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ABSTRACT

This study systematically investigates how language barriers influence trust formation in multinational teams (MNTs). Based on 90 interviews with team members, team leaders, and senior managers in 15 MNTs in three German automotive corporations, we show how MNT members' cognitive and emotional reactions to language barriers influence their perceived trustworthiness and intention to trust, which in turn affect trust formation. We contribute to diversity research by distinguishing the exclusively negative language effects from the more ambivalent effects of other diversity dimensions. Our findings also illustrate how surface-level language diversity may create perceptions of deep-level diversity. Furthermore, our study advances MNT research by revealing the specific influences of language barriers on team trust, an important mediator between team inputs and performance outcomes. It thereby encourages the examination of other team processes through a language lens. Finally, our study suggests that multilingual settings necessitate a reexamination and modification of the seminal trust theories by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) and McAllister (1995). In terms of practical implications, we outline how MNT leaders can manage their subordinates' problematic reactions to language barriers and how MNT members can enhance their perceived trustworthiness in multilingual settings.

Keywords: Interpersonal Trust – Language – Multinational Teams – Cognition – Emotion

INTRODUCTION

"Companies deal with language issues every day. (…) How they do so, however, remains largely absent from the literature." This striking observation by Maclean (2006: 1377) rang true until very recently. Despite the importance of language for the efficient functioning of multinational corporations (MNCs) (Harzing & Feely, 2008; Luo & Shenkar, 2006), language effects have long been underestimated by international business researchers (Harzing, Köster, & Magner, 2011). Only since the groundbreaking research by Piekkari (see e.g. Marschan, Welch, & Welch, 1997; Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999a, 1999b) have international business and management studies recognized the importance of language as a "medium for thought" (Brannen & Doz, 2012: 80), which is "central to the process of constructing organizational, social and global realities" (Piekkari & Tietze, 2011: 267). The fact that scholars have traditionally subsumed language under the umbrella of culture (Kassis Henderson, 2005) may be a key reason why the "linguistic turn" (Tietze, 2007) of the field was delayed for so long. Although language and culture are closely intertwined (Piekkari, 2006; Welch & Welch, 2008), an increasing number of scholars has recognized the need to investigate and theorize language diversity separately (see e.g. Holden, 2008; Piekkari & Zander, 2005) to capture its unique effects.

The emerging studies in this area mostly focus on the disruptive effects of language diversity and tackle it "as a barrier to effectiveness and to doing international business due to communication problems" (Jonsen, Maznevski & Schneider, 2011: 48). Although several studies have described language barriers in terms of their manifestations in lower social integration, reduced knowledge sharing or power-authority distortions (see e.g. Lagerström & Andersson, 2003; Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman, 2005; Harzing & Feely, 2008), the field still lacks a clear definition of language barriers. To provide a working definition for the present study, we conceptualize language barriers as obstacles to effective communication, which arise if interlocutors speak different mother tongues and lack a shared language in which they all have native proficiency. Thus, whether *language diversity* leads to *language barriers* depends on the interlocutors' proficiency levels.

Extant studies on language in international business have mostly been dedicated to communication between the headquarters and subsidiaries of MNCs (see e.g. Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen, & Piekkari, 2006; Harzing et al., 2011; Harzing & Pudelko, 2013). With this focus, scholars have largely neglected a different context in which language issues are equally crucial: multinational teams (MNTs), i.e. teams including members from different national and cultural backgrounds (Earley & Gibson, 2002). Although large corporations have significantly increased their reliance on team-based management techniques (Stahl, Mäkelä, Zander & Maznevski, 2010a; Zander, Mockaitis & Butler, 2012), only a few pioneering studies (Chen, Geluykens, & Choi, 2006; Kassis Henderson, 2005; Lagerström & Andersson, 2003) have investigated language diversity in MNTs. Given that language diversity is "one of the clearest distinguishing features" (Chen et al., 2006: 680) of MNTs which can substantially impede communication (Kassis Henderson, 2005), more research on language effects on team processes is long overdue.

Trust formation is a team process which particularly merits a language sensitive investigation, as it is both crucial for the functioning of MNTs and very likely to be influenced by language effects. Considering that MNTs are often formed to fulfill integrative tasks in global organizations (Lagerström & Andersson, 2003; Buckley, Carter, Clegg, & Tan, 2005), their efficiency hinges on MNT members' social interaction (von Glinow, Shapiro, & Brett, 2004). Although interdependency is a defining characteristic of any team (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001), the integrative goals of MNTs place a particularly great weight on interdependent work. This can only be realized effectively with the help of strong interpersonal trust relationships between MNT members. Therefore, the proposition that "trust is the basic ingredient of collaboration" (Kasper-Fuehrer & Ashkanasy, 2001: 236) and "the glue that holds most cooperative relationships together" (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996: 129) is particularly significant for MNT contexts.

Several scholars have noted that language-related issues can significantly impact trust formation (Jonsen et al., 2011). For instance, Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman (2007) found a strong connection between language proficiency and perceived trustworthiness in the relationship between different units of an MNC. Feely and Harzing (2003) suggested that language barriers can distort and damage relationships

and give rise to insecurity and distrust. Neeley (2013: 485) recently demonstrated that a corporate language mandate can lead non-native speakers to distrust native speakers, fearing the latter might "deceive them because of their superior language ability". Despite the centrality of trust for team efficiency, however, only Kassis Henderson (2005) has made the connection between language and trust formation in the context of teamwork. More importantly, previous research has only established that language and trust *are* connected, but has not systematically studied the much more interesting question of *how* language barriers influence trust formation. This constitutes a striking research gap.

The lack of satisfactory theories explaining the relationship between language barriers and trust formation is best addressed with an inductive research strategy that lets theory emerge from the data (Siggelkow, 2007: 21). Based on 90 interviews in 15 MNTs in three major German automotive corporations, covering 19 nationalities and 14 mother tongues, our study provides an in-depth understanding of the micro-processes linking language and trust. On the basis of our rich insights from the MNT context we develop mid-range theory on how team members' cognitive and emotional reactions to language barriers influence cognition- and emotion-based aspects of trustworthiness and the intention or willingness to trust.

This new mid-range theory establishes a long overdue link between three major, but so far separate research areas, and makes contributions to each of them. First, we provide a more fine-grained theoretical conceptualization of language diversity than previous studies, distinguish the exclusively negative language effects from the more ambivalent effects of other diversity dimensions (for reviews see Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003; Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008), and illustrate how surface-level language diversity may create perceptions of deep-level diversity. With these novel contributions to long-standing tenets of *diversity research* we aim to encourage a more language-sensitive research agenda on diversity. Second, by revealing the specific influences of language barriers on team trust, an important mediator between team inputs and performance outcomes (Mathieu et al., 2008), our study encourages future *MNT research* to refocus their efforts from the already well-studied effects of cultural diversity towards the under-researched area of language diversity. Third, our study also enriches *trust research* by

responding to the frequent calls for context-specific models of trust (Kramer & Cook, 2004; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007), focusing in particular on multilingual environments. Unraveling the "multifaceted role of language" (Brannen, Piekkari & Tietze, 2012) for the equally multifaceted process of trust formation (Costa, 2003), our study suggests that multilingual settings necessitate a reexamination and modification of the seminal trust theories by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) and McAllister (1995).

In the remainder of this paper we first briefly review concepts from prior research on language barriers and interpersonal trust, which constitute important reference points for our investigation. Subsequently, we provide a detailed account of our inductive research design and our qualitative methodology. We then report our findings, integrate them with previous research and develop a set of theoretical propositions on this basis. These propositions are subsequently integrated into a model of how MNT members' reactions to language barriers influence different aspects of trust formation. We conclude with the theoretical and managerial implications of our model and suggest avenues for further research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Whereas inductive research focuses on the systematic discovery of theory from data and affords less importance to a priori theoretical considerations (Mantere & Ketoviki, 2013), studies following this paradigm are still guided and influenced by some initial frames of reference (Siggelkow, 2007) and use current theory as a backdrop for interpreting the data (Bansal & Corley, 2012). Our study's foundation was built around two key streams of research. The first stream is concerned with language barriers in international business and their specific influence on MNTs. The second stream investigates different forms of interpersonal trust in organizations. In the following section we will briefly review some key concepts from the language and trust literature, outline the lack of satisfactory theories connecting language barriers with interpersonal trust formation and present the research questions which guided our inductive theory building.

Language Barriers in International Business and Their Influence on MNTs

The first building block for our study is the literature on language effects in international business with particular focus on the MNT setting. Language diversity can be conceptualized on an intra-lingual level in the form of different regional dialects, professional jargons or firm-specific terminologies (see e.g. Brannen & Doz, 2012) and on an inter-lingual level in the form of differences in national languages (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Language-related research in international business is mainly concerned with the latter (see e.g. Kassis Henderson, 2005; Harzing et al., 2011). Given the salience of national languages in our own data, the present study also follows this approach.

We furthermore follow the pioneering studies on language in international business by focusing on language as a disruptive element, a barrier to effective cooperation. The field's almost exclusive focus on the negative implications of language indicates a crucial distinction between diversity in language and culture. Whereas cultural diversity may positively or negatively affect a team's communication effectiveness (Stahl et al., 2010a; Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt & Jonsen, 2010b), language diversity has exclusively been related to impediments in communication (Harzing et al., 2011). This distinction indicates that language needs to be taken "out of the 'culture box'" (Welch & Welch, 2008: 341) and studied separately.

When cycling between the extant literature on language effects in international business and our own findings during data collection and analysis, we discovered that our findings particularly tied in with prior studies on the cognitive and emotional effects of language barriers. Whereas the bulk of research in these areas has been conducted with respect to headquarters-subsidiary communication, many of the findings in this research stream are also relevant to an MNT environment.

The impact of language barriers on *cognition* captures employees' individual coping strategies with language barriers at a rational level. It can be explained by attribution theory, which helps to understand how people perceive and interpret the causes for other persons' or their own behavior (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Problematic attributions can arise between speech communities, i.e. groups set apart from each other by significant differences in language use (Gumperz, 2009). According to Kassis

Henderson (2005), each speech community considers certain forms of speech behavior as appropriate, with speakers frequently considering these norms as universal. If their expectations are not met in communication across language barriers, they may erroneously attribute language-based friction to their colleagues' personalities and consequently form negative attitudes about members of other speech communities. Once these negative attributions take on a leading role, the relationship between employees from different speech communities can quickly deteriorate (Harzing & Feely, 2008).

Prior research has also found strong language effects on the *emotional* states of MNC employees. According to Neeley, Hinds and Cramton (2012: 2), less proficient speakers of an MNC's official language often feel "restricted and reduced" and "apprehensive and anxious". They tend to cope with these feelings by avoiding meetings with native speakers, frequently switching to their mother tongue, and grouping with fellow native speakers. Consequently, they exclude speakers of other languages, who then feel angry and frustrated. Hostile stereotyping and emotional conflicts are likely to ensue, again increasing miscommunication, uncertainty and anxiety (Harzing & Feely, 2008).

