

The Impact of Multilingualism: Innovation in Linguistically Diverse Workplaces (LDWs)

Natsumi Uehara

La Unión High School, Av. Manuel Cipriano Dulanto 1950, Lima, Lima, 15084, Perú; uehara.nat@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Multilingualism and language diversity are key resources in multinational companies, fostering innovation through diverse perspectives and improved knowledge sharing. This study investigates how multilingualism among employees enhances innovation in linguistically diverse workplaces (LDWs). It was hypothesized that multilingualism in LDWs increases innovation by facilitating more effective communication among employees, broadening perspectives, and enabling adaptation to multiple global markets. The research centers on an exploratory case study of Crimson Education, a multinational college preparation consultancy, with a small sample of 10 multilingual employees. The study employed qualitative semi-structured interviews as well as a survey consisting of both quantitative Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions for multilingual employees at Crimson Education. The findings were supplemented by interviews with employees of three multinational technology companies. The results indicate that multilingualism improves communication, knowledge sharing, and creative problem-solving by bridging linguistic and cultural gaps. Moreover, employees reported that multilingualism supports innovation through effective communication and collaboration, serving as a competitive advantage. Overall, multilingualism emerges as an essential cultural and cognitive resource that drives innovation in LDWs.

KEYWORDS: Behavioral and Social Sciences, Sociology and Social Psychology, Multilingualism, Innovation, Business.

■ Introduction

Multilingualism is the ability of individuals to engage in their daily interactions using more than one language,¹ while language diversity refers to the presence of multiple languages, due to the presence of speakers of diverse backgrounds, within a particular organization.² The relationship between multilingualism and language diversity is complementary: multilingualism highlights an individual's proficiency in languages, and language diversity encompasses the collective linguistic variety within a workplace. The increase, since the last century, of companies operating across borders results in engagement with a larger scale and variety of customer bases. These companies collaborate with international partners, enabling the integration of multiple perspectives that contribute to innovative outcomes within global business environments.

According to a 2005 study by international business communication expert Jane Henderson, language diversity influences team members' perception in unique ways, aside from the pure communication in various mother tongues.³ These unique ways include social identities within teams, power dynamics, and communication norms. It is essential to note that language diversity can create challenges and opportunities, and this interaction impacts how innovation occurs in linguistically diverse workplaces (LDWs) by fostering an exchange of ideas enriched with cultural insights.

This paper investigates the central question: How does multilingualism among employees enhance innovation in LDWs? Multilingualism relates to innovation at work by improving communication, expanding knowledge sharing, and broadening perspectives from individuals with diverse linguistic backgrounds. In this context, innovation encompasses the

creation of new products, the generation of creative ideas, and problem-solving within the organizational context. This paper examines how multilingualism in LDWs enhances innovation when communication and knowledge sharing are improved, and when adaptive solutions are enabled as perceived through evidence from employees' perceptions and concrete examples from multinational companies.

This study distinguishes itself from the existing literature by emphasizing the significance of multilingualism and language diversity in innovative contexts. While multilingualism has been previously studied in relation to communication and organizational behavior, existing research has often undervalued and positioned language as a medium of information transmission rather than a social and cultural resource.³ However, recent studies have begun to uncover the socio-cultural dimensions of language use in workplaces, highlighting how language shapes interpersonal dynamics. Based on this foundation, this study addresses a gap regarding the specific role of multilingual interpersonal interaction in fostering innovation, an area less explored in prior research.⁴ Furthermore, this paper highlights the competitive advantage that companies gain when multilingualism is leveraged. By examining language implications such as knowledge sharing, sociolinguistic competence, and cross-linguistic collaboration, the present study analyzes challenges and opportunities presented by linguistic diversity. Therefore, these dynamics help organizations unlock the full potential of their multilingual workforce.

This study adopts an exploratory case study approach focusing on Crimson Education, a multinational college preparation consultancy. It includes seven interviews and responses from 10 multilingual employees to a survey comprising Likert-scale

and open-ended questions. Additionally, supplementary interviews were conducted with three multilingual employees, each representing one of three multinational technology companies, to provide additional contextual insights.

When managed effectively, language diversity strengthens team cohesion, interpretive frameworks, and communication strategies. As Information Systems Science expert Farhan Ahmad and Information Studies expert Gunilla Widen argue, “Knowledge sharing is a product of the collaborative and supportive environment formed by socialization and informal communication between employees.”²⁵ However, unmanaged language diversity often leads to language clustering, which restricts knowledge flows and limits informal communication across the organization.⁵

Furthermore, this research aims to offer practical guidance for organizations seeking to boost the potential of their linguistic resources by investigating the mechanisms through which multilingualism fosters innovation outcomes in LDWs. Overall, by understanding how multilingualism among employees specifically enhances innovation, this study fills the gap left by prior research, which has frequently underestimated language as a key element of culture and society.

This paper hypothesizes that multilingualism among employees enhances innovation in linguistically diverse workplaces through effective knowledge sharing, integration of diverse perspectives, and communication strategies such as code-switching and language coverage. These mechanisms enable employees to bridge knowledge silos through cross-linguistic collaboration, develop sociolinguistic competence, and cultivate inclusive environments in which language diversity is leveraged. The potential of multilingualism for innovation depends on organizational efforts to support sociolinguistic competence and address social dynamics — such as language clustering and shadow structures — that impact language use in daily practices.

