# Delicate Dialogues: Faculty Member's Experiences to Language Barriers within a Swedish University

Master in Management,
Thesis, MGTN59

*Submitted by*
Hayden, Ruth
Tapaila, Annami

May 31st, 2024

Supervisor: Christine Blomquist
Examiner: Martin Blom

# Table of Contents

# Acknowledgements

Firstly, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the participants involved in this study, whose openness and willingness to share their experiences made the study possible.

We would also like to thank our supervisor, Christine Blomquist, for her guidance and support throughout this process. Thank you for believing in us. Additionally, we would like to extend our gratitude to Ola Mattisson for his commitment and dedication to making this year a success. Thank you for bringing this class together and most importantly, we appreciate you teaching us the true meaning of teamwork.

I would like to thank my thesis partner, Ruth, for her unwavering commitment to this thesis, her support, and the countless shared lunches. She went from being that nice Irish girl in our class to a friend for life. She is truly an inspiration.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis partner, Annami. This thesis would not have been possible without her exceptional support, patience, and collaborative spirit. She made even the most daunting tasks manageable and even enjoyable. Here's to more mandatory coffee breaks in the future.

# Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how faculty members at Lund's School of Economics and Management experience language barriers within the workplace. The study focuses on the relationship specifically between the language use of Swedish and English within the working environment. Data for this research were collected by conducting 14 semi-structured interviews with employees from the faculty. The participants ranged from Swedish natives to international faculty members. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. They then were coded into the most relevant themes and categories. The data extracted is then presented through quotes and excerpts from the interviews in relation to these themes. The results reveal that faculty members at the school experience barriers to integration, issues in accessing higher-up administrative positions and being constricted to bachelor-level teaching due to language. The impact of the school's language policy on the experience of these barriers is examined. Additionally, barriers to learning the local tongue are also discussed, along with anxiety and guilt around the topic. On the basis of the results of this research, it can be concluded that subtle discrimination and managerial relations can be obscured by this aforementioned guilt. The results provide some support for existing research in the area, complementing the studies already conducted in similar international industries. Although qualitative research cannot be broadly generalised, we nevertheless believe that our study contributes to the important work regarding workplace diversity.

**Keywords:** language barriers; exclusion; managerial implications; experiences; guilt; subtle discrimination, language policy, domain loss; language clustering

# 1. Introduction

Universities are increasingly becoming centres of globalisation, diversity, and multiculturalism on the world stage. Similar to the corporate sector, research indicates that diverse companies tend to outperform others (Hunt et al., 2015). Additionally, top universities understand that internationalisation helps positively influence the reputation of the institution (Delgado-Márquez et al, 2013). However, recent studies have shown that this multicultural arena does not come without difficulties, especially when it comes to language usage (Pudelko & Tenzer, 2019; De Coninck & Verhulst, 2024; Neeley, 2013; Lønsmann, 2014). This is particularly important when considering the role of English in relation to the local language. English has dominated the modern business world and academia, taking the leading position as the global lingua franca (Jenkins et al., 2011; Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012), a language used for communication between people who do not share the same first language, for cross-country communication (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). However, Sweden has strengthened the status of Swedish through a national language policy that safeguards its position within public institutions (Riksdagen, 2009). This leaves it up to the institutions themselves to decide on the guiding principle of using both Swedish and English in parallel (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012). This is a dynamic that an international institution such as Lund University's School of Economics and Management (LUSEM) has to deal with on a daily basis. Through this research, we aim to explore faculty members' experiences with language barriers in the workplace, with a particular focus on the use of Swedish and English.

A working definition of language barriers is "obstacles to effective communication, which arise if interlocutors speak different mother tongues and lack a shared language in which they all have native proficiency" (Tenzer et al., 2014, p.509). Therefore, communication can be completed within a work setting, however, even when an institute has a common working language, the local language will still be used if a majority of a group has that as a native language (Tange & Lauring, 2009). The language barriers in this study are attributed to the fact that English serves as the common working language among all academic employees at the institution, whereas Swedish is a skill not possessed by all faculty members. The concept of parallel languages holds

a significant place in Nordic language policy discussions, as investigated by Hultgren (2016). They found that it revolves around the notion that no language should hold superior status over another, particularly highlighting the coexistence of English alongside the official national languages of Nordic nations such as Swedish. This strategy aims to mitigate "domain loss" and has become increasingly influential in recent times, supplanting previous language policy objectives.

Therefore, it became apparent to us that this topic demanded further investigation. On a personal note, we wanted to touch upon this topic as we are both highly interested in linguistic use within a professional setting, as we had both studied languages before. During this course, we were deeply moved by the topic of diversity and wanted to seek methods in which to enhance its management. As potential managers ourselves, we want to investigate how best we can handle diversity and inclusion within our future careers, whether that be in the formal position of a manager or being an individual with the skills and capabilities to manage these scenarios.

## 1.1. Research Gap

Much of the research in this area focused on the language barriers within the business workplace (Tenzer et al. 2013; Neeley, 2013; De Coninck & Verhulst, 2024; Yusof & Rahmat, 2020; Lønsmann, 2014) but very few analysed it from a working academic perspective. The most relevant study was done by Pudelko and Tenzer (2019) that looked at how English and local language barriers create boundaries to foreign management scholars' careers, which is analysed in detail in the literature review. Their study focuses on participants from Japan, Finland, Spain and the United States and concentrates solely on the language barrier's effects on career advancement. Other studies have also examined institutions that have implemented an English-only policy, preventing language diversity at the workplace (Peebles, 2005, Neeley, 2013). Alternatively, this study will be looking at a Swedish institution that has a multiple language policy and focuses on the relationship between the languages of Swedish and English. It will centre around the experiences of faculty members within the School of Economics and Management at Lund University (LUSEM) from both Sweden and outside of Sweden and focus on the barriers that using the two languages have on faculty members.

## 1.2. Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this research is to explore how faculty members experience language barriers within the workplace. It will aim to find out how having parallel languages, Swedish and English, affects those working at the faculty. We hope to explore this dilemma in greater depth, to understand how individuals feel in regards to language usage within the workplace. Through our research, we hope to identify these issues so that a better understanding and communication can be had around the topic of language barriers. In the end, we hope a path can be found towards better management of these scenarios. This paper will solely focus on the use of Swedish and English within the faculty. Therefore, our research question is: *"How do faculty members experience language barriers?"* By posing this question, we hope to delve deeper into the discourse within the faculty and examine the experiences that arise due to parallel language use.

## 1.3. Structure of the Paper

This paper will be formulated firstly with the literature review in Chapter 2, which outlines the relevant theory, helping us navigate the topic and see what has already been researched. In Chapter 3, the methodology will be detailed to ensure the study can be replicated in the future. Our data will be gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews with faculty members at LUSEM. By analysing the interviews and implementing an analytical-qualitative framework using coding, we will derive key themes, categories, differences and similarities between experiences. Using the themes identified, we will closely look at specific segments within the interviews in order to pinpoint examples of this behaviour and identify the forms in which language barriers are experienced within the workplace. Chapter 4 will consist of presenting the primary and secondary data collected. This includes statistics and policies of the University and a presentation of the data received from the interviews through quotations. Chapter 5 will be the discussion section, which will look in-depth into each of the topics and themes the participants brought up, analysing them for aspects in how they experience language barriers. Results will be derived from this in the form of common themes and reasoning behind the actions. Finally, Chapter 6 will serve as the conclusion, in which we will outline our contribution to the research

on this topic and highlight potential avenues for future investigation to further advance this research area.

# 2. Literature Review

Studies on the topic of language barriers within the workplace are extensive and complex, however, the foundations of numerous research is based around the ideas of diversity management and the impact of language policies. This approach provides a clearer understanding of the significance of managing workplace diversity and how policies affect employees. In the literature review, we explore the concepts of domain loss and language clustering, along with social identity theory, to better understand employees' experiences. Additionally, the elements and identification of subtle discrimination will be explored. We will also examine language barriers in relation to career advancement and the guilt and anxiety associated with these barriers. Finally, we look at managerial implications. The purpose of the literature review as a whole is to help later identify and explain the results of the study.

## 2.1. Diversity Management

"Diversity management refers to organisational policies and practices aimed at recruiting, retaining, and managing employees of diverse backgrounds and identities while creating a culture in which everybody is equally enabled to perform and achieve organisational and personal objectives" (Syed & Tariq, 2017, p.1). In other words, companies and organisations need to create a space in which diversity can be managed to the extent that individuals can accomplish their work and personal goals. Working across different linguistic, cultural and social contexts requires organisations to embed diversity at the heart of internationalisation strategies (Scott & Byrd, 2012). According to Scott and Byrd (2012), the benefits of leveraging diversity are attracting and retaining human talent, flexibility and adaptability and thirdly, an improved reputation as the company becomes an agent for change. Employees who are able to feel more comfortable with those who are different and are able to build relationships across cultural lines result in a more productive workplace (Chakraborty & Ganguly, 2019). When a company

embraces diversity with the correct policies and practices, it can reap these long-term benefits. Therefore, well-defined and curated policies are vital for successful diversity management.

## 2.2. Language Policies on a National Level and at the Workplace

Language policy and planning play a major role in shaping a company's culture. It affects all parties within an organisation, whether directly or indirectly. How knowledge is transferred within a company is vital in creating a competitive advantage for multinational corporations (Thomas, 2007). Therefore, the importance of understanding if these language policies are effective and helpful is crucial for the success of the institution or company. The role of Swedish in Sweden is fundamental, and one reason for it is the language policy. The Declaration of Nordic Language Policy was created to protect the position of Swedish as the main language (Bolton & Kuteeva, 2012). The Language Act of 2009 or *Språklag 2009*, (Riksdagen, 2009) states that public institutions have particular responsibility for ensuring that Swedish is used and developed and that Swedish terminology is available in different specialist areas (Språklag 2009, cited in Sundberg, 2013). The law itself states that in Sweden, Swedish functions as the main language, and that the national minority languages and their usage in Sweden are also protected by this law (Riksdagen, 2009). Worth mentioning is that English is not a national minority language in Sweden. Notably, in 2020 there was a motion in the parliament that wanted to give English the status of a minority language in Sweden because it would help the immigration of the people who come to Sweden for work (Riksdagen, 2020). They acknowledged that English is already used as the corporate language in many international companies and in universities, but the motion was not passed.

As it happens, Lund University has outlined its own language policy and states that "parallel language use means that Swedish and English are used side by side. Parallel language use is to enable students and employees to function well at the University and in society, regardless of whether or not they master Swedish" (Lund University, 2014, p.1). The usage of a parallel language does not mean that the local language and the parallel language have the same status but should be used when appropriately applicable. However, language policies are not always beneficial to all parties. De Coninck and Verhulst (2024) in their study found that the formal

language policy in a Belgian company became problematic when language proficiency became a criteria in job roles. They remark on the dilemma of advertising 'equal job opportunities' when language does play a major part, with participants in their study commenting on the fine line between justified discrimination and rejection. Karlsson & Karlsson (2020) discovered that the Swedish language policy may cause issues in higher education institutions since only a part of the staff is eligible for administrative and managerial positions due to the requirement of the Swedish language. This then puts the Swedish-speaking faculty under the obligation to fill these roles, taking time away from their research. As communicated in Lund University's official language policy (2014), a supportive environment for parallel language use helps attract international staff and students, facilitating their integration and effectiveness. Prioritising internationalisation and using English creates an appealing work environment for internationals (Lund University, 2024).

## 2.3. Domain Loss

Domain loss can be defined as "the national language 'losing terrain' to English" (Hultgren, 2013, p.166). It is of notable concern to Nordic countries in the areas of higher education and business (Hultgren, 2013). Dealing with this language threat naturally leads to discussions on what is the best way to continue. Having a monolingual language stance can clash with diversity and impede on one's right to express their culture and individualism. Other studies have found that even companies that set the corporate language as English with the purpose of standardising the language practices, still found that English was not top of the organisational language hierarchy (Sanden, 2020). Language hierarchies rapidly shift according to the communicative needs of the participants (Sanden, 2020).

