

**MÄLARDALENS HÖGSKOLA**  
Institutionen för Humaniora (IHU)  
Västerås

Magisterprogram i Interkulturell Kommunikation

# **Effects of English as a Corporate Language on Communication in a Nordic Merged Company**

D-uppsats i Interkulturell Kommunikation, 10 p  
Västerås 27 maj, 2004  
Annaliina Leppänen

Handledare: Jarmo Lainio  
Anders Törnvall

## ABSTRACT

In the business world facilitation of corporate communication through the use of a single language has become almost a standard procedure. There is little knowledge, however, regarding how working in a language other than the mother tongue affects our thought processes and functionality at work. This study is an attempt to clear some issues around the subject.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of the corporate language, English, on managers' communication within the organisation. The target group includes Finnish and Swedish managers working at a Nordic IT corporation, TietoEnator. The study was conducted by combining theoretical material on communication, language and culture with the empirical results of 7 qualitative interviews.

The results show us that using a shared corporate language has both advantages and disadvantages. English helps in company internationalisation and in creating a sense of belonging, but also complicates everyday communication. The main disadvantage that English has caused is the lack of social communication between members of different nations in an unofficial level.

The main conclusion is that the corporate language is not at all times sufficient fulfil the social needs of the members of the organisation. Through this lack of socialisation it is possible that the functionality of the organisation loses some of its competitive advantage in the business markets.

Keywords: Organisational communication, Corporate language, Merged corporations, Finnish culture, Swedish culture.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1. Finnish-Swedish mergers and corporate language .....	6
1.2 Purpose.....	6
1.2.1. The Aims of the Study.....	6
1.3. Limitation of the study and the key concepts used .....	7
1.4. Disposition.....	8
2. Method .....	9
2.1. Qualitative or quantitative research or both? .....	9
2.2. Grounded Theory.....	10
2.3. Qualitative interviewing as a method .....	12
3. Communication and language.....	15
3.1. Organisational communication.....	16
3.2. Language as a barrier .....	17
3.3. Corporate language .....	19
3.4. Managerial communication in English.....	20
4. Cultural issues.....	22
4.1. Finnish and Swedish Culture .....	22
4.2. Corporate culture and discourse system .....	23
5. TietoEnator –the company studied .....	25
5.1. TietoEnator’s Communications Policy.....	25
5.2. Previous research on TietoEnator .....	26
6. Material and Interview analysis .....	28
6.1. General results.....	28
6.2. Positive effects of English as a corporate language .....	29
6.3. Negative effects of English as a corporate language .....	32
6.4. Corporate communications and national cultures .....	36
7. End discussion .....	39
7.1. The three levels of communication at TietoEnator .....	39
7.2. Content or social communication in English? .....	41

7.3. Further development on the subject.....	42
8. Corporate language –where art thou? .....	43
References .....	44
Printed references.....	44
Other references .....	45
Interviews.....	47

#### Appendixes

Appendix 1. The introduction letter

Appendix 2. The interview guide in Swedish

Appendix 3. The interview guide in Finnish

## 1. Introduction

The study of intercultural communication is a combination of two extensive fields of study, intercultural studies and communication studies. The aim of combining these two is to come to terms with defining problems in communication between members of different cultures. In other words, intercultural communication becomes essential for understanding communication among people when cultural identifications affect their message use. At times, the problems and difficulties related to these areas are multiplied when people communicate using a language that is foreign to them.

When individuals are communicating with people from different cultures, it is important to remember that culture and communication are closely connected. The way that we view communication – what it is, how to do it, and reasons for doing it – is a part of our culture. The probability of misunderstandings between members of different cultures increases when this important connection is forgotten (Jandt 2001). Similarly, it has often been concluded that no other element of international business is as often noted as a barrier to effective communication across cultures than differences in language. Language is such a significant obstacle in both international and domestic cross-cultural business dealings precisely because it is so fundamental (Victor 1992). Here it should be pointed out, though, that the possibility to use a common language is a blessing for those wanting to communicate.

Nevertheless, in our globalised, international world it is more important now than ever to be able to communicate in foreign languages, not to mention the importance of developing an intercultural understanding. The need for efficient communication is particularly urgent in the world of business, where communicative and cultural competence are a prerequisite for success (Jämtelid 2002). An example of the ways that the companies answer to the demands of the global market is the standardizing of corporate communication into one language. In practice this often means that the lingua franca of modern days, English, is chosen to facilitate corporate communication. This has been the case in the international IT corporation TietoEnator.

In the corporate world language standardization has many advantages from the international management perspective. For instance, it facilitates formal reporting between units across national boundaries and minimizes the potential for miscommunication. It is also suggested that adoption of one common language eases the access to corporate documents at the same time as it enhances informal communication and the flow of information between subsidiaries. Finally it can foster a sense of belonging to a globally dispersed corporate family (Dhir & Goke-Pariola, 2002). Operating in a shared language does not, however, necessarily reduce the difficulties in communication. This is partly due to the fact that the new language is often foreign or a second language to all its users.

Although the inability to understand what one party communicates in a foreign language is the most fundamental problem that differences in language pose, lack of a shared language presents many less obvious pitfalls as well. In an organisation where a foreign language is a shared language, these other difficulties are more subtle, yet often affecting the business in a way that may sometimes be less obvious for the organisation (Victor 1992).

## 1.1. Finnish-Swedish mergers and corporate language

To fully understand the potential problematic issues related to the choice of a corporate language and the usage of it in mergers between Swedish and Finnish companies, one should be aware of some other cultural and historical facts, as Louhiala-Salminen (2002b) writes in her research report. The relationship between Sweden and Finland has always been special, emerging from a shared history as one nation during 700 years. The connection that the two countries have felt up until modern times has resulted in cooperation in several different fields, in politics as well as in business life. An interesting notion is that for some reason the Finnish-Swedish business mergers have often proved to be more successful than mergers between the other Nordic countries (Carlsson 2003).

When it comes to the matter of corporate language, merged corporations within the Nordic countries have often used “Scandinavian”; a mixture of Swedish, Norwegian and Danish as the corporate language. However, Finnish belongs to a different group of languages and therefore cannot be understood by Scandinavians without extensive language studies. This fact has often been the reason for changing the corporate language into English, even though at least some Finns have been able to communicate in Swedish, due to the fact that it is the second official language in the country and widely studied in schools.

Carlsson (2003) describes the Finnish-Swedish business actions as an international game in which none of the parties is allowed to win over the other. Instead, equality and justice rule and the main aim of the cooperation is to create synergies that benefit both parties. The quest for balance and equality can express itself in several ways; one of which is an even division of top management posts in the corporation or placement of corporate headquarters in both countries. Choosing a “neutral” language such as English as the corporate language in a Scandinavian corporation is one of the most obvious ways of showing the parties’ mutual will of equality when doing business.

Within the TietoEnator corporation English has been the corporate language since 1999, when the two IT-companies, Finnish Tieto and Swedish Enator merged into a large Nordic IT-corporation. After the merger companies from other nationalities and nations have become a part of the TietoEnator corporation. However, TietoEnator can be described as a company with a solid Nordic base, with business world’s lingua franca as its corporate language.

## 1.2 Purpose

The principal purpose of the study is to explore the impact of English on managers’ communication within the organisation of TietoEnator. The target group includes TietoEnator’s Finnish and Swedish managers, of whom none has English as their mother tongue. The issues studied include leadership and management perspectives and in addition, an analysis of possible positive and negative effects that the usage of English has created on communication is done.

### 1.2.1. The Aims of the Study

The aim of the study is to try to answer the following questions:

- How does English function as a corporate language from a management point of view?
- Which positive effects has the corporate language had on organizational communication in an intercultural corporation?

- What kind of problems has English caused in managerial communication?
- What solutions can be found for these problems?

The above questions are mostly empirical in nature. The theoretical information in this essay is meant to give the reader a background for a comparison and analysis of the empirical findings.

### 1.3. Limitation of the study and the key concepts used

The research is limited to a certain company, TietoEnator and more precisely to certain top and middle managers and project leaders active in Finland and Sweden. The aim is to present an analysis that covers the company and managers in question, but not necessarily to present information that can be generalised. A choice has been made to concentrate only on the viewpoint of the managers. In the empirical part only some of those managers who use English in their contacts and most frequently with Finland/Sweden, have been asked to tell about their experiences concerning the corporate language.

As will be concluded later, the data has to be in harmony with the theoretical framework of the study. This is partly a matter of understanding the limitation of the research. As the data in this study consist of a small number of semi-structured personal interviews, the results cannot cover the attitudes of the members of the entire organisation. This means that the study provides only a partial view of the functionality of English as corporate language within the organisation. This delimitation can be partly justified with the scope of the research project and time limitations in mind, as well as the fact that the best informants on the management point of view are the managers themselves. The researcher acknowledges both for the empirical and theoretical point of view the possible need of further research within the area and the possibility of expanding the research to other groups active within TietoEnator or other multinational organisations.

In order to understand what the intercultural communication perspective means for the research in hand, we need to define some key concepts.

#### **Communication**

The dictionary meaning of the word *communication* is defined as “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour, *also* : exchange of information”. (Merriam-Webster online, 2004). For a deeper meaning, Samovar and Porter (1988), define *communication* as “a dynamic transactional behaviour-affecting process in which sources and receivers intentionally code their behaviour to produce messages that they transmit through a channel in order to induce or elicit particular attitudes or behaviours.” Therefore, “communication is complete only when the intended message recipient perceives the coded behaviour, attributes meaning to it, and is affected by it”.

#### **Culture**

Possible definitions for *culture* are many. Jandt (2001) defines culture as the “sum total of ways of living including behavioural norms, linguistic expression, styles of communication, patterns of thinking, and beliefs and values of a group large enough to be self-sustaining transmitted over the course of generations”. This is also the definition that the author has decided to use in this report.

### **Intercultural communication**

In a deeper sense, *intercultural communication* occurs “whenever a message producer is a member of one culture and a message receiver is a member of another” (Samovar & Porter, 1988). This means that in a communication process they bring with themselves the backgrounds that represent the values, experiences and attitudes of the group(s) that they are members of.

### **Language**

One definition of *language* is that it is a set of symbols shared by a community to communicate meaning and experience. The symbols may be sounds or gestures (Jandt 2001). On a more deeper level, language is understood as *a natural means of communication* and in this study *English* is used most often as an example of it. The functions of language are to inform, invite, regulate and express (Linell 1978).

### **Corporate language**

A clear definition of *corporate language* was not available from the target corporation. In literature the expression *house language* is used for a “language that is used as a working language within a company, particularly big companies that to a large extent communicate outside the house”. (Höglin 2002) To be clear about the meaning of corporate language in this study, the researcher has decided to use her own definition as the starting point. In this study, corporate language is *the language that has been defined as the main means of communication in a group of businesses with the aim to facilitate the internal and external communication of the corporation.*

#### 1.4. Disposition

Chapter 2 presents a methodology review. It introduces Grounded Theory and qualitative interviewing as a method and provides frames for later discussion. The background is divided in two chapters. First in chapter 3, a deeper look into communication and language is taken. Further on in this chapter, the managerial communication gets an emphasis. Chapter 4 presents the cultural differences between Sweden and Finland that have an effect on communication. Chapter 5 concentrates on the target company, TietoEnator and describes its Communications Policy and previous research on the company. The following chapter, 6, presents the empirical results of the interviews, which are followed by chapter 7, where the discussion takes place. The composition ends in chapter 8 with the final conclusions.



## 2. Method

### 2.1. Qualitative or quantitative research or both?

When choosing a method for a research study, one has to consider that the method is in harmony with the theoretical framework of the study (Alasuutari, 1995). Most often, the research problem will help to determine the perspective, which in turn determines the choice of methods. One way to group methods is to make a division into qualitative and quantitative methods. It is natural that the qualitative and quantitative research methods differ in nature, but also in width. The quantitative method is most often associated with larger surveys, while qualitative research aims at grasping the deeper thoughts and attitudes of a few informants.

The researcher's aim in this study was to find out about the impact of a corporate language on the managers' communication, as well as their attitudes towards the issue. It therefore turned natural to use a qualitative method and present the results of a qualitative study. One distinctive feature of a qualitative study is that the aim is not generalization. If the data consist of a small number of personal interviews, as is the case with this study, it is impossible to try to find out about the attitudes of a larger group or the entire organisation. Instead, the focus of attention is on explaining the phenomenon, not proving its existence (Alasuutari 1995). That is also a reference to what the researcher has wanted to do with this study.

As stated above, methods in scientific research are usually divided in two groups, quantitative and qualitative. Yet, as Alasuutari (1995) points out, this division fits badly with reality. According to him all scientific research have certain principles in common, such as attempts towards logical reasoning and objectivity towards the data. Additionally, both qualitative and quantitative methods may be of use within the same study and in analysing the same data. Therefore according to him it is more appropriate to see these methods as a continuum instead of opposites. In this study, the researcher saw a potential for an extensive study with a more quantitative perspective, but due to restrictions related to time and the width of the current project to be planned, performed and summarized within a few months, a more extensive research with quantitative features remains to the future.

