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Lost in Translation: How Linguistic Diversity among Indians in the UAE
shapes organizational life

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One's work is never just one's own work. It is my belief that even the most solitary endeavors are seldom the effort of one individual, just as in economics, there is also an invisible hand that guides us through the good days and the bad. I have been fortunate enough to have multiple invisible hands to take me through this journey. Ultimately, this project will be cited as my own individual achievement, but I would like to take this space to credit all those who have helped me through this challenging, but immensely gratifying process.

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Abstract

The financial prosperity of the United Arab Emirates is in no small part due to the country's immense diversity and inherent multiculturalism. Indians, in particular, make up a significant chunk of the population of the UAE. However, while this diversity is almost universally viewed as a boon for any organization, in practice, it can pose numerous challenges that may be difficult to work around. Linguistic diversity within a workforce has the potential to exclude people who do not speak a certain language by creating informational and social boundaries that may be difficult to cross. This study is an attempt in understanding how Indians employees working in the UAE experience and perceive the linguistic diversity that exists in their organization, and how this diversity can both facilitate and disrupt organizational processes. The data used in this study was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews (N=15) with employees with a diverse range of professional backgrounds and experiences. Participants were asked questions on the language diversity within their organizations and their own personal opinions and experiences with working within a diverse organization. The results revealed that although participants expressed warm opinions on working with a linguistically diverse workforce, there were considerable difficulties and painful experiences with working in such an environment. In particular, language-based exclusion and the subsequent isolation and loneliness that comes with it were identified as two recurrent issues that multiple participants reported experiencing. The findings of this study reveal that handling diversity is a delicate job, about which organizations are simply not doing enough, and that this inaction can have detrimental consequences to both the health of the organization, and the mental health of its employees. Suggestions are made on how organizations can create a more inclusive, welcoming organizational culture where employees from all over the world may be able to feel at home, along with directions for future research in the same field.

Keywords: linguistic diversity, language-based exclusion, non-residential Indians

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Problem and Question

Globalization has had an enormous influence on the ways in which organizations function and how we understand the workplace. Economic reforms around the world in the past few decades have created more opportunities for international mergers and acquisitions, while removing significant immigration barriers, which has made it easier for organizations to have an international presence in ways that weren't possible before (Fiset & Bhave, 2019). As a result, the modern workplace often brings together people from very different cultural and linguistic backgrounds as coworkers (Lonsmann, 2014); resulting in organizations that are often melting pots of diversity. These changes have resulted in a marked demographic trend that reflects an increase in the linguistic diversity of the populations of many countries (Fiset & Bhave, 2019). According to the US Census Bureau, there has been a 158% increase in the number of people who speak a language other than English since 1980 (Ryan, 2013). In the European Union, more than 54% of the population speaks more than one language (Special Eurobarometer 386, 2012), while in China, over 416 million citizens were estimated to have received foreign language instruction (Wei & Su, 2012). This global trend is mirrored by the fact that many businesses view the promotion of diversity as a strategic move both to appeal to future employees as well as to cater to an increasingly heterogeneous customer base (Groysberg & Connolly, 2013). For example, Microsoft's strategy to manage 80 languages at work (Spolsky, 2009) helps it to become more relatable to a global audience. Similarly, IBM has identified eight languages in addition to English that complement its global strategic objectives and trains staff based on these languages (Neeley & Kaplan, 2014). However, despite the apparent benefits that multilingual workplaces offer, linguistic differences often pose unique communication challenges that cannot be navigated easily.

There are at least three main challenges that are unique to multilingual workplaces. Linguistic diversity in organizations has the potential to lead to the exclusion of certain employees who do not speak a certain language. Linguistic differences at the workplace can result in the creation of in-groups and out-groups, which employees use to establish their social identities at work (Lonsmann, 2014). Linguistic diversity can also lead to exclusion of people with poor language skills, and threaten feelings of belongingness (Welch, Welch & Piekkari, 2005). Furthermore, for employees who cannot speak a certain language, linguistic differences can also result in implicit forms of discrimination, under evaluation of their competencies, and fewer career opportunities (Huang, Friddeger & Pearce, 2013). These issues are particularly exacerbated for international employees that often do not speak the local language of the countries they work in. Exclusion at the workplace based on language is also quite different from other forms of exclusion in that it can also be an unintentional form of exclusion, although this need not always be the case (Fiset & Bhave, 2019).

In the case of multicultural societies, the United Arab Emirates provides a unique perspective on how a melting pot of languages and cultures can contribute to a vibrant, booming society. Positioned strategically between Asia, Africa and Europe, the UAE connects major international trade routes and is home to at least 180 different nationalities (Jayanthi, 2016). The UAE's multiculturalism is peculiar in that its expatriate population far outnumbers the local population: of its nearly 10 million strong population, only 1.15 million are citizens. South Asians, particularly Indians make up most of the UAE's expatriate population. However, South Asia is one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world, with as many as 7099 active languages spoken in the subcontinent (The Hindu, 2018), and this trend can be observed among South Asians in the UAE too. This means that the typical workplace in the UAE is populated by employees that speak very different languages and hail from diverse cultures.

The UAE's booming economy, high standard of living, tolerant locals, and a vibrant society is an ode to the best of what multiculturalism can bring to the table. However, the political history of South Asia, specifically India's; has been marred by conflict on linguistic and religious lines even long after colonization. The absence of a common national language that all Indians speak often means that English is the *lingua franca* between Indians who do not speak mutually intelligible languages. These historical differences are often put aside when it comes to work, and in a way, the UAE offers a chance at fostering unity that is difficult to forge within India itself. However, language is often political, and has the potential to be weaponized. The negative consequences of linguistic diversity may result in exclusionary behaviors, the creation of in-groups and out-groups and prejudicial treatment (Hitlan, Kelly & Zarate, 2007). These factors may indirectly result in unhappy workers who are less productive, hostility towards coworkers (Dotan-Eliaz, Rubin & Sommer, 2009), and even aggressive behaviors that may be counterproductive to the organization's goals (Hitlan, Kelly, Schepman, Schneider & Zarate, 2006).

Within the context of the UAE, little research has been conducted on how this diversity in languages among Indians influences the functioning of organizations, or on how Indians themselves perceive the role that so many languages play in this context. Although the existence of so many different languages within the same nation is not an uncommon occurrence, India's colonial history and the context of the evolution of its post-independence national identity makes it quite unique in that sense. The Indian diaspora is also one of the largest in the world, and it makes for interesting research to see how the dynamics of language politics that originate in India plays out in an adopted homeland. It is quite possible that the presence of so many different languages can strengthen the adoption of a common organizational language and foster greater organizational unity. On the other hand, it is equally likely that this same linguistic diversity can result in employees that speak the same language sticking together, thereby excluding those that do not speak that language, resulting in a more divided organization. This study is a small attempt to gain a better understanding of this unique, yet important question.

Research Question:

How does the presence of multiple languages at the workplace help or hinder organizational processes according to Indian professionals in the United Arab Emirates? How do employees experience situations at work where they are unable to understand the language being spoken, and how do these experiences influence their feelings towards their perceptions of their organizational life?

1.2. Relevance of the Research

While much has been written about social exclusion in the context of work, most of that research has been in controlled settings and environments such as laboratories (Zhao, Peng & Sheard, 2013). One major disadvantage of controlled settings is that it may not provide the most accurate picture of things as they are, but of how participants want the researchers to see them. Furthermore, in an actual organization, conditions are often beyond one's control and subsequent findings may not always reflect reality, but a controlled version of it. There is also the fact that much of the research in this field is quantitative. Quantitative research can be useful in the sense that it can point out relationships between social phenomena, as well as explain *what* causes these relationships. However, they are not always a very effective technique to understand *why* and *how* these relationships exist. With its emphasis on details and richness, qualitative research allows us to zoom into the people behind the statistics, providing a unique lens to see society through the eyes of the individual. Quantitative research can also be reductionist in the sense that in its attempts to be objective, it can quantify concepts that are often beyond quantification, in this case concepts such as emotions, conflict, and exclusion. Qualitative research places considerable emphasis on richness of data, experience and subjectivity, which may be a more reliable way to understand how employees experience their organizational lives. By gaining a richer understanding of how employees perceive language-based workplace exclusion, we may be able to better sympathize with them and come up with practical ideas to mitigate the negative effects of such experiences.

Despite businesses becoming more diverse and multicultural, it is surprising to note that the role language plays in international business is often ignored or downplayed. Even though there is tacit acknowledgment that language constitutes "almost the essence of international business" (Welch, Welch & Piekkari, 2005) it often does not get the attention it deserves and research in the field still leaves much to be desired (Reeves & Wright, 1996; Holden, 2002; Feely & Harzing, 2008). This is somewhat surprising, as other than being the primary means of sensemaking and communication, language is also strongly linked to culture and identity (Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2010), and may provide important clues as to how employees make sense of their professional environment. As organizations become increasingly diverse, it becomes even more important to know how best to manage this diversity and the problems that often come with it. This study is an attempt to fill at least some of these gaps. Finally, there is also the fact that those who feel excluded at work are often marginalized and voiceless, and experience considerable anguish because of it. Not enough attention has been paid to how employees experience exclusion and what coping mechanisms they use. In that sense, this study tries to give these individuals a voice to air their grievances and share their experiences.

The findings from this research may also be useful for organizations and could help them get a better idea of how to create a more diverse, inclusive and respectful workplace.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section further details the problem of language-based workplace exclusion and provides additional context in terms of how such situations come about, what exactly constitutes exclusion and why it can be such a painful experience for those who go through it. It also sheds some light on why it is important to study practices of exclusion based on language, the personal and professional consequences it may have on employees, while also highlighting gaps in existing research on the field which ensures that our understanding of language-based exclusion remains incomplete at best.

2.1. The Challenges of Internationalization

Thanks to globalization, diversity in the workplace has become the norm (Martin, 2014). The term “workplace diversity” may be defined as the “co-existence of staff from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds in a particular organization” (Chan, 2011, p.1). Globalization has juxtaposed unique situations at the workplace that may not have been possible earlier: an Indian employee in Amsterdam may work for Accenture, an Irish company with branches all over the world; and work in a team with colleagues from Spain, Kenya and Brazil. The organizations of today not only require employees to get work done, but to be able to break free of linguistic and cultural differences and communicate effectively. Organizations often tout diversity as one of their biggest strengths, taking pride in the fact that their workforce is a melting pot of cultures and ethnicities. The effective management of diversity can lead to higher employee retention and attraction, energize workplace productivity and can increase an organization’s competitive edge (Ferreira and Coetzee, 2010). However, workplace diversity can also pose significant challenges and costs for organizations, not least when it comes to communication and cohesion.