Although the research reviewed above provides *some* indications about possible language effects in the MNT environment, findings are still fragmented, because authors have devoted little attention to the conceptualization of language diversity. The fact that diversity in mother tongues between MNT members forms part of *surface-level (demographic) diversity*, which is readily noticed (Harrison, Price, Gavin & Florey, 2002), easily obscures the *deep-level*, less straightforward aspects of language *diversity*. The intricacies of this deep-level diversity can be captured in Harrison and Klein's (2007) distinction between diversity as variety or disparity. The authors speak of *variety* if members of a group differ in relevant knowledge or experience. Given that speakers of different mother tongues hold separate "batches" of knowledge (Harrison & Klein, 2007: 1204), language diversity constitutes a form of variety in MNTs. *Disparity* exists if group members differ on the "socially valued assets or resources" they hold (Harrison & Klein, 2007: 1203). Since language diversity in MNTs is usually manifested in different proficiency levels in a shared language (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013), which deliver power to the most fluent individuals (Welch & Welch, 2008), it also constitutes *disparity* in MNTs.

Against the backdrop of the emerging literature on language barriers in international business and its unrealized conceptual potential with respect to trust research, our study will provide a fine-grained answer to the following first research question: *"How do MNT members react to language barriers?"* In response to this question, our study will provide a carefully grounded and comprehensive picture of MNT members' cognitive and emotional reactions to language barriers.

Key Antecedents and Conceptualizations of Trust

The second foundation for our work is the research on interpersonal trust in organizations. Although perspectives on trust vary between disciplines (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998) and between scholars (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007), its definition as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (Mayer et al., 1995: 712) is broadly adopted. According to (Mayer et al., 1995), trust relationships involve two specific parties: a trusting party (trustor) and a party to be trusted (trustee). The single most important antecedent to trust (Costa, 2003) is a trustor's assessment of a trustee's trustworthiness, i.e. the "characteristics that inspire positive expectations" among trustors (Colquitt et al., 2007: 909). Since a trustor judgment of a trustee's trustworthiness is entirely based on his or her subjective perceptions (Mayer et al., 1995), it may be obscured by language barriers.

Trust research has established a wide range of aspects that influence perceived trustworthiness and consequently leads to the formation of different forms of trust (for reviews see e.g. Kramer, 1999; Rousseau et al., 1998). Although authors use varied terminology, the substantial overlap between well-established trust models (see e.g. Mayer et al., 1995; McAllister, 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998) helps to group these aspects around a few major themes. Cognitive and emotional antecedents to perceived trustworthiness and the related trust forms have attracted the most scholarly attention.

The assessment of partners' trustworthiness based on evidence about their past track record (McAllister, 1995) inspires *cognition-based trust*, i.e., "rational reasons for trust" (Noteboom & Six, 2003:

8). Mayer et al. (1995) and Schoorman et al. (2007) refine our understanding of cognitive bases for trust by distinguishing three specific sub-categories of cognition-based trustworthiness. First, a trustee perceived to have high task-related competencies conveys trustworthiness based on *ability* (ability-based trust). Second, a trustee believed to adhere to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable exhibits trustworthiness based on *integrity* (integrity-based trust). Third, a trustee perceived to have favorable intentions towards the trustor beyond self interest conveys trustworthiness based on *benevolence* (benevolence-based trust).

In addition to rational-cognitive sources, the literature also increasingly recognizes emotions as important sources of trust (see e.g. Williams, 2007). *Affect*- (McAllister, 1995) or *emotion-based trust* (Noteboom & Six, 2003) is said to rest on the emotional bonds between individuals, attributions concerning the motives for others' behavior and the belief that interpersonal care and concern are reciprocated. This "faith" or emotional security (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985) increases a person's willingness to depend on the other person (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998).

McKnight et al. (1998: 474) further refine the concept of trust by distinguishing the above detailed perceptions or *beliefs* about a trustee's trustworthiness from the trustor's situational *intention* to trust, "meaning that one is willing to depend on the other person in a given situation". This intention is not only influenced by beliefs about the trustee's trustworthiness, but also by the trustor's perceptions of the situation: Only if a trustor perceives a situation to be "in proper order" (McKnight et al., 1998: 474) does he or she intend to trust others. The present study will discuss these situational perceptions as far as they are influenced by language barriers.

Our investigation ties the emerging research on language barriers in international business together with previous studies on interpersonal trust in organizations and reveals previously unexplored parallels between these two separate streams of research. Whereas the former identified cognitive and emotional effects of language barriers between organizational members, the latter focuses on cognition- and emotion-based aspects of trustworthiness and trust forms. Authors identifying language barriers as obstacles to trust formation (see e.g. Feely & Harzing, 2003; Lagerström & Andersson, 2003; Neeley,

2013; Piekkari, 2006) have already hinted at possible connections between these two discrete research streams. However, so far these connections have not been systematically explored. This is surprising, since effective international management requires a profound understanding of how the "multilingual realities" (Fredriksson et al., 2006) of modern MNCs influence trust. Our study addresses this important gap with particular focus on the MNT context, which is characterized by both a high need for trust and a high degree of language variety and disparity. Consequently, our second research question is: "*How do MNT members' reactions to language barriers influence the formation of different forms of trust?"*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Birkinshaw, Brannen and Tung (2011) identified multicultural teams as a particularly complex phenomenon, which should be newly conceptualized and interpreted through qualitative studies. We argue that the same is true for multi*lingual* teams. Given that the relationship between language barriers and trust in MNTs has not yet been systematically investigated, an inductive and theory generating approach was considered most appropriate (Siggelkow, 2007: 21). This approach is well suited for the investigation of complex subject areas (Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Suddaby, 2006), as it brings us "closer to theoretical constructs" (Siggelkow, 2007: 22) than any other approach and allows us to gain an "up-close and grounded" (Birkinshaw et al., 2011: 575; Brannen et al., 2012: 3) understanding of the micro-processes under study. As suggested by Siggelkow (2007), Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), we grounded our study in prior research, namely theories on language effects in international management and interpersonal trust in organizations. Although the specification of potentially important constructs from the literature regarding the *kind* of trust formation provided some focus to our data collection (Eisenhardt, 1989), we didn't have any preconceived notions about *how* language barriers influence trust formation in MNTs. Following Eisenhardt's (1989) seminal guidelines on case study research, we aim to inductively build mid-range theory, i.e. theory "applicable to limited conceptual ranges" (Merton, 1968: 51), which

abstracts from special empirical phenomena to create verifiable general propositions. Through "taking a medium-size slice" of a problem (Daft & Lewin, 1993: ii), mid-range theories address issues that are large enough to make a significant contribution, but small enough to be studied in depth. The philosophical orientation of Eisenhardt's approach to inductive theory building can be characterized as positivistic (Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011). In our objective to build mid-range theory we follow this approach, but our exploratory study deviates from Eisenhardt in aiming at an in-depth understanding and rich descriptions of our research context. We therefore designed our study to yield a rich content base of interview data from which to generate theoretical propositions (Mantere & Ketoviki, 2013). Our unit of data collection is the MNT. Specifically, we studied 15 MNTs in three German automotive corporations allowing us to cross-check and compare results.

Research Setting

In order to keep home country and industry constant and therefore be better able to compare teams, we conducted all our investigations in a single country and a single industry: the German automotive industry. The automotive sector is of particular interest, given its global reach and size in terms of turnover and employment numbers. This translates into a considerable worldwide importance of this sector. Furthermore, it is characterized by relatively few MNCs which are traditionally regarded as representing cutting-edge management practice (Barnes & Morris, 2008) due to the complexity of their products, the global nature of their markets and the intensity of worldwide competition. MNCs operating in such a global, complex and competitive environment pose significant challenges for MNTs, rendering this sector ideal for our investigation. The German context is of particular interest here, because the German automotive firms can be considered rather successful, suggesting the possibility of sophisticated management practices. In addition, German management has for years been under-represented in the English-language management literature (Holden, 2008). Additionally, this context entails advantages related to the background of the authors. According to Morgan and Smircich (1980), the researchers'

experience and their ability to understand the phenomena under study can be an important advantage in making sense of their data. Two of the three authors speak the home country language German as their mother tongue and are very familiar with German business culture. The third author understands German very well as a second language. This helped to make sense of respondents' accounts in a way that preserved the authenticity of their perspectives (Langley, 1999).

Our study includes three of the seven major players in the German automotive industry, for which we use the pseudonyms GERMANDRIVE, GERMANAUTO and GERMANCAR. We conducted in-depth investigations in 15 teams, five in each corporation. Two of the remaining four German automakers were not included, because they form part of the same corporate group as one of the companies already represented in our study. The last two players were left out since they are part of American automotive groups. Comparisons of different teams within the same firm can help us to look beyond team idiosyncrasies, whereas comparisons between teams in different firms can indicate the influences of organizational culture on language use and team processes. Sampling multiple teams across organizational contexts offers a particularly powerful research design (Mathieu et al., 2008), as it allows us to retain only the relationships that are replicated across most or all of the MNTs (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Welch et al., 2011). Given that parsimony and robustness characterize superior theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007: 30), a focus on recurring findings can significantly increase the quality of our propositions and mid-range theory.

To sample MNTs with the highest possible theoretical relevance for our research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994), we purposefully sought out the most information-rich cases (Patton, 2002) in terms of language barriers and trust. Our first sampling criterion was an MNT's language variety (Harrison & Klein, 2007), i.e. we selected MNTs with a high number of different mother tongues which are, in addition, well spread across team members. 14 of the MNTs under study include members of three or more mother tongues. The one exception of team AUTO4 is due to the fact that we aimed to also sample native speakers of Russian, the ninth most influential language worldwide (Amadú,

Esperanca, Pereira, & Amaral-Baptista, 2013), yet the corporations under study only serviced the Russian market with bi-national teams. Where possible, we also aimed for MNTs with a high linguistic distance (Chiswick & Miller, 2005) between members' native languages. Overall, our sample covers respondents from 19 countries, speaking 14 different mother tongues. German-speaking respondents constituted the largest single group in the sample. This allowed the interviewer, who speaks German as her mother tongue, to establish very good rapport with many respondents and profoundly understand the cultural context of their working environment. In many cases the interviewer even shared respondents' local dialect, which helped them to speak in a natural and relaxed fashion and thus stimulated particularly rich accounts of their experiences.

To investigate team settings in which trust formation could not be substituted by rules and routines, we furthermore searched for MNTs with "less structured, less routine, more ambiguous" tasks which "require higher levels of interdependence" (Stahl et al., 2010b: 695). Given that higher levels of interdependence required by a team's task are connected with more communication incidents and more frequent meetings (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000), we operationalized this criterion by selecting teams which required particularly frequent communication and extensive meetings to tackle their tasks. To meet this criterion and additionally enable personal interviews with a large number of team members, we selected MNTs which were primarily co-located.

To uncover possible variations in language effects across relevant team characteristics (Locke, 2001) and thereby probe the robustness of our emerging theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994), we sampled teams which followed different language policies. Whereas the majority of teams used English, the lingua franca of international business, as their working language, others used German, the home country language. The remaining teams did not regulate language use and allowed members to switch at discretion. One team also brought in interpreters if needed. We also included many different functional areas across all three companies, spanning the value chain from research and development, purchasing and production to sales and including corporate functions such as IT, human resources, cost planning and

business development. Some cross-functional teams were also sampled. To investigate language effects in different stages of team development, we furthermore sampled MNTs with varying tenures. With the exception of one team in GERMANDRIVE, which had been in existence for eight years, all teams were between six months and three years old when interviews were conducted. These differences in team tenures allow us to investigate language effects in different stages of team development. Team sizes ranged from 4 to 42 members. Studying such a diverse set of MNTs helps to develop propositions which are firmly grounded in varied empirical evidence and thereby enhances the robustness of the resulting mid-range theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Table 1 summarizes the relevant characteristics of the investigated teams and interviewees.

