

A Qualitative Study on The Role of Corporate Language Strategy in Minimizing Cultural Distance in Multinational Corporations*[□]

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to compare the cultural distance between the Italian headquarters and its Turkish subsidiary and to examine the role of corporate language strategy on cultural distance. In this study, both inductive and deductive approaches were applied using a single case study. Research data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and online documents. Descriptive content analysis was used to analyze the research data. The findings reveal that to minimize cultural distance and to adopt corporate language effectively, the MNC focuses on employees' personal development and prioritize candidates with high cultural awareness and language proficiency; it implements many techniques such as language training, talent development, adaptation department, social events, diversity, equity and inclusion activities; it has relatively low cultural distance between Italy and Türkiye; the subsidiary's long-standing presence in Istanbul; it has culturally sensitive language management strategies.

Keywords: Multinational corporations, Hofstede, cultural distance, corporate language, single case study

JEL codes: M1, M11

Çok Uluslu İşletmelerde Kültürel Mesafenin Azaltılmasında Kurumsal Dil Stratejisinin Rolü Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, İtalyan ana merkez ile Türk bağlı kuruluşu arasındaki kültürel mesafeyi karşılaştırmak ve kurumsal dil stratejisinin kültürel mesafe üzerindeki rolünü incelemektir. Bu çalışmada, tek bir örnek olay incelemesi kullanılarak hem tümevarımsal hem de tümdengelsel yaklaşımlar uygulanmıştır. Araştırma verileri, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler, Hofstede'nin kültürel boyutları ve çevrimiçi belgeler aracılığıyla elde edilmiştir. Araştırma verilerinin analizinde betimsel içerik analizinden faydalanılmıştır. Bulgular; kültürel mesafeyi en aza indirmek ve kurumsal dili etkili bir şekilde benimsemek için çok uluslu işletmenin, çalışanların kişisel gelişimine odaklandığını ve kültürel farkındalığı ve dil yeterliliği yüksek adaylara öncelik verdiğini; dil eğitimi, yetenek geliştirme, uyum departmanı, sosyal etkinlikler, çeşitlilik, eşitlik ve kapsayıcılık faaliyetleri gibi birçok teknik uyguladığını; İtalya ve Türkiye arasında nispeten düşük bir kültürel mesafe olduğunu; iştirakin İstanbul'da uzun süredir var olduğunu; kültürel açıdan duyarlı dil yönetimi stratejilerine sahip olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

* This study is derived from the doctoral thesis of the first author.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Çok uluslu işletmeler, Hofstede, kültürel mesafe, kurumsal dil, örnek olay

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1. Introduction

Multinational Corporations (MNCs) are multilingual and multicultural societies which entail differences among members in language, interpersonal styles, values, behaviors, and perspectives and a host of other factors. These differences can create a balance (cohesion and unity) or an imbalance (member exclusion, subgroup dominance, and other undesirable outcomes), depending on how they are handled (Weinzierl, 2024). In this sense the cultural distance between headquarters (HQs) and subsidiaries can shape business operations, market entry strategies, knowledge transfer, human resource policies, business strategies, human behavior, technology transfer and so on (Dappa and Akhigbe, 2023; Hsu and Nguyen, 2023). In addition, the necessity to communicate, to share knowledge, network, and build relationships are all essential challenges for most MNCs and are all dependent on how language is used (Horn et al., 2020).

The cultural distance between the HQs and the subsidiaries, and corporate language of the MNCs have been the focus of many studies both in practice and in literature (Duan et al., 2021; Weinzierl, 2024). However, language is often regarded as the "forgotten factor" in practice. MNCs are aware of the importance of language for successful international business operations, however they sometimes view investing in language-related activities as expenses and therefore prefer not to prioritize language management (Shenkar, 2001; Feely and Harzing, 2003; Sanden, 2020). Additionally, managers may dismiss culture as a minor issue, and they may avoid discussing cultural distances and concern that cultural differences could fragment a multicultural workforce. The literature on language management and cultural distance in multinational corporations is expanding, however there is a notable gap regarding the intersection of corporate language strategy and national cultural distance, particularly from a subsidiary perspective (Lauring and Klitmoller, 2017; Weinzierl, 2024). HQs and subsidiary relationships need to be carefully considered but are overlooked in existing studies (Hsu and Nguyen, 2023). In the case of Italian HQs and their subsidiaries in Türkiye, this gap becomes even more apparent, as both countries present semi proximate cultural distance and distinct linguistic profiles. Moreover, selecting the insurance industry makes the present study more compelling and distinctive, as it is a multicultural foundation from its inception (Baskıcı, 2002). In this sense this study aims to address a notable gap in the existing literature, as the role of corporate language strategy in managing cultural distance within HQs and subsidiary relationships.

The purpose of this study is comparing the cultural distance between the HQs of a MNC in Italy and its subsidiary in Türkiye and to explore the role of corporate language strategy on cultural distance. In this study, a single case analysis from qualitative research designs is employed. The cultural distance between Italy and Türkiye is analyzed through Hofstede's cultural dimensions, with a focus on how intercultural communication is experienced from the perspective of a subsidiary.

Additionally, the study examines corporate language in detail and provides a management viewpoint on the significance of language and culture between HQs and subsidiaries.

