

# Summary of doctoral thesis

## *Foreign language and technical language multilingualism in the service sector in Poland*

Multilingualism and plurilingualism, which are essentially two sides of the same coin, will also be a major theme for the decade 2022–2032, following the decision taken by the UN General Assembly. The initiative helps to promote and raise awareness of the value of multilingualism and linguistic diversity, especially since there are over 7,000 languages in the world, almost half of which are threatened with extinction. Some languages do not even have a codified writing system or have such a limited vocabulary that they are only used in spoken form for everyday communication, whereas Arabic, English, Chinese, and Spanish are used in business and professional communication. Work-related contexts raise questions about the complexity of multilingualism in the workplace, especially in the rapidly developing Shared Service Sector. In the relevant literature, a number of positions discussing the phenomenon of foreign and technical language use for professional purposes in multilingual and plurilingual professional contexts can be isolated. Nevertheless, the topic of multilingualism and plurilingualism in the Polish labour market remains relatively unexplored in explicit and detailed terms. This doctoral thesis is therefore intended as a contribution to filling this research gap.

Based on the phenomenon of plurilingualism among individuals in the workplace, the following research questions are posed for this study:

- Which foreign languages are in highest demand among employers at large international companies in Poland? In other words: What is the linguistic diversity among employees at these large companies in Poland?
- In which linguistic contexts are foreign languages used? What differences can be observed in language use depending on specialist areas or business processes at work?
- To what extent is the English language known and used in the Shared Service Sector in Poland? Is English a common corporate language (CCL)?
- In the context of the Shared Service Sector, can one speak of (controlled) bilingualism or even plurilingualism?

In the context of multilingualism, with regard to the target group under investigation, the following questions arise:

- What types of multilingualism can be identified on the basis of the questionnaires? Can we speak of technical and foreign language multilingualism?
- What social structure of the team can be observed in the companies? What degree programmes have been completed? Which languages are identified as first languages (native languages)?

The dissertation also has two main secondary objectives. The first is to compare the European scientific perspective on multilingualism with Asian and Latin American literature and to enrich it with corresponding attempts to describe the phenomenon. The second is to explain language neutralisation, a recent phenomenon in large companies driven by artificial intelligence, which has not yet been discussed in the relevant literature.

The theoretical part of the dissertation therefore consists of three chapters. First, both the scientific status of multilingualism and the terminology used for the purposes of the work are presented. Furthermore, the phenomenon is shown at the level of countries, regions and institutions, which leads directly to the context of large international corporations, which is also enriched by theoretical foundations about their structure and functioning.

In terms of methodology, data collection to answer the research questions is carried out using a qualitative questionnaire-based survey method. The questionnaires in Polish are sent electronically to employees within the respective departments of a number of selected large companies in the service sector in Poland. Where necessary, additional face-to-face interviews were conducted, particularly with respondents who did not speak Polish, with their answers and comments being entered into the form in English. The presentation of results is covered in the practical part of the thesis.

A total of 109 people in nine teams from five different large companies took part in the qualitative study in the form of an anonymous survey. 23 different languages were listed. According to the study, all participating employees in the service sector in Poland are plurilingual, as they were able to demonstrate at least two languages according to the pattern 'English + another language'. 12.84 per cent of the respondents have a multilingual background. In terms of education, after graduating from secondary school, the participants always chose to study either at a university or a polytechnic. According to the study, using the criteria of both Kniffka (2022) and Kankaanranta and Lu (2013), it is proven that English is a common language of the company, i.e. CCL, and a lingua franca in the broader sense, i.e. BELF. The study

identified 13 work-related languages in ten specialist areas, but three of these languages are of great importance in the Shared Service Sector: English, Polish and German, which are required in all ten specialist areas proposed in the survey. English predominates with its technical language cardinality (using a term proposed in the dissertation to describe the phenomenon) in eight processes, Polish in human resources, and German in BFI (i. e. Banking, Financial Services, Insurance), but the differences are statistically negligible. Four specialist areas generally stand out in terms of technical language cardinality due to the number of employees working in them: supply chain management and logistics, customer service, data management and information technology. Despite its presence in the repertoire of one person or another, a language is not always considered relevant to work, which is where the difference between the perspective of institutional and individual multilingualism lies, as ten other codes are identified in the linguistic repertoire of individuals as a whole. The results are consistent with official EU statistics on language popularity and demonstrate the dynamism of the Shared Service Sector in Poland. They may also contribute to the further development of practical courses (such as linguistics for business) due to the social structure of the sector, especially since a large proportion of the respondents had completed philological or broadly defined philological courses.

**Keywords:** *plurilingualism, multilingualism, multi-competence, Shared Service Sector, technical languages.*