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Data Collection

Our dataset consists of 90 semi-structured and problem-centered interviews conducted in 2011 and 2012 with all 15 leaders of the investigated MNTs, 67 team members and 8 senior managers above the team level. Our research questions about reactions to language barriers and their influence on trust antecedents like perceived trustworthiness were best addressed by means of qualitative interviewing, as it enabled us "to learn about perceptions and reactions known only to those to whom they occurred" (Weiss, 1994: 10), in our case the leaders and members of MNTs. The interviews provided us with access to informants' "inner events", including cognitions such as thoughts, beliefs or decisions and emotions such as feelings, strivings or impulses (Weiss, 1994: 75). Semi-structured interviews ensure a certain degree of consistency in questions and consequently secure comparability between respondents and teams, while allowing for important but unanticipated issues to emerge (Myers, 2008). Problem-centered interviews are geared towards eliciting interviewees' perceptions of and reflections about a specific problem. Following the principle of induction, these interviews start with open questions allowing respondents to unfold their subjective views of the problem. The interviewer gradually makes these questions more specific to elicit concrete examples of interviewees' experiences and clarify abstractions or unclear terms (Witzel, 2000).

We argue that problem-centered interviews are particularly well suited for theory-generation as they allow interviewers to use their "inevitable previous knowledge" (Witzel, 2000: 2) to develop interview questions, bring out respondents "original view" by focusing on what they perceive to be important and secure the interviewer's understanding through probing questions.

Our semi-structured interview guide for team members and leaders had three parts. The first, rather brief section served to gather background information on the respondent, team composition, team tasks and member interdependencies. The second section was dedicated to language practices and investigated which languages were used in spoken and written communication and how strongly proficiency levels diverged in the teams. We specifically asked members to rate their own proficiency in the MNT's shared language and compare it with their colleagues' proficiency. The third and most extensive interview section was designed to investigate the influence of language barriers on organizational behavior in MNTs. This section focused, among others, on interviewees' reactions to language barriers (research question 1) and the impact of language barriers on trust (research question 2). We probed respondents specifically for extensive descriptions and interpretations of critical incidents to aid our information gathering. Furthermore, interviewees were asked to reflect on changes in critical incidents over their team's life. Although we are aware of the limitations of retrospective data (Flick, 2009) and acknowledge that our cross-sectional research design does not allow for a longitudinal analysis, we argue that respondents' reflections on changes combined with comparisons between MNTs of different tenures help us understand if and how time moderates language effects on trust.

To accommodate our respondents' train of thoughts, we kept the order of questions flexible. As recommended by Myers (2008), we remained open to new themes during the entire process of data collection and continuously refined our interview guide in the light of emerging theory. For example, we initially did not expect emotional reactions to language barriers to be very salient. However, since emotions featured strongly in interviewees' critical incident descriptions, we soon included them into our interview protocol.

To capture the full range of language variety we aimed to interview team members from as many different nationalities and mother tongues as possible. Our sample covers 19 of the 23 nationalities and 14 of the 16 native languages represented in the 15 teams. With the recommendation of theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in mind, we furthermore sought to include the entire range of language-related disparity (Harrison & Klein, 2007) and sampled respondents with different levels of English (in most cases the MNT working language) proficiency and different levels of German (language of the companies' home country, in some cases also the working language) skills. Furthermore, we included the leaders of all 15 teams. Since they are expected to foster cooperation through competent leadership, their perceptions of language effects and trust formation are especially relevant for our study. Including a variety of perspectives, coming from managers at different hierarchical levels, mitigates the potential bias of any individual respondent (Golden, 1992) and enables especially rich theory building. Our theoretically guided informant choice ensured that data saturation (Locke, 2001) was reached after around two thirds of our interviews. Nevertheless, we continued interviewing to broaden the range of team functions and interviewees' mother tongues, thereby ensuring that saturation had really been achieved.

Since the organizational context strongly influences MNT processes (Jackson et al., 2003; Mathieu et al., 2008), we also conducted interviews with senior managers above the team level in order to go beyond the inner working of our teams. These individuals were interviewed primarily about their company's corporate culture and language policies.

The interviews with German or English native speakers were conducted in their mother tongue. Team leaders and members of other nationalities were interviewed in either German or English, depending on which option they felt most comfortable with. One might argue that interviewing the speakers of the twelve other mother tongues that were included in our sample in their respective native language as well might have improved rapport and enhanced their critical incident descriptions. However, next to the practical impossibility of such an undertaking, interviewees were used to speaking either English or German in their daily team practice. As a result, the investigated effects also surfaced with sufficient clarity in interviews held in a second language. Interviews lasted 45 minutes to one hour on average with

the shortest interview taking 25 minutes and the longest 1 hour and 46 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in their original languages following the conventions formulated by Bryman and Bell (2007), yielding over two thousand double-spaced pages of transcripts. Core passages of the interviews conducted in German were translated to English. In the findings section below, translated quotes are marked with "TR".

Upon finalization of the data collection phase, all 90 respondents were provided with an eight-page summary of findings and practical recommendations. To provide a check on the validity of our observations and conclusions, we also conducted a round of feedback with key informants, asking them to reflect upon our interpretations. The additional statements respondents provided in their feedback emails, phone calls or in subsequent meetings were also included into our data analysis.

Data Analysis

Inductive studies are characterized by the fact that theorizing occurs during and after data collection (Patton, 2002). As recommended by Locke (2001), we therefore already initiated the analytical process parallel to data collection using an "open coding" technique (also see Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in the Atlas.ti qualitative research software. In this process, every passage of the interview was studied to determine what exactly had been said and each passage was labeled with an appropriate provisional code. All transcripts were coded with English labels. Some codes were taken directly from the data, i.e. labels reflected respondents' exact words. For instance, respondents talked about colleagues "hiding behind the language barrier". We assigned this code to any statements directly related to this reaction (e.g., "It seems to me Chinese colleagues are sometimes hiding behind the language") or information which we interpreted as being related (e.g., "When people don't deliver on their promises, they sometimes like to take advantage of the language gap, so that they can say 'We misunderstood each other'."). Other codes were informed by the literature and marked theoretical concepts reflected in our data (e.g., the statement "As soon as the tiniest problem arises, they immediately switch into German" generated the code "code-switching").

In the subsequent step of analysis, we proceeded from a mainly descriptive to a more conceptual level by bringing together different first-order codes that linked together through higher-order categories. To tease out these categories, we followed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001) and compared our data in different ways. First, we examined the consistency of each single interview by comparing different parts of it. Second, we juxtaposed different interviews within each team to compare the perceptions of team colleagues. Third, we compared the statements of team leaders and members to bring out the influence of different hierarchical levels. Fourth, the data from each team were aggregated and compared amongst each other. Finally, we juxtaposed the results from different companies to examine the influence of different organizational contexts and validated our findings against the information provided by senior managers. In the course of this comparative process, connections between previously fragmented codes emerged. For instance, the codes "fear of loss of face", "feeling of insecurity" and "language-based inhibition" were integrated into the higher-order category "language-based anxiety". We cycled back and forth between the data, codes and categories in an iterative fashion until no new categories emerged and saturation was reached (Locke, 2001). In the final step of analysis we arranged these "clusters of meaning" (Creswell, 2003; Myers, 2008) in relation to each other and integrated them into a set of core findings explaining how MNT members' reactions to language barriers influence different forms of trust. Theoretical memos (Glaser, 1978) were recorded throughout the data analysis process. Tying the insights that emerged from our interview data to the extant literature enhanced the internal validity and the conceptual level of our inductively built mid-range theory.

Coding was predominantly done by the first author, with emerging categories being intensely discussed among co-authors during the entire process of data analysis. We conducted an additional reliability check by having a research assistant independently code ten transcripts. Her coding was compared with the coding conducted by the first author based on the same set of transcripts. Very high reliabilities were usually obtained - and in the rare cases of differing interpretations we adjusted the coding scheme (clarifying definitions of codes) until the reliability was satisfactory.

FINDINGS, PROPOSITIONS AND MODEL BUILDING

The following presentation of findings, their integration with previous studies, the subsequent development of theoretical propositions and their ultimate integration into a comprehensive model reflect the epistemological process of inductive mid-range theory building. The section is structured according to the thematic blocks which emerged from our data. First, we will explore different cognitive reactions to language barriers and their impact on perceived ability- and integrity-based trustworthiness. Second, we will outline reactions that are both cognitively and emotionally motivated and show their influence on perceived benevolence-based trustworthiness. Third, we analyze MNT members' emotional reactions to language barriers and how they impede MNT members' emotion-based intention or willingness to trust. On this basis we ultimately integrate our findings and propositions into a comprehensive trust model for the multilingual MNT context.

Cognitive Reactions to Language Barriers and their Implications on Trust in MNTs

Language-based attributions of low competence and their impact on perceived ability-based trustworthiness. Across all three companies and all 15 teams we identified two main ways in which language barriers influenced MNT members' cognitions about each other and how these cognitions influenced perceived trustworthiness. The first salient theme centered on the relationship between team members' proficiency in the shared team language, their perceived professional standing and ability-based trustworthiness. A Japanese respondent reported how a fellow countryman's difficulties with English as the team language kept colleagues from recognizing his high technical skills:

> I know a good guy from Japan. When I talk to him in Japanese, he gives me the precise information about what I want to know, what I need. But his English is a disaster! And when I talk to Germans and ask them "What do you think about this guy?" they say: "His English is so bad, he takes so much time in the meetings to explain himself, nobody understands what he tries to explain." For me he's very good technically. But for other people it takes more time to believe in his abilities, because of this communication problem. (Japanese DRIVE1 member 10)

This Japanese engineer had been assigned to a cross-functional MNT at GERMANDRIVE's headquarters to bring in his extensive knowledge of specifications required for the Japanese market. However, his lack

of proficiency in the shared language English kept him from gaining a professional standing corresponding to his abilities. A Chinese HR manager explained this effect:

> If you speak in a flawed way you don't come across like a professional, don't look competent and secure. This probably also leads to you being evaluated lower on your work. My colleagues probably wonder: "Does Miss X know the process at all?" This is seen as a lack of competence and knowledge, although it's really just about wording. (Chinese AUTO1 member 4, TR)

These worries were echoed by many respondents. They were based on frequent and frustrating experiences, since low language proficiency was easily mistaken for a general lack of abilities. MNT members saw the cause of their colleagues' problems in expressing themselves in their low task competence, i.e. they attributed low task competence to their colleagues (Kelley & Michela, 1980):

> Imagine a case where there is a German colleague doing a presentation. If his communication skills are not strong, it could be perceived as, well, as if this person isn't as smart. (American CAR5 member 4)

Whereas this interviewee already recognized the underlying issue, the following statement of a German engineer illustrates the persistence of language-based attributions of low competence:

> I frequently have the impression that those who find it difficult to conduct a technical conversation in a foreign language are generally not very articulate and have problems with coherent argumentation. (German DRIVE2 member 2, TR)

This quote lends support to Piekkari's (2006) finding that a lack of proficiency in the corporate language may in extreme cases be interpreted as stupidity.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The interview excerpts in Table 2 further highlight how MNT members attributed low task competence to colleagues with low proficiency in the shared language. Whereas similar effects emerged in all our teams, the magnitude of language influences on team members' perceived technical competence varied depending on a team's functional area and tasks. Low proficiency in the team language appeared least important on the shop floor, where hands-on skills take precedence, or in technical development, where expertise may be conveyed to some extent through language-independent design drawings or diagrams. Even in these functional areas, however, language proficiency was seen as "absolutely decisive" as soon as results need to be presented and discussed. Consequently, language-based attributions of low

competence were most salient in cross-functional, HR, marketing or sales teams, which are highly dependent on the spoken word. These findings are consistent with Hall and Hall's (1990) distinction between low- and high-context communication: technical tasks can mostly be addressed by sharing facts through low context communication, whereas people-oriented tasks require more intricate high context communication.