Key Concepts / Background:

The impact of language diversity in organizational dynamics and innovation has shown promise in recent linguistic and business studies. Language fluency — the ability to write and speak a language effectively — enables basic communication, while sociolinguistic competence is the capacity to interpret, negotiate, and respond to meaning in social contexts; together, these allow for effective language use for innovation.² As Henderson points out, employees with language proficiency skills may encounter several difficulties in communicating when they lack this sociolinguistic competence.³

Language diversity plays a crucial role in companies by helping them to progressively reach global clients and markets. However, this valuable element also raises challenges that need to be identified.³ The literature indicates that language clustering — the tendency of employees to interact mainly with the members of their own linguistic community — can hinder informal communication and the flow of knowledge throughout the team.⁵ Those fluent in the principal language of the company can also be affected by language clustering.

This highlights the importance of effective social dynamics within innovative multilingual teams.

The connection between language and innovation manifests itself through knowledge sharing, in which multilingual employees serve as bridges, facilitating the cross-pollination of ideas, thus eradicating language barriers that exclude employees from key decision-making processes and create “islands” within the organization.⁴

Recent research highlights specific language practices such as code-switching — alternating between languages in the same discourse — and language convergence — adapting one’s linguistic behavior to a specific audience. Those strategies facilitate knowledge sharing in multilingual companies by fostering inclusive environments where perspectives from different linguistic groups can be integrated into discussions and ongoing networking.⁶

Moreover, the concept of shadow structures — informal, language-based networks — illustrates how languages impose their own pattern on communication and in personal connections, as employees with superior language skills access broader networks within the multinational.⁵ Companies must implement additional practices beyond simply hiring multilingual staff to maximize the innovative potential of linguistically diverse workplaces (LDWs). They need to promote mechanisms that influence language use to foment inclusive environments in which all voices are valued through knowledge-sharing initiatives.⁵

■ Methods

This study investigates innovation supported by multilingualism in linguistically diverse workplaces (LDWs), using Crimson Education — a multinational university admissions consultancy — as a case study. This research employs a qualitative and quantitative approach, using survey results and in-depth interviews to explore the implications of a phenomenon in its real-world context. Although Sociologist Peter Swanborn’s approach emphasizes triangulation through survey results, in-depth interviews, and participant observation,⁷ in the present study, the first two methods — survey results and in-depth interviews — were utilized. Future studies may include participant observation to corroborate and expand on the study’s findings related to multilingualism and innovation.

A careful literature review was done using JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate, reviewing papers published from the year 1993 to the present and using keywords such as “multilingualism,” “innovation,” and “linguistic diversity.” Out of 26 academic papers and articles initially selected, the 16 most relevant ones were analyzed for this study. In addition, two books were used for reference, including Swanborn’s book, *Case Study Research: What, Why, and How?* (2010) and Lee and Saunders’ book *Conducting Case Study Research for Business and Management Students* (2017).

The case company, Crimson Education, was selected based on the inclusion criteria of having international operations and a workforce composed of employees proficient in multiple languages. Within Crimson Education, this study focused on the Latin America office and operations of the company. In

addition to the company selected for the case study (Crimson Education), three other multinational companies — Google, Amazon, and Uber — that also meet the abovementioned inclusion criteria were included in the study to a more limited extent for the purpose of additional context and comparison. Companies operating solely in monolingual environments or that lack practices supporting multilingualism were not considered in the present study.

A questionnaire with 30 questions was distributed to multilingual employees at Crimson Education. The survey participants were selected according to the following inclusion criteria: they were required to be current employees of Crimson Education, to have worked at the company for at least one year, and to be proficient in at least two languages used in a professional context. Employees were excluded from the survey if they had less than one year of tenure or lacked proficiency in more than one language, in order to ensure that all employees had relevant experiences with multilingual workplace dynamics.

The initial five questions of the questionnaire gathered demographic and profile information, such as tenure, the number of languages in which employees are proficient, and their job roles. Additionally, the questionnaire incorporated 16 Likert-scale statements — ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”) — to evaluate the employees’ experiences related to multilingualism, collaboration, communication, creativity, knowledge sharing, and innovation. For instance, two of the 16 Likert-scale items were the following: “Multilingualism enhances communication between me and my colleagues” and “Multilingualism has allowed for greater innovation by my team.” Subsequently, nine open-ended questions explored the challenges and benefits of multilingualism and examples of how it influences innovation — including prompts such as “What challenges do you face when communicating in a multilingual environment?” and “Do you think that multilingualism influences your company’s ability to adapt to new technologies or markets? If so, how?” In addition, the start of the questionnaire included four questions for ascertaining the employees’ eligibility for the study and one question about the employees’ professional role.

