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“The working language is Norwegian. Not that this means anything, it seems”: when expectations meet the new multilingual reality

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic and cultural diversity in Northern Norwegian working life has increased dramatically in the twenty-first century. Based on a series of telephone interviews with company representatives, this article presents an overview of the new multilingual reality in many workplaces and analyzes how managers and administrators position their expectations and experiences of it. Participants’ responses suggest that many workplaces are linguistically segregated. Though most participants said their companies did not have explicit workplace language policies, they expressed clear perceptions of how things should be in their workplaces, and these were often in conflict with their descriptions of the status quo. We also show how multiple contextual conditions in and out of workplaces, both ideological and practical, informed participants’ accounts of multilingual practices in their workplaces. Static and normative ideological positions are challenged by employees’ language choices, practices, and developments on a societal level, particularly those of the labour market, which regulates companies’ access to workers. Our study reveals the need for applicable knowledge about multilingual practices and sociolinguistic relations in workplaces.

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1. Introduction

Researchers have repeatedly and from different angles highlighted the changing conditions surrounding language use and sociolinguistic relations at a time of increased global communication and international mobility (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005; Duchêne and Heller 2012; Pennycook and Otsuji 2015; Pietikäinen et al. 2016). Communication in the workplace is part of this development (Blommaert, Collins, and Slembrouck 2005; Roberts 2010), as ideas about using one particular language in one domain are challenged by work situations in which the participating speakers, their individual and mutual linguistic resources, the context, and the interactions themselves will determine the language practices and choices. This is the reality in many Northern Norwegian workplaces, and it has consequences for both leaders and employees. Despite a long history of multilingual and multicultural encounters in the North (Eidheim 1969; Eriksen

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and Niemi 1981; Broch and Jahr 1984; Huss and Lindgren 2010; Hiss 2017), migration to Northern Norway is experienced in today's society as a relatively recent phenomenon that quickly changes the linguistic and cultural diversity of society and working life and affects language practices, culture, and sociolinguistic relations in many workplaces.

In this article, we shed light on the changing multilingual reality of working life in Northern Norway and how managers and administrators explicitly and implicitly evaluate their experiences of diversity, mobility, and immobility. Previous ethnographic research has provided in-depth insights into the language practices, policies, and sociolinguistic relations of workplaces in Southern Norway and the Nordic countries (e.g. Lønsmann 2015; Strømmer 2016; Kraft 2017, 2019; Lønsmann and Kraft 2018). However, we have little knowledge of linguistic diversity in contemporary workplaces in Norway's Northern periphery, and studies are needed that reveal patterns beyond single workplaces. Our study builds on a telephone survey of regional companies, offering insights into the language practices and policies of a relatively large number of workplaces. At the same time, each interview represents the perceptions and expectations of individual company representatives, usually people in key organizational positions. The data set includes companies from various sectors that employ local and migrant employees, including seafood production, construction, services, transport, and retail. The finding we use as this article's point of departure is that many participants reported considerable linguistic and cultural diversity in their workplaces even as most indicated that they had strong local roots, did not have significant exposure to other cultures, and had language competences mainly limited to Norwegian and, to some extent, English. This implies that many Norwegian managers and administrators are not competent in the languages of their migrant employees. Such unequal distribution of language competences may affect mutual understandings in the workplace and reinforce institutional and interactional hierarchies at work. We also found that it is accompanied by ideological perceptions of language and social relations. We show that the shifting conditions and increased mobility of workers in the North have opened spaces in which multiple contextual conditions are entangled and in competition with each other, including mobility and immobility, multilingual practices and a monolingual ideal, and ideological perceptions and practical needs. Thus, the main analytical goal of this article is to show how the tensions between these conditions surface in the subjective accounts of company representatives: is the management of linguistic diversity in many workplaces a result of language ideological perceptions of how things should be at work and in society?

We begin by presenting a brief overview of language, migration, and work in Northern Norway and relate the region's development to relevant research on language in the workplace. We then briefly describe our data set and methodological approach and present a quantitative overview of participants' responses. This is followed by a qualitative analysis of four individual statements showing how informants contextualized and accounted for their experiences in multilingual work settings. Finally, we bring together the different findings and sketch connections between discursive expressions, work practices, and broader society.