The findings of this research are expected to be encouraging and a guide for future studies as it offers valuable insights into the role of cultural distance and corporate language in MNCs and contributes to an under-explored area in literature that has not yet received enough attention. In addition, this study is noteworthy in that it enables to capture the experiences of a subsidiary operating in Türkiye which helps to understand the corporate language strategy implemented in subsidiaries and the measures taken to minimize the cultural distance between the HQs and the subsidiary. It is believed that this study will also provide insights on which language management strategies that MNCs can favor in Turkish market and the types of techniques that can be used to minimize and embrace the cultural distance. It is thought that effective language management, which is implemented by MNCs by considering the national cultural distance, will help employees to recognize and respect different cultures and to be aware of their own and other discourse practices, traditions, and cultural preferences.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Cultural Distance

While culture refers to the collective programming of the mind that reflects values of a group of people, thus illustrating how they think and react, culture distance describes a general concept of the fundamental differences between two nations (Hsu and Nguyen, 2023). To measure cultural distance, Hofstede's (2001) model is commonly used (West and Graham, 2004; Tekinkaya Kacir, 2024). Below is an overview of Hofstede's (2001) model:

Individualism vs. Collectivism: It measures the degree to which individuals in a society prioritize personal goals over group goals (Hofstede, 2001). Subsidiaries located in countries with individualistic cultures; HQs could provide employees with clear targets and individual rewards. Conversely, subsidiaries located in collectivistic countries are not pioneers in innovation. They are highly tied to in-groups, and employees tend to see HQs and their division as a united community (Hsu and Nguyen, 2023).

Power Distance (Social Hierarchy): It is defined as the degree to which a society tolerates the inequality of power distribution among status sets (Hofstede, 2001). In cultures with high power distance, hierarchical relationships are important, there is little questioning of authority, the roles and status differences are clearly defined (Minkov and Kaasa, 2022). In contrast, cultures with low power distance prioritize a participatory management style, greater openness to questioning authority, power is always allocated equitably, and leaders are more approachable (Minkov and Hofstede, 2011).

Uncertainty Avoidance: It measures the extent to which a society tolerates ambiguity and uncertainty. Countries with high uncertainty avoidance cultures usually control uncertainty through religion or strict rules and they tend to resist

change and prioritize stability and predictability (Hofstede, 2001). In contrast, cultures with low uncertainty avoidance embrace flexibility and adaptability in new situations, they are more open to change and innovation and tend to have fewer formal rules (Jan et al., 2024).

Masculinity vs. Femininity: It refers to the preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success (Gerlach and Eriksson, 2021). In masculine cultures, hegemonic values are highly emphasized, they tend to be win-oriented and prioritize material success. On the other hand, femininity illustrates a situation relating to a proclivity for relationships, nurturing the feeble, and life quality (Jan et al., 2024).

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation: It is concerned with values about whether a society prioritizes long-term planning and future-oriented goals or short-term immediate gratification and respect for tradition (Minkov and Hofstede, 2011). Employees in a long-term oriented subsidiary are characterized by persistence, hard work, thrift, and willingness to accept a long-term plan; therefore, it is suitable for strategic and sustainable development for enterprises. On the other hand, in a short-term-oriented culture a well-known formulation is more easily accepted. Subsidiaries in countries with short-term culture prefer to align to the existing standards (Hsu and Nguyen, 2023).

Indulgence vs. Restraint: It measures the fulfillment of enjoyment. Indulgent societies encourage the pursuit of happiness, leisure, and self-expression, whereas restrained societies emphasize self-discipline, social norms, and the regulation of desires (Hofstede, 2001; Jan et al., 2024).

2.2. Language Management and Corporate Language Strategy in MNCs

MNCs follow a language management process to minimize distance created by language and culture. In order to facilitate communication between subsidiaries and HQs, MNCs implement language management strategies that standardize linguistic and cultural processes (Sanden, 2020). Language management is defined as the facilitation and coordination of effective communication among members of diverse linguistic communities in multilingual organizations (Lauring and Selmer, 2010).

Language management offers MNCs a range of strategies that can minimize cultural and language barriers (Riznar and Kavcic, 2017; Bruen and Buckley, 2022). Tekinkaya Kacir (2024), in her doctoral thesis, which examines the role of cultural distance on the language management strategies implemented by a multinational company, she lists some of the strategies used in language management as follows: *hiring native speakers from target markets, promoting employees with good language skills, using professional translators and/or interpreters, implementing a linguistic audit, providing language training for employees, determining corporate language, collaborating with universities, and creating multilingual websites*; Tekinkaya Kacir, 2024). These strategies are especially important for companies operating in multiple countries with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Corporate language is one of the most common language management strategies used in MNCs, which offers a standardized language for communication both within and between departments, HQs, and subsidiaries (Lauring and Selmer, 2010). In this strategy, an official corporate language is adopted to address communication barriers (Swift and Wallace, 2011). All management processes are carried out in the adopted corporate language that is used to minimize cultural distance and to enhance organizational unity (Feely and Harzing, 2002; Tange and Lauring, 2009; Bruen and Buckley, 2022).

Research indicates that English is the most commonly adopted corporate language in MNCs (Feely, 2004; Fredriksson et al., 2006; Charles and Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Karhunen et al., 2023). As noted by Feely and Harzing (2002), this strategy is used by numerous global MNCs, such as Siemens, Electrolux, Daimler-Chrysler, and Olivetti (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b).

Adopting a corporate language strategy offers plenty of advantages for MNCs. According to Welch et al. (2001), corporate language improves and facilitates both formal and informal communication in and between departments, HQs, and subsidiaries. It also facilitates access to technical documents, operational procedures, and reports, which maintain business documentation (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b; Piekkari and Zander, 2005). Thanks to corporate language, members of MNCs can participate in ongoing dialogues, share their ideas, and thereby contribute to creating a more collaborative work environment (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Feely and Harzing, 2003; Karhunen et al., 2023). It contributes to the development of organizational culture and fosters a sense of belonging among members (Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman, 2007; Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999b). In this way, it provides a common communication platform among organizational units (Janssens et al., 2004). This strategy aims to overcome misunderstandings, reduce costs, avoid time-consuming translations, and maximize productivity by fostering a sense of unity, belonging, and harmony inside the organization (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999a; Sørensen, 2005; Weinzierl, 2024).