Despite much of the media and literature praising the effects of internationalization and cultural diversity at the workplace and a widespread acceptance that it may positively enhance employee competence and productivity, the truth is more complicated (Al-Jenaibi, 2011, p.49). While most organizations do not admit this, diversity can be one of the biggest challenges facing the contemporary workplace. While a diverse workplace can cultivate creativity and innovation, it can also introduce complex, significant challenges (Van den Born & Peltokorpi, 2010). Al-Jenaibi (2011) likens the problems that arise to an iceberg, where the little that is visible often belies a much more complicated reality. Diversity can be responsible for serious communication problems, intercultural conflict (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2004) and can impede on the smooth running of business (Elmadssia, 2011, p. 201). The everyday

interactions that coworkers have with each other can also be fertile ground for misunderstandings, which may result in friction and conflicts (Al-Jenaibi, 2011).

Linguistic diversity most often results in two distinct types of challenges at work (Kim, Roberson, Russo, & Briganti, 2018). On the surface, there is the real challenge of communication among people with varying levels of fluency in the common language/languages used within the organization. Organizations often try to address this by providing language courses and hiring consultants to help non-native employees integrate better in the workplace. The second challenge is somewhat more subtle and complicated to address. Despite proficiency in a language, there may still be difficulties in communication due to inherent biases or prejudices that people may have. For example, non-native speakers of a language may still retain an accent which may serve as a cue to native speakers that the former cannot speak the language fluently, regardless of their actual competence (Kim et al., 2018). This perception of non-fluency can result in the formation of in-groups and out-groups, whereby non-native speakers of the language in question are excluded and face indirect forms of discrimination from their coworkers (Russo, Islam & Koyuncu, 2017). In this case, even a competent understanding of or fluency in the language isn't enough, because native speakers still view the non-native speakers as an "outsider".

2.2. Language Diversity in the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates presents one of the most unique examples of diversity in the world. Divided into seven kingdoms of different sizes called emirates, the country boasts of a highly advanced, ultra-modern and high-tech cities sandwiched between the desert and the Arabian sea, each of these connected by multi-lane highways that run across the length of the country (Siemund, Al-Issa & Leimgruber, 2020). Following the discovery of oil in the late 1960s, migrants flocked to the country en masse, resulting in a population spike that was further boosted by the country's strategy of attracting investment with low taxes (Brook, 2013). This influx of immigration resulted in a unique demographic situation unlikely to be found in many other countries of the world; the citizens of the United Arab Emirates make up no more than 11% of the country's population. Immigrants from Asia make up as much as 80% of the population, who come primarily from India, Pakistan and the Philippines. (United Arab Emirates Population Statistics, 2022). This staggering ethnic diversity is often used as a testament to the best of what diversity can bring to the table. As a means of communication, English is often considered the *lingua franca* of the UAE, with almost all signboards and official communication being bilingual, in both English and Arabic (Randall & Samimi, 2010, pp. 43-44). This may suggest that the UAE's diversity makes for a desert paradise, where people of all nationalities, religions and creeds seamlessly fit together. However, research on this field shows the reality of a much more complex, multilingual, intercultural communication network that is still not well understood (Randall & Samimi, 2010; Drodz, 2017).

Diversity provides fertile ground for the birth of new ideas, and creative, unconventional approaches to problems; but it also throws significant challenges at organizations, least of all communication problems (Hofstede, 2001). Cultural differences can spark conflict for various

reasons, sometimes historical (like the conflict between India and Pakistan), contextual (like the differences between China and America), religious (the conflict between Islam and the Western world) or, in the case of Indians, even regional (like the Northern and Southern parts of India). These challenges often rear their head like the tip of an iceberg and expecting it to disappear by promoting even more diversity is often wishful thinking at best. The case of the UAE is particularly interesting in that its expatriate population appears to have found a way to peacefully coexist with expats of other nationalities, despite conflicts back in the homeland. For example, it is quite common for Indians and Pakistanis to live next to each other and celebrate each other's festivals in the UAE, all while India and Pakistan share a border that is the most militarized zone in the world (The Economist, 2013) and engage in a war that stretches back seven decades and has resulted in the loss of millions of lives. Zooming further, the Tamils, an ethnic group in the South of India, has always been in conflict with the North of India, as they believe the ethnically, linguistically and culturally different Hindi-speaking side of India is trying to culturally subjugate the South through language and power politics (Ramaswamy, 1998). However, it is rare to see these problems rear their heads during a typical workplace interaction in the UAE.

These expressions of cordiality may suggest that Indians living in the UAE put aside their cultural differences to get along together at work. However, this could not be further away from the truth. Despite the appearance and maintenance of (often) genuine decorum, there is still an observable tendency among Indians to switch to their mother tongues whenever they meet another Indian who speaks the same language as them. Such behavior in the presence of people who do not understand that language has the potential to be exclusionary, and when done explicitly; may even amount to discriminatory behavior. These kind of behaviors are often referred to as linguistic ostracism, which is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

2.3. Linguistic Ostracism

The potential that language has to inadvertently exclude employees has only recently begun to attract more attention. Sociolinguists have long been interested in how language can be used as a tool to wield and assert power (Myers-Scotton, 1990; Canagarajah, 1995) and communicate across different social groups, but they did not give enough attention to how differences in language can be a possible source of exclusion and interpersonal conflict in social situations. Much of early research on language in the workplace tended to focus on macro-level factors like language documents and policies (Fiset & Bhave, 2019). These studies also place an emphasis on events that have the potential to trigger linguistic tensions, such as transnational mergers and policies mandating the use of a singular language at the workplace (Neeley, 2013). However, recent studies have started to shift their focus towards micro-level factors that permeate across organizations (Fiset & Bhave, 2019). An example of such a micro-level factor is "code-switching", (i.e. shifting from one language to another; Harzing & Feely, 2008; Neeley, 2013). Code-switching is quite common in international workplaces, as it allows employees who speak the same language to streamline communication and makes it easier for them to express their true emotions (Tenzer, Pudielko & Harzing, 2014). Because language is the primary mode of communication and disseminating information at work, such microlevel factors may create

informational boundaries between those who understand what is being said and those who do not (Tenzer et al., 2014). The fact that certain employees are left unable to understand what is being communicated can significantly strain employees' interpersonal relationships, and thus language can unintentionally become a conduit for exclusion (Fiset & Bhave, 2019). This makes it even more important for us to understand how linguistic ostracism comes about, the impact it has on focal employees, and how organizations can do better to deal with it.

According to Hitlan, Zarate, Kelly and DeSoto (2015), language-based exclusion refers to any situation in which a target individual (or group) is ostracized by another individual or group via a language with which the target has extremely limited familiarity and understanding. Because people are left unable to participate in conversations they cannot understand, those who work in linguistically diverse environments may have to deal with feelings of rejection, anger and anxiety because of their exclusion from social interactions at work (Dotan-Eliaz et al., 2009). One of the more notable studies in the field of language exclusion was conducted by Hitlan et al. (2007), who found that people who felt socially ostracized in a foreign language would feel angrier and reported higher levels of prejudice than if they were socially ostracized in a language they understood. Participants who felt excluded in the study reported more negative attitudes towards immigrants, which is indicative of prejudice.

Another interesting aspect of linguistic ostracism that differentiates it from usual forms of exclusionary behavior is that it is often inadvertent; the perpetrators are often engaging in it unconsciously and do not realize that other employees are being excluded from it (Fiset & Bhave, 2019). Linguistic ostracism is also different in that it is a partial form of exclusion. In a multilingual setting, sources of linguistic ostracism are likely to speak to victims of linguistic ostracism in a commonly understood language, and switch to a non-understandable language only in interactions with others who speak their same language. (Dotan-Eliaz et al., 2009). However, that does not dilute the anguish and pain that linguistic ostracism can cause. In Dotan-Eliaz's study (2009); other than feelings of rejection and isolation, targets of linguistic ostracism viewed their coworkers less favorably, and they remained hostile to sources of linguistic ostracism despite the latter displaying a friendly demeanor throughout their interactions. Employees who are linguistically ostracized also find it difficult to identify with their workplace as they view themselves as a part of a linguistic outgroup (Kulkarni, 2015). In turn, this disidentification may also influence the performance of interpersonal actions in such a manner that linguistically ostracized employees display fewer organizational citizenship behaviors (behaviors that directly/indirectly contribute to effective organizational functioning) (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) and instead participate in more deviant behavior (behaviors that impede or disrupt effective organizational functioning) (Vadera & Pratt, 2013). The following section explains the relationship between exclusion at work and interpersonal work behaviors in more detail.

2.4. Exclusion and Interpersonal Work Behaviors

While it may be quite tempting to imagine that experiences of ostracism are isolated, one-off events, research suggests that ostracism can be a uniquely painful experience, with the social

disconnection caused by ostracism being likened to physical pain (Eisenberger, 2012). Exclusion at work can result in counterproductive work behaviors, which refer to volitional acts that harm or intend to harm organizations and stakeholders (Spector & Fox, 2005). The negative consequences of exclusion are often explained through belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) which contends that exclusion can have detrimental outcomes because it threatens individuals' innate, biological needs to belong and gain acceptance from others. Employees who face exclusion may display more aggressive behaviors (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice & Stucke, 2001), have decreased self-regulation (Baumeister & DeWall, 2005) and engage in more self-defeating behaviors (Thau, Poortvliet & Aquino, 2007). Such employees are also likelier to perform different types of interpersonal counterproductive work behaviors, which under some circumstances can be even more dangerous than behaviors such as aggression and harassment (O'Reilly & Robinson, 2009; Williams & Zadro, 2001). Ostracized individuals report liking their group members less (Pepitone & Wilpizeski, 1960), a desire to avoid future contact with them (Cheuk & Rosen, 1994) and derogate those who excluded them (Bourgeois & Leary, 2001).