2. Migration to the North and workplace diversity

The presence of multiple languages at work is not a new phenomenon in Northern Norway (Hiss 2017, 2020). The region has a long history of multilingual and multicultural encounters,

with Sámi multilingualism, Kven migration, and cross-border trade with Russia. Historically, more people emigrated from the North, but work migration to the region has increased considerably in the twenty-first century (Aure 2012; Søholt, Tronstad, and Vestby 2015; Søholt 2017), which has considerably changed the linguistic and cultural diversity in communities and workplaces. In 2020, according to Statistics Norway, about 13% of the population of Troms and Finnmark county were migrants. That statistic includes migrants and children of migrants born in Norway from 153 different countries. The five largest groups come from Poland, Syria, Lithuania, Russia, and Finland. The 2004 eastward expansion of the European Union is one reason behind the increase of migrant workers from countries such as Poland and Lithuania. Additionally, increased work immigration is related to increased economic and political interest in the High North after the year 2000 (e.g. Jensen and Hønneland 2011; Røvik, Jentoft, and Nergård 2011). In the context of ongoing economic development, job opportunities are among the most central reasons why migrants settle in the region (Aure 2012). In the face of a general decline in population, immigration is a vital stabilizing force, particularly for rural economies (Søholt 2017; Solbakken and Handeland 2019); indeed, “to the extent that manufacturing industries survive, they are likely to be operated by immigrant labour rather than locals” (Aarsæther 2015, 66). Many production facilities, such as those of the seafood industry, are located in small, coastal communities. As the labour markets and decreasing populations of rural communities cannot provide enough workers, migrant workers are actively sought and quickly integrated into the labour market (e.g. Aure, Førde, and Magnussen 2018). As a result, more migrants have settled in Norway’s rural peripheries than in those of most other European countries (Søholt, Tronstad, and Vestby 2015). To increase the stability of local economies, politicians and researchers have called for multicultural competence and measures that ease the integration of migrants into communities (Søholt 2017; Solbakken and Handeland 2019). At the same time, part of the challenge of integrating migrant workers in local communities is the fact that most of them are employed at the bottoms of highly segregated workplaces (Aure, Førde, and Magnussen 2018). In addition to hierarchical segregation within companies, Søholt et al. (2015, 9) pointed out that migrants and locals tend to work in different types of companies and sectors.

This segregation goes hand in hand with a linguistic division of labour (e.g. between managers, administrators and workers), which has received much attention in research on language in workplaces that value certain languages and varieties over others (e.g. McAll 2003; Roberts 2010; Duchêne, Moyer, and Roberts 2013; Angouri and Miglbauer 2014; Lønsmann and Kraft 2018). Employees may carry out their everyday work speaking different languages than managers and administrators, and language skills may limit career opportunities. As in many other European workplaces (Gunnarsson 2014), the languages and varieties in the workplaces of our data set (see Section 4.1) include national and local languages (i.e. Norwegian and local dialects), English as a lingua franca, and all languages spoken by individual employees or groups of employees. How these are valued in a particular workplace depends on the type of work conducted, hierarchies and relationships, and a range of contextual conditions, agents, practices, and ideologies. Duchêne and Heller (2012) pointed out that globalization, diversification, ideologies of national homogeneity, and the rationale of economic profit exist side by side and in competition at work and in the economy. Dominant ideologies and the macro-level language policies of the state or community impact the language practices and sociolinguistic

relations of workplaces (Angouri 2014, 2018; Heller et al. 2016): However globalized an enterprise is, its employees are usually expected to adapt to the environment, i.e. the language and culture of the nation-state in which the company operates (Urciuoli and LaDoussa 2013). Yet, global developments can have regulating effects on linguistic diversity in workplaces such that English is typically perceived as the only linguistic means of conducting international business (Lønsmann 2015; Piller and Cho 2013) and as the *lingua franca* providing migrant workers with access to global labour markets (Lorente 2017).

A multilingual staff has implications for management. At the most general level, linguistic diversity may pose challenges in that communication must be handled differently than in monolingual environments (Angouri 2018, 50). Multilingual workplaces typically involve some kind of language management grounded in a hierarchical relationship between managers and subordinates (Urciuoli and LaDoussa 2013). Workplace language policies may be expressed explicitly through policy documents and rules for communication, but irrespective of the existence or application of explicit workplace language policies, most workplaces have institutional structures and power relations that value the use of some languages more than others; in return, language practices and choices directly affect workplace power relations (e.g. Angouri 2013). There is a close relationship between institutional orders (as hierarchical and other professional role relations) and linguistic interaction (Sarangi and Roberts 1999). In multilingual workplaces, institutional structures may determine what languages or varieties are used. At the same time, differences in linguistic competence can limit employees' agency and participation, which reinforces hierarchical social relations (Roberts 2010; Gunnarsson 2014; Angouri 2018). Yet, workplace relations are more complex than linear hierarchies, and language policies arise also from workforces' perceptions and practices; indeed, top-down and bottom-up management of language practices coexist in many workplaces (Angouri 2013; Lüdi 2014). Lønsmann (2015) examined how different ideological perceptions of international business and community socialization competed in a Danish company. Orienting the company toward the international market, the management introduced English as an official working language, while for many employees, Danish was the key to integration in Danish society and the local work environment. In their study of two multilingual production workplaces in Denmark and Norway, Lønsmann and Kraft (2018) found that the same perceptions of language and multilingualism lay the groundwork for the development of language policies for migrant production workers. They stated that "the hegemonic statuses of English and Norwegian in the language policies reflect to a large extent the role these languages play in the work life of managers" (Lønsmann and Kraft 2018, 420). Consequently, linguistic competence is constructed and evaluated on the basis of the practices and repertoires of high-status employees.

We argue that language management, as reported by our participants, also involves ideological perceptions that are often prescriptive. Ideology is typically expressed implicitly and is therefore powerful (Verschueren 2012). It is intertwined with and helps maintain patterns of social dominance (Thompson 1990). In line with Verschueren (2012, 7), we see ideology as "underlying patterns of meaning" or "forms of everyday thinking and explanation" that involve perceptions of how things are and should be in the world, typically understood as commonsensical, normative, and stable. Language ideologies connect such underlying perceptions with linguistic behaviours and language choices and let language users project macro-societal categories on particular linguistic

actions and speakers (e.g. Kroskrity 2000). Ideology is typically not expressed explicitly, but speakers may relate to ideology as a common ground from which to justify attitudes or be persuasive (Verschuereen 2012). As Lønsmann's (2015) study showed, ideologies can inform the development of corporate language policies and contestations thereof. Here, we direct our attention to ideology because it generates expectations of how things should be in multilingual workplaces and offers stable and normative explanations in the face of a complex and changing reality that impacts actions and decision-making. In Section 4.3, we will return to how diversity is entangled with work practices, institutional relations, underlying ideologies, and other conditions.

3. Data and method

Our data set consists of short telephone interviews carried out in 2015 and 2016 with representatives of 140 small and medium-sized companies (up to 150 employees) in 16 municipalities in Troms and Finnmark. Our sample was reflective of the fact that there were few large companies in the area. The data set covers various sectors, including fishery and seafood production, construction and manufacturing, technical and cleaning services, transport, healthcare, consulting, and retail.

The interviews followed a standardized questionnaire. At the same time, we reacted flexibly to participants' responses to allow the interviews to develop beyond simple question-answer sequences, encouraging participants to engage in conversations about the survey questions. In this way, we received a set of quantifiable survey responses and a series of recorded interview conversations for qualitative analysis. The data set provides a broad, regional perspective, and it allows us to consider the individual voices of all participants. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and gave their consent.

All participants held positions of relative power in their companies, typically as managers or administrators. This means that the practices of a large number of employees were mediated to us only through the participants' perspectives, which opened only small windows into the multilingual realities of their workplaces. Nevertheless, considering the positions, views, and choices of these managers and administrators is important because they were influential agents in their workplaces. The participants' institutional position and linguistic background (compared to that of many employees) can be linked directly to the linguistic division of labour.

To enable company representatives to engage in telephone conversations during busy workdays, the questionnaire was kept short, covering three main topics. The first part contained questions about the participant's language practices, position at their company, and sector their company worked in. The second part focused on language practices among employees and language use in various communicative settings. Part three contained questions about language policies, diversity management, and attitudes towards diversity.

We selected four interview extracts for detailed analysis (Section 4.3) because they exemplify the linguistic distance between participants and their multilingual workforces, which is visible in the quantitative comparisons of responses presented in sections 4.1 and 4.2. Interviews are metacommunicative acts that report, describe, interpret, and evaluate communicative actions, processes, and relations (Briggs 1986). Therefore, it is important to analyse the interviews as speech events in their own rights. As everything participants

reported about language practices in their workplaces was discursively mediated in the interviews, we needed to focus on the mediated content as well as the discursive practices in the interview, participants' positions and relations, and any obvious or subtle discourses circulating in the moment (Scollon 2007). The survey design presupposed interactional relations between the interviewer and interviewees as well as the position of the interviewee vis-à-vis the topic of the interview (including participants' relationship to the company's employees). An analysis of responses concerning the use and position of Sámi and Kven (the region's historical minority languages) revealed that participants positioned themselves by implicitly or explicitly anchoring their responses to three different but intertwining levels of social organization: interactional relations in the interview; their roles as professionals, company representatives, and interviewees; and their underlying ideological perceptions of the interview topic (Hiss 2019). In particular, ideology is expressed rather implicitly. As a basic pattern of meaning or frame of interpretation, ideology typically involves both description and prescription (i.e. understandings of how things are and should be (Verschuere 2012, 8)). As we will demonstrate, prescription's involvement in description surfaced in the interviews as a tension between reported experiences and underlying expectations.

4. Findings

We begin this section with a comprehensive quantitative overview detailing participants' positions and the use of different languages in their companies, and we examine their remarks about workplace language policies. Finally, we present an in-depth and context-sensitive analysis of the stances participants took on their experiences of diversity in their workplaces.

4.1. Diversity and participants' positions

The design of the study presupposed a set of contexts and participant role relations, which affected how all the information on language policies and practices was mediated in dialogue between participants and interviewer. Their professional expertise, their institutional roles in the companies, language competences, practices, sociolinguistic experiences, and local and regional rootedness are among the characteristics that form the participants' individual positions.

