clearly lower hierarchical levels than in the first focus group and compare them with each other. This gave us a better view about the routines of the employees who work with the customer base and have to make quick decisions. Also this group discussion was videoed, which helped us in the analyzing process.

3.3.3. Individual interviews

The individual interviews of case company employees and the observations made in the working environment were another source of data. A total of five individual interviews were held. All the employees of the individual interviews were from different departments. The average duration of an individual interview was one hour and all the interviews were recorded and revised in written form before the analysis.

Three of the interviews were made with employees who stated in the preliminary questionnaire that they do not possess good language skills or did not have access to translation aids, so they gave us totally different perspective from that of the focus groups. One interview was made with a person, who clearly seemed to be a language node in a case company and who was clearly given a lot of translation work. This interview was important to us to understanding the role, meaning and working of a language node.

One of the interviews was with the head of the Finnish translation department of the case company. It was held on 3rd of March 2009. She explained to us the communication policy of Nordea in more depth, introduced the activities and operation modes of the translation department and provided lots of supportive material. This interview gave us a perspective on the work routines of the translation department and on the other data that we gathered as we were able to compare the translation that the other people do with the work that the translation department is supposed to do. Also, this interview was recorded and revised in written form.

Furthermore, we were lucky to have close contacts with the employees of the case company, as one of us works there and we already personally knew many of the employees. Thus, during the thesis process, we could unofficially discuss and talk with the employees about the topics we were interested in and observe their behavior when faced with translation tasks. This often helped us to understand the case better and faster.

All the interviewees are listed in table 1 along with the interview type, duration of the interview, and their title and language skills. Further information on the specific job descriptions of each interviewee can be found in appendix B.

Date	Interview type	Duration	Participant	Title	Language skills
4.2.2009	Individual	00:37:21	Female	Company Service Adviser	Finnish and weak language skills of English
5.2.2009	Individual	00:35:22	Male	Senior Relationship Manager	Finnish and weak language skills of English
6.2.2009	Focus Group	01:04:30	Male	Investment Manager	Bilingual (fin & swe) + Estonia, English
	Focus Group	01:04:30	Female	Investment Manager	Finnish, English, Swedish, German & French
	Focus Group	01:04:30	Female	Senior Private Banker	Finnish, Swedish, English and French
	Focus Group	01:04:30	Male	Client Manager in Savings & Life Products	Bilingual (fin & swe) + English
	Focus Group	01:04:30	Male	Portfolio Manager in Savings & Life Products	Bilingual (fin & swe) + English
	Focus Group	01:04:30	Male	Product Developer	Finnish, Swedish and English
6.2.2009	Group discussion	01:01:10	Female	Service Adviser	Finnish and English
		01:01:10	Male	Service Adviser	Finnish and English
		01:01:10	Female	System Analyst	Finnish and English
17.2.2009	Individual	00:58:20	Male	Service Adviser	Language Node: 8 languages
20.2.2009	Individual	00:43:40	Male	Private Banker	Finnish and weak language skills of English
3.3.2009	Individual	00:42:27	Female	Head of Translation Service	Translator of Finnish, Swedish and English

Table 1. Interview information.

3.4. Teamwork

As this study involved teamwork, we will now explain more about the tasks that each of us performed. Even though some parts were more divided than others all in all the whole study was done together with both of us contributing to all the different sections of the thesis.

The work process began with mutual research on the existing literature. Our literature review is divided into two main sections, of which the other one was combined by the other researcher and vice versa. However, both researchers found the data together and used them collectively sharing all the found data. As a result, the theoretical framework was formed together to represent the literature review and thesis as a whole.

The methodology for the study was decided together with the help of outside researchers. The interviews were held in three different parts where we switched roles depending on the situation. In the focus group one of us was the moderator and one was the actual interviewer. The same method was used in the group discussion. This enabled the moderator to intervene only when necessary and focus more on listening to the discussion and paying attention to how the interviewees acted.

In the individual interviews we had very similar roles, both working as interviewers. We had, however, divided the topics that we wanted to discuss with the interviewee so that the conversation would flow naturally. Some of the interviews were made with only one researcher present when work-related obstacles prevented one of us from being present.

The interviews were transcribed after the interview. This was done individually for efficiency reasons. Overall in the interview phase we worked well as a team and both felt that the interviews were straightforward and ease to do as a team. The researchers also concluded that it was easier to have an interview with both the researchers present instead of just having the other one there.

In the analysis phase the other researcher came up with the basic models that were then worked on together. The models were transformed into a written form and quotations were selected together from the written interviews to support the models.

As researchers we have had somewhat different roles as one of us works in the case company so she has had access to more insider information regarding the company. For example, the intranet of the company has been used extensively for supporting information. Also, daily discussions with employees have been possible and this has created a perspective to the whole topic.

The other researcher has done previous research on the case company and therefore he possessed additional academic information regarding the company. This was also useful in the study and helped us find information. We believe that having both an insider and an outsider of the case company has given us a wider perspective on the whole topic.

4. Findings

In this part we will first introduce the case company and more specifically tell about the background, structure and processes of the translation department. After that we will look more deeply into the empirical findings and the literature that we have collected. We will start by describing some typical translation situations for giving a concrete picture about translation activities within a MNE that is working in the service branch. After that we launch our theoretical models that are based on the data collected. The models will be discussed and backed up with various statements by the interviewees. All statements will be anonymous to protect the interviewees' privacy.

4.1. Presentation of the case company

Nordea Bank AB is a financial services institution that works globally and is the leader in its field in the Nordic and Baltic Sea area. Nordea has its headquarters in Sweden. At the moment Nordea has around 1,400 branch offices and 34,000 employees. The customer base is a massive 10 million with over 5 million also being e-customers making Nordea the leading online bank.

Nordea was founded in 2000 as a result of mergers and acquisitions between different Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian and Danish banks between 1997 and 2000. After the first cross-border merger between the Finnish Merita and the Swedish Nordbanken the corporate language was Swedish. Since other banks joined the group in 2000 the corporate language has been English.

The main language policy of Nordea is to support and reflect Nordea's vision and corporate values. The corporate language is used in cross-border communication while local communication including external communication with customers and internal communication can be done in the respective local language. Local languages are also used whenever there is legal responsibility. (Nordea homepage)

4.1.1. Translation departments in Nordea

In Finland the bank had a foreign correspondent department that handled translations in the 80s. Although a lot of French, German and Spanish was used, English slowly took its place as the dominating language in the banking industry. At some point in the 80s it was decided that translation services were not an essential part of the bank and it was outsourced.