Additionally, many smaller languages are at risk of extinction and even languages with hundreds of thousands or a few million speakers can be considered vulnerable (Perlin, 2024). Dominant languages like English have been called 'killer languages' as they have infiltrated the political, economic and cultural landscape (Perlin, 2024). There is an imperative need for language documentation, new methods, new policy initiatives and safeguarding strategies to enhance the vitality of these languages, with the efforts of language communities, professionals, NGOs and

governments vital for countering this threat (Cenoz et al. 2011). Previous studies have looked at lexicon borrowing from English into Nordic languages, however, they found it not an apt metaphor to describe the current linguistic situation with the country's loss of native language (Hultgren, 2013). Instead, the researchers in one study concluded that concerns about domain loss can be seen as a reflection of anxiety over deeper social changes that come with globalisation, with language-related issues serving as a symbolic representation of these broader transformations (Hultgren, 2013).

## 2.4. Language Proficiency and Positions of Power

Numerous studies have shown that one's language capabilities can have a significant effect on their access to the hierarchy. A study done by Lønsmann (2014) on a Danish company found that for international experts, exclusion manifests as a lack of knowledge-sharing and the belief that they cannot advance within the company's hierarchy. Therefore, when decisions are made in informal settings and one does not speak the power language, they will most likely remain at a disadvantage. The social interaction that happens after a meeting, during lunch hour or at a fika break, plays an important part in the decision-making process. As seen in the above subsection on language policies, in Karlsson & Karlsson (2020) and De Coninck and Verhulst (2024) studies, accessing higher up managerial positions can be blocked due to language proficiencies.

Pudelko and Tenzer's 2019 paper indicates that one's academic career and the possibility to climb the career ladder are highly affected by issues that might arise when a researcher at an academic institution does not master both English and the local language. In practice, this could be seen in promotions for example (Glick et al., 2007, as cited in Pudelko & Tenzer, 2019). In other words, one's ability to use either English, in an anglophone academic environment, or the local language can have an effect on the career of an international researcher in a business school abroad. In their study about the impact of language barriers in academic careers, Pudelko & Tenzer (2019) found that even if mastering the local language is beneficial in order to apply for grants for example, there are some downsides to learning the local language. One thing is that it takes time away from one's research and that it can make one's teaching burden heavier. They discovered that the academics who did not learn the local language did not have to teach the

bigger bachelor-level courses and could focus on master-level courses and their own research. The most issues the international staff recounted were with the administration since the local language was often the main language (Pudelko & Tenzer, 2019). Pudelko & Tenzer (2019) also found that faculties often used the local language when it came to higher-up boards and committees, as well as that getting a managerial role would most often require knowing the local language since the administrative tasks were in the local language. They discovered that not everyone was bothered by this since having a higher-up role would take time away from their research, which is often what academics want to focus on.

## 2.5. Language Clustering and Power Distribution

Language clustering has been observed in many workplaces and international institutions, where employees gravitate towards their own language community. It is noted that "speakers of the same language, identifying themselves with the same culture and having the same identity, may find it important to socialize and communicate with each other in their own language in the workplace" (Ahmad & Widén, 2015, p.438). Additionally, this affects informal communication and has a negative effect on knowledge mobility (Ahmad, & Widén, 2015). Research was done on two educational institutions, which found that students whose native language is Swedish, while enrolled in English-taught courses, primarily communicate in their mother tongue when interacting with both their peers and teachers (Lim Falk 2008; Söderlundh 2010 as cited in Sundberg, 2013). Rebecca Marschan-Piekkari, Denice Welch and Lawrence Welch conducted a study where they investigated the impact of language on structure, power and communication in the Finnish multinational company Kone and its diverse subsidiaries (1999). They found that various clusters formed, not based on geographical location but on language, which included the five groups; Finnish, English, `Scandinaviska', German and Spanish. This resulted in a *shadow structure* forming, which differed from the formal structure of management and hierarchy.

Therefore, language clustering not only affects everyday interactions but it also can control who accesses power. Employees with a common language gravitate towards each other. Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999) found that although Kone had adopted English as their standard company language, it did not remove the barriers to cross-border activities. Instead, the data

suggest that language serves both as a barrier and a facilitator to inter-unit communication. Those with relevant language skills may find themselves in more influential positions than they would otherwise (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999). Similarly, Tange & Lauring (2009) conducted a study on language clustering as an International Danish Company. They discovered that the Danes naturally switched back to their own language, even if people who did not understand Danish were present. The small talk during lunch was experienced as exclusionary to the participants in their study since it was often in Danish and the participants felt like they were missing out on important information. Lønsmann's (2014) study found a similar result, indicating that Danes are less likely to switch back to English when interacting with internationals who have been in Denmark for more than a few months, as they are expected to have learned Danish by that time. They concluded in their study that employees in this specific international workplace need to be proficient in both the local majority language and English to access all communicative events and integrate socially. On the topic of language learning, Palfreyman, (2011) notes that understanding one's social network and in which ways they interact with their target language can influence and improve their learnings. They look to the term 'social network theory' and highlight that "the fact that languages (like other skills) are learned not just by individuals but by families or communities" (Palfreyman, 2011, p.22).

This links to Bolman & Deal's idea of the importance of informal communication at the workplace, in their work on the manager as a politician (2021). They write that a key skill that the manager as a politician exercises is that of networking and building coalitions. Informal networks fulfil several functions that formal structures may perform poorly or not at all, including advancing projects, transmitting culture, mentoring, and fostering "communities of practice" (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p.210). To gain power, the manager needs to form channels of informal communication. With a language barrier, this socialising can no longer take place, leaving those without the relevant skills at a disadvantage. Therefore, international employees who do not speak the local language do not have access to the informal local network that is already there.

## 2.6. Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory suggests that our sense of belonging to particular groups influences our well-being and behaviour and our attachments to these groups also shape our self-esteem (McKeown et al., 2016). Social identity theory infers that one wants to have a stable identification for social order to be restored. The understanding of specific processes and situations of identity construction in and around work and organisations is thus somewhat poor and in a turbulent and multifaceted world, identity becomes destabilised (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). One crucial part of social identity is acknowledging the part language plays in it. Language is an important part of one's identity (Khatib & Ghamari, 2011) and the usage of a specific language is often seen as a membership in a group (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). Studies also show that not only is language important in one's social identity but also culture plays an important part in connecting the members of a group (Eastman, 1985). Therefore, the native language is often important to a speaker. When a person is speaking in their second language, the level of language will not be on the same level as the native language and this will cause them to have a different identity (Khatib & Ghamari, 2011). This can have an impact on whether the person can be a 'member' of a group.

A connection can therefore be made between social identity theory and language clustering. As individuals seek out comfort in belonging to a group, they gravitate towards their own people. As mentioned, language plays an important part in Social identity theory and so clustering due to language is a natural way to create an in-group out-group dynamic.

## 2.7. Subtle Discrimination

Subtle discrimination refers to "forms of discrimination that pervade society, are less visible, are often very ambiguous for those experiencing it and are not easily recognized as discrimination" (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011, p.1205). Looking at the works of Van Laer and Janssens (2011), they conducted a study on the experiences of ethnic minorities regarding subtle discrimination within the workplace. Due to the challenge of readily recognising and identifying subtle discrimination, victims often find it challenging to voice their concerns or determine whether

their experiences constitute such discrimination. The authors adopted a perspective that focuses on the experiences of the individuals exposed to it. By doing so, overlooked discrimination can be pinpointed and illuminate seemingly innocuous or conventional phenomena (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). It involves interpersonal discrimination that frequently occurs without awareness or intention, deeply rooted in everyday interactions. This can manifest as harassment, jokes, incivility, avoidance, and various forms of disrespectful treatment (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011).

Additionally, perpetrators may remain unaware that their actions or words are being perceived in this manner. Discrimination can also be broken down along the spectrum from interpersonal discrimination to formal discrimination, where interpersonal discrimination can manifest as disrespect, verbal and nonverbal harassment, and general rudeness or hostility toward minorities and formal discrimination has rules, regulations, laws and policies in place to prevent it from occurring or facilitating an appropriate response (Jones et al. 2017). Not only does the interaction need to be rude or hostile, but it can also be a misconstrued compliment if worded poorly, for example, complimenting someone on their language skills (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). As Van Laer & Janssens (2011) note, a comment like this implies a comparison is present, as here it can be interpreted that the person giving the compliment did not expect the receiver's English to be as proficient in comparison to other natives of their country.

## 2.8. Anxiety Due to Language Barriers and Managerial Implications

Tenzer, Pudelko and Harzing (2013) conducted a study on the impact that language barriers have on trust and its formation in Multinational teams (MNT). Their study was conducted on three German automotive companies and demonstrated how MNT members' cognitive and emotional reactions to language barriers impact their perceived trustworthiness and intention to trust, ultimately influencing the formation of trust. Tenzer et al. (2013) found that after analysing their data, another language-induced and trust-related emotion they found was anxiety. They found that those who personally thought that their language level was unsatisfactory feared being

judged by their colleagues due to their low language competence. This made them hesitant to speak up. In their study, they define their findings as various propositions, and on this subject matter find that "the need to speak a foreign language in team communication creates anxiety, particularly among those MNT members who perceive their command of this language as insufficient" (Tenzer et al., 2013, p.526). A similar finding can be seen in Neeley's (2013) study, where they found that workers with low to medium language fluency worried that they would appear incompetent to native-speaking colleagues. This led them to withdraw from conversations and even avoid meetings. According to Neeley, (2013), "withdrawing from discourse and avoiding meetings altogether are subtle, inconspicuous, and self-perpetuating coping mechanisms that can go unnoticed by coworkers, because remaining quiet during a conversation is often viewed as a normal default, and absence may be equally inconspicuous" (p.491). This is echoed in the work of Harzing and Feeley (2008), as no one, particularly senior international managers, wants to be seen as unintelligent, uninformed, or slow to grasp concepts. As a result, managers frequently maintain an appearance of understanding, even when they have lost track of the discussion, or they may stay completely silent. Tenzer et al (2013) conclude their study by looking at the managerial implications regarding the barriers found in the workplace due to language. They implore team leaders to become more aware of the negative effects language barriers can create and to take specific steps to help lessen these problems and to help build trust among the employees. This, in turn, will enable "a corporate culture that values diversity as a source of creativity and consequently encourages open communication across language barriers may support MNTs in their efforts to build a positive emotional climate" (Tenzer et al., 2013, p.530).

## 2.9. Summary

The literature review has revealed how one's connection to their own language can lead to language clustering and can be attributed to the need to define personal identity and the fear of domain loss. This, in turn, can affect the flow of information and create a power dynamic between those who know the local language and those who don't. It is clear from the literature review that both national language policies and the language policies of the institution also play an important role in the experiences of employees. This can be linked to administrative and

managerial roles, which can affect access to the power structure within the workplace. Diversity management has emphasised how important having the right language policies in place is for a productive working environment. However, with that being said, one's own anxiety over their own language proficiency can negatively affect their participation and stance within work group settings. In conclusion, managers need to ensure they are aware of these barriers to help mitigate their effects.

# 3. Methodology

The methodology chapter will examine the steps undertaken to address the research question. It will explain how we initially approached the topic and how we collected the data. The reasons behind each of the decisions are discussed. It will continue on to detail how the data was processed and analysed and in what way this was conducted. We will also explain the reasoning behind our chosen framework for analysis and discuss the reliability, validity, and limitations of the study.

It became clear that an inductive approach would be best suited for our exploration. An inductive approach indicates a method where conclusions are derived from close analysis of the data (Business Research Methodology, n.d.). Exploratory data analysis is more effective in phenomenon detection within organisational sciences (Jebb et al., 2017). Furthermore, the countless research topics within human resource management (and even management more broadly) carry with them many important research questions that might benefit from a more empirical and exploratory approach (Woo et al. 2017). Nevertheless, we aim to also incorporate established theories into our analysis of the findings. Abduction theory, in particular, extends this process by providing deeper insights and facilitating the development of explanations for observed phenomena (Woo et al. 2017). Therefore, combining both inductive and abductive methods will lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. While case studies have limitations in terms of generalizability, they provide comprehensive insights (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 cited in De Coninck & Verhulst, 2024).