However, there is evidence to suggest that ostracism at the workplace doesn't *always* lead to a negative reaction. As a form of organizational incivility, ostracism is more passive than other forms of incivility such as sexual harassment, bullying and supervisor abuse in two ways: it is low on behavioral intensity; and is often fraught with ambiguity (Fiset, al-Hajj & Vongas, 2017). This means that ostracized individuals may attempt to elevate their status among the group that excludes them by putting in more effort and ingratiation (Baumeister & Larry, 2005). Other reactions that may not be negative include affiliation (tend-and-befriend), flattering the source (Williams, 2007), compliance to reduce future ostracism (Carter-Sowell, Chen & Williams, 2008) or securing alternative sources of belonging (Aydin et al., 2020). The reason for this may be that while employees with more power see themselves through a lens of self-interest, ostracized employees might see themselves through the needs of others, in order to enhance their potential for inclusion through prosocial behavior. Such behaviors that support the social and psychological environment in which task performance takes place are called organizational citizenship behaviors, and they can be directed both towards other individuals and the organization as a whole (Fiset et al., 2017). Through the exercise of organizational citizenship behaviors, ostracized employees may be seen as engaging in impression management to secure future resources and reaffirm their lost power (Rioux and Penner, 2001). Some studies see organizational citizenship behaviors as something of a gamble, pitting the choice between short-term costs to gain long-term benefits such as re-inclusion (Joireman, Kamdar, Daniels & Duell, 2006)

Existing literature about working in international organizations and diverse environments suggest that all is not as well as it may seem. Beneath the image of cordiality and camaraderie that organizations like to showcase, is a battlefield of proxy language wars, identity politics, disidentification and power struggles. The subtlety of these experiences has meant that it is both difficult to observe and impossible to quantify, along with the added challenge that those who are complicit in language-based exclusion or discrimination are hardly aware, or willing to admit their complicity. Furthermore, the implicit nature of language-based exclusion means

that even reactions towards it can be similarly ambiguous, implying that it can elicit both pro-social and anti-social responses. Although language's universality is such that it is taken for granted in an organizational context, not understanding how to manage its own diversity can be counter-productive to organizations. Finally, much of the literature on this subject has been quantitative research, which is useful for identifying patterns, relationships and causes behind organizational phenomena. However, there is a noticeable dearth of literature on the more subjective side of the experience of language-based exclusion, which is somewhat surprising, given how our emotions lay the foundation of the structures on which our society is built. The emotional experience of organizational life (and in this case, language based exclusion) is not always acknowledged, even though understanding these experiences can shed so much light on organizational life, and even the nature of our very existence. By conducting a qualitative study with the help of semi-structured interviews, this study attempts to correct that, and by emphasizing on the more emotional, subjective consequences of language-based exclusion, it is hoped that we may have a better understanding of the phenomenon and how to avoid it.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This research is inductive in nature, in the sense that it uses existing theories to make inferences and observations that may be applicable beyond the narrow contexts of those theories. It is also a cross-sectional study in the sense that the data is collected at one point in time. Existing research has already identified a link between exclusion at the workplace and negative feelings towards the self (Zhao et al., 2013) as well as negative feelings towards coworkers and the organization (Spector & Fox, 2005), but does not provide much in the way of an explanation as to why that is the case. A qualitative research design was chosen for this study, as its main aim is to learn more about the subjective experiences and emotions that employees face with regards to language diversity within their organizations. While quantitative research is often useful in identifying relationships between social phenomena, it is not as effective in explaining the nuances of those relationships. Many of the prominent studies on language-based exclusion were conducted in experimental settings (Hitlan et al., 2015; Hitlan et al., 2006) or through surveys (Fiset & Bhave, 2019). While these studies identified that the experience of language-based exclusion is indeed painful and undesirable, it does not explore the depth and emotions associated with those experiences and makes no attempt to understand how these experiences shape employee perceptions of organizational life. This study is an attempt to study the more subjective elements of these experiences.

Due to the open-ended, explorative nature of this research, semi-structured interviews are used as the primary mode of data collection. They allow for open-ended conversations with the participants, while simultaneously keeping these conversations within a framework of topics that the researcher wishes to investigate, which included language-based exclusion and linguistic ostracism, the formation of cliques based on language and how sensitively

organizations managed the diversity of their workforce. Semi-structured interviews are quite useful in situations when the researcher wants to explore data that is more subjective and sensitive in nature, while also allowing for participants to delve deeper into their thoughts, beliefs and feelings about a particular topic. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to ask probing, open-ended questions on topics such as language-based exclusion; topics that are uncharted territory in the sense that the problems are known, but not fully understood. (Adams, 2015). It was felt that keeping in theme with the topics being studied, and the ambiguous nature of many of these concepts, semi-structured interviews would provide the most breadth and depth in terms of the quality of the data. Additionally, they may also provide a multidimensional understanding of the phenomenon being studied, while simultaneously maintaining a certain degree of consistency in the questions, while leaving room to be flexible and go off-script if the interview demands it (Myers, 2008). In this particular case, they may also be useful in gaining understanding into implicit issues such as how languages are used and how communication occurs in an organization (Tange & Luring, 2006).

3.2. Participants

For this study, a total of fifteen participants from fifteen different organizations were selected using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a convenience sampling method that is applied in cases where there is some difficulty in accessing subjects with the target characteristics (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2016). It involves existing subjects recruiting or suggesting future participants among their acquaintances. Sampling is conducted until data saturation occurs. The eligibility criteria for participants was straightforward: they needed to be full-time employees at an organization located in the United Arab Emirates, hold a valid UAE residence permit, and worked in a relatively diverse organization. While finding a diverse organization may be challenging in some countries, the UAE's inherent diversity meant that almost all the potential subjects who were contacted were already working in or had worked in an organization with a diverse set of employees. Initially, personal and professional acquaintances were contacted, and the premise and context of the study were explained to them. Interested participants were then asked if they knew others who may have experienced language-based exclusion or worked in a diverse organization. Data collection was carried out until there was an observable saturation in terms of recurring themes, feelings and experiences. None of the participants revoked their consent following the interviews with them. Participants were not rewarded or compensated for their participation.

Given that a prominent theme of this study is diversity, care was taken to ensure that the participants themselves were as diverse as possible, not just in terms of mother-tongues, but also in terms of the roles they played within their organizations. This study involves interviews with professionals from a plethora of industries, each of whom had varying levels of professional experience in their respective fields, from junior doctors completing their first year on the job to seasoned project managers with three decades of experience in their field. There was also considerable levels of diversity in terms of the job roles and industries that participants worked in, with participants working in fields as diverse as education, construction, marketing, healthcare and finance taking part in the interviews. It is hoped that by including

such a diverse and representative sample, we may see if, and how different generations view diversity differently, how the interplay of so many languages play out in different industries, and whether language diversity within an organization helps or hinders organizational processes, if it does so at all.

Table 1.

Participant Details

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Position</i>
Participant 1	59	Construction	Project Manager
Participant 2	23	Healthcare	Junior Doctor
Participant 3	23	Logistics	Procurement Officer
Participant 4	37	Shipping	Customer Service Manager
Participant 5	25	Digital Marketing	Graphic Designer
Participant 6	25	Education	Marketeer
Participant 7	26	Finance	Auditor
Participant 8	24	Digital Marketing	Content Marketer
Participant 9	27	Construction	Supervisor
Participant 10	51	Education	Middle-school supervisor
Participant 11	22	Restaurant and Catering	Chef
Participant 12	23	Web Development	UX designer
Participant 13	26	Digital Marketing	Marketing Officer
Participant 14	35	Logistics	Operations Supervisor
Participant 15	27	Web Development	Technical Consultant

3.3. Data Collection

Participants were contacted via email or phone and provided with a brief description of the study. I provided details on my intention to understand their experiences with others when the latter conversed in an unknown language in their presence at work, and elaborated with a few hypothetical examples or situations of the experience being studied. In the case of participants that were recruited through other subjects, the email also mentioned the personal contact who had connected me and the subject. Participants were told that their data would be completely

protected and their personal details and the names of the organization they worked at would be treated with absolute confidentiality, and that they had the right to revoke their consent, if granted, at any stage of the interview or after.

Participants were also informed that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed for purposes of data analysis, and that they were free to withdraw their consent in the event that they did not feel comfortable doing so. As much as possible, an attempt was made to conduct interviews with participants in person, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was not always feasible. In this case, the interviews with participants were recorded and participants gave their consent verbally, which is often done in situations where participants do not want any written record of their participation. The interviews varied in terms of their duration, with most interviews on average taking between 45 minutes and one hour.

3.4. Data Analysis

Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2013) recommend that in interviews, the processes of data collection and analysis be conducted simultaneously. In accordance with this recommendation, the coding and content analysis happened even as interviews were still being conducted. To analyze the interviews, the recordings were first transcribed in their entirety. Then, the data that was created was reduced to remove information irrelevant to the research and to make it easier to analyze. This meant that parts of the interviews were cut out to ensure that only information relevant to the research would be analyzed. Following this, top-down coding was conducted on the data, where the most obvious themes that were present in an initial overview of the data and previous research were used for the first few interviews. Following the conduction of all the interviews, a few comprehensive readings of the transcripts were undertaken, and some of the most prominent and frequent themes, feelings and experiences across all of these interviews were identified. These themes provided a foundation for the eventual coding scheme. With the help of the software Atlas.ti, the coding scheme was continually modified to document all the themes that emerged, and the frequency at which these codes recurred were also noted down. Eventually, at the end of the data analysis process, 53 distinct codes were identified in this research. Finally, to check for reliability, two of the interviews were independently coded by a second coder, and across both the interviews, it was found that both coders coded the same codes in 42 out of 56 instances, providing Cohen's Kappa value of .75, indicating an acceptable level of inter-coder agreement and reliability. Following this, tables were made to map out how interviewees responded to sub-categories of the research question, and to make coherent sense out of the data.

4. Results

In general, participants seemed to have ambivalent views on the linguistic diversity within their organizations. All of the participants accepted that the organizations that they currently worked at was diverse in terms of the languages that their coworkers spoke, but the ways in which they

seemed to perceive the effects that diversity had in their organization seemed to depend on their own experiences with diversity as well as the kind of work they did. Following analysis of the interview data, how participants felt about the linguistic diversity within their organization often seemed contingent on a few factors, which are mentioned in Table 1, and expanded upon in the sections to follow.

4.1. Factors that Influenced Participants' Views on Diversity

Table 2

Factors that Influenced Participants' Views on Diversity

Subcategory	Definition	Example
Type of Education <i>4 comments</i>	Participants who studied in international schools or universities expressed more favorable opinions or on the diversity in their organizations and were more comfortable working with a diverse workforce.	<i>"I studied in an international school and because of that, I got to meet people from all over the world. It really broadens your worldview."</i>
Generational differences <i>4 comments</i>	Participants who were second generation non-resident Indians (NRIs) expressed more favorable opinions on the diversity in their organizations than first generation NRIs.	<p>1. <i>My dad's not too happy about internal immigration in India. He grew up in Maharashtra, he was probably exposed to the same people, the same things his entire childhood. So I guess in all cases, it's about what you're used to.</i></p> <p>1. <i>This office is the first time I'm working with mostly Indians. So at first,</i></p>

it was a bit of...reverse culture shock? Is that what you call that? Like even though I'm Indian, born and bred, not living there your entire life kind of shields you from a lot of things.