Ten Crimson employees responded to the survey. These employees have a variety of job titles and functions, as follows: one “LATAM Regional Team Lead and U.S. Senior Strategist,” who oversees regional operations; one “Country Manager for Brazil & LATAM,” who manages country-specific strategies; one “Student Success Manager,” who supports student outcomes; one “LATAM Student Success Team Lead,” who coordinates team performance; one “Head of Marketing for Brazil & LATAM,” who is responsible for promotional strategies; one “Academic Advisor,” who guides Crimson’s available academic programs; one “Academic Advisor and Former Regional Manager,” who combines advising expertise with management experience; and three “Senior Strategists,” who focus on students’ university application strategy.

In addition, seven of the ten Crimson employees who responded to the survey — all except for the three “Senior Strategists” — were interviewed, for the purpose of obtain-

ing more in-depth information and perspectives from them. These interviews explored a variety of areas: the perceptions of multilingual staff, the innovation outcomes, the companies’ initiatives to leverage language diversity, strategies for mitigating language hierarchy, mechanisms for integrating multilingual perspectives into market strategy, investments in multilingual infrastructure, operational costs in contrast to innovation benefits, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for multilingual teams, examples of multilingual teams solving problems, unrealized opportunities due to underleveraged multilingualism, and recommendations to boost multilingualism’s impact.

Four of the interviewed employees were interviewed individually, in one-on-one conversations: the “LATAM Regional Team Lead and U.S. Senior Strategist,” the “Country Manager for Brazil & LATAM,” the “Student Success Manager,” and the “LATAM Student Success Team Lead.” A group interview was held with the other three interviewed staff members — the “Head of Marketing for Brazil & LATAM,” the “Academic Advisor,” and the “Academic Advisor and Former Regional Manager.”

To broaden the contextual understanding and compare practices across industries, supplementary interviews were conducted with one former or current employee from each of the following multinational technology companies: Amazon, Google, and Uber at the offices of those companies in England, Spain, and the United States, respectively. These participants were selected for their multilingual backgrounds and their direct experience working in international teams. The overall sample size for the supplementary interviews was three multilingual employees, one from each company. The interviews focused on how multilingualism is managed, perceptions of innovation in LDWs, strategies and initiatives for effective integration of multiple languages in the workplace, and concrete examples of multilingual perspectives having led to innovative solutions.

The qualitative analysis of the responses to the interview and open-ended survey was organized thematically, following an inductive approach to identify patterns related to key themes, complementing the insights of the literature review. Furthermore, survey data from the Likert-scale questions were analyzed using statistics to identify overall trends pertaining to multilingualism and innovation.

■ Results

Survey data from ten Crimson Education staff members highlights a workplace with employees who are fluent in multiple languages, with each respondent reporting proficiency in at least two languages; several reported fluency in three or more, including English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Mandarin, Italian, Macedonian, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian, and Arabic. The respondents’ tenure ranged from one year to more than six years, which indicated an experienced, linguistically diverse team. As shown in Table 1, all responses to the 16 Likert-scale survey questions (L1-L16) were on the standard five-point Likert scale: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral/Unsure (N/U), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).

This section presents how communication and knowledge-sharing related to multilingualism enhance innovation within teams with the support of the evidence from quantitative survey data and qualitative interview insights. It is important to mention that the measure of innovation used in this study is based on employees' perceptions and self-reported experience rather than objective organizational performance metrics.

Table 1: Responses to the 16 Likert-scale survey questions.

L#	SD	D	N/U	A	SA
L1	1	1	0	0	8
L2	0	0	0	1	9
L3	0	0	0	2	8
L4	0	0	0	0	10
L5	1	1	1	3	4
L6	0	0	0	0	10
L7	0	0	0	1	9
L8	0	0	0	2	8
L9	0	0	3	3	4
L10	0	0	0	4	6
L11	0	0	1	2	7
L12	0	1	1	2	6
L13	0	0	0	4	6
L14	0	0	2	3	5
L15	0	1	0	1	8
L16	0	0	1	2	7

Multilingual usage is prevalent in the daily operations of Crimson Education employees. Specifically, 80% of respondents strongly agreed with statement L1, "At work, I frequently communicate in two or more languages," while 10% strongly disagreed and another 10% disagreed. Of the respondents, 90% strongly agreed with L2, "Multilingualism (proficiency in more than one language) is important for my job performance." Additionally, all respondents strongly agreed with L4, "I often collaborate with colleagues who are multilingual," signaling a workplace culture in which multilingual collaboration is integral. Notably, statement L5, "I often collaborate with colleagues who speak a language that I don't," received the strong agreement (SA) of only 40% of the participants; 30% agreed (A), 10% remained neutral or unsure (N/U), 10% disagreed (D), and 10% strongly disagreed (SD). This indicates that direct interaction among multilingual employees who have different language sets (non-shared languages) is less frequent than interaction among multilingual employees who are proficient in the same set of languages.