## 3.1. Data Collection and Data Storage

We decided to conduct semi-structured interviews as, in general, interviews are seen as a more intimate way of retrieving data (Edley & Litosseliti, 2018). Given that business is primarily a social phenomenon, a significant portion of the data necessary for informed decision-making in the workplace stems from human interactions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Interviews are one of the prevalent methods in business research, enabling researchers to gather diverse data from

human respondents (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). We decided on a qualitative approach as it fitted the purpose of our research more closely and we wanted to conduct semi-structured interviews in order to get as honest answers as possible. The interviews were semi-structured, and the reasoning for this approach was to give the interviews some flexibility. Semi-structured interviews are suitable for topics that can be seen as sensitive since they allow us to ask more questions if we need clarification or more information (Barriball & While, 1994). Barriball & While (1994) also state that if the participants in the sample group have different backgrounds, this approach is easier to use. Utilising stories in the analysis is a way of seeing patterns and insights that might otherwise be difficult to pinpoint (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

We conducted a pilot interview and met with a participant, without knowing our finalised set of questions. Almost all the questions we asked during this interview were implemented in the finalised guide. The participant brought up topics and examples of cases they had observed. This particular interview gave us the opportunity to see what aspects of the topic should be taken into consideration when looking into language barriers. After this interview, we decided on the finalised structure of the interviews. The first and the finalised interview guide can be found in Appendix A and B. The following interviews were conducted using the finalised interview guide. Permission was given to record the interviews. The interviews were conducted anonymously as when the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants are protected, participants tend to be more open about their experiences (Kang & Hwang, 2023). In analysis and discussion, we have decided to refer to the participants with letters and change specific personal information about them in order to protect their anonymity.

To contact potential interviewees, we utilised email and LinkedIn. All of the faculty members have a university profile on the website with their email. The process of finding people to interview started with our supervisor. She recommended we speak with two faculty members whom she thought we might find interesting due to their research and background. We started with organising an interview with both of them. After these interviews, we got additional names of people that might be relevant to the study and reached out to them. Various participants were found through snowball sampling which is a method where participants are found through other participants (Parker et al., 2019). Additional interviewees were contacted through email found on

the LUSEM webpage. We reached out to employees we thought were relevant for the study, which included reaching out to people of different ethnicities. We wanted to interview both internationals and Swedish employees to get different perspectives, to hear the experiences of the international faculty members as well as the opinions of the Swedes. We stayed within the limits of those who were members of the LUSEM faculty but had a mix of individuals from the different departments. To set the scene and help the reader understand the type of institution where the study was conducted, we gathered statistics about the faculty as secondary data. We felt it was necessary to examine the university's diversity information to gauge the extent of its multiculturalism. Additionally, we researched the university's discrimination policy, and this secondary data is presented in Chapter 4.1.1, along with all other secondary data.

We created a shared folder where we created a draft for an email, a separate document for all the interviews, and a folder for the voice recordings. For data protection purposes, we ensured that the files were stored without including names or personal information that could identify the participant. All the research and possible sources were also stored in the folder. Once we had finished all of our interviews, we utilised the transcribe tool in Microsoft Word so that we could have a rough, initial outline of each of the interviews. We then listened to each interview in close detail, changing any mistakes that were spotted in the script. We divided the interviews into two groups, allowing each of us to review and edit seven transcripts. Afterwards, we cross-checked by listening to the audio and reading the transcripts created by the other person, ensuring the accuracy of each script. Once that was done, we went through each of the transcripts and removed any personal information that could be linked to the participant to uphold anonymity. Finally, we assigned each of the participants a letter and labelled the transcripts in accordance with those letters. A consent form was written up, detailing that participation in this research was voluntary and that each participant was free to withdraw from the research at any time. This was signed by each of the participants, to ensure that the participant's voluntary participation was clearly established.

## 3.2. The Profile of Each of the Interviewees

In total, we interviewed 14 employees at the faculty of LUSEM at Lund University. Four of them were from Sweden and ten of them were from outside of Sweden. In this study, we categorise them as international employees. To keep anonymity, we have labelled the participants from A to N. We have also indicated whether they are international or Swedish by adding the codes 'Int' and 'Swe' respectively. The aim of the table is to give the reader an understanding of who each interviewee is and from what perspective they are coming from. It will also help indicate who is speaking in the running text in Chapter 4. The excerpts from the interviews are written in italics to clearly indicate when the interviewee is speaking.

When conducting the semi-structured interviews, we had a list of set questions that we asked in every interview, to create a profile of each individual. We asked all of the participants whether they considered themselves Swedish or International. This was noted down as so in the table. We also asked if they could speak Swedish, to see if they could understand the language when it was used within the workplace. Within Table 1, this has been labelled as Swedish Skills. The level of Swedish skills among the individuals was self-reported, as we asked them whether they spoke Swedish and if they felt comfortable speaking it in an informal setting. Those who answered "no" to having Swedish skills do not necessarily lack Swedish skills entirely; rather, they do not feel comfortable speaking it in an informal setting. Each of our interviewees was asked what their position was at LUSEM, in order for us to understand their power position within the institution, as well as if they had people responsibilities where employees might come to them for help. To help aid anonymity, we simplified roles and positions down into more generic labels, which still maintained a separation in hierarchical positions. The first is the manager. This refers to anyone who is in a position like Head of Department, Deputy Head of Department, Director of Studies or Dean. Next, professor, indicates anyone who is a senior professor, associate professor or docent. Finally, a researcher is anyone who is a PhD student, Doctorate, PhD candidate or a fellow.

| Interviewee Code | Swedish/International | Swedish Skills | Job |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A/Int | Int | Yes | Manager |
| B/Swe | Swe | Yes | Manager |
| C/Int | Int | Yes | Professor |
| D/Swe | Swe | Yes | Professor |
| E/Swe | Swe | Yes | Researcher |
| F/Int | Int | No | Researcher |
| G/Int | Int | No | Professor |
| H/Int | Int | No | Professor |
| I/Int | Int | Yes | Professor |
| J/Swe | Swe | Yes | Professor |
| K/Int | Int | Yes | Professor |
| L/Int | Int | No | Researcher |
| M/Int | Int | Yes | Professor |
| N/Int | Int | No | Researcher |

*Table 1; The Profile of Each of the Interviewees*

## 3.3. Data Analysis

When analysing qualitative data, there are relatively few well-established and commonly accepted rules and guidelines (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). However, as suggested by Miles and Huberman, there are generally three steps in analysing qualitative data: data reduction, data display and the drawing of conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, cited in Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Data reduction is the process of selecting, coding and categorising data, data display is the way of presenting the data, illustrating a pattern that may help the researcher to understand the data and finally drawing and verifying conclusions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Additionally, the authors also emphasise that this is a nonlinear, continuous and iterative process (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

The first process, therefore, is data reduction. This is done through coding and categorisation. Codes are labels given to units of texts, that are grouped and turned into categories which is done to help draw meaningful conclusions about the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In other words,

identified themes, patterns and remarks were given labels in the transcript. This process is called open coding, where the researcher examines qualitative data, selects a relevant segment of data, and attaches a code (or codes) that capture the meaning or the aspects that are relevant to the research question within that data segment (Roehl, n.d). We utilised Nvivo to complete this stage, as it enabled the user to upload the transcripts and easily create and assign codes to the text. The programme would also group together text with the same code for easy access. We opted to tackle this stage individually to maximise the diversity of codes we could generate, free from any mutual influence. We stayed consistent throughout and went through the same process after each and every interview. The more we did it, the more we started seeing occurring phenomena and categories of themes. The codes found were based on noting any aspect we thought was relevant, including aspects that surprised us, aspects that the interviewee indicated as important, words that appeared repeatedly and experiences that reminded us of a theory. Below are two graphs, with one each of our initial analysis of the data.
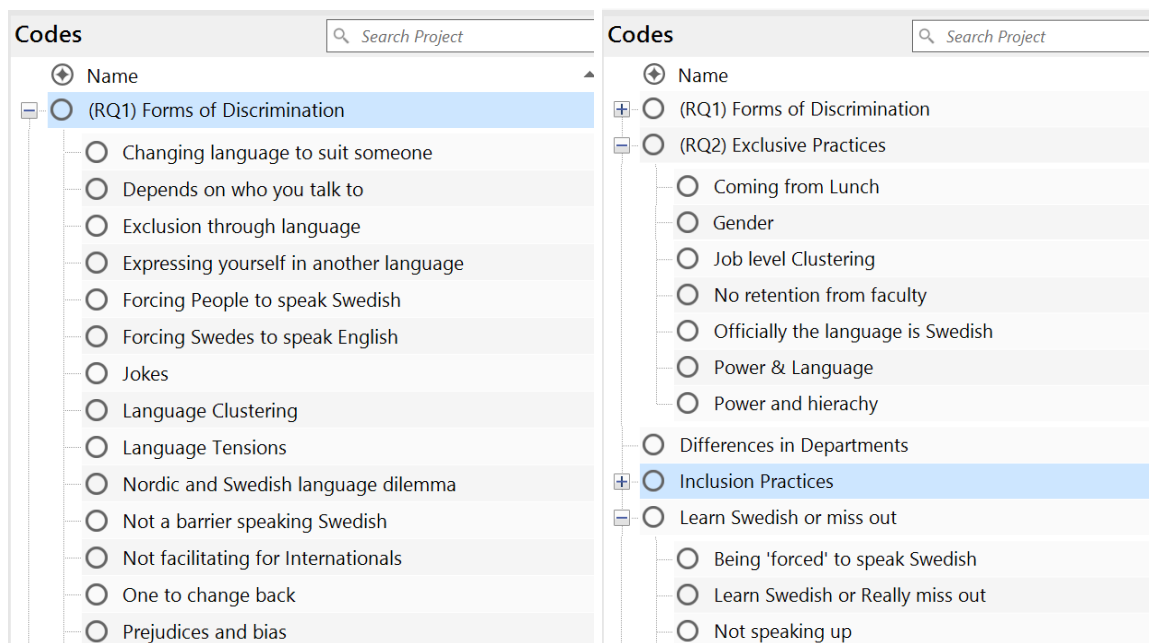


*Figure 1: Excerpt of Codes from the first round of coding using Nvivo.*

For the second part of the coding, we decided on which codes were most important and created categories by bringing several codes together. We did this stage by utilising both Nvivo, Google Sheets and Microsoft Word. Researcher 1 used Microsoft Word and created a table and labelled

each of the columns 'clusters'. Researcher 2 used Google Sheets for the same process. They then began inserting the various codes into the various boxes, grouping codes with similar meanings or connotations. New codes were created by combining several codes. Initial codes that we found in the next step were no longer relevant were dropped. These categories can be seen below in the next two figures and show the individual work done.

| Cluster 1 | Cluster 2 | Cluster 3 | Cluster 4 | Cluster 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Changing language to suit someone<br><br>Forcing People to speak Swedish<br><br>Forcing Swedes to speak English<br><br>Switching back to English<br><br>Swedish Students wanting to speak Swedish<br><br>When you have to Speak Swedish<br><br>Being 'forced' to speak Swedish<br><br>Formal pressure<br><br>Nordic and Swedish language dilemma<br><br>Depends on who you talk to<br><br>One to change back | Jokes<br><br>Prejudices and bias<br><br>Subtle Discrimination | Language Tensions<br><br>Tensions and dilemmas<br><br>Resistance<br><br>Social tensions through language<br><br>informal pressure | Language Clustering<br><br>Not facilitating for Internationals<br><br>Exclusion through language | (RQ2) Exclusive Practices<br><br>Coming from Lunch (kind connected to language clustering)<br><br>Job level Clustering |

*Figure 2: A sample of the Subcategories of each of the coding themes from researcher 1*

*Figure 3: A sample of the Subcategories of each of the coding themes from researcher 2*

In the third part, we labelled and named the categories and decided which of them were the most relevant and how they are connected to each other. Here, we were able to find connections in which once an initial theme or observation was identified, other subcategories could be seen in correlation to it, for example, once subtle discrimination was identified, it was more likely the interviewee would mention power dynamics. The categories and connections are the main results of our study. It is new knowledge about the world, from the perspective of the participant in our study (Qualitative analysis of interview data: A step-by-step guide, 2013).

| Workplace Division | Policies |
|---|---|
| Power Dynamics Caused by Language | Individual's Experience |
| Managerial Implications | Exclusionary Practices |

*Table 2: The Themes Identified as Most Relevant to Answer the Research Questions*

Coming back to Miles and Huberman's second step, we discussed the best way for the data to be displayed. This can be seen in Table 2 and will be displayed in Chapter 4. To draw conclusions

from this data, a content analysis will be performed as it enables the researcher to analyse large amounts of textual information and systematically identify its properties, such as the presence of certain words, concepts, characters, themes or sentences (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). It will be analysed using a conceptual analysis which establishes the existence and frequency of concepts such as words, themes or characters in a text (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). This is used to make inferences about the messages in the text, the effect or messages on the receiver (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this paper, the content analysis will be done by gathering various excerpts of texts from the transcript which correlate or connect to one of the final themes identified. This will create a narrative under each theme and show what the participants actually said.

## 3.4. Reliability and Validity

While retrieving data from personal experiences, it is important to note that people can remember things differently, such as details, wrongly (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). To take into consideration as well is that "the what and the how of the story convey information about the evaluative perspective of the teller" (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015, p. 106). Therefore, it must be remembered that one view is not the absolute truth of the specific situation. The data can only be extracted through analysing their words and therefore, we must take into account that these narratives are personal experiences and are not a reflection of all faculty members at LUSEM. However, we aim to get a better understanding of this context. In order to maintain reliability, we phrased our questions as neutral as possible. Nevertheless, it's crucial to acknowledge our relative novelty in conducting interviews, which raises the possibility that our remarks or actions may have inadvertently influenced the responses provided by participants.

## 3.5. Delimitations

Firstly, this study is limited to the faculty of LUSEM at Lund University where we will conduct interviews with faculty members not limited to any particular department within the school. Gender, age or how long they have been at the faculty will not be taken into consideration. The only criteria is that they are directly employed by the faculty. The cultural background has been grouped into the category of international, as the scope of the research relates to the relationship

between Swedes and non-swedes, as well as Swedish-speaking individuals and non-Swedish individuals. This also allowed us to keep the anonymity of the participants. Additionally, we did not formally indicate the level of the participants' Swedish, as it was highly subjective in accordance with the participants' opinions. Therefore, we let the participants decide for themselves whether they felt capable of communicating with others in the language.

# 4. Data Results

This chapter presents the findings in relation to the primary research question: How do faculty members experience language barriers? The results are organised into two main sections: secondary data and primary data. The secondary data was gathered from researching the Lund University website and the LUSEM website. The primary data was collected by conducting 14 semi-structured interviews with faculty members at LUSEM. The sample consisted of both international and Swedish employees. The results will be presented thematically with qualitative insights from interviews. Initial analysis indicates a significant correlation between language proficiency and the barriers faculty members face within the workplace, setting the stage for a detailed exploration of these findings.

## 4.1. Lund University and its Policies

To fully understand the official stance of the workplace and the environment the participants of this study are situated in, it is necessary to get an insight into the policies of the institution. Therefore, in this section, the institution's size and multiculturalism are discussed, along with the school's language policy and its guides to dealing with discrimination and harassment in the workplace. The data has been gathered from LUSEM's official website.

### 4.1.1. The Institution of Lund University's School of Economics and Management

The institution of Lund University's School of Economics and Management (LUSEM) has internationalisation as one of its main strategies. At the university, 37% of the employees are international and 57% of the researchers are international (Lund University, 2024). During the terms 22/23 LUSEM welcomed 358 exchange students and sent out 586 students to universities abroad (Lund University School of Economics and Management, 2024b). Lund University wants to be perceived as an international institution that attracts students and researchers from all over the world. The university also has the three crown accreditation that less than 1% of all business schools worldwide has since it is "accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools

of Business (AACSB), the EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) and the Association of MBAs (AMBA)" (Lund University School of Economics and Management, 2024a).

In regards to how the faculty facilitates Swedish language learning, the school does provide Swedish language courses for employees who are eager to learn the language. It is called Swedish for university staff (SFU) and the programme involves levels ranging from 1 to 5. According to the website, the course is paid for by the applicant's department and they recommend before they apply, to discuss it with their manager (Staff Pages, 2024).

## 4.1.2. LUSEM Guides to dealing with discrimination, harassment and victimisation

LUSEM has published two separate guides, one for students and one for staff, for dealing with discrimination, harassment and victimisation (Lund University School of Economics and Management, 2024d). In the staff guide, it details the difficulties in identifying discrimination, as it requires the person who is experiencing it to categorise it as so. It also calls for the victim to reach out to the perpetrator and communicate their interpretation of the situation. They ensure to also note that in some situations, the offence is so evident that no clarification is required. An excerpt from the staff guide is presented below:

> The person who feels subjected to the behaviour is the one to determine what they perceive to be discrimination or harassment. However, this does not mean that others cannot have a different perception of the situation. The circumstances of the event may entail the situation being legally categorised differently from how the victim perceives it. In order for the case to be a question of harassment, the action or behaviour must be unwanted. It is the person who feels exposed to the behaviour who determines whether it is unwanted or not. According to the Discrimination Act, the person who is harassing the victim must understand how the behaviour is perceived for it to constitute harassment. It is therefore very important that the person who feels victimised makes it clear to the perpetrator that the actions are unpleasant and unwelcome. In certain situations, the offense is

so obvious that no clarification is needed (Lund University School of Economics and Management, 2024d).

Additionally, the guide also recommends that if you have experienced or have witnessed this kind of behaviour, report so by telling your manager. If this is not possible, you can contact a superior, such as the dean or equivalent or talk to a health and safety representative or union representative for advice and support.

The staff guide and student guide differ slightly, with the student guide giving additional case examples of everyday discrimination. In the student's guide, they list seven grounds in which discrimination occurs. One of the grounds is on the basis of ethnicity. With each of the grounds, they provide everyday examples of discrimination. The example given is about a student who is excluded from group work due to his fellow classmates switching to Swedish constantly, a language he does not understand. When he reaches out for help, his course director responds dismissively of his problem. Below is the full excerpt of the example from the student guide:

> Mattias was born and grew up in Germany and does not speak Swedish. He is attending a course taught in English. In connection with group work, he ends up with people who all grew up in Sweden. During their work, the group often switches to Swedish which makes Mattias feel excluded and he finds it difficult to take active part. Mattias asks his fellow students several times to speak English while working so that he can understand and contribute. When he contacts the course director, the response is that "it is important to be able to speak Swedish in Sweden" (Lund University School of Economics and Management, 2024c).

Although this is given as an example in the guide for students and not for employees, it illustrates what the faculty deems as discrimination within the institution. The reason we include this excerpt from the student guide is that it gives an example that is similar to the experiences recalled by the participants in this study.

## 4.2. The Experiences of Each of the Individuals

In this section, the primary data from the semi-structured interview of the 14 faculty members will be presented. Each sub-subsection correlates to a different barrier that occurs due to language differences and is grouped through similar experiences. In this section, the results from those interviews will be presented, highlighting the various themes and topics that participants brought up in relation to their experiences with language barriers at the workplace. The quotes from the interviews have been italicised for an easier reading experience. Firstly, the social and cultural division between the faculty members is explored, where the barriers to the integration of employees is discussed. This leads to the experience of being excluded from conversations and meetings and the effect of negative remarks towards language use. Following on from this, the experience of career advancement and how language can impede this is looked at, along with the interesting observation of the disadvantage of knowing Swedish. Finally, how language barriers cause feelings of guilt and embarrassment is looked at, leading to the managerial implications of this.

### 4.2.1. Learning Swedish and the Social Division between the Faculty Members

Given that a majority of the faculty are Swedish, both Swedish and international participants commented that it was natural for them to speak Swedish with their colleagues. They observed that Swedes tend to revert back to Swedish whenever they get the chance, noting that it feels more natural and comfortable for them. However, there are two contrasting experiences when it comes to integration between local and international faculty members. On one hand, Swedes are widely recognised for their proficiency in English. However, this creates difficulties for internationals to learn Swedish, as they do not get the opportunity to practise their Swedish at the workplace. On the other hand, Swedes do also prefer to speak their native language when speaking with other Swedes. The observation of an exclusive inner circle was mentioned, inferring a connection between Swedes on a cultural basis that even those internationals who learn Swedish cannot penetrate. The establishment of an official parallel language can, to some extent, create a division between those who know the local language and those who do not. This

topic was not included in the interview questions so was derived from individuals who brought it up themselves.

A common opinion about the English skills of the Swedes is shared between almost all of the participants. **Participant N/Int** states, *"I mean, the best thing about Sweden is that everyone speaks English and pretty good English, right?"* Similarly, **Participant E/Swe** notes, " [Swedes] *are fairly good at English."* Aligning views come from Swedish-speaking **Participant I/Int,** *"I would say, generally speaking, Swedes are really good in switching to English, and the level is so high that it's rarely at least kind of in academic environments, it's very rare that they struggle to express themselves in English."* Therefore, across the board, the majority of participants mentioned that Swedes have a good level of English. However, this factor acts as a hindrance for those who want to learn Swedish, as Swedes are likely to switch back to English when interacting with someone with lower Swedish skills. This has been a barrier **Participant A/Int** has faced as they wished Swedish speakers would not switch so quickly back to English and persevere a bit more through Swedish.

Numerous participants acknowledged the fact that one must work harder to communicate when utilising a second language. **Participant E/Swe** says, *"I think a lot of things get lost by continuously speaking in a non native language.* They also say that, *speaking English, it is in a way, it's a performance."* This refers to the additional effort required when speaking a non-native language, as it doesn't flow as effortlessly as one's native tongue. **Participant N/Int** agrees, "*I think… they're more comfortable in speaking their own language."* Many value the ability to speak in their native language, whether it's Swedish or English. **Participant B/Swe,** "*I guess it's always easier to talk about certain things in your native language."* However, the internationals who speak Swedish do not feel excluded from these scenarios, *"I think it has never bothered me because I could always still follow what they were saying. I didn't really feel excluded there",* says **Participant I/Int.** Hence, a notable dilemma emerges: while Swedes excel in English proficiency, they tend to favour speaking Swedish among themselves, yet opt for English when communicating with internationals. This preference poses a challenge for internationals seeking integration or opportunities to practise the language.

Division within the faculty was a theme identified during categorisation. This aspect can be observed in a scenario recounted by **Participant C/Int.** They reflected on when they first arrived at the faculty, *"before, when I began in this department, we had all the old professors, and they liked to have fika, and they provided a space for you to actually practise your Swedish"*. They acknowledge that the earlier environment created a better space for language learning. They go on to say, *"but that thing has disappeared. Because the older professors, they retired, and the younger professors did not have the same tradition…* [the older professors] *were inviting and then they helped me a lot to actually be able to learn Swedish back in the day.* A shift can then be observed from the changing of generations within the workplace, *"but then professors who are 40s and 50s speak English so well, they don't really* [see the need to speak Swedish to internationals]. *You can see there are two worlds."* Similar experiences were recounted by **Participant D/Swe** when they talked about the fact English is often used with internationals and they do not get to practise their Swedish.

There was a frequent mentioning of a divide between Swedes and Internationals, with language being the main separating factor. An exclusive grouping of Swedes was observed and suggested a situation where the internationals are not allowed to integrate fully. Contrarily, internationals are not pushed to learn Swedish and there is no formal pressure to learn the language, as many participants mentioned *"Swedes speak so good English"*. **Participant D/Swe** explains how a friend of theirs wants to learn Swedish and be invited to dinners and social gatherings. They mention that, *"my friend said, I feel this* [the wall between the inner circle and him] *almost physically. I will never, ever be invited in that small nuances, looks, stuff. I look at it, but I can only be part of it."* They keep explaining that this is a common problem for internationals since Swedes like speaking English, but it is easier to connect with a Swede in Swedish. Switching to English with a non-native speaker who tries to learn Swedish, in their view is *"a way of saying, well, you're not really included"*. Therefore, it could be argued that getting a Swedish friend can be a difficult task. **Participant I/Int** shares this view, *"it took a long time before they would invite me for a dinner or something along those lines."* **Participant D/Swe**, coming from a Swedish perspective, observes, *"but I think that we have also become a bit better to invite people* [for dinner]" They attribute the difficulty in infiltrating the inner circle as a shyness in Swedes,

saying, "*Sweden is perhaps not the most inclusive and welcoming country in the world. Not because we're evil, but a bit shy.*"

A conundrum can be observed here in the discourse that Swedes are so good at English that there is no need to learn Swedish to communicate within the workplace. However, naturally, they will speak Swedish to their fellow colleagues when applicable as they are in a Swedish institution. Nevertheless, those who would like to infiltrate the Swedish-speaking realm find it difficult to practise their language skills at the workplace and even if they do, they may not be able to infiltrate the informal community.

## 4.2.2. Being Excluded from Conversations and Meetings

Several of the international participants who could not understand Swedish experienced feelings of exclusion in various informal interactions with colleagues. They were surrounded by Swedes who maintained speaking in a language they could not understand. These instances were during work meetings or during lunch or an event. There is an interpretation of resistance coming from the Swedish side, where various international participants feel like there is a point being made when Swedes do not switch to English due to the fact that the internationals, at this point, should know Swedish.