Nature of job/industry	Participants who worked in highly regulated, organized and time-bound industries or did jobs involving manual work were less likely to see language diversity as relevant in the performance of their jobs.	<i>“When it comes to actual day to day operations, I think it makes no difference at all. Like I told you, I don’t even know the names of all the people I work with, leave alone knowing where they come from. I think it’s just a fact of working in a big restaurant, you don’t always get the time to get to know your coworkers.”</i>
5 comments		

4.1.1. Type of Education

Participants who studied in international schools or were exposed to diverse environments earlier on in life were much likelier to hold positive attitudes towards diversity, and also generally found it easier to work in diverse organizations. Participants who spent the early years of their lives in the United Arab Emirates reported that their familiarity with being in a diverse environment at school meant that the transition to working in a diverse organization was quite seamless. Participant 5 expanded on this, saying “For example, in my school, there were kids from all over the world. I had friends from the UK, Australia, Spain, Turkey, even Mexico!”. Being exposed to such an international environment at a young age had meant that they felt diversity within an organization was the norm, rather than an exception. These participants largely expressed positive views on diversity. “I got to meet people all over the world. It really broadens your world-view.”

However, it becomes important to mark a distinction between international diversity and Indian diversity, as participants who studied in international schools and then worked in an Indian organization did struggle somewhat. This is down to the fact that while international organizations formally tend to use English as a common language; in organizations run or

comprised by Indians, the use of a common language tends to be far less straightforward. While many Indian organizations have formal language policies advocating only the use of English at work, these policies are often ignored even by senior officials, who choose to speak in their own regional languages with each other or use Hindi (the most frequently cited common language other than English) for official communications. While English often acts as an adhesive for an organization with a diverse Indian workforce because it is foreign to everyone, the same cannot be said of Hindi. Longstanding regional tensions and language wars often take on a proxy form even in the UAE, and participants often find themselves in the crossfire.

When an employee speaks a language that isn't spoken by many others in the office, they can quickly find themselves in a lonely place. As one participant from Tamil Nadu who worked in an organization dominated by Hindi speakers mentioned "Now, because everyone speaks in Hindi, I feel like Tamil is suddenly more important to me. I've never cared much about my Tamil identity, because the only time I speak in Tamil is at home. I've grown up and studied in very diverse environments. But now, I suddenly feel the need for someone to speak in my mother-tongue. Just to feel like I belong."

4.1.2. Generational Differences

There seemed to be a generational gap between 1st generation non-resident Indians (NRIs) and 2nd generation non-resident Indians in terms of how they favorably they viewed the diversity in their organizations. 1st generation NRIs tended to be less open to diversity, and even though they worked in diverse organizations, they preferred to be closer to culturally similar employees; while 2nd generation NRIs, who were likelier to be exposed to diverse environments reported few problems with adjusting in a diverse organization. Elaborating on how the modern Indian identity is constantly in flux, participant 9 complained that large-scale internal immigration within India has reshaped what it means to come from a particular region. "I grew up in Bangalore, which is a very Indian city in terms of diversity, there's people from everywhere there. But I'd often feel like a foreigner in my own city. The last time I was there, I'd met this auto driver who told me "*Kannada gothilla sir*" (I do not know Kannada, sir) which was a very strange thing because that's just something I never thought would happen." While this indicates that the modern Indian identity is more complex than ever, 1st generation NRIs often feel a stronger attachment to their regional identities. Participant 12 said that "My dad's not too happy about internal immigration in India. He grew up in Maharashtra, he was probably exposed to the same people, the same things his entire childhood. So when he went to Dubai for the first time, I think it might've felt like a culture shock to him too, you know? So I guess in all cases, it's always about what you're used to."

However, with second generation NRIs, the question of identity is not as straightforward. Having been exposed to environments where diversity was the norm at a much younger age, these Indians seemed to be much more open to working with diverse teams and seeing diversity as an organic part of organizational life. They did not readily identify with their "Indianness", despite their Indian passports and citizenships, and in some cases, reported being more fluent in a third language than their own mother-tongues. Participant 12 even said that

they felt “reverse culture shock” upon spending some time in his hometown back in India, adding that “it felt a bit odd to be among so many people who were all so similar”. These generational differences in upbringing, education and exposure often meant that while first generation NRIs tended to prefer some more homogeneity in terms of who they thought they were, who they were exposed to and socialized with; second generation NRIs took a more flexible view towards their own identity, often identifying themselves as an amalgam of different cultures that they did not necessarily come from; although exploring the true depth and complexity of that identity is well beyond the scope of this paper.

4.1.3. The Influence of Nature of the Job and Industry

There seemed to be a link between the nature of the job or industry and how participants felt towards or perceived the effects of language diversity in their organization. Generally, participants who worked in highly organized, tightly regulated environments such as logistics or shipping, or performed work that was manual or repetitive in nature reported that they didn’t care where their coworkers came from, because they didn’t need to communicate with them much, at least as long as each of them did their jobs. Participant 4 said “English is commonly spoken by everyone, all the more so in Dubai. In a field such as mine, it’s necessary that all the work goes smoothly, so disruptions by themselves are rare. Even if their English is not good, they try to speak in English to get the work done.” These participants repeatedly stated that due to the relatively straightforward nature of their jobs, language wasn’t relevant at their jobs. For example, in the culinary industry, the pressure to perform can often be so intense that coworkers literally do not communicate with each other for personal reasons during work hours. “A lot of our conversations happen before opening hours and after closing hours. That’s the only time we really talk to each other about something that isn’t food, you know?”

However, participants who worked in industries that were more information-intensive and required consistent internal communication did not echo the same beliefs or have the same experiences. When working with coworkers who do not speak a shared language fluently, miscommunication is frequent, and can often affect the quality of the work. Sometimes, despite knowing a shared language fluently, some coworkers refuse to speak it. Participant 7 complained that although some of her Malayali coworkers spoke Hindi fluently for professional reasons, they would pretend to not know the language when it came to more informal conversations. “I’d sometimes try to make a joke in Hindi, just to get along with certain Malayali colleagues of mine, and they’d just give me a strange look. When I asked them if they knew Hindi, they said they understood it well enough that I could speak in Hindi and they would reply in English. But then, I’d notice these same colleagues speak to people on the phone in fluent Hindi...I’d often wonder why they didn’t do this with me”. These colleagues would also go on to talk among themselves in Malayalam, while she was in their presence. While she does not go on to elaborate on possible reasons why this may have happened, she did admit to feeling a bit of aversion towards both her coworkers as well as the language after these experiences. “They were very nice people to work with, but I couldn’t stand being around them after a point.” When asked about why she didn’t try to bring this up with her HR, she plainly stated “Nobody ever thought of it as wrong or anything, it was just a part of the work culture.”

4.2. Positive Aspects of Diversity

Table 3

Results of the Positive Aspects of Diversity

Subcategory	Definition	Example
Positive feelings	Fun, friendly	It's really fun and a nice feeling when you get along with people who aren't like you"
<i>6 comments</i>		
Celebrating differences	Open-mindedness.	"It helps people to refine and finetune their ability to live beautifully."
<i>2 comments</i>		
Interesting challenges	Variety in perspectives invoke different debates, increasing the quality of the decision made during debates or meetings.	<i>"A decision that everyone agrees with is probably a mediocre decision. I think diversity makes sure that there's more debates before we come to a decision."</i>
<i>2 comments</i>		
Enrichment	Broadening through different perspectives lead to richness, variety and detail.	<i>"By working in a diverse organization, one is always getting enriched in his way of thinking and his way of dealing with others."</i>
<i>1 comment</i>		
Innovation	New products and services that have typical 'diverse' elements to them.	<i>"I think when you're cooking, diversity is actually the best possible thing, because everyone has a different idea of how to cook stuff. You need to have a fusion crew if you want to cook really good fusion food."</i>
<i>1 comment</i>		
Feeling at home abroad	The U.A.E is frequently referred to as a second home by several expatriates, and its	<i>"Dubai is just India with higher living standards."</i>

	large Indian population enables other Indians to feel at home.	
6 comments		
Inclusion	Speaking a common language helps to build cohesion and a sense of community.	<i>“We often have a few get-togethers outside of work. So, since I can speak in both English and in Hindi, I’m part of both get-togethers in a way.”</i>
1 comment		

Many participants welcomed the positive aspects of engaging in linguistically and culturally diverse environments, and the resultant challenges that may come from working there. A common sentiment that was echoed by many participants was that the United Arab Emirates was a home away from home for Indians, best summarized by participant 7, who suggested “Dubai is just India with higher living standards”. They felt that the UAE’s vibrant multiculturalism results in a unique melting pot of not just South Asians, but the entire world. The UAE’s large population of Indians also creates a unique situation for the Indian diaspora, bringing together Indians who come from different states and speak different languages in ways that may only be possible in the metropolitan cities of India. In India, it is not uncommon for regional identities to take precedence before national identities, but the fact that everyone is in a foreign land often puts such regionalist notions to rest. One stops identifying themselves as a Mumbaikar or a Malayali, but as an Indian. “Even though there are people from Kerala, Karnataka, everyone still gets along because Dubai is one place everyone can call home.”

Some participants shared that their careers were enriched by working by working in diverse organization. “It’s really fun and a nice feeling when you get along with people who aren’t like you”. Participant 2 felt that “By working in a diverse organization, one is always getting enriched in his way of thinking and his way of dealing with others. When making decisions, different perspectives can often help in making the right call.” Participant 8 added that “A decision that everyone agrees with is probably a mediocre decision. I think diversity makes sure that there’s more debates before we come to a decision.” In the restaurant industry, having a diverse workforce could often be what defines one’s establishment. As participant 11, who worked in a restaurant specializing in fusion food said “I think when you’re cooking, diversity is actually the best possible thing, because everyone has a different idea of how to cook stuff. You need to have a fusion crew if you want to cook really good fusion food.” Participants that held a favorable view of the diversity in their organization also added that it made them more open-minded and accepting of differing perspectives and viewpoints. “One is always getting enriched in his way of thinking and dealing with others. Instead of working in a monolingual organization, I’d rather work in a diverse one, because it helps people to refine and finetune their ability to live beautifully.” Table 2 provides a complete overview of the most common participant responses about their positive feelings or experiences with language diversity.

4.3. Negative Aspects of Diversity

Table 4

Participants' Negative Experiences with Diversity

Subcategory	Definition	Example
Miscommunication and Language Barriers <i>5 comments</i>	Not knowing a language can result in difficulties with communication and getting the required work done.	<p>1. <i>"I feel like communication is relatively harder, definitely. Sometimes, pronunciations are not very clear to them because they pronounce things a little differently from us."</i></p> <p>1. <i>"That when we had events at the university, even though the main language in those events were in English, a lot of the conversations with the guests were in other languages. I'd just let my colleagues do the talking at that point."</i></p>
Language-based cliques <i>4 comments</i>	The presence of a commonly spoken language in an organization can result in the formation of cliques by those who speak that language	<i>"Them not inviting the South Indians did not sit right with me. Maybe it was just that they forgot to invite the others. Maybe subconsciously they might have felt that they wouldn't be able to converse</i>

		<i>with them once they go out. In a way, I think it was a clique.”</i>
Perceived Hypocrisy 3 comments	Dissonance between organization’s principles on diversity and how it actually handles its diverse workforce	<i>“I think that it’s just a bit hypocritical. Because some of them, they’re working closely with internationalization and they still don’t realize when they’re doing something wrong. On the one hand, they’re trying to promote internationalization, on the other hand they’re also trying to bring it down. They make you feel a little bad”</i>
Perceived Inconsiderateness 5 comments	Behaviors exhibited by coworkers that is perceived as inconsiderate by participants	<i>“Usually, if it were up to me, I’d speak in English or a neutral language just so that all of us can be a part of the conversation. But these guys never really cared that much. They’d speak in Malayalam all the time, totally disregarding everyone else”</i>
Feelings of Annoyance 3 comments	Participants feeling annoyed at coworkers due to their actions or behavior towards them	<i>“The moment when they talk to me, they’re forced to switch to English. And then when they’re talking to others, it’s Malayalam. I think they’re annoyed that they constantly have to keep switching languages just because of my presence.”</i>
Language-based Exclusion and Ostracism 11 comments	Being excluded or ostracized because of an inability to speak a certain language at work	<i>“They would talk only in Arabic, and that would just feel like a complete waste of my time, because neither could I learn anything; nor could I participate even if I wanted to.”</i>
Isolation and Alienation	Feelings of isolation and alienation because of social exclusion at work caused by an	<i>“More than exclusion, I think it was a subtle form of isolation. They made me feel like an insider who was an outsider.”</i>

10 comments	inability to speak a certain language	
Discrimination and Racism 2 comments	Facing overt or implicit discrimination for inability to speak a certain language at work	<i>“There’s a lot of racism as well, very blatantly, half the time, they don’t even realize that they’re being racist. They can be culturally insensitive, and just do what they think is normal. I’ve been called wrong names, sometimes even sounds, which really upsets me.”</i>
Organizational Exit 2 comments	Exiting the organization due to negative experiences caused by inability to speak a certain language at work	<i>“Honestly, all this really negatively affects me, career-wise as well. It makes me think if this is what my field is going to be like, is this what healthcare is like, or is this just the hospital I’m working in that is so terrible? I really question my career choices at times, because I don’t want to live or work in an environment where there are these kind of language barriers and language supremacy.”</i>
Change in Career Plans 2 comments	Considering or actually changing careers due to negative experiences	<i>“All this really negatively affects me, career-wise as well. It makes me think if this is what my field is going to be like, is this what healthcare is like, or is this just the hospital I’m working in that is so terrible? I really question my career choices at times, because I don’t want to live or work in an environment where there are these kind of language barriers and language supremacy.”</i>
Feelings of Invisibility and Loneliness	Experiencing feelings of loneliness and invisibility due to exclusion caused by inability	<i>“I would spend an hour of my time attending this meeting that I was forced to attend. I would feel completely invisible,</i>

5 comments	to speak a certain language at work	<i>watching them discuss, laugh, and enjoy their time. I would just feel really left out when this happened”</i>
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Although most participants expressed favorable views towards diversity, their organizational experiences were often in sharp contrast to their views. When asked about their opinions on their organization’s diversity, participants often had warm words to say, but the more they spoke about it, it became clear that diversity wasn’t always as groundbreaking as organizations like to tout; sometimes working with people who are different from oneself is just difficult. Although in most instances, the inconveniences caused by diversity were minor and easily resolved; in some cases, these difficulties often snowballed into more serious problems, such as incivility, discrimination, and even blatant racism. The following section explores some of these negative consequences in greater detail. Table 3 provides an overview of the most frequently mentioned themes in participant responses.

4.3.1. Miscommunications and Language Barriers

In a few cases, participants reported experiencing communication difficulties with coworkers or their clientele because the latter could not speak a common language fluently. In some organizations, employees who often did the manual work such as offloading and driving often did not speak great English and were often better at speaking in Hindi or their own language, and communicating with these employees was both essential, but also problematic. Participant 4 explained these difficulties, saying “Because peons and drivers for example, don’t speak in English well and can only speak good Hindi, my coworkers find it difficult to understand Hindi. So they have a problem communicating with them, and at that point they come to me to translate”. In this case, only internal communication is affected but in certain situations, external communication can also be hampered.

This can often result in difficulties in getting the necessary work done. As one participant who worked in a university shared, her inability to speak in Hindi or Arabic made it impossible for her to do her job at times, as the parents of prospective students often preferred to speak in their own languages than to speak in English during the open days of the university. While she dealt with this problem by asking other coworkers to do most of the talking, in some cases, not knowing a language fluently often meant that you were unsuitable for a job. In the medical industry, participant 1’s inability to understand Arabic resulted in the deterioration of her mental health and her own self-assessment as being unsuitable for the job. Despite working in a private hospital, the fact that the patients mostly spoke in Arabic meant that she could not perform her job to her fullest capacity. “Honestly if I could recommend anything, it would be to work in a place where you know the language. If in France, know French. If in Germany, know German. I feel like that’s the only way you can ever feel truly comfortable at an office. That’s the only thing I’ve got to say.” Participant 9, who worked as a construction supervisor claimed

that although language by itself is not very relevant to the performance of his work, knowing many languages was what got him the job in the first place. “Language diversity doesn’t play a role in my organization at all. But to be in my position, you need to have a good grasp of a few languages in the first place. Otherwise, you can’t be very effective.”

4.3.2. Clique Formation

In multiple interviews, participants often reported being unable to speak a dominant language (most commonly Hindi or Arabic) fluently and stated that this often had negative consequences for their own well-being and organizational standing. Although this was not the case in most organizations, some participants did report that their office was divided along linguistic lines, where coworkers who spoke a common language often formed cliques. These cliques were often described as important groups to be a part of if one wanted to have a social life within the organization. Participant 3, who was Malayali, but spoke Hindi more fluently than Malayalam, reported that his ability to speak in Hindi enabled him to become a part of the social fabric of the organization despite his ethnicity being different from most of his coworkers and enabled him to be a part of the more prominent clique in his organization. This meant that he was often invited to get-togethers and social gatherings outside of work. The ability to speak a dominant language well, particularly when it was not one’s mother-tongue was often so important that it bridged colleagues together despite other interpersonal differences, such as age, gender and life experiences. However, his ability to speak in Hindi better than Malayalam often meant that he faced some hostility from his Malayali colleagues, and that he often felt out of place when he had to interact with them. “They’ll be speaking in Malayalam the whole time, but the moment when they talk to me, they’re forced to switch to English. And then when they’re talking to others, it’s Malayalam. I think they’re annoyed that they constantly have to keep switching languages just because of my presence.”

4.3.3. Negative Feelings, Incivility and Destructive Organizational Behaviors

Participants that are unable to participate in both formal and informal conversations at work that occur in a language that they do not understand, frequently mentioned feelings of exclusion, isolation, loneliness and negative feelings towards their coworkers. With a few participants, these feelings of isolation were not so consequential as they only experienced it during the beginning of their tenure at the organization. Participant 6 said that “When I just started out, these kind of things really made me feel a bit isolated. But with time, once I got to know my colleagues better, I came to the conclusion, if I can still speak English in the office and be understood, that’s enough.” She perceived her exclusion as down to her status as a new employee than due to language, although most of the exclusion she experienced was due to language. However, some participants were excluded in implicit, but clearly deliberate ways, which negatively influenced their perceptions of both their organizations and coworkers. In some cases, participants complained that their coworkers made the effort to include them in a conversation, only to end up speaking in a language that the former couldn’t understand. Participant 8 shared that “It made me feel like I wasted my time. I don’t see them doing this with other people, but it’s just with me. More than exclusion, I think it was a subtle form of

isolation. They made me feel like an insider who was an outsider.” Participants often reported that they perceived their coworkers as arrogant and inconsiderate, and that sometimes it feels like “they’re in their own little bubble”.

Participants frequently mentioned that these experiences were most common during more informal settings, such as breaks. Although this did not directly impact their performance at work, it did affect their social life within the organization and made it difficult for them to connect with their fellow employees. While some participants coped with these experiences by simply brushing it off and explaining it away as a “part of organizational life”, many did not share the same views. Other than feelings of isolation and loneliness, another recurrent theme was that participants felt invisible, as though their coworkers literally did not see them. Although this was a frequent occurrence during informal settings, language switches often happened even during official meetings, alienating employees who could not speak in a particular language. Participant 1 gave an example of such an instance in the hospital where she worked, claiming “They would talk only in Arabic, and that would just feel like a complete waste of my time, because neither could I learn anything; nor could I participate even if I wanted to. This also happened during meetings. I would spend an hour of my time attending this meeting that I was forced to attend. I would feel completely invisible, watching them discuss, laugh, and enjoy their time.” Another participant reported that senior executives (most often Arabs) would often switch languages during important meetings to deliberate amongst themselves and make decisions without consulting the non-Arabs. While the participant sympathized with their reasons for doing so, he still felt these employees were “arrogant”. Although he acknowledges that these executives probably did so because they felt more comfortable discussing in their native language, he still felt that it was inconsiderate behavior.

Interestingly, despite having some strongly negative experiences, participants overwhelmingly did not feel like their coworkers excluded them on purpose, with only one out of fifteen participants claiming that their coworkers switched languages around them deliberately. When asked why their coworkers often switched languages, participants felt that speaking in one’s own mother-tongue often helped them feel at home. Participant 6 felt that “I think everyone does it, not deliberately, like to make you feel bad or something, they just do it because it’s their mother-tongue. It’s like a comfort-zone, they just feel more at home.” When asked about whether switching languages signaled any malicious intent or had any political undertones, participants largely disagreed. “I feel that much of the exclusion and inclusion that happens because of language diversity is mostly unintentional. It’s often more of a comfort zone to switch to your native tongue, in this case Hindi I guess. They don’t do it to deliberately exclude the South Indians”. Some participants were unsure of how deliberate such behavior was. “It’s either that (it’s deliberate) or just a coincidence that it happened every time I was there.” Participant 7 said she wanted to say it wasn’t deliberate but didn’t know if that was true. “It’s complicated. I’m sure they could understand that I couldn’t speak Malayalam, so why did they continue doing it? I don’t know, I think it might’ve been a bit deliberate in hindsight. But they did their best to make sure I didn’t feel that way, I guess.”