The role of multilingualism in enhancing knowledge sharing within teams was emphasized by the survey participants. All ten respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with L3, "Multilingualism enhances communication between me and my colleagues"; 80% strongly agreed, while 20% agreed. Similarly, for both L7, "Multilingualism encourages the sharing of knowledge among members of my team," and L8, "I believe that multilingualism in the workplace helps employees to understand each other's ideas," all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed, with most of them strongly agreeing (90% for L7, and 80% for L8) — thereby evidencing multilingualism's impact on fostering a deeper understanding within teams and clearer communication. Furthermore, for L11, "My company actively fosters multilingualism through its hiring and

educational policies," 70% of the participants strongly agreed, 20% agreed, and 10% remained neutral or unsure, while for L12, "My company leverages employees' multilingual capabilities," 60% strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 10% remained neutral or unsure, and 10% disagreed. This variation in responses may reflect differences in job roles, where some employees use their multilingual skills more than others, or differences in perceptions regarding how the company leverages these abilities, based on the insights from the interviews. Although agreement with L11 and L12 was not universal, as for L3, L7, and L8, the level of agreement was nevertheless high. This was elucidated in an open-ended response: "Multilingualism brings a richer, more inclusive workplace culture. It fosters curiosity, empathy, and openness to diverse perspectives. At the same time, it challenges teams to be more intentional and mindful in how they communicate — which can lead to more thoughtful collaboration overall." Additionally, respondents noted that multilingual capabilities help adapt services to regional needs while enhancing effective knowledge transfer.

Survey respondents perceived multilingualism as a driver of innovation, with 70% of participants strongly agreeing, 20% agreeing, and 10% disagreeing with L16, "Multilingualism has allowed for greater innovation by my team." These perceptions were corroborated by in-depth interview data that provide concrete examples of innovation. It is facilitated by multilingual collaboration, such as the localization of products and decision-making based on distinct cultural settings. Furthermore, all participants strongly agreed with L6, "Multilingualism enhances my ability to understand different cultural contexts," and 100% of participants agreed or strongly agreed with both L10, "Multilingualism gives my organization a competitive advantage," and L13, "I believe that multilingualism in companies has a positive impact on creativity and innovation." Likewise, 80% strongly agreed and 10% agreed with L15, "Multilingualism allows my team to access and apply knowledge from sources in different languages, contributing to innovative solutions."

One respondent's comment illustrated this impact: "Multilingualism accelerates our ability to localize products, campaigns, and services for different markets. It also makes it easier to understand user feedback in native languages, which helps us iterate faster and make more culturally relevant decisions." This example reflects essential themes of cross-cultural collaboration and the benefits of linguistic diversity found in the data. Another innovation-related statement, L14 — "Multilingualism has allowed for greater creativity in brainstorming sessions on my team" — also had a high level of agreement, at 80% (with 50% responding "SA" and 30% responding "A"), and no disagreement, with the other 20% remaining neutral or unsure. This evidences the employees' recognition of the role of multilingualism in promoting creativity. However, statement L9, "Multilingualism reduces misunderstandings in my team's communication," had a somewhat lower rate of agreement, at 70% — with 40% strongly agreeing (SA), 30% agreeing (A), and 30% remaining neutral or unsure (N/U) — suggesting the possibility of some remaining communication challenges, though no respondents disagreed with the statement.

Respondents also highlighted obstacles faced by employees in multilingual workplaces. The most frequently identified issues included misunderstandings due to cultural differences, difficulties adapting to unfamiliar accents, and loss of nuance in translation. Some participants pointed out that holding training in only one language can limit knowledge absorption for multilingual employees. Open-ended responses further described how expressing ideas with full nuance across languages requires cognitive effort, and how this difficulty can lead to the unintentional silencing of innovative contributions.

Interview data provided insights into how multilingualism enhances innovation within the company. Employee 1, LATAM Student Success Team Lead, explained that cross-language collaboration is essential for effective knowledge sharing and that multilingual staff often interpret and clarify information, ensuring inclusive communication for colleagues and clients alike. Complementing this, Employee 2, Head of Marketing Brazil & LATAM, described how multilingualism supports content adaptation and brainstorming: “We create content daily ... and multilingualism really helps us adapt to different cultures. When we brainstorm, trends from Brazil, China, or Colombia influence our content and strategies.” This illustrates how multilingual perspectives shape innovation efforts.

The strategic importance of language diversity in recruitment was emphasized by Employee 3, the Regional Team Lead, who stated that approximately one-third of current openings require specific language proficiency, which supports regional market entry and hybrid team innovation. This approach confirms that the company leverages multilingual human resources as an advantage in product development.

Interviews, including responses from Employee 4, Country Manager Brazil & LATAM, revealed that multilingual expertise enables service customization. Specifically, Employee 4 described how knowledge of local languages supported expansion from Mexico into Brazil, building trust with new clients and developing tailored offerings such as SAT group classes in Portuguese, reinforcing the link between localized innovation and languages.

Technological tools were identified by interviewees as facilitators of multilingual innovation. Employee 5, Academic Advisor, highlighted the AI “Copilot” tool, which translates session notes into English instantly, making information accessible across teams: “The AI tool translates local language meeting notes into English instantly, saving time and making information accessible.” This reduces communication overhead and accelerates knowledge flow without overburdening staff.

