

LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

- LITERATURE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE – LITERATURE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Foreword to the translated edition

This literature review and the resulting recommendations on language learning in the workplace are a joint effort between researchers from Roskilde University, the University of Copenhagen and the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (SIRI). The project's editorial team consisted of Anne Holmen (Professor of Parallel Language Use, University of Copenhagen), Marta Kirilova (Associate Professor, University of Copenhagen), Michael Svendsen Pedersen (Associate Professor Emeritus, Roskilde University), Louise Tranekjær (Associate Professor, Roskilde University) and staff from SIRI.

The review of research-based knowledge about language learning in the workplace from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland was carried out by Marta Kirilova and Louise Tranekjær. The chapter on language learning and language use at work was compiled by Marta Kirilova, Louise Tranekjær, Michael Svendsen Pedersen and Anne Holmen. The study of language support initiatives at Danish workplaces was conducted by Louise Tranekjær in collaboration with SIRI. This part is only available in Danish and can be found in the original report [Sproglæring på arbejdspladsen](#) (2023).

A group of language researchers from the University of Copenhagen gave their input to ensure the quality of the literature searches and selection processes that form the basis for the review into language learning in the workplace. A big thank you goes to Associate Professor Dorte Lønsmann, Assistant Professor Kamilla Kraft, Professor Martha Karrebæk and Professor Janus Mortensen from the University of Copenhagen for their invaluable contributions.

We would also like to thank the contributors from the companies, language centres and local authorities who were interviewed for the study of language support initiatives in Danish workplaces, and thanks also go to the language centres and

local authorities who responded to the questionnaire sent out for the study.

We would also like to thank the network *Language at work: Migrants and Nordic Workplaces* funded by The Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NOS-HS), which financed the English translation of the literature review and recommendations.

The translation was made by Pete Westbrook at the Centre for Internationalisation and Parallel Language Use at the University of Copenhagen. In the translated edition the chapters are slightly re-ordered and smaller paragraphs and links to the omitted parts have been excluded. For the original publication in Danish - *Sproglæring på arbejdspladser* - please visit <https://danskogproever.dk/media/10659/sproglæring-paa-arbejdspladser.pdf>

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The acquisition of Danish language skills is of vital importance to increasing foreigners' job opportunities in the labour market and to their ability to participate in the communities that exist in Danish workplaces. A good level of proficiency in Danish can also help ensure that foreigners' specific job skills are utilised in the best possible way and contribute to retaining manpower for the benefit of companies and Danish society.

In Denmark, there is a wide range of Danish courses on offer for all recently-arrived foreigners. However, not all foreigners make use of the available courses or even need to take them to be able to succeed in the labour market.

This literature review and the resulting recommendations were put together with the purpose of providing systematic insight into the existing research-based knowledge on how foreigners can best learn languages in a work-related context. In addition, the recommendations aim to contribute practical and experience-based knowledge about how different language support initiatives in workplaces function and how they can be organised to best support language learning in the workplace.

The content is based on both research- and practice-based knowledge, as well as on experiences and reflections from professionals and companies that have been involved in organising language support initiatives for second-language speakers in the workplace.

The idea behind producing these recommendations is to contribute ideas and provide inspiration for companies, language centres and local authorities that are interested in developing and improving their practice in this area.

The literature review and recommendations focus on the following two overarching research questions:

1. **What knowledge, knowhow and perspectives can be found about language learning in workplaces in research studies and reports, etc. from the Nordic countries?**
2. **What is the current thinking as to what constitute effective language support initiatives in Danish workplaces?**

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW AND WHO THE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE AIMED AT

The literature review and recommendations are made up of three parts: the two main elements relate to the two overarching research questions, and the third section presents theoretical perspectives on second language learning. The three parts can be read independently of each other.

- **Part 1:** A review of the existing knowledge base about language learning in workplaces based on research literature from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland
- **Part 2:** A study of initiatives offering language support in Danish workplaces based on practical experience (not included in the current translation)¹
- **Part 3:** A theoretical background on language learning and language use in the workplace

The literature review draws on the experiences of a diverse group of foreigners with different linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds, but what they all have in common is that they are in the process of learning Danish as a second language and are affiliated with a workplace.

The recommendations focus primarily on language learning in the workplace and on language support initiatives, and in this context no account has been taken of second-language-speaking employees' residency status in Denmark. This group of employees therefore comprises refugees and their family members, immigrants, foreign workers, students, etc., who will be covered by different legislation depending on their status.

¹ This part has not been translated in English and can only be found in the Danish version of the report *Sproglæring på arbejdspladsen* – see Introduction.

Key concepts in the literature review and recommendations

Language support: used for initiatives aimed at supporting adult foreigners in learning Danish as a second language in the workplace.

Second-language-speaking employee: applies to foreigners who have Danish as a second language and who are affiliated with a workplace where they are engaged in ordinary employment, a traineeship or apprenticeship, a job with a subsidised salary or some other company-based activity.

Language learners: used for people who speak Danish as a second language and who are in the process of learning the language.

Recently-arrived foreigners: applies to foreigners who have come to Denmark within the past five years. No distinction is made between different groups of foreigners in relation to their residency status.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

Characteristics of the knowledge base

The studies included in this review examine different aspects of language use in the workplace. These include language use in practice, linguistic socialisation, and the opportunities and barriers that may arise in relation to using a second language in the workplace. Most of the studies that are included in the review do not, therefore, deal directly with language learning as learning develops over time in a workplace context; rather, they identify different aspects of language learning and

examine various environmental factors that play a role in the language-learning process second-language speakers typically go through.

Language learning in the workplace is a relatively new area of research, and the review only identified a limited number of research-based studies that have a direct focus on investigating and documenting language learning and the language-learning processes that take place in workplaces over time. This may be because informal learning in a work context can be more difficult to document than learning in a teaching context, where linguistic progression can, for example, be measured through language tests and exams. If we want to document language learning as it takes place over time in a workplace, it will require longitudinal studies or comparative studies between different workplaces that can show evidence of any linguistic progress that has been achieved. Such studies are time-consuming because it is generally difficult to measure linguistic progression in an informal context such as a workplace.

In the literature search and in the review, we have primarily identified qualitative case studies and have only managed to find a few quantitative studies and effect studies that can shed light on this area. A small number of ethnographic case studies from unpaid internships have been identified, but only very few research studies were found documenting foreigners working under standard employment contracts.

Based on the studies that have been identified for the review, a number of points may be made in relation to language learning in the workplace which are repeated in several studies across the Nordic countries, and which relate to factors that can contribute positively to language learning in the workplace.

Methodology behind the selection of publications

The literature search that forms the basis for the review is limited to literature from the Nordic countries: Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. Common to the Nordic countries generally is a strong focus on providing recently-arrived foreigners with educational and employment opportunities. In addition, there are a number of basic social similarities in relation to, for example, welfare, employment, the school system and, to some extent, integration policy, which make it possible to compare knowledge and perspectives across countries. In contrast to English-speaking countries, recently-arrived foreigners to the Nordic countries are not usually able to communicate at all in the official language.

A systematic literature search was conducted across 11 research databases limited to a period of 20 years (2002-2022). The literature searches included the following three types of literature:

- Peer-reviewed research publications and research-based dissemination articles in national and international journals and anthologies
- PhD dissertations from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland
- Reports drawn up by either researchers or practitioners, including those done in collaboration with government agencies (boards, municipalities, educational institutions, etc.)

In the preliminary search, a total of 1186 references to publications within the field of language learning in the workplace were found. These references were subsequently screened and assessed, resulting in 105 publications that were read in more detail. It was also a criterion that the publications had to be written in Danish, Norwegian, Swedish or English.

Search strategy

Language use and informal language learning in the workplace are relatively new areas of research and so only a limited number of research-based studies exist in the field. This is also reflected in the systematic literature searches that were carried out for this literature review. Using 'language learning' as a keyword yielded only very few hits in most databases.

We used block searches with three blocks in Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and English. However, the databases were organised very differently in terms of indexing metadata (e.g. keywords, tags, descriptions), and this meant that we were not able to search for exactly the same words in all 11 databases, but had to adapt the combinations of keywords and phrases and introduce alternative keywords to either limit or increase the number of hits we got. Where possible, we used Boolean operators (e.g. AND, OR, ", *). Below is an example of Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and English keywords in the three blocks and an overview of the databases used.

Block search in Danish		
indvandrere* flygtning* udlænding*	"dansk sprog" "dansk som andet-sprog" sprog (alternativt: sproglæring, danskundervisning)	arbejd* arbejdsplads (alternativt: beskæftigelse, arbejdsmarked)
Databases in Denmark		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The Royal Library (kb.dk) – for publications from, for example, the University of Copenhagen and Aarhus University▪ Roskilde University's research portal (forskning.ruc.dk)▪ Aalborg University's research portal (vbn.aau.dk)		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University of Southern Denmark's university library (sdu.dk/da/bibliotek) ▪ Forskningsportal.dk (combined research database, though not optimal for searches in Danish) 		
Block search in Swedish		
migr* migration	"svenska som andraspråk" "svenska språk*" språk (alternativt: språkläring)	arbet* arbetsplats
Databases in Sweden		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Swedish digital academic archive (diva-portal.org) ▪ Combined university database (swepub.kb.se) 		
Block search in Norwegian		
innvandrere* migr* migrasjon	"norsk som andrespråk" "norsk språk" (alternativt: språkläring)	arbeid* yrke
Databases in Norway		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The combined Norwegian scientific archive (nora.openaccess.no) ▪ Bergen University's open research archive (bora.uib.no) 		
Block search in English (all databases + databases in Finland)		
refugee* