

# A Review of Language-Sensitive Research in International Business: A Multi-Paradigmatic Reading

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Résumé de l'article

This paper reviews language-sensitive research in International Business (IB) by asking how paradigmatic positions affect knowledge production in this field of study. Paradigms refer to the researchers' assumptions about how research should be conducted and reported. Because they affect the theoretical aim and framing of a study, the data sources, and analysis techniques used, paradigms ultimately shape the kind of knowledge produced. To study how paradigmatic choices influence the knowledge produced, we compared 299 publications in the field of language-sensitive research with 229 publications in mainstream IB by determining the paradigmatic position from which each study had been conducted. Our analysis shows that the paradigmatic diversity of language-sensitive research exceeds that of mainstream IB. Although positivism still dominates language-sensitive research in IB, interpretivist and critical studies have accounted for a growing proportion of research over the years and exceed those in mainstream IB research. We suggest that the norms of the specific research field and of academia in general strongly influence paradigmatic choices, and thus the kind of knowledge researchers produce. The review opens up a novel perspective on knowledge production within language-sensitive IB research.

## **A Review of Language-Sensitive Research in International Business: A Multi-Paradigmatic Reading**

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*This paper reviews language-sensitive research in International Business (IB) by asking how paradigmatic positions affect knowledge production in this field of study. Paradigms refer to the researchers' assumptions about how research should be conducted and reported. Because they affect the theoretical aim and framing of a study, the data sources, and analysis techniques used, paradigms ultimately shape the kind of knowledge produced. To study how paradigmatic choices influence the knowledge produced, we compared 299 publications in the field of language-sensitive research with 229 publications in mainstream IB by determining the paradigmatic position from which each study had been conducted. Our analysis shows that the paradigmatic diversity of language-sensitive research exceeds that of mainstream IB. Although positivism still dominates language-sensitive research in IB, interpretivist and critical studies have accounted for a growing proportion of research over the years and exceed those in mainstream IB research. We suggest that the norms of the specific research field and of academia in general strongly influence paradigmatic choices, and thus the kind of knowledge researchers produce. The review opens up a novel perspective on knowledge production within language-sensitive IB research.*

**Keywords:** paradigms; language-sensitive research; international business research; languages; meta-theoretical perspective; knowledge production

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### **Introduction**

Scholars fundamentally shape the knowledge they produce by following a specific paradigm in conducting and writing up their research for publication, even if they seldom articulate the adopted paradigm explicitly. A paradigm is “a cluster of beliefs...[that] influence[s] what should be studied, how research should be done, [and] how results should be interpreted”

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within a scholarly community (Bryman, 2003, p. 4). In other words, paradigms guide researchers' lines and forms of inquiry in a given discipline (e.g., Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Kuhn, 2012) and lead to the production of particular forms of knowledge. This paper investigates how paradigmatic positions affect knowledge production by reviewing language-sensitive IB research – a field of study that has engaged with language diversity in organizations.

During the past decade, several reviews have been undertaken on language-sensitive research in International Business (IB) (Brannen & Mughan, 2017; Karhunen, Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen, & Piekkari, 2018; Tenzer, Terjesen, & Harzing, 2017). Some of them have mapped this growing stream of research quantitatively (Tenzer et al., 2017), while others have provided focused thematic overviews as part of editorials for special issues (e.g., Beeler, Cohen, de Vecchi, Kassis-Henderson, & Lecomte, 2017; Gaibrois, Lecomte, Boussebaa, & Śliwa, forthcoming; Lecomte, Tenzer, & Zhang, 2018; Piekkari & Zander, 2005) or edited volumes (e.g., Brannen & Mughan, 2017). The contributions of language-sensitive IB research have also been introduced to other academic communities such as cross-cultural management (Beeler et al., 2017; Pudelko, Tenzer, & Harzing, 2015; Tietze & Piekkari, 2020; Wilczewski, Söderberg, & Gut, 2020), translation studies (Piekkari & Tietze, 2021), and management communication (Gaibrois, 2019; Tietze, Back, & Piekkari, 2021). Taken together, these contributions have advanced our understanding of how language diversity shapes key organizational processes and outcomes in important ways. However, previous research has paid far less attention – beyond pure methodological concerns – to how this body of knowledge has been produced.

In this paper, we undertake a paradigm-focused review of language-sensitive research in IB by posing the following research question: how do paradigmatic positions affect knowledge production in language-sensitive IB research compared to mainstream IB research? We take stock of previous research published during 1976-2022<sup>1</sup> in journals and handbooks and interpret this body of work from the perspective of three paradigms: positivist, interpretivist, and critical. Together, these three paradigms provide a holistic perspective on the accumulated knowledge of language-sensitive research. While we take inspiration from the work of Romani, Barmeyer, Primecz, and Pilhofer (2018), who analyzed the field of cross-cultural management from the perspective of four paradigms (positivist, interpretivist, critical, and post-modern), we have omitted the post-modern paradigm due to a lack of post-modern papers in our sample.

Our findings show that language-sensitive IB research is a multi-paradigmatic field. Although we find that the dominant form of language-sensitive research in IB is implicitly and often unreflectively positivist, the proportion of interpretivist and critical studies exceeds that of mainstream IB research, and has grown over time. Diversity in paradigmatic positions is important for the continued vibrancy of a field. Our analysis also shows that although qualitative methods have become less prevalent in empirical language-sensitive IB, they remain important (Tenzer et al., 2017). A considerable part of the field's output is also conceptual and theoretical in nature, pointing to a degree of maturity in the field.

Since we will be advocating (self-)reflexivity and the surfacing of underlying assumptions, we begin by explaining our own positionality. Our team consists of three researchers whose work can be characterized as non-positivist. While Rebecca's research has shifted over the years

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<sup>1</sup> The starting year of our review is based on the historical analysis by Brannen and Mughan (2017) of all language-related articles published in the *Journal of International Business Studies*. Brannen, Piekkari and Tietze (2014) likewise state that the field of IB has addressed language-related issues since the 1970s.

from qualitative positivism to interpretive and even critical traditions, Claudine's and Marjana's work has been firmly anchored in alternative paradigms, especially the critical one. In this regard, our reading of language-sensitive research is not neutral, but reflective of our own positionality in this field.

In the following, we first provide a brief introduction to language-sensitive research in IB. We then explain the procedures that we followed in undertaking a multi-paradigmatic review of previous research. We proceed with the dominant positivist reading of the field, followed by alternative paradigms, namely the interpretivist and the critical. In examining each tradition in language-sensitive IB research, we focus on the ontological assumptions, the purpose of the knowledge produced, data collection methods and analysis techniques, and the positionality of the researcher and the treatment of context (e.g., Piekkari, Welch, & Zølner, 2020; Romani, Barmeyer, Primecz, & Pilhofer, 2018; Romani, Primecz, & Bell, 2014). We provide examples of publications to illustrate the three paradigmatic readings.

### **Language-Sensitive Research in International Business**

Language-sensitive research investigates how language diversity in organizations – i.e., use of a variety of native tongues – affects workplace interactions, organizational processes, and outcomes. It is a cross-disciplinary field, covering contributions from IB, sociolinguistics, economics, management and organization studies, and even neuroscience. For many decades, researchers in IB tended to subsume language, if they mentioned it at all, under cultural and more recently institutional differences. Although language issues had been sporadically addressed in IB research since the 1970s, in the late 1990s researchers begun to study them more systematically (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch, 1999a; 1999b), and the field of language-sensitive research eventually emerged as a distinct area (Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze, 2014). By the mid-2010s, language had become a major area of conceptual and empirical research in IB (Brannen & Mughan, 2017).