To sum up, language management in MNCs is a complex and critical process that involves minimizing cultural distances and language unity. It can be concluded that effective language management contributes to efficient communication, and it brings along efficient multicultural management. Adopting a corporate language, typically English, is the most popular way to guarantee that communication flows smoothly across borders and organizational units.

3. Methodology

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the cultural distance between the HQs of a MNC (Italy) and its subsidiary (Türkiye), as well as to examine the role of corporate language strategy in minimizing cultural distance. In this research, qualitative research methods have been applied, which allows for an exploratory approach that is open to development and change, focusing on smaller clusters where participants' perspectives are highlighted (Creswell, 2019: 6-8).

In-depth single case studies are one of the most effective ways to comprehend how a phenomenon interacts with its surroundings (Logeman and Piekkari, 2015). According to Boddy (2016), single case studies can provide rich, meaningful insights and present unique examples. For this reason, a single case study is conducted for this research, with the focus being on a subsidiary organization operating in Istanbul. The MNC in which this research is conducted operates in the insurance industry. The insurance industry in Türkiye is born as a sector dominated by foreign capital. It has not developed due to reasons such as the advantages gained by foreign companies, the delay in government regulations, a negative view of insurance due to religious concerns, and insufficient domestic capital accumulation. As a result, the sector has not become one dominated by local capital (Baskıcı, 2002). Therefore, the insurance market has become a sector dominated by European capital groups benefiting from the privileges granted by capitulations. This point makes it inherently multicultural, European-based, and places significant emphasis on cultural and linguistic diversity, which makes it ideal for this single case study. This MNC is one of the earliest insurance companies to be established in Türkiye, having launched its first agency in Istanbul in 1863. Today it has a vast network of more than 500 agencies nationwide.

This study draws on three primary data sources. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the employees of the subsidiary to gain in-depth insight into organizational practices and perceptions. While formulating the research questions, a literature review is conducted extensively and deeply, expert opinion is taken, and the studies of Sanden (2020), Peltokorpi (2007), Tange and Luring (2009), Feely (2004), Zhao et al. (2021), and Incelli (2008) are benefited. The main research questions used in the interviews are listed below.

- *Can you describe the communication style of your corporation?*
- *How many different nationalities have you worked with?*
- *What are the cultural differences between the countries of HQs and subsidiaries?*
- *How do you think cultural distance influence communication within the team?*
- *How do you deal with the problems caused by cultural differences?*
- *What kind of language problems do you encounter in your job? Can you give an example?*
- *Which steps has the company taken to improve language management?*
- *How important to speak in corporate language of the MNC?*
- *What kinds of language-related events are held at HQs or at the subsidiary?*

The participants are chosen using the criterion of the sampling approach, which is one of the purposive sampling techniques. Two criteria are determined; working for the subsidiary for at least one year and involving in intercultural interaction currently or in the past. The criterion was determined by considering the participants' cultural background, communication skills, language competence, and work experience. The participants are contacted through LinkedIn, e-mail, and participant references. The interviews are conducted using various communication methods such as telephone calls, Google Teams, Zoom, and WhatsApp calls depending on the preferences of the participants. To maintain anonymity,

pseudonyms are assigned to the participants by the researcher. Table 1 provides details of the participants.

Table 1. Participant Information and Interview Details

Participant	Department	Management Level	Duration (min)
Atlas	Marketing	Middle	50
Dora	Human Resources		60
Isabelle	Brand and Communication		56
Birce	Human Resources		38
Aslan	Adaptation		35
Emma			40
Giorgia			45
Uzay	Marketing		38
Alessandro	Brand and Communication		55
Maya	Sales	Lower	60
Kurt Efe	Information Technology		20
Ayaz	Human Resources		45
Parla	Sales		45
Can	Marketing		23
Bulut	Logistics		30

Second, Hofstede's (2001) national cultural dimension scores were used to measure the cultural distance between the two countries, with data obtained from Hofstede Insights (2024). Third, textual data were collected from the official website of the multinational company's subsidiary, including monthly corporate bulletins and agenda updates published between 2020 and 2023, as well as activity reports from 2003 and 2022. These combined sources provide a comprehensive foundation for examining the intersection of corporate language strategy and cultural distance within multinational organizational contexts.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Criteria and Strategies Applied in Research

Validity and Reliability Criteria		Strategies
Credibility (Internal Validity)	Are the results credible?	Long-term engagement: Participants are informed in detail before the interviews. It is noted that a trusting atmosphere developed, and they begin to provide more sincere and comfortable responses as the interview progresses. Method triangulation: Semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and quantitative data are used. Data triangulation: News from the subsidiary's website between 2020 and 2023, activity reports from 2003 and 2022, as well as numerical data from Hofstede's website are utilized. Interviews from different departments are conducted. Researcher triangulation: The authors collaborate in the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data.

		Data saturation: The interviews are ended when the data reached saturation, and the data collection process continues until no new information have been obtained. Negative and alternative case analysis: Since reality is multifaceted and complex (Creswell, 2019), a range of viewpoints that both support and contradict the research purpose are included.
Transferability (External Validity)	Are the results transferable to different people and situations?	Comprehensive description: So many quotations are taken from interview data and documents by being faithful to the nature of the data. Purposive sampling: Intercultural experience and language competence are determined as criteria.
Dependability (Internal Reliability)	If the study is conducted again with comparable individuals and conditions, would the outcomes be the same?	Research Audit: The research process is transparently reported.
Confirmability (External Reliability)	Is objectivity increased by minimizing prejudices?	Critical <i>inquiry</i> : The researchers make a diligent effort to avoid their assumptions and prejudices with a critical perspective. Data records: The data collection tools is used in the study have been archived.

Source: Created by the authors based on Creswell, 2019; Braun and Clarke, 2013; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021.