Innovation outcomes arise through effective use of multilingualism and language diversity to facilitate communication, localize content, and tailor solutions to specific markets. Teams utilized cultural and linguistic knowledge to localize sales proposals and marketing materials, thereby enhancing revenue and engagement in new regions. Employee 1 recounted resolving complex financial aid misunderstandings through multilingual support, preventing loss of scholarships and increasing clients’ satisfaction. Likewise, Employee 3 discussed how a group of three multilingual employees (fluent in various combinations

of Portuguese, Spanish, and English) accessed global resources to create educational tools for Latin American students — work that monolingual teams could not have managed as effectively. Furthermore, localized marketing campaigns tested in Brazil and other Latin American countries outperformed English-only versions, as confirmed by Employee 2’s observations on improved engagement due to the regionally adapted content.

Despite the benefits of language diversity and multilingualism, interviewees expressed concerns about challenges resulting from language hierarchy. Interviewees noted that the dominance of English as the corporate lingua franca can unintentionally suppress the voices of less fluent employees, limiting their participation and innovative contributions. To address this issue, regional team initiatives have encouraged the use of Portuguese, Spanish, and French, in addition to English, in both formal and informal settings. However, training programs delivered in English can restrict multilingual employees’ effective knowledge acquisition, suggesting a potential need for greater investment in inclusive multilingual environments.

Supplementary interviews with multilingual employees from Google, Amazon, and Uber reveal a consistent prioritization of English as the primary language for communication within global teams. Both Google and Uber maintain high English proficiency requirements to ensure collaboration across their international workforce. However, this reliance on English can limit the inclusion of multilingual employees with varying fluency levels. Recognizing this, all three of the multinational tech companies have developed initiatives to support both linguistic diversity and multilingualism. Google provides training and English courses to reduce language barriers and has instituted clear policies that safeguard the right to use native languages in informal settings. Amazon promotes diversity through hiring practices and provides budgets for language learning as part of employee development. Uber draws on insights from multilingual employees on teams spread across more than 30 countries.

Regarding innovation, the interviewees concurred that multilingual employees contribute not only language proficiency but also important cultural perspectives that enhance product development and market strategies. An Amazon employee, who is on Amazon’s Alexa team, stated that multilingualism, when combined with diverse cultural experiences, can foster out-of-the-box thinking. Nonetheless, a high-level Google manager noted that investments tend to focus on translation technologies and language training that facilitate efficiency in operations rather than directly driving innovation.

Overall, the external perspectives from the multinational tech companies align with the findings at Crimson Education, highlighting broad recognition of multilingualism’s value in fostering innovation.

■ Discussion

This study has a small sample size of only 10 employees from one main company, combined with reliance on self-reported data, which means that limits the generalization of the findings. However, this exploratory case study offers insights

for future research with larger samples. The results of the study confirm that multilingual employees contribute to knowledge sharing and increase teams' diversity of perspectives and experiences, thereby promoting innovation outcomes. The following discussion details, in order, these effects and mechanisms that were identified.

Knowledge sharing:

The findings confirmed that the presence of multilingual employees enhances knowledge sharing in LDWs. Survey responses revealed that a large majority of employees (80–90%) agreed or strongly agreed that multilingualism improves communication and knowledge sharing within teams. Moreover, most participants reported frequent communication in two or more languages at work and described active collaboration with colleagues from different linguistic backgrounds. These results corroborate Ahmad and Widen's findings that overcoming language clustering facilitates knowledge flows that are essential for innovation.⁵ However, our study expands on their work by providing empirical evidence of how multilingual employees serve as knowledge brokers in terms of bridging linguistic gaps and navigating sociocultural complexities in real organizational contexts. Interview insights from Employee 1 further demonstrated that multilingual employees serve as linguistic and cultural bridges, interpreting, contextualizing, and clarifying information to ensure inclusivity, consistent with Henderson's emphasis on sociolinguistic competence beyond mere language fluency.³

Further, the concept of employees acting as "knowledge brokers" emerged from the interviews: multilingual staff not only translate and adapt resources but also channel client insights across regions, enabling opportunities that monolingual teams might miss. For instance, Employee 3, LATAM Regional Team Lead and U.S. Senior Strategist, noted, "We were able to cater to the Latin American audience, making sure that strategists spoke the languages — at least Portuguese and Spanish. That allows us to address what is necessary for clients in those regions." This ensured that strategies and communications were culturally and linguistically aligned with local market needs. Additionally, this employee highlighted how bilingual strategies helped with curating local databases of academic competitions, a task that would have been unmanageable otherwise. This corroborates Ahmad's idea of "dual translation," whereby employees translate both language and contextual meaning.¹ The dual data source verification confirms that multilingualism enhances the effectiveness of knowledge exchange, which is foundational for innovation. The open-ended survey responses highlight how multilingualism brings a "richer, more inclusive culture" that encourages more thoughtful, collaborative processes.