We equally found language-based attributions of low competence in teams using English, German or a mix of both languages. However, we found a clear connection between the magnitude of these attributions and the extent of disparity in proficiency levels in the team language. The larger the differences in team members' proficiency in the team language, the more individuals with high proficiency erroneously attributed low task competency to less proficient colleagues. MNT members with high skill levels in the shared language were often unaware of their less proficient colleagues' difficulties and consequently tended to look down on them. In contrast, MNT members with lower skills were less prone to this type of attributions. Although they often found it very hard to grasp the ideas of other low-proficiency team members and were therefore not entirely free from these negative attributions, their own language difficulties constantly reminded them of the difference between language proficiency and task competence. The importance of *relative* language proficiency became evident in all our teams independent of their chosen working language. It appeared both in relationships between native and non-native speakers, as well as fluent and less fluent non-native speakers of an MNT's team language. While disparity in proficiency levels may also be present in *bi*national settings, our investigation of distinctly *multi*national team constellations demonstrated that differences in MNT members' linguistic distance to the team language heightened this effect. MNTs in which some members faced a high linguistic distance (e.g. Japanese speaking English), whereas others faced a lower distance (e.g. Germans speaking English) or none at all (e.g. US-Americans speaking English) appeared particularly prone to this effect.

Language-based attributions of low competence were found in teams of all sizes. Comparisons between MNTs of different tenures furthermore demonstrated that these negative attributions already emerged very early in a team's life. Our interviews in older teams such as DRIVE3 suggest that they

remained remarkably stable over time, indicating a high robustness of MNT members' first impressions about their colleagues' competency. These results contribute a new facet to a so far inconclusive debate: On the one hand, previous studies found the negative effects of diversity to decrease over time (see e.g. Jehn & Mannix, 2001). On the other hand, Stahl et al. (2010b) found higher team tenure to be associated with higher conflict and less effective communication. The present study, in contrast, found only negligible effects of tenure on language effects in MNTs.

These results extend and strengthen prior research in linguistics, nursing, business and sociology which established a connection between speakers' foreign accent and their perceived competence in the relationships between teachers and students (McLean, 2007), physicians and patients (Rubin, Healy, Gardiner, Zath, & Moore, 1997), salespersons and customers (Tsalikis, DeShields, & LaTour, 1991) or in controlled laboratory environments (Foddy & Riches, 2000). Overall, our findings strengthen Marschan-Piekkari et al.'s (1999a; also see Piekkari, 2006) and Brett, Behfar and Kern's (2006) findings that otherwise highly capable employees may appear unintelligent in communication across language barriers, because their professional competence is hidden behind the language barrier. Brett et al. (2006) rightly categorized this effect as one of the main challenges in MNT management. Accordingly, we propose:

P 1a: MNT members attribute low task competence to colleagues with relatively lower proficiency in the shared language.

Language-based attributions of low task competence were clearly erroneous, given that team leaders and senior managers repeatedly highlighted that MNT members were primarily selected for their task expertise. These selection policies were in accordance with the understanding of German organizations as "well-oiled machines" (Hofstede, 1991). However, if language barriers obscure team members' capabilities, which form the basis of cooperative interdependencies, they produce momentous impediments to team processes. A German IT developer describes how mutual understanding builds and language-based restraint hinders trust and willingness to cooperate:

> When you first meet a person you form an impression of him or her. In my team there are two to three guys about whom I said to myself right away: "Hey, you can pull this project off with them,

> because they asked the right questions and they understood what it's all about." And there are five or six about whom I thought: "Oh well, they were just here because someone sent them." Maybe they were just silent because the language was challenging for them? But this first impression is decisive about whom you will call if there is a problem, with whom you feel to have a shared interest. (German DRIVE4 member 3, TR)

We found that negative attributions about task competence based on language fluency directly influenced MNT members' judgments about each other's trustworthiness, thereby mediating between language barriers and perceptions of trustworthiness. It became apparent that our respondents were more willing to trust team colleagues whom they believed to competently fulfill their share of the common task:

> To build trust you need to have the feeling that the partner knows what he is doing. If he promises something, you need to know that he can do it right. (Italian AUTO3 member 4, TR)

This connection between perceived competence and trustworthiness might have been especially salient in the very "Technik"-based German automotive industry, which is characterized by employees' pride in and focus on superior engineering skills. Overall, our findings support Krebs, Hobman and Bordia (2006) as well as Mockaitis, Rose and Zettining (2009), who highlight that the confidence team members have in each other's expertise is an important determinant of team trust. Similarly, according to Mayer et al. (1995) and Schoorman et al. (2007), ability-based trustworthiness hinges on the degree to which a trustee is perceived to have high task-related competencies. The importance of perceived competence is also highlighted by Colquitt et al. (2007: 910), who state that "ability has become one of the more commonly discussed components of trustworthiness". Our results showed that an MNT member's task-related competencies may be obscured by a lack of language proficiency. We therefore propose that:

P 1b: Language-based attributions of low competence reduce the perceived ability-based trustworthiness of MNT members.

Language-based attributions of low dependability and their impact on perceived integrity-based trustworthiness. A second salient cognitive reaction to language barriers that emerged from our data centered on the relationship between proficiency in the shared language and perceived dependability. We found that simple linguistic misunderstandings and the subsequent unmet expectations could misguide MNT members' judgments about their colleagues' dependability. When language barriers were present,

misunderstandings were very likely to arise, since the meaning of a statement may be changed by a single word:

> For example, the word “not” is very important: Is a statement negative or positive? For example: “I cannot do anything”. Some people miss “not” or other negative words. In that case they understand the complete opposite of what was meant. (Japanese DRIVE4 member 4)

This Japanese team member found it particularly hard to understand negations. In English you would answer the question “You haven’t done this yet?” with “No (I haven’t)”. However, in Japanese the answer would be “Yes (you are right, I haven’t done this yet)”. Misunderstandings of this kind are of course particularly severe, as they turn a statement into its complete opposite. While such basic failures to understand may have been rare, examples of similarly momentous misunderstandings abound in our data. As already noted for language-based attributions of low task competence, the potential for linguistic misunderstanding was found to increase with disparity in proficiency levels and linguistic distance in MNTs. However, even between Germanic languages like English and German, misunderstandings frequently arose:

> There are certain words like recommended vs. required, must vs. should. Somehow this got a little confused with the way people interpreted it or what we thought it meant. We actually had to work pretty hard to try to define what the real policy was trying to say about what must definitely be provided or whether you just should do this and whether you would get paid or not. (American CAR5 member 5)

Somewhat surprisingly, our comparisons between MNTs with shorter and longer tenures have shown that misunderstandings were not limited to the early stages of team development. Interviewees’ retrospective accounts yielded similar findings: Although many respondents from older MNTs recalled getting used to their colleagues’ way of speaking after some time and believed that team communication had improved compared to the early days of cooperation, they reported that misunderstandings still arose frequently even after several years of cooperation. Furthermore, we found language-based misunderstandings to arise irrespective of the MNTs’ language policies. We also found no connection between the frequency of misunderstandings and an MNT’s functional area or size. The former result indicates that the possibility to share factual information through design drawings or diagrams in technical areas does not preclude misunderstandings, which primarily arise in relation to interpersonal issues of interdependency and

coordination. The latter finding is surprising, considering that Stahl et al. (2010b) found a negative relationship between the size of diverse teams and their communication effectiveness. It once more highlights the uniqueness of language effects compared to other diversity dimensions.

We found language-based misunderstandings to be highly problematic, as they frequently kept MNT members from fully understanding their task assignments. Not having understood what they were asked to do, MNT found themselves unable to meet their colleagues' expectations:

> If I don't understand what my counterpart expects from me I have of course no chance to meet his expectations. (German DRIVE4 member 1, TR)

Our findings support Mortensen and Beyene's (2009) observation that linguistic misunderstandings not only lead to unmet expectations, but in consequence also make colleagues appear unpredictable:

> Misunderstandings easily lead to disappointments. You agree on things, they are done, and then you find out: This is all wrong! Then you have a conflict. I currently have this dilemma with my Indian colleagues. I tell them: "I need this IT specification by this certain date" and I suppose that they understood what I want. But, well, I can't really tell if we will discover possible misunderstandings in time or if they will remain until the deadline. (German DRIVE4 member 3, TR)

If MNT members failed to recognize that these disappointments were caused by language barriers, they tended to attribute this friction to the colleague's character or work ethic and perceived the colleague as undependable. By underestimating the degree to which unmet expectations were caused externally by the multilingual environment and simultaneously overestimating the extent to which they were due to their colleagues' internal dispositions, MNT members committed a fundamental attribution error (Sabini, Siepmann, & Stein, 2001). This phenomenon has been discussed extensively in social psychology (see e.g. Langdridge & Butt, 2004). Whereas most interviewees recognized that unmet expectations were often caused by language barriers, the impression that their counterpart was not true to his or her word still lingered. Moreover, even those interviewees who did see a connection between unfulfilled promises and linguistic misunderstandings often attributed bad intentions to their counterparts, accusing them to "hide behind the language barrier" and simulate non-understanding as a way to eschew unwanted tasks.

> In that concrete example many people were sitting together, we agreed on something, everyone nodded and three months later we noticed that no one seems to have understood or wanted to understand. People like to take advantage of this in order to say "I haven't caught this." From my

> experience I would say that you often cannot be sure if they really didn't understand or just act as if they didn't, just to restart the discussion again later and play out the language barrier to their advantage. (German AUTO5 member 3, TR)

Although we cannot ascertain to what degree allegations like these are justified, they clearly demonstrate that linguistic misunderstandings can create very negative attributions among MNT members.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The interview excerpts in Table 3 illustrate different instances of misunderstandings, which led to unmet expectations or gave rise to accusations of "hiding behind the language barrier". These consequently created attributions of low dependability among MNT members. Given the pervasiveness of this particular form of the fundamental attribution error, we propose that:

P 2a: MNT members attribute low dependability to colleagues with relatively lower proficiency in the shared language.