**Participant G/Int** recounts a time when they were at a kick-off meeting with the department, where the whole floor gathers together once a year to have lunch. The participant was sitting at a table with many Swedes. The conversation ended up switching to Swedish and they knew that **Participant G/Int** did not speak Swedish. "*I've been in this situation where I felt excluded, because people know perfectly well I cannot speak Swedish.*" They do acknowledge that one colleague tried to switch the language back to English, to "*include me, but then some other colleagues would switch back to Swedish.*" Reflecting on the experience, they say "*I never felt so uncomfortable my entire life with people speaking Swedish around me. And I was like during, like 20 minutes and my colleagues would switch back to English and then they would always switch back to Swedish.*" They interpret that a point was being made by the Swedes to infer that the participant should know Swedish by now.

**Participant N/Int** had a similar experience of being subtly told that they lack language proficiency. They were invited to a work event that was conducted in Swedish. **Participant N/Int** emphasised that they knew **Participant N/Int** could not speak Swedish. In their opinion, they felt like this was a purposeful invite, and they say, *"they have this hidden innate tendencies that they don't like the fact that, you know, people are not speaking Swedish."* They do acknowledge that in an informal setting, such as getting a beer after work or at lunch, the switching of language is more natural. At some point the language would switch to Swedish and **Participant N/Int** acknowledged, like in the situation with **Participant G/Int**, that one colleague spoke up for them and tried to steer the conversation back to English. They say, "*But also someone would remind them, hey,* [they do not] *speak Swedish. And they would start speaking English, but after some time they would go back to Swedish. I think it's more unconscious because it's more natural.*" The participants perceive the experiences as something that is natural for the Swedes to do, but as a result, they still feel excluded from the group.

However, various participants experienced the opposite of this, where Swedish was immediately replaced by English when it was recognised that a non-native Swedish speaker was in the room. In this vein, **Participant H/Int** states; "*when there is a meeting and I am the only one who doesn't speak Swedish, everyone is changing to English without even asking, or sometimes asking, would you prefer that we do it in English or in Swedish?"* **Participant A** has the same experience, saying, *"I think people here are very good at changing* [back to English].*"* Therefore, in every situation, the likelihood of switching languages largely depends on the individuals present in the situation: whether they will naturally transition to English to be inclusive or continue speaking Swedish.

## 4.2.3. Negative Remarks Towards Their Language Use

Exclusion can also be experienced in the form of comments from colleagues, due to misunderstanding or turns of phrases attributed to language barriers. Irrelevant of whether it was meant maliciously or not, the participants receiving the comments felt othered because of it. **Participant C/Int** recalls a colleague commenting on their writing abilities, saying, "*that's very*

*sweet what you wrote"* in response to something the participant was writing in Swedish. They go on to say that they get the impression that some Swedes they have met will never see the international's Swedish on the same level as theirs. In a different capacity, **Participant K/Int** remembers a colleague making a joke about language usage. **Participant K/Int** when they first joined the faculty and did not speak Swedish, felt like everyone else was accommodating them by speaking English. However, *"repeatedly, Swedish people assured me that is not the case, 'we love to speak English', and I didn't really believe them. And a couple years ago now, when I could speak Swedish, one colleague joked with me that, something about, "oh, now we don't have to switch to English." It was really a joke, but I was like, I knew it"*. **Participant K/Int** did not interpret this in a negative manner but as an interesting observation and comment.

**Participant M/Int** recalls how a past colleague who no longer works there, who was an international with dark skin, remarked that *"Swedish is the only language I know of where you lose in status when you speak it. He was dark, right? If he had been a German, he wouldn't have said the same thing"*. The inference here is that as a dark person speaking Swedish, they were treated with less respect and regard as to someone who was also an international but was white. Therefore, visual appearances can also affect other's preconceived biases on a colleague's language proficiency.

## 4.2.4. Career Advancement and Language

Throughout the narratives retold during the interview process, the topic of job position in correlation with which language was used was a recurring theme. The hierarchy and seniority of the person in the situation had influence over which language was used. The main backdrop to this discussion is the fact that the University is a *Myndighet*, a public institution, and has therefore responsibility to officially have Swedish as the main administrative language and to make sure that the language is kept up to date and developed. Many participants remarked that those in upper management utilised more Swedish.

**Participant A/Int** remarked that *"on a managerial level, we're expected to speak Swedish, or at least the meetings to be in Swedish."* They go on to say, *"I mean, if you look at this department,*

*there are not many people in a managerial position or a position of responsibility that are not Swedes."* **Participant G/Int** confirms this observation, *"I mean, the information that is shared at the department level, they are usually in Swedish…in the board meeting, so, like, the documents are written in Swedish."* **Participant N/Int** has the same opinion about the matter, *"so these different boards, the director of studies, to be able to sit in them, because these meetings are conducted in Swedish. So obviously it's not stated. But if you don't know Swedish, you can't sit there. Right? Because they're not going to do it in English."* **Participant E/Swe** adds *"if you cannot take on those positions, then you probably cannot do that kind of a career. So in that sense … there is definitely power. I mean, power in a very sort of tangible way."*

**Participant I/Int**, even though knowing Swedish quite well, stated, *"I have never been asked, and that has been a little frustrating, for… years to take up some kind of a management role."* They continue saying that taking upon a manager role would have been a natural continuum in their career and that, *"I felt language ... was a factor there, and I ... think would have liked to do that at some point, at least."* They continue saying that there is a known atmosphere where internationals are expected to leave at some point anyway. When it comes to their career they say that, *"it's also not like they should have been giving me that opportunity. I think I could have created that opportunity for myself as well by exposing myself more early in my career. So it's not a complaint, but it is something that I think I've noticed."* Thus, knowing the local language, Swedish, enables access to higher positions within the faculty, according to the participants.

However, although Swedish was not a requirement for any of the internationals, many observed the benefit in having it. On this topic, **Participant G/Int** remarked:

> *"Yes. And I can see as well the fact that some people speak Swedish sometimes, as non Swedish speakers, we can feel a bit excluded from. So it's not just the conversation, but as well, like, from the promotions, when people get promoted, we see that there's people who are from Sweden have maybe heard a little bit. I have to be careful the way I feel, but, like, I feel that the potential favour. "*

It was remarked by various participants that those in a higher position were more likely to be Swedish speakers. **Participant G/Int** said, "*It depends on which level. So the professors, people with higher status. Yeah, there are many more Swedish people.*" **Participant J/Swe** says that, "*there are some meetings, and in particular, among the more senior faculty, it's still very dominated by Swedish for different reasons.*" They go on to say that this is due to the pure time dimension in that speaking with a majority of Swedes in Swedish is more efficient than English. They also mention the Myndighet and the requirement for board meetings to be in Swedish.

On the other hand, some also mention that sitting on the board is not everyone's intention. **Participant B/Swe** explains, "*I'm not sure that it is such an attractive position to have.* **Participant E/Swe** shares the same opinion; *academia is a bit of a strange place in terms of what is sort of valued as an aspirational position. Top management positions are not necessarily so aspirational for academics.*"

**Participant D/Swe** brought up another aspect of this topic. They talk about how when they are in an important meeting and speaking English, they worry that they are missing important nuances of the words they use when making important decisions. "*So, for instance, decisions being made in English, because I'm a part of one board, and sometimes I'm not really sure. You know, I think I know. And I know English to some extent, but I'm not really sure what are the ramifications or the decisions I'm making now because I don't really, I can't grasp all the nuances in the language.*"

There is also the perspective of those who do not master English at all. Several participants mentioned that the administrative staff do not speak working professional English. A thought that was shared by **Participant B/Swe,** as they say "*Because as I said before, the administrative is, to a large majority, not that confident* [when speaking English]. "*They speak English, of course, but they're not that comfortable to do that and feel that the quality of their contribution to conversations becomes reduced even to the degree that they went step away from partaking in conversations and discussions. 'I can't really express anything here, so why should I even bother.'*" With this, they mean that if one does not feel like they can contribute to the conversation, it could lead to them not saying anything. According to **Participant B/Swe**, the

official company happenings are in English. So for example, at the Christmas party, if you are seated next to people who speak English, and you do not feel comfortable expressing yourself in English, you might not say anything.

**Participant M/Int** says they are very conscious of the way they use the Swedish language. When spoken, they are confident and have no issues in speaking to all their fellow Swedish-speaking colleagues. However, when it comes to the written form, they have slight insecurities. *"I do not feel smaller when I talk in Swedish. But I do feel smaller when I write in Swedish."* Therefore, when contacting someone new for the first time, they do not want to use their Swedish as they may come across as not competent as a professional academic. In detail, they say that they want to use written Swedish to a manager or colleague to demonstrate *"well, I'm Swedish. Even if I have grammar mistakes, when I write, it's almost a political decision. I write in Swedish and to educate them that you're still as competent, even if your grammar lacks."* However, once they need to contact someone who does not know them and who does not know that they are a good teacher, they switch back to English.

**Participant G/Int** also observed a situation where they felt that the Swedish speakers clustered together and benefitted from the collaboration. It was during covid and the school still encouraged workers to come into the university to work. However, many stayed home as the national recommendation was to stay at home. However, according to the participant, *"a group of people speaking Swedish…starting to launch some project together."* In other words, they were able to advance their academic research in this way. The coupling was attributed to them being Swedish and the participant remarks, *"And I felt it was. It was connected as well to the language."*

## 4.2.5. Disadvantages of Knowing Swedish

A recurring narrative about language skills was mentioned. Many participants said that there is a known problem with the fact that faculty who know Swedish, are 'trapped' teaching the bachelor level, whereas faculty who do not speak Swedish, automatically get to teach the more interesting master and PhD levels. Some participants stated that the bachelor-level classes are often bigger

groups and that there is not so much interaction with the students. They also said that the topics in master classes are often more interesting. Sometimes the skills do not match with the skills of the teachers and this can then lead to tensions. **Participant E/Swe** joked that knowing Swedish is almost a bad thing if you want to teach interesting classes.

Several participants brought up a power imbalance that happens when there are not enough Swedish-speaking teachers. Various bachelor's programmes are taught through Swedish. **Participant B/Swe** remarks that there are more bachelor students than master's students and there are administrative issues in filling all the teaching positions for the bachelors level. This is due to a language imbalance in the skills of the staff. They say that due to the international staff not knowing Swedish, they either cannot teach the lower degree classes or must conduct them through English. "*The fact that we sometimes actually deviate from this due to the fact that we can't really support or resource, teaching resources to that programme. If we only took the swedish speaking people there, it creates problem for us. So we have stretched it a little bit, saying that, okay, sometimes we teach actually in English, but every examination must be in Swedish.*"

Some of our participants think that this creates a problem because the international teaching staff will automatically get the more interesting and specific master courses, whereas the Swedes are "trapped" to teach the larger and less academically complicated bachelor classes. **Participant E/Swe**, '*the majority of my teaching is on the a levels, which is, I mean, I enjoy teaching, but it is, objectively speaking, the least attractive form of teaching.*" They continue, "*I mean, I don't want to say that, but it is weird form of, I wouldn't go so far as to say it's some kind of discrimination, but it is an issue, I think.* **Participant E/Swe** also mentioned the teaching quota that needs to be filled, one way or another, and if the ones who do not speak Swedish are signed up for the master classes and PhDs that are taught through English, the ones who can speak Swedish most often get the bachelor classes. Even **Participant K/Int** recognised the Swedish-speaking faculty gets stuck teaching bachelors classes. They say that "*I thought maybe that's another kind of issue that might arise from having this blended language situation, and that is that maybe this native Swedes or the people who are better at Swedish maybe get stuck with teaching the bachelor levels rather than. Yeah, rather than the perhaps more interesting*

*masters level.*" They suggest that there is a lack of appropriate teachers in the bachelor programme.

## 4.2.6. Language Barriers Cause Feelings of Guilt and Embarrassment

A recurrent theme in the interviews was an insecurity regarding language proficiency. Naturally, the Swedes spoke Swedish and six out of the ten internationals spoke Swedish. Those who could not speak Swedish felt an immense guilt around the topic, and blamed themselves for the lack of knowledge. The internationals who could speak Swedish also reported that they think it is the responsibility of the individual to learn. Interestingly, a few observations were made that those who had a familial connection to Sweden with a spouse or child, were usually more likely to speak Swedish. In contrast to this, it was also commented that Swedes have a very good standard of English and there is no need to learn the local language. On the other hand, the loss of the Swedish language also came up in a few interviews, with comparisons to this issue in other countries.

