

Language Management & Development in CPEC: A Case Study of Special Economic Zone of Punjab

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The article aims to understand the language management taking place in the Special Economic Zone of Punjab (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor—CPEC). It incorporates data from both local and Chinese employees. The importance of multi-culture setting at workplace is addressed in this study by incorporating the impact of globalization. Respondents were selected by using random stratified sampling method. Primary data were gathered using multiple research tools; questionnaires, in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. Findings suggested that Urdu is still the most preferred language followed by English for official purposes or Punjabi for informal communication among lower management. Mandarin still needs to make its place in the Pakistani multi-culture context. Top management from both sides has adopted a positive stance and is willingly accepting a different culture. Chinese employees are even trying to learn Urdu. Use of translators and applications to reduce language barriers is increasing.

Keywords: multilingual workplace, technology, globalization, CPEC, lingua franca

Overview

The importance of foreign languages in a multinational work setting has long been acknowledged (Marschan, D. Welch, & L. Welch, 1997; Didiot-Cook, Gauthier, & Scheirlinckx, 2000; Korzilius, Hooft, Planken, & Hendrix, 2011). Different domains including organizational culture, cross culture communication, and even internationalization are all replete with various examples of how multilingualism and language management has influenced workplace setting and employees (Marschan et al., 1997). The importance of language in psychic distance was initially recognized by Paul-Weidersheim (1972). But gradually its importance in international operations was somewhat neglected (Paul-Weidersheim, 1972; Luostarinen, 1979). Recently many studies are being conducted on its importance and the role it plays in internationalization (Forese, Shen, & Davies, 2020; Nguyen, Ning, Alikaj, & Tran, 2020).

Global information holds utmost importance when it comes to internationalization and multinational success. Dr. Jiro Tokuyama, then executive director and dean of the Nomura School of Advanced Management suggested,

Many of the Japanese executives not only follow many Japanese magazines and newspapers, but read at least a few of the following periodicals: Newsweek, Time, the London Economist, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and the

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Financial Times. We are making such an effort to understand the global market. As you know, we live in an information-oriented era when countries with valuable pieces of information or intelligence win. So-called industrial policy is not necessarily the cause of our competitive position in world markets. The economic “miracle” of Japan is attributable in part to our eagerness to gather and analyze available information on world markets. I recommend that American executives do the same if they want to remain intact in the highly competitive global market. (Tung, 1990, p.102)

Tung (1990) further suggested that Japanese multinationals are highly vigilant when it comes to language learning and management. It is believed that without linguistic knowledge multinationals cannot excel and grow.

The rising globalization rate has forced businesses to make expansions. It has also made it evident that the managers will be exposed to different languages as well. This is specific to those global managers who should the task of communicating goals and objectives to employees across the globe (Kubota & McKay, 2009). Moreover, increased international recruitment has led to the mushrooming of linguistic diversity as well. International mergers as well as acquisitions have also increased international exposure (Johnson, 2009). Language can be regarded as a socio-culture resource in this respect as it can both facilitate and hinder social interactions (Dhir & Goke-Pariola, 2002; Feely & Harzing, 2003; Tange & Luring, 2009).

This study takes into account the changing business dynamics and aims to study it with respect to Pakistani scenario. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a huge initiative undertaken by Pakistan and China. It aims at strengthening global ties and expanding businesses across border. This study aims to study the impact of linguistic factors with respect to globalization taking place under CPEC. It’s regarded as a huge step to move ahead of time and is regarded as a hot topic for research and discussion these days (Hilali, 2020; Shahbaz Aslam & Farooq, 2020; Rasoola & Kundib, 2018; Iqbal, 2017). But there is still a gap in the literature as very few studies have highlighted the role of language in CPEC (Anwer & Gill, 2020; Anjum & Manzoor, 2020). Moreover, a few studies have been conducted on CPEC but very few of them focused on the Punjab region (Hussain & Aziz, 2020). Thus study incorporates the workplace management process under CPEC with respect to multi-linguistic scenario. It takes into account three levels of management so that a holistic view of language adoption could be understood.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate if language development programs are being planned or offered to provide language support to the employees.
2. To explore language management at workplace.