Similar to ability-based trustworthiness, we found that attributions of low dependability mediated the relationship between language barriers and MNT members' judgments about each other's trustworthiness. This relationship may be particularly strong in our specific research context, given that German managers tend to spend much time and effort on making decisions, but subsequently expect team members to stick to these decisions exactly (Pudelko, 2006). Along these lines, a German team leader highlighted the importance of team members' dependability for their perceived trustworthiness:

> The first point about work-related trust that occurs to me is dependability. I need to know that if I discuss something with a team member, he will do as he promised. If I know that he will do the things we agreed upon, then I do not only seem in him a dependable team member – I can also build trust in him. (German DRIVE3 leader, TR)

In accordance with Mishra's (1996) finding that inconsistencies between words and action decrease trust, a German IT developer explained:

> When I tell a colleague "I expect you to do this and I trust you will do this", but he doesn't deliver three or four times and cannot plausibly explain why it didn't work – then I can't trust him anymore. That's true for an international colleague just like it is for a German – the difference is that I might not have understood the guy because of the language barrier, and this makes things much more difficult. (German DRIVE4 member 2, TR)

As explained by Stahl et al. (2010a), mutual understanding is closely connected to interpersonal trust between team members. If linguistic misunderstandings impaired an MNT member's perceived dependability, his or her perceived trustworthiness was reduced simultaneously. More specifically, we found attributions of low dependability to diminish MNT members' integrity-based trustworthiness, which depends on their perceived willingness to "adhere to written or verbal promises" (Heffernan, 2004: 115) or the "extent to which the party's actions are congruent with his or her words" (Mayer et al., 1995: 719). Following Mayer et al. (1995), integrity-based trustworthiness furthermore requires that the trustee's and the trustor's values align. If MNT members accuse others of dishonestly feigning misunderstandings to eschew unwanted tasks, they perceive a clash between each other's values. We therefore propose that:

P 2b: Language-based attributions of low dependability reduce the perceived integrity-based trustworthiness of MNT members.

Cognitive-emotional Reactions to Language Barriers and Their Implications on Trust in MNTs

Whereas the reactions to language barriers described above are mostly situated on the cognitive level, one particular response was found to be both cognitively and emotionally motivated. In the literature this behavior is known as "code-switching" (Harzing & Feely, 2008; Neeley, 2013; Neeley et al., 2012), i.e. switching from one language to another. Across teams of all tenures, sizes and functions and regardless of the language policies in place, interviewees were found to frequently switch from the shared team language to their mother tongue during meetings in order to consult with their fellow countrymen. Many respondents characterized this behavior as a spontaneous, almost involuntary reaction to language difficulties:

> We usually start meetings in English, but it often happens at some point that Germans start talking among themselves. Once they start speaking German they usually forget about English. That happens frequently. (Italian CAR2 member 2, TR)

The motivations behind this behavior appeared ambivalent. Some respondents presented it as a purely rational-cognitive reaction to language barriers:

> A lot of times we break into German and speak German a little bit. Then I have to come back and interpret for the Americans: "This is what they are saying; this is what is going on…" We do this just because it makes communication faster. (German CAR5 member 1, TR)

This pragmatic motivation for code-switching was also recognized by Harzing and Feely (2008: 55), who stated that second language users "simply want to compare notes and to realign themselves before moving on to the critical discussion issues." These reactions may also be explained by the cognitive overload experienced by second language speakers in particular situations (Cook, 1977) and the intention to mitigate this overload by reverting to the native language. The high complexity of team tasks in the automotive industry may account for particularly frequent incidences of cognitive overload.

However, situations of language-induced cognitive overload are often less manageable by rational decisions than the involved individuals believe. In this vein our interviewees' critical incident descriptions also revealed that code-switching is frequently driven by emotional impulses. A cognitive overload often arose if feelings were involved in a conversation. Encountering difficulties to express the required nuances in a foreign language, MNT members then tended to involuntarily switch to their mother tongue:

> No matter in which country: If emotions are rising, be they positive or negative, people have a higher tendency to change into their mother tongue. This way they can better express their feelings. (German DRIVE2 member 6, TR)

More interesting than the initial reasons for code-switching, however, was MNT members' tendency to continue conversations in their mother tongue once the switch had occurred. In MNTs with a very high degree of language variety, i.e. teams in which each member's mother tongue is only shared by very few colleagues, the excursions into the mother tongue were naturally found to remain brief. However, supporting Harrison and Klein's (2007: 1205) proposition that moderate variety may lead to problems of "unshared information", we found MNTs with only few, but strong linguistic subgroups to be much more prone to prolonged conversations outside the team language. If initiated by members of a linguistic majority like the German speakers in teams DRIVE1 and DRIVE2, code-switching frequently got out of hand and took up substantial portions of the meetings. This pervasive use of the mother tongue despite a foreign language mandate indicates MNT members' feeling of comfort when communicating in their native language. Based on our findings we propose that:

P 3a: Efficiency considerations, language-induced cognitive overload and the emotional comfort in using the mother tongue frequently lead to code-switching in MNTs.

We investigated how this code-switching behavior mediated the relationship between language barriers and perceived trustworthiness by capturing interviewees' perceptions of this practice. Reflecting the cognitive and emotional motivations for code-switching, MNT members' evaluations of the practice also varied between rational analysis and emotional responses. In line with Harzing et al.'s (2011) findings, interviewees giving precedence to cognitive considerations either found the practice unproblematic or held a more skeptical view and only approved of code-switching as long as the episodes remained short and the content of side-conversations was summarized comprehensively for the rest of the team. Given the neutrality of these rational considerations, we found no impact of code-switching on purely cognitive trust antecedents like perceived integrity. In contrast to these dispassionate appraisals given by some respondents, the majority of our interviewees displayed strong negative emotions against code-switching, indicating notable effects on trust antecedents involving emotional components. As the quotations in Table 4 demonstrate, MNT members characterized code-switching as "annoying", "impolite" or "unfair". These judgments are in line with previous studies describing code-switching as an undesirable phenomenon (Brannen & Salk, 2000; Harzing & Feely, 2008).

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

With respect to trust formation in MNTs, the practice appeared highly problematic, as it created "feelings of irritation, discomfort and even exclusion and suspicion" (Harzing et al., 2011: 283):

> When I'm in a conversation and there are jokes in Bavarian that have a double meaning, I end up thinking "Ok, are you laughing about me or what?" I don't understand what they are laughing about, I don't understand the jokes and cannot join in. (…) Someone drops a stupid word in Bavarian, I don't understand and I wonder: "Did he intend to provoke me, because I'm the only woman in the team?" (Spanish AUTO2 member 4, TR)

The Spanish development engineer quoted here questioned her colleagues' benevolent intentions towards her. Following Mayer et al.'s (1995) classification of trustworthiness factors, we can see that these doubts negatively influenced the interviewee's perception of her colleagues' benevolence-based trustworthiness. A German engineer pointed out these harmful implications of code-switching even more explicitly:

> If you as a foreigner sit there and your colleagues suddenly start talking in a language you don't speak, that's definitely a breach of trust. (German CAR5 member 3, TR)

This breach of trust occurs, because the code-switchers are perceived to use language barriers to their unfair advantage at the expense of those who cannot follow. In this context, our interviewees repeatedly spoke of team members "talking behind the back" of others. Some of our interviewees perceived code-switching as outright malevolent:

> Language can be used as an instrument of power, a means to ostracize people. If you want to exclude listeners, you just use a language they don't master. In my view, people do this on purpose. (German AUTO3 leader, TR)

These results support recent findings by Neeley et al. (2012: 240), whose respondents believed that their co-workers "wanted to ostracize them" if they switched to a language they couldn't follow. Supporting this negative view of code-switching, a South African sales manager recalled:

> In my previous team it happened quite often that in the meeting they switched to Japanese. Sometimes, they did it in order to prevent you from understanding. (…) We used to do the same thing. We switched to Afrikaans if we didn't want them to understand what we were talking about. (South African AUTO5 member 4)

Whereas this interviewee admitted to using language barriers to his own advantage, others clearly rejected this attribution of malevolence:

> German colleagues may think that we don't want them to understand what we are saying. (…) But we don't try to cheat! Language switching really happens because it helps. There are some things we cannot say in another tongue, only our mother tongue. (Moroccan AUTO5 member 5)

However, irrespective of the true intentions behind code-switching, we found the negative attributions triggered by this practice to impede the formation of benevolence-based trust in MNTs. According to Harzing and Feely (2008: 55; also see Harzing et al., 2011), "a switching of codes 'just when it was getting interesting' smacks of conspiracy and double-dealing" and consequently leads to mistrust between co-workers. If language barriers are purposefully used "to convey some information and hold back other things" (German DRIVE4 leader), team members of different speech communities suspect malevolent intentions whenever team members speak in a tongue other than the team language. As benevolence-based trustworthiness depends on the "extent to which a party is believed to want to do good for the trusting party" (Schoorman et al., 2007: 345), we propose that:

P 3b: Code-switching reduces the perceived benevolence-based trustworthiness of MNT members engaging in this behavior.

Emotional Reactions to Language Barriers and their Implications on Trust in MNTs

Our data gave evidence of another language-induced and trust-related emotion: anxiety. Particularly team members who assessed their proficiency in the shared language as unsatisfactory feared losing face and being judged negatively due to low language competence. Therefore, they were afraid of speaking the shared team language:

> If the phone rings and it's someone speaking English, some people immediately break out in a sweat and don't feel well at all. (German AUTO1 member 1, TR)

This inhibition frequently became manifest in MNT members' abstinence from conversations in the foreign language:

> Colleagues who don't speak English fluently are often nervous about having to speak English in international meetings. Sometimes, they won't say anything in the meeting but you will get five e-mails afterwards. This defeats the purpose of the meeting. (South African AUTO5 member 4)

As illustrated by the interview excerpts in Table 5, respondents of all nationalities associated team communication in a foreign language with "insecurity", "embarrassment", "feeling stupid", "feeling threatened", "showing weaknesses", "losing face" and "having no self-confidence". Taken together, these emotions created a pervasive language-based anxiety.

INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

These feelings became salient in MNTs of all functions and sizes and regardless of the language policies in place. They appeared particularly acute in MNT settings characterized by a high degree of disparity in language proficiency, i.e. inequality in the socially valued resource of language skills. Supporting Harrison and Klein's (2007) proposition that disparity may foster, among other reactions, silence and withdrawal, interviewees who believed that they were less proficient in the shared language than their colleagues feared losing status for this reason (Neeley, 2013) and consequently felt strongly inhibited by language-based anxiety. Mirroring the importance of relative language proficiency for attributions of competence described above, anxieties were highly salient in conversations between non-native and native

speakers as well as proficient and less proficient non-native speakers of the shared language, even from the same mother tongue. Illustrating the latter aspect, we found that some German team members sometimes disrespectfully commented about the bad English of fellow countrymen. Being judged negatively on the basis of their language skills, team members feared to disgrace themselves, particularly in front of close colleagues from the same background.