Language-sensitive IB research covers multiple levels of analysis (Tenzer et al., 2017). Much of the work focuses on MNC language policies and English as a lingua franca (e.g., Jeanjean, Stolowy, Erkens, & Yohn, 2015; Komori-Glatz, 2018; Neeley & Dumas, 2016; Sanden & Kankaanranta, 2018; Spielmann & Delvert, 2014), knowledge sharing between headquarters and subsidiaries (e.g., Reiche, Harzing, & Pudelko, 2015; Schomaker & Zaheer, 2014) the effects of language differences on communication (e.g., Du-Babcock & Tanaka, 2013; Harzing & Pudelko, 2014; Hua, 2018; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2012), especially within multinational teams (Tenzer, Pudelko, & Harzing, 2014; Vigier & Spencer-Oatey, 2017), and the impact of individual language skills on careers and people management more broadly (Itani, Järnlström, & Piekkari, 2015; Lønsmann, 2017; Peltokorpi & Vaara, 2014; Yamao & Sekiguchi, 2015). Over time, the field has also developed strands which question clear-cut definitions of natural languages and focus for example on hybrid language use and translanguaging (e.g., Barner-Rasmussen & Langinier, 2020; Gaibrois, 2018). A smaller number of contributions has adopted a meta-theoretical perspective in order to look at knowledge production and dissemination (e.g., Holden & Michailova, 2014; Tietze, 2018), including advances in teaching and education (e.g., Cohen, Kassis-Henderson, & Lecomte, 2015; Daly & Davy, 2018; Du-Babcock, 2006; Gaibrois & Piekkari, 2020; Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen, & Karhunen, 2015) and research methods (Fan & Harzing, 2020; Isphording & Otten, 2013). Our paper joins this last stream of research on knowledge production but broadens the inquiry from a focus on methods to consideration of paradigms.

Initially, much emphasis in the field was placed on decoupling language from culture in order to focus on language in its own right (Brannen et al., 2014). Pudelko, Tenzer and Harzing (2015) provide two main reasons for the emergence of language-sensitive research in IB: i) the shift from a culture-free to a culture-inclusive research agenda in IB and ii) that from a reductionist to a differentiated approach to culture in cross-cultural management. This has led IB researchers to pay greater attention to “the dynamic interaction processes between people of different nationalities on the organizational level” (Pudelko, Tenzer, & Harzing, 2015, p. 86). Piekkari and Westney (2017) turn attention to changes in the organizational architecture of MNCs and argue that these developments provided momentum for increasing interest in language issues. The network models that became very popular in the late 1980s built on extensive interaction between MNC units. Together these shifts in research foci paved the way in the 1990s for language-sensitive research in IB.

It is worth noting that the field of IB is part of the broader discipline of Management and Organization Studies (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014) that emerged in the 1950s. IB traditionally “borrowed its theoretical apparatus from economics” (Brannen & Doz, 2010, p. 238), accompanied by positivist, quantitative methodological preferences. As we will show later in this article, these paradigmatic influences also continue to dominate the field of language-sensitive IB research, which has now established itself as a distinct subfield of IB inquiry (Brannen et al., 2014).

## **Review Methodology**

In this section, we explain the logic behind constructing two samples of publications for our review: one for language-sensitive IB research and the other for mainstream IB research. We also detail how we went about categorizing each publication into one of the three paradigms – positivist, interpretivist, or critical – and reflect upon the analytical procedure.

### **Two Samples: Language-Sensitive vs. Mainstream IB Research**

We constructed our sample of 299 publications in language-sensitive IB research by drawing on existing sets of articles included in i) recent review papers of the field, ii) papers in special issues, and iii) chapters written for edited volumes, especially handbooks (see Table 1 for an overview of data sources and Appendix 1 for a complete list of publications). Since our purpose was meta-theoretical – to understand how knowledge has been produced in language-sensitive IB research – it seemed reasonable to reuse samples of papers that represented important milestones in the accumulation of knowledge by this field. This approach to sampling also allowed us to reassess the boundaries of language-sensitive research in IB with respect to both temporal scope and content. Reanalysis of existing data sets is becoming an established research method in social sciences as it allows researchers to pose new research questions and provide new readings and interpretations (Corti, Thomson, & Fink, 2004; Tarrant & Hughes, 2019).

**Table 1: Sampled Sources of IB Language-Sensitive Research**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Review articles</b>	
Karhunen, Kankaanranta, Louhiala-Salminen, & Piekkari (2018)	92
Tenzer, Terjesen, & Harzing (2017)	264
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>356</b>
<b>Special issues</b>	
<i>European Journal of International Management</i> (2018, vol. 12, no. 1/2)	8
<i>International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management</i> (2017, vol. 17, no. 1)	11
<i>International Studies of Management &amp; Organization</i> (2005, vol. 35, no. 1)	6
<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> (2014, vol. 45, no. 5)	7
<i>Journal of World Business</i> (2011, vol. 46, no. 3)	7
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Edited volumes</b>	
Brannen & Mughan (2017), <i>Language in International Business: Developing a Field</i>	61
Holden, Michailova, & Tietze (2015), <i>The Routledge Companion to Cross-Cultural Management</i>	10
Horn, Lecomte, & Tietze (2020), <i>Managing Multilingual Workplaces: Methodological, Empirical and Pedagogic Perspectives</i>	11
Lecomte, Vigier, Gaibrois, & Beeler (2022), <i>Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Multilingualism in Professional Contexts: Advances in Language-Sensitive Management Research</i>	12
Szkudlarek, Romani, Caprar, & Osland (2020), <i>The Sage Handbook of Contemporary Cross-Cultural Management</i>	1
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Initial sample</b>	<b>490</b>
<b>Final sample</b>	<b>299</b>

The initial sample consists of the original publications included in the review articles, special issues, and edited volumes. We removed from this sample duplicates, conferences papers, and publications in which language was not a central theme, leaving us with the final sample of 299 papers.

As Table 1 shows, we used 356 articles included in two review papers by Karhunen et al. (2018) and Tenzer et al. (2017) as our base sample. This sample was complemented with 39 articles included in five special issues as well as an additional 95 chapters published in four edited volumes. After removing 171 duplicates and conference papers, as well as 20 publications in which language was mentioned very briefly (e.g., in connection with the translation of a survey instrument, see Cosmas & Sheth, 1980; Delmestri & Wezel, 2011; DiRienzo, Das, Cort, & Burbridge, 2007), we were left with a final sample of 299 publications (see Table 1).

**Table 2: Sampled Sources of Mainstream IB Research**

<b>Journal</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>International Business Review</i>	79 (34%)
<i>Journal of International Business Studies</i>	66 (29%)
<i>Journal of World Business</i>	61 (27%)
<i>Management International Review</i>	23 (10%)
<b>Final sample</b>	<b>229 (100%)</b>

Percentage totals are rounded to whole numbers.

We also compared the sample of language-sensitive IB research with mainstream IB research. The comparative sample of 229 articles consisted of all conceptual and empirical papers on any topic published in four key IB journals between June 2020 and May 2021. The journals we chose were *International Business Review*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of World Business*, and *Management International Review* (see Table 2). Although we acknowledge that this time period is considerably shorter than that of the language-sensitive sample, when combined with insights from historical reviews on methodological trends in IB as a field (Nielsen et al., 2020), we argue that it provides valuable insight. Together, the language-sensitive and mainstream samples included 528 publications.

### **Categorization and Analysis of the Sampled Publications**

The criteria used for categorizing the publications into the three paradigmatic positions were not given – they were constructed through a process of iteration. We started from the characterizations of each paradigm in the literature (Piekkari, Welch, & Zølner, 2020, p. 159; also Duberley & Johnson, 2009; Romani et al., 2018) and complemented them with our own reading of the publications included in the sample. The final set of criteria, which was developed in a dialogic process between the three of us, encompassed the ontological assumptions of the publication, the purpose of its knowledge production, the data collection methods and approaches to data analysis used, the positionality of the researcher, and the treatment of context in the publication.

The papers in the language-sensitive sample were coded by two people – one member of the research team and a research assistant trained in identifying paradigms. Each of us coded conceptual, empirical, and review papers. The categorization was further discussed within the co-author team to ensure consistency and alignment. The mainstream sample was primarily coded by the research assistant with support from one team member. The same procedures were followed for both samples.

Finally, we compared the proportions of positivist, interpretivist, and critical publications in the language-sensitive IB sample with those in the mainstream IB sample. We also sought to explain the differences between the samples by considering the historical development of language-sensitive IB research, publication outlets, and whether the publications in question were empirical or non-empirical (i.e., theoretical, conceptual, or review papers) by nature.

### **Our Reflections on the Review Methodology**

We acknowledge that paradigms are challenging to identify because authors rarely declare their paradigmatic stance in published work. While we initially used the heuristic of deductive vs.

inductive research to identify paradigmatic positions, the qualitative publications required a much closer look. Qualitative publications may follow inductive, deductive, or even abductive reasoning because they subscribe to multiple paradigms (Romani et al., 2018). For example, we commonly categorized inductive qualitative research that followed classical grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as positivist (see Mees-Buss, Welch, & Piekkari, 2022); in fact, most qualitative publications in our sample could be characterized as qualitatively positivist. While some mixed-method studies exhibited characteristics of several paradigms, most of them subscribed to positivism. We classified mixed-methods papers in a single category based on the dominant paradigm. Therefore, when deciding on the paradigm we made a holistic evaluation of each publication and deciphered the researcher's positionality from subtle choices (or absences) of words and expressions in the write-up of the paper. We relied on multiple cues revealed by the authors such as the use of variable-oriented language, explicit concerns about researcher bias, commentary about the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of the results, and researcher reflexivity.

Out of 299 articles, we classified 20 as boundary cases: publications that could have been categorized under several paradigms depending on which feature of the study was highlighted. For example, we discovered that the topic of power struggles in MNCs, which is well attuned to the critical paradigm, was also studied from the positivist (Neeley & Dumas, 2016) and interpretivist perspective (Beeler & Lecomte, 2017). While the study by Neeley and Dumas (2016) is aligned with the critical tradition with respect to theoretical approach and research topic, it was conducted in a positivist way and hence aimed at universal and generalizable knowledge. We regarded the overarching aim and orientation of the publication as decisive in our categorization.

Four of the 20 boundary cases were review papers (Brannen & Mughan, 2017; Karhunen et al., 2018; Mughan, 2020; Tenzer et al. 2017), which were also challenging to classify. Even though some authors revealed their non-positivist stance (Karhunen et al., 2018), deciding on whether the underlying paradigm was interpretivist or critical was not straightforward. We categorized review papers as positivist if they took stock of previous research in a seemingly neutral and technical way (Brannen & Mughan, 2017; Mughan, 2020; Tenzer et al., 2017). All the boundary cases were discussed extensively within the co-author team in order to settle on a single categorization. Given the challenges associated with categorizing publications by paradigm and the many factors that may influence the final write-up of a paper, we attribute the paradigm to the publication rather than to the authors themselves.

## **Findings**

We have divided the discussion of our findings into two sections: i) three paradigmatic readings of language-sensitive IB research –positivist, interpretivist, and critical – and ii) a paradigm-focused comparison of language-sensitive and mainstream IB research.

### **Three Paradigmatic Readings of Language-Sensitive IB Research**

In this section, we present the three paradigmatic readings supported by a selection of quotes from a wide range of papers categorized as positivist, interpretivist, or critical. Table 3 provides an overview of the key characteristics of each paradigm and our readings are structured according to these characteristics.

**Table 3: Comparison of the Three Paradigms in Language-Sensitive IB Research**

<b>Criteria of comparison</b>	<b>Positivist</b>	<b>Interpretivist</b>	<b>Critical</b>
<b>Ontological assumptions</b>	Objectively observable external reality	Subjectively constructed realities	Subjectively mediated or imagined/created realities
<b>Purpose of the knowledge produced</b>	Universal, objective and predictive knowledge	Subjective, descriptive and local knowledge	Radical and emancipatory knowledge
<b>Data collection methods</b>	Quantitative surveys; mixed methods; interviews, multiple case studies	Qualitative methodologies, especially ethnography, interviews, naturally occurring talk, single case studies	Qualitative methodologies; texts broadly defined; critical ethnography; interviews; participatory action research; autoethnography
<b>Approaches to data analysis</b>	Statistical techniques; classic grounded theory; triangulation	Hermeneutic techniques; discourse and narrative analysis; conversation analysis	Critical discourse analysis; reflexivity; standpoint analysis
<b>Positionality of the researcher</b>	Neutral and objective outsider (etic perspective); the researcher's position rarely reflected upon	Engaged participant (emic perspective); reflexive about the researcher's position in knowledge production	Participant with political agency and agenda; reflexive about the researcher's position in knowledge production
<b>Treatment of context</b>	Context-free research	Immediate context embraced; thick description	Broader socio-political and economic forces, inequalities and power asymmetries integrated into the analysis
<b>Examples</b>	Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman (2007); Kankaanranta & Planken (2010); Mäkelä, Kalla, & Piekkari (2007); Tange & Lauring (2009)	Barner-Rasmussen & Langinier (2020); Beeler & Lecomte (2017); Handford & Matous (2015); Lønsmann (2017); Outila et al. (2020); Xian (2020)	Boussebaa et al. (2014); Gaibrois (2018); Śliwa & Johansson (2014; 2015); Tietze et al. (2017); Vaara et al. (2005); Wilmot (2017)

Sourced from Piekkari, Welch and Zølner (2020, p. 159), see also Duberley and Johnson (2011); Romani et al. (2018).

## **Positivist Reading**

The positivist paradigm represented the dominant tradition in language-sensitive IB research. The ontological assumptions of the positivist paradigm suggest that reality is external to the researcher and objectively observable (see Table 3). Positivist publications typically present their findings as law-like and context-free predictions and propositions, with generalization, universality and objectivity being the purpose of the knowledge produced. In both quantitative and qualitative publications a variable-oriented approach was commonly adopted, emphasizing connections between constructs in a decontextualized fashion. Topics in the positivist category often adopted a managerial and pragmatic perspective, emphasizing success, efficiency, and organizational performance. The positionality of the researcher was implicitly or explicitly that of a neutral and objective outsider with an etic perspective (see Table 3).

When the goal of developing generalizable, context-free, and universal theory that can serve to predict and control social behavior (Piekkari et al., 2020) was seemingly unattainable, the authors tended to adopt an apologetic tone in discussing the limitations of their study. For example, Kankaanranta and Planken (2010, p. 404) acknowledged that “the findings of our study, although they concern international business, are biased toward Europe.” In a similar vein, Tange and Luring (2009, p. 223) admit that “[t]he main weakness of our method is the specific nature of the data, which makes any conclusions hard to apply to other business situations.” These quotations reveal that in the positivist tradition (statistical) generalizability of the findings is the ultimate goal of knowledge production.

In line with the goal of generalizability, the theoretical contribution in the positivist publications, both quantitative and qualitative, was commonly presented in the form of law-like predictions, emphasizing connections between a set of variables. For example, Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman (2007, p. 105) found in their quantitative study that “language fluency related significantly to shared vision and perceived trustworthiness in both the Chinese and Finnish subsidiaries.” Based on their qualitative multiple case study, Mäkelä, Kalla, and Piekkari (2007, p. 15) predicted that “the more two MNC managers interact, the higher the tendency that they will share knowledge with each other.” They investigated knowledge sharing within the MNC by zooming in on interpersonal similarity, which was defined as similarity in national-cultural background, shared language, and organizational status. It was argued that taken together, these factors led to homophily (Mäkelä et al., 2007). Studies that followed the positivist tradition tended to emphasize relationships between key variables and typically decontextualized their findings from the research setting. Some of the positivist contributions also attempted to develop appropriate measures to quantify language barriers in MNCs (e.g., Feely & Harzing, 2003) or cross-national differences in buyer-seller interactions (e.g., Kale & Barnes, 1992).

Our analysis revealed that language-sensitive IB research, which followed positivist approaches to knowledge production, took three forms: 1) large-scale quantitative studies, which were the dominant form of the positivist category (53% or 89/169). These studies tended to specify relationships between key constructs and test them in order to develop predictive theories (e.g., Björkman & Piekkari, 2009; Dow, Cuypers, & Ertug, 2016; Freeman & Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Latukha, Doleeva, Järnlström, Jokinen, & Piekkari, 2016; Voss, Albert, & Ferring, 2014); 2) mixed method studies (11% or 18/169) (e.g., Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä, 2014; Chiocchetti, 2018; Itani, Järnlström, & Piekkari, 2015; Liu, Adair, & Bello, 2015; Peltokorpi & Vaara, 2014;), and 3) qualitative, often multiple case studies (17% or 28/169) that aimed at producing generalizable theory (e.g., Daly & Davy, 2016; Neeley & Dumas, 2016; Sanden & Lønsmann, 2018; Zhang & Harzing, 2016).

In line with these research designs, common approaches to data analysis included statistical techniques and classical grounded theory (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The latter advocates induction as an approach to theorizing and triangulation that confirms and corroborates data across different sources. For example, Conaway and Wardrope (2010, p. 148) adopted “an inductive approach to thematic analysis” as “[t]hese sets of explanations may lead to generalizations.” Fujio (2004, p. 333) argued that “[i]n order to make my analysis as objective and accurate as possible, I adopted a research method called triangulation.” The positionality of the researcher was rarely mentioned or reflected upon in these papers because the researcher was seen as a neutral and objective outsider with an etic perspective (see Table 3). For example, some authors conveyed a US-centric view but without explicitly acknowledging it (e.g., Du-Babcock, 2006).

Much of the research in the positivist tradition adopted a top-down managerial perspective in which language was regarded as a matter of strategic design (Luo & Shenkar, 2006). In these publications language was often conceptualized as an instrument for gaining synergy and achieving value; as Dhir (2005, p. 363) puts it, language is an “asset” in the corporation. A number of articles in this category adopted a highly pragmatic and solution-oriented approach. For example, Berg and Holtbrügge (2010, p. 188) write that “the aim of this article is to investigate how members of global teams consider the relevance of different determinants of their cooperation, how these determinants are interrelated, and how they influence team performance” (see also Chen, Geluykens, & Choi, 2006). Tange and Lauring (2009, p. 228) regarded the language differences in Danish organizations as “problematic for the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication.”

In sum, the publications in this category often followed the positivist paradigm in an implicit, unreflexive way. This dominant tradition in language-sensitive IB research was taken-for-granted without any additional justification. On the other hand, as the following sections illustrate, scholars following the alternative paradigms – interpretivist and critical – demonstrated much greater awareness of their own positionality and of doing research that represents a minority pursuit in IB.

### **Interpretivist Reading**

Publications in this category drew on two traditions – the hermeneutic and the naturalist (Mees-Buss et al., 2022) – which are both referred to as interpretive qualitative research. In order to clarify the confusion, our use of the term “interpretivist” refers to the hermeneutic tradition (e.g., Van Maanen, 2011). We categorized the naturalist tradition in interpretive qualitative research, which has been popularized by the Gioia methodology as positivist (see Mees-Buss et al., 2022 for an extensive discussion of these two traditions).

The interpretivist publications tended to provide rich descriptions of research participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon under study. Interpretive scholars were interested in uncovering the meanings that research participants attributed to the issues of interest and often relied on ethnographic designs to access them. Hermeneutic techniques, discursive and narrative analyses as well as the analysis of naturally occurring talk were commonly used as analytical approaches. Interpretive scholars frequently “wrote themselves” into their texts, for instance by using the pronoun “I”, and did not aim at generalizable findings. Rather, they were reflexive about their positionality in the research process.

Interpretive approaches acknowledge the subjective nature of interpretation and knowledge production (Romani et al., 2014). In contrast to the positivist paradigm, they therefore focus on subjectively constructed realities (see Table 3). While interpretive traditions have not been widely adopted in IB, they have received increasing attention in the past ten years (e.g., Gertsen & Zølner, 2020). Typically, papers adopting an interpretive approach aim at understanding the subjective experiences of research participants (Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011, p. 247). For instance, in their study of empowerment in Russia, Outila, Piekkari, and Mihailova (2020, p. 31) stated that “[t]he research approach of this study is interpretive, emphasizing the sensemaking of empowerment in terms of the meanings people bring to it.” Tange (2009, p.133) set out to investigate “policy effect and implementation from the perspective of individual members, examining language workers’ experiences with a corporate language initiative.”

Given their focus on the subjective nature of knowledge production, interpretive approaches generally draw on concepts that emphasize meanings and view language as a vehicle for meaning-making and for creating and maintaining relationships. Barner-Rasmussen and Langinier (2020, p. 108) relied on the notion of language ecology, which “explains the relation between languages and their environment in a specific area with a focus on the interpersonal co-creation of meaning.” In her book chapter on the translation of Western research methodology into Chinese, Xian (2020, p. 45) conceptualized translation as a cultural practice that “entails the recreation of meaning and knowledge that makes sense to the target audience.” To shed light on the “darker” side of language in cross-cultural communication, Beeler and Lecomte (2017, p. 53) drew on Bakhtin’s dialogical perspective, which conceives of sensemaking as the “co-construction of meaning through interconnected utterances ...multivoicedness... and multiple speaking styles.”

Interpretive studies in our sample aimed to understand the lived experiences of the research participants and their interpretive frames from an emic perspective. The authors of these articles typically had a preference for ethnography, thick description, hermeneutic techniques, and single case studies, but also for interviews and naturally occurring talk (see Table 3). As an example, Beeler and Lecomte (2017, p. 56) relied on qualitative data collected by one of the researchers acting as a participant observer. The authors emphasize that “[a]ccess to thick data was particularly crucial to the success of our inquiry, as our research questions called for inside knowledge of the way the members of multicultural teams interacted.” In her study of employees’ reception of corporate language policies Lønsmann (2017, p. 120) highlights that “[m]ethodologically, the use of ethnographic observation and focus group interviews... gives the researcher access to data about the local linguistic context which has been shown to be central to an understanding of the employee perspective.” In order to study code-switching in newly formed multinational project teams, Vigier and Spencer-Oatey (2017, p. 27) relied on a similar combination of data. Apart from observations of team interactions and follow-up team debriefing sessions, the authors conducted interviews with the project team participants. In contrast, Handford and Matous (2015, p. 87) relied on naturally occurring talk to investigate problem-solving discourse on an international construction site. The authors “shadowed the two Japanese engineers, Kita and Arai, for one week, recording their spoken communication” (p. 87).

Interpretive approaches that draw on the hermeneutic tradition do not aim at generalization. Instead, authors of interpretive papers tend to write themselves into their texts, often based on the assumption that “the researcher’s own role in the production of knowledge needs to be accounted for” (Dick & Cassell, 2002, p. 958). As an example, Tietze (2008, p. 375) openly

declares her philosophical stance by stating that her text espouses “an interpretivist epistemology... which seeks to understand the research themes from the point of view of participants.” Another typical element of an interpretive study is the use of the pronoun “I,” as in Tange’s (2009, p. 131) study on language workers: “I define a language worker as an employee who has an educational background in modern languages or languages for specific purposes.”

Attention to context is a fundamental part of research adopting an interpretive approach. Studies aim at exploring “how the social context imbues human action with meaning” (Welch et al., 2011, p. 247). For instance, Xian (2020, p. 45) proposes “a contextualised approach, in which a foreign concept is interpreted, supplemented with local knowledge specially to the target language and reconstructed in a comprehensible domestic style.” In their study of translanguaging practices, Barner-Rasmussen and Langinier (2020, p. 105) explicitly distance themselves from “a traditional positivist comparison of such practices” because “[t]ranslanguaging practices are deeply embedded in, and derive much of their legitimacy from, the socio-historical environment of the geographical areas where they occur.” The authors therefore propose “to analyze and contrast how these practices relate to their separate contexts” (p. 105). Similarly, Lønsmann (2017, p. 119) highlights how “[t]he local linguistic context has proved to be another very influential factor in the reception of new language strategy by employees. Following the argument that “English has to make sense”, employees working in a Danish linguistic environment with Danish co-workers and Danish customers frequently took a stance of resisting English” (p. 119). Handford and Matous (2015, p. 96) argue that “the professional context of the construction industry may be more relevant than other factors” such as the nationalities of the speakers. According to the authors, the elements that contribute to create such a context include “the critical importance of safety ...; the complexity of the projects...; the one-off nature of projects...; the time pressure under which construction projects are inevitably conducted; and the very masculine genderlect that typifies much construction communication” (Handford & Matous, 2015, p. 96).

In sum, publications in this category rested upon the assumptions that knowledge is produced subjectively and that generalizability of findings should not be seen as the goal of knowledge production. In sharp contrast to the positivist paradigm, there is no objectively measurable external reality for the interpretivists. Interpretive studies investigated shared meanings and meaning creation in interaction with context. Similar to the critical paradigm, to which we will turn next, interpretive approaches had a preference for qualitative methodologies, particularly ethnography, but they also worked with interviews and naturally occurring talk (see Table 2). However, unlike critical approaches, interpretive studies rarely aimed at questioning or transforming current circumstances or offering alternative perspectives.

### **Critical Reading**

The critical papers in our sample commonly dealt with power struggles, social hierarchies, inequalities, and conflicts of the social world, as is typical of this paradigm (Romani et al., 2014). Our use of the critical paradigm does not refer only to research done in the tradition of Critical Theory or critical realism, but includes any perspective dealing with the issues mentioned above (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Romani et al., 2014). Publications in this category aimed at providing alternative perspectives and/or redressing current circumstances to achieve transformative, emancipatory or equality purposes by “questioning established social orders, dominating practices, ideologies, discourses, and institutions” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 1). It is also common for critical research to consider the wider social, political and economic context within which the studied phenomenon is situated, with an eye towards analyzing

societal power asymmetries. Authors were highly reflexive about the positionality of the researcher in knowledge production.

Empirical studies in this category were typically qualitative, with interviews being the most common method. Although method does not necessarily map onto paradigm in a clear-cut way, the dominance of qualitative methods clearly distinguishes the critical paradigm from the positivist (see Table 4). Where a mixed approach also involving questionnaires was employed, the questionnaire was used for descriptive purposes of background information (e.g., Tietze & Dick, 2013). Other sources of data included various types of texts (academic texts or other documents). Approaches to data analysis were often abductive, involving a close reading of the data, interpretive content analysis, thematic analysis, discourse analysis, or critical discourse analysis (see Table 3).

In order to question social orders and dominant practices, critical texts often focused on power. For example, Śliwa and Johansson (2015, p. 9) “explore the role of the English language as pertaining to issues of domination and power” and Steyaert and Janssens (2013, p. 133) state that “language use is the result of a political process: power, domination, negotiation and forms of resistance are core ingredients of the way language is performed.” Similarly, Wright, Kumagai and Bonney (2001, p. 241) explain that “control of language, given its ubiquity in communication, is a significant source of power and, therefore, a location of struggle.” To avoid determinism, analyses of power also considered the agency of different actors: “I demonstrate how the choice of language policy can be viewed as a particular application of power and how employees may seek to resist such choices” (Wilmot, 2017, p. 85). Sometimes power relations were examined in terms of the asymmetries between individuals or groups: “the power relation between a junior non-native speaking employee and a senior manager who uses the most highly valued language variety becomes more unequal than if the two parties used the same variety of English” (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014, p. 1146). Critically examining power in this way differs markedly from the dominant positivist paradigm in IB, where a top-down managerialist perspective is the implicit default definition of power.

In other cases, power relations and asymmetries were analyzed in hegemonic terms, where power is seen to operate through discourses which produce organizational realities (Hardy, 2001). For example, in her paper on the role of English as a lingua franca in spreading the discourse of management, Tietze (2004, p. 175) observes that “the ‘English language’ and the ‘discourse of management’ [are] two powerful forces of (discursive) action” which contribute to “the shaping of an increasingly global reality.” The shaping of reality is also at work here: “English became constructed as the legitimate official corporate language, which can be seen as an example of a normalization of Anglo-American cultural dominance in multinationals” (Vaara et al., 2005, p. 621). In other words, reality is the product of social negotiations underpinned by power relations and not an objectively observable external entity as in positivist publications.

In examining patterns of dominance, the perspective of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) was sometimes evoked, especially in articles which focused on the role of English. This meant that the view of language, adopted in much positivist research as a neutral medium of communication and knowledge sharing or simply a barrier to overcome, was questioned: “we challenge some of these assumptions about [...] the role of English as an unproblematic lingua franca in the knowledge transfer process” (Tietze et al., 2017, p. 152). Typical for a critical approach, some papers presented a broader political, social or economic framing of the issue at hand, with sensitivities to historical relations between nations. Drawing on critical discourse

analysis to examine power relations in the merger of two banks, Vaara et al. (2005, p. 595) found that “language skills are an essential element in the construction of international confrontation, [and] lead to a construction of superiority and inferiority, and also reproduce post-colonial identities.” According to Boussebaa, Sinha, and Gabriel (2014, p. 1153), who similarly analyze historical colonial ties in order to understand contemporary language use, “corporate Englishization (re-)produces international power relations that are rooted in the history of European imperialism.” In these papers context is not mere background, but a powerful force that acts on organizations, groups, and individuals.

Showing that MNCs and other organizations, and the individuals who work in and for them, are shaped by such wider forces, informs the aim of some critical papers to redress current circumstances for transformative, emancipatory, or social justice purposes. This is often a key purpose of critically oriented research (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). For example, in their evaluations of non-native English speakers, Śliwa and Johansson (2014, p. 1147) assert that “understanding how particular linguistic practices [...] are linked to underlying sociocultural and political assumptions is imperative for creating an inclusive organizational climate of equal opportunity”. This aim may also explicitly involve commitment on the part of the researchers themselves, for example “to promote and further those aspects which I consider emancipatory by raising awareness and increasing knowledge about the role and function of language and discourse” (Tietze, 2004, p.186). In keeping with the interpretivist paradigm rather than the positivist, some authors of critical papers wrote themselves into the text. However, unlike the interpretivist paradigm, the critical paradigm tended to be accompanied by a political aim or a focus on power.

The final aspect to point out about this category of papers is critical reflexivity, in other words explicit consideration of how researchers “make truth claims and construct meaning” (Cunliffe, 2003, p. 985) and their own positionality and role in knowledge production. There is a recognition that knowledge is not value-free, but produced under particular conditions which render some forms of knowledge more valuable than others: “certain meaning systems gain advantage over others; certain epistemological and methodological positions are favored” (Tietze & Dick, 2013, p. 130). Reference is also made to the wider IB field, within which language-sensitive research is situated: “IB has pursued sameness rather than difference due to the dominance of imposed ethics, the pursuit of equivalence, and the ‘hegemonic’ rise of English” (Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki, & Welch, 2014, p. 575). Here, the reference to the status of English is used to provide a reflexive take on knowledge production. First, these critical papers include what such hegemony means for the communication of knowledge: “Given our view of the hegemony of the English language and the effects of this hegemony, it needs to be formally recorded and acknowledged that this article, too, is bounded by the very processes it endeavors to capture” (Tietze & Dick, 2013, p. 127). Second, critical papers include those individuals who are involved in knowledge production: “We consider ourselves prisoners of the English language since we hardly drew on non-English sources or data, demonstrating the hegemony of English in the production of management knowledge” (Karhunen et al., 2018, p. 985). In other words, researchers are necessarily part of the very power relations they examine.