The corporate communications department and certain other units needed translators and they started to get both Swedish and English translators over time. At that point most of the translation was done from Finnish into a foreign language or Finnish-Swedish.

In 2000 when the company became Nordea and the corporate language changed from Swedish to English the translators from the corporate communications department and technical services department were brought together in Finland. Sweden and Norway had no in-house translators to start with. Denmark already had a very organized translation department and that was a good starting point for the formation of the Nordic translation unit.

At the moment there are 12 people working in the translation department in Finland, 10 in Denmark, 4 in Sweden and two in Norway. At the time when the unit was formed there were about 30 translators. (Interview data)

4.1.2. Nordea language policy

When it comes to the actual translations that people in the translation department do, they follow the language policy of Nordea. According to the language policy translations are done in a manner that takes into consideration the financial effects as well as reputation to the company and delivering the message successfully. All of these have to be in balance together with the costs of each translation. The translation policy also follows the three Nordea values:

1. Great customer experiences: We communicate with the customer in mind.
2. It's all about people: We use plain language so that our information is easily read and understood.
3. One Nordea team: We use consistent terminology across national boundaries and fields of business to promote clear and consistent communication and aid cross-cultural understanding.

The translations that are done in the translation departments are mostly official and legal documents. There is a priority order for the translations so that all outgoing and legal documents come first while in-house translations can wait. In Finland many of the translations are done for Swedish speaking Finns. This is also the reason for the large number of translators in the Finnish translation department.

4.2. Introducing translation activities

From the previous academic literature we found some examples of translation activities. However, most of them are from the industrial sector, such as Marschan et al. (1997) on the global elevator company, Kone or Andersen & Rasmussen (2004) on the Danish industrial firms with subsidiaries in France. There were few examples from the service branch.

Additionally, our interviews showed that the translation department believes that translation does not take place outside the translation department. However, this belief was overruled by the findings from the other interviews. Hence, we will here first present some example situations of translation activities straight from our own data and then compare them with the situations found from previous literature. After introducing the phenomena we will present our empirical findings in a more general and concrete way with triangle models.

First example story was told by middle aged service manager (look at the appendix B, job title: private banker), who has worked his whole life in a bank. He had a commercial education and during his career he was able to build specific know-how within his department in Finland. He rarely used foreign languages in his work; most of his customers were local people speaking the local language alone. So many other employees had similar stories that we see his as a representative example.

Story 1:
A middle aged service manager gets a call from his customer. The customer has bought a free time house from France and he has to transfer money to the account of the seller. The customer asks the bank officer to arrange the money transfer with the local bank and gives the phone number. However, the middle-aged service manager does not speak French at all, but wants to serve his customer.

According to our data the translation situations are very often singular tasks that happen suddenly without time for preparation. In addition, they are usually very case sensitive, and the reason for translation comes very often from outside of the organization. For example, compared with previous studies, which were mainly focused on translation situations within the organization (for example Marschan et al. 1997 and Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004 studied translation situations between subsidiaries), our research clarified the characteristics of translation activities that are typical in customer service situations.

The second story that we have chosen was built by the impression that we also got from interviews. It explains the typical situation in a service industry and explains the nature of the service work in customer interface further.

Story 2:
When the customer comes to visit in a bank with a specific task in mind, he assumes that it will be done during the bank visit. In addition, the bank officer wants to get the task done immediately because there the next customer is already waiting, maybe with a more difficult problem.

According to our findings the translation activities in higher hierarchical levels of the organization were more accurate and prepared than the translation activities in lower hierarchical levels of the organization. According to our analysis, the main reason was the different nature of the work on the different hierarchical levels. On the top levels the work is more concentrated on strategic decisions, which are prepared and considered carefully. In contrast, on the lower hierarchical levels of a service-sector MNE the work is more hectic and divided into a larger number of different separated tasks. Compared with the data of previous literature that were very often collected from higher hierarchical levels of the organization, we focused in this research on the translation activities that also happened on lower hierarchical levels.

Because the hierarchy of an MNE seemed to have an important role explaining the translation activities of an MNE, we will start our analysis by observing its impact in a more detailed manner.

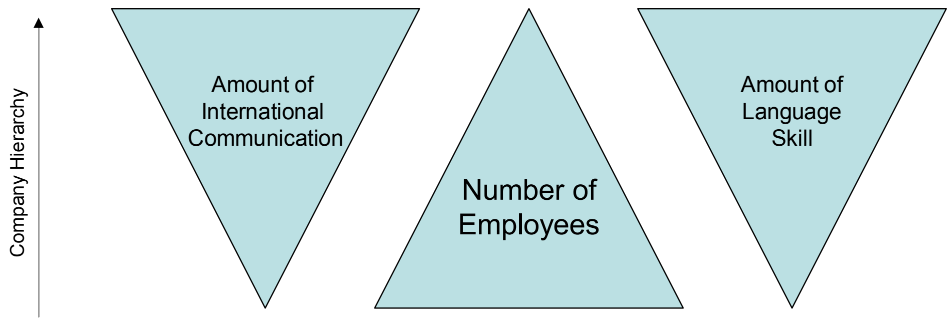

Figure 2. Present situation of employees and language skill

Figure 2 portrays the current situation in most multinational enterprises. The middle triangle represents the distribution of employees in an MNE, so that there are more employees on lower hierarchical levels and fewer employees on the highest hierarchical levels. The triangle on the left hand side portrays the amount of international communication within an MNE and the triangle on the right hand side represents the amount of language skill in an MNE.

According to our findings there is more international communication in the higher hierarchical levels of an MNE (see for example Andersen & Rasmussen, 2004; Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b, Muukari, 2009) as the managers are more likely to be in touch with parties from different countries and therefore also require using various languages. One interviewee from a higher organizational level of the company pointed this out in the interview.

> *The whole communication in Nordic-projects is made in English. (Male, middle management)*

Another interviewee made the same observation in a different context.