Lastly, to increase validity and reliability in this research some strategies recommended by Guba (1981) and Lincoln and Guba (1994) are applied which are used are shown in Table 2.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

In MNCs, a significant part of intercultural communication occurs between and among employees of the HQs and subsidiaries (Louhiala-Salminen, 2002). Since a significant part of communication is internal, this study specifically focuses on the role of language in organizational communication dynamics. Descriptive content analysis is used in this study. It enables the examination and organization of all studies conducted independently on a specific topic and the identification of general trends in the field (Akbulut and Yavuz, 2022).

Analysis of the Linguistic Situation of the Subsidiary and Participants

In the MNC, it is understood that various communication tools such as e-mail, online meeting platforms, face-to-face meetings, and phone conversations are used. The participants state that the importance and urgency of the topic influence the choice of communication tools. The majority of the participants from different departments report that e-mail is the most frequently used communication tool both within the subsidiary and between the subsidiary and the HQs. Figure 1 illustrates the areas where fluency in foreign languages is most required in the subsidiary. This figure highlights key aspects of language needs for internal communications inside

the subsidiary as well as for contacts with the HQs and sheds light on how language turns into an essential tool for effective communication.

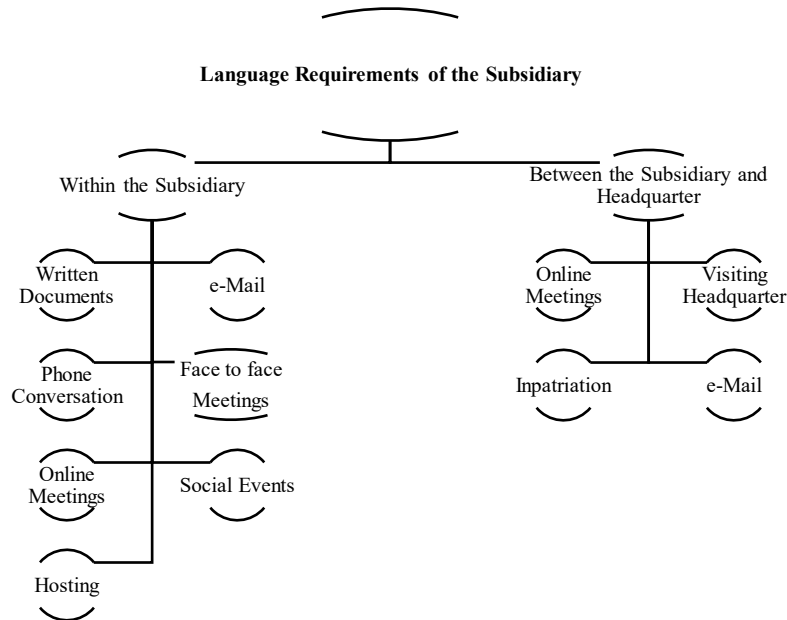


Figure 1. Foreign Language Requirements of the Subsidiary

It can be understood that there is a significant demand for language proficiency when hosting international visitors, organizing social events, visiting HQs, having online and face-to-face meetings, writing emails, speaking on the phone, and so on. Furthermore, it has been observed that phone conversation and online meeting tools are widely used for internal communication in the subsidiary, and online meeting tools are frequently used for contacting HQs. It is thought that having home-office employees in the subsidiary increases the use of online meeting tools. Below are some examples of participants' perspectives regarding the language needs of the subsidiary:

“When communicating with Italy, we mostly use Teams, phone, e-mail, video conferences, and face-to-face meetings.” Aslan

“We use physical and virtual environments. By virtual environment, I mean online meetings, Team meetings or Zoom meetings. We also send reporting equipment by e-mail. Physical meetings are also a must.” Atlas

“Our corporate language is English; we translate it into Turkish when it is necessary. Our local CEO is French. I am French too, but we do not speak French. We speak English...” Isabelle

Based on the evaluation of participant views, it is discovered that various communication tools are used, such as e-mail, online meeting tools, and face-to-face meetings, and that the employees of the subsidiary mostly use English in both written and verbal communication.

The interviews indicate that the participants generally have proficiency in English, Turkish, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Japanese, Dutch, Russian, Bulgarian, Kazakh, and Indonesian. Additionally, it is found that the participants' educational qualifications are at least at the associate degree level. In Table 3, the participants' language proficiencies, interview language, and educational backgrounds are summarized.

Table 3. Participants' Language Proficiencies, Interview Language, and Educational Backgrounds

Native (Turkish)	Non-Native (German, Italian, French)	One Foreign Language Competence	More Than One Foreign Language Competence	Educational Status			Interview Language	
				Associate	Bachelor	Master	Turkish	English
Atlas, Dora, Parla, Can, Bulut, Birce, Maya, Kurt Efe, Uzay, Ayaz Aslan	Emma, Alessandro, Giorgia, Isabelle	Atlas, Dora, Parla, Can, Bulut, Birce, Maya, Kurt Efe	Uzay, Ayaz, Aslan, Emma, Alessandro, Giorgia, Isabelle	Kurt Efe	Dora Parla Can Bulut Birce Maya	Atlas Ayaz Aslan Emma Alessandro Giorgia Isabelle	Atlas Dora, Parla, Can, Bulut Birce Maya Kurt, Efe, Uzay Ayaz Aslan	Emma Alessandro Giorgia Isabelle

Finally, when the corporate website of the MNC is examined in terms of the languages used by the HQs and subsidiary countries, the corporate website of the Italian HQs is primarily designed in English. Reports from the HQs are accessible in English on the HQs website. Furthermore, it is particularly notable that the websites of the subsidiaries serve in the language of that country. Each subsidiary operates its own distinct corporate website. In the case of the Turkish subsidiary, a review of its corporate website indicates that annual reports and financial statements are published in Turkish.

Cultural Distance Analysis of Italy and Türkiye

The data from Hofstede (2001) is used to compare the cultural distance between Italy and Türkiye because the HQs of the MNC is located in Italy and the subsidiary is located in Türkiye. Hofstede's (2001) framework is applied for two primary reasons: First, it highlights the information flow between HQs and subsidiary countries and is appropriate for conceptualizing the psychic and cultural differences that increase the cost of overseas expansion due to uncertainty (Barkema et al., 1996; Hennart and Larimo, 1998; Johanson and Vahlne, 1977). The second is that Hofstede's (2001) study is particularly valuable because it draws on a large sample of countries and provides cultural indicators that are widely applicable (Kogut and Singh, 1988). In this research, binary cultural comparisons are primarily grounded as multiple cultural comparisons falling out of the scope of this research. Hofstede's

(2001) cultural distance scores and participant perspectives are presented in Table 4.

Individualism-Collectivism: Türkiye and Italy have different individualism and collectivism scores. Table 4 shows that Italian society is more individualistic, with a score of 53, while Turkish society is more collectivist, with a score of 46. Interviews revealed that Turks value group harmony highly, generally do not go into detail in verbal communication, and rely on the other person to fill in the blanks during discussions. It is also observed that feedback in the work environment is always indirect.

Table 4. Hofstede cultural distance scores and participant perspectives

Scores	Participant Perspectives
Individualism-Collectivism (Türkiye 46, Italy 53)	<i>"You know, Italians are really respectful of private life. For us, working hours are a bit more flexible. But in Italy, it's very clear. Once the work is done, that's it. Their workday ends right there. They don't have anyone interfering in your personal life. No calls or messages after working hours or on the weekends. They really have time for themselves. They focus on self-development. Everyone has a hobby, plays an instrument, or is into something else." Birce</i> <i>"... Also, when you go out for a drink with non-Turkish people after work, there is a different person in front of you. Their friendship at work and in social life is totally different. At that moment, the work is over, and the social life starts. If you want to have a chit-chat, you do that. But you cannot fully socialize with a Turkish manager. That shift continues exactly the same." Atlas</i>
Power Distance (Türkiye 66, Italy 50)	<i>"Turks are very attached to authority, hierarchy, and physical appearance rather than the real value of people. How people look, their titles, and what they wear are very important, which is quite wrong. Because a person cannot be fully defined by these alone. Adding value to the company is not about appearance, skin color, eye shape, or attire. They have too many prejudices. When they have a title, they may not do anything or respect others. This situation can sometimes be quite challenging, as it is a society dependent on state authority. This is my own point of view..." Isabelle</i> <i>"... Italians have a very disciplined working process. They have a developmental discipline. Turkish managers can sometimes be stressful and tough. But Italians manage this process in a relaxing and friendly way. They don't use their title while working. This makes the relationships more sincere." Birce</i>
Masculinity-Femininity (Türkiye 45, Italy 70)	<i>"...Since they embraced corporate culture and memory long before we did, they approach potential business issues completely rationally rather than emotionally. It goes completely within the framework of respect. Therefore, there is a fair management style if we compare it with Türkiye. Turks, on the other hand, have a more emotional culture that changes based on the people's mood..." Atlas</i> <i>"You need to work on an emotional level when you work with Turks. First, you have to establish an emotional connection with people. It's very interesting. If I were to compare Turks to Belgians, Swedes, or Germans, I would say that while it is important for all of them to connect, it is more important for Turks to connect on a personal level." Isabelle</i>
Uncertainty Avoidance	<i>"Their working methodology is like project management. For example, we will begin a project; they want to plan every detail from soup to nuts. They</i>

(Türkiye 85, Italy 75)	ask questions like what their advantages are, opportunities for improvement, risks, and possible costs. Birce
	<i>"They are very detail-oriented. This level of detail orientation is exhausting for us. It brings many unnecessary questions. I can say this both for my own HQs and for all other international workers. We don't do a great deal of analysis. Sometimes, we find these details so unnecessary. Actually, this is the cultural difference between us. Even though they are aware of this, they still want every detail for everything because of their working style. That's why I can say that we have common sense, and we are much more practical. Yes, I can admit that we do not work systematically or scientifically, but we're much more practical, we can act quickly, and we can adapt ourselves to the changing conditions easily. Our integration into life is much faster than theirs. The biggest reason why Europeans cannot integrate themselves easily into life is their detailed orientation. That's why in Türkiye, technology integration is higher, so many people use social media and mobile phones. In terms of lifestyle, there's not much difference between Italy and Türkiye. When you go to Italy, you feel like you're at home."</i> Atlas

It is understood that the sense of 'we' is important in the workplace, group harmony is emphasized, and it is widely believed that employees belong to the company in return for their loyalty. Participants state that the concept of working hours is broader in Türkiye, and interference in private life is often considered acceptable. On the other hand, Italians place greater value on individual goals and personal autonomy. The majority of participants note that Italians and other expats play musical instruments and have hobbies.

Power Distance: The difference between the scores of the two countries is not substantial; Türkiye scores 66, while Italy scores 50 (Table 4). It is seen that Italy has a lower power distance compared to Türkiye. Interviews indicate that Turkish society is more hierarchical and emphasizes the power dynamic between superior and subordinate. Power is centralized, and those who are powerful always have privileges. The attitude towards managers is formal. Many participants note that Turkish people are more dependent on authority and hierarchy and place an excessive amount of importance on titles and appearance. In contrast, Italians value teamwork, minimize inequality, have approachable superiors, and adopt an open management style. Participants state that they generally do not feel a subordinate-superior relationship and that they work in a more sincere and comfortable working environment.