In sum, the critical papers identified and challenged underlying assumptions about languages and language use in order to lay bare how power works, often in subtle ways, to produce hierarchical relations and unequal opportunities. In some cases this included analyzing the historical and political context in which organizational practices emerge and become taken for granted, in order to open up avenues for more equitable and just ways of organizing.

## Comparing Language-Sensitive Research with Mainstream IB Research

The sample of language-sensitive research in IB differs from the mainstream sample in several ways. Our main finding is that language-sensitive research in IB shows greater paradigmatic diversity than mainstream IB research. Although positivism dominates both samples, the positivist papers account for a significantly larger proportion of the studies in then mainstream sample than in the language-sensitive IB sample (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Paradigms by Research Method in Language-Sensitive and Mainstream IB Empirical Samples**

	Positivist	Interpretivist	Critical	Total
<b>Language-Sensitive IB Sample</b>				
Qualitative	29 (13%)	54 (25%)	21 (10%)	<b>104 (48%)</b>
Quantitative	89 (41%)	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	<b>91 (42%)</b>
Mixed methods	18 (8%)	5 (2%)	0 (0%)	<b>23 (11%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>136 (62%)</b>	<b>59 (27%)</b>	<b>23 (11%)</b>	<b>218 (100%)</b>
<b>Mainstream IB Sample</b>				
Qualitative	12 (7%)	28 (17%)	2 (1%)	<b>42 (26%)</b>
Quantitative	115 (71%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	<b>115 (71%)</b>
Mixed methods	4 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	<b>4 (2%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>131 (81%)</b>	<b>28 (17%)</b>	<b>2 (1%)</b>	<b>161 (100%)</b>

All percentage totals are rounded to whole numbers.

As Table 4 suggests, research methods are also used differently in the two samples. Empirical papers in the language-sensitive sample demonstrate greater variety than the mainstream IB research by drawing on quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods; half of the articles in the mainstream approach use quantitative methods (see Table 4). Interpretivist and critical papers in both samples primarily rely on qualitative methods. Non-empirical (i.e. conceptual and review papers) potentially account for a larger proportion in the language-sensitive sample because 15% (46/299) of the publications were sourced from handbooks and edited volumes (see Table 1). At the same time, one may ask whether language-sensitive IB is more inclined towards conceptual publications than mainstream IB research.

As Table 5 shows, out of the total number of *empirical* publications, positivist papers account for 57% (131/229) of the mainstream IB research compared with 45% (136/299) of the language-sensitive research. When considering the full samples of positivist papers, the difference remains significant: 79% (181/229) for the mainstream sample and 57% (170/299) for the language-sensitive sample (see Table 5).

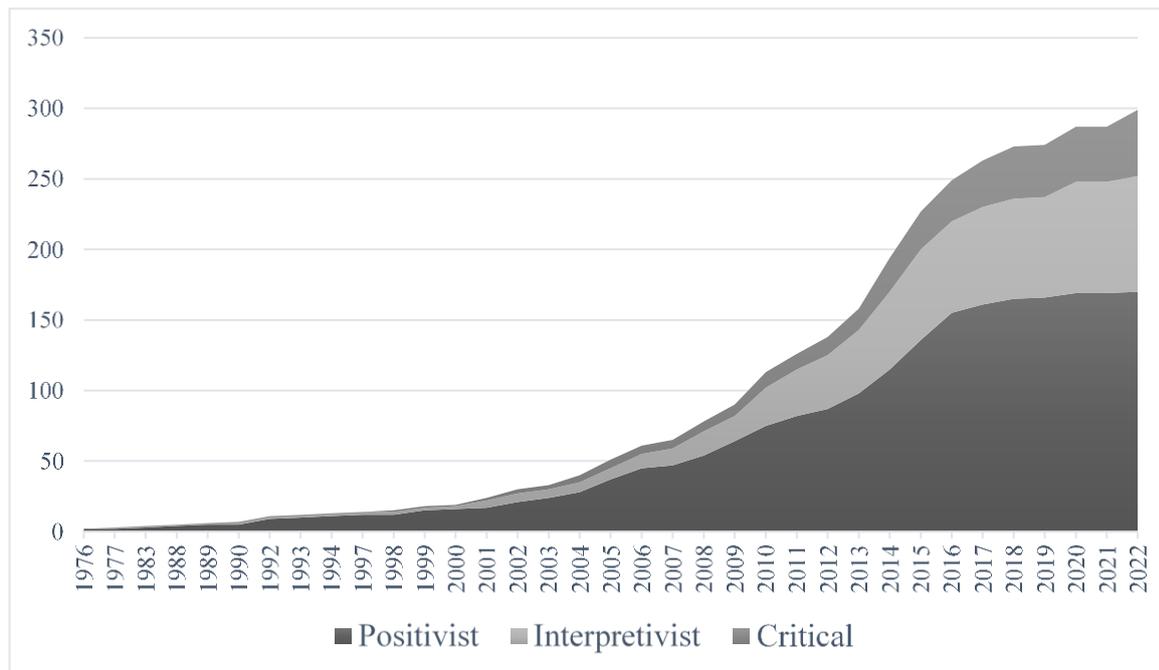
**Table 5: Paradigms by Empirical and Non-Empirical Publication in Language-Sensitive and Mainstream IB Empirical Samples**

	Positivist	Interpretivist	Critical	Total
<b>Language-Sensitive IB Sample</b>				
Empirical	136 (45%)	59 (20%)	23 (8%)	<b>218 (73%)</b>
Non-Empirical	34 (11%)	23 (8%)	24 (8%)	<b>81 (27%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>170 (57%)</b>	<b>82 (27%)</b>	<b>47 (16%)</b>	<b>299 (100%)</b>
<b>Mainstream IB Sample</b>				
Empirical	131 (57%)	28 (12%)	2 (1%)	<b>161 (70%)</b>
Non-Empirical	50 (22%)	4 (2%)	14 (6%)	<b>68 (30%)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>181 (79%)</b>	<b>32 (14%)</b>	<b>16 (7%)</b>	<b>229 (100%)</b>

All percentage totals are rounded to whole numbers.

As Figure 1 shows, language-sensitive research has accounted for an increasing proportion of the interpretivist and critical papers throughout the period of analysis from 1976 to 2022. Overall, interpretive approaches have also increased in mainstream IB research during the past decade (Gertsen & Zølner, 2020). We may assume that had our mainstream sample of IB research spanned a period of more than one year, the contrast between the two samples would have been even starker<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 1: Use of the Three Paradigms in Language-Sensitive IB Research over Time**



<sup>2</sup> We thank Helene Tenzer for making this pertinent observation.

## Discussion

In this paper, we have undertaken a review of language-sensitive IB research by examining how paradigmatic choices affect knowledge production. While scholars rarely acknowledge or reflect on the paradigmatic underpinnings of their research, paradigms do have a significant impact on research. Because paradigmatic choices affect the theoretical aim and framing of a study, the data sources and the analysis techniques used, they ultimately shape the kind of knowledge produced. During the past decade, several reviews of language-sensitive IB research have been published (Brannen & Mughan, 2017; Karhunen et al., 2018; Tenzer et al., 2017); this can be seen as a sign that this field has reached a certain degree of maturity. However, none of these reviews has focused on the paradigmatic underpinnings. Meanwhile, there has been a growing interest in methodological and philosophical questions in IB (Eden & Nielsen, 2020; Nielsen et al., 2020; Reuber & Fischer, 2022). We have contributed to this line of inquiry while simultaneously opening up a novel perspective on knowledge production within the sub-field of language-sensitive research.

In this review, we exposed a total of 528 publications to a multi-paradigmatic reading by categorizing them into three paradigms: positivist, interpretivist, and critical. Our core data set consisted of 299 language-sensitive research publications published in journals, handbooks, and edited volumes from 1976 through 2022. We compared our findings with a sample of 229 articles published in four key IB journals between June 2020 and May 2021. This comparative exercise confirmed that language-sensitive research is a distinct sub-field in IB with its own unique features regarding the paradigms and methods used.

Our findings showed that language-sensitive research in IB is characterized by greater paradigmatic diversity than mainstream IB research. Despite positivism being the dominant paradigm in language-sensitive research as in IB research more generally, our multi-paradigmatic comparison revealed that interpretivist and critical studies accounted for a significantly larger proportion than in mainstream IB research. Furthermore, the use of these alternative paradigms kept growing during the period of analysis.

Our findings also show that the majority of the publications drew on quantitative rather than qualitative methods. The use of qualitative methods was, however, greater than in mainstream IB research. This stands in contrast to arguments that even after more than two decades, language-sensitive research in IB still relies predominantly on qualitative case-studies (see Tenzer et al., 2017; Pudelko, Tenzer, & Harzing, 2015). The difference can be explained by the longer period of analysis in our review as the early papers published in the *Journal of International Business Studies* typically drew on quantitative methods. It is also worth noting that many of the publications we analyzed were conceptual and theoretical in nature. As commented earlier, we see this as a sign of maturity in the field. Some papers seek to name particular phenomena related to language-sensitive research, which enriches and develops the conceptual apparatus of the field. Other papers address and question the philosophical underpinnings of the field; hence they contribute to redrawing its boundaries and provide it with an identity distinct from that of mainstream IB research. Based on our analysis it is clear that language-sensitive research is an outlier in IB because of its differing paradigmatic and methodological characteristics.

Paradigmatic diversity is promising for two key reasons. Firstly, such diversity means greater tolerance for a variety of theorizing styles (Cornelissen, Höllerer, & Seidl, 2021) and theoretical contributions as well as more methodological and theoretical innovations (Lê &

Schmid, 2022). The existence of multiple paradigms is inextricably linked to methodological and theoretical pluralism, because paradigmatic assumptions affect our methodological preferences and views of “what theory is and should be” (Welch, Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, Piekkari, & Plakoyiannaki, 2022, p. 5). Secondly, a diversity of paradigms and perspectives ensures debate and vibrancy within a scholarly community. In this regard, paradigmatic diversity can be seen as an insurance against stagnation and paralysis of a field in the future.

There are several reasons for greater paradigmatic diversity in language-sensitive IB research. One might be the openness of the field towards other disciplines such as sociolinguistics, in which alternative paradigms are common. We may ask whether greater interdisciplinarity is associated with lower institutional pressure to follow the dominant publishing norms and expectations of leading IB journals that tend to favor positivist research. The origins of language-sensitive research in IB may explain why the positivist paradigm still dominates the field. In the early years, language researchers may have felt greater need to conform to the disciplinary conventions of IB in order to gain legitimacy among this community of scholars. It is also worth mentioning that a published version of a paper is always a compromise and an outcome of many external influences. These include pressure from editors and reviewers to conform to disciplinary conventions and follow established templates as well as the degree of openness of the journal towards particular types of research and research methods. A journal dedicated to language-sensitive IB research could further increase paradigmatic diversity in the field. We may also ask, more than two decades after its emergence, whether the field has begun to distance itself from its close association with IB, which might include dropping the ‘IB’ attribute in its name.

Finally, it would be remiss of us not to subject our own paper to a paradigm-focused reading. While we have clearly written ourselves into the paper and our endeavor to uncover the often silent assumptions underlying knowledge production has a critical tone, our approach to reading the papers (our data) and making sense of them conforms most closely to the interpretivist paradigm. However, we propose that further research into knowledge production in this field would benefit from an explicit critical stance, as we will discuss in the concluding section.

## **Conclusion**

Our review has made us, as language-sensitive IB researchers, increasingly aware that the boundaries of the field are fuzzy. Language-sensitive research is both interdisciplinary and phenomenon-driven, rendering it challenging to decide what it should (or should not) include. Although sociolinguistics and communication studies are an integral part of the field, it is unclear how these disciplines affect the prevalence of paradigmatic positions in language-sensitive IB research. Our review therefore opens interesting avenues for future research.

While previous reviews of the field have addressed questions of *what* (topics and themes) and *how* (methods), our review can be said to address, at least partially, the question of *why* (paradigmatic assumptions about knowledge production). In scoping future research, we see great potential and value in examining two additional questions: *where* and *who*. Both of these questions can be addressed productively through a critical paradigm. The first question concerns the geographical and geopolitical aspects of knowledge production, in other words, *where* research deemed high-quality and legitimate is produced. Reading the papers of our sample showed that the vast majority of publications stem from the Global North, and more specifically the Anglosphere. As both the field of language-sensitive research and the broader

field of IB have a global outlook, the dominance of knowledge produced in the Global North is worth questioning (Tietze, 2021).

The second question concerns an analysis of *who* produces knowledge within a particular field. Here, our suggestion is to adopt a gendered perspective. It has been shown that fields dominated by women tend to be devalued and viewed as less scientific (Knights & Richards, 2003). Further, a gendered perspective can also be taken on the knowledge produced within a particular field. Diversity, of which language is one dimension, tend to be considered “soft” (Blasco, 2020) and therefore feminine, as is also the case with qualitative methods such as interviews and ethnographies (Phillips, Pullen, & Rhodes, 2014). Hence, a gender-focused analysis of who contributes to knowledge production within a particular field and how the core topic is perceived and researched would enable a critical analysis of constructions of legitimacy.

Finally, given the challenges associated with a multi-paradigmatic reading, future research may consider conceptualizing various paradigmatic positions as a continuum instead of stable categories. The temporal dimension of the development of a field also offers interesting possibilities because discursive norms vary with historical time and discipline (Strang & Siler, 2017). We did not situate each publication in its own temporal context although the pressure to conform to the positivist paradigm was probably stronger in the 1990s than in the 2020s due to greater paradigmatic diversity in the latter time period. We suggest this would offer an interesting reading of the data set. Charting preferences for particular topics and their development would also enable a richer understanding of how the boundaries of a field are shaped and maintained over time. Overall, we argue that addressing questions associated with what counts as relevant and legitimate knowledge offers promising avenues for future research.

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**Appendix 1: List of Publications Included in the Review**

Adler & Bartholomew (1992)	Bielenia-Grajewska (2015)	Cohen, Kassis-Henderson, & Lecomte (2015)
Adler & Graham (1989)	Björkman & Piekkari (2009)	Comu, Unsal, & Taylor (2011)
Ahmad & Widén (2015)	Blenkinsopp & Pajouh (2010)	Conaway & Wardrope (2010)
Ahmad & Widén (2018)	Boussebaa, Sinha, & Gabriel (2014)	Cordeiro (2017)
Akkermans, Harzing, & van Witteloostuijn (2010)	Boussebaa & Brown (2016)	Cuypers, Ertug, & Hennart (2015)
Alvarez, Taylor, & Gomez (2016)	Brandt & Hulbert (1976)	Daly & Davy (2016, 2018)
Ambos & Ambos (2009)	Brannen (2004)	Debaere, Lee, & Lee (2013)
Andersen & Rasmussen (2004)	Brannen & Mughan (2017)	Detzen & Löhlein (2020)
Angouri (2013)	Brannen, Piekkari, & Tietze (2014)	Dhir (2005)
Angouri & Miglbauer (2014)	Bresman, Birkinshaw, & Nobel (1999)	Dhir & Savage (2002)
Angouri & Piekkari (2018)	Brown & Sachdev (2009)	Dotan-Eliasz, Sommer, & Rubin (2009)
Babcock & Du-Babcock (2001)	Buckley, Carter, Glegg, & Tan (2005)	Dow & Karunuratna (2006)
Ball & McCulloch (1993)	Cayla & Bhatnagar (2016)	Dow, Cuypers, & Ertug (2016)
Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio (2011)	Charles & Marschan-Piekkari (2002)	Du-Babcock (2006, 2007)
Barner-Rasmussen & Björkman (2005, 2007)	Chen (2013)	Du-Babcock & Tanaka (2016)
Barner-Rasmussen (2015)	Chen, Geluykens, & Choi (2006)	Egger & Lassmann (2015)
Barner-Rasmussen & Langinier (2020)	Chidlow, Plakoyiannaki, & Welch (2014)	Ehrenreich (2010)
Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä (2014)	Chiocchetti (2018)	England & Harpaz (1983)
Beeler & Lecomte (2017)	Chong, Rios-Salas, & Guillen (2010)	Fan & Harzing (2020)
Bell & Puzakova (2016)	Cleveland, Rojas-Mendez, Laroche, & Papadopoulos (2014)	Feely & Harzing (2003)
Berg & Holtbrügge (2010)	Cohen & Kassis-Henderson (2012, 2017)	Fenko, Otten, & Schifferstein (2010)
Berthoud, Grin, & Lüdi (2013)		Fernández-Ortiz & Fuentes (2009)
		Firdmuc & Firdmuc (2016)
		Fixman (1990)