> *A couple of years ago Swedish was a must, but nowadays Swedish is not just enough anymore. You have to be able to speak at least English and other languages are also more and more useful in a bank. (Female, middle management)*

Our findings also imply that more language skills can be found from higher hierarchical levels than from lower hierarchical levels of a MNE. The relationship between language skills and career development has already been studied (see for example Muukari, 2009), but we found it important for our research as well since language skills are an essential part of translation processes. The differentiation of language skills between different hierarchical levels could be seen from the interviews we had with the employees. One interviewee stated the following:

> *It is required nowadays that the higher you are in the company the more languages you know. If I wanted to move ahead in my career I would have to know English. (Female, employee)*

Another interviewee pointed out the following:

Language skills do have a say in career advancement. (Male, lower middle management)

We can therefore conclude on the basis of previous research and our own research that the higher you are in the hierarchy of a on a company the more you have to know and use foreign languages. We can also conclude that the translation situations are more common in higher hierarchical levels, where employees use foreign languages more often.

4.3. Problems related to translation activities

When we go further in our analysis and look at the situation that our figure presents more carefully, it might at first seem as if there are no problems at all. There exists more international communication in higher hierarchical levels of the MNE, but on the other hand there is also more capability to communicate with foreign languages (in the figure the triangle: 'Amount of Language skill').

In other words, the amount of international communication can be seen as demand and the amount of language skill as supply. As the figure shows those satisfy each other very well. There is a need for international communication on the higher hierarchical levels of a MNE but there are also relatively more language skills responding to that need.

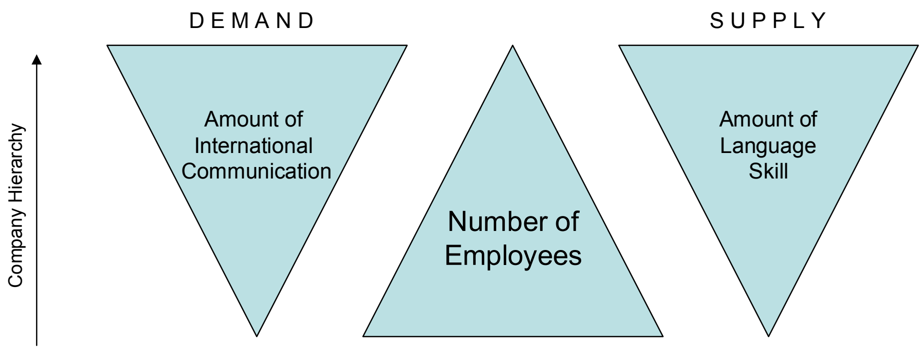

Figure 3. Demand for and supply of international communication

However, according to our findings the situation is not as clear as it might at first seem. There are problems especially on the lower hierarchical levels of a MNE, where the amount of international communication is smaller and the amount of language skill is lower than in the higher hierarchical levels generally.

One of the major trends affecting the imbalance between demand and supply in our figure is that the amount of international communication is increasing in the lower hierarchical level of the company and can no longer be portrayed as a triangle.

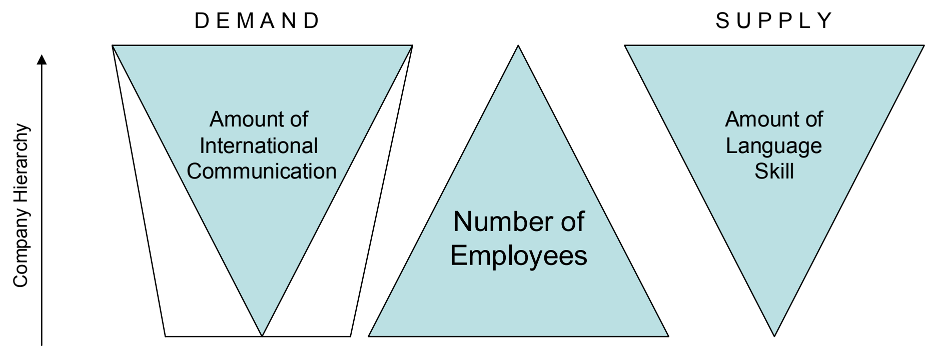

Figure 4. Changes in the demand for international communication

This generalization of international communication is found already in the previous academic studies (Virkkula, 2008) and this will present a problem in the future, as the language skills are still low on that organizational level. Also, our data, which represented a service company, show this development and the current need for language skills on lower hierarchical levels of the company. Here are some examples straight from the interviews.

> *Typically Nordea has always had people with language skills, but especially the customer service requires more skilled personnel mainly ones who know Swedish. (Male, lower middle management)*

> *I do have contact with foreign customers and I could speak English a little bit but I do not have the vocabulary for advising them in their banking issues. (Female, employee)*

> *There is more need for language skills nowadays than there used to be. (Male, employee)*

On the other hand, the amount of language skill on lower organizational levels has increased a lot as the previous academic literature also noticed (Virkkula, 2008). Employees, especially the younger generation, were extremely proficient in foreign languages according to our data. There were lots of employees working on the operational level of the company who spoke more than two foreign languages.

Hence, we can draw totally new pictures of the situation. The amount of international communication and the amount of language skill could no longer be depicted with triangles; squares would be more effective. In the next chapter we will take a closer look at this and investigate the most problematic area of translation activities that is located in lower hierarchical levels of an MNE as presented above. At the same time we will explore the new academic research ground, when we are in touch with the working environment of the operative employees in a service company.

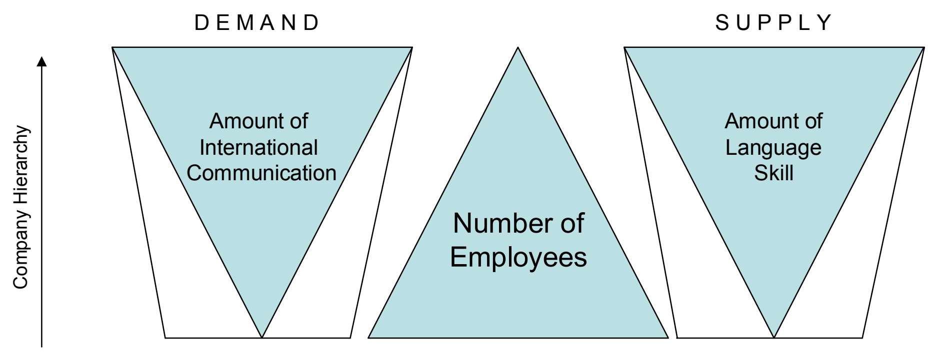

Figure 5. Changes in the demand for and supply of international communication

4.4. The problem area

Although some decades ago there were different units for international communication in international companies (Virkkula, 2008), our findings show that nowadays translation activities are a part of normal routines like any other working tasks. Employers expect that their employees will manage with foreign languages more independently on their own. This expectation was also clear from the translation department's point of view. An interviewee from the translation department stated the following:

> *If there are some in-house translations and employees know the language then they can do it themselves since we don't even have the resources to do everything. (Female, middle management)*

However, sometimes employees consider translation activities difficult and try to avoid situations where they have to use foreign languages as one interviewee explained:

> *I feel a bit annoyed if I have to use English and therefore I often guide the foreign customers to my colleague, who likes to speak English. (Female, middle management)*

Because of globalization, the kinds of situations introduced above are also more and more common in local customer service. Today, not all customers are natives speakers of just the local language, and in their increasing international business MNEs want to be able to serve their international customers wherever they are from. Language is part of the service quality and very important in customer service, therefore the employee who wants to do his or her work as well as possible might not be willing to use his or her imperfect language skills, if not absolutely necessary.