Methodology

A deductive research approach was used for this research. Further analysis and data collection were guided by the past findings and primary data (Zefeiti & Mohamad, 2015).

Research Strategies

A survey design was adopted to collect primary data. Survey design makes it easier for researchers to gather large amount of primary data in lesser time span. This study was time bound but required larger amount of data to meet all objectives. Therefore, a survey design was selected.

A mixed method approach was used. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and tested separately to meet the research objectives. Separate tools were used for both qualitative and quantitative data collection.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected through the use of multiple research tools. Structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observations were used. Questionnaires were circulated among 200 respondents from different companies selected in the sample. Moreover, seven focus group discussions were conducted with eight respondents in each group. Each group consisted of two respondents from middle management and six respondents from lower management. In-depth interviews were conducted from five companies. The individual interviews were conducted from employees of top management. Overall, the data collected were satisfactory and fit for analysis.

Data Analysis

The analysis of quantitative data was conducted by using SPSS and Amos Graphics 15. Descriptive analysis was conducted, by using SPSS, to report research findings.

Qualitative analysis was conducted with the help of qualitative deductive analysis. In this analysis themes taken from the theoretical framework and new data were extracted from the primary information gathered via interviews and focus group discussions as well as observations.

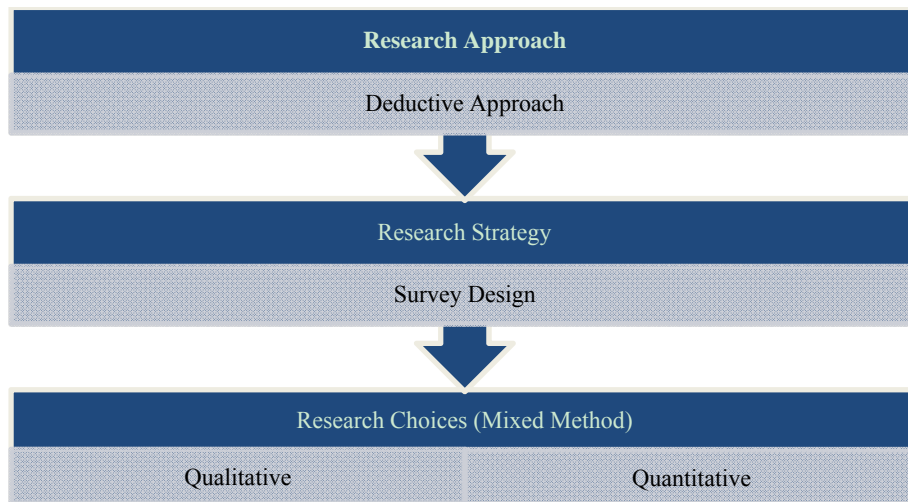


Figure 1. Research methodology.

Sampling Design

The sampling design includes the research population and then the sampling frame. The sample was extracted from the sampling frame.

M-3 City was considered to be the research population as it is the only functional SEZ in Punjab so far. The following table shows the sampling frame. All those companies, within M-3 City, which were officially registered with FIEDC and fully or at least partially functional, were included in the sample frame. It includes both local and Chinese firms.

Table 1

Sampling Frame

No.	Companies	Origin	Total	Sample	Status
1	Times Ceramic	Chinese	220	20	All employees are not present daily
2	LED Zone	Chinese	25	4	All employees are not present daily
3	Nishat Mills	Local	400	100	Fully functional
4	Zahid Jee	Local	850	50	Fully functional
5	Shanghai Unifa	Chinese	35	14	Fully functional
6	MMC	Chinese	50	12	All employees are not present daily
7	King Kong	Chinese	20	8	Fully functional
8	Multan Chemicals	Local	150	-	Fully functional
Total employees		1,780			
Chinese employees		350			
Local employees		1,430			

Note. Decided sample size = 200.