> When Germans speak English and make a grammatical mistake, then the others immediately react to this. I think we are sometimes a little stupid in this respect. (German CAR4 leader, TR)

Being salient in the accounts of team members and leaders alike, language-induced anxieties appeared at all hierarchical levels. The fact that respondents who joined their MNTs only recently expressed especially high levels of anxiety suggests that language-induced anxieties tend to diminish over time. In line with this finding, many respondents believed that people with extended working experience in multilingual environments tend to feel more secure. This provides an interesting contrast to the language-induced perceptions of low task competence described above, which were found to largely persist over time. The perception of colleagues' ability is seemingly harder to change than one's own perceptions of personal security. However, anxieties did not fully subside over time. Even some experienced MNT members still expressed concerns about disgracing themselves through low language proficiency. This remarkable incidence of language-based anxiety in MNTs is consistent with the finding by Thomas (1957) that individuals experience higher emotional tension if they find themselves in highly interdependent settings.

Overall, our findings corroborate Neeley et al.'s (2012: 240) recent study, which highlighted the "emotional labor" and heightened anxiety an MNC's language mandate can cause among the non-native speakers of the official language. Our study demonstrates that these effects not only apply to inter-subsidiary relations, but also affect cooperation in MNTs. We therefore propose that:

P 4a: The need to speak a foreign language in team communication creates anxiety particularly among those MNT members who perceive their command of this language as insufficient.

Our results coincide with Neeley's (2013: 487) observation that employees who considered their proficiency in an MNC's official language unsatisfactory tended to feel "vulnerable to criticism on the basis of their language skills".

> You are always inhibited, wondering: "What are the others thinking about me? What I say could be wrong! For how dumb will they take me?" (German CAR3 leader, TR)

Since trust is defined as the "willingness to be vulnerable" (Mayer et al., 1995: 712) to the actions of others, these emotions connect language-induced emotions to the very essence of interpersonal trust in MNTs. The heightened feelings of vulnerability indicate that particularly high trust levels are required to enable teamwork across language barriers. As already shown above, these are unlikely to form if MNT members are falsely attributed low task competence, integrity and benevolence. Our findings also show that they are impeded by MNT members' acute language-based anxiety. Being "very scared of missing something" (Chinese AUTO2 member 3), MNT members with low proficiency in the shared language feared to be taken advantage of due to their limited grasp of many situations:

> If you cannot express yourself well, then you cannot tell how you come across. That's different if you know the language, if you know what people are talking about. Then you can clearly communicate what you want. Then you find it easier to gauge the situation and build a trusting atmosphere. (Greek AUTO1 member 6, TR)

This fear was directed primarily towards other MNT members with a relatively higher proficiency in the shared language, who could potentially use this fluency to their advantage in an unfair way. Even within speech communities, less proficient speakers were wary of their fellow countrymen's superior language proficiency:

> Among some Japanese team members I found that there was a slight feeling of negativity towards new members of the team, who are also Japanese, but speak English very well. (…) They felt threatened by the fact that somebody speaks better English than them. (British DRIVE1 member 9)

In contrast to all other language effects identified in our study, we found that language-induced emotions did not influence the perceived characteristics of trustees, but rather the trustors' situational intention or willingness to trust. Rempel et al. (1985: 98) found high personal security and self-esteem to contribute to "the extent to which a person is willing to take emotional risk". Conversely, anxiety and low self-esteem

can decrease MNT members' situational intention or willingness to trust team colleagues. All things being equal, we found that MNT members who considered their proficiency in the shared language as unsatisfactory felt more anxious and insecure in multilingual compared to monolingual settings and were consequently less willing to make themselves vulnerable to more proficient MNT members in these situations. Our finding that language-induced anxiety mediates the relationship between language barriers and situational intention to trust is in line with Dunn and Schweitzer's (2005) finding that negative emotional states can decrease trust. We therefore propose that:

P 4b: Language-based anxiety reduces MNT members' emotion-based intention to trust other MNT members with relatively higher proficiency in the shared language.

Based on the findings described above and the theoretical propositions we inductively derived on their basis, we construct a model indicating how MNT members' reactions to language barriers influence different forms of trust (see Figure 1). Whereas we recognize that some of the effects may interact and reinforce each other (e.g. the expectation to be judged low on task competence due to proficiency issues heightens language-based anxiety), we argue that for the purpose of our analysis it is important to keep them conceptually distinct. One may also assume possible feedback effects going in the opposite direction of our propositions (e.g. MNT members perceiving a colleague to be incompetent may be less willing to listen to this person, consequently increasing language barriers). However, we found no instances of such reverse causalities in our data. Given that the depicted effects were found in teams of different tenures, sizes and functions, our model appears very robust. The cognitive and emotional phenomena are shaded differently to highlight the parallels between language effects, different aspects of trustworthiness, intention to trust and various trust forms. As code-switching and perceived benevolence-based trustworthiness contain cognitive as well as emotional elements and influence both trust forms, they are marked with a gradient between light and dark grey.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Significance

The model developed above illustrates the way in which language barriers are connected to trust formation in MNTs. In response to our first research question, salient cognitive and emotional reactions to language barriers emerged from our study. In addressing our second research question, we uncovered how these reactions influence MNT members' perceptions of their colleagues' trustworthiness and their situational intention or willingness to trust. The connection between perceived trustworthiness and intention to trust with actual trust formation has been established by a broad stream of research (see e.g. Mayer et al., 1995; McKnight et al., 1998). Our findings reveal that MNT member's reactions to language barriers constitute an intervening mechanism mediating the relationship between language barriers and different aspects of perceived trustworthiness and intention to trust. These trust antecedents then mediate the relationship between MNT members' reactions to language barriers and trust formation in teams. By revealing and describing these relationships, our inductive investigation establishes an important link between the literatures on diversity, MNTs and trust. While our findings need to be understood against the background of our case companies from the German automotive industry, and as in any qualitative and explorative research cannot be broadly generalized, we nevertheless believe that our study also makes a number of important contributions to each of these research areas.

Contributions to diversity research. The distinctive effects of language diversity revealed by our study enrich research on team diversity in several ways: First, our findings introduce a cautionary note into the research stream conceptualizing diversity as *variety* in information and knowledge between team members. This stream commonly focuses on the benefits of variety for effective decision making and team creativity (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Whereas cultural variety entails creative potential and may enhance team members' satisfaction (Stahl et al., 2010a), we found that language variety can create fault-lines with strongly negative trust implications within MNTs. Second, our findings extend research on diversity as status *disparity*, which tends to deplore its negative effects on cooperation and trust (Harrison & Klein, 2007). We found the negative effects of language barriers on trust to rise with higher disparity in language proficiency, demonstrating that MNT members' *relative* language proficiency influences trust

building much more than *absolute* skill levels. Third, our study informs the long-standing debate about the generally ambivalent effects of team diversity on team performance (for reviews see Jackson et al., 2003; Mathieu et al., 2008; Stahl et al., 2010b). The prevalence of negative effects identified in the present study demonstrates that the impact of language diversity differs fundamentally from the more ambiguous effects of other diversity dimensions. Fourth, our study suggests important language-specific modifications to extant theory on surface- and deep-level diversity (see e.g. Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Mohammed & Angell, 2004). We found that diversity in mother tongues, which forms part of demographic surface-level diversity, makes MNT members believe that they differ on a deeper level, namely in competences, integrity and benevolence. This explains the notable persistence of language effects in our study and modifies Harrison et al.'s (2002) proposition that the effects of surface-level diversity factors decrease over time, whereas deep-level factors tend to rise in importance. These novel insights reinforce Harzing and Pudelko's (in press) recent conclusion that language diversity constitutes a category of its own and should not be subsumed under the related, yet separate concept of cultural diversity. Our findings thus highlight the need for international business studies to become "more sensitive to the existence and influence of languages and language use in the corporate context" (Brannen et al., 2012: 2).

Contributions to MNT research. Our study also advances MNT research in two major ways: First, it introduces language barriers as crucial antecedents for trust formation in MNTs. Second, it encourages scholars to refine theories on different MNT processes under a language lens. The former contribution can be considered overdue, given that the performance-enhancing effects of strong trust relationships in teams (Mathieu et al., 2008) necessitate a profound understanding of trust antecedents in MNTs. The surprising fact that previous research entirely neglected language barriers in this respect may be a consequence of MNT scholars' strong focus on cultural differences. As indicated above, our investigation has revealed specific language effects which are clearly distinct from the previously established impact of cultural value differences, thereby demonstrating that the "multilingual realities" (Fredriksson et al., 2006) of teamwork in MNCs need to be investigated in their own right. Our second contribution to MNT research therefore lies in arguing that a profound knowledge of language effects is needed to understand all team

processes, emergent states or outcomes. The present study encourages MNT researchers to reexamine or refine their central tenets under a language-sensitive perspective.

Contributions to trust theory. Our study also advances trust theory in several important ways. First, by inductively developing a model of the language-based antecedents to trust in the particular context of MNTs, we address the repeated calls for context-specific trust models. Given that trust is not only defined by the characteristics of the trustor and the trustee, but also the specific context in which their relationship is embedded (Hardin, 2002), scholars have been encouraged to enrich their models with additional variables, which are "unique to studying trust within a particular context" (Schoorman et al., 2007: 351), particularly focusing on "new, interesting, and important organizational settings and forms" (Kramer & Cook, 2004: 3). Considering that language is "the first and foremost means through which the 'connecting' of different socio-cultural, institutional and individual worlds occurs" (Piekkari & Tietze, 2011: 267), and that MNTs are becoming ever more important in the light of new workforce dynamics (Birkinshaw et al., 2011), our study contextualizes trust formation in a particularly meaningful way.

Having enriched trust theory with language as an important new variable, our findings suggest important contextual modifications to Mayer et al.'s (1995), Schoorman et al.'s (2007) and McAllister's (1995) seminal trust models. Our comparisons between teams of different tenures have demonstrated that language-induced impediments to MNT members' perceived ability-, integrity- and benevolence-based trustworthiness already arise early in a team's life. These findings support Mayer et al.'s (1995) and Schoorman et al.'s (2007) proposition that judgments of a person's ability and integrity will form relatively quickly, but challenge their proposition that judgments about a trustee's benevolence take longer to form. Furthermore, we observed all salient language effects to persist even in teams of longer tenure, contradicting Mayer et al.'s (1995) proposition that the effect of integrity on trust will decline over time. Moreover, we found that perceived benevolence in multilingual settings hinges mostly on the emotional impact of trustee behavior. This finding supports the proposition by Noteboom and Six (2003) that it is often difficult to separate reason and emotion as sources of trust, and contradicts Schoorman et al.'s (2007) interpretation of Mayer et al.'s (1995) aspects of trustworthiness as purely cognition-based.

Finally, our study strikes a cautionary note on McAllister's much cited trust theory (1995) which proposes that emotion-based trust increases with the frequency of interaction. Whereas this positive effect may habitually arise in monolingual settings, it is much less likely to apply for multilingual environments. These modifications to seminal trust models once again highlight the distinctiveness of language effects compared to the impact of other team input factors or diversity dimensions. More research is required on the impact of language on cooperative processes, not only to cover the prerequisites for MNT functioning, but also to understand any context which is characterized by interdependency between speakers of different mother tongues.