On the other hand, there were very many interviewees, who liked the variety that foreign languages offer in their working day and performed minor translation tasks with pleasure. For example, one interviewee had the following to say:

> *It is good variety to sometimes receive foreign e-mails… it also gives me pleasure when I can use my language skills. (Male, employee)*

Only the persons who were asked regularly to translate documents by other people felt that the larger quantity of translation work is not necessarily a task that they should be performing. However, that happened only if they had to do translation very often or they were busy with their normal work.

> *Sometimes I have to say that I'm busy right now and please look for some other ways to get the translation. However, it is not always such an easy task, because you want to be friends with the person asking for help. (Male, employee)*

Most of the problems occur because of the infrequent and unallocated nature of translation tasks. This means that in customer service the employee does not deal with foreign languages regularly and the translation situations happen suddenly to a random employee who does not necessarily have the needed language skills. Hence, employees who deal with the foreign language infrequently do not have a routine for handling such situations. The translation task takes much more time and the employees feel uncertain about the translation work in comparison with the employees who are faced with translation tasks regularly. We obtained some comments from our interviewees related to this issue.

If I have a very difficult text to translate then it might feel like an impossible task and take a lot of time. (Female, employee)

It takes a lot of time to do official (like agreements or contracts) and difficult translations and on the other hand I do not want to take responsibility for whether I got something right or wrong. (Male, employee)

The amount of time that it takes to make a translation depends on the aid that I have for that particular situation. (Female, employee)

We found the biggest problems to be concerns of time consumption, quality level and stress about responsibility. In a situation where international communication is needed in a location where the language-skilled employee does not exist the demand of international communication and supply of language skills do not meet. That is indicated as the problem area in figure 6.

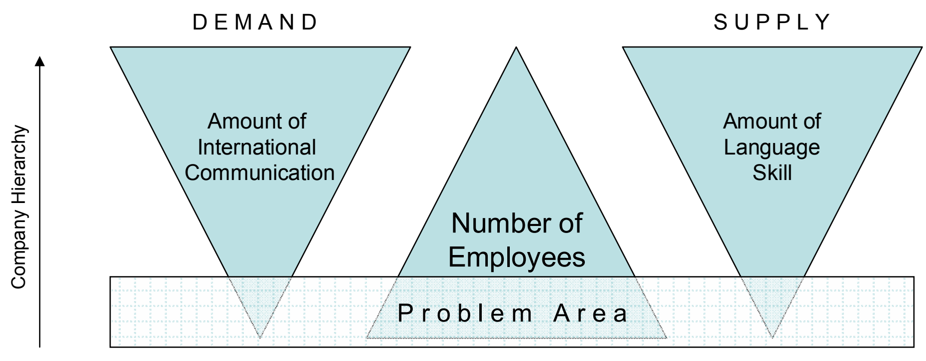

Figure 6. Problem area in international communication

Two stories straight from our data have been chosen to concretize this finding:

Story 1:

A person with excellent language skills in Swedish works in a local bank. He usually gets the Swedish-speaking customers, who are quite a few. One day, when this Swedish-speaking officer is busy, a Swedish-speaking customer comes to ask for a new product. The product information is only in Finnish. The customer insists on getting the information in Swedish since Swedish is also the second official language of Finland, but the officer, who happens to serve the customer, is not sure about his language skills and does not want to take responsibility for translateíng the product information.

Story 2:

The wife of a good customer is used to taking care of the banking transactions of her husband. However, the wife is from Germany and does not speak Finnish at all. However the bank wants to keep this very good customer and tries to give as good service as possible. There is only one person in the branch office of the bank who speaks German but he is not willing to take responsibility for his translation mistakes and all the misunderstandings and he also argues that it always take so much time to translate all the document just for one customer. In addition, there are also problems and stress among other employees when this bank officer is not available and a customer has to be served.

4.5. The importance of social networks

According to our findings help in unofficial translation work seemed to come mainly through employees' own social networks within the organization and also from outside the organization such as through family. In fact, we found the same five ways employees handle translation tasks as Marschan et al. did in 1997 (a) when they studied communication between foreign subsidiaries. Those five kinds of behavior (passive behavior, using of language intermediaries within the organization, informal links outside the organization, formal language links between the parties, and learning the company language) were all represented in our data too.

For example, one employee said that if she is not able to understand the foreign message, she could ask her daughter to translate it (informal link outside the organization).

Another employee preferred to ask his colleague to call the customer, who speaks the foreign language (formal language intermediary within the organization).

Very few interviewees said that they would avoid contact with the customer who speaks a foreign language (passive behavior) or postpone the translation tasks to be done after other tasks. However, one interviewee said that she would let the foreign language email wait until Monday, because it takes such a lot of time.

Instead almost all the interviewees asked their colleagues for help with the translation (use of language intermediaries) and actually the social network within the company seemed to be the critical issue in completing the translation activities faster and more efficiently. However, additional research is needed to prove the statement that the employees who have a broader social network can succeed in working with more foreign languages faster and more efficiently.

As already indicated, international communication does not necessarily take place in a location where there are employees with language skills. Instead, very often employees without the required language skills must deal with the foreign language and they have to find help and arrange the translation themselves. Without a network contact within the MNE to the right person with the appropriate language skills, problems for both the employee and the company start to arise in various levels. These concerns where pointed out by some of our interviewees.