Table 2

Proportion Allocation of Sample

Strata	Pop. size (N)	Prop. allocation	Sample size
Chinese	350	$350/1,780 = 0.2$ (0.196 exact)	$200 \times 0.2 = 40$
Local	1,430	$1,430/1,780 = 0.80$	$200 \times 0.80 = 160$

This sampling will be categorized as random stratified sampling. Below is the actual sample collected from both strata:

Chinese = 50,
Local = 150.

The number of Chinese respondents was increased by 10, because the study was more concerned with the data gathered from the Chinese employees. Therefore the number of local employees has been reduced to 150.

A mixed method approach was used to collect the primary data. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through survey design. Random stratified sampling was used to extract a sample of 200 respondents for qualitative analysis. The data were divided into two clusters: local and Chinese. Data were collected from the M-3 City Faisalabad, which is currently the only functional Special Economic Zone of Punjab which hosts both foreign and local companies. Seven companies were selected: two local and five Chinese. Moreover, qualitative data were gathered from respondents who belonged to different management levels.

Research Findings

Objective 1: To Investigate If Language Development Programs Are Being Planned or Offered to Provide Language Support to the Employees

This objective was fulfilled by considering the training and development variables from the theoretical framework.

Many respondents believed that working in multi-culture work environment promotes learning and creativity. When both Chinese and Pakistani employees are working together, it adds more creativity in the work which could benefit the organization as well as the Pakistani economy. One of the respondent described CPEC in the following words:

CPEC has promoted multi-culture work. (Top Management)

Senior manager suggested that it's important that employees have multilingual skills. Thus, in order to increase these skills within the organization, the company has installed different applications which could help the employees in learning more languages.

When it comes to the role and status of Urdu, it was seen that Urdu has humongous importance when it comes to internal communication. Even the Chinese employees are trying to learn Urdu so that they could communicate better with the local people.

Usually, employees communicate in Urdu language in our organization and even the Chinese employees can understand Urdu well. (Chinese Firm, Top Management)

Translators play an integral role in increasing the efficiency of work place in a multicultural work setting. They help in proper communication. Therefore, these days many companies which are operating globally are trying to hire translators so that they do not face any form of language barriers.

Objective 2: To Explore Language Management at Workplace

This objective was achieved by considering the language planning and policy measures. The statistical analysis suggested that language planning and policy was positively affected by strategies and measures adopted by MNCs. Moreover, it was also positively affected by language and cultural barriers. This suggested that as the number of barriers increased it gave more room to policy makers to improve the language policy as per the needs of employees.

Table 3

Respondents Opinion Regarding Mandarin Usage

	Yes	No	Total
Official	14 (7%)	186 (93%)	200
Unofficial	8 (4%)	192 (96%)	200

The table shows that 186 respondents did not want Mandarin to become an official language at workplace. Moreover, 192 respondents did not want it even as an unofficial language. Very few respondents positively responded regarding the status of Mandarin as an official or unofficial language.

All but one, respondents stated that they have no official language policy in their organization. Only one of the Chinese firms had an official language policy. Others believed that language is not posing a major issue for the employees. They are working cordially with each other and are trying to eliminate the language barriers by learning and adopting.

No we don't have any official language policy because Chinese people are learning Urdu and local people are learning Chinese. (Chinese Firm, Middle Management)

The status of English as the link language is still unquestionable. All the respondents from the top management suggested that English is used as the link language for official communication. But it can be gauged from their responses that Mandarin has also gained an important status, as a link language, over the period of time. It was seen that majority of the respondents from top management suggested that now Mandarin is also used as a link language along with English.

In terms of upward mobility, it was seen that none of the companies had a written, official policy with respect to language. But if an employee could speak more than one language, then his/her chance of getting promoted increased. Chinese managers also felt the need to learn Urdu and acquire multilingual skills for upward mobility. They believed that through the adoption of local languages it becomes easier for top management to settle in a foreign country and understand the needs of their employees.