**Participant C/Int** felt that it was the onus of the individual to actively integrate themselves. They state that it is a matter of prioritisation, and your own initiative and motivation are needed in the matter, "*I believe that if you're here, you must learn Swedish. Some people don't do it, because they believe that it takes too much time away from their research and from their work and that's the reason why they don't do it.*" They go on to say that a lot of the time the Swedes will switch to English but not always. The international person has then put themselves in that situation, "*So sometimes* [the Swedes] *might be inclusive, but they are not always like that. And you can see when people feel excluded, but, you know, it's also, they also make that decision.*"

There is also the discourse that 'we' are in Sweden, so we must respect that and speak the local dialect. **Participant C/Int** remarks, "*I believe that if you're here, you must learn Swedish. Yeah, because, like, you know, I am the one coming here, so I have to understand that as well.*" There is an obviousness to speaking Swedish in a Swedish institution and **Participant F/Int** highlights this by simply saying, "*We are in Sweden. Lund University is a Swedish institution. So people speak in Swedish.*" However, currently for them, they mention that they do not have the existing

capacity to take Swedish lessons due to workload and familial situation. **Participant L/Int** on this topic notes that if they formally were obliged to learn the language, they would want the courses to be included in the working hours.

Many participants mentioned that those who had a familial connection are more likely to have Swedish skills. **Participant J/Swe says,** *"Of course, there is also the idea that if you are learning Swedish, maybe you do it for a reason. Maybe you are already more integrated. You might have a spouse or something. That needs a language and those kind of things…I think it helps when it comes to feeling fully integrated."* **Participant G/Int,** on the same topic, observes, *"But, yes, some managed to learn Swedish and now they can as well teach in Swedish. There are often people whose partner is from Sweden."* Thinking about the topic some more, they go on to remark, *"So all my colleagues who didn't speak Swedish, like, as soon as they entered a long term relationship with someone from Sweden, they started to learn Swedish. But otherwise colleagues like me who don't have. I mean, either they have a partner from someone or another. They don't."* **Participant K/Int** on a very similar line of thinking, added, *"But I wouldn't say I could really speak until I had my* [child] *and then I was on parental leave with* [them]. *And then I mixed with…a lot of Swedish people and spoke to little children in baby Swedish."*

From an alternative perspective, **Participant L/Int** makes a connection with their home country, where the national language is being overshadowed by English and as a result, some University courses that were originally taught in the native language have been dropped. They say, *"I do see the relevance in wanting people that come here to learn the language, at least to like, a rudimentary level, so to speak. I can understand that. Yeah. Because in the end, what I see in. I mean, in* [their country] *as well, is that we're losing whole programs."* This links into the issue of domain loss, where the threat of English overtaking Swedish on a professional level is a common concern. When the topic came up in the interview with **Participant J/Swe**, they remarked, *"I mean, if you think that there is a value of preserving the Swedish language, so that, I think, is, of course, a concern."* However, within the faculty itself, *"it's not much discussion still about it."* **Participant D/Swe** on the topic of domain loss stated, *"If we allow…English to dominate, too, for too long, what happens is that certain kind of domains are embedded? We lose the ability to talk about politics and science in Swedish, which means that we don't understand really what it's*

*all about."* They go on to say that the level of understanding within the board rooms will drop and will in turn threaten democracy.

Contradictory, **Participant E/Swe** suggested that if they were in the shoes of an international faculty member, they would not have invested the time to learn the language. They say, *"I mean, if I would come in here, I probably wouldn't try to learn Swedish if I would be a foreigner."*

Multiple international participants answered that they were not required to know Swedish or learn the language when applying for their current job position. Many were on the fence about whether that is a positive or negative point. However, they were uncomfortable with the notion of being contractually obligated to do so. **Participant N/Int** says they have experienced indirect pushing when it comes to learning Swedish and that it has contributed to the fact that they have not learned the language. They say, *"I have this habit that I don't want to do what I'm told."* Even **Participant L/Int** remarks that they would not react well to pressure from the school in regards to language learning. **Participant I/Int**, who knows Swedish, also agreed that if they had been pressured to learn faster they would have not liked it, *"I would have just maybe been, just been annoyed about feeling that pressure at that moment."* But as mentioned, there is no push from the university's side to learn the language.

## 4.2.7. Not Going to their Manager when Experiencing Language Barriers

One of the questions asked in the interview was, *"Would you go to your Manager if you felt like you were experiencing language exclusion?"* The answer across the board was a resounding no. The reasons for this are as follows; Two participants remarked that they did not have a manager above them that they could go to. Others answered that they would not go as they would approach the person excluding them directly and confront them in person, not needing to go to a higher-level manager. The majority felt it would be an embarrassing issue to go to their manager for. Several of the internationals commented that they are in Sweden, so they should be able to speak Swedish. Additionally, they believed that Swedes had the right to speak Swedish in their own country. It was their own fault they were being excluded for not learning Swedish.

**Participant F/Int** was given a group of students to supervise where the students were Swedish and the participant only had rudimentary Swedish. They felt that they could not go to their manager as their manager is also an international and has dealt with a similar situation in the same manner. The manager said it was ok to speak in English to the group they were supervising and the students would reply in Swedish. However, **Participant F/Int** has insecurities around their language skills. **Participant F/Int** shares, "*It's simply* [them] *sharing* [their] *experience, but it's, it's making it hard to voice those, you know, your insecurities or your doubts or your, whatever it is. A guilt."* They go on to say that they are very happy with their manager and, "*I would go to* [them] *with most things."* However, on the topic of language insecurities, they would not.

**Participant G/Int** shared the same sentiment as **Participant F/Int**. They also felt a personal guilt about their Swedish language skills. When asked the same question, they replied, "*I mean, I think I could tell* [them]*, but I feel I would be ashamed going there because I know they will judge. They will still judge me and think that even if they don't say it openly, I'm sure* [they] *will not tell you directly to me that you should speak. But, like, I would prevent myself to go talk to* [them] *directly because I know that."* **Participant G/Int** talks of an underlying sentiment they have, where they speculate that the manager would think that they should know Swedish after being in Sweden for so long. However, they would never voice this opinion out loud. *"Yeah, inside* [their] *reaction,* [they] *would say, yeah, but you should be able to speak Swedish after being here for so many years."* **Participant N/Int** shares the feeling of guilt. Their answer to the question is, "*no, because most people here are Swedes…what will I really say that they're doing?"* They continue telling us that there is a sort of person that would actually take the language issue to the manager. "*I'm not that kind of a person. So I wouldn't want to cause trouble or I don't. I mean, because, you know, the university is so. It's such a small environment. I wouldn't want to be the one who has problems with these people's language here and I wouldn't want to be identified as that."*

**Participant K/Int**, who now speaks Swedish, says that when they did not have a good demand of the language in earlier days, they would not have gone to their manager about it. They state, "*When I didn't speak Swedish, I can't imagine that I would have gone to my manager and said, I*

*feel excluded and can you do something about it? Because I feel like the solution there is to learn to speak Swedish."* When reflecting on their previous remark, they go on to say, *"Like, yeah, I know this is some sort of, I've got some weird, like, victim blaming loop going on here, maybe now, but I definitely would have felt that the solution was on me there to be better at Swedish."* **Participant I/Int** is in a similar position, an international who now speaks Swedish. However, in reflecting back to before they acquired the language, they reply, *"no, no, I would, I would blame myself"* and then laughs it away. They do see the importance of communicating issues with one's manager, however, in this case, they see it more appropriate if the individual went straight to the perpetrator. They say, *"so, I mean, so I don't see it necessarily something that you would need to address with your manager. It could, you know, rather be something that you would, if you would have people you're closely working with, something that you could directly communicate."* Likewise, **Participant E/Swe** would take a possible issue directly with the person in question instead of going to the manager. The same goes for **Participant H/Int**, *"of course I could. But actually, I can just say, "what did you say?" And people would go to English and they would explain"*.

## 4.3. Integrative Summary of Findings

These narratives integrate together to demonstrate the experiences of the faculty members when it comes to language barriers. Language is tightly intertwined with social and cultural practices, causing a divide between the international faculty members and the Swedish faculty members. As a direct barrier to collaboration at the workplace, participants recount experiences of being excluded from conversations and meetings, implying an implication that it is a pushback to them not knowing Swedish. Also, comments that have been made regarding their language abilities and the language barrier in accessing the hierarchy. This links in with feelings of guilt and perceived embarrassment, that a majority of the international participants feel. As a result, many would not go to their manager if they were experiencing language exclusion. The difficulties in learning the language of Swedish and how language requirements affect formal job positions. In the next Chapter, the findings will be analysed along with the concepts from the literature review.

# 5. Discussion

The previous chapter has presented the data gathered, illustrating the experiences that the participants have faced due to language barriers within the workplace and presenting the policies of the school. The following section will discuss these findings in relation to the concepts defined in the literature review. The purpose of this discussion is to gain a deeper understanding of how Lund University's language policies affect those at the university and if the parallel language use causes a divide between the faculty and between their managers. It also discusses how fears in domain loss or language insecurities contribute to the experiences within the faculty. Guilt is one of the barriers preventing a discussion from arising around the various issues that arise. While it is clear that those without Swedish skills are at a disadvantage, the present discussion looks at both how Swedes and Internationals experience language barriers. Each of these recountings of events is of an individual's experience and does not represent those of their colleagues. However, the findings may help us to better understand these language barriers and contribute to the studies in this area.

## 5.1. Division Between Groups

A clear take away from the interviews was that Swedes feel more comfortable in speaking Swedish with their fellow native colleagues. They observed that Swedes tend to revert back to Swedish whenever they get the chance, noting that it feels more natural and comfortable for them. They likened speaking English to putting on a performance. A possible explanation for this might be found by looking to social identity theory. As Khatib & Ghamari (2011) state, language is a big part of one's identity. Speaking Swedish at the faculty can be seen as a way for Swedish speakers to feel included in the group of Swedes (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). It is also important to mention that culture plays a significant role in being included in these groups (Eastman, 1985). Both international and Swedish faculty members noted that speaking their native language feels more natural, not to exclude anyone, but to maintain a stronger connection with their identity.

A strong relationship between social identity theory and language clustering has been reported in the literature. A natural cluster will form because of this as in language clustering, individuals are attracted to comfortability and what they know. As Tange and Lauring (2009) found in their study conducted in Denmark, the Danes ended up reverting back to their own language, as similarly seen in the data of this study. Their study points out that the informal conversation that happens during lunch can be important in information sharing and not just for socialising. It is important to understand that language clustering is not motivated by a wish to exclude others. Rather, it comes from a natural desire to speak one's native language, which is deeply connected to personal identity. However, even if the clustering happens without a mindset of excluding anyone, it does not mean it is any easier to the internationals. It is worth noting that the clusters should not be encouraged to form, since the Lund University language policy clearly states that any employee must be able to fully function at the university, even if they do not master the language of Swedish (Lund University, 2014).

Prior studies have also noted the importance of mentioning domain loss around this topic, especially within a Nordic setting (Hultgren, 2013). Domain loss, as defined in the literature review, is a concept of losing vocabulary in a specific language to English (Hultgren, 2013). Even if the academic Swedish faculty are proficient in English, their switching back to Swedish could be attributed to the underlying fear of English taking an overbearing dominant stance at the institution. As explained earlier, there was a motion to add English to the group of national minority languages in Sweden, but the motion was not approved (Riksdagen, 2020).

Nevertheless, this behaviour of the language switching has caused several of the participants to observe a separation between the two groups: the Swedes and the internationals. This study found that even those who learn the language will never truly be accepted into the Swedish' inner group. As seen in the literature review, being a native speaker of a language can be more influential than if one learns it as a second language (Khatib & Ghamari, 2011). An invisible boundary was observed, with a polite relationship at work but a more intimate relation was not possible.

## 5.2. The Difficulties in Learning Swedish

Our results indicate that learning the local language of Swedish is difficult for internationals, as the high English proficiency of Swedes naturally makes them quick at switching to English when needed. There appears to be no current work culture that allows for a learning experience during working hours. This outcome is contrary to that of Tange and Lauring (2009) and Lønsmann's (2014), who found Danes are more inclined to remain speaking Danish to internationals. However, similar to Lønsmann's (2014) study, the sentiment that internationals should at this point learn the local language was there. From the interviews, there was a resounding agreement on the topic that internationals should learn Swedish while they are here, apart from one Swede who commented that they would not learn Swedish if they had moved here, due to the high use of English. Many mention that it depends on an individual's own situation. Those whose partner is Swedish or those who have children here are more likely to learn the local language than those who do not have similar connections. This aligns with the concept that the more outlets in which the language learning can interact with the target language, the more beneficial the learning experience (Palfreyman, 2011). Within the workplace, it very much depends on who you speak with whether they will switch immediately to English or stay in Swedish.

Additionally, the participants mentioned the time limitation in learning another language. Again, this depends on one's familial situation and whether they have a family to look after after work. The language classes that the university provides, as presented in the secondary data called SFU, are also not accounted for in the working week and must be done in the person's free time or during time that could be spent on research.

## 5.3. Career Advantages to Knowing Swedish

The data is broadly consistent with the major trends in the literature regarding how knowledge of the local language helps to advance one's career (Pudelko & Tenzer, 2019). When asked about the power dynamics between the utilisation of English vs Swedish, all of the participants noted that the higher-up positions go mainly to Swedish-speaking staff. The reasoning behind this is attributed to official documents being in Swedish and therefore a non-Swedish speaking person

cannot take up this role, similar to the reasoning found in Pudelko and Tenzer's (2019) study. Most notably, some of the Swedish participants remarked that this disadvantage is not problematic as they believe academics do not find managerial positions particularly attractive, a sentiment echoed in Pudelko and Tenzer's (2019) study. Interestingly, this view was mentioned only by Swedish participants, not by the international staff affected by the language barrier. Comparison of the findings with those of other studies confirms that access to higher managerial positions can be hindered by language proficiency issues (Karlsson & Karlsson, 2020; De Coninck & Verhulst, 2024).

Not only is the formal barrier for administrative work mentioned, the international participants mentioned how networking and socialising through the local language is also highly beneficial. These results concur with other studies that show how networking can affect the hierarchy within the institution. Like in the works of Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999), a networking web could be identified between employees that spoke Swedish. One participant mentioned how over covid, a group of Swedish speakers met up and worked on a project together, advancing their research during a difficult time. The participant attributed this group forming due to language similarities.

## 5.4. The Disadvantages of Knowing Swedish

The most striking observation was in the fact that Swedish speaking employees felt disadvantaged in knowing the language, as the choice in degree level teaching was limited. This links back to the same phenomenon that Pudelko & Tenzer (2019) talked about where faculty members who know the local language must teach the larger bachelor classes that are conducted in that same local language. As can be seen from our interview guide in Appendix B, the questions about bachelor teaching were not part of it, but brought up as a barrier by staff themselves. This issue creates a language-based barrier in teaching. Swedish-speaking staff are the only ones capable of teaching in Swedish. As a result, English-speaking staff primarily teach master's and PhD levels, which are usually taught through English. Thus, this issue presents a reversed language barrier in teaching.

Several participants also mentioned that there are administrative staff that do not speak English to a high professional level, which can create problems with communication. Lund University has chosen to have English as a parallel language in order to be internationally attractive (Lund University, 2014). This means that some faculty do not speak Swedish and some do not speak English. Since official events, such as Christmas parties are held in English, the ones who do not speak English can feel excluded from the conversation. The dilemma at LUSEM comes from the fact that even though the Language Act of 2009 does not mention parallel language use, the university has made their own policy about having English as a parallel language. As mentioned in the literature, language policies are not always beneficial to all parties (De Coninck & Verhulst, 2024; Karlsson & Karlsson, 2020). The issue with having a parallel language is that not all staff at the faculty will have English and Swedish skills, meaning that communication boundaries are inevitable.

## 5.5. A Guilty Conscious

A significant finding from the interviews was the topic of guilt. Similar to the works of both Neeley (2013) and Tenzer et al (2013), there is a harsh personal evaluation of those who are not native-Swedish speakers. They feel that either their Swedish skills are not good enough or they are ashamed of not having the competence in holding a conversation in Swedish. The data reveals a strong, pervasive fear of being judged by colleagues. This is either being seen as professionally incompetent or a disapproval of having not learnt the language after living here for a certain number of years. Like in the works of Harzing and Feeley (2008), these highly qualified academics do not want to be perceived as incapable of performing their job and as a result, not being taken seriously. As seen in the literature review, remaining silent and not speaking up is a consequence of aforementioned fear of being judged and therefore many of the participants would not go to their manager if they were experiencing this issue. This also links into the subtle discrimination discussion, where participants find it difficult to speak up when surrounded by Swedish speakers and rely on another to speak up for them.

# 5.6. Ambiguous Experiences and Subtle Discrimination

The exclusion of the two faculty members due to Swedish speakers always switching back to their native language can be interpreted as subtle discrimination, albeit the participants not labelling it as such. These results align with the work of Van Laer and Janssens (2011), who discuss how everyday discrimination is concealed within daily work practices. On these occasions, the participants were left out of the conversation and left feeling excluded and their presence unwanted. They interpret a resistance from their colleagues on the grounds that they at this point should know Swedish as seen in the findings of Lønsmann's (2014) study. To complement this, the LUSEM harassment and discrimination student guide, as shown in the secondary data chapter, on this subject describes a very similar case of a student experiencing discrimination. Both the participants voiced their opinion in saying that they felt that the Swedish speakers knew that the participant did not speak the local language, however they still reverted back to Swedish. Whether this was on purpose or purely just out of habit, it left the participant feeling left out of the discussion.

The joke one participant remembered could be recognised as a form of subtle discrimination, delivered in the form of humour. In recounting this scene, they did not interpret this as discrimination or harassment, which is one of the rules which needs to be fulfilled in the LUSEM guide for it to be labelled as so. However, perhaps a different employee could have had a different interpretation. Even if the person who delivered the joke meant it purely as a humorous comment, perhaps there was a sort of relief not having to constantly switch back to English, and that they can now comfortably express themselves more clearly and be themselves. Similarly regarding the comment on how "sweet" the participants' Swedish is, complementing an individual on their language skills can be misconstrued negatively if the compliment itself is worded poorly (Van Laer et al. 2011). This is belittling behaviour that would, in turn, deter an employee from engaging in learning Swedish and practising it at the workplace. Therefore, this individual experienced language barriers in the form of subtle discrimination.

Our findings show that participants are recounting situations with clear sightings of subtle discrimination however, many of them are not interpreting them or recognising them as so. Many

participants ensured to 'balance' out the story by adding at the end a sentence in the essence of, *"Well, it is my fault for not knowing Swedish."* The most likely explanation of the finding is that they cannot interpret the discrimination due to personal blame or guilt for their own inadequacies. They are accepting this behaviour because they think it is due to them and the Swedes are in the right to say so. The institutional policies are also making it difficult for them to define the problem and are making the line between a throwaway comment and subtle discrimination impossible to decipher. As seen in the student guide example in 4.1.2., where the German student was being excluded due to language barriers, this was a common situation many of the participants found themselves in, but no one labelled it as subtle discrimination.

Just like how Jones, et al. (2017) differentiate, formal and interpersonal discrimination cannot be documented in the same way. LUSEM does have policies that protects employees from formal discrimination, however, due to the ambivalent nature of interpersonal discrimination that can be seen in the data of this study, it is hard to outline these behaviours in a policy. Like in the work of Tenzer et al (2013), this study has shown that it is up to all employees within the organisation to ensure that this type of behaviour is not tolerated and to call out another colleague when witnessing or experiencing this kind of behaviour. For various reasons the victim may not interpret a situation as unwanted and to some extent may see it as being deserved. However, this is not the case and situations like this need to be called out and stopped by others in a position to do so.

## 5.7. Managerial Implications

The participants acknowledge that they would not go to their manager if they were experiencing issues regarding language barriers. This was due to feelings of embarrassment, the fear of being judged, internal guilt and also not having a clear appointed manager in which they would bring this matter to. As acknowledged in the works of Tenzer et al. (2013), those who regarded their own language skills as poor feared being judged by their colleagues. This is preventing the issue from being discussed between colleagues and preventing them from going to their managers with this issue. Nearly every participant expressed that they would not go to their manager for fear of being judged and being embarrassed to admit they were struggling in this matter.

Additionally, many of the participants mentioned how they did not have a direct or formal manager, and how there is a dean or head of department but they do not have much contact with them. In the LUSEM discrimination guide handbook, as shown in the secondary data retrieved for this study in chapter 4, it is indicated to bring any issues pertaining to harassment or discrimination to a manager or equivalent. However, if there is a lack of a relationship between the manager and the employee, they may not feel comfortable going to these representatives with such a sensitive case. Improving this relationship between manager and subordinate is imperative to fostering a healthier workplace. As in the research of Tenzer et al. (2013), promoting a culture of open communication that bridges the gap between language barriers will lead towards a goal of having a positive emotional climate. Linking back to diversity management, by working towards bridging this gap, the institution as a whole can have an improved reputation and the employees can better accomplish personal and professional goals (Syed, J. & Tariq, M., 2017).

## 5.8. Summary of the Findings

This study has shown how faculty members experience language barriers within the faculty of LUSEM. The findings suggest that native language plays a crucial role in shaping one's identity, leading individuals to naturally cluster with others who share the same language and cultural experiences. Despite learning Swedish, non-native speakers often struggle to fully integrate into these groups due to the deep cultural connections tied to the language. Furthermore, the high proficiency in English among Swedes makes it challenging for internationals to practise and learn Swedish effectively, although there is a general consensus on the importance of learning the language.

A significant finding of the study is that higher managerial positions within a Swedish University are predominantly occupied by Swedish speakers, creating a language barrier for those who do not know Swedish. This barrier is further emphasised where Swedish-speaking staff are more likely to be assigned to teach bachelor-level courses in Swedish, as many international staff members cannot speak the language. Language policies, while intended to facilitate communication, often have the potential to create barriers instead. Everyday discrimination in

the workplace is difficult to identify due to its ambiguity and the subjective nature of personal interpretation, making it challenging to address explicitly in policy documents. Additionally, feelings of guilt surrounding language proficiency issues can strain managerial relationships and hinder the identification of subtle discriminatory behaviours. Managers have a responsibility to foster an open dialogue on language-related topics, and all employees are responsible for calling out exclusionary behaviours in the workplace. By encouraging inclusivity and addressing language barriers, the faculty of LUSEM can create a more equitable and supportive environment for all employees.

## 5.9. Research Limitations

First and foremost, the sample size is small, but we were faced with a time limitation and were restricted by the availability of the interviewees. However, our 14 in-depth interviews still paint a picture of the work culture at LUSEM and are valid and relevant for this research paper. Additionally, the topic is one that is very personal and individual and the opinion of one person may not be reflected in the whole faculty. Individuals may have certain underlying biases that we cannot know or attain during a singular interview. This also links to people's honesty during the interview and whether they were telling the truth or lying or exaggerating a situation, or simply were not comfortable telling us a personal situation. Some scenarios recounted were from a few years ago and may not be remembered with complete accuracy.

## 5.10. Further Research

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, much was done to help anonymise the participants, which included removing ethnicity and generalising them into just international. This prevented an investigation into how those from within Europe and those from outside of Europe experience language barriers differently. A study in this area could create a better understanding of how the different ethnic groups experience language barriers. Additionally, an investigation into how the different genders experience these barriers could also be studied. Also, we believe that more research should be done into the various languages used within a Swedish institution, especially the minority languages that are protected by the national language policy. This could be done

alongside an analysis on how effective the Language Act of 2009 is on preserving minority languages within universities.

# 6. Conclusion

The findings of this study clearly suggest that the faculty members experience difficulties within the workplace due to language barriers. These experiences are highly affected by language policies, language clustering and difficulties in learning the language. It is important to note that phenomena such as language clustering do not stem from a desire to exclude others. Instead, they arise from a natural inclination to speak one's first language, which is closely tied to one's identity. While exclusionary practices might not be intentional, non-Swedish speakers need better support navigating the bilingual workplace. Challenges such as calling out subtle discrimination may be difficult, however, ensuring there is an open dialogue around the topic is essential to ensure a more inclusive and diverse workplace. Having this open dialogue should, in turn, help mitigate the guilt and embarrassment felt around the topic and should aid employees in speaking up when feeling neglected. We hope this study contributes to the understanding of workplace interactions around the topic of language use, and that the identified barriers can be recognised when they present themselves. Further research is needed around this topic, especially in the area of parallel languages within the Nordic countries, as a high English fluency of a nation does not necessarily indicate inclusivity and the absence of language barriers.

