Working with multilingual data in workplace discourse research

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The workplace is the field of study for researchers from a number of disciplines, such as management, sociology, psychology, and linguistics. Regarding the latter, the sub- field of workplace discourse has grown over the past few decades and particularly since the early 80s. Despite the different approaches and theoretical traditions a common goal has been the focus on what people actually do at work, rather than what people say they do, through the analysis of naturally occurring interactions. Given that the workplace becomes increasingly multilingual and both lingua francae and local languages play a complex role, discourse analytic research often operates at the interface of a number of languages. This presents the field with theoretical and methodological challenges that are open to further investigation.

Against this backdrop, the paper draws on ongoing and recently completed projects in multinational, and hence inherently multilingual, companies and discusses the issues involved in the process of capturing, transcribing, translating, analysing and reporting on multilingual datasets. The paper discusses two cases where real life data were translated and the challenges involved in the process. The findings from a pilot dataset where workplace researchers reflect on their research practices and the methodological choices they make are also discussed. The paper will close by focusing on the ways in which the complex linguistic landscape of the modern workplace can be captured in discourse analytic work. Special attention is paid to the processes of translation which become paramount in how speakers and workplace contexts are represented and (re)constructed by the researcher.