Instead of questioning whether a method is quantitative or qualitative, an analytical point of view can be taken. According to Alasuutari (1995) qualitative *analysis* is the key concept here. This can be summarized as reasoning and argumentation that is not based on statistical relations between variables, but an aim at explaining or making sense of a phenomenon. Qualitative research that leads into qualitative analysis includes three major components. These are data, which can come from various sources such as interviews and observations; analytic or interpretive procedures that are used for arriving at findings or theories (also known as coding) and reporting of the results as the third component (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The benefits of a qualitative analysis are plenty. For instance, the qualitative analysis permits a study of selected issues in both depth and detail, as the researcher does not need to be inhibited by predetermined categories (Johansson, 1995). Another issue is the relation between the data and the analysis, which is often less biased than is the case with quantitative research. Further on, the descriptions and the theories that the qualitative research produces are well anchored to the reality that they portray. Moreover the qualitative data is more generous and detailed, allowing the researcher to describe life closer as it shows itself in the reality. This also means that the method includes more tolerance towards contradictions and ambiguity in the data and therefore offers a wider range of alternative explanations (Denscombe, 1998). Contradictions

and ambiguity of the data are clearly seen in this study and in the author's opinion is what makes them so interesting.

Within social sciences, among which Intercultural Communication can be categorised, qualitative analysis is mentioned as the most common choice of method. The qualitative interviewing method includes several different types of interviews, which can be characterised as structured, semi-structured, unstructured or group interviews. The difference between these models is the amount of intervention from the researcher's point of view and the character and length of the interviewees' answers (Denscombe, 1998). When doing a structured interview, the researcher has more control over the answers, as the questions have been thoroughly determined in advance. An unstructured interview can at times resemble a discussion or a flow-of-mind as the interviewees are given almost full freedom to develop their thoughts and to express them. The only limits to the interview situation are the thematic topics that the interviewer has introduced. In this study a semi-structured interview method was used.

Validity and reliability are important issues to be considered in scientific research. The traditional criteria for reliability is whether the research instruments are neutral in the usage and if the methods used would give similar results if someone other than the researcher conducted the research. This poses a problem especially in qualitative research, as the researcher often is an integrated part of the research instruments (Denscombe 1998).

In this study, the researcher is aware of the fact that she might have affected some of the answers in the interviews. Nevertheless, during the interview situation she tried to maintain an objective attitude and aspired not to "force out" any answers. The researcher however recognizes the possibility of some misleading results, as the informants may have, from different reasons, answered as they thought the researcher wanted them to answer. All informants have agreed on publishing of their answers anonymously in this report and can therefore be held responsible for them. Another important notion concerning the validity is that the researcher was not able to select the informants objectively and randomly, but was forced to use an intermediary in the selection process. As the intermediary is also the assigner of the research, this might have had an effect on the results.

The validity of the data can be considered in several ways. The most important question to answer is: "Does the evidence really reflect the reality under examination?" (Gumesson 1991). It can be said that if the informants themselves recognize the reality that the research report portrays, at least some validity is reached. Here it is also important to point out that the results of this study are applicable only to the group of people studied within the TietoEnator organisation and that they are not even meant to be generalized. The researcher has aspired to present their reality as truthfully as possible, without unnecessary simplifications.

When it comes to external validity, it can be stated that similar results as in this study have been found by other researchers and the author has acquainted herself with their research, making comparisons and evaluations during the whole research process. However, it is important to point out that the corporate language as a research subject has not been very popular until quite recently.

## 2.2. Grounded Theory

Within the world of qualitative methods there is a wide variety of theoretical and practical analysis methods to choose from. These range from hermeneutics to phenomenology, from

phenomenography to case studies and finally to Grounded Theory, which is the method the author has decided to use. What differentiates Grounded Theory from other theories is that it can be described as a theory that combines the features of inductive and deductive methods (Hartman 2001). As an approach, though, Grounded Theory has a lot in common with case studies and ethnography. Just as in an ethnographic approaches, Grounded Theory has a modest and reserved stance towards existing theory together with a style of analysis that interweaves data collection with theory building, narrowing the focus of the study. Similarly, the grounded theory style of handling and interpreting data is closely related to the case studies (Locke 2001). In other words, Grounded Theory's mix of induction and deduction takes place through an interactional process, in which data collection, selection and analysis come together. This is partly illustrated later in figure 2.

In this research process the researcher has decided to proceed with Grounded Theory's guidelines. Grounded Theory was created by two researchers, Glaser and Strauss, and it is defined as a way of building theory that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. This means that it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. The research findings constitute a theoretical formulation of the reality under investigation. Using a Grounded Theory approach requires many specific procedures, which are necessary to make it possible to build a theory that is faithful to the area of study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Grounded Theory has certain demands that have to be fulfilled in order to create a reliable theory. These include:

- *The theory must fit the data.* This means that the theory must be constructed from the data, not the reverse, as often has been the case with many other methods.
- *The theory must work.* This means that the theory has to be able to explain and interpret the past and future events in the area that the study is concerned with.
- *The theory must have practical relevance.* In order to be a good theory, the theory must have usability also for practitioners, not just theorists.
- *The theory must be possible to modify.* Here it is important to understand that theories are not definite truths, but possible indicators of what is.

(Starrin et. al. 1997)

An important part of a research project that follows the guidelines of the Grounded Theory is developing theoretical sensitivity. By this it is meant that a researcher should start every study with as little bias or preunderstanding as possible. In other words, one should be sensitive to events and be capable of observing and recording them without the interference of premeditated assumptions (Starrin et. al. 1997). In reality this may be harder than it seems, as beginning almost any research project means that the researcher has had to acquire at least *some* pre-information on the subject. With this specific project in mind, it has to be pointed out that the researcher herself has had certain views on both the cultural and language issues due to own experience from both cultures and language problematic. Nevertheless, the surroundings in which the phenomenon was studied were new for the researcher.

An important part of control and verification of the research data is method triangulation. For instance, at their best written sources and observation can provide a support for interview data or sometimes even create reasons for hesitation concerning the quality and truthfulness of the collected data (Denscombe 1998). In this research project, the method triangulation includes comparison of interview data and written material on the matter found from several different sources.

In order to find relevant printed material on the matter at hand, multiple searches on both the internet and available databases at Mälardalens högskola were carried out. Relevant key words such as *organisational communication*, *corporate language* and *language use* as well as names of the target company and known scholars within the field were used in the searches.

Therefore, the literature includes books, periodicals and articles on methodology, intercultural communication, Finnish and Swedish culture, language use in organisations, et cetera.

### 2.3. Qualitative interviewing as a method

In this study, 7 qualitative interviews were conducted in February and March 2004. These include one pre-interview which helped the researcher to find out about the operations and organisation of the company thus helping to identify relevant issues to be included in the questionnaire. The pre-interview was conducted with the assigner of the research at TietoEnator, Personnel Manager Inger Wallsten. The final version of the interview questionnaire was accepted by her and her comments concerning the content were taken into account. Further on, the pre-interview was analysed as a part of the data to complement the remaining data from research interviews.

The interviews took place during February and March 2004 at the premises of the assigner, TietoEnator, in their Swedish corporate headquarters in Kista, Stockholm. The informants included managers from different units in the corporation and project managers and are presented in figure 1. All informants were contacted beforehand by the assigner and accepted the request to participate in the research. The length of the interviews varied from 35 to 60 minutes. The interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and therefore only a few relevant details of their identity are given in this report. A significant fact about the interviews is that they were conducted in the mother tongues of the informants. This took place due to the fact that the researcher felt that giving the informants a chance to use their mother tongues might have a beneficial effect on the interview atmosphere and give a further depth in the answers. Therefore the answers quoted in this report are written both in English and the informants mother tongues. The findings from the interviews are presented in chapter 6.

Respondents	Top management	Mid-level management	Project manager
<b>Finnish</b>	FT1, FT2	FM1	
<b>Swedish</b>	ST1	SM1, SM2	SP1, SP2

Figure 1. Informants of the study

The interviewees in the research represented TietoEnator's Finnish and Swedish top and mid-level management with some exceptions. In figure 1 the informants are placed in order depending on their nationality and management level. As the gender of the interviewees did not show any relevance when analysing the results, it has not been placed in as a factor. For the reader it will be told, however, that 5 of the informants were men and 2 women. The codes in the columns can be translated as follows: FT1 = Finnish Top manager nr. 1, SM2= Swedish Middle manager nr. 2, and so on.

Due to researcher's role as an outsider to the organisation without an in-depth view to the organisation, the pre-choice of the informants was made by the commissioner of the research according to certain guidelines from the researcher. These included a somewhat even division between the two nationalities, genders and ages. Nevertheless, the most relevant factor for the research was that the informants were in contact with Finns and/or Swedes in English on a weekly basis. Naturally, as in qualitative analysis in general, the purpose was to receive more

in-depth information on the target group’s overall views on language-related problems and also to find descriptions of concrete situations in their communication.

The interviews with the informants are tape-recorded and transcribed in order to secure a permanent and complete documentation of the details of the interview. Nevertheless, taping cannot be considered a fool-proof method, as all the non-verbal communication and other contextual factors are missed (Denscombe, 1998). In other words, a tape recorder does not make interpretations of the events, it just stores them. As a complement to taping an interviewer has to take notes of the impressions s/he gets during the interview.

Transcribing the taped interview is an essential part of narrative analysis (Kohler Riessman, 1993). In this study, the transcribing was done in a semi-detailed way. This means that the interviewees’ exact words were written down the way they uttered them, together with different emotional expressions such as laughter and excitement. Since the aim was not to conduct a conversation analysis as its purest, the deeper details such as lengths of pauses were not marked in the transcription. Disregarding the wearisome nature of the procedure, transcribing brings the researcher into a closer contact with the data. The discussion is being revived in a way that can be found valuable when analysing the data (Denscombe, 1998). This is something that the researcher experienced several times during the transcribing process. The transcribed material includes more than 60 pages of text with four centimetres’ marginal at the right side of the sheet. This marginal was used for hand-written raw analysis, collecting points of relevance from the transcribed text for deeper analysis.

To better understand the proceeding with the interviews in this research project, we can look at figure 2, which illustrates the process.

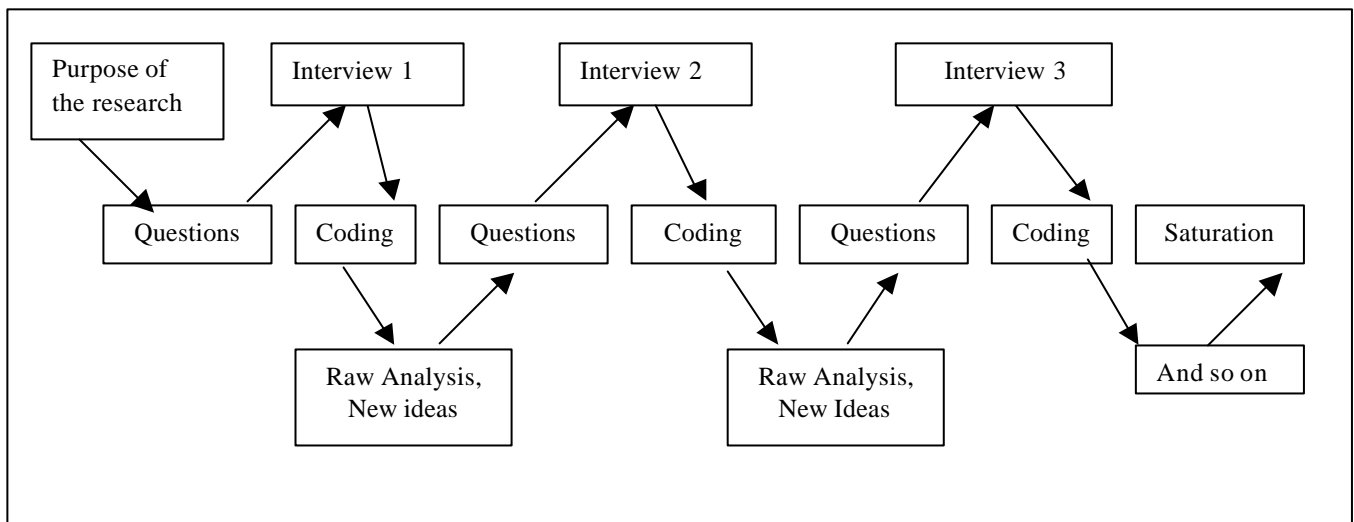


Figure 2. The interviewing process

In the spirit of Grounded Theory, an analysis of the interview data was conducted simultaneously with the interviewing and transcribing process. The points of interest arising from the data were treated as clues of further knowledge in the following interviews, even though the original interview questionnaire was used as the basis in all the interviews. This combination of induction and deduction in data selection, sampling and analysis creates an interaction that separates grounded theory from other theories (Hartman 2001). In the data analysis the most essential and relevant points were sampled from the multiple data and summarized. When the interviews had been conducted, transcribed and analysed, a further

categorisation and coding of the data was done. As in other scientific research the observations made in empirical research were never treated as “results” as such, but as clues to be interpreted in one way or another in order to get behind the observations (Alasuutari, 1995).

