



Enhancing language education in cross-border vocational education

Languages in an enterprise in the German-Luxembourg-France border region

General information about the case study

The following case study is situated in the automotive sector and was undertaken by the research group GRETI (Groupement de Recherches Transfrontalières Interdisciplinaires, see <http://cbs.uni-gr.eu/en/border-studies/working-groups/greti>) in the Greater Region, a border region consisting of parts of Germany, France, and Luxembourg (, and Belgium – in brackets because not relevant in this case study, but part of the Greater Region). More information about the Greater Region can be found [on our website](#).

In the case study, researchers from different universities of the Greater Region – University of Lorraine, University of Luxembourg, Saarland University and University of Strasbourg – and from various disciplines – Geography, Sociology, Business Administration, and Linguistics – focused on linguistic and spatial borders in cross-border enterprises, especially regarding challenges of intercultural management (cf. Polzin-Haumann/Reissner 2016: 105).

The enterprise smart

The case study was conducted in the enterprise smart in Hambach (France), which counted 800 employees plus the same amount of employees of the suppliers at that time. As the French subsidiary of the German Daimler AG, smart employs about 5 % of German employees; most of the employees come from France. Most employees live near the factory, some of them are cross-border commuters and cross the German-French border on their way to work every day (ibid.).

Research focus

From a linguistic perspective, research questions concern, for example, the linguistic landscape in the enterprise, borders and transitions between the languages, and how they are perceived by the employees. Furthermore, possible connections between socio-professional affiliation, national origin, and language skills were addressed. With the



interdisciplinary focus of the researchers involved, different perspectives on the communication processes within the enterprise are introduced — in accordance with the aforementioned requirement to create interdisciplinary linguistic studies on business communication and intercultural management in order to be able to do justice to their inherent complexity (ibid. 106).

Methodology

The study followed a Grounded Theory approach: From the practices in the company, ideas for category development were formulated and, on this basis, a first analysis of the conditions in the enterprise was carried out. In this step, further survey instruments were also determined, before the data collection followed, which was continuously adjusted based on further monitoring processes. Methods for data collection were, for example, interviews, observations, or carte mentales. The methodology and the research design can be seen as complex as data collection methods of different disciplines were used and combined (ibid. 107f.).

Corpus

The following findings are based on conversation with the company manager, guided interviews (approx. 15 hours in total) with employees at different hierarchical levels and from different work areas, as well as questionnaires on their language biographies. The interviews were conducted in tandem with two researchers from different nationalities and disciplines. This module focuses on the role of different languages in specific communication contexts as well as the question of borders and transitions between the languages and their perception by the different employees (ibid. 108).

For further reading and a comprehensive overview of the case study results check:

- **in French:** Trépos, Jean-Yves/Ehrhart, Sabine/Hamez, Grégory/Langinier, Hélène/Polzin-Haumann, Claudia/Reissner, Christina (2016): „Frontières linguistiques et communautés de travail. Un bilinguisme à l'épreuve du changement industriel”, in: questions de communication 29/2016, 351-374.
- **in German:** Polzin-Haumann, Claudia/Reissner, Christina (2016): „Unternehmenskommunikation in einem internationalen Unternehmen in der SaarLorLux-Region. Eine Fallstudie auf interdisziplinärer Grundlage”, in: Hennemann, Anja/Schlaak, Claudia (edd.): Unternehmenskommunikation und Wirtschaftsdiskurse - Herausforderungen für die romanistische Linguistik, Heidelberg, 103-121.