Though we selected companies rather than people when preparing the study, most participants displayed a set of typical characteristics concerning job title, geographical roots, language competences, and language use. As presented in Table 1, most participants worked in managerial positions (i.e. they were decision-makers in their companies, were responsible for personnel, and could influence language policies). All participants held positions that centrally involved workplace communication.

Most participants were high up in their organizational hierarchies. Another important difference between the participants and many employees became visible when we

Table 1. Participants' positions in their companies.

Position:	management	administration	other
Number of informants:	97 (69.3%)	25 (17.9%)	18 (12.9%)

Table 2. Participants' places of origin.

Place of origin:	same municipality	Northern Norway	rest of Norway	Europe	world
Number of informants:	89 (63.6%)	32 (22.9%)	13 (9.3%)	4 (2.9%)	2 (1.4%)

examined mobility and local rootedness. As [Table 2](#) shows, most participants worked in the same municipality they indicated as their place of origin. Only a marginally small percentage came from outside Norway.

Participants' local and regional rootedness were mirrored in their reports of their own language competences and language use at work. Of the 140 participants, 129 reported that Norwegian was their mother tongue, while three identified Sámi or Kven in addition to Norwegian, and five reported Sámi as their mother tongue. All were competent in Norwegian. Additionally, 94% reported that they had knowledge of English, which was typically the only foreign language they used at work. Describing their language practices in everyday work, 50% reported that they only used Norwegian, while 41% said they used Norwegian and English, and 5% said they also use Sámi or Kven. According to participants, competences in foreign languages other than English (e.g. German, which is taught in many Norwegian schools) were seldom relevant at work.

The language competences reported by the participants overlapped very little with the languages spoken by many employees. A considerable number reported having multilingual employees. Some employees were highly proficient in Norwegian. Others were learning it or used English or multiple available resources such as mixing languages and gestures when communicating with colleagues. In some workplaces, communication among workers took place in languages other than Norwegian or English. Some companies supported Norwegian language classes for their employees, but hardly any of the Norwegian managers or administrators reported that they made efforts to learn their employees' languages. In brief, however diverse a company's workforce was, most of its managers and administrators only used Norwegian and/or English at work.

We asked participants to describe communication practices within their companies and the languages used at work. Sixty-seven (48%) stated that only one language (usually Norwegian) was used in their companies' everyday work, while 34 (24%) reported the use of two languages, and 39 (28%) reported the use of three or more languages. [Table 3](#) provides an overview of the use of different languages at different organizational levels as reported by participants.

Table 3: Languages used in the workplaces.

Number of participants reporting specific languages used by individual employees	Number of participants reporting specific languages used within teams	Number of participants reporting specific languages used between management and employees
Norwegian (137), English (46), Lithuanian (14), Polish (13), Sámi (10), Russian (7), Finnish (6), Swedish (5), "mixture" (4), German (4), Thai (4), Latvian (3), Estonian (2), Hungarian (2), Somali (2), "Afghan" (1) Arabic (1), Bulgarian (1), Faroese (1), Icelandic (1), Italian (1), Kven (1), Portuguese (1), Slovenian (1), Spanish (1), and "other languages" (8).	Norwegian (122), English (39), Lithuanian (3), Sámi (3), "mixture" (2), Hungarian (1), and Russian (1).	Norwegian (137), English (39), Sámi (4), Lithuanian (2), "mixture" (1), Russian (1)

The differences between participants' linguistic practices and those of their employees were not only expressed in the number of languages they mentioned but also in the quality of their descriptions. Responses such as "Afghan" related to workers' country of origin rather than their languages; statements like "other languages" reveal the limits of participants' knowledge of workers' language competences and practices. This also suggests that these linguistic practices were of minor importance to participants. [Table 3](#) also shows that both historical minority languages – Sámi and Kven – were used in the workplaces, according to participants. However, the languages of recent migrants were much more commonly reported. For a more detailed discussion on the uses and positions of Sámi and Kven in the data set, see [Hiss \(2019\)](#).

The reported numbers of different languages spoken in the workplaces correlated to some extent with the type of work rather than the number of employees. Production workplaces, especially in the seafood industry, were most likely to be linguistically diverse beyond the use of Norwegian and/or English. In sum, the distribution of linguistic diversity mirrors the hierarchical segregation of the labour market and within the companies ([Søholt, Tronstad, and Vestby 2015](#); [Aure, Førde, and Magnussen 2018](#)).

4.2. Regulating language use

Companies' management of linguistic diversity is a point of importance. The participant reports summarized in [Table 3](#) suggest that, at least to some extent, language practices were regulated by participants' language competences and institutional structures within the workplaces. The use of many languages by individual employees was limited to communication among colleagues who shared the same languages. In contexts involving more employees and institutional hierarchies (i.e. communication between managers and employees), participants reported a much smaller variety of languages, in most cases just Norwegian or English.