# 7. Bibliography

Ahmad, F., & Widén, G. (2015). Language clustering and knowledge sharing in multilingual organizations: A social perspective on language. *Journal of Information Science*, vol. 41, no. 4, pp. 430-443, https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551515581280

Barriball, K. L., & While. A. (1994) "Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper." *Journal of Advanced Nursing-Institutional Subscription* vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 328-335, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01088.x

Bolmen L. G., & Deal T. E. (2021). Reframing Organisations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. imprint, Hoboken, New Jersey.

Bolton, K., & Kuteeva, M. (2012). 'English as an academic language at a Swedish university: parallel language use and the 'threat' of English', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 33, no. 5, pp. 429–447, doi: 10.1080/01434632.2012.670241

Business Research Methodology. (n.d.). Inductive Approach (Inductive Reasoning), https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-approach/inductive-approach-2 [Accessed 28 April 2024]

Cenoz, J., Gorter, D., & Heugh, K. (2011). 'Linguistic Diversity' In S. Knotter, R. De Lobel, L. Tsipouri & V. Stenius (eds) *Diversity Research and Policy: A Multidisciplinary Exploration* Pallas Publications, pp. 83 - 98

Chakraborty, T., & Ganguly, M. (2019). Crafting Engaged Employees Through Positive Work Environment. *Management Techniques for Employee Engagement in Contemporary Organizations,* pp.180-198, DOI:10.4018/978-1-5225-7799-7.ch011

De Coninck, D., & Verhulst, L. (2024). Inequality beneath the surface: a Belgian case study on structural discrimination in the workplace and the role of organizational structure, culture and

policies. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal.* https://doi.org/10.1108/edi-09-2023-0295

Delgado-Márquez, B. L., Escudero-Torres, M. N., & Hurtado-Torres, N. E. (2013). Being highly internationalised strengthens your reputation: an empirical investigation of top higher education institutions. *Higher Education,* vol.66, no. 5, pp.619–633, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9626-8

Eastman, C. M. (1985). "Establishing Social Identity Through Language Use". *Journal of Language and Social Psychology,* vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1-20, https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X8500400101

Edley, N. & Litosseliti, E. (2018). Critical Perspectives on Using Interviews and Focus Groups. In L. Litosseliti, (eds.), *Research Methods in Linguistics*, London, UK: Bloomsbury, pp. 195-227

Harzing, A., & Feely, A, J. (2008) Cross cultural management, *An International Journal,* vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 49-61, DOI: 10.1108/13527600810848827

Holmes, J., & Wilson, N. (2017). An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*,* Routledge

Hultgren, A. K. (2013). Lexical borrowing from English into Danish in the Sciences: An empirical investigation of 'domain loss'. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 166-182, DOI:10.1111/j.1473-4192.2012.00324.x

Hultgren, A. K. (2016). Parallel Language Use. In A. Linn (eds) *Investigating English in Europe: Contexts and Agendas*, Berlin: Mouton, pp. 158-163.

Hunt, D. V., Layton, D., & Prince, S. (2015). Why diversity matters. McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/why-diversity-matters

Jebb, A. T., Parrigon, S., Woo, S. E. (2017). Exploratory data analysis as a foundation of inductive research, *Human Resource Management* Review, vol. 27, no. 2, pp 265-276. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2016.08.003

Jenkins, J., Cogo, A. & Dewey, M. (2011). 'Review of developments in research into English as a lingua franca', *Language Teaching*, vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 281–315. doi:10.1017/S0261444811000115

Jones, K. P., Arena, D. F., Nittrouer, C. L., Alonso, N. M., & Lindsey, A. P. (2017). Subtle Discrimination in the Workplace: A Vicious Cycle. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology,* vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 51–76, doi:10.1017/iop.2016.91

Kang, E, & Hwang, H. (2023). "The Importance of Anonymity and Confidentiality for Conducting Survey Research." *Journal of Research and Publication Ethics,* vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1-7, DOI:10.15722/jrpe.4.1.202303.1

Karlsson, S., & Karlsson, T. S. (2020). 'Language policy as 'frozen' ideology: exploring the administrative function in Swedish higher education', *Current Issues in Language Planning,* vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 67–87, doi: 10.1080/14664208.2019.1593723

Khatib, M. & Ghamari, M.R., (2011). Mutual Relations of Identity and Foreign Language Learning: An Overview of Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Approaches to Identity. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies* (TPLS), vol. 1, no. 12, DOI:10.4304/tpls.1.12.1701-1708

Lund University. (2014). Lund University Language Policy [pdf], https://www.staff.lu.se/sites/staff.lu.se/files/lund-university-language-policy.pdf [Accessed 28 April]

Lund University. (2024). *Work at Lund University,* https://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/about-university/work-lund-university [Accessed 22 April 2024]

Lund University School of Economics and Management. (2024a). *Accreditations and rankings,* https://www.lusem.lu.se/about-lund-university-school-economics-and-management-lusem/accred itations-and-rankings  [Accessed 22 April 2024]

Lund University School of Economics and Management. (2024b). *Figures about LUSEM,* https://www.lusem.lu.se/about-lund-university-school-economics-and-management-lusem#figure s  [Accessed 22 April 2024]

Lund University School of Economics and Management. (2024c). Guide to dealing with discrimination, harassment and victimisation for students at Lund University School of Economics and Management [pdf], https://www.lusem.lu.se/internal/sites/lusem.lu.se.internal/files/2024-01/studentdiscriminationgui de.pdf [Accessed 28 April 2024]

Lund University School of Economics and Management. (2024d). Guide to dealing with discrimination, harassment and victimisation for staff at Lund University School of Economics and Management [pdf], https://www.lusem.lu.se/internal/sites/lusem.lu.se.internal/files/2024-01/ny-antidiskrimineringsg uide-medarbetare-eng-3_0.pdf [Accessed 28 April 2024]

Lønsmann, D. (2014). Linguistic diversity in the international workplace: Language ideologies and processes of exclusion. *Multilingua*, Vol. 33, Issue 1-2, pp. 89-116. https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2014-0005

Magnusson, E. & Marecek, J. (2015). Doing Interview-based Qualitative Research: A Learner's Guide. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Marschan-Piekkari, R., Welch, D., & Welch, L. (1999). In the shadow: The impact of language on structure, power and communication in the multinational. *International Business Review,* vol. 8, no.4, pp. . 421-440, DOI;10.1016/S0969-5931(99)00015-3

McKeown, S., Haji, R., & Ferguson, N. (2016). Understanding Peace and Conflict Through Social Identity Theory, Springer

Neeley, T. B. (2013). Language Matters: Status Loss and Achieved Status Distinctions in Global Organizations. *Organization Science*, vol. *24*, no. 2, pp. 476–497, https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0739

Palfreyman, D.M. (2011). Family, Friends, and Learning Beyond the Classroom: Social Networks and Social Capital in Language Learning. In P. Benson & H. Reinders, (eds) *Beyond the Language Classroom.* Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 17-34, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230306790_3

Parker, C., Scott, S., & Geddes, A. (2019). Snowball sampling. *SAGE research methods foundations,* https://uk.sagepub.com/engb/eur/srmfoundations

Peebles, L, & Solberg, J. J. (2005). Language Barriers at Work: An Analysis of English-Only Policies and Proposed Test*, Journal of Law & Business,* vol. 12, pp. 31-44, https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/jourlbun12&i=35

Perlin, R. (2024). Disappearing tongues: the endangered language crisis. *The Guardian*, 22 February, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/feb/22/disappearing-tongues-the-endangered-language-crisis

Pudelko, M. & Tenzer, H. (2019). 'Boundaryless Careers or Career Boundaries? The Impact of Language Barriers on Academic Careers in International Business Schools', *Academy of Management Learning & Education,* vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 213–240, doi:10.5465/amle.2017.0236

Qualitative analysis of interview data: A step-by-step guide. (2013). Youtube video, added by Kent Löfgren, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRL4PF2u9XA [Accessed 28 April 2024]

Riksdagen. (2009). Språklag (2009:600), https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/spraklag-2009600_sfs-2009-600/ [Accessed 30 April 2024]

Riksdagen. (2020). Underlätta arbetskraftsinvandring – utred engelska som andra officiellt språk, https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/motion/underlatta-arbetskraftsinvandring-utred-engelska_h8022687/ [Accessed 30 April 2024]

Roehl, S. (n.d.) What is Open Coding in Qualitative Research?, https://atlasti.com/research-hub/open-coding#:~:text=Open%20codes%20are%20created%20when,question%20within%20that%20data%20 segment [Accessed 23 April 2024]

Sanden, G. R. (2020). Domain loss theory revisited: From multinational corporations to multicorporate nations, *Int J Appl Linguist,* vol. 30, pp. 510–529, https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12309

Scott, C. L., Byrd, M. Y. (2012). Handbook of Research on Workforce Diversity in a Global Society: Technologies and Concepts, Ukraine: Business Science Reference, DOI:10.4018/978-1-4666-1812-1

Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R. (2016). Research methods for business: A skill building approach. John Wiley & Sons

Staff Pages. (2024). Swedish for university staff (SFU). https://www.staff.lu.se/employment/working-lund-university/new-employees/swedish-university-staff-sfu#:~:text=Lund%20University%20offers%20Swedish%20language,Languages%20and%20Literature%20(SOL)  [Accessed 24 April 2024]

Sundberg, G. (2013). Language Policy and Multilingual Identity in Sweden Through the Lens of Generation Y. *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 85, no. 2, pp. 205–232, https://doi.org/10.5406/scanstud.85.2.0205

Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing Managerial Identities: Organizational Fragmentation, Discourse and Identity Struggle. *Human Relations*, vol. 56, no. 10, pp. 1163-1193, https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726703561

Syed, J. & Tariq, M. (2017). Global Diversity Management, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.013.62

Tange, H. & Lauring, J., (2009). Language management and social interaction within the multilingual workplace, *Journal of Communication Management*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 218-232, DOI:10.1108/13632540910976671

Tenzer, H., Pudelko, M. & Harzing, A.W., (2014). The impact of language barriers on trust formation in multinational teams. *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol. 45, no.5, pp. 508-535, DOI:10.1057/jibs.2013.64

Thomas, C.A. (2007). Language policy in multilingual organizations. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics,* vol. 22, no. 1 ,pp. 81-104, https://shorturl.at/YbZo2

Van Laer, K., & Janssens, M. (2011). Ethnic minority professionals' experiences with subtle discrimination in the workplace. *Human Relations*, vol. 64, no. 9, pp. 1203-1227, https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726711409

Woo, S. E., O'Boyle, E. H., & Spector, P. E. (2017). Best practices in developing, conducting, and evaluating inductive research. *Human Resource Management Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 255-264, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2016.08.004


Yusof, A. N. A. M. & Rahmat, N. H. (2020). Communication barriers at the workplace: A case study. *European Journal of Education Studies,* vol. 7, no. 10. DOI: 10.46827/ejes.v7i10.3299

# Appendix A

The first interview guide.

- In your research, have you come across any language barriers for ethnic minorities?
- Have you found issues with companies that say their company language in English but the minorities feel excluded during social/lunch time?
- How have you collected data for your research?
- How have you analysed the data?
- What analytical tools did you use?
- What is your take on diversity inclusion at LUSEM?
- Do you speak swedish?
- What is your position/role at LUSEM? Do you have any people-responsibility? If so, how do you face the challenges that come with a multinational team?
- How do you find your manager reacts in these situations?
- How long have you lived in Sweden?
- Has Lund changed over the past years you have been here?
- Have you found this an issue at LUSEM?
- Have you ever felt excluded from LUSEM?

# Appendix B

The finalised interview guide.


- Are you from Sweden?

- Do you speak Swedish?

- How long have you lived in Sweden?

- How long have you worked at LUSEM?

- What languages do you speak?

- What is your position/role at LUSEM? Do you have any people-responsibility?

- Has Lund University ever asked you to learn Swedish?

- Were you required to know Swedish to get your job?

- Do you have any examples of cases where you experienced or observed exclusion?

- Have you observed a power dynamic between the use of English and Swedish?

- How do you face the challenges that come with multinational colleagues?

- Do you feel like you can go to your manager regarding this? How do you find your manager reacts in these situations?

- What is your take on diversity inclusion at LUSEM and have you found this an issue at LUSEM?