In an extreme case, participant 1 reported facing harassment and being explicitly discriminated against due to the fact that she could not speak Arabic, which although not the official language of her organization, was the most commonly spoken one. This often meant that she could not participate in many conversations within the organization, as well as communicate with patients in many instances. As someone who had to do a lot of documentation work, her inability to understand Arabic meant that she often struggled to do the job. She felt that her coworkers, who did not always speak good English, often held an air of superiority over her, both because of their experience and her junior role in the organization. Although she described some of her colleagues as racist, she did not go into great detail on why this was the case. "I don't often know if they're speaking shit about me, but yeah everyone just speaks their own thing. Usually, I try my best not to interact with them and that keeps happening. There's a lot of racism as well, very blatantly, half the time, they don't even realize that they're being racist. They can be culturally insensitive, and just do what they think is normal. I've been called wrong names, sometimes even sounds, which really upsets me." The impact that these experiences had on her mental health were quite detrimental. "I had a lot of anxiety when I started. The first day I worked 24 hours, I was literally crying by 6 pm". When asked whether she felt invisible at the organization, she responded "I could prefer being invisible, but this situation makes me feel like I have to live it out. At least if I were invisible, I wouldn't have to deal with all this stuff."

4.3.4. Organizational Exit and Career Changes

For some participants, the effect of the negative aspects of language diversity were so strong that it led them to consider quitting the organization, and in two cases, even changing career paths. When one does not speak a common language fluently, be it English or Hindi, the resulting isolation often meant a total lack of a social life within the organization. Participants reported losing interest in their work, and having negative feelings towards their coworkers. Even when participants were invited to socialize by the very employees who ironically excluded them, they were still left feeling isolated as those employees would not speak in a language that the former could understand. Feelings of low self-worth were evident even in the interview responses. When asked how her coworkers tried to translate or include her in a conversation, participant 1 bluntly stated that "As I said, I'm at the bottom of the hierarchy so nobody cares if I can understand, or if I am a part of that conversation". Some participants reported feelings of anxiety, having panic attacks at work, and feelings of complete helplessness. These adverse effects often lead to organizational exit, and in some cases, even a change in career. Participant 1 added "It makes me think if this is what my field is like, is this what healthcare is like, or is it just the hospital I'm working in that's so terrible? I really question my career choices at times because I don't want to work in an environment where there are these kinds of language barriers and supremacy". Participant 7, who now works as an accountant mentioned that language problems was a catalyst in her changing organizations, and even shifting to a career in finance.

4.4. Coping Strategies for Language-based Exclusion

Table 5

Coping Strategies for Language-based Exclusion

Subcategory	Definition	Example
Asking for clarifications/translations <i>2 comments</i>	Participants literally interrupting a conversation that takes place in another language to clarify or understand what is being spoken about	<i>"We will ask them what the conclusion is, and they tell us in English. We often get it through mediators, and they in turn reach out to them and translate it correctly."</i>
Ranting to coworkers/friends <i>2 comments</i>	Participants complaining about their negative experiences to fellow coworkers who have the same experiences or their friends	<i>"I don't really have a choice. So obviously, I would just rant about it to my friends."</i>
Changing the topic <i>2 comments</i>	Participants attempting to change the topic of the conversation to make themselves feel included	<i>"I try to include myself by speaking in English, or bringing up a different topic in which all of us can understand and talk. But honestly, I try to deal with it in my own way by trying to include myself."</i>
Ignoring the experience <i>5 comments</i>	Participants ignoring the experience of exclusion and brushing it off as a part of organizational life	<i>"You can try all the diversity training you want, but people will only feel at home with people similar to them. So I think that experiences like mine are just an inevitable part of organizational life? After 3 years of work experience, I think that trying to make things more pleasant is pointless."</i>
Learning the language <i>3 comments</i>	Participants learning the (unknown) language to feel included in the organization	<i>"Initially when I started working, I didn't have any idea of Arabic. But because of the language diversity we talked about, I have some basic idea of a few languages now."</i>

		<i>Enough that I can get by with day-to-day work. That did push me to learn more about the language. However, I do think I've reached a plateau on some level."</i>
Self-distraction 2 comments	Participants distracting themselves to avoid the negative emotions that come with language-based exclusion	<i>"I just stay calm and yeah...how to say...I try to be busy and get on my phone and see something...maybe I get on my laptop and just try to distract myself. I don't like staying there doing nothing, but I think when there's fewer people, like 5 people."</i>
Organizational exit 2 comments	Participants exiting or considering exiting the organization to deal with the negative emotions that come with language-based exclusion	<i>"I just put up with it thinking it wouldn't go on for long, but then I realized it would never go away that easy. So I think...I coped by giving up? By leaving the company, I guess."</i>
Perceived high pay/ Perceived appreciation for work 1 comment	Participants justifying their continuation in an organization where they feel excluded by citing benefits such as high pay and appreciation by coworkers for quality of work	<i>"I try to scroll through my social media when it happens, but it's still going on in the background. I have seriously considered quitting my job. But it pays really well, and my work is appreciated, so I haven't done it yet."</i>

When asked about how they navigated the difficult and emotionally challenging consequences of language-based exclusion, participants offered a string of responses, none of which helped to fully solve the problems they faced in their organization. Helplessness was a common theme that often surfaced in many of their responses. In some cases, when participants were left unable to understand what was going on, they would ask for a translation or a clarification. However, even this process was perceived as undesirable, and was commonly mentioned as 'awkward and uncomfortable.' "They'll be speaking in Malayalam the whole time, but the moment when they talk to me, they're forced to switch to English. And then when they're talking to others, it's Malayalam. I think they're annoyed that they constantly have to keep switching languages just because of my presence." Due to this perceived inconvenience, some of them stop bothering to do it after a point. A few

participants try to change the topic being discussed and attempt to steer the conversation down a different road. Interestingly, it was found that perceived high pay and appreciation of one's contributions in the organization helped to mediate some of the negative feelings that participants may have felt. "I have seriously considered quitting my job. But it pays really well, and my work is appreciated, so I haven't done it yet."

One of the more common responses to language-based exclusion was outright ignorance of the problem and pretending it didn't exist. "It's just a part of organizational life." Interestingly, these participants were also most likely to express strong negative feelings about their experiences with language diversity. Some others coped with it by connecting with other coworkers who could not speak the dominant language used within the organization. "At the end, I ended up forming a strong bond with my other international workers who only spoke English. They are also at the same stage as me". Resigned to their fates, some participants rant about the problem to their coworkers or friends at home. A less common coping mechanism was attempting to learn the language, but participants reported that trying to do so often made very little difference. "Initially when I started working, I didn't have any idea of Arabic. But because of the language diversity we talked about, I have some basic idea of a few languages now. Enough that I can get by with day-to-day work. That did push me to learn more about the language. However, I do think I've reached a plateau on some level. I do feel like I can't take this anymore." Two participants cited that experiences of language-based exclusion was one factor that led towards them leaving the organization. Participant 7 said "At first, I just put up with it thinking it wouldn't go on for long, but then I realized it would never go away that easy. So I think...I coped by giving up? By leaving the company, I guess."

4.5. Solutions Organizations can Offer

Table 6

Solutions Organizations can Offer to Victims of Language-based Exclusion

Subcategory	Definition	Example
Language policy 6 comments	Having a language policy, either formal or informal helps mitigate some of the negative experiences caused by language diversity	<i>"Definitely, I would say so. It streamlines a lot of my work, there's no communication errors or problems. Everyone knows enough English to abide by the policy in the first place. I think the fact that English is a common language definitely helps."</i>

Diversity training	Sensitizing the workforce to working and collaborating with colleagues that are different from themselves through the help of diversity training organized by the HR department	<i>“You shouldn’t be scared of interacting w culturally diverse people, because of your fear of judgments. Only once you interact with them do you know how they are and the ways in which they behave. Maybe some diversity training is a good idea, definitely.”</i>
2 comments		
Hiring more internationals	Hiring more internationals to create a more diverse, multicultural organization	<i>“I don’t really think it’s a big problem. There are always few things to solve, but that’s okay. Maybe, I’d hire more internationals.”</i>
1 comment		
Language classes	Organizing language classes to help employees who are not fluent or proficient in a common language	<i>“In my company itself we have meetings with the HR where they teach us how to use Excel. Just like that, I think English training classes could definitely help employees who can’t speak English. Not just to converse with fellow employees, but also for important meetings with clients and contractors, they’ll have more natural confidence to explain the topic and speak up more. Because now, they’re very soft-spoken. Even if they know what to say, they don’t say it because of the language barrier.”</i>
2 comments		
Core-values	Inculcating acceptance and celebration of diversity as a core value within the organization	<i>“The main point that needs to be addressed is that these people feel excluded, and therefore, they need to feel more included. Inclusivity should be the core value driving these initiatives. When people feel like they belong, that will boost their capacity to network. If a single bond is</i>
2 comments		

		<i>weakened in the whole chain, it affects the whole system."</i>
Get-togethers and social events	Organizing informal social events within the organization so that employees can get to know each other better, in the hopes of fostering goodwill and trust between them	<i>"I also think more get-togethers and activities. Even with language barriers, when you do an activity together, you kind of forget your professional differences and try to have some fun together. You have a sense of connection and bonding with them. So maybe some kind of group-based activities can boost morale and productivity."</i>
2 comments		

When asked what else their organization could do to create a more inclusive climate that can mitigate some of the pitfalls of diversity, participants did have a few responses in common. Even though language-based exclusion as a phenomenon was less common in international organizations as compared to an organization managed or owned by an Indian, participants still felt like there was dissonance between what the organization preached and practiced. According to participant 13, this amounted to hypocrisy. "I think that it's just a bit hypocritical. Because they're working closely with internationalization and they still don't realize when they're doing something wrong. On the one hand, they're trying to promote internationalization, on the other hand they're also trying to bring it down". One participant felt that unless diversity was enshrined as one of the core values of the organization, it was difficult to bring about lasting change. "Inclusivity should be the core value driving these initiatives. When people feel like they belong, they will boost their capacity. If a single bond is weakened in the whole chain, it affects the whole system."

As many as six different participants felt that a language policy, be it informal or formal could help to prevent situations of language-based exclusion. They agreed that mandating a common language, at least for official communications or conversations could be a great leveler for an organization with a diverse workforce, and at least prevent it from breaking out into fragmented cliques. "I feel like if there's just one language involved, it would be a lot easier. I feel like more people would be more accommodated". There was no consensus on how strict they thought the policy should be. Participants who experienced strongly negative experiences either recommended a strict official policy or were so traumatized by their experiences that they did not think a policy would help at all. "I think that trying to make things more pleasant is pointless. Conflict and awkward moments are part of life. I wish things changed for me, and that people didn't speak in Hindi all the damn time. But I guess I've just resigned to accepting this as a part of office life. It is what it is."

However, some participants cast doubts with regards to the effectiveness of such policies, saying that despite having such policies, it was ineffective as long as senior employees in the organization continually flaunted them.” Language policies, I don’t think that works. It works partially, but when they (the Emaratis) want to switch to Arabic, they do anyway. So I don’t think that helps.” Some others felt that a strict policy would be too stifling for employees to follow. “I think maybe a policy will help, but then again, not too much. Like I told you before, I think my thoughts in Hindi. Sometimes, that means I speak a bit of Hindi without meaning to. Even if everyone can speak English, it doesn’t mean it’s their first choice. So I think a bit of leeway should be given.” Participants who worked in shipping, logistics, construction and finance felt that language policies were irrelevant to their work, because their jobs either required a working knowledge of English or did not require much interpersonal communication to be able to do the job. There was also quite some support for unofficial and informal policies, with participants hinting at the fact that coaxing employees to perform a certain behavior may be far more effective than obligatory compliance. In organizations that already had such an unofficial policy, reports of language-based exclusion were significantly fewer than when compared to organizations that had an official or formal policy; or none at all.

Cohesion and camaraderie were identified as enablers in bringing together a diverse organization, and to that end, participants identified social events outside of the organization as an innovative way of bridging diverse people. “So maybe some kind of group-based activities can boost morale and productivity. Stuff like get-togethers, drinks on the weekend, dinner once a month. Different groups can get together, meet up, talk about their life, in a way there’ll be a lot of unification over there. If two people are closer to each other in their personal life, I think it’ll really help them get along professionally too.” Participants echoed the sentiments that oftentimes, a lot of the conflicts that arise due to diversity are simply down to employees not knowing each other, or where they come from. “When a person is inducted to an organization, he needs to be briefed not just about his job role, but about his fellow coworkers. Like where they come from, how many are there, how diverse the organization is, et cetera. There needs to be training and management policies towards this. These are the finer sides of org life that few talk about, but they affect everything.”

Language classes and diversity training were also frequently quoted as possible interventions that could be organized. For employees who are not fluent in a particular language, languages classes were seen as something that could boost their confidence. “I think English training classes could definitely help employees who can’t speak English. Not just to converse with fellow employees, but also for important meetings with clients and contractors, they’ll have more natural confidence to explain the topic and speak up more. Because now, they’re very soft-spoken. Even if they know what to say, they don’t say it because of the language barrier.” These events may also help to break the ice between coworkers who otherwise may not even know each other’s names. “You shouldn’t be scared of interacting with culturally diverse people, because of your fear of judgments. Only once you interact with them do you know how they are and the ways in which they behave”. Hiring more internationals was another

suggestion, although the U.A.E has a significantly higher expatriate population compared to the local population.

With participants who felt their organization could do nothing else to create a more diverse organization, responses tended to be on both ends of the emotional spectrum. On the one hand, quite a few participants were satisfied with the ways that diversity was managed in their organization, with or without a language policy. They felt their coworkers respected the need to communicate in a common language despite the absence of a policy, or understood the necessity for such a policy in the first place. “You know the thing about rules right? People always find a way to break them. And I don’t think there’s any need to even have a language policy as long as people already speak English.” They felt there was little else that their organizations could do to create a more inclusive environment, and that some conflict or misunderstandings were simply inevitable. “Honestly, I don’t know what else they could do.”

However, on the other hand, some participants were so disillusioned with their experiences that they had just resigned to their fates. “: I feel it’s really hard because it’s something that is related to mindset. So this is about mindset of people, even though they know in theory about internationalization and stuff.” The impact of such experiences were so negative that they’d just given up and started seeing them as a part of professional life. “You can try all the diversity training you want, but people will only feel at home with people similar to them. So I think that experiences like mine are just an inevitable part of organizational life.” Although they did not always attribute this to malicious intent on the side of their coworkers, they often felt that a hesitance or resistance to get to know culturally different people from themselves was the main reason behind language-based exclusion. “I think everyone’s a bit shy about getting out of their comfort zones and talking to someone from a different cultural background. But once you get along I don’t feel that same shyness anymore.”

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand how language diversity in organizations could help or hinder organizational processes in the United Arab Emirates according to Indian professionals. This research also tries to understand the kind of challenges employees face due to language diversity, the kind of consequences these challenges bring, and how these experiences shape their organizational life. The findings of this study indicate that the current understanding we have about language diversity in organizations is but the tip of the iceberg, and that it is a very small tip. We know very little about the rest of the iceberg or the waters in which it floats.

Given the United Arab Emirates' heterogeneous population, it may be argued that diversity within an organization is inherent; an organization that employs a homogenous workforce is likelier to be the exception than the norm. Given that Indians make up as much as 28% of the population of the United Arab Emirates (United Arab Emirates Population Statistics, 2022), it is perhaps no surprise that despite n being eligible for citizenship, the results reflected that Indians who have lived here for a considerable amount of time feel right at home. In previous research, Dubai was called "the best-run Indian city" (Jayanthi, 2016). This sentiment was frequently expressed in this study too, with Dubai being called "India with higher living standards". For those unhappy with the number and the quality of opportunities available for their professional careers in India, the UAE has always been a logical next step. The fact that it isn't difficult to find fellow expatriates who speak the same language as themselves makes the transition to settling in the UAE far easier. Even though the findings of this study concur with existing research in that local integration is difficult (Jayanthi, 2016; al-Jenaibi, 2011) and that there remains some distance between expatriates and locals, who rarely mingle outside of professional reasons; the ubiquity of Indian restaurants, cultural events, and other Indian expatriates who speak the same language enables a different kind of integration, whereby expats do not need to "feel" at home by adapting to the local culture and customs, but already have the necessary tools to feel at home by settling into their own culture.

These factors often meant that the participants of this study were already exposed to a certain level of diversity within their environments, and that several participants had learned or were willing to learn another language outside of English (most commonly Hindi) to communicate with other Indians. Those participants who had already learned a common or dominant language found it much easier to integrate within their organizations, both professionally and socially. This helped them feel like they belonged to the organization, and helped them get along with their coworkers better. Many also appreciated the diversity in opinion that came with working with such a diverse group of people. Diversity was seen as something that enriched one's professional life, as well as the organization. The challenges that diversity can introduce during decision-making processes was seen as welcome, and a step towards making the right decision. This sentiment was best echoed by one participant, who said "A decision that everyone agrees with is probably a mediocre decision." While it is difficult to find academic research confirming this, market research conducted by McKinsey (2015) does support this statement, showing that there was indeed a correlation between the gender and ethnic diversity present in organizations and its financial returns. In the culinary sector, diversity was literally the USP of the restaurant that the participant worked in. "You need to have a fusion crew if you want to cook really good fusion food".

Despite speaking different languages, expatriates in the UAE appeared to have quite a bit of common ground, in terms of shared difficulties with adjusting to a foreign country, a hostile climate, and a local culture that largely keeps to themselves. Consistent with the findings of Bayratkar (2015), this study also found that these shared difficulties often bridges apart other differences such as language, age and culture. "It helps us understand each other better, because we know how things work around here, the kind of difficulties we had to face, how we work in our cultures, how we have to adapt ourselves." When working in a diverse organization,

fluency and adherence to speaking in the common language was identified as the single factor that helps an organization come together. When a common language is spoken, people tend to put down their guards, focus on their work, and find ways to coexist. However, while this was indeed the case in a few organizations, the opposite was true in others.

The fact that diversity of their organizations was often viewed as a positive thing did not always mean that participants felt right at home in their organizations. Despite the common acknowledgment that diverse organizations were somewhat universal in the UAE, working with coworkers who spoke different languages was only a seamless experience when everyone could speak a common language at a certain level of fluency. Most of the participants responded that their organization did not have a language policy of any sort, which meant that the implementation of a common language to be used was difficult to carry out. Even the few organizations that did have a language policy were often inefficient at ensuring that it was abided by, with the rules being flagrantly broken even by senior officials. The lack of uniformity in the language being spoken within the organization often meant that despite the organization claiming its diverse workforce to be its biggest strength, it eventually had the capacity to seriously undermine it. This is a situation that is reflected in research conducted by Kara (2017), where despite organizations reflecting their commitment to diversity in their recruitment practices, the lack of a systematic mechanism to manage the linguistic abilities of its workforce meant that there were limitations in terms of how much they were able to utilize this diversity.

Throughout the interviews, situations where employees were unable to understand each other were quite common; even if they both spoke the same language, different regional accents often meant that it was hard to communicate without constantly clarifying what was being said. In line with research conducted by Kim et al., (2018) some participants admitted that they judged their fellow employees on the basis of accent, either consciously or subconsciously, and that they judged the latter's competence on the basis of this. This barrier was described as a "noise" by one participant, where he'd try to convey one thing, but another thing was understood. Furthermore, the absence of a common language policy (officially or unofficially) often resulted in situations where cliques were formed on the basis of a regional language, excluding all those who could not speak that language.

Concurring with previous research, the act of "code-switching" (Harzing & Feely, 2008; Neeley, 2013) often creates both informational and interpersonal boundaries which exclude employees who do not understand the language being spoken. Although instances of code-switching in this study were perceived by participants to be unintentional, there were situations where it was clearly deliberate, with the aim of creating an informational boundary with other employees. The resulting exclusion was a universally negative experience for those participants who had to go through it. While there was little evidence to suggest that excluded employees resulted in them exhibiting counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) as suggested by Spector & Fox (2005); the results of this study does concur with previous research in that participants reported having negative feelings towards their coworkers (Dotan-Eliaz et al., 2009), found it more difficult to feel like they belonged in their organization and often led to the exclusion of employees with poor language skills (Welch et al., 2005). Disillusionment with their current jobs

and even careers was a recurrent theme in the responses. In more extreme cases, the dissatisfaction was so intense that participants considered exiting the organization because of these experiences, and even shifting career paths entirely. These participants also reported a feeling of helplessness and a sense of apathy from their organizations, so much that they eventually resigned to their fates. "I guess experiences like mine are just an inevitable part of organizational life. I wish people didn't speak in Hindi all the damn time, but I guess I've just resigned to accepting this as a part of organizational life. It is what it is." It becomes quite clear from the responses that when there are no policies regarding a common language, or when those policies are broken; code-switching results in excluded employees who are dissatisfied with their job, angry at their colleagues and often waiting for the first chance they get to leave. Language-based exclusion may lead to an organization that is highly divided, divisive; and in constant, unspoken conflict with itself.