Managerial Implications

Our study carries significant practical implications for the management of MNTs. If team leaders are aware of the effects described above, they can take specific measures to mitigate their subordinates' reactions to language barriers and their negative effects on trust formation. For instance, they can raise awareness about these language barriers in form of meta-communication, i.e. communication about the communication processes between people with different mother tongues and the problems they are facing. In addition, leaders may counteract language-based attributions of low competence by regularly highlighting the task-related achievements of each team member in group meetings. This helps individuals to look beyond low proficiency in the shared language and recognize their colleagues' real skill levels. Considering the high robustness of MNT members' first impressions, these measures should receive particular attention at a team's inception.

To reduce misunderstandings and subsequent attributions of low dependability, leaders should regularly summarize and paraphrase discussion outcomes during meetings. However, team members should also be called upon to proactively foster integrity-based trust. Previous studies have shown that they can enhance their perceived dependability by showing individual initiative, volunteering for roles and meeting the related commitments (Järvenpää, Knoll, & Leidner, 1998). To sidestep the negative effects of code-switching, MNT members need to overcome the temptation to follow the "path of least resistance"

(Gass & Varonis, 1991) by avoiding direct communication in a foreign language. Team leaders are well advised to uphold language discipline and quickly guide code-switchers back to the team's shared language. To overcome language-based anxiety, MNT leaders and members need to jointly strive for an open and positive emotional climate, in which members do not fear to lose face due to proficiency issues. Statements like Goran Lindahl's, who said that ABB's official language was 'poor English' (Harzing et al., 2011), might reduce the pressure for team members to express themselves in a flawless manner. A positive emotional climate was found to foster team performance by increasing cooperation and cohesion between team members (Stewart, Williams, Castro, & Reus, 2011). A corporate culture that values diversity as a source of creativity and consequently encourages open communication across language barriers may support MNTs in their efforts to build a positive emotional climate.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Despite its important contributions, our study has several limitations that suggest fruitful avenues for future research. First, it might be argued that the direction of causality between communication and trust is not entirely clear. Whereas some previous studies identified trust as enhancing communication quality (see e.g. Gibson & Manuel, 2003), our study has demonstrated that communicative barriers imposed by diversity in mother tongues impede trust formation between MNT members. More specifically, we found that the various forms of trust only develop over time and in the course of interaction (see also Krebs et al., 2006; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996) and are formed (or not) on the basis of experiences with language barriers in the MNT. The resulting lack of trust may then, in a feed-back loop, further aggravate communication barriers between MNT members. Harzing and Feely (2008) argued that the reciprocal and self-reinforcing interplay between miscommunication and mistrust would create a vicious cycle in HQ-subsidiary relationships. Future research could investigate if similar effects also arise in MNT contexts.

Second, since we collected all our data in 2011 and early 2012, our study design does not allow for a longitudinal analysis of language effects on trust. However, we argue that our comparisons of MNTs

with tenures between six months and three years as well as the retrospective accounts gathered from respondents in older teams also enable us to capture the dynamics of perceived trustworthiness and intention to trust - factors which are influenced by the ongoing cross-lingual interaction between MNT members. To complement our cross-sectional between-team comparisons and retrospective data we encourage future longitudinal research tracing the development and maturation of MNTs in real time.

Third, our case-based study was conducted only in German-based automotive multinationals. This was done on purpose to keep the home country and industry constant, thus being able to better focus our comparisons on language-induced effects. However, as a consequence, our findings are specific to our case companies of the German automotive industry and care needs to be taken when transferring them to MNTs in other corporations, home countries and industries. Our choice of research setting also resulted in a disproportionately large number of German interviewees. One might argue that this could influence the relationship between language and trust formation, because German team members may be seen as headquarters representatives by their foreign colleagues. However, between-team comparisons showed that majority constellations in MNTs reinforce the negative influence of language barriers on trust no matter which speech community is in the majority. To transcend national, industry-specific and corporate idiosyncrasies, we suggest including additional MNC home countries, mother tongues as well as corporate contexts in future research.

Fourth, the scope of our study did not allow us to analyze how language effects interact with other antecedents to trust formation in MNTs. Previous studies have identified team composition factors such as job skills and team cohesion, work characteristics such as task ambiguity, and features of the organizational context such as the management climate as antecedents of trust in work teams (for a review see Costa, 2003). Future research should investigate how these factors play out in the specific context of multilingual teams. Considering the increasing use of multinational virtual teams in modern organizations (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Zander, Mockaitis & Butler, 2012), studying language effects on trust formation under conditions of virtuality would provide another excellent opportunity for further research. Given that the lack of face-to-face time in multinational virtual teams reduces MNT members'

opportunities to assess their colleagues' trustworthiness through nonverbal cues (Cascio, 2000), the impact of language barriers on trust formation would likely be intensified in these settings. Comparisons between the form and intensity of language effects in co-located versus virtual MNTs could provide valuable extensions to extant theory on global virtual teamwork and computer-mediated communication.

Fifth, given that our study's purpose was to uncover MNT members' reactions to language barriers and link them to their trust outcomes, we did not seek to unearth the psychological underpinning of these reactions. Reinforcing Cantwell and Brannen's (2011: 4) proposition that international business studies are in "need for new combinations of knowledge across fields", we argue that interdisciplinary efforts integrating approaches from psychology, sociology, and linguistics would be desirable to provide more in-depth explanations for MNT members' language-related behaviors. Considering that research on language in international business has so far has been dominated by qualitative case studies (an exception being Harzing & Pudelko, 2013), this area could also benefit from applying multiple methods in future language-related studies. For instance, particular aspects of our rich qualitative findings could be examined in isolation using experimental studies with multilingual student teams. Given that a key merit of inductive theory building is its ability to produce theoretical propositions upon which large-scale quantitative testing can be based (Welch et al., 2011), language research in international business would furthermore benefit from applying quantitative means to test the specific propositions we generated through our qualitative study. Whereas it would probably not be possible to test all relationships specified in our model in a single quantitative empirical study, a focus on language barriers as the independent variable, MNT members' reactions to these barriers as mediating variables and different factors of perceived trustworthiness as dependent variables appears viable. Given that the barrier imposed by language diversity hinges on the requirements for foreign language use and employees' proficiency levels, the extent of language barriers may be gauged through surveys about language policies, practices and perceived proficiency levels complemented with independent linguistic assessments of proficiency (see e.g. Neeley, 2013; Harzing & Pudelko, 2013). Our study provided an in-depth account of MNT members' reactions to language barriers, but questionnaires for measuring language-based cognitions and emotions

still need to be developed. A scale for measuring perceived trustworthiness is provided by Mayer and Davis (1999). The relationship between perceived trustworthiness and intention to trust and actual trust formation (depicted with dotted lines at the right-hand side of our model) has already been tested by multiple studies (for an overview see Colquitt et al., 2007) and may therefore be omitted in future quantifications of our findings.

Sixth, we allocated comparatively little space to the comparison of different functional areas, related professional identities and the corporate context. Whereas the magnitude of language effects on trust formation was found to differ slightly depending on team tasks, team members' reactions to language barriers and their impact on perceived trustworthiness and intention to trust appeared comparatively homogenous across all teams. As illustrated in our tables, the same is true for comparisons between the three corporations investigated. Future research should take a closer look at the influence of "professional guilds" (Mudambi & Swift, 2009) and the organizational macro context on trust formation in MNTs.

Seventh, the scope of the present paper did not allow us to explore how language barriers affect trust formation in MNTs with different types of interdependencies. Considering that MNTs are mostly formed to perform integrative tasks in global organizations (Buckley et al., 2005), the majority of them is likely to work under conditions of symbiotic interdependency with individuals complementing each other's work by combining different skills (Hawley, 1950; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). In this constellation work moves back and forth among team members (Thompson, 1967; also see Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000) and every individual's contribution is indispensable to fulfill the task. A lower degree of interdependence would be given if team members only pooled their energies to achieve a common goal (Hawley, 1950; Thomas, 1957) and the dropout of one individual did not jeopardize the task. Future research could extend trust theory by connecting these classic concepts with the reality of MNTs in today's organizations.

Eighth, our focus on trust formation allowed us to cover only one of many areas in MNT research which require a profound knowledge of language effects. Agreeing with Holden (2008: 242) that "a close union must (...) exist between philology and (...) management both as a practice and a subject of social

scientific study", we believe that language-sensitive research is required with respect to all team processes, emergent states or outcomes. In particular, future research exploring the effects of language barriers on power relations, emotional climate, shared cognition or identity in MNTs could make valuable contributions.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on qualitative research in 15 MNTs, we have inductively developed mid-range theory explaining how team members' cognitive and emotional reactions to language barriers influence perceived trustworthiness and intention to trust, which in turn affect the formation of trust in MNTs. By unraveling these micro-processes our study has introduced language into the fields of MNT, diversity and trust research. Having demonstrated that language uniquely affects trust, an emergent state which previous studies closely connected to team performance, our study encourages future MNT researchers to reexamine their field from a language perspective. By demonstrating that language effects in MNTs fundamentally differ from the influence of other diversity dimensions and illustrating how surface-level diversity in mother tongues triggers perceptions of deep-level diversity among MNT members, we furthermore highlight the need for more language-sensitive diversity research. Finally, our study also responded to the frequent calls for context-specific trust models and demonstrated how seminal trust models need to be reexamined and modified in multilingual settings. Our investigation allowed us to gain particularly rich insights into language effects on trust formation, but we acknowledge that our findings are situated in the MNT context and specifically in three German automotive corporations. To broaden the contextual basis of our theory, we suggest that future research should study language effects on trust in intergovernmental collaborations, supra-national institutions and multilingual countries.