### 3. Communication and language

The process of human communication is often described in literature with different models. One of the best known is the model presenting the ten components of communication.

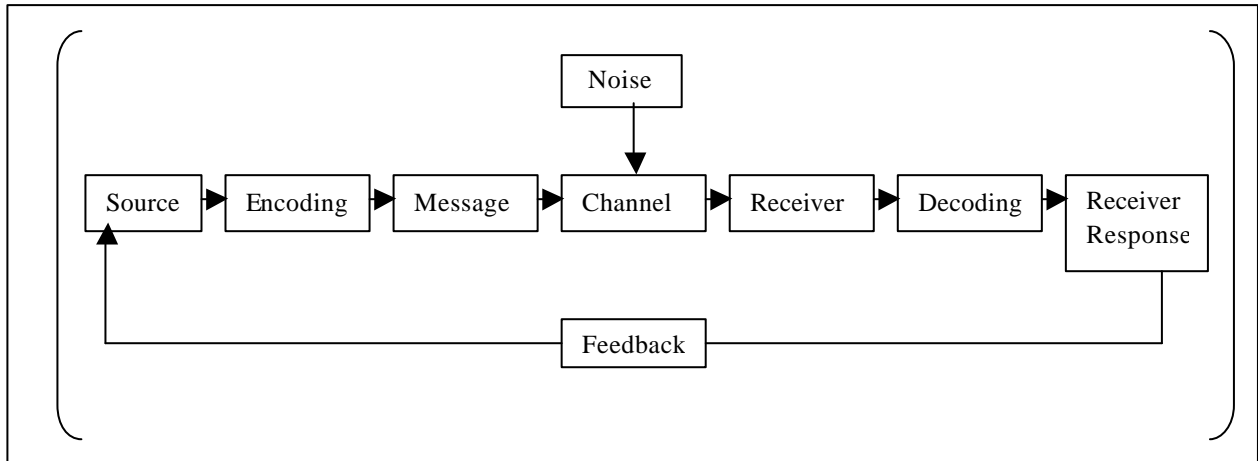


Figure 3. Ten components of communication. (As in Jandt 2001)

The components include *source*, which is the person with an idea s/he wants to communicate. This is done through *encoding*, i.e. the process of putting the idea into a symbol. The symbols may vary from words to gestures and other forms of nonverbal communication. The *message* identifies the encoded thought. *Channel* is the means by which the encoded message is transmitted and it may be in print, electronic or most often face-to-face communication.

The term *noise* refers to anything disturbing the communication. It can be external, such as sounds and sights, internal such as thoughts and feelings that may interfere with the message, or so-called “semantic noise”, that refers to the possibly distracting way the message itself is produced. Further on in the communication line, the *receiver* is any person who attends to the message. In order to understand the message s/he has to *decode* it by assigning meaning to the symbols received. A natural follower to the process described above is the *receiver response*, which refers to anything to receiver does after having attended and decoded the message. Most often this takes place in the form of *feedback*. Feedback makes the communication an interactive process.

In order to wholly understand the communication process it has to be remembered that it always takes place in a *context* (brackets in figure 3). The context is something that helps us to interpret what the communication is about. Culture is also context. Realizing this helps us to recognize that the extent to which the source and receiver have similar meanings for the communicated symbols and similar understandings of the culture in which the communication takes place (Jandt 2001). In the case that this research illustrates, the context is most often the TietoEnator organisation, but also the national contexts affect the communication between the members.

What makes the communication at TietoEnator even more complex, is the fact that sources and receivers are not using their mother tongues (codes) when encoding and decoding their messages. Therefore it can be assumed that receiver’s response may in fact be multiple

feedbacks in terms of confirming that the message was understood as the source originally presented it.

### 3.1.Organisational communication

As long as there are people in organisations and those people have a need to coordinate their activities, there is going to be need for communication. Therefore, communication problems are of the most essential nature when dealing with organisational problems. Difficulties are multiple, the messages communicated are not understood, information doesn't reach the recipients for different reasons, information is misunderstood or mistakenly interpreted. It is an imperative for all organisations to create functional internal communication with sufficient channels and understandable forms of information, so that everybody can grasp it at least somewhat similarly. Being one of the most foundational processes in an organisation, communication functions like a glue holding the pieces together. Without a sufficient communication it is impossible to have other functional processes such as decision-making, creating culture, motivating or learning (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002).

Currently, it is often suggested that internal communication is one of the most, if not *the* most significant factor in gaining competitive advantage in organisational competition in the business world. Seen from a leadership perspective this poses a few challenges for the managers of any organisation. It is not a seldom seen accusation that the communication between the management level and lower-level staff doesn't work as well as it should.

For every manager, and especially for those directly responsible for people, communication is an important means of governing, managing, controlling and coordinating. Managing and controlling have as their prerequisite that information on events happening in the organisation exists continuously so that the management can, as the need arises, react to negative and positive events. Simultaneously effective management means that the managers succeed in communicating their message further in a successful way. Additionally, most forms of coordinating are based on communication between individuals.

A number of studies have showed that cultural factors have an effect on how members of an organisation interpret information, events and activities and how they communicate with each other. The main discovery is that people within one culture communicate better than people over the invisible lines of cultures. Reasons for this are multiple, but most important is the fact that members of one culture have more *trust* towards each other, since they share the same values, norms and basic outlook on life. In a simplistic way it can be stated that the receiver's perception of the source's credibility, intentions and attitudes has a major effect on the way that the receiver interprets the message (Habermas, 1984).

The more confidence one has for a person or a group, the more open one is both in sending information and receiving and decoding it. This is being reinforced through the communication process as it functions like a so-called snowball effect; the more individuals communicate with each other, the more confidence they gain in each other. However, this doesn't mean that the snowball effect cannot be a negative one, i.e. when lack of confidence creates bad communication. Regarding this matter Jacobsen & Thorsvik (2002) point out that it is essential that the individuals representing different cultures share a language. Words and expressions can be interpreted in multiple ways and create different associations according to individuals'



positions in the culture. Therefore, the quality of communication is dependent on the level of prerequisites for creating a common understanding.

### 3.2. Language as a barrier

The language aspect is only one part of communication, but a significant one. On a more common level, as in Scollon & Scollon (2001) a well-known linguist, Stephen Levinson, sums up four general conclusions on language. These include:

- 1) Language is ambiguous by nature
- 2) We must draw inferences about meaning
- 3) Our inferences tend to be fixed, not tentative
- 4) Our conclusions are drawn very quickly.

Looking at these conclusions it is easy to state that the sender can never have full control over the message, not even when the sender and receiver would be communicating in the same language.

In research within cross-cultural communication the negative effect of limited language skills has often been identified. And, as Victor (1992) points out: “Perhaps no other element of international business is so often noted as a barrier to effective communication across cultures than differences in language.” Therefore, a myriad of minor problems occur when crossing linguistic lines. Four of these are discussed below.

Firstly, language shapes the reality of its speaker. This means that certain phrases and turns of thought depend on the many associations linked to a specific language and to the culture intertwined with it. As a result, the subtle nuances of the mother tongue are often lost in translation, even if the speaker of the second language is fluent in it.

Second, the use of a language may carry social implications belonging to a common group that for many cultures establishes the trust necessary for long-term business relationships. In some cultures, this trust is often delayed or never available to the people who do not speak the shared language.

Third, the degree of fluency among speakers of any foreign language varies, even among the best of language professionals such as translators and interpreters, let alone “common” people in business or other organisations. But unless the speakers of the foreign language make frequent grammatical or pronunciation errors in it, any lack of comprehension on their part may go unrecognised. Therefore, it is easy for especially native speakers, but even skilful non-natives to falsely assume that anyone speaking the supposedly shared language fully understands the conversation and the texts produced.

Finally, cultural attachment to variants or dialects of a language often communicate messages of which the person learning the language as a second or third tongue is unaware. Even though the words are understood by both parties, the underlying sociolinguistic implications conveyed by the accents or the choice of words may communicate unintended messages (Victor 1992). Many of these problems are especially associated with English, as it is the most common language of international business.

Between speakers of different languages even other barriers than a simple accuracy of communication exist. Even in situations in which all parties speak the chosen language with fluency, the social implications of the users' languages and the shared language still remain a crucial factor. Thus even when language differences pose no problem in comprehension, the selection of one language (especially a foreign one) over another may or may not create goodwill independently of any message communicated.

As stated already in introduction, choosing a language that is more or less foreign to all parties is one of the best ways of avoiding certain problems that the cultural attachment of our mother tongues manifests. One of the problems is that of linguistic ethnocentrism, a belief that one's language is better than others'. Linguistic ethnocentrism is closely related to cultural ethnocentrism which all people are subject to. Linguistic ethnocentrism can have plenty of different reasons, ranging from historical and religious to social and political.

Some cultures demonstrate a stronger attachment to their language than others and therefore are more likely to take linguistic ethnocentrism more seriously than others. The language issue of Swedish-speaking Finns and the somewhat exceptional role that Swedish has as a second official language in Finland can have created some level of linguistic ethnocentrism from both points of view. First, there have been voices within the Finnish majority saying that their language is the only official language needed in the country. Second, some representatives of the Swedish-speaking minority refuse to use Finnish in Finland, preferring Swedish, despite the fact that they have learned Finnish at school.

Another way how cultural attachment appears in linguistics is the so-called insider-outsider relationships. Victor (1992) explains this very simply: "to the extent that a language is closely tied to a culture, the use of that language tends to admit entry into that society". The language itself functions like a window through which the persons communicating can participate in each others' cultures and gain the trust of its members. In TietoEnator, the Finns who are able and willing to use the others' mother tongue when working with their Swedish colleagues, have a chance of gaining this trust-related advantage. Swedes on the other hand, have seldom or never a chance for this, as knowledge of Finnish is almost non-existent among Swedes.

In any situation in which bilingual business communicators use the language of their foreign counterparts or any other, shared foreign language, they should be aware of the fact that knowing a language without the knowledge of the cultural behaviour of a group can be damaging. As the language acts as a kind of a password between stranger and a member of the culture, the use of it in insider-outsider encounters may lead others to believe that the businessperson fluent in language is also fluent in the culture (Victor 1992). Needless to say, the possibilities for errors are virtually multiplied, when representatives of different cultures decide to express themselves in a tongue that doesn't include the same cultural expressions that they carry inside themselves.

Naturally, the degree of fluency of those speaking a foreign language varies. The extent to which a business communicator is able to perceive this variance and sees it as a problem can have a major impact on the success in co-operating internationally. In any interaction involving parties with different native languages, the possibility for misunderstandings exist. It is easy to mistakenly believe that what has been said or written is fully understood by other communicators.

Comprehension differences caused by accents are, on the whole, of relatively little importance. Still, to the extent that they interfere with comprehension or breed resentment and annoyance, they should concern anyone communicating in the international business (Victor, 1992).

### 3.3. Corporate language

One argument for studying the impact of corporate language on communication is the lack of previous research within the subject. Annika Levin (2000) points out in an internet-published Swedish language consultancy paper that the Swedes are used to one national language, which has had such a dominative position that its existence has never been questioned.

In Sweden more than 10 per cent of employees and 19 % of privately employed are working in companies with foreign ownership. Of the 20 largest companies in Sweden 17 have changed their corporate language to English. The higher the position, the more common it is to use English as working language. The number of “English-speaking” companies grows substantially even among Swedish companies. Grounds for doing this are multiple. English as a shared language facilitates entering the competition on international markets, organisation becomes more manageable. Even contacts with subsidiaries become better-functioning as well as the internal communication. Some companies choose to adopt a foreign corporate language just to create a more distinctive profile, even if they have not got any international operations (Liljequist Rydz, 2002).

Many of the informants in the study that Liljequist Rydz (2002) refers to were originally surprised and almost offended to receive questions concerning the corporate language. An interesting fact is that a few of the representatives she interviewed were willing to acknowledge that the language even posed a problem. This was presumably because such a recognition might discredit the activities of both the interviewees and the organisation. Nevertheless, some of the informants actually stated that they often feel linguistically inferior and less effective in their work due to the usage of a foreign language. A fact of importance is that many of them consider themselves more professional in their mother tongue. Jokes, irony, metaphors and set phrases form an essential part of the mother tongue that often proves to be difficult to use in another language.

In her article, Liljequist Rydz (2002) establishes that very few companies have reflected on the consequences the change in corporate language can have for the organisation and the employees. In general the problems arising from a corporate language change are underestimated. According to her, what is required is proper planning that includes certain guidelines for language usage in different situations and more significantly, proper and continuous training for the employees, even after the language change. It is also important for the employees to know in which levels and contexts one has to master English or some other foreign language.

Agreeing with her, Karlsen (2001) states that a change of corporate language is also a big investment and therefore a significant amount of employees should speak some other language than the original language so that the grounds for change would be reasonable. Karlsen has interviewed Bengt Stymne, a professor in organisational theory at the Stockholm School of Economics. According to him, one study shows that the nuances in the language disappear and approximately 50 % of the contents of communication are lost at a working place where the employees are not using their mother tongue. This can also be considered as the largest financial expense when a change to a foreign corporate language is done.

Levin (2000) refers to a small-scale questionnaire sent out to large Swedish companies that have both chosen English as their corporate language and not chosen to do so. When asking whether or not the corporate language has some significance in practice, a “careful yes” was given as an answer. Further on, the usage of English in companies was most frequent among managers, least frequent among employees (Levin 2000). This seems to be the case also in TietoEnator. Minor differences could be seen even among the informants in this research, but in general the top managers are more involved in communication processes in English.

An interesting finding in the survey Levin (2000) refers to is the fact that English as the corporate language seems to dominate in all communication, except for internal oral communication, including telephone conversations. Disregarding these minor exceptions, English is used in correspondence, customer visits and internal manuals. When it comes to the possible risks that a foreign corporate language creates, an important notion is made here. Disregarding the fact that choosing a single corporate language may lead to ignoring other languages, an even more important fact must be considered. More relevant from the corporate point of view is the problem of alienating the employees from their managers (Levin 2000). Some findings from this study complement this view, as will later be seen in this report.

Another interesting point related to the corporate language issue is the lack of possibilities of expressing oneself in the mother tongue, when some other language has been chosen for usage. Leif Alsheimer (2002) points out that the only language that can fully function as the key to our thoughts, conceptions, feelings and imagination is the mother tongue. It is the essential building brick when building one’s identity and self-esteem. This discussion, however, assumes that one can only have one mother tongue.

Bearing this in mind, it is easy to agree with Alsheimer (2002) when he argues that the importance of language goes deeper than to the capability to express one’s thoughts. To him, language is the prerequisite for being able to produce advanced thoughts. Those who do not master a language are not able to reach their intricate field of association in the brain in that language. Language and capability for abstract thinking belong together, he concludes.

“Without a well-developed language it is difficult to be a part of a sensible fellowship with the others, because the grounds for a behaviour that is truly intellectual, social and emotional are missing.” (Alsheimer 2002) One can search for reasons as to why Finns often are experienced as emotionally cold and unsocial, similarly as their language skills are often referred to “not as good as ours” by many Swedes (Louhiala-Salminen 2002b). If a lack of well-developed common language in social contacts has such a deeply rooted significance, as pointed out above by Alsheimer, then this might be a possible explanation for Finns’ behaviour experienced by the Swedes.

### 3.4 Managerial communication in English

An important issue in this study is the managerial point of view to the communication. The higher up one is in the hierarchy of the company that has adopted English as a corporate language, the more English is used. Junior clerks and workers are usually directly affected by the transition to English only to a limited extent. It is the higher-ranked staff and employees higher up in the hierarchy that are primarily involved. Most English is used in the boardroom and by the management (Höglin 2002).

In her dissertation from 1991, Kati Laine-Sveiby studies the cultural meetings in three Finnish companies and their Swedish subsidiaries. A significant part is concentrated around the different perceptions of leadership and management that members of the two cultures have. Both Swedes and Finns agree on the fact that leadership styles and communication in the countries differ from each other. The problem is, however, that this realization seldom goes deeper than the surface and is in practice often forgotten.

Concerning managerial role models in the two countries it can be stated in Finnish organisations the management's role is more pronounced. The connection between a formal position in the corporation hierarchy and the power a person represents is also more demonstratively communicated outward. In a Swedish organisation the decisions are ideally seen as growing or emerging from within the organisation itself. In practice this means that the Swedish manager has been trained to understand and communicate his authority through an informal, smoother style (Laine-Sveiby 1991). More of the cultural issues affecting the cooperation between the two nationalities can be read in chapter 4 below.

In Svenska Dagbladet, a leading Swedish daily newspaper, Christer Hedberg (2001) reflects over company managers' bad English skills. He does not see speakers' bad pronunciation as a big problem, but refers to their insufficient vocabulary as the main lacking feature in language use. These flaws become visible especially in press conferences and other presentations, when a larger number of audience is listening and the corporate managers at present are functioning as the windows of the companies to the outside world.

A possible reason for this is the heavy tradition of engineering education in Sweden (and even in Finland) that has not put any emphasis on the acquisition of language skills. Most corporate managers have background education as engineers or in business administration. Within neither of the subjects has the importance of in humanistic subjects such as languages been a priority. Therefore, even if in comparison with several other countries the Swedes' English skills are good, the top managers' skills are still often insufficient. However, this is a problem that can and will be diminished as the younger generations step into leading positions in the corporate world (Hedberg 2001).

## 4. Cultural issues

### 4.1. Finnish and Swedish Culture

It seems natural that communication across cultural borders frequently involves misunderstandings. These can be caused by language itself or other factors. Among others, Asheghian and Ebrahimi (1990) point out that the more two cultures differ, the more demanding it will be for the members of these cultures to understand each other, thereby increasing the risk of communication problems.

In an international comparison Sweden and Finland can be described as very similar nations when measured in cultural terms. The geographical location, nature, history and society model all provide for an alike, to a certain extent shared culture. In fact, the whole Scandinavia has so many things in common that it feels justified to describe it as a fairly homogenous and separate part of Europe (Ekwall & Karlsson, 1999). One way to demonstrate this is to take a look at Dutch Geert Hofstede's study on cultures. Hofstede's world famous research included several different factors that attempted to describe the characteristics within and differences between cultures. On Hofstede's scales, Finland and Sweden are situated mostly at the same end of the scale with some minor exceptions.

Hofstede identified four cultural dimensions that he labelled individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, power distance and uncertainty avoidance. The individualism-collectivism dimension describes how cultures can be anything from loosely structured to tightly integrated. On this scale of 53 different nations Sweden ranks on the 10/11 place together with France, whereas Finland's ranking is 17. This can be translated as a slightly higher level of collectivism in Finland. The masculinity-femininity dimension describes how a culture's dominant values are assertive or nurturing. Not surprisingly, both Sweden and Finland can be found at the feminine end of this scale, Finland as number 47 and Sweden at the top as the most feminine nation of the 53 studied.

The third dimension, power distance, describes how a culture deals with inequalities. Hofstede (1997) defines the power distance as "the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally". In the power distance scale Sweden ranks to the 47/48th place together with Norway, and Finland can be found at the 46th place. The final dimension, uncertainty avoidance describes the extent to which people in a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations. Cultures strong in uncertainty avoidance can be described as active, more aggressive and emotional, compulsive, intolerant and naturally security seeking. Cultures weak in uncertainty avoidance are contemplative, less aggressive, unemotional, relaxed, accepting personal risks and relatively tolerant. Here some more significant differences between Sweden and Finland can be found, as Sweden ranks 49/50th and Finland 31st/32nd.

As one considers the relative similarity of Swedish and Finnish cultures, a few differences must be borne in mind. Anita Ekwall and Svenolof Karlsson (1999) have written a book describing cultural differences between Sweden and Finland.<sup>1</sup> Their point of view is that the differences exist, but they must be handled in a way that emphasizes their benefits without trying to force them to a compromise. In fact, they point out that most of the problems arising

---

<sup>1</sup> Ekwall and Karlsson's book should be perceived more as a description of empirical experiences rather than as a scientific research report.

from the cultural differences have significant lack of self-understanding behind them. Swedes are described by Finns as group-oriented, social, diplomatic and talkative, whereas Finns are described by Swedes as honest, hard-working, reserved and shy, just to mention the four adjectives that got the top ratings in a small-scale quantitative research conducted by the authors.

Among other cultural issues, the authors discuss the common policy of Finnish-Swedish mergers in business world. Finns are at their best when working under pressure and creating order and clarity from crises and chaos. At the same time, Swedes work best when they have had a chance to plan, organize and commit the whole organisation into the action. Since chaos and crises are perceived as negative factors, they have created well-functioning, thoroughly planned project organisations. Ekwall and Karlsson's notion on combining the two in a beneficial way is a valuable one, as the leadership created by merging the two systems could prove to be one of the most effective in the world.

#### 4.2. Corporate culture and discourse system

Organisational culture, or corporate culture for that matter, is in contemporary literature defined as “the set of shared norms, values and attitudes that are developed in an organisation when the members are cooperating with each other and the world around them” (Bang 1994). Organisational culture theorists have had two different views on the subject itself. One of them emphasizes the meaning that values and norms have on establishing, maintaining and changing organisational cultures. The other, which is maybe more relevant in this context, studies how organisational culture can be used as a means to reach better results. Within this group belong the questions such as “How does culture affect the work and learning in the organisation?” and “How does the culture affect the relationships between the employees and the organisation?” (Jacobsen & Thorsvik 2002).

In the context of this study, language can be considered the principal means by which an organisation acquires and communicates its culture to members within the society in which it operates. What is special about language is that it does not only communicate information, but also facilitates the creation of value through the exchange of ideas within the context of this culture (Dhir & Goke-Pariola, 2002). Thus can communication be considered a significant part of organisational culture, because it works like a glue holding the pieces together. Scollon and Scollon (2001) call this communication taking place in an organisation *a discourse system*.

The basic difference between cultures, and as in Scollon and Scollon (2001), different discourse systems, is that some of them are voluntary and the others involuntary. Voluntary discourse systems, such as corporate discourse system, are goal-oriented and formed for specific purposes. In involuntary discourse systems such as gender, ethnicity, generation and other such characteristics, the members have relatively little choice about whether or not they are a part of these systems. Moreover, involuntary discourse systems are not created by a conscious choice, they simply just exist. To illustrate this difference, it can be said that for instance the informants of this study are involuntarily members of their national cultures and discourse systems and voluntarily members of the corporate culture and discourse system that the TietoEnator corporation forms.

The corporate discourse system is given special attention in the book *Intercultural Communication* (Scollon & Scollon 2001). It is described as the ultimate form of Utilitarian discourse system, which in turn is the discourse system most often preferred in Western

culture. The Utilitarian discourse system has six characteristics, which include: anti-rhetorical, positivist-empirical, deductive, individualistic, egalitarian and public.

The most important premise of corporate discourse system is that it is goal-oriented. This means that it are brought into being to achieve certain purposes. Most often these purposes include:

- (1) making profit for the owners
- (2) providing service to some constituency
- (3) maintaining the existence of the organisation
- (4) providing employment for the members of the organisation

Being goal-oriented, corporate discourse system tends to emphasize information over relationships, negotiation over ratification and individual creativity over group harmony. When it comes to language, it is implicitly assumed that the function of language is to communicate the ideas of individuals to each other (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). This is the case especially in Western societies, where the TietoEnator organisation mostly is situated.

Even if individuals working in multinational corporations have different national cultures, the corporate culture that they share helps in bringing them closer together. This notion is supported by Louhiala-Salminen's (2002a) research report on the daily discourse routines of a business manager. According to her, in the multinational organisation that she studied, the communication was flowing painlessly and naturally between the representatives of different nationalities. Her conclusion is that the corporate culture had a more decisive role over the national cultures and that the absence of miscommunication can be explained by the shared knowledge and expertise, but also shared norms and values of the corporate culture. A natural conclusion is that even if individuals working in multinational corporations have different national backgrounds, the corporate culture that they share brings them closer together, depending on the quality of corporate culture.



## 5. TietoEnator –the company studied

TietoEnator (further on, also TE) defines itself as one of the leading architects in building a more efficient information society, by supplying high-value-added services. Within the corporation, close to 13 000 experts provide IT services mostly in the Nordic countries. Altogether the corporation reaches over three continents and over 20 countries. TE's annual net sales are approx. EUR 1.4 billion and its shares are listed both on the HEX Helsinki Exchanges and SAX Stockholmsbörsen.

The corporation focuses on four principal areas, which include: Banking and Finance, Telecom and Media, Public and Healthcare, and, Production and Logistics. The business idea of TE is to create and develop innovative IT-solutions for their customers' needs in close partnership with them. This happens by combining their deep industry expertise with the latest information technology (TietoEnator Business Review 2003).

TE originates from several originally independent companies, of which the largest were Finnish Tieto and Swedish Enator. These two merged successfully 1999, creating one of Scandinavia's largest IT-companies (DN 4.3.1999). Despite the corporation's expanding aspirations towards other parts of the world, the majority of the employees are still active in Finland (54%) and Sweden (28%). (TietoEnator Business Review 2003). Nevertheless, internationalisation is one of the main aims of TE and as a consequence, English has been chosen as its corporate language.

### 5.1. TietoEnator's Communications Policy

In a statement from the year 2003, Eric Österberg, the Senior Vice President at Corporate Communications describes communication as one of TietoEnator's most critical tools for reaching their objectives in business. In fact, he writes, "without a clear, consistent and structured communication with our target groups --- (among which) our employees --- we will never reach our goal". (TietoEnator's Communications Policy, internal material for corporate use only, 2003)

Further on, it is stated in the Communications Policy that the managers of TietoEnator should actively make the guidelines and the policy known to their employees. It can be considered as a vital part of the work that the persons interviewed for this research do. Some of the most important guidelines in corporate communication, which are relevant even in the corporate language context are listed as follows:

- "Clarity – Communications must be as clear and easily understood as possible and never be misleading or vaguely formulated.
- Openness – Communications shall be as open as possible, but taking into account the rules of the stock exchange and the requirements of normal business secrecy.
- Speed – Communications must be sufficiently rapid to avoid the need for preliminary information. Proactivity is therefore of utmost importance.
- Continuity and persistence – Often a message needs to be repeated over a considerable period to be understood and accepted by the target groups."

(TietoEnator's Communications Policy 2003)

A foreign corporate language means in practice that a special emphasis has to be put on all of these areas. For instance, clarity requires that the language used in corporate communications

must not only be factually and grammatically correct, but even reader-friendly in terms of simplicity and precision. This may present a certain contradiction to the requirement of rapid communication, as the best message is not always the one that is quickly produced. In the name of openness it can be pointed out that some parts of information should be published also in the receivers' mother tongues, as everybody's command of English is not sufficient. The lack of adequate English skills may partly be the reason to why the emphasis is put on continuity and persistence in information distribution. It is important to observe that any of these problems can appear even when one single language is used in an organisation, but that the difficulties escalate when a foreign language complicates the communication.

As the reader can see, much of the emphasis in the guidelines presented above is put on external communication. The chapter concerning internal communications in the Communications Policy states that the employees are an important target group for all communication-related activities within TietoEnator. An on-time access to trustworthy information is seen as an important factor when encouraging the employees' sense of participation in the company and making them feel empowered. Further on, when it comes to managers, information distribution is considered as one of the priority elements in management responsibility at all levels.

The Corporate Communications is the body that produces and distributes basic information about TE and its main tool is the intranet. Concerning this it is stated that the way information activities in the business areas and units are handled is based on the conditions that apply to each instance. As a result, the distribution of internal information and its production differs from unit to unit. Finally, it is pointed out that each employee has a personal responsibility for actively providing, updating, seeking and obtaining information (TietoEnator's Communications Policy 2003). A connection from these statements concerning internal communication to the usage of English has not been made on the behalf of the organisation.

Further on, even in a document of this importance, it is never pronounced that the corporate language should be English. After repeated requests for information and enquiries with the interviewed informants the researcher has not been able to get hold of official or published information on the language choice of TietoEnator.

## 5.2. Previous research on TietoEnator

In his research report from the year 2002, Ilari Karlsson studies TietoEnator's internal communication and corporate identity. After having interviewed 10 managers in significant positions and analysed the interviews Karlsson concludes that some problems around the corporation language still existed (Karlsson 2002). Currently, over two years after his study was conducted, the situation has not showed any significant change.

Karlsson suggests that the new corporate language (English) was chosen mostly based on strategic reasons, as the corporation had expansion to the global markets as its goal. There were some problems experienced with the language, especially in the beginning, and these were dealt with mostly through language courses. Problems related to languages were at times not related to English at all, but rather to the e-mails or documents written in Finnish or Swedish and sent to people who do not understand the language.

One conclusion was that a new corporate language may have had positive effects on internal communication and contacts over the Gulf of Bothnia, as English is perceived as "neutral" for

both parties. Further he states that it automatically helps in breaking down “Finnish-Swedish barricades”. An ambition of having an as democratic organisation as possible is implicit. An interviewee in Karlsson’s research concludes that building a shared company identity had not been possible without a neutral language. Other positive effects include the possibility of expanding, as English as a common language makes recruiting foreign experts from other nationalities easier (Karlsson 2002).

In his analysis, Karlsson points out that most language-related problems have been conquered and that the language issue no longer represents a communicative problem for those who use English in their daily routines. (Karlsson 2002). It is partly this statement that the researcher has wanted to study in this report.

The “Swedish half” of TE, Enator, has been subject to an extensive study in the 1990s. As the book “Ledning av kunskapsföretag” only discusses Enator before the merger and does not therefore adequately represent the current situation in the corporation, the researcher has chosen not to analyse it in this study. However, for those with deeper interest towards the Enator’s history, the book will be recommended (Alvesson 2000).

## 6. Material and Interview analysis

The empirical material in this study consists of 7 tape-recorded, transcribed and analysed interviews with Finnish and Swedish top and middle managers and project leaders at the target company, TietoEnator.

To support the review of the empirical results it was decided to use direct quotations from the interviews to better illustrate the interviewees' point of view. To better serve the reader, the quotations are presented in both the original language and the language of the report, English. The aim has been to have as correct translations as possible, but even the readability of the English text was taken into account.

### 6.1. General results

Five of the seven interviewees have been working at the corporation between 3 to 9 years and can therefore be considered as relatively fresh employees of TE. The remaining two had over 20 years of experience in the corporation and its predecessors.

English as a corporate language has become widespread within the TE organisation. This can be concluded from the interviewees' comments, as all but one of them said that they use English daily at their work. This means that they either read, speak or write in English. Even the remaining one, a project manager who is mostly in contact with his fellow countrymen, said that he used English varyingly, but approximately three times a week. All in all, the estimated (by the interviewees) percentages describing the usage of English in their everyday work ranged from 20% to 95%, the average being around 60%, remaining 40% of communication was conducted in the mother tongues or, as in some cases in Swedish between Swedes and Finns knowing enough Swedish to get along with it in conversation. These figures summarize the interviewees' overall usage of English at work.

Of languages used with superiors and colleagues English was once again most popular. In the researcher's opinion this reflects well the organisational structure that TietoEnator has developed. The work that many of the managers and employees do is mostly project work, which in turn means that they are constantly in contact with new people, possibly of other nationalities, and therefore speaking and writing English falls in naturally. Generally, the choice of language is dictated by the context and people present. English is not used only because of a corporate policy, but it is used when common sense says that it is necessary.

Concerning the functionality of English as a corporate language, several of the interviewees felt that there were no other alternatives. Using English was a natural choice if the corporation was to function as one unit. This had been the case even in the beginning, and on the merger phase the adoption of a new, shared corporate language was merely a formality. As in some other merged Nordic corporations, choosing a corporate language was never really an issue, which some of the informants claim.

On the other hand, the fact that the adoption of a new corporate language was done through a statement tells us that language planning in the merger process may have been inadequate. This is supported by the interviewees' utterances, which report that getting started with English was a hard thing. Several of the informants stated that in the beginning English was experienced as a threshold, a burden that rather confused and complicated the communication than facilitated

it. But the years have passed and the members of the organisation have become accustomed to using English and more confident in their skills. English has been established as a natural means of communication, despite the challenges.

*“Well, it is a challenge for communication. In that sense both for internal and external communication.” FMI*

*“(Kyllä se on kommunikaatiolle haaste. Siinä mielessä niin kuin sisäiselle kommunikaatiolle ja ulkoisellekin.)”*

After the merger, some attention to employees' language acquisition was given, English courses were arranged and even now a self-instructing course remains available at the company's eLearning site, an internal www-based learning centre. After having analysed the interviews, the researcher got the impression that improving the level of English is currently not considered as an critical issue within the corporation, and that learning through for instance language courses has not been a matter of bigger interest since the complications related to the merger had been dealt with.

However, as reported earlier, all of the communication within TE does not take place in English. In practice this means that much of the internal work at the units is done in the local mother tongues. However, a few interviewees mentioned a “corporation rule” concerning groups that consist of representatives from more than one nation/language group. In groups like this it should be an imperative to use English. However, this is not always the case. Especially the Swedish informants criticized their Finnish colleagues for using their mother tongue in meetings that are supposed to be conducted in the corporate language.

*“Then suddenly someone says ‘just a few words in Finnish’, and that’s so typical, it happens almost in every meeting. And that keeps going on for about 10-15 minutes and then they have come to a solution in Finnish and then they explain the solution but not the reason why.” SP1*

*(“Sedan helt plötsligt säger någon ‘just a few words in Finnish’, och det är så typiskt, i nästan alla möten är det så. Och det pågår kanske 10-15 minuter och sedan har man diskuterat fram en lösning på finska och sedan förklarar man lösningen men inte varför.”)*

## 6.2. Positive effects of English as a corporate language

The positive effects of English are multiple according to the interviewees, and the biggest single factor among them is the equalizing power of a “neutral” language in corporate usage. Since the language is more or less foreign to everyone, the conditions for using it are experienced as approximately the same for each and every one. Using English at daily work is a challenge, which is shared by all members of the organisation and therefore no-one can feel prioritised. This reduction of “Finnkamp” (referring to an annual sport event between the two Nordic neighbours) was experienced as thoroughly positive by the managers interviewed.

*“I think it’s positive that you get something that’s new. Something common that’s yet a little new, a little unknown. It becomes a shared ambition. And it even equalizes us a little, no one is better represented than the others. So we have the same conditions for everyone who’s involved.” SP2*

*“(Jag tycker att det positiva är att du får något som är nytt. Något gemensamt som ändå är lite nytt, lite främmande. Det blir en gemensam strävan. Och det jämför oss också lite grann, ingen får företräde eller är bättre företrätt än någon annan. Så har man samma förutsättningar för alla involverade.)”*

A foreign corporate language was positively experienced also from the interviewees' personal points of view. Personal development, learning the language from an individual perspective and having a chance to use it in their spare time were mentioned as examples of this. Moreover, having to use English at work was experienced as educating and meaningful at the same time as it gave new perspectives. Finally, one manager uttered what could have been interpreted between the lines of many other answers:

*“I believe that even if it (English) would cause problems, at the end of the day it is still experienced as a positive thing rather than a negative.” FTI*

*“(Mä luulen että vaikka se (englanti) aiheuttaisikin ongelmia, niin kyllä se loppupeleissä koetaan positiivisena asiana ennemmin kuin negatiivisena)”*

Other positive effects of a common corporate language include facilitation of internal communication. In an international organisation, it is essential that the corporate information reaches the members as rapidly and correctly as possible. This is one of the guidelines also in TietoEnator's Communications Policy. It seems as if especially the top managers in this study have adopted this view very well, because they were the ones who emphasized that the spread of information to the entire organisation is simultaneous, when it is done in English.

Corporate language use in internal communication is a double-edged sword, however, as the assumption of the comprehensibility of the information may be false. A good example of this was a small anecdote told by a manager, where his subordinates had got upset after reading important news concerning the corporation in a Finnish newspaper, even though the information had been available earlier on the corporation web page –in English.

Another major positive factor worth mentioning is the role English as a corporate language plays in the internationalisation process of the company. It seemed more than clear for everyone that if TietoEnator was to expand to and operate successfully in international markets, the whole corporation has to function well in English. For integrating the activities into one common corporation, not a Finnish/Swedish TE, the choice of one corporate language has been essential. From the interviewees' answers it can be interpreted that the internationalisation process is an ongoing one and that the organisation is not yet at the peak of its internationalisation.

Tightly integrated into the internationalisation process is the customers' point of view. Even if the corporation as a whole is aspiring to reach the global market, most of the business that TietoEnator does is very local. In general it can be established that the projects TE conducts are in most cases based in one country only. In practice, though, this often means that the projects are conducted in English as the customers can be in any of the over 20 countries that the company operates in. In addition, much of the business the customers are involved in is itself Nordic or international and the solutions that TE offers are often used in their entire organisations.

However, the corporate language sometimes even causes problems with the customers. From the TietoEnator point of view, project reporting is most easily done in English mostly for practical reasons. Local translations for the customer are offered, but not recommended since projects in continuation have often proved to be complicated to conduct. Verifying that the information in customer's report matches with the TE report is sometimes easier said than done after multiple translations during the project.

Using a foreign language at work was experienced very differently by the interviewees. When asked if they had noticed any difference between written and oral communication, the answers were clearly divided. Contradicting each other, some of the managers said they felt that writing in English was easier than speaking, and others told exact the opposite. For those who preferred oral communication to written, the main reason was that they felt they had a better chance to explain in case misunderstandings occurred in face-to-face discussions. However, talking English on the phone posed more problems, as possible misunderstandings could not be read from the face and body language of the conversation partner. The benefits experienced in written communication were things such as possibility of using spelling control (in computer programs), having a chance to think over what one is writing, and possibly using the dictionary as an aid.

Especially concerning the oral/written communication, but also elsewhere in the interviews, many of the informants made a distinction between how they themselves reacted or acted in a situation in comparison with how they supposed the majority of their colleagues, both Finnish and Swedish, were. One way of finding out about this biased information and a possible source of further knowledge could have been observation. However, in terms of this research, a possibility to participate in communication situations was not accessible, partly due to experienced difficulties from the commissioner's part.

For instance, none of the informants specifically said that small talk in English caused them problems. However, the answers given by some Swedish interviewees allowed for an interpretation that in their opinion Finns did not master the small talk as well as they should have. Further conclusions on the cultural issues can be found later in chapter 6.4.

When asked whether other TE-employees' different skills in English affect their work, most of the managers answered yes. For them it was a matter of adaptation and as such not necessarily a negative issue, since learning to communicate with different people can also be an advantage. In practice this meant trying to express oneself more clearly; being more consistent and speaking slowly. In other words, trying to place oneself on the same level with the person(s) one is talking with.

*“There is a huge humbleness caused by the fact that we all talk as bad English as we can (laughs). So actually we are very kind towards each other, if there's someone who misses a word, we fill their sentences and so on. In case someone says something strange, we still try to understand. We're all in this together. ” SMI*

*“(Alltså det finns ju en väldigt stor... vad ska jag säga... ödmjukhet i att vi alla pratar så dålig engelska som vi kan (skratt). Så vi är egentligen väldigt snälla mot varandra, om det är någon som tappar något ord så fyller vi i och så. Säger någon något konstigt så försöker vi förstå ändå. Vi sitter i samma båt på något vis.)”*

The interviewees were also asked to tell about situations when English as a corporate language was experienced as well-functioning. All in all, it they felt that it functioned better and better all the time. It was also assumed, by a few, that some of the problems related to the poorer skills of the older generations would diminish further as the time would go by and they would retire. Special praise was given to the top management, as their English was considered very good, both in written reports and oral presentations.

Small talk-English was experienced functional by most of the interviewees. However, there is a contradiction in this statement. Even if small talk was not experienced as difficult, several of the interviewees commented on the lack of it in English in social situations.

This was in fact one of the main criticisms by the interviewees. Using English worked in meetings and e-mails between two individuals (not necessarily when forwarded to larger groups, as Finnish e-mails to Swedish respondents were reoccurring), but not in social communication between meetings and conferences. In other words, as some of the interviewees concluded, as soon as the word “break” was uttered, the representatives of different nationalities switched to their mother tongue, conversating almost solely with their fellow countrymen at the coffee machine or lunch table. Considering this it is easy to understand and agree with the demand of one Swedish interviewee:

*“I think that it’s important to be consistent. If we are to have one corporation language, then we must have it from top down. It should be more clearly expressed that this is the way it is” SPI*

*“(Jag tror att det är viktigt att man ska vara konsekvent. Ska man ha ett koncernspråk, då måste man ha det ‘from top down’. Det måste uttryckas mer att det ska vara det.)”*

### 6.3. Negative effects of English as a corporate language

The most common negative effect of a foreign corporate language is naturally the number of misunderstandings and misinterpretations in communication that English causes. These were mentioned by all the interviewees, even some of their comments describing the usage of English as “complicated” and “unnatural”. Having difficulties in expressing one’s ideas and thoughts was at times experienced as a major obstacle.

The previously mentioned feeling can easily be understood and further interpreted when one considers the definitions of mother tongue that the interviewees gave. For them, a mother tongue was something that one best could express oneself with, something that a person grows up with so closely that it becomes a part of oneself. An interesting notion here is that several of the informants described the mother tongue as something that has a clear connection to feelings. Not having a chance to express oneself as well as one could in a mother tongue can therefore understandably create frustrations.

*“It might be a little blurry definition, but if you know only poor English and understand a little Swedish, you reach very quickly the limits of being able to express your emotions and going beyond the business-language.” FT2*

*“(Se voi olla vähän epämääräinen käsite, mutta kun osaa vaan tätä huonoa englantia ja sitten ymmärtää vähän ruotsia, niin siinä tulee aika nopeasti rajat*



*vastaan että kuinka hyvin sä pystyt ilmaisemaan sun tunteita eli menemään niin kuin tämän business-kielen ulkopuolelle.)”*

An indirect negative effect of English experienced by some interviewees is that people are more tense than they would be in their mother tongue. In addition, they do not act as openly as they normally would. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they know people who feel pressure in social situations and are afraid to get involved in a discussion due to the fact that they have to use English. However, they emphasized that they themselves had not experienced this. Expressing one's opinions and ideas or taking in new information in a foreign tongue was also mentioned as a problem. Considering these descriptions of difficulties it is rather easy to make the interpretation that the lack of adequate language skills makes a difference worth mentioning.

The difficulties related to the use of English are of the kind that are often experienced by any speaker of a foreign tongue. The interviewees felt that it was harder for them to express themselves, partly due to limited vocabulary and “tricky” expressions in English. As concluded earlier, misunderstandings occur frequently. Even taking in information produced in English was as an obstacle for some. A special problem that had to do with translating from the language of origin back and forth to English was mentioned. In some parts of business this has led to a double workload.

Some of the interviewees described the English used at TietoEnator as “home-made English” or “half-English”, which now had been established as a corporate language. One interviewee even mentioned that among his colleagues it is sometimes known to make jokes at the corporate language of TE by calling it “Bad English”. Here it is essential to point out, though, that the same people who posed this kind of criticism also emphasized that the most important thing in communication is to get the message through and be understood, and that this could take place even with a “home-made” tongue. It seems obvious that the interviewees have learned to live with a communication which at least at some level is insufficient for their needs.

A special problem related to the management point of view is the fact that even though there are large amounts of information available, the subordinates, especially at the “grass root level” don't necessarily read or otherwise take in the information exactly because it is produced in English. Partly this is the reason why some parts of the information concerning the company still are translated to local languages, so that all members of the TietoEnator society would be reached.

Apart from analysing their own language use, the managers were asked to evaluate the language skills of others in the organisation. The answers were surprisingly unanimous; none of the seven managers interviewed felt that everyone who uses English within the corporation has sufficient skills. Or as one of them concluded:

*“Every other day I feel like I don't know English well enough. (laughs) The answer is that there are many times when one should know the language better.” FT2*

*“(Joka toinen päivä musta tuntuu ettei itsekään osaa riittävästi. (naurahtaa) Vastaus on että pitäisi monta kertaa osata paremmin.)”*

An issue worth mentioning is the fact that inadequate skills in language seem to have an effect on credibility in business meetings. Having to feel insecure about one's language skills may

cause insecurity in the communication and therefore people may end up sending confusing and contradicting signals to their surroundings. Competence in business and competence in expressing oneself in a foreign language do not always meet.

*“Our English is not especially good. You feel that your skills are very limited and that’s when you get a little unsure of yourself. There’s a risk that you appear to be less knowing in the other person’s eyes, even though that’s not true.” SM2*

*“(Vår engelska är inte särskilt bra. Man känner själv att man är väldigt begränsad och då blir man lite osäker. Det är en risk att man framstår som... i den andra personens ögon som mindre vetande, även om man inte är det. )”*

*”I believe I’m experienced as more tense (by others) and less competent because of my poor vocabulary.” SM1*

*”(Jag tror att jag uppfattas (av andra) som mera spänd och mindre kompetent därför att jag har så dåligt ordförråd.)”*

Situations such as these were mentioned especially when the interviewees communicated with their North American/British business contacts, or others with English as the mother tongue, but even when communication between Finland and Sweden took place. The effect of language can even be seen in totally opposite situations, when using the mother tongue, or as one Swedish interviewee concluded;

*“It may be that we’re sitting in a meeting with a Finnish colleague and talking English. And the person in question seems quite stiff and formal and so on. And then maybe his telephone rings during a break and he starts speaking Finnish and that’s when he gets a totally different body language, he somehow gets more energy, looks happier, a totally different charisma.” SM1*

*“(Det kan vara en finsk kollega som sitter i ett möte och pratar engelska då. Och personen i fråga verkar vara ganska stel och formell och så. Och sen kanske telefonen ringer i en rast och så pratar han finska och då får han ett helt annat kroppsspråk, han på något vis får mer energi, ser gladare ut, en helt annan utstrålning.)”*

In career-planning at TietoEnator language skills is considered as an important factor. It was mentioned by a few interviewees that having at least sufficient, if not very good skills in English, was a prerequisite for advancing in one’s career, especially when top posts were concerned. A top manager’s language skills have to be very good. For a manager responsible for arranging meetings between investors and TE-managers, an access to managers who master excellent English, apart from their other competencies, was a necessity.

The interviewees were asked if they felt that they communicated differently when using English instead of their mother tongues. The answers differed remarkably from each other; while some thought that the language made an enormous difference, others said that it doesn’t affect their communication at all. An important fact to point out here is, though, that the language was not considered an issue by those whose work and background were the most international. Some of them even concluded that using their mother tongues was at times

harder than using the corporate language, as the terminology in their own field has been learned only in English.

For those who experienced difference in communication depending on the language used, the implications were many. It seems natural that the main conclusion was that expressing oneself in another tongue made communicating more complex and difficult. Reasons for this are many, such as lack of sufficient skills in English both regarding vocabulary and grammar and absence of rich expressions and nuances, in other words, a poorer language. This in turn leads to communication that is often experienced as unnatural from both the sender's and the receiver's part.

*“I have to try to find the right words, I have to concentrate on the language in a different kind of way than I would do in Swedish. So a part of the energy goes to finding words and expressing myself, instead of concentrating on the person I'm talking to or the matter at hand.” SMI*

*“(Jag får söka ord mer, jag måste ändå koncentrera mig på språket på ett annat sätt än jag gör på svenska. Så en del av energin går till att finna ord och uttrycka mig, i stället för att jag har koncentrationen på den jag pratar med eller ämnet då.)”*

As the interviewees point out, using a corporate language does not promote an acquisition of a language that is rich. Writing e-mails back and forth in English that has its Swedish and Finnish elements does sometimes work misleadingly; reading the same mistakes over and over again may lead to believing that the language is correct. The interviewees repeatedly described the lack of complete and “rich” language to express themselves with as the main problem when using a foreign corporate language.

Another main criticism, especially from some of the Swedish interviewees, was the lack of consistency when using the corporate language. E-mails, project descriptions and reports written in Finnish and then arriving to their desks or mailboxes were a common cause of irritation. It seemed as if there prevailed at least some level of confusion on how and in which situations the corporate language should be used.

The interviewees were also asked to describe situations in their daily work in which they felt that the corporate language functions worst. A striking feature that was experienced as difficult by most of the informants was public communication, even if this took place within the corporation. Having to give presentations to a larger number of co-workers or other situations where the person was forced to speak English in front of an audience were often considered troublesome.

Situations such as these can be interpreted twofoldly challenging. Partly because the speakers themselves may feel that speaking English in the presence of others is an obstacle, partly due to the fact that they are not sure of how the audience reacts to their communication. Since many of the managers conduct most of their work in English, the work-related vocabulary in their minds is often most easily accessible in that language. This may lead to situations where the mother tongue is suffering. Using English phrases and terminology e.g. in a Finnish presentation for Finnish subordinates may lead to major outbursts of irritation. One manager mentioned that there is a possibility that the listener may end up feeling like an outsider and that the speaker is groundlessly judged as arrogant and condescending.

*“People feel that when you’re using these abbreviations and English terminology, you don’t have respect towards the listener” FT2*

*“(Ihmiset kun kokee että kun käyttää näitä lyhenteitä ja englanninkielisiä termejä, niin jotenkin sitä ei sitten arvosta kuulijaa.)”*

The difficulties of public communication were mentioned by a few even when concerning written communication, when for instance one had to write an article to be published in the corporate newspaper or writing larger, official reports. Another circumstance when English is an obstacle, are group situations such as workshops, where the intention is to have a dialogue. Insecurity concerning the language skills may lead to unnecessary quietness and through that to a lack of synergy reached through conversation.

*“That’s when English is very clearly a restraining factor. Those who are most active are the ones who feel that they have the courage to say something in English. The others who feel that they don’t master the language, they become very quiet. Sometimes it might even be that you can be unsure of whether or not they have understood what’s being said.” SM2*

*“(Då är ju engelskan väldigt tydligt en hämmande faktor. De som är mest aktiva är de som känner att de vågar säga någonting på engelska. De som inte känner att de behärskar språket, de blir ju väldigt tysta. Det kan till och med vara så att man kan vara osäker om de har förstått vad man har sagt.)”*

One interpretation is that even group situations are experienced, by some, as public situations where communicating in English is an obstacle. Naturally, this may be the case even when the group’s mother tongue is used, but a foreign language surely makes the situation more challenging.

#### 6.4. Corporate communications and national cultures

As the interviewees represented two different countries, it was interesting to find out about their ideas concerning each other, both on cultural and language levels.

Both the Swedish and Finnish respondents described Swedes’ usage of English generally as better than that of Finns. One of the Finns interviewed concluded that the difficulties in cooperation between Sweden and Finland are rarely caused by Swedes’ lack of language skills, quite the opposite. It seems as if the Finns interviewed acknowledged the insufficient language skills of their fellow countrymen, but did not necessarily point out this as a notable problem.

All of the Swedes felt that English was something that “fit their mouths well”, in other words, was easy to pronounce and to speak, almost in a casual kind of manner. However, some Swedes posed a criticism towards their own usage of English, saying that they at times sound better than they in reality are, and even believe to be better at speaking English than they really are. Guessed reasons for this, given by the interviewees were many, ranging from historical to educational.

When it comes to Finns’ language skills, many of the interviewees, both Finnish and Swedish felt that there was a larger variation between people who master the language and those who do

not. Differences were seen for instance in level of education and thereby the level at which the person was in the organisation. Finnish top managers' English skills were described as good, but common workers' skills as lacking. The same comparison went through generational differences, the younger Finns outranking their older counterparts. In comparison, the overall level of English among the Swedes, both young and old, highly educated and less educated, was described as higher by some.

Apart from grammar mistakes such as difficulties in separating "he" and "she" and lack in the use of articles (neither of the two do exist in Finnish), a striking feature was Finns' pronunciation of English, which was described as "very different" by the Swedes. This is presumably why it was also at times hard for them to learn their accent. A notable fact is that the Swedish managers seemed to agree on the fact that there was a typical Finnish accent.

*"It becomes some kind of staccato-English that they use, a shortened text that is not really correct." SM2*

*"(Så att det blir någon slags staccato-engelska som man använder, förkortad text, som inte riktigt är korrekt.)"*

From the Swedes' side it was also mentioned that the shyness of their Finnish counterparts at times made communicating more difficult. "They use it when they have to" was a frustrated remark made by a Swedish project manager.

Concerning the cultural differences between the Nordic neighbours, it was pointed out by all of the interviewees that the decision-making culture differs a lot between the two. Both Finns and Swedes commented on the fact that the Finnish corporate culture is very decisive, and that the responsibility is often individually given to "the boss", who is almost solely responsible for the decisions. This often leads to very straight-forward communication, in which there is seldom place for further discussions.

To add to the difficulties, having discussions are exactly what Swedes are accustomed to. In Sweden the decisions, whether small or big, are made through consensus-like processing. In practice this means that every individual who might be affected by the decision is informed about it, even before the decision is made, so that they will have a chance to have a say about it. One of the Swedish managers, who had notable experience in working in both countries said that he has had to adopt a different kind of managerial role, whenever he has been working in Finland.

*"First I have to say that I think these two cultures are really close to each other. It has to be kept in mind that it doesn't matter where we go from here, to east, to west or to south, the cultural differences are getting bigger. You can't find another place that would be as much alike as Sweden. But it's clear that the way the organisations work is pretty different. " FT1*

*"(Ensinnäkin pitää sanoa se, että kyllä mun mielestä nämä kulttuurit on hyvin lähellä toisiaan. Että pitää se aina pitää mielessä, että mennään tästä mihin tahansa muualle, itään, länteen tai etelään, niin aina vain ne kulttuurierot suurenee. Mistään ei löydy sellaista paikkaa joka olis yhtä lähellä kuin Ruotsi. Mutta kyllähän tämä organisaatioiden tapa toimia on aika erilainen.)"*

Cultural differences were experienced very varyingly by the interviewees. The above is a comment by a Finnish top manager who has several years of international experience, both through studies and work in TietoEnator's intercultural organisation. This interviewee, as well as a few others with long international experience made it clear that on a larger scale the cultural differences between the two Nordic neighbours were minimal. However, interviewees with less international experience emphasized the effect that the cultural differences have on communication and functionality of the corporation. Some of them felt that these had been paid better attention to a few years ago, right after the merger, but that the effect of cultural issues on TietoEnator has been forgotten during the last few years.

However, it should be remembered that several of the interviewees pointed out that having cultural differences is not solely a negative fact. Having two or more varying views on how things should be done in a corporation also often results to a greater creativity in solving any problems that might occur. Nevertheless, this only takes place if all features of the both cultures are allowed to flourish. Through some of the statements made by the Swedish interviewees it could be interpreted that from their point of view the TietoEnator organisation had a slightly too "Finnish" way of functioning.

All in all, many of the comments given by the interviewees tell us that a foreign language used in communication at times highlights the cultural differences, whether they are large or small, between two nations.

## 7. End discussion

The lack of knowledge regarding how working in a language other than their mother tongue affects people is huge. There has been and still is a lack of knowledge regarding the process of changing the corporate language and what it does to our thought processes, as well as functionality and effectivity at work. This study is an attempt to answer some of the questions around the subject. The main issues are concentrated on the positive and negative effects of the corporate language on communication in the organisation studied and the impact of English on managers' communication.

In this final chapter, the main findings of the study will be summarized and discussed. However, it has to be pointed out that some of the data from the interviews were so plentiful that some points of interest, such as the cultural issues, will only be addressed shortly and partly left for possible further development.

An important question that arises from this study is: What does it really mean to have English as a corporate language? After having analysed the interviews with Finnish and Swedish managers in the TietoEnator corporation, it is still complicated to come to a clear conclusion. On the contrary, the meaning of corporate language seemed at times unclear even for the managers themselves.

### 7.1. The three levels of communication at TietoEnator

Based on the interview analysis it can be stated that in the multinational organisation of TietoEnator the communication takes place at three different levels which can be described as follows:

- Official and Semi-official external communication level: published company information, meetings with customers, partners and investors etc.,
- Semi-official and Official internal communication level; meetings, internal emails, project reports and so on,
- Unofficial internal communication, so-called "small talk-level"; everyday discussions, coffee breaks, lunches, etc.

Communication in English takes place in all these levels. The functionality of the corporate language and the positive and negative effects that English has caused, can also be judged separately on each of them.

Partly in order to reach the international markets and satisfy their customers' needs, TietoEnator has chosen to use English as the corporate language. When considering the external communication, the functionality of English can be considered good. Information materials produced for the public needs, such as annual reports and financial information, are very professional and accurate. The same applies for the individuals involved in external communication, the top management of the corporation, which is most often in the public eye and functions almost as human marketing tools through different events and media. They are also the ones that most frequently come to contact with partners and investors that are essential for the existence and success of the corporation.

None of the interviewees in this study expressed major dissatisfaction towards the functionality of external communication when it takes place in English. The only situations where some problems have occurred, or alternatively the interviewees themselves have felt that English is

an obstacle, are presentations given in front of an audience, whether external or company-internal. It should be stressed that both the speakers' accustomedness in speaking English in public and the audience's known level of English have an effect on the presentation itself.

The semi-official and official internal communication level was discussed the most during the interviews. This seems natural, as it covers the area in which most of the managers' work takes place, such as meetings, e-mails, projects and so on. It is also the first level where the use of English as the corporate language has caused most obvious problems.

The results show that misunderstandings and misinterpretations during the working processes, difficulties for people in expressing themselves and finding out what the others want to express, seemed to be common problems caused by the corporate language. If the language established as corporate language is "half-English", as it was described, these can be considered as natural consequences. Nevertheless, as stated by the interviewees, more important for the organisation itself is that even a home-made language works currently for company's requirements. Another question is, however, if the members of the organisation feel that the level of communication is sufficient for their personal and professional needs.

A notable positive effect that the corporate language has had on internal communication is its equalizing power. Using English daily at work is a shared challenge for everyone in the organisation who does not speak English as a mother tongue, and functions as a helping force in bringing people closer together. Reduction of the problems that might occur when the mother tongue of one group is used, and when allowing one party dominate over the other, has been one of the most positive influences the corporate language has had.

As in many other organisations that describe themselves as international, in the TietoEnator corporation it is implicitly assumed that everyone knows English, especially representatives of the management level. This became evident even in the interviews, in which it was mentioned by many that for a few "otherwise competent persons" an insufficient knowledge of English has been a barrier in career advancement. Even some of the interviewees themselves had gone through complex situations where using a foreign language made them doubt their ability to show their skills as managers and experts to others present.

Unofficial internal communication is the level that is seldom considered having larger importance for the functions of a corporation. This study is an attempt to emphasize the importance of social communication at the workplace. Adopting a foreign corporate language has at times been criticised, as it is apparent that it does not reach the human being as a whole (Alsheimer 2002). This criticism is shared by most of the managers interviewed for this study, as they felt that the small talk communication in English between the representatives of different nationalities, is hardly sufficient. A break in the middle of a meeting may sometimes prove to be exactly the moment when the problem discussed is solved –without the involvement or acceptance of all parties- due to the use of other than the corporate language. Even addressing other difficult issues, such as personal emotions and ideas that are usually accessible in one's mother tongue, can prove to be more difficult to do in a foreign tongue.

As Höglin (2002) concludes, in unofficial contexts the use of corporate language often ceases to exist. During lunches, coffee breaks and other situations that often include small talk, it is not experienced as important to use English. These are the situations when the ones who do not know the majority's mother tongue are frozen out from discussions. Whether this is unintentional or not, it gives rise to a notable amount of frustrations and creates a great social



void. More on the social characteristics of communication , and content characteristics for that matter, can be read below in chapter 7.2.

One of the aims of this study was to find solutions to problems that English has caused in communication. This is a task that could not completely be fulfilled. However, in order to reduce the difficulties caused by English, the results show us that many of the managers feel that the corporation should put more pressure on the employees in being consistent in the use of the corporate language. It seems as if a company is to adopt a new corporate language, it should be done whole-heartedly and the circumstances for using it should be made clear even for the employees to avoid confusion.

## 7.2. Content or social communication in English?

To separate the different functions of communication, we can draw a line between two types of communication that take place in an organisation. The first of them is content communication. Content is the issue or subject of a message that should be carefully balanced with the feeling in the message. Over-concentration on content can lead to interpersonal stagnation and stress, but ignoring content can lead to confusion and a lack of problem-solving goals with the appropriate corrective action being taken (Messina 2004).

After having analysed the results of the interviews it is easy to conclude that much of the communication that takes place in English at the organisation studied, is so-called content communication. This is also the part that gets most of the attention both from the organisation's point of view and the ones working in it. Most of content communication flows at least relatively painlessly, but causes at times problems that have been discussed above. Much of the official and semi-official communication, both external and internal, taking place in the organisation is content communication.

The unofficial internal communication, however, is mostly social in nature. Communication that lacks an explicit/implicit idea can be referred to social communication. As we can learn from the results, it is exactly in this part of the communication that English is least functional. Most of the time it is not used in unofficial conversations between members of two cultures, and if it is used, it does not succeed in fulfilling the users' needs for accurate self-expression.

The results tell that using a foreign tongue works often as a restricting factor when communicating with others. However, the question is if the language itself functions as a hindrance in social situations or is the more important problem the unwillingness to use it in them? Implications towards both alternatives are given in the results.

In case the language is the main hindering factor, the measures taken by the organisation could possibly be better commitment to offering language courses and other language education for the employees. However, this solely is not sufficient, as the employees themselves have to feel the need and desire to raise their level of English in order to be able to better communicate with each other within the corporation.

If the main problem is the unwillingness to use English, a possible reason behind it might be a lack of trust and confidence between the members of the organisation. If an individual does not feel confident in his skills and has a lack of confidence towards the other party he is conversating with, then this may lead to diminished communication or ineffectiveness in it between the two.

The issue of trust becomes even more evident when the cultural differences are taken into consideration. One conclusion from the interviews is that the corporate language at times complicates issues that already are affected by cultural differences between the two countries. Stereotypes that the Finns/Swedes have of each other might even function as self-fulfilling prophecies, that is to say, the commonly known fact that Finns are more quiet and decisive is accepted as such, disregarding the situations where Finns do not act in the previously mentioned way.

English as a corporate language may neither necessarily carry all the cultural implications that the message a Swedish/Finnish manager wants to express. If the mother tongue is the only language that can fully function as the key to our feelings, then one has to ask if it is ever possible for an individual to be completely present in an organisation that is using a foreign corporate language. This is a question that could not be answered in the framework of this study, but will remain as an interesting starting point for those proceeding further in this area of studies.

### 7.3. Further development on the subject

A deeper investigation on TietoEnator's corporate communication and the effects of corporate language use could be developed both in width and depth. A quantitative research examining the width of corporate language use could possibly open up new perspectives as to where the language causes difficulties. Similarly it might show us where in the TE organisation English functions so well that the other units could learn from these "best practices".

Through 7 interviews with Finnish and Swedish managers this study shows only a limited view on the corporate language use. For further research, it would be interesting to see what other nationalities within TietoEnator think on the issue, and additionally broaden the perspective from managers to lower-level workers. It is likely that studies like this, and most of all actions based on their results, would help the corporation to better cope with the demands that the internationalisation poses.

## 8. Corporate language –where art thou?

The overall aim of this study has been to explore the impact of corporate language on managers' communication within the TietoEnator organisation. The managers who participated in the interviews acknowledged both the advantages and disadvantages of having English as a corporate language. The results show that English is a major factor in both internationalization and in facilitating corporate communications. At the same time that a shared corporate language eases frictions between members of two nations and equalizes them, it also complicates everyday working.

Misunderstandings and creditability problems due to inadequate language skills are a few of the negative effects the corporate language has caused. However, the main disadvantage that English has caused is the lack of social communication between different nationalities in an unofficial level.

The main conclusion is that the corporate language is not at all times sufficient or even fit to fulfil the social needs of the members of the organisation. Through this lack of socialisation it is possible that the functionality of the organisation loses some of its competitive advantage in the business markets. Lack of social communication in the TietoEnator organisation may lead to a lack of synergy.

## References

### Printed references

Alasuutari, P. (1995) *Researching Culture – Qualitative Method and Cultural Studies*. Sage Publications. London.

Alsheimer L. (2002) Språk och tanke –koncernspråk talar inte till hela människan. *Svenska Dagbladet*. 2002-09-06.

Alvesson, M. (2000) *Ledning av kunskapsföretag -en studie av ett datakonsultföretag*. Norstedts Juridik. Stockholm

Asheghian P., Ebrahimi B. (1990). *International Business: Economics, environment and strategies*. Harper Collins Publishers. New York.

Bang. H. (1994) *Organisationskultur*. Studentlitteratur. Lund.

Denscombe, M. (2000) *Forskningshandboken –för småskaliga forskningsprojekt inom samhällsvetenskaperna*. Studentlitteratur. Lund.

Dhir, K.S., Goke-Pariola, A. (2002) The case for language policies in multinational corporations. *Corporate Communications*. Bradford. 2002. Vol. 7, Iss. 4, s. 241-252.

Gummesson E. (1991) *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*. Sage Publications. Newbury Park.

Habermas, J. (1984) *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Polity Press. Cambridge.

Hartman J. (2001) *Grundad Teori –Teorigenerering på empirisk grund*. Studentlitteratur. Lund.

Hedberg. C (2001) Apropå språket -pinsamt dålig engelska hos flera företagsledare. *Svenska Dagbladet Näringsliv*. 20010629

Höglin R. (2002) *Engelska språket som hot och tillgång i Norden*. Nordiska Ministerrådet. Köpenhamn. TemaNord 2002: 561.

Jacobsen, D. I., Thorsvik J. (2002) *Hur moderna organisationer fungerar*. Studentlitteratur. Lund.

Jandt, F. E. (2001) *Intercultural communication -An introduction*. Sage publications. Thousand Oaks.

Johansson, B. (1995) *Quantitative or Qualitative research -Or a combination? A matter of decision-making from theories of research methodology*. Göteborgs universitet. Göteborg.

Jämtelid K. (2002) *Texter och skrivande i en internationaliserad affärsvärld –flerspråkig textproduktion vid ett svenskt storföretag*. Almqvist & Wiksell International. Stockholm.

Karlsson I. (2002) *Företagsfusionen TietoEnator – explorativ studie av företagsidentitet och inre kommunikation*. C-uppsats i medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap. Uppsala Universitet. Uppsala.

Kohler Riessman C. (1993) *Narrative Analysis*. Sage Publications. California.

Laine-Sveiby K. (1991) *Företag i kulturmöten. Tre finländska företag och deras svenska dotterbolag. En etnologisk studie*. Akademitryck AB. Edsbruk.

Linell. P. (1978) *Människans språk. En orientering om språk, tänkande och kommunikation*. Gleerups utbildning. Malmö.

Locke K. (2001) *Grounded Theory in Management Research*. Sage Publications. London.

Louhiala-Salminen L. (2002a) The fly's perspective: discourse in the daily routines of a business manager. *English for specific purposes* 21. 211-231.

Louhiala-Salminen L. (2002b) *Communication and language use in merged corporations: Cases Stora Enso and Nordea*. Helsinki School of Economics. Working Papers. W-330.

Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E. (1988) *Intercultural communication: A Reader*. Wadsworth Publishing Company. Belmont, California.

Scollon R. & Scollon Wong S. (2001) *Intercultural Communication. Second edition*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Oxford.

Starrin, B., Dahlgren L., Larsson G., Styrborn S. (1997) *Along the path of discovery – Qualitative Methods and Grounded Theory*. Studentlitteratur. Lund.

Victor, D. A. (1992) *International Business Communication*. Harper Collins Publishers Inc. New York.

#### Other references

Carlsson B. (2003) *Svensk-finska äktenskap bygger på jämställdhet*. Site visited 2004-24-02. Dagens Nyheter. 2003-09-09.

[http://skolan.presstext.prb.se/bin/neta2gate?state=t9u8vo.10.18&f=doc\\_print&p\\_u\\_prbkref=S4&p\\_s\\_ALL^tag=S4+och+\(DN200309090386\)&a\\_search=&p\\_u\\_prl=50&p\\_l=1](http://skolan.presstext.prb.se/bin/neta2gate?state=t9u8vo.10.18&f=doc_print&p_u_prbkref=S4&p_s_ALL^tag=S4+och+(DN200309090386)&a_search=&p_u_prl=50&p_l=1)

Levin A. (2000). *Svenskan på 2000-talet*. Språkkonsulten 2/2000. Site visited 2004-24-02. Site last updated 2000-06-27 [http://www.sprakkonsult.org/tidning\\_uppdateras/0200/svenskan.htm](http://www.sprakkonsult.org/tidning_uppdateras/0200/svenskan.htm)

Liljequist Rydz K. (2002) *Språkförbistring på företag*. Chefsforum. Site visited 2004-24-02. Site last updated 2002-02-27. <http://www.htf.se/chef/arkiv/20020227135618a.shtml>

Messina J. (2004) *Model for effective communication*. Site visited 2004-05-17. <http://www.coping.org/communi/model.htm>

TietoEnator's Communications Policy. (2003-05-28)

Merriam-Webster web dictionary. Site visited 2004-02-15.

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=communication>

## Interviews

Interview with SM1. February 6, 2004.

Interview with SP1. February 24, 2004.

Interview with SM2. February 24, 2004.

Interview with FT2. March 3, 2004.

Interview with SP2. March 3, 2004.

Interview with FT1. March 30, 2004.

Interview with FM1. March 31, 2004.

## Appendix 1. Introduction letter

Hej / Hei!

My name is Annaliina Leppänen and I'm 23 years old. Born and raised in Jyväskylä, Finland, I moved to Västerås, Sweden approximately 1 ½ years ago. In Finland I've taken my Bachelor's degree with Business Administration as my major, but currently I'm studying for Master's, majoring in Intercultural Communication at Mälardalens högskola. The final part of my studies includes a thesis, which I'm writing for TietoEnator.

### The Title of the Thesis

"The Impact of Corporate Language on Managers' Communication Within the TietoEnator Organisation"

### The Aim of the Research

The corporate language within TietoEnator is English. The principal aim of the study is to explore the impact of English on managers' communication within the organisation. The target group includes TE's Finnish and Swedish managers, of whom none has English as a mother tongue. The issues studied include leadership and management perspectives and additionally an analysis of possible positive and negative effects that the usage of English has created.

### The Issues Studied

- How does English function as a corporate language from a management point of view?
- Which positive effects has the corporate language had on organisational communication in an intercultural corporation?
- What kind of problems has English caused in managerial communication?
- What solutions can be found for these problems?

### Time Plan

The study will be carried out during the spring term 2004 and should be finished in June 2004. The Master's thesis is equivalent to 10 study credits (poäng/ov).

### Data Collection:

When it comes to TietoEnator, I'm interested in interviewing Finnish and Swedish managers, who are often in contact over the Baltic Sea, possibly with each other. The prerequisite is that they use English at work on a regular basis. The number of interviews is 6. Other sources of material include Personnel Papers (Action News) and Business Reports. Optimally, the interviews take place during February and the beginning of March 2004. The interview results and other material will be presented anonymously in the thesis and the author has signed a vow of silence. Additionally, aware of some details in the study are my tutor at the Mälardalens högskola, professor Jarmo Lainio and professor Anders Törnvall, who is responsible for the Intercultural Communication programme.

Even other theoretical material will be used in the thesis. The aim of this research is to find results that benefit both TietoEnator and me as a research-worker. After the thesis is finished, a copy of it will be given to Inger Wallsten, HR Manager at Production and Logistics, who is also my contact person at TietoEnator. It is my wish and hope that TietoEnator will benefit from this kind of research.

Best regards,

Annaliina Leppänen (aln00022@student.mdh.se /0046-21-14 66 43 /0046-70- 437 19 02)



## **Intervjufrågor om koncernspråket engelska** **För TietoEnators svenska chefer**

### **Bakgrundsfrågor**

- Berätta om dig själv?
- Vilket är ditt modersmål?
- Berätta om din utbildning?
- Vilken position har Du inom TE organisation?
  - Vilka är Dina huvudsakliga uppgifter/ansvarsområden?

### **Engelskan som koncernspråk**

- Hur tycker Du engelskan har fungerat som koncernspråk?
- På vilket sätt har ett gemensamt koncernspråk påverkat kommunikationen inom TE?
  - Positivt? Utveckla i form av ett exempel?
  - Negativt? Utveckla i form av ett exempel?

### **Språkbruket ur individuellt perspektiv**

- Hur ofta kommunicerar Du på engelska inom TE?
  - Hur ofta kommunicerar du med andra språk?
- Har Du fått utbildning i engelska inom TE? Om, vad?
- Blir ditt sätt att kommunicera annorlunda om du använder engelska (jfr. med modersmål)?
  - Om, hur?
  - Finns det skillnader mellan skriftlig och muntlig kommunikation?
- Hur skulle Du kunna förbättra din kommunikation på engelska?
  - Vilka behov tror Du dig att ha i framtiden när det gäller språket?

### **Koncernspråket ur ledningsperspektiv**

- Vilket språk använder Du mest med dina kollegor och underordnade?
- Påverkar engelskan som koncernspråk ditt arbete som chef?
  - Hur? Utveckla med ett eget exempel?

### **Kulturrelaterade frågor**

- Hur skulle du beskriva finländarnas språkbruk?
- Hur skulle du beskriva svenskarnas språkbruk?
- Har Du upptäckt problem i språkbruket som har med kulturella skillnader att göra?
  - Utveckla med ett exempel?

### **Ytterligare frågor**

- Känner du att du har något annat att tillägga?
  - Om, vad?

## **Haastattelurunko –englanti organisaatiokielenä** **Kysymykset TietoEnatorin suomalaisille johtajille**

### **Taustakysymykset**

- Kuka olet?
- Mikä on äidinkielesi?
- Millainen koulutus sinulla on?
- Mikä on asemasi TietoEnatorin organisaatiossa?
  - Mitkä ovat pääasialliset tehtäväsi/vastuualueet?

### **Englanti organisaatiokielenä**

- Kuinka englanti on mielestäsi toiminut organisaatiokielenä?
- Millä tavalla yhteinen organisaatiokieli on vaikuttanut viestintään TE:n organisaatiossa?
  - Positiivisesti? Miten? (esimerkki)
  - Negatiivisesti? Miten? (esimerkki)

### **Organisaatiokieli yksilön näkökulmasta**

- Kuinka usein viestii englanniksi organisaation sisällä?
  - Entä muilla kielillä?
- Oletko saanut koulutusta englannin kielen käytössä TE:ssä? Jos, mitä?
- Koetko viestiväsi eri tavalla jos käytät englantia äidinkielesi sijasta?
  - Jos, miten?
  - Oletko havainnut eroja suullisen ja kirjallisen viestinnän välillä?
- Kuinka voisit parantaa englannin kielen käyttöä työtehtävissäsi?
  - Mitä viestintään liittyviä tarpeita sinulla voisi olla tulevaisuudessa?

### **Organisaatiokieli johtamisen välineenä**

- Mitä kieltä käytät enimmäksä määrin kollegoiden ja alaistesi kanssa?
- Vaikuttaako englannin käyttö organisaatiokielenä omaan esimiestyöhösi?
  - Miten? Voitko antaa konkreettisen esimerkin?

### **Kulttuuriin liittyvät kysymykset**

- Kuinka kuvailisit ruotsalaisten kielenkäyttöä?
- Kuinka kuvailisit suomalaisten kielenkäyttöä?
- Oletko havainnut englannin käytössä ongelmia, jotka liittyvät kulttuurillisiin eroihin?
  - Jos, mitä? Voitko antaa esimerkin?

### **Täydentävät kysymykset**

- Haluatko täydentää tai lisätä jotain edellä mainittuihin kysymyksiin?
  - Jos, mitä?