This sense of conflict between practice and principle was another theme that was visible across participant responses. This was most readily apparent in the interviews when participants largely expressed positive opinions on working in a diverse organization but had overwhelmingly negative experiences because of it. This simmering tension between values and experiences is perhaps most visible in the stark differences between the inclusive policies some organizations had keeping diversity in mind, and the implementation of these policies. This dissonance was acutely felt and commented on by a few participants. "On the one hand, they're trying to promote internationalization, and on the other hand they're also trying to bring it down." Having a diverse workforce is seen as something that organizations proudly boast about, but little is done to mitigate the inevitable conflicts that come with it, or even acknowledge that these conflicts arise. While diversity is a buzzword for bringing culturally and linguistically different people together, in practice, either due to its own nature, or due to a lack of understanding of how to manage a diverse workforce; it also ends up driving people apart. While their organizations enshrined inclusivity as a core value, exclusivity was practiced quite blatantly by the very people who wrote the policies. This sense of dissonance was a source of frustration and perceived hypocrisy for participants. They felt that their organizations praised diversity more out of tokenism and the need to maintain a shining public image than any genuine willingness to be truly inclusive.

The most glaring example of this conflict is perhaps in the presence of a language policy within an organization. A language policy, by its very existence may imply that a common language is always spoken within the organization. However, the results of this study show that even having a formal language policy mandating the use of a common language may not prevent instances of code-switching or employees from being excluded on the basis of language; when top officials themselves have little regard for the rules they themselves set, it sets the bar low for the rest of the organization. "You know the thing about rules, right? People always find a way to break them." However, this may not always be an act of intentionality, but under-confidence in one's fluency in the common language. Research conducted by Ronnlof (2014) on language policies indicate that one reason that the common language is not always spoken in social settings in an organization is that employees feel they are not fluent in that common language. This implies that employee willingness to use the common language is not always

about the length or leniency of language policies, but employees' feelings and beliefs regarding the language play a role in its adoption (Tange & Luring, 2009).

However, somewhat surprisingly, participants from organizations that did not have a formal language policy often reported little to no difficulties with regards to communication and claimed that a common language was always spoken without being constantly reminded of it. Again, this too may be due to individual preferences that participants may have regarding the use of a language. All these factors invite further questions on the role language may play within organizations and specific industries, and whether some professions make it easier for language-based exclusion to happen simply by their very nature (as language-intensive professions); as the results of this study clearly indicate that the role that language played in a certain workplace (and the resultant experiences that participants had) were largely dependent on the nature of the industry. It also asks questions of the effectiveness of having a language policy in the first place. While several participants did think that having a language policy may provide some official platform by which they may mitigate experiences of language-based exclusion, this study provides clear evidence that this may not always be the case.

Furthermore, it is misleading to suggest that language plays only a minor role even in industries where participants claimed it didn't matter so much. Rather, it may be argued that fluency in a particular language is a pre-requisite to being eligible for employment in those jobs or industries. This was explicitly stated by those who worked in education, where English is usually the language of instruction. In logistics and construction, despite the algorithmic and often manual nature of the work, not being fluent in a common language(s) can be problematic. "We can't really afford any delays just because someone can't understand the main language being used." Instead, it may be more accurate to conclude that in such jobs, language does not have the same potential to be weaponized as it does in more information-intensive industries, such as marketing where instances of language-based exclusion were most frequent. In general, when participants had to interact with their coworkers (due to the nature of their work) more often, instances of language-based exclusion were more common, while those who did not need to do so reported that the language diversity in their organizations had "no effect."

5.2. Practical Implications and Directions for Future Research

In its essence, the results of this study imply that having a diverse workforce is a double-edged sword. Diversity has the potential to enrich organizational life, make better decisions, and influence the overall quality of the products or services being sold. Working in a diverse environment is seen as a healthy challenge, in that employees are forced to think out of the box, and get to understand the world from other perspectives, and challenge their own thought processes. Diversity often means adjustment, accommodation and compromises, but these very factors often make a diverse organization greater than the sum of its parts. However, it becomes evident that far too many organizations make the assumption that assembling a diverse workforce is enough; the rest merely falls into place. From the perspective of the individual worker, working in Dubai does not always mean a celebration of different cultures

and perspectives, but an economic necessity precipitated by one's needs and financial situations. People often work in diverse organizations not *because* of its diversity, but *despite* it.

In plain terms, managing a diverse workforce is difficult. Within the workforce, communication difficulties are an eventual inevitability, cultural differences may often turn political, and the same message may be interpreted in several ways. While the term "melting pot" is often used to describe a diverse environment, in the real world, diversity tends to be more of an unbalanced amalgam, and the mixture may not always look appealing. However, this does not mean that the amalgam has no purpose; at the hands of the right alchemists, it may be used to create something of extraordinary value. This is where senior executives and management plays a role. Firstly, it is important to note that the mere adoption of inclusive core values and language policies ring hollow when they are not actively implemented and can play a role in employees not working to their full potential. When management bridges the gap between practice and principle, there is evidence to suggest that it can lead to more camaraderie between employees, greater interest shown towards their work, and more positive feelings towards their coworkers and organization. It is not easy to manage a diverse workforce, much less one that is divided on linguistic lines, and there was unanimous agreement that if at all any change can be brought about; it must start from the top. How the management views and handles diversity sets a precedent for the rest of the organization to follow. In interviews where management themselves failed to follow the language policies they set for the rest of the organization; instances of language-based exclusion were frequent. The opposite was true in organizations where despite the absence of a language policy, employees did not face language-based exclusion or participate in such behavior, simply because the organization practiced what it preached. This is perhaps the first step to addressing the perceived hypocrisy that participants felt their organizations were guilty of.

An unexpected, but important finding of this research was that it highlighted how central a role a common language played in organizational processes, and how the role it played often differed depending on what kind of job or industry it was used in. A common language is a great leveler and unifier in a diverse organization, and the findings made it clear that it was the glue that kept it from falling apart. In certain industries, such as education and finance, the role of the common language was so important towards the efficient performance of one's work that it went without saying that it was to be spoken at all times. Unsurprisingly, this unsaid rule was always abided to without employees needing to be reminded of it. This was in contrast to industries such as marketing which required more frequent interpersonal interactions between employees. In these industries, the role of a common language is not just about getting the work done, but also has more to do with ideation, planning and execution. Given that there are more opportunities for employees to communicate with each other in such job roles, having a common mother-tongue may help to form closer inter-personal bonds. Unfortunately, speaking in one's mother-tongue at work can result in language-based exclusion, whether done deliberately or not. While this study merely scratches the tip of the iceberg, future research may do well to investigate the exact role that a common language plays across multiple industries, so that organizations may better understand it and devise policies that use it to its full potential.

The results of this study confirm what previous research has been saying for quite some time now: despite often being an unintentional form of exclusion, language-based exclusion can literally be a painful experience for participants that can have adverse effects on their mental health. While there is no evidence to suggest that these experiences prompt aggressive behaviors that may be detrimental to the smooth functioning of the organizations, it can lead to higher turnover, frustrated employees and a sense of disconnection towards the organization and their work. Participants that experienced language-based exclusion exuded a sense of helplessness, as though they would receive no support from their peers or their organizations. This is a glaring problem that organizations must immediately find ways to remedy if they are to solve the problems that diversity introduces. Organizations need to review the health of their own environments and understand how their own policies (or inefficient implementation of these policies) may be at the root of these problems. Being such an essential part of any organization, language is one of those things that are so obvious that our eyes miss it completely. More well-thought policies, diversity training, and language classes may be a small step towards solving some of these problems, although this is not the kind of problem that can be fixed with a one size fits all approach. This research is little more than a starting point to answering this complicated question. Future research in this field may also do well to investigate possible antecedents to language-based exclusion, such as the role the organizational environment itself plays in such behavior, and how organizations can do more to support aggrieved employees with the sensitivity and empathy they deserve. Further research into the exact role and effectiveness that language policies play in diverse organizations is necessary. While language policies are often seen as the first step to bringing together a diverse organization, the results of this study indicate that their effectiveness often depends on a few factors, such as how seriously it is adhered to and how formal it is. Research into whether employees comply better with informal policies than formal ones may be a good place to start.

5.3. Limitations

The sampling procedure used for this research was snowball sampling, which by its own nature, does not provide any guarantees of how representative a sample really is. While adequate care was taken to ensure that participants were as diverse as possible, in terms of mother-tongue, occupation, industry, age, and gender to reflect the purpose of this study; the sampling for this particular study initially began with a network of the participant's own peers and professional networks. This meant that there is a slight possibility that the results may have been biased. Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to conduct all the interviews in person. Engagement with participants was noticeably more difficult online, where the absence of non-verbal cues and difficulties in expressing meaning through subconscious cues such as body language meant that the interviews conducted online tended to be noticeably shorter, considerably less rich, with engagement proving to be more difficult to achieve than those interviews that were conducted in person. While this was an unavoidable consequence of conducting research during a pandemic, conducting all interviews in person may undoubtedly have resulted in more candid, dynamic interviews. This may have unwittingly altered the quality of the data.

Another limitation of this study is that while it identifies the existence of certain problems and experiences, it cannot adequately provide solutions to these problems. This limitation is also partly due to existing literature on the subject, which is still in its early days. The problems that linguistic and cultural diversity bring are often so subtle that they tend to be processed unconsciously, to the extent that few participants simply saw such experiences as a normal part of organizational life, that was just something to be endured. However, the negative repercussions that language-based exclusion bring with it are serious enough that it cannot be handled with a simple slap on the wrist. Contemporary literature relating to the topic of language-based exclusion and ostracism has been in decline, and difficult to find; even as the necessity to study these topics in greater detail grows by the day. Further research on exactly how organizations themselves (unwittingly) create an environment that encourages language-based exclusion may prove to be a starting point to understanding how they may prevent language-based exclusion and other potential problems that may occur in a diverse organization.

5.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study shed light on how language diversity in organizations in the UAE is a double-edged sword in terms of organizational processes. While language diversity in organizations is usually specific to international organizations, the inherent multiculturalism and high expatriate population of the UAE makes for a unique situation in that diversity may be considered the norm, than the exception. The findings of this research reveal that although diversity is most definitely a boon for organizations, it toes a fine line. A diverse workforce needs to be managed with sensitivity, empathy and care, while leaving space for the inevitable conflict, misunderstandings and disagreements that may come with it. It is quite easy for a diverse organization to become a divided one, but when employees are able to find some common ground, or connect with and see each other as human beings, than ethnicities; diversity can actually benefit the organization in terms of productivity, output and morale. Respect for diversity needs to move beyond a buzz-word and become an actual guiding principle within the organization. Although the experience of language-based exclusion is a painful one to undergo, there is evidence to suggest that among victims, there is still a willingness to reconcile, forgive and work harmoniously with each other. However, for that to happen, the initiative needs to come from the very top. Organizations simply aren't doing enough for their employees and are often selective about how they portray their efforts towards hiring a diverse workforce. Regrettably, it is to be noted that research on this topic is in decline, which may be reflected in the fact that many of the sources that this paper refers to are older than ten years. Future research may do well to focus on how organizations can create a truly inclusive work culture, and how they may create better policies and a working environment which at least does not make employees feel out of place, if not right at home.

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