In contrast, several employees noted frequent misunderstandings due to nuances in tone, connotation, and specific terminology, resulting in the dilution of innovative ideas. Respondents mentioned challenges such as "ensuring that ideas are expressed with the same nuance and clarity across languages," and noted that "brilliant insights can be lost or diluted due to differences in fluency or vocabulary." These barriers illustrate

the complex nature of multilingual knowledge sharing but do not diminish its role in overcoming knowledge silos — bridging regions, clients, and teams — and creating pathways for innovation. This perspective resonates with Marschan-Piekkari and Welch's identification of "islands" that form communication barriers in multinational contexts. This study demonstrates, with organizational case study evidence, how multilingual practices can transform these isolating islands into innovative channels for formal and informal knowledge exchange.⁵

Teams' diverse perspectives:

The study highlights how language diversity broadens cognitive and cultural perspectives, fostering innovation in global teams. Interviewees noted that the ability to code-switch and use multiple languages during meetings and brainstorming sessions increased participation, especially for staff less confident in a non-native language. These inclusive practices nurture psychological safety and encourage the free exchange of ideas, consistent with Cohen and Henderson's research suggesting that linguistic diversity, when well managed, transforms from a divisive factor into a creativity-enhancing resource.⁸ Survey participants reinforced that this diversity promotes "more thoughtful collaboration overall" and "contributes to a more globally empathetic and culturally agile workplace," with 90% of respondents acknowledging multilingualism as a competitive advantage that supports innovation and a workplace culture marked by empathy and openness to diverse perspectives. This was said to encourage new ideas and make colleagues from varied backgrounds feel welcome in contributing to group discussions. Employee 1, LATAM Student Success Team Lead, reflected, "We're even investing even more into learning the languages we work with."

Interviewees described tangible innovation outcomes derived from leveraging local languages, such as adapting SAT training to Portuguese-speaking clients and tailoring region-specific marketing content. This aligns with the findings of Stephen Chen, a scholar of international business management, who has emphasized the role of linguistic diversity in expanding cognitive frameworks, enriching decision-making, and innovation through exposure to multiple perspectives.⁹ However, this study extends Chen's work by providing concrete organizational examples that detail how these cognitive benefits are operationalized within specific educational service adaptations to diverse markets. Moreover, the integration of AI-supported translation tools, such as Crimson Education's "Copilot" system that instantly translates meeting notes, illustrates organizational use of technology to enhance cross-linguistic communication and knowledge transfer processes. This reflects Tenzer and Pudelko's advocacy for hybrid language practices and the use of technology as fundamental to innovation in multilingual settings,¹⁰ while offering distinctive insights into real-world company implementation.

Nevertheless, participants cited persistent systemic challenges: formal documentation, training, and development programs often defaulted to a single language (English), which can diminish less proficient speakers and impede profound engagement. These findings echo Ahmad and Widen's call for

organizations to address the social dynamics behind language clustering and to foster environments in which linguistic diversity is embraced to unlock the potential of innovation.⁵

Innovation outcomes:

Survey and interview evidence indicate that multilingualism is a key element of innovation within Crimson Education and other multinational firms. Most survey respondents strongly agreed that multilingualism enhances their team's creativity and capacity for better innovation outcomes. Interviewees detailed how multilingual collaboration enabled product and service innovations, including regional market adaptations, local client engagement strategies, and development of educational resources. Employee 2, Head of Marketing, stated, "Our departments all have meetings where collaborators who speak different languages and live in different countries can share ideas, trends, and solutions based on their own cultural environment," describing how multilingual team members bring rich, regionally informed insights to global content creation. Employee 3, LATAM Regional Team Lead, explained, "We're leveraging our multilingual employees' expertise through different marketing campaigns so that we can speak the language of the families that we're selling to," affirming that language-specific hiring is essential for sustaining hybrid teams that successfully navigate diverse markets. Crimson's capacity to operate across regions such as China, Brazil, and the Middle East relies on multilingual teams who understand local systems, cultural values, and communication styles. This localized expertise has been fundamental in enabling meaningful adaptations to products and services tailored for these varied markets. Additionally, collaboration across regions and the role of multilingual staff in bridging cultural gaps have proven essential in reaching new markets and iterating products based on authentic user feedback.

These observations align with Marschan-Piekkari and Welch's framework of "shadow structures," where multilingual employees act as connectors, bridging formal and informal organizational networks, and enabling richer "cross-pollination" of ideas for innovation.⁵ However, our interview data reveal operational challenges, such as adapting to various communication styles and standardizing processes without sacrificing regional adaptation or excluding voices less fluent in dominant corporate languages. These nuances complement Henderson, Marschan-Piekkari, and Welch's findings by highlighting how language hierarchies and shadow structures persist in impeding equitable participation and knowledge flow.^{3,5} Moreover, training programs primarily delivered in one language were seen as a barrier to full knowledge absorption by multilingual employees, suggesting that organizational initiatives still need to better support sociolinguistic competence and inclusive learning environments.

The findings highlight that while multilingual teams require operational costs related to multilingual hiring, training, and technology investments, the benefits in market reach, client satisfaction, and innovation strongly outweigh these expenses. As Employee 3 stated, metrics such as Net Promoter Scores were consistently higher in multilingual regions, illustrating tangible

returns on investing in multilingual employees and language diversity. These results corroborate Feely and Harzing's argument that language management serves as a strategic asset fostering coordination and innovation.¹¹ This study advances this discussion by emphasizing the essential role of developing sociolinguistic competence and adaptive technologies to capitalize on this asset. Moreover, recommendations from interviewees to further invest in AI translation tools, language learning, and structured multilingual collaboration sessions align with existing literature urging companies to develop language management strategies.⁵ This indicates that maximizing innovation from multilingualism requires organizational initiatives addressing sociolinguistic competence.