> *It takes time to complete a task in a foreign language since you have to find someone who knows the language and wait for him or her to be available to help. (Female, employee)*

> *To be able to get help from colleagues you have to know people. You have to know their names and where they work and where they used to work since the organization is changing so quickly. (Female, employee)*

People in our case company felt that it was easy to go and ask for help. They were also very inclined to give help to their colleagues in translation tasks. Most of them mentioned that it is typical to get together with one or two colleagues and check the messages or documents that they had translated and therefore focus more on the quality of the text. One interviewee stated the following:

> *We have a lot of linguistically skilled personnel so it is easy to ask for help. (Male, lower middle management)*

Sometimes people come and ask for help in proofreading something. (Male, lower middle management)

Another one also mentioned that

I always first try to do the translation myself but sometimes when I'm not sure of something I go to a colleague. It is normal to ask for help from the people you work with. (Male, middle management)

This mentality was clarified as some other interviewees made similar comments.

I always try to do the translation myself first but if I'm not completely sure about it then I ask for someone to come and verify the information for me. (Female, employee)

I do not hesitate to ask for help from a colleague. (Female, employee)

We basically always try to look at documents together. (Male, employee)

It is easy to ask for help at least for those who can admit that they do not know a language. (Male, employee)

If an employee without the required language skill has a contact or belongs to a network including a person with the required language skills and the translation task can be completed then there often appears to be another kind of problem. The person with language skills receives more and more translation tasks from the people in the network and this hinders his or her primary work. This problem also tends to increase as the networks expand and word starts to spread that someone in the organization has the required linguistic skills to do otherwise difficult translations tasks. One of our interviewees especially felt this pressure.

> *I get asked for help every day. I constantly have to look at documents and try to figure out what they contain and what they are about. (Male, employee)*

> *Doing translations for someone is not yet a burden but if the word spreads that I might help then I would not be able to help anymore. (Male, employee)*

> *Even though it is nice to be asked for help it is still an inconvenience. (Male, employee)*

We can therefore conclude that in our case company people use their social connections in doing translation works. This, however, is mostly seen as a normal work routine, at least to those asking for help. Shoving translation tasks onto one person clearly interferes with normal work. This kind of translation outside the translation department seems to create problems, not just because it disturbs the actual work of the translator, but also because control and coordination of translation quality are also lacking.

4.6. Supportive ways to work through the translation

When an employee faces problems with translation tasks there are several means that they can take to overcome the obstacles. New technology is evolving all the time and also in our case company there are a number of different technical tools, such as translation programs and software, to help in the translation process. The employees have become used to using the technical assistance that has been provided for them, which was clear from the following comments

I use the dictionaries and applications provided to us for translation purposes but they are pretty limited. (Male, lower middle management)

I have used a company provided dictionary application. It is useful but I only need it for English. (Female, employee)

Now what becomes the problem here is the quality of the translation. If a translation is done mainly with technical tools making it close to a machine translation then the context might not be taken into consideration in the same way it would if a human were to do the translation. Although technical assistance provides fast access to help when dealing with a foreign language, it still does not guarantee the production of quality translation. We will be focusing more on the issue of quality later on.

Another way to get help in demanding translation tasks is to contact a translation service, or in our case company's situation a translation department. However, there is a high threshold for getting in touch with the official translation department. The employees feel that the costs of using the department are high and as the costs would have to be paid by their own department they do not want to be responsible for causing those costs.

It is too complicated and official (meaning the bureaucracy) to send something to the translation department. (Male, employee)

If I would need to use the translation services I guess I would have to ask for permission from my superior. (Female, employee)

We are very strict in costs and therefore on what needs to be translated officially and who does it. (Female, employee)

Some employees were also unaware of when it would be suitable to use the translation department or even how to contact them.

I do not know where the translation department is situated and I do not know how to contact them. (Male, lower middle management)

Maybe the translation department does not want to advertise itself. (Male, lower middle management)

4.7. The issue of time

Our case company is a typical example of a service-sector MNE that does business with both private and corporate customers. When customers for example call or visit an office, they are in contact first with the operative, lower hierarchical level employee of the case company. So, the typical situation for a multinational company such as our case company is that the people working in the lower levels in the company hierarchy are the ones who are in direct contact with the customer base on a daily basis.

Compared with the employees in a higher hierarchical level of the company, the nature of the work is different. As explained in our data customers for example have to reserve a special time or have to have a special reason to be in contact with employees on higher hierarchical levels. This means that employees on lower hierarchical levels tend to be in situations that are not as well prepared and in which they have to make quick decisions. This means that when employees who do not have special language skills come in contact with a customer who speaks a foreign language or have to deal with a document that is in a language that they have not mastered then they have little time to decide on a course of action.

On higher levels in the hierarchy the employees, mostly managers, make strategy decisions and they are given more time to prepare translations. Often they can contact the translation department and also use other kinds of technical tools to help them in the translation process. This enables the employees in higher positions to focus more on the quality of the translation and therefore also produce better and more value-providing translations. This situation is illustrated in Figure 7.

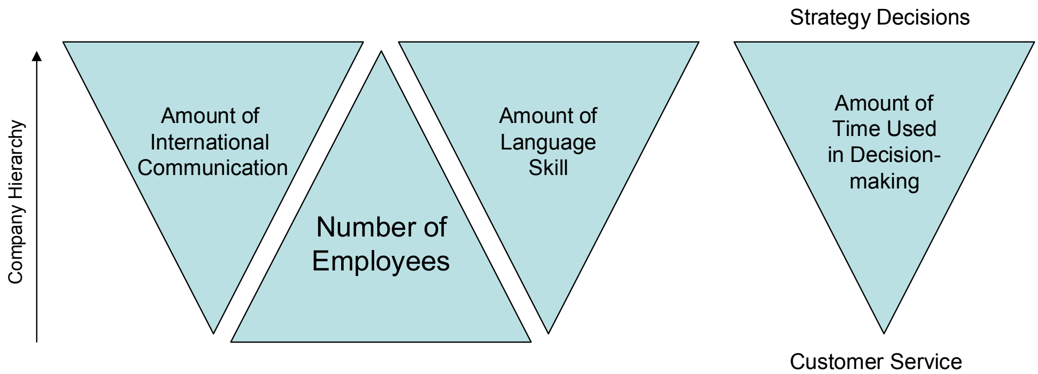

Figure 7. Time issues in international communication

When an employee comes in contact with a customer who needs to communicate in a foreign language the employee usually does not have time to wait for additional help. If an employee who has to make the decision about the translation task fast feels uncertain about the task, then it is likely that he or she will feel stressed and might also either postpone the translation task or assign it to someone else. One of our interviewees stated the following:

> *I might ask another employee to take care of a matter since it feels like a waste of time and resources to always have a third party present. (Female, employee)*

Both postponing and assigning a task forward to another person usually mean that the customer has to be put aside and this lowers the value of the company in the eyes of the customer. The customer does not necessarily have to mean the traditional type of a person outside the company who is buying the product or service of the company. In this case it refers to the sender of the information, while the employee doing the translation is the receiver (see figure 8).