Masculinity-Femininity: When comparing the cultural distance scores, there is a significant difference between Türkiye and Italy. Türkiye is a feminine society with 45 points, whereas Italy is a masculine society with 70 points (Table 4). Interviews reveal that Turkish culture emphasizes emotionality, which is correlated with femininity. Turkish people place a high importance on more delicate aspects of culture, such as consensus, equality, and compassion for the downtrodden. Many participants state that building an emotional connection is important with Turkish colleagues in the workplace, and their management style tends to fluctuate based on the mood of the authority. In contrast, it is understood that Italians embrace competition, and winning is crucial in life. Participants highlight in the interviews

that Italians believe that the workplace is a way of success, building a career is competitive, and they tend to adopt a rational approach to problem-solving.

Uncertainty Avoidance: It is seen that both countries, Türkiye (85) and Italy (75), have high uncertainty avoidance scores (Table 4). Even though the two countries' scores do not differ significantly, it is clear from the interviews that Italians have more planned and detailed working styles than Turks; they are uncomfortable with uncertainty, value formality, and there is bureaucracy. Participants report that Italians engage in highly detailed planning in the workplace, while Turks, on the other hand, are more practical and less detail-oriented.

It is seen that the data obtained from this study support Hofstede's (2001) scores. Since Hofstede's later work, which includes dimensions of long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint, does not provide findings specifically for Türkiye, these dimensions are not included in the analyses.

The Role of Corporate Language on Cultural Distance

Language cannot be considered independently from its social and cultural context. Thus, the influence of culture can be seen in almost every word and sentence in a language (West and Graham, 2004). In this research, English is selected as a corporate language, neither Italian nor Turkish. It is understood that the whole communication process of the MNC is affected by the choice of a corporate language. For example, words in English tend to be gender-neutral (e.g., the term "manager" is used for both male and female managers). This instance illustrates how the linguistic structure of English tends to overlook the social context. In contrast, in Italian, before speaking, the speaker must choose words based on the gender of the person, reflecting a deeper sensitivity to and appreciation for social context.

Another issue where the influence of culture is clearly reflected in language is in the expression of social hierarchy in the structure of a language. It highlights the importance of corporate language in MNCs. For instance, in English, the second-person pronoun "you" is used universally, without formality or familiarity. So, users of this language learn a single second-person pronoun that does not require any information about group membership or role (West and Graham, 2004). However, it is different in Italian and in Turkish. Pronouns can change based on formality and familiarity. In Italian "lei" is a singular pronoun, and "voi" is a plural pronoun that is typically used for both men and women, but in highly formal contexts, "loro" is preferred. In Turkish, "sen" is used for informal contexts, whereas "siz" is used for strangers or in formal contexts without any distinction between singular and plural. It infers some information about group role, membership, or formality of the situation even by looking at the pronouns of the languages. Therefore, it is impossible to evaluate language and culture independently. Culture is embedded in the structure of language, and language is embedded in the structure of culture.

To minimize the cultural distance in this MNC, it is acknowledged that both intercultural experiences and foreign language competencies of the employees are strongly emphasized. For instance, language training, internal promotion

opportunities are provided, and a talent pool is created. In this way, it is aimed at enhancing the corporate language competencies and motivation of the employees. In addition, the interviews revealed that during the recruitment process, language assessment tests are made depending on the position, and candidates with cultural awareness are prioritized. It is also understood that bilingual, multilingual employees and expatriates greatly contribute to embracing cultural distance and to using corporate language intensively.

In the interviews, it is determined that there is a correlation between language competence and intercultural experiences. Accordingly, participants' opinions on second language learning may vary depending on the number and level of languages they know and their intercultural experiences. Specifically, it is discovered that participants with 1-4 years of intercultural experience can only speak English at the A1 or A2 level and struggled with speaking and listening skills. Their intercultural experiences are also bound by short-term work experience, social interactions, and collaborative projects or the MNC they worked for.

"When I was in high school, I stayed in Seville for a month for a project." Kurt Efe

"Once I had a few foreign friends in my personal life." Can

Many participants who have low corporate language competence state that having a good level of corporate language skills is important, but sometimes rhetorical competencies come first.

"... English is a sign of power. Umm... half of the power may be English. Of course, your competencies are more important than that. We cannot say that a person is perfect just because he knows a language. Rhetorical competencies are also important. These skills are the priority. Language comes last." Kurt Efe

"In my opinion, language skills do not determine anything in terms of competence. But language just helps you to express yourself... Rhetorical competencies are very important. In fact, they may be more effective than the language itself." Can

It is observed that the participants who have more than 4 years of intercultural experience and who know more than one language generally have high language levels both in the corporate language and in other languages they know. These participants report that they have no trouble with any of the language skills (reading, speaking, writing, and listening) during the communication process. It is observed that these participants, who are competent in the corporate language, lived abroad for many years or had contact with diverse cultures frequently.

"I was previously in Belgium. I worked for an American company in Sweden. Then I worked with Europe-based MNCs. I also worked in global HQs. During my time at the HQs, I was responsible for American and Asian subsidiaries. I also had my own business for 5 years. I also worked for the Belgian subsidiary of this MNC... I have an American wife and bilingual children, and I speak 6 languages." Isabelle

"I was born abroad and lived abroad for many years." Aslan

"I grew up in Kuşadası. I worked in the tourism sector until I graduated from university. I always worked with foreigners. Also, I did Erasmus in Italy. Then I worked in Athens for 2 years. In Türkiye I always worked for global companies. So, I can say that I always worked interculturally." Uzey

It is understood that participants who feel competent in corporate language skills are confident in intercultural communication. They highlight the importance of being competent in corporate language for intercultural communication, career development, and social and corporate integration, and they also state that in case of a lack of language skills, it could become a barrier for a person.