I learnt Urdu from the local markets of Pakistan because I knew that if I would learn Urdu then it would help me in upward mobility. (Chinese Firm, Top Management)

Employees from middle management and lower management suggested that it's important to develop an understanding of different languages at workplace in order to eliminate any kind of technical errors. They suggested that their work is technical which requires a smooth flow of information which is impossible without a thorough understanding of language.

The use of a properly chalked out official language policy was highly uncommon in the local companies. None of the respondent's respondent responded in an affirmative manner when asked about an official language policy. Urdu was considered as the most commonly used language at work followed by Punjabi. Punjabi language was more common among the lower management employees as compared to the middle management. English, though not considered important at an informal level, is considered important for formal communication such as international meetings or dealing with a client. English language is considered to be a status symbol and majority of the respondents from top management preferred using it for communication. Middle and lower management believed that top management uses English as a way to portray their superiority and status.

English language is regarded as a status symbol therefore people like communicating in English. (Pakistani Firm)

Moreover, mostly official documentation takes place in English. All the paper work is completed in English language. Thus, it can be regarded as an official language of the organizations as all the official documentation takes place in it. Mandarin had no official or unofficial status in the local companies. None of the respondents knew Mandarin.

Conclusion & Recommendations

On the whole, the employees do not experience major linguistic barriers for the time being. CPEC is still in its developing stage and currently the employees are working amicably as both the countries are trying to facilitate the cross-border arrangements. Translators are provided by local management and the use of applications is also getting common. Chinese employees, despite being rigid in their cultural and linguistic practices, are trying to adopt the local language (Boyle, 2000). So far, there is no official language for CPEC but all documentation and paper work are completed in English. Thus, it holds a very strong position as a lingua franca. This finding is congruent to the past findings which also suggest that English has become a global link language (Jenkins, Cogo, & Dewey, 2011; Ehrenreich, 2010; Kankaanranta, 2006). But importance of English language was just restricted to official purposes. For information communication Urdu was the most dominant language. Despite the presence of foreign expatriates in the firms, the management, especially lower management, preferred using Urdu or Punjabi for their personal, information communication. The findings coincide with Mansoor (2004) which suggests that there is a language shift from regional to national language.

Despite giving less importance to linguistic skills, the local employees accepted that at least some superficial knowledge about foreign language is essential to avoid any technical errors, especially when it comes to machine handling. Role of Mandarin, as a link language, was given more importance by upper management employees who were both educated and more flexible in their attitude towards foreign culture. Uuçİşısağ (2010) advocated a similar view in his study suggesting that language adoption is dependent on the way an individual perceives a different culture. Moreover, people tend to be flexible towards different cultures on the basis of their experiences and education level. On the whole, cross culture work environment was seen to have a positive impact on the working style. It was believed to enhance creativity in the near future. Lubart (2010) also reported a similar finding in his study.

The study concludes by suggesting that multi-culture workplace management requires cooperation and acceptance from both sides. In the case of CPEC, the employees from both cultures are currently interacting less with each other. Therefore, so far none or very few problems, associated with language, have emerged. The local top management as well as foreign management has a positive attitude towards inter-culture communication. This has facilitated the smooth flow of operations so far. The use of applications and technology would increase in near future and would boost the efficiency of firms by facilitating better communication. Lower management is less likely to come in contact with foreign expatriates so the emergence of language barriers is somewhat less for now.

The findings of this study have many implications for policy makers as well as managers. There is a dire need for a proper language policy. This would provide a direction to the employees as well. They would be clearer regarding their position in the company with respect to upward mobility. A proper language policy would formalize the linguistic makeup of organizations. Promoting Mandarin at workplace could help in reducing technical errors. The use of translated technical cards and books for machinery handling can be used to facilitate the technicians; both local and Chinese. More translators could be hired in near future to further facilitate communication from both ends. The use of applications would also become common. Therefore, it's advised to develop separate application for firms which could host their own server, eliminating language barriers by offering translated documents.

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