- Fredriksson, Barner-Heikkilä & Smale (2011) Joshi & Lahiri (2015)
- Rasmussen, & Piekkari (2006) Heuer, Müller-Frommeyer, & Jung & Louhiala-Salminen  
Freeman & Olson-Buchanan Kauffeld (2019) (2012)
- (2013) Hicks, Santacreu-Vasut, & Kale & Barnes (1992)
- Froese, Kim, & Eng (2016) Shoham (2015) Kameda (2005)
- Fujio (2004) Hinds, Neeley, & Cramton Kankaanranta & Louhiala-  
Gaibrois (2018) (2014) Salminen (2010, 2013)
- Gaibrois & Piekkari (2020) Holden (1998, 2002, 2008) Kankaanranta & Lu (2013)
- Gaibrois & Steyaert (2017) Holden & Michailova (2014) Kankaanranta & Planken  
Gargalianou, Muehlfeld, Holden, Kuznetsov, & (2010)
- Urbig, & van Witteloostuijn Whitelock (2008) Kankaanranta, Louhiala-  
(2016) Hosoda, Nguyen, & Stone- Salminen, & Karhunen (2015)
- Ghoshal & Bartlett (1988) Romero (2012) Karhunen et al. (2018)
- Goby & Nickerson (2015) Hua (2014) Kassis-Henderson (2005)
- Goodall & Warner (2006) Huff (2013) Kassis-Henderson & Cohen  
Graf (2004) Hultgren (2014) (2020)
- Gray & Massimino (2014) Hurmerinta, Nummela, & Kedia & Reddy (2016)
- Green & White (1976) Paavilainen-Mäntymäki Keysar, Hayakawa, & An  
Groutsis, O'Leary, & Russell (2015) (2012)
- (2016) Hutchinson (2002, 2005) Klitmøller & Lauring (2013,  
Gunnarsson (2014) Hwang (2013) 2015a, 2015b)
- Hadjichristidis, Geipel, & Isphording (2013) Klitmøller, Schneider, &  
Surian (2016) Isphording & Otten (2013) Jonsen (2015)
- Haley & Boje (2014) Itani, Järnlström, & Piekkari Komori-Glatz (2018)
- Handford & Matous (2015) (2015) Kordsmeier, Arn, & Rogers  
Harris (2003) Janssens & Steyaert (2004) (2000)
- Harzing (2005) Janssens, Lambert, & Steyaert Koskinen (2020)
- Harzing et al. (2009) (2004) Kraak & Holmqvist (2016)
- Harzing & Maznevski (2002) Jansson (2014) Kroon, Cornelissen, & Vaara  
Harzing, Köster, & Magner Jeanjean, Lesage, & Stolowy (2015)
- (2011) (2008) Ku & Zussman (2010)
- Harzing & Feely (2008) Jeanjean, Stolowy, Erkens, & Kubat & Swaminathan (2015)
- Harzing & Pudelko (2013, Yohn (2015) Kulkarni (2015)
- 2014) Johanson & Vahine (1977)

- Kuznetsov & Kuznetsova (2014) Marschan-Piekkari, Welch, & Welch (1999a, 1999b) Puntoni, Langhe, & Osselaer (2009)
- Lagerström & Adenfelt (2003) Melitz (2008) Ravasi, Salamin, & Davoine (2015)
- Latukha, Piekkari, Doleeva, & Millot (2015) Refsum Sanden (2016)
- Järlström (2016) Mughan (2020) Refsum Sanden & Lønsmann (2018)
- Lauring (2007, 2008) Mäkelä, Kalla, & Piekkari (2007) Reiche, Harzing, & Pudelko (2015)
- Lauring & Selmer (2011, 2012) Neeley (2013, 2017) Roberts (2010)
- Lauring & Tange (2010) Neeley & Dumas (2015) Rogerson-Revell (2010)
- Lecomte, Vigier, Gaibrois & Beeler (2022; Ch 1-12) Neeley, Kaplan (2014) Salciuvene, Ghauri, Streder, & De Mattos (2010)
- Lehman-Wilzig (2001) Neeley, Hinds, & Cramton (2012) Santacreu-Vasut, Shenkar, & Shoham (2014)
- Lien, Oh, & Selmier (2012) Noordehaven & Harzing (2009) Schmirr, Pan, & Tavassoli (1994)
- Light, Zhou, & Kim (2002) Offermann, Matos, & DeGraaf (2014) Schomaker & Zaheer (2014)
- Liu, Adair, & Bello (2015) Outila, Piekkari, & Mihailova (2020) Selmer (2006)
- Logemann & Piekkari (2015) Peltokorpi (2010, 2015) Selmer & Lauring (2015)
- López-Duarte & Vidal-Suárez (2010) Peltokorpi & Vaara (2012, 2014) Selmer, Lauring, & Jonasson (2013)
- Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta (2011, 2012) Peltokorpi & Clausen (2011) Selmier & Oh (2012, 2013)
- Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta (2005) Piekkari (2006, 2008a, 2008b) Selmier, Newenham-Kahindi, & Oh (2015)
- Luna, Ringberg, & Peracchio (2008) Piekkari & Tietze (2011, 2012, 2014) Sims & Guice (1992)
- Luo & Shenkar (2006) Piekkari, Oxelheim, & Randøy (2013) Slangen (2011)
- Lønsmann (2017) Piekkari, Welch, & Welch (2014) Śliwa & Johansson (2013, 2014)
- Macleane (2006) (2014) Spielmann & Delvert (2014)
- Mahili (2014) Piller & Lising (2014) Steyaert & Janssens (2013, 2015)
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**Claudine Gaibrois** (PhD, University of St Gallen) is a Lecturer at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland), and an External Lecturer at the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland) as well as at the Ecole de Management Strasbourg (France). Her research focuses on diversity, particularly on the diversity of languages and cultures, power and participation. Claudine's current research includes investigating the role of language in migrants' workplace experiences, language diversity and cultural stereotyping, gendered aspects of knowledge production in language-sensitive IB research, and diversity in higher education. She has published in leading journals such as *Journal of World Business*, *European Journal of International Management*, and *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*. Claudine has also co-edited the volume entitled *Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Multilingualism in Professional Contexts: Advances in Language-Sensitive Management Research* (2022) and the Special Issue of *Critical Perspectives on International Business* on "Critical Perspectives on the Management of Multilingualism in International Business" (forthcoming). Claudine was a board member of the GEM&L (Groupe d'Etudes Management et Language) and has now joined the research association's Scientific Committee.

**Marjana Johansson** (PhD, Stockholm School of Economics) is a Senior Lecturer at the Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow. Prior to joining Glasgow she worked at the University of Essex, and taught at Stockholm School of Economics and at Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki. Marjana's research interests focus on organizational inequalities, diversity and inclusion, and intersectionality. Current and recent research includes examining gendered aspects of knowledge production in language-sensitive IB research, the dynamics of class and gender in academia, and intersectional analyses of professional work. She has published in leading journals such as *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Human Relations*, *Gender, Work & Organization*, and *Organization*. She is a member of the GEM&L Advisory Board.