"To me, language is a barrier. Those who do not know the language cannot interact with the HQs. For example, we work with global suppliers; our social media platforms, customer platforms, and all of our platforms are in English, so language is a huge barrier. I see that some of our employees have some difficulties using these platforms because they cannot understand what is going on" Isabelle

"As I said, if you do not know the language, you cannot integrate, you cannot speak, so you cannot communicate. If you have language skills, you can explain yourself and provide details. If you have basic language skills, you will get little..." Atlas

"I personally observed that MNCs can be challenging for a person who does not have basic language skills. A person who knows the language can be promoted more easily. Because if you work in a global company, there are many areas where you need to use your language." Uzey

"The effect of language is great. If you do not have fluent English, you cannot communicate professionally, so it becomes impossible for you to take on a global role." Emma

Another key finding of this study is that the organizational structure of the MNC mandates the use of corporate language and facilitates intercultural interaction. Due to the organizational structure of the MNC, the subsidiary has its own board of directors, and each department is associated with HQs. This situation makes it obligatory for all departments of the subsidiary to communicate with the HQs, and thus they are exposed to the corporate language, English, and interact with diverse cultures.

"The way the business works here is like this. Like an independent local company, there is a general manager and a board of directors in the subsidiary. But in fact, each department is connected to HQs." Dora

"I can say all departments are in touch with HQs. Because each department has two managers. For example, the marketing department has a manager both in Türkiye and in the HQs..." Birce

"Sales, marketing, finance, business development, human resources. In general, a certain part of each department can be in touch with the HQs at a certain level of English. But some units like ours require an advanced language level." Ayaz

Another crucial point to be mentioned is that the MNC establishes a adaptation department in order to maximize the effectiveness of the corporate language and minimize the obstacles brought about by cultural distance. The adaptation department is located in each subsidiary and is known to be in direct contact with HQs. This department deals with challenges arising from cultural and language differences.

“There is an adaptation week. If you encounter any unpleasant situation, you can share it with the adaptation manager. You can even complain about your own manager since the adaptation manager is directly connected to HQs. It's known as the department of internal adaptation. This department and sometimes the human resources department deal with challenges arising from language and cultural differences. All subsidiaries have an adaptation department, and employees are from all countries.” Dora

In addition, it has been determined that the MNC actively works to create a common cultural language in the subsidiary via charitable organizations, sustainability messages, and intercultural training. It also fosters a variety of social events such as breakfast, New Year's parties, birthday celebrations, and luncheons to pave the way for social interaction. Besides, MNC supports intercultural interaction by organizing joint projects and competitions among all subsidiaries.

“We have intercultural trainings. There are also online trainings on this subject.” Emma

“Actually, all subsidiaries of this MNC are rivals, so there is a competition between them. Every year, top subsidiaries are chosen. Once Türkiye was also on that list.” Parla

“Sure, we celebrate our birthdays and special days in the office. Sometimes we gather for breakfast or dinner with our families.” Birce

Another significant finding is that the MNC has intensified DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) activities to minimize cultural distance. In this regard, there is a DEI week in the MNC, and every year DEI week is celebrated. It is also important to mention that they have set up a department and develop a set of formal policies and guidelines to support DEI efforts.

“Lately they have taken a lot of action on DEI. So, everyone puts aside their prejudices and embraces diversity as much as possible.” Dora

“We celebrate DEI Week every year to remind its importance to all our employees. In 2022, on March 8, International Working Women's Day, we organized an event where all our employees and our general manager met.” 2022 Activity Report

“For example, I have a meeting at 5 o'clock. The meeting is in English and includes different topics such as the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria and DEI activities. March 8, Women's Day, is approaching, and DEI Week is about to start. We are working on these. These preparations are strategic tasks that the HQs asks us to do, and we try to implement these tasks by integrating them into the local culture.” Alessandro

“The most important way to cope with the problems caused by cultural and language distances is respect... Respecting cultural differences and defining these differences as richness and diversity rather than a problem is the solution to this problem. If you respect personal preferences, accept everyone as they are, and see these as the greatest richness, you will overcome everything while working. We do this here as DEI...” Uzey

In conclusion, this study highlights the notion that linguistic and cultural differences should be viewed not merely as divergences but as essential forms of diversity that contribute significantly to the enrichment of the MNC. The findings suggest that language evolves and takes on greater depth through consistent and dynamic interactions with diverse cultural contexts. Consequently, both linguistic and cultural differences serve to enhance the overall value of the MNC, fostering a more inclusive, innovative, and adaptable environment. Furthermore, these differences also contribute to the empowerment and development of the employees, enabling them to leverage diverse perspectives, ideas, and problem-solving approaches, thereby enriching the organizational culture and promoting sustained success. In this light, embracing and valuing diversity is not only beneficial but essential for the long-term growth and competitiveness of the MNC.

5. Evaluation And Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to shed light on how corporate language management strategy helps MNCs to minimize cultural distance. Previous research shows that many MNCs have adopted English as their corporate language (Feely, 2004; Nickerson, 2005; Fredriksson et al., 2006). English is the preferred corporate language of many significant MNCs, such as Daimler AG, Kone Elevators, SAP, Siemens, Philips, Nokia, Alcatel-Lucent, Nissan, Technicolor, Rakuten, and Microsoft (Neeley-Hinds and Cramton, 2012). Similarly, in this study, the MNC chose English as its corporate language. Research findings indicate that all departments should have the four language skills (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) at various proficiency levels in all communication processes, such as online and physical meetings, social events, emails, phone calls, and written documents.

In a study by Feely and Harzing (2002), it is indicated that most of the MNCs choose English as a corporate language. However, they discover that in some cases written documents are not in English even though MNC's corporate language is. In another study (Sørensen, 2005), all documents from HQs are written in the corporate language but subsidiaries constantly translate these documents into local languages. In this study, the findings are different. The organizational structure of the MNC pushes the use of corporate language. The participants state that almost all departments in the subsidiary, especially in the marketing and human resources departments, are exposed to interlingual communication. It is concluded that this situation necessitates the subsidiary to use corporate language effectively in both written and oral communication.