The questionnaire contained two questions concerning explicit measures that regulated language practices. One was asked about the company's official guidelines for language; the other was about required language skills. The vast majority (88.5%) of participants stated that their companies did not have any official policies for language use at work. The responses of the remaining 11.5% varied from references to legal prescriptions for the use of specific languages in specific communicative settings (e.g. the use of Sámi according to the Sámi Act) to general appeals to communicate politely. Only two participants stated that Norwegian and English were official working languages.

[Table 4](#) summarizes participants' responses to questions concerning language skill requirements. The number of companies requiring only Norwegian skills corresponded with participants reporting that only Norwegian was used in everyday work and that no or only a few migrant workers were employed at the company. In these cases, setting up explicit language policies might seem unnecessary because everybody speaks Norwegian.

Some participants described making themselves understood in English as a minimal requirement. Others talked about fluency in Norwegian and English. Thus, there was a great variation in participants' perceptions of what their companies expected regarding language skills, which can be explained in different ways. [Angouri \(2014\)](#) argued that if companies do not commit themselves to explicit policies, they maintain strategic flexibility. It

Table 4. Number of companies that required language skills.

Norwegian	71	50.7%
English	15	10.7%
Norwegian and English	20	14.3%
Sámi and/or Norwegian	3	2.1%
No specific requirements	17	12.2%
No response	3	2.1%

may also mean that some companies either lack strategies for handling diversity and linguistic differences or cannot afford imposing specific demands on the language practices and competences of their employees. Here, the specific conditions of the region become relevant. Regardless of their language competences, migrant workers are vital to local economies, particularly to companies in peripheral areas harshly exposed to the limitations of the labour market (Søholt 2017; Solbakken and Handeland 2019).

4.3. Participants' statements

In the telephone interviews, participants' reports about their companies were discursively mediated. In this section, we analyze how four participants accounted for their experience with multilingual work practices and how they contextualized their interview responses. In all four statements, participants highlighted challenges related to linguistic diversity and reactions to them. In particular, we want to demonstrate how their descriptions of multilingual work practices involved prescriptive perceptions of how things should be.

Example 1 neatly illustrates the tensions between prescription and description. Britt managed a small, family-owned company that produced and sold food in a rural Finnmark community. The company had 10 employees: four Norwegians, four Estonians, and two Poles. Britt's position as general manager gave her the institutional power to design and implement explicit language policies. In the interview excerpt below, however, she communicates the impression of having no control over the employees' language choices by highlighting contextual conditions she indicates that she cannot influence (in this section, we present detailed transcriptions to accurately reflect the conversation; a transcription key is found at the end of the article).

Example 1

- Interviewer: har dokker noen offisielle retningslinjer for språkbruk?
Do you have any official guidelines for language use?
- Britt: (1.5) nei: men æ burde kanskje *hatt det*.
*No, but maybe I should *have that*.*
- Interviewer: ((laughs)) (.)
- Britt: [[[laughs]]]
- Interviewer: [eh eh koffor da?] eller eh h (0.5)
[Um um, why is that?] Or, um.
- Britt: det er en utfordring å så få de her eh: eh: dem som snakker samme språk å så få dem te å snakke språk- norsk. både (.) seg imellom og til oss. (.) så også ellers.h (.) til hverandre sånn at (0.6) at det felles språket blir norsk..h selv om: (.) hvis det er tre stykka i: (0.6) et rom som sitt og har pause så er det jævli kjedelig at to av dem sitt og snakker estisk og den ene ikke skjønner nåt. (1.7).hh

It's a challenge to make those, um um, those who speak the same language, to make them speak the lang- Norwegian. Both with each other and with us. And also with each other so that the common language is Norwegian. Even if. When there are three persons in a room who are sitting there and having a break, it's bloody unfortunate that two of them are speaking Estonian and one doesn't understand anything.

Interviewer: [selvføl- (.) ja:a]

[Of course. (.) Yes.]

Britt: [så det er en liten utfordring å få dem te å] (.) kommunisere på norsk. (3.8)
[So, it's a little bit of challenge to get them] (.) to communicate in Norwegian. (3.8)
(ca. 22seconds omitted)

Interviewer: ja .hh ehm: (1.7) et spørsmål som er knytta til det her. har dokker ehm .h noen spesielle krav om språkkunnskaper hos eh: dem som ska jobbe hos dokker?
Yes, um, (1.7) another question related to this. Do you have, um, any special requirements concerning the language competences of those who work in your company?

Britt: (0.6) nei vi ha'kke råd te å være så kravstor. vi må ta de vi får.

(0.6) No, we can't afford to be so demanding. We must take those who we get.

In the excerpt, when responding to the interviewer's question, Britt reacts with irony and laughter, which is echoed by the interviewer. In this way, she interpersonally anchors her response and simultaneously signals a contrast between the status quo of her workplace and an underlying perception of how things should be. In her explanation, she contrasts her wish that the common language was Norwegian with a linguistic reality she evaluates as "bloody unfortunate." Taking such a strong stance without confronting the interlocutor presumes a common ground, aligning her with the interviewer while othering the employees. Throughout the sequence, Britt allocates agency to the workers (e.g. "speaking Estonian") and finally refers to forces beyond her company ("we must take those we get"). As constructed in the interview sequence, her own agency is mainly limited to the attempt to influence the workers' practices ("make them communicate in Norwegian"). Her wish for Norwegian as a common language is neither explained nor justified but relates to her own understanding and competence and is treated as commonsensical and normative.

Example 2 shows a very similar response. Anita was an administrator in a seafood production company in Finnmark. In her everyday work, she used Norwegian and some English. Similar to Britt ("we must take those we get"), Anita stated during the interview: *norske folk vil jo ikke jobbe med fisk, så de:t (0.5) vi er nå pent nødt til å ta de eh utenlandske* ("Norwegian people don't want to work with fish, so we simply have to take the foreigners"). Anita reported that her company had many employees from Russia and the Baltic countries, most of whom could speak Russian. Many were recruited unsystematically via private networks and did not speak Norwegian or English. Russian was used extensively among the production workers in addition to some English and Norwegian. The production foremen spoke Russian, and sometimes, the company used interpreters to assist in communications between management and workers. The managers and administrators, including Anita, were Norwegians with no knowledge of Russian. None of the languages spoken in the workplace were shared by all employees. Against this background, it is striking that during the interview, Anita maintained a monolingual Norwegian ideal. Example 2 shows her response to the question about official guidelines for language use.

Example 2

- Anita: du kan si, det heng oppslag rundt på bedriften om at arbeidsspråket er norsk
You could say, there are signs hanging around in the company saying that the working language is Norwegian.
- Interviewer: m:h
- Anita: (0.6) uten at de:t (1.1) har noe å si, ser det ut før
(0.6) Not that this means anything, it seems.
- Interviewer: (0.5) okei
(0.5) Okay
- Anita: (0.6) vi er, du kan si det, åtti prosent (.) som snakker russisk med i produksjo-
nen=
(0.6) We are-. You could say that 80% of the production workers speak Russian=
- Interviewer: mm
- Anita: = (.) og da:, når dem har pause å sånt, da går det jo på russisk, så vi er i f- i
mindretall, vi som kan norsk.
*= (.) and then, when they go on breaks and the like, they speak Russian, so we are
in a minority, we who speak Norwegian.*
- Interviewer: (0.6) ja skjønner. ((writing)) korsn er det, oppleves det av og til som utfordranes
(0.6) asså det at-
*(0.6) Yes, I see. ((writing)) How is it? Do you sometimes experience that as chal-
lenging? (0.6) I mean that-*
- Anita: e:h (.) ja (.) æ sitt jo på lønn og personal og e::h, så mange gang, så vi har to- de
to lederan, som styrer produksjonen, dem snakker russisk (.) til de ansatte og
eh, du hører det snakkes i gangan, du hører at det er nåkka som foregår, du
aner ikke ka det er (.) og da må b-, må man: (.) æ bruker å gå og spørre, er
det noe som foregår, ska det være permittering, er det nåkka på gang som
æ må vite, "jajaja, okei, selvfølgelig, du ska jo få vite det". det er veldig frustrer-
anes rett å slett. (0.5) ja
*Um, yes. I'm sitting in the wages and personnel [section] and, um, so, many times,
so, we have these two leaders who manage the production. They speak Russian
to the employees and, um, you hear people are talking in the corridors. You hear
that something is going on. You don't have a clue what it is. And then you have
to-. One has to-. I use to go and ask, "Is something going on? Is it about layoffs? Is
there anything in the pipeline that I need to know about?" "Yes, yes, yes, okay, of
course we'll tell you." It's quite simply very frustrating. Yes.*

In the transcript, Anita points to Norwegian as the prescribed working language, though she does not say who put up the signs. However, this policy is neither followed by the employees nor implemented organizationally. In her interview, Anita reported that workers were recruited through family relations or private networks and are not required to have Norwegian skills. Based on what she said, it seems that the Russian-speaking foremen functioned as language brokers between workers and management. Previous research (e.g. Lüdi 2014; Lønsmann and Kraft 2018) pointed out that the language practices, competences, experiences, and communication needs of workers are different from those of managers and administrators and that the linguistic resources workers find most effective for carrying out their duties may be different from those preferred by their bosses or the majority population. Likely, the use of Russian facilitated an effective work-flow for those capable of speaking it. Nevertheless, in the transcript, Anita complains that the extensive use of Russian is a barrier to effective communication. By saying "*you could say, there are signs hanging around in the company saying that the working language is*

Norwegian. *Not that this means anything, it seems,*" she renders herself passive and allocates agency and responsibility to others.

In Anita's and Britt's statements, the subjective experiences of a multilingual reality are entangled with expectations of how things should be, a position of relative power in the workplace, and conditions within and beyond the workplace that limit this power. Both reported subjective experiences of not understanding, which they evaluated as "*bloody unfortunate*" (Example 1) and "*very frustrating*" (Example 2). Both point to the workers' agency and the labour market, which does not allow for employing only speakers of Norwegian. Additionally, speaking Norwegian was treated discursively as commonsensical and normative.

In Example 3, Ove defines the value and status of Norwegian more explicitly. He was the manager of a facility service company based in an urban community and offering cleaning, garden services, small repairs, snow clearing, and other services to companies and private households. The company had approximately 30 employees, including Norwegians, Swedes, Poles, Latvians, and Romanians. Most of the work took place where their customers were located, and often, when competences in Norwegian were not sufficient, English was used as a common language among employees and in their communications with Norwegian customers. The company required competence in either Norwegian or English from its employees. In the excerpt below, Ove answers the question about whether the company had official guidelines for language use.

Example 3

Ove: (3.3) nei (1.1) ikke annet enn at vi: e:h (0.6) prøver å få våre (0.5) medarbeidere som ikke snakker norsk til å: skjønnne verdien av eh (0.5) skal du bli: e:h godt integrert i det norske samfunnet, så: er du nødt tel å lære dæ norsk (0.5) så de:r e::h (.) prøver vi å bruke noe norsk i stedet for engelsk. (5.0) for det er en del av den norske kulturen å snakke norsk. (2.0) da (.) får dem norske venner og blir (.) integrert (1.0) på en god måte.

No, not more than that we, um, try to make our employees who don't speak Norwegian understand the value of, um, if you want to get, um, well integrated in Norwegian society, you have to learn Norwegian. Because speaking Norwegian is part of the Norwegian culture. They would find Norwegian friends and get integrated in a good way.

In the excerpt, for Ove, Norwegian is the preferred language choice. However, he does not refer to workplace communication but to integration in Norwegian society. "*It is part of the Norwegian culture to speak Norwegian*" is the basis of his argument. This argument bears the typical features of language ideology: *iconization, fractal recursivity, and erasure* (Irvine and Gal 2000). This means that the Norwegian language is understood as inherent to Norwegian culture (iconization), that this relation is projected into multiple spheres of individual life, such as friendship, integration, and work (fractal recursivity), and that other languages are not considered as means of integration (erasure). Ove's expression "*make (them) understand the value*" presents the value as given and commonsensical. Instead of foregrounding his own agency and institutional power, Ove presents learning and using Norwegian as common norms in society and workplaces, and he allocates agency and responsibility to the workers.

As Table 3 shows, participants reported that other than Norwegian, only English was frequently used in their workplaces. However, frequency does not indicate social

acceptance. English has been described as a high-status language in Norway (e.g. Bull and Lindgren 2009). Our data set contains a few cases in which the use of English was highly valued by participants because it was seen as ensuring the effectiveness and equal participation of all employees, particularly highly educated experts. In most cases, however, participants presented Norwegian as the preferred choice of workplace language. Speaking English thus appears to be a practical but unsolicited solution enabling necessary communication at the bottom of workplace hierarchies. Here, the use of English may underscore the otherness of migrant employees (Angouri and Miglbauer 2014).

Arve (Example 4) was the local manager of a fish-processing plant responsible for 23 employees from Norway, Poland, Lithuania, Afghanistan, and Somalia. During his interview, he described linguistic diversity as a major challenge and an inevitable reality. According to Arve, his company did not have any explicit policies regulating language practices at work. Though he stated that it would be best if everybody could communicate in the same language, he did not present Norwegian as ideal norm. Rather, he differentiated between understanding and expressing oneself in English as a minimum requirement for enabling a somewhat effective flow of communication. At the same time, he displayed limited insights into the workers' language practices (e.g. *æ trur de fra Somalia har fransk*, "I think those from Somalia speak French"). Example 4 shows Arve's reaction to the interviewer's question about the language skills his company expected when hiring employees.

Example 4

- Arve: (0.7) eh vi har tidligare- tidligare ikkje stilt noen krav enn eh at dem sku forstått oss på eh: (0.5) minimum engelsk. men litt- litt forskjell på de to tingane. (0.9) *Um, earlier, we did not pose any requirements than, um, that they had to understand us in, um, at least English. But there's a little difference between the two things.*
- Interviewer: ja. (2.0) .hh asså før var det sånn at dem også: (0.7) eh måtte snakke engelsk, tenker du, eller?
Yes. You mean earlier it was like that that they also, um, had to speak English, you think, or?
- Arve: (.) nei før var det sånn at hvis æ sa nåkka på engelsk så sku dem forstått ka æ sa. (.)
No, earlier it was like, if I said something in English they should have understood what I said.
- Interviewer: ja.
Yes.
- Arve: nå ska det være sånn at dem ska kunne svare meg tebakke på forstå- forståeli engelsk. (.)
Now it should be that they should be able to reply to me in understandable English.
- Interviewer: å: sånn sett. ja. (.) mm.
Oh, that way. Yes.
- Arve: (.) det er (et) vesentli forskjell. for veldig mange førstår engelsk. men dem kan ikkje uttrykke seg tebakke på (.) samme nivå. (0.5) å det e ikkje- det må vi (.) bynne å ta hensyn tel. (0.5)
That's an essential difference because many understand English, but they can't express themselves on the same level, and that's not-. We must begin to take that into account.

The allocation of agency in Arve's response differs from that of examples 1–3. Requiring productive English skills from his workers, he claims a more active role as a leader taking responsibility for the effective exchange of information. However, the statement "*we must begin to take that into account*" presents his agency as a reaction to workers' linguistic behaviour, and the workers are held responsible for that behaviour. The solution Arve suggests (requiring productive English skills) was not based on workers' practices but on his own practices and skills. His company did not offer English classes to improve workers' communication skills. He reported that they tried to offer Norwegian classes, but the workers were not interested in participating. Unlike Ove, Arve did not build on the idea of Norwegian as key to integration but rather framed expressing oneself in understandable English as a minimal requirement. Additionally, the unequal distribution of language skills and practices as well as Arve's approach to ensuring effective communication mirrored the uneven power relations in his workplace.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The four examples reveal how handling linguistic diversity at work is entangled with institutional power relations, ideological perceptions of how things are and should be, participants' own language skills and experiences, and practical conditions within and beyond a particular workplace. Diversity was more a characteristic of workers than managers and administrators, which was a reflection of participants' mobility and local rootedness, as most participants lived and worked in the same place or region they identified as their place of origin. This implies that most of them had subjective experiences of multilingualism that differed from those of migrant employees. In particular, they did not share the experience of having limited skills in a language valued most by their leaders. The quantitative data showed that these challenges and ways of encountering diversity in workplaces were not limited to isolated cases.

Additionally, only a few participants reported that their company had language policies. Their statements suggest that employers might wish to enact a clearer standardization of language choices based on the ideological perceptions of a monolingual standard. Handling linguistic diversity at work appears first and foremost as a reaction to developments outside the workplace and the employees' language skills and practices (i.e. it is the result of the dependence of local economies and labour markets on migrant workers).

Despite the fact that most surveyed companies did not have explicit language policies, participants revealed clear perceptions of how things should be in their workplaces and that they evaluated their experiences of the multilingual realities on the basis of those perceptions. In all examples, participants reported a status quo that did not conform to their perceptions of how things should be. These perceptions build on an essentialist view of language as preceding practice and functioning as a vehicle for the exchange of information. They position Norwegian as a norm for all participants and largely understate or problematize other types of linguistic practice.

Previous research by social scientists described the social segregation of migrant workers and linguistic division of workplaces and labour markets (Søholt, Tronstad, and Vestby 2015; Aure, Førde, and Magnussen 2018). The ideological perceptions that are entangled with institutional power relations and participants' stances on employees' linguistic behaviour, which themselves are based on the premises, experiences,

communicative needs, and language skills of Norwegian managers or administrators (cf. Lønsmann and Kraft 2018), may contribute to the upholding of these conditions.

Because of this study's design, the practices of a large number of employees were mediated only through the voices of participants, thus opening a small window onto the multilingual realities of workplaces. There is still a need for studies directly focusing on the positions and language practices of migrant workers in Northern Norway. However, when focusing on company representatives in positions of relative power, their constructions of agency and allocations of responsibility for challenges arising from linguistic diversity are interesting to note, as they hold workers, the market, or both responsible for at least some aspect of the challenges. This reflects a widespread attitude that migrants (rather than communities) are responsible for their own integration in Norwegian communities (Søholt, Stenbacka, and Nørgaard 2018). At the same time, in allocating agency and responsibility to others, participants in this study pointed to the limits of their own power and control. Noting this, we conclude by emphasizing the interplay of multiple different forces and conditions. Institutional relations, ideology, language practices, skills, experiences, work practices, material conditions within and beyond workplaces, and the agency of high-level employees are some of these conditions. Our participants' responses revealed that applicable knowledge about the multiple facets of multilingual practices and their entangling with social relations is needed for those who are responsible for handling linguistic diversity at work. This need is even more obvious because such challenges appear relatively widespread in the quantitative data.

Transcription key

(0.5)	pause (in seconds)
(.)	pause (<0,5s)
(word)	uncertain word
[]	overlap
word-	truncation
((laughs))	nonverbal action
=	utterance continues
eh:	prolonged
hh	breathing out
.hh	breathing in
word	smile voice

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