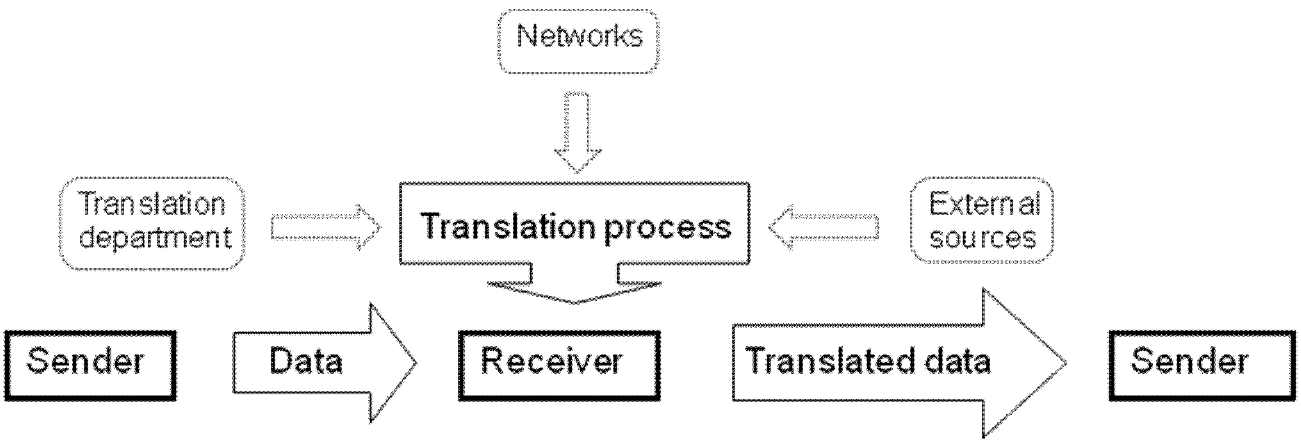

Figure 8. Translation process from sender to receiver

The sender is very often using a person that he or she knows to help in the translation. The receiver subsequently uses his or her resources to do the translation. The translation process includes various factors, the biggest being the help received from networks within the company, external sources from outside the company or for example technical help, or contacting the translation department. Even though the sender is often close to the translation department we found out that people do not tend to use it but try to find some other way to complete the translation process.

4.8. Translation quality

Our interviews also raised the issue of language quality and how the employees perceive that. It appears that the employees are not so much worried about the quality of language when they are dealing with the customer base for example in face-to-face situations.

> *We only strive for understanding each other, not so much into perfection in the form or use of language (Male, lower middle management)*

> *As long as the parties understand each other the quality is good. (Male, employee)*

However as soon as they get in touch with some more formal documents, like agreements, offers or contracts then the quality seems to become an issue.

> *The amount of attention that one gives to quality depends on where the document is going. (Male, employee)*

Especially with formal documents that hold for example contract or legal information or formal documents that are explaining the money transaction, the translation quality was seen as very important among the employees. No one wants to take the responsibility of doing an official translation and neither should that be expected of them in a company that has an official translation department.

> *Documents that have to serve the whole company come ready to us. One person cannot be held responsible for such a translation. (Female, employee)*

> *If I were asked to translate a difficult document I would not do it since my job description is not translation services. If it should be official, then someone else has to do it. (Male, employee)*

> *If a contract is to be translated then I think that the company should provide at least some "official unofficial" translation that we can provide to the customers. (Male, employee)*

The employees did seem to have a very good sense of their own language skills and the quality of text that they can provide. They felt that they have to be able to trust their own skills and that they can provide good enough text in foreign languages for it to be sent ahead either internally or externally.

> *One should be able to trust in language skills of his- or herself. (Male, middle management)*

> *I am unable to check the correctness of the translations by myself but if the superiors trust in the quality then I guess I also have to trust it. (Female, employee)*

I often trust my own skills and the quality of my translations. (Male, employee)

I would assume that language quality in our department is good. (Male, employee)

In addition the importance of learning the company language was seen from our Nordea interview data as well as it was seen from the KONE interview data of Marschan et al (1997a). Many of the interviewees mentioned how difficult it is to understand the accents of English and the different ways in which English is written and compared the language skills of other nations to the language skills of Finns. One interviewee had the following to say:

In our own opinion we need to form a sentence in a sensible manner, but when a Danish person is writing he just puts words after words. (Female, employee)

A Finn writes much more accurately and looks that every comma is on its own place ... we are more punctual… other Nordic people already speak faster and more and they are not so thorough. (Male, middle management)

It would seem according to these findings that employees in our case company have a good understanding about the quality issues when it comes to translations. They know when it is important to put more emphasis on the quality and when it is only necessary to have enough quality for the parties to understand the point made by the other person.

4.9. External communication vs. internal communication

It appears to be the case that a company can ponder decisions for a longer time if the communication is internal, within the company. Whenever an outside party becomes involved and the communication switches from internal to external communication the decisions are required to be made faster. Also in some cases more emphasis has to be put on quality. One interviewee from the translation department pointed this out by telling us the following:

> *We have one native English person who proofreads all of our most important documents. (Female, middle management)*

In addition, as mentioned earlier, the translation department in the case company makes priority decisions based on whether documents are internal or external.

When talking about translations we have already showed that the translation department is a key element in making a quality translation. However, lower hierarchical levels of the company who are the ones making the fast decisions tend not to use the translation department since they find it hard and time consuming as was previously pointed out. This creates the dilemma presented in figure 9.