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Figure 1 Overview of language influences on trust formation in MNTs

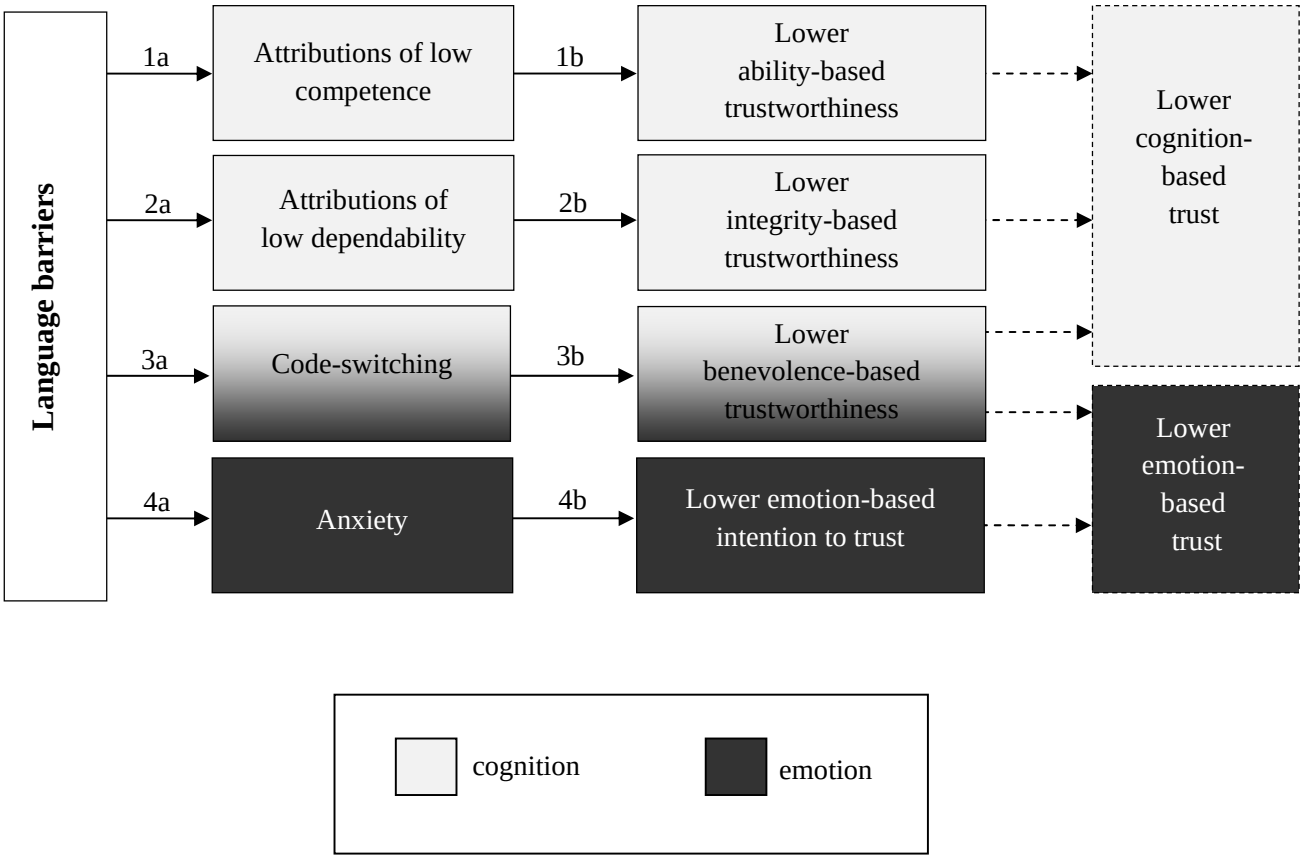

Table 1 Overview of investigated teams

Firm	Team	Functional area	Team size and composition	Official team language	Year founded	Interviewees	Duration recorded interviews	No. of transcript pages
GERMANDRIVE	--- Senior management ---					3 DE, 1 US	2hrs 39min	54
	DRIVE1	cross-functional	11 DE, 5 US, 3 J, 1 UK	English	2009	1 US (TL), 6 DE, 3 J, 1 UK	10hrs 14min	166
	DRIVE2	cross-functional	10 DE, 4 US, 3 J	English	2009	1 US (TL), 7 DE, 3 J	9hrs 50min	140
	DRIVE3	IT	15 J, 6 DE, 1 US	English	2003	3 DE (1 TL), 1 J, 1 US	4hrs 17min	61
	DRIVE4	IT	31 IN, 10 DE, 1 TR	English	2010	1 TR (TL), 3 DE, 1 IN	3hrs 17min	52
	DRIVE5	cost planning	12 DE, 5 ES, 1 CN, 1 IT	NR, mostly German	2009	1 CN (TL), 1 DE, 1 ES	2hrs 42min	54
GERMANAUTO	--- Senior management ---					2 DE	1h 37min	17
	AUTO1	HR	6 DE, 1 CN, 1 HU, 1 GR, 1 ES	German	2011	4 DE (1 TL), 1 CN, 1 HU, 1 GR	4hrs 48min	74
	AUTO2	R&D	10 DE, 2 CN, 1 ES	German	2009	2 DE (1 TL), 2 CN, 1 ES	3hrs 46min	61
	AUTO3	cross-functional	15 CN, 5 DE, 1 RO, 1 IT	NR, English or use of translators	2008	3 DE (1 TL), 1 RO, 1 IT	4hrs 19min	79
	AUTO4	marketing	2 RU, 2 DE	NR, English or German	2009	2 DE (1 TL), 1 RU	2hr 06min	35
	AUTO5	sales	6 DE, 1 US, 1 ZA, 1 F, 1 MA, 1 RE	NR, English or German	2008	3 DE (1 TL), 1 ZA, 1 MA, 1 RE	2hrs 36min	43
GERMANCAR	--- Senior management ---					2 DE	1h 52min	30
	CAR1	sales	8 DE, 1 US, 1 BR, 1 SE, 1 ES, 1 F, 1 NL	NR, mostly German	2009	1 US (TL), 1 DE, 1 BR	2hrs 48min	46
	CAR2	R&D	9 AT, 6 DE, 3 IT, 3 ES, 3 US, 1 UK	NR, German or English	2008	2 AT (1 TL), 1 IT	1hr 26min	26
	CAR3	R&D	9 DE, 4 UK, 3 US,1 ZA, 1 F	English	2009	3 DE (1 TL), 1 F	3hrs 37min	45
	CAR4	purchasing	12 CN, 5 DE, 1 F	English	2009	3 DE (1 TL), 1 F, 1 CN	4hrs 24min	79
	CAR5	R&D	6 DE, 6 US, 2 MEX, 1 AR	English	2008	4 DE (1 TL), 2 US	4hrs 31min	66

NR = not regulated; TL = team leader; Country codes: Argentina: AR, Austria: AT, Brazil: BR, China: CN, France: F, Germany: DE, Greece: GR, Hungary: HU, India: IN, Italy: IT, Japan: J, Mexico: MEX, Morocco: MA, Netherlands: NL, Réunion: RE, Romania: RO, Russia: RU, South Africa: ZA, Spain: ES, Sweden: SE, Turkey: TR, USA: US, United Kingdom: UK

Table 2 The impact of language proficiency on fellow team members' perceived competence

GERMAN-DRIVE	He can totally ace the technical stuff, but he still loses acceptance! If the others have the impression that he cannot follow the discussion for language reasons, then he can be the greatest specialist, but will still lose acceptance in the team. (German DRIVE2 member 2, TR) A person who is very perfect in his technical skills, but is having language problems and cannot talk is often very quiet in team meetings. In that case we need to talk to that guy and make some special kind of efforts to make that person speak. (…) Otherwise a person who has good skills is not getting that kind of credibility. (Indian DRIVE3 member 4)
GERMANAUTO	Many people who are excellent specialists, have extensive knowledge and many competencies just don't come across so well because of language problems. (…) In fact, I noticed that for myself. I didn't get such a good feedback because of this. (…) You are so busy with yourself in these situations that you may come across as unfriendly or incompetent. (Greek AUTO1 member 6, TR) My colleague who is in charge of sales is an Englishman. He speaks English as his mother tongue. That means that he has it a lot easier language-wise in discussions and presentations. So he appears more competent in his demeanor, his fluency, his rhetoric. (German GERMANAUTO senior manager 2, TR)
GERMAN-CAR	Language is a very important tool. If you don't master it, then your ideas only come across quite shaky. (Chinese CAR4 member 3) Only if I am very sure of what I am talking about do I look competent. (German CAR4 member 1, TR)

Table 3 The impact of linguistic misunderstandings on fellow team members' perceived dependability

GERMAN-DRIVE	If you do not understand, how can you trust? (…) From my point of view, the first basis for trust in a team is clear communication. (Indian DRIVE4 member 4) They [Japanese colleagues] wait till the end of the meetings and then go into several meetings with themselves, when they would switch into Japanese, review what they thought they just heard and/or understood. And when they had come to a common understanding of what they though they heard and/or understood, they would realize that they couldn't agree to some of the things and then asked in other meetings and another forum to deal with these issues. (British DRIVE1 member 9)
GERMAN-AUTO	If I write something wrong in German it may happen that a small word changes my whole opinion. That can turn out pretty bad. (Russian AUTO4 member 1, TR) If the others say "Yes, I've understood, ok, I'll do it", we can only see if it was really ok as soon as our negotiation results have to be put in practice. And being honest: it often happens that it hasn't been understood. It looks like people like to make use of this language gap and say "This was a misunderstanding." I think that this is done consciously. (German AUTO5 member 1, TR)
GERMAN-CAR	Divergent understandings come up particularly often if two people have a conversation and none of them speaks the language as his mother tongue. (…) It may happen that one of them just agrees to some points for a lack of linguistic understanding. (Chinese CAR4 member 3) The negative interpretation would be that they [Chinese colleagues] try to hide behind the language barrier. Or they really don't understand. In any case, I have a problem. (German CAR4 member 4, TR)

Table 4 Cognitions and emotions connected to code-switching

GERMAN-DRIVE	I noticed that Germans frequently switch to German without warning. I don't think that's fair – even if they are not talking about secrets of any kind. As a non-German colleague I would sometimes feel a little excluded. (German DRIVE2 member 2, TR) I think it is impolite to do a side conversation in another language, because other people want to understand. It's like talking behind somebody's back. (American DRIVE3 member 3)
GERMAN-AUTO	Whenever I am in a meeting with Hungarian colleagues and someone tells me something in Hungarian I immediately translate to German and explain why he used Hungarian. I find it impolite. It would bother me if I didn't know what they are talking about behind my back. (Hungarian AUTO1 member 5, TR) If I listen to a group discussion and notice that the others are suddenly communicating in another language that I don't speak, that's annoying. (…) People just aren't getting straight that this creates an uneasy situation for others. (German AUTO1 member 1, TR)
GERMANCAR	People also notice some things even if they don't understand the language. If you are talking about a Chinese colleague and say "Why does he act so damn stupid?", then he doesn't understand a word. But he still understands what it's all about. (German CAR4 member 4, TR) When things escalate language switching is used very much on purpose to exclude some people. That's always a problem, because the others notice this. (…) But in other instances we just switch languages because it's more convenient. (German CAR4 member 1, TR)

Table 5 Anxiety and fear of linguistic blunders

GERMAN-DRIVE	The Japanese have problems speaking in English, so they are very shy in using the English language. (Japanese DRIVE1 member 10) The fact that Japanese colleagues would feel threatened by the fact that somebody speaks better English than them (…) means in reverse that they also feel some kind of embarrassment and loss of face about their own supposed and perceived inability to function in the team. (British DRIVE1 member 9)
GERMANAUTO	Colleagues noticed that when I speak Chinese on the phone I speak louder, am more cheerful, laugh more and also louder … It's interesting: I am louder and feel more secure in Chinese. I think a feeling of security is connected to using one's own language. (Chinese AUTO1 member 4, TR) I know some very high-ranking [Chinese] colleagues, who only use German when something tremendously important happens and otherwise just communicate through translators. This is about not using incorrect words – in their position they don't want to become the company's laughing stock. People in lower ranks sometimes speak better German and the boss cannot show any weaknesses here – that would be a loss of face. (German AUTO3 member 2, TR)
GERMANCAR	A German who doesn't speak English has such a hard time. He doesn't feel well, has no self-confidence and doesn't open his mouth. We have some cases here, in which the colleagues don't even pick up the phone when they see that an English colleague is calling. The demand is that you speak good English, otherwise you are an idiot. (German CAR3 member 1, TR) You have to be very careful not to say "yes", just so that things move on, or because you are embarrassed that you still haven't understood. In situations like this you feel quite stupid. Then I must pull myself together and really say: "Keep calm, ask again, you are *not* the idiot!" (German CAR3 leader, TR)