

The Language of Global Success: How a Common Tongue Transforms Multinational Organizations. By Tsedal Neeley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. vii + 188 pp. Tables, appendixes, notes, index. Cloth, \$26.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-17537-9.

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As multinational organizations are expanding their global reach, business communication across cultural and linguistic boundaries is becoming commonplace. Multilingual workforces need to communicate effectively to promote international knowledge flows and enable collaborative innovation. To cope with this challenge, organizations around the globe have adopted English as the lingua franca (common language) of international business. Despite this trend, there is a dearth of studies about the implications for employees and organizations of corporate language mandates.

Tsedal Neeley's *The Language of Global Success* fills this gap with an in-depth and longitudinal study of the English language mandate introduced at the Japanese e-commerce giant Rakuten in 2010. Based on 650 interviews conducted over five years with Rakuten employees from eight countries, a large-scale survey, and extensive archival data, this book provides an up close view of language shaping global business communication. Repurposing the term "expatriate," which typically refers to individuals residing temporarily or permanently in a country other than their country of origin, Neeley demonstrates that a global language mandate transforms all employees into some kind of expat, that is, detaches them from their mother tongue and/or home culture.

The first chapter sets the scene with a rich, behind-the-scenes account of Rakuten's first steps toward a comprehensive linguistic overhaul. Vividly describing the upheaval caused by CEO Hiroshi Mikitani's initiative, Neeley highlights that linguistic integration is a challenge for all multinational organizations. Chapter 2 focuses on Mikitani as a transformational leader who proactively alleviated employees' fears of linguistic marginalization in order to prevent turnover in times of radical organizational change. In this context, Neeley critically discusses the relationship between language and culture. Her novel insights on this longstanding debate have the potential to stimulate language-sensitive international business research.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are dedicated to three distinct social groups that were affected differently by "Englishnization" at Rakuten. The first group consists of Japanese employees, who remained in their home country, but had to adopt a foreign language at the workplace. Because their daily work experience was fraught with substantial linguistic challenges, Neeley calls them *linguistic expats*. The second group comprises

native-English-speaking employees working at Rakuten's U.S. subsidiaries. Those workers initially felt privileged by the English-language mandate, but surprisingly found that the common corporate language became a conduit for headquarters to spread its Japanese corporate culture to the U.S. sites. Neeley memorably describes how orders to wear the Rakuten badge, correctly pinned and at all times, forced U.S. personnel to detach from their accustomed cultural norms. Despite staying in their home country, these employees became *cultural expats*. The third group consists of employees working at Rakuten's non-native-English-speaking foreign subsidiaries. These individuals had to shed both their mother tongue and native working culture and were consequently termed *linguistic-cultural expats*. Despite initial frustrations, these workers adapted astoundingly well to the dual challenges they faced. This flexibility turns linguistic-cultural expats into highly valuable talent for globalized organizations.

Chapter 6 takes stock of Rakuten's bold corporate language initiative five years after its inception. Whereas language standardization facilitated international acquisitions, global integration, and talent management, Neeley also indicates persisting challenges. She describes how Rakuten's initiative affected Japanese society, thus testifying to the wider political, social, and economic importance of "Englishnization." The final chapter presents valuable lessons for corporate leaders, managers, and employees seeking to navigate the linguistic and cultural challenges of corporate language mandates.

"Language is everywhere. It flows across and touches the entire spectrum of global organizational processes," Neeley writes (pp. 5–6). Yet, "theoretical and empirical focus on language and globalization continues to dramatically lag the realities that employees face on the ground" (p. 5). *The Language of Global Success* helps to close that gap with a longitudinal perspective on how employees of global organizations learn to navigate linguistic and cultural differences. This book explains global phenomena through the lived experiences of individual workers, is written with empathy for the research subjects, and reads like a good novel. The combination of rigorous research and a compelling story will hopefully make this an influential book. Neeley's evocative examples are not only relevant for global managers in search of successful language strategies, they may also change the way management and organization scholars think about multilingual business in the age of globalization.

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