■ Conclusion

This study examined how multilingualism among employees enhances innovation within linguistically diverse workplaces (LDWs), focusing on Crimson Education as a case study alongside contextual insights from multinational technology firms. The findings affirm that multilingualism fosters innovation by improving communication, knowledge sharing, and the integration of diverse cultural perspectives. Multilingual employees serve as bridges across languages and cultural divides, facilitating inclusive dialogue that contributes to innovative outcomes such as localized products, targeted marketing campaigns, and customized client services. Moreover, organizational investments in language management and technological tools, such as AI translation systems, further amplify these benefits. The study also revealed that multilingual strategies, such as code switching and language convergence, facilitate inclusion and the sharing of insights and information. In synthesizing these insights, this study corroborated that multilingualism provides a cognitive and cultural resource that enhances knowledge exchange, creative problem-solving, and adaptation in LDWs.

Despite the research confirming core elements of the hypothesis, some challenges remain unresolved, including communication nuances that lead to misunderstandings, as well as persistent social dynamics that marginalize less proficient speakers when training and formal documentation favor a single dominant language. These issues suggest that while multilingualism is a powerful resource for innovation, its potential depends on sociolinguistic competence development and inclusive organizational policies. This study validates and expands key findings from the literature by showcasing how effectively managed multilingual teams contribute to richer knowledge networks and better localized innovation outcomes.

Important questions emerge from this study, such as "How can companies better balance the dominance of corporate lingua francas with the linguistic diversity present in workplaces?" Future research could explore these dynamics and their direct impact on innovation. Experimental designs might measure innovation through organizational outcomes rather than employees' perceptions. Additionally, exploring the impact of emerging AI language tools on mitigating communication barriers and fostering innovation shows promise for future research.

This study confirms that multilingualism, when supported by sociolinguistic competence, organizational policies, and technological infrastructure, is a powerful tool for innovation in linguistically diverse workplaces (LDWs). It accentuates the complexity and importance of language's role as not merely a communication tool but also a dynamic cultural and cognitive resource that influences knowledge sharing, creativity, and competitive advantage. Organizations committed to leveraging multilingualism must continue investing strategically in language skills development, inclusive practices, and adaptive technologies to harness the full innovative potential embedded in their multilingual workforces.

■ Ethics

This study received informed consent from all participants before data collection, while ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study. The identities of the participants were protected through anonymization and appropriate handling of interview transcripts. Furthermore, confidentiality measures were maintained throughout data analysis and reporting to safeguard participant privacy.

■ Acknowledgments

The author sincerely thanks Dr. Aaron Litvin for his invaluable guidance and support throughout this research. The author also thanks the survey respondents and interviewees at Crimson Education, Google, Amazon, and Uber for their time, participation, and valuable insights.

■ References

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2025.
2. Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary. 2025.
3. Henderson, J. K. Language Diversity in International Management Teams. *Int. Stud. Manag. Organ.* 2005, 35(1), 66–82.
4. Ahmad, F.; Widen, G. Language clustering and knowledge sharing in multilingual organizations: A social perspective on language. *J. Inf. Sci.* 2015, 41(4), 430–443.
5. Piekari, R.; Welch, L. In the shadow: The impact of language on structure, power and communication in the multinational. *Int. Bus. Rev.* 1999, 8(4), 421–440.
6. Ahmad, F.; Widen, G. Knowledge sharing and language diversity in organisations: Influence of code switching and convergence. *Eur. J. Int. Manag.* 2018, 12(4), 351–373.
7. Swanborn, P. *Case Study Research: What, Why and How?*. SAGE. 2010.
8. Cohen, L.; Henderson, J. K. Revisiting culture and language in global management teams: Toward a multilingual turn. *Int. J. Cross Cult. Manag.* 2017, 17(1), 7–22.
9. Chen, S.; Geluykens, R.; Choi, C. J. The importance of language in global teams: A linguistic perspective. *Manag. Int. Rev.* 2006, 46(6), 679–696.
10. Tenzer, H.; Pudielko, M. The Impact of Language Diversity on Multinational Teamwork. *Research Gate*. 2020.
11. Feely, A.; Harzing, A. W. Language Management in Multinational Companies. *Cross Cult. Manag.* 2002, 10(2).
12. Ahmad, F. Knowledge-sharing networks: Language diversity, its causes, and consequences. *Knowl. Process Manag.* 2017, 24(2), 139–151.

13. Ahmad, F. Knowledge sharing in a non-native language context: Challenges and strategies. *J. Inf. Sci.* 2018, 44(2), 248–264.
14. Gupta, A. K.; Singhal, A. Managing Human Resources for Innovation and Creativity. *Res. Technol. Manag.* 1993, 36(3), 41–48.
15. McAll, C. Language dynamics in the bi-and multilingual workplace. *Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 2003, 235–250.
16. García, M. C.; Pérez, M. L. Language and Power: Raising Awareness of the Role of Language in Multicultural Teams. *Lang. Intercult. Commun.* 2005, 5(2), 104–86.
17. Rangus, K.; Drnovšek, M.; Di Minin, A.; Spithoven, A. The Role of Open Innovation and Absorptive Capacity in Innovation Performance: Empirical Evidence from Slovenia. *J. East Eur. Manag. Stud.* 2017, 22(1), 39–62.
18. Tenzer, H.; Terjesen, S.; Harzing, A. W. Language in International Business: A Review and Agenda for Future Research. *Manag. Int. Rev.* 2017, 57(6), 815–854.
19. Welch, L.; Welch, D. The importance of language in international knowledge transfer. *Manag. Int. Rev.* 2008, 48(3), 339–360.