Charles and Marschan Piekkari (2002) observe that Siemens offers all its employees the opportunity to learn English, German, French, and Spanish. In a similar study, Brandt and Chancellor (2011) identify that language training and cultural awareness programs are implemented in European SMEs, and online language learning programs are developed. In this study, similar results are obtained. According to the research findings, the subsidiary offers a talent pool program and corporate language training possibilities to improve employees' corporate language proficiency. The talent pool program evaluates successful employees in various ways and offers them opportunities for self-improvement. The participants state that the corporate language competencies of the employees are highly valued in these evaluations. The corporate language training courses are based on employees' preferences and include online courses, private lessons, and face-to-face courses, both in and outside the company. Additionally, it is important to mention that expat managers provide individual support to employees who want to improve their corporate language skills.

Nekvapil (2007) concludes in his study that the communication in a corporate language of a particular ethnic group cannot be improved only by providing language training but also by providing favorable social and cultural events. Similarly, Hwang (2013) emphasizes the importance of informal communication, such as dining or socializing during formal meetings, which plays an important role in establishing strong collaborative relationships. It is concluded that the findings of this study support these findings. In this study, it is understood that the MNC provides its employees with social and cultural events where they can interact with each other. It is observed that the subsidiary organizes breakfast and lunch events, New Year's parties, birthday celebrations, farewell and welcoming parties, and football tournaments. They also do not forget to celebrate national holidays. The MNC also organizes collaborative projects with all subsidiaries and various global competitions. So, it can be concluded that these activities foster socialization outside of work, promote informal communication, reduce cultural distance, increase the use of the corporate language, and impact on work relations positively.

The research findings indicate that the MNC has an adaptation department that works for creating a common cultural language by focusing on DEI activities. It is also noted that adaptation management policies are established, and an announced in the annual reports. On the subsidiary's website, the sustainability, code of business conduct and investment guidelines, principles on environment and climate, are available in Turkish. Participants note that the MNC collaborates with humanitarian organizations, organizes intercultural training, and undertakes numerous experience projects to create a common cultural language and reduce national cultural distance. It is concluded that all intercultural activities, excluding customers and local organizations, support the corporate language.

Peltokorpi (2007) reveals that during the recruitment process, candidates are required to pass language proficiency exams. In this study, similar criteria are set in the recruitment process. The MNC places great importance on candidates' proficiency in the corporate language and assesses language proficiency based on

job requirements. It is observed that during the recruitment process, personality tests, foreign language tests and case studies to evaluate professional knowledge and skills are conducted. It is noted that language assessments are position dependent. Participants state that employees who have poor language skills may be hired depending on the position, on the condition that they develop their skills in time. Also, they add that exams and interviews measuring four language competencies (reading, speaking, listening, writing) are conducted in order to assess the English level of the candidates.

Lauring and Klitmoller (2017) discover that homogeneous groups, which means less receptive to language diversity and cultural differences, suffer from poor organizational performance, whereas heterogeneous groups have higher decision effectiveness and perform better. The findings of this study support this research. Employees of the subsidiary work in a multicultural environment, and the HQs foster a supportive attitude toward cultural diversity. Besides the MNC's openness to language diversity and cultural differences, the employees' corporate language proficiency and the duration of their intercultural experience are influential in the communication process. Participants report that an employee's point of view on learning a new language can change based on their intercultural experience and language proficiency.

Lauring and Selmer (2013) and Hwang (2013) observe that MNCs whose corporate language is English have greater opportunities for their bilingual or multilingual employees in their professional lives, and they are more likely to be trusted and can be assigned to key roles. They also state that individuals with limited language skills often avoid speaking, which causes some problems. In this study, it is determined that employees who do not feel competent enough in the corporate language have the most difficulty in English speaking skills. Participants also note that the lack of proficiency in corporate language and language skills negatively affects their career progression, integration, and participation in communication processes.

To sum up, this study reveals that the MNC views language as a critical element that requires management and emphasizes its importance to minimize cultural distance. It can be concluded that there are effective intercultural communication and successful implementation of the corporate language in the subsidiary. As it has been operating since the Ottoman era in Istanbul and have relatively low cultural distance between Italy and Türkiye. It has been concluded that the MNC implements the most appropriate language management strategies for its subsidiary and explores various idiosyncratic methods to manage language and minimize cultural distance such as corporate language, selective recruitment, bilingual and multilingual employees, and language training. The organizational structure of the MNC is so distinctive that it is designed to use corporate language. Also, MNC tries to create a common cultural language through various practices such as talent pool, adaptation department, social and cultural events, and DEI studies. It can be concluded that MNC focuses on the development and motivation of employees.

Future studies can further investigate positive or negative outcomes of cultural and linguistic distance between the HQs and the subsidiary, and the conditions,

processes, and mechanisms that may lead to these outcomes. In this study, Hofstede's (2001) cultural distance dimensions are used, and Hofstede's later-added two dimensions (long-term orientation and indulgence) could be included, or different cultural distance dimensions such as GLOBE (House et al., 2004), Schwartz (1999, 2006), or Inglehart and Baker's (2000) World Value Survey (WVS) data could be used in future research. Other distance dimensions such as geographical, political and economic distances can also be examined. The effects of corporate language strategies on the HQs, subsidiaries, and employee performance can also be examined. It might also be recommended to examine how corporate language strategy contributes to the process of challenging national cultural distance in English-speaking HQs and/or English-speaking subsidiaries. MNCs that have two or more corporate languages and cultural impacts of language management strategies on the HQs and subsidiaries can be examined. Lastly, it may be suggested to contribute to the literature by analyzing different language management strategies applied in MNCs in different contexts by including various variables.

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