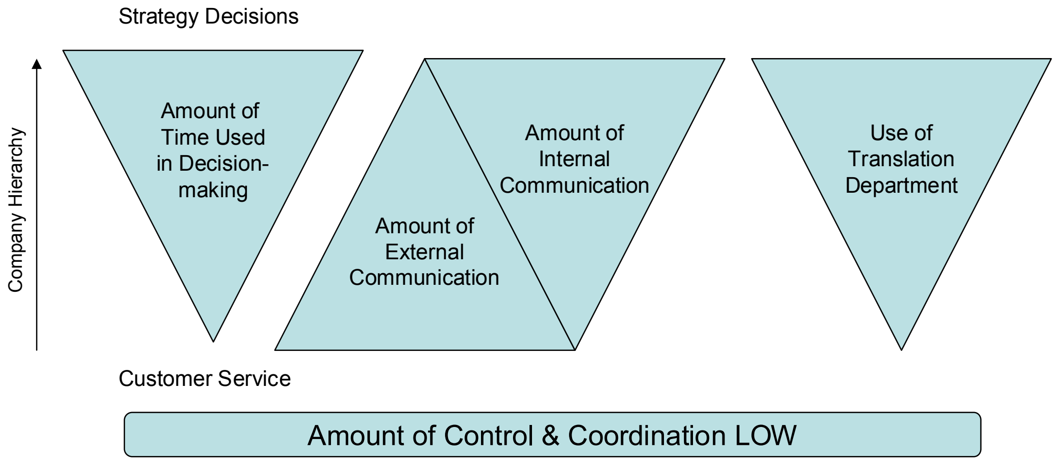

Figure 9. Control and coordination of translation

Hence, we can conclude here that the employees in the lower hierarchical levels have to deal with international communication and since the pace is so fast they cannot provide quality translations. The control of the translations that they do is very low, on some occasions almost non-existent, and this might have a permanent effect on the image of the company.

What companies can do to avoid this problem and make sure that quality translations are also provided in the most hectic working environments within the company is presented later in the managerial implications chapter.

5. Conclusions and managerial implication

In this thesis we found that translation activities made outside the official translation department are a very complex and context-sensitive issue. Normally, an MNE does not offer common guidance to employees and employees are used to doing translation in their own individual ways. Often only dictionaries or translation software are offered to employees by the MNE.

The nature of the work and the use of the final translation, meaning the destination of translation, guided the employees' behavior in translation activities. Thus the responsibility of the translator was considerable and employees should themselves be able to understand the risks and problems that may arise if the translation fails. There was often no official controlling or checking system arranged by the MNE for making sure that the translations are correct.

Very often especially on the lower hierarchical levels in a service company, there is no time for careful translation. There were lots of minor customer service situations during a normal working day; they could not be predicted and came at short notice. Employees working on the higher hierarchical levels in a multinational service company saw this differently. More time and support for translations were available on higher organizational levels. The translation tasks were prepared more carefully and they were seen as a routine. The official translation department was also used more often by employees from higher organizational levels than from lower levels of the organization.

Translation work was experienced very differently among employees. Some employees perceive it as a part of their work that they cannot control and see it like any other tasks in their work. Other employees consider translation activities additional work or a burden that was not included in their job description. They usually wanted extra money if they had to do translations or wanted to pass the translations on to other persons. However, some employees saw translation activities as a welcome addition to their daily routines. They liked to do translations every now and then and they enjoyed using their language skills.

Extremely important for solving translation problems seemed to be the social networks of the employee. If the translator for example was not sure about the meaning of foreign text or if he or she just wanted to check that the text was correctly translated, the translator usually asked a friend for help. Help could be also asked from outside the employee's own department or from totally outside the company. The person you are asking for help does not need to be a very close friend. A small link to a person who could help was usually enough when asking for support in translation matters.

As found already in the previous academic literature the translation situations are increased in multinational enterprises because of the globalizing business environment. The challenges that already exist could be found when the translation activities were researched in this study. Multinational companies have to find a way to provide their employees with resources to produce quality translations in a limited time to fulfill the needs of the internationalizing field of banking industry.

5.1. Managerial implications

Many of our findings are at least quite case-sensitive and we are not going to offer any overall advice or strategy for MNEs to avoid the difficulties of translation activities. However, it is already important for MNEs to notice the increasing need for translation within the organizations that is caused by globalization as portrayed in more detail in the study and to start to think about company-specific problems and solutions.

Some useful hints can however be made based on our empirical findings. For example all the interviewees saw the variety of different branch specific terms in communication very problematic. The problem especially appeared in external communication with customers. A common situation was that the employee was not familiar with the term that was used by the customer and there were misunderstandings or in some situations a complete lack of understanding. Hence, it is very important that the terms used within the MNE are clear, well-known, and available to everyone.

In addition the use of common terms should be controlled or managed. The use of different terms by different employees in the same MNE with the same customer causes confusion and clearly indicates the need for consistent terminology. Common updated term lists available to and used by everyone in the MNE are helpful.

Other implications are related to technological assistance. There existed a very strong need for a common database of all the data already translated inside the MNE. If the company could arrange a working database for all the translated documents, a lot of translation work could be avoided. Many of the interviewees mentioned that they store the translated documents on the hard discs or on the folders of their own computers, because they personally use similar translations all the time. A common database could then offer access to the translations already made by other employees and decrease the amount of work inside the MNE. For example in project work, the term list should be collected and processed at the beginning of the project and updated by all the members during the project. There is already plenty of software on the market for this purpose.

Other technological needs are related to translation software and dictionaries. The problem according to the interviews is that there are lots of different virtual dictionaries in the organization, but the quality and location of them varied greatly. Especially the employees who do not use the dictionaries were very often felt frustrated about the choice and use of different dictionaries and translation tools. Hence, an MNE should offer a well-working, easy-to-use dictionary that is simple to find. For example, one good idea is to put a dictionary in the first site of an intranet.

The translation department should be made more available to the lower hierarchical levels in the company. This could prevent the employees from having to do the same work several times or incorrectly, which in turn detracts from the reputation of the company. As many employees were not even aware of the services of the translation department it would be good if employees who have to work in various languages were provided with information regarding when to contact the translation department and how to do it in the best possible manner.

6. Limitations and suggestions for further research

There are two major limitations on this master's thesis, both of which are more or less connected to generalization of the study. One of the limitations is that it deals with only one company from one industry. Hence, the question is how well do we explain the phenomena in general or do the results merely explain the situation in one specific case company.

Another limitation concerns the amount of data. There were 13 individuals present in interviews. Is this enough for portraying the whole multinational company and all the hierarchical levels? The amount of time and other resources limited collection of more qualitative data. In addition, some challenges were met when trying to fit timetables together with the interviewees and willingness of some interviewees to take part into our study. That also limited the number of interviewees.