■ Author

Natsumi Uehara is a recent graduate of Colegio La Unión (La Unión High School) with a strong interest in both business and languages. She aspires to major in business management in college, where she aims to develop her skills further and continue pursuing her love of research.

■ Appendix

Document 1: Survey:

Introduction:

Dear Participant,

I am Natsumi Uehara, and I am conducting research on how multilingualism among personnel enhances innovation in linguistically diverse workplaces (LDW). This survey is designed for multilingual employees who have worked at their current company for at least one year. Your participation is invaluable, and I am grateful for the time you will dedicate to this survey. Please note that this survey is anonymous unless you choose to provide your email address. If you have any questions or need further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me at uehara.nat@gmail.com

Thank you again for your participation.

Profile information:

1. How long have you been working for the company?
 - Less than 1 year
 - 1–3 years
 - 4–6 years
 - More than 6 years
2. How many languages are you proficient in?
 - 1 language
 - 2 languages
 - 3 languages
 - 4 languages
 - More than 5 languages
3. List the languages in which you are proficient, meaning you can read, write, and speak them effectively in a professional context.
4. What is the name of your company?

5. What is your job title and role in the company?

Agree/Disagree Questions:

For the following questions, please rate your level of agreement with each statement, from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

6. At work, I frequently communicate in two or more languages.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

7. Multilingualism (proficiency in more than one language) is important for my job performance.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

8. Multilingualism enhances communication between my colleagues and me.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

9. I often collaborate with colleagues who are multilingual.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

10. I often collaborate with colleagues who speak a language that I don't.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

11. Multilingualism enhances my ability to understand different cultural contexts.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

12. Multilingualism encourages the sharing of knowledge among the members of my team.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

13. I believe that multilingualism in the workplace helps employees to understand each other's ideas.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

14. Multilingualism reduces misunderstandings in my team's communication.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

15. Multilingualism gives my organization a competitive advantage.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

16. My company actively fosters multilingualism through its hiring and education policies.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

17. My company leverages employees' multilingual capabilities.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

18. I believe that multilingualism in companies has a positive impact on creativity and innovation.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

19. Multilingualism has allowed for greater creativity in brainstorming sessions on my team.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

20. Multilingualism allows my team to access and apply knowledge from sources in different languages, contributing to innovative solutions.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

21. Multilingualism has allowed for greater innovation by my team.

- 1 Strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral/unsure, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree

Free response:

22. What challenges do you face when communicating in a multilingual environment?

23. How do you think multilingualism affects the overall culture of your workplace?

24. What benefits or drawbacks do you see in working in a linguistically diverse environment?

25. Do you think multilingualism has contributed to innovation in your own work at your company? (Yes/No)

- If yes, please give some examples. If no, please explain why. _____

26. Do you think multilingualism has contributed to innovation at your company more broadly? (Yes/No)

- If yes, please give some examples. If no, please explain why. _____

27. Do you think your company could better leverage multilingualism to enhance innovation? If so, how?

28. Do you think that multilingualism influences your company's ability to adapt to new technologies or markets? If so, how?

29. Please share any personal experiences in which speaking two or more languages in the workplace helped you or your team to achieve a goal more effectively.

30. Have you noticed a difference between multilingual teams and monolingual teams in terms of their respective levels of innovation? Please explain.

Closing message:

Closing Message

Thank you for submitting your responses!

Your participation is greatly appreciated, and I wish you all the best in your professional endeavors.

Document 2: Interview questions:

1. How does your company view the connection between multilingual staff and innovation outcomes?

2. What initiatives has the company implemented to leverage language diversity for the promotion of innovation? (Hiring practices, training programs, technology, patent filing, etc.)

3. How do you mitigate "language hierarchy" dynamics where fluency in a dominant language inadvertently silences innovative ideas from less fluent multilingual staff?

-
4. What mechanisms exist to ensure multilingual employees' cultural perspectives directly inform product development/market expansion strategies?
 5. Which investments in multilingual infrastructure (translation AI tools, language training programs, and others) have most directly boosted innovation, and why?
 6. How are the operational costs associated with coordinating multilingual teams balanced against the potential benefits of increased innovation that they can bring?
 7. What KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) track whether multilingual teams out-innovate monolingual ones in areas such as patent diversity?
 8. Can you share a recent example where a multilingual team solved a problem or a challenge that monolingual teams had struggled with (or likely would have struggled with)? (For example, thanks to cultural insights, improved communication, greater collaboration, etc.)
 9. What industry-specific opportunities remain unexploited because your staff's multilingual capabilities aren't being leveraged fully?
 10. If you could implement one policy or approach to amplify multilingualism's impact on innovation at your company, what policy or approach might you propose?