The interview situations were created so that the interviewees would feel comfortable in expressing their true emotions related to the situations. However, it is difficult not to ask leading questions. Also, some interviewees might have held back on their emotions knowing that we would report the results to the case company. This was, however, avoided in most cases by telling the interviewees that the interviewees were confidential.

For further research we feel that the true impact of social networks on translation activities should be explored. It was clear that all the interviewees felt that social networking was the way to get help when they faced translation issues. In addition the actual costs that come from translations done by employees in departments other than the translation department should be investigated since this kind of work is usually the one that affects the company image and therefore also the results and profits of the company. Also, this study focuses only on written language, and it would also be important to include spoken language. This would provide a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix A comprises the email questionnaire that was sent in Finnish to employees within the company when trying to find suitable candidates for the interviews.

Hei,

Mitä vieraita kieliä käytät työssäsi?
Milloin olet viimeksi suomentanut työhösi liittyvää tekstiä?
Pyydetäänkö sinua muokkaamaan vieraskielistä tekstiä?
Onko "käännöstyö" sinulle arkipäivää?

Olisiko sinulla hetki aikaa tavata kasvotusten ja kertoa meille kokemuksistasi arjen kielikysymyksissä?
Vastaa tähän viestiin mahdollisimman pikaisesti (viim. 16.1. mennessä), niin otamme valittuihin henkilöihin yhteyttä. Vastaamalla olet myös mukana leffalippujen arvonnassa!

Ystävällisin terveisin,

Tiina Vesa ja Jukka-Pekka Peltonen
Helsingin kauppakorkeakoulu

Hi,

What foreign languages do you use in your work?
When did you last translate a work-related text into Finnish?
Do people ask you to modify a text that is in a foreign language?
Do you do “translation work” on a regular basis?

Would you have a moment to meet us face-to-face and discuss your experiences regarding everyday language issues?
Please answer this email as soon as possible (by January 16th at the latest) and we will contact the people selected personally. By answering you will have a chance to win movie tickets!

Best regards,

Tiina Vesa and Jukka-Pekka Peltonen
Helsinki School of Economics

Appendix B

Job descriptions of all the interviewees.

<u>Agent inbound</u>

The main responsibilities for this position are handling customer requests via phone and e-mail, promoting and selling Nordea products and by doing so ensuring customer satisfaction. Evaluation is done mainly on sales results and personal development. This position requires only local spoken and written language skills. However, employees are allowed to give service in additional languages according to their competencies.

<u>Service adviser</u>

The main responsibilities for this position are to have meetings with clients and creating new customer base. In addition promoting and selling Nordea products as well as investment management are fundamental parts of this position. Evaluation is mainly on the basis of sales reports and customer satisfaction. Language skills are not required for this position.

<u>Product developer</u>

The main responsibilities for this position are contributing to product strategy development, providing the necessary documentation, and building knowledge. Evaluation is based on the individual's ability to deliver value adding solutions, to meet targets, and to increase efficiency increasing. In addition to a Bachelor degree, this position requires a professional level in written and spoken English and an excellent level of written and spoken local language.

Corporate service adviser

The main accountabilities for this position are to handle relationships with named corporation customers, creating profit, contacting the client base, and creating value for them. Evaluation is done based on customer relationships, value creation for the unit and daily performances. This position does not require specific language skills.

System analyst

The system analyst knows the strategies of the company as well as legal issues and follows their changes. The main responsibility is to make change management easier. The accountabilities include knowing the processes and helping reduce costs and increasing efficiency. System analysts are evaluated on the basis of the value adding solutions they produce, creating improvements, and sharing information with others within the company. This position requires an advanced level in both written and spoken local language and a good level in both written and spoken English.

Private banker in private banks

The private bankers are responsible for designated customers within Nordea Private Banking. Private bankers provide wealth management for them. The responsibilities include learning the customers' needs in their financing and acting accordingly, increasing customer commitment to Nordea, reaching the unit goals, and following the markets and business area. Evaluation is based on the value adding solutions delivered, sales efforts and profitability, and understanding the organization and sharing knowledge. This position requires a bachelor's degree and a professional level in both written and spoken English.

Senior private banker in private banks

Senior private bankers are responsible for the relationships with more demanding customers. Other responsibilities include learning the customers' needs and acting accordingly, making long-term financial plans and increasing customer commitment, work goal oriented and follow the business area and markets. Evaluation is based on the value adding solutions delivered, sales efforts and results, business ability, and knowledge sharing. This position requires a bachelor degree and a professional level of both written and spoken English.

Senior Relationship Manager

A senior relationship manager is responsible for overall customer management and development. The accountabilities include taking care of demanding customers, getting new customers for Nordea, keeping in touch with existing customers regularly, and making sure to use networks within the bank to serve customers accordingly. Evaluation is based on the level of customer relations and on attracting new customers, overall improvement in customer satisfaction, and improving the unit's results. This position requires a bachelor's degree and a good level in both written and spoken English.

Portfolio Manager in Savings & Life Products

A portfolio manager is responsible for managing portfolios within a specific area. The accountabilities of this position include contributing to the development of new products, participating in meetings with clients, promoting the unit's image to clients, and having superior knowledge within a specific investment area. Evaluation is based on analyses provided, economic results, contribution to development, and knowledge sharing. This position requires a master's degree and in addition to written and local spoken language also a superior level in written and spoken English.

Client Manager in Savings & Life Products

A client manager is responsible for combining products into complex client portfolios. Other responsibilities include advising the team in their client portfolios, creating and maintaining client relationships to ensure long-term earnings, and making sure that within the client portfolio the turnover, earnings, activities, and the goal of client meetings are reached. This position might also require participation in some cross-organizational projects. Evaluation is based on value adding solutions delivered, unit representation, level of business results, contribution to unit development, and knowledge sharing. This position requires a master's degree and written and spoken local language skills as well as a superior level in written and spoken English.

Manager GIC (Group Identity & Communications)

A Manager GIC is responsible for communicating the Nordea vision and values into a clear strategy. The accountabilities include creating adding value for Nordea customers and shareholders, support of proactive and integrated communications as an integral part of the business decision-making process, adding value in communication processes and production, and encouraging managers and employees to use communications as a natural part of daily work. Evaluation is based on decision-making skills, customer orientation, cost efficiency, following the values of Nordea, and promoting commitment and motivation among employees. This position requires a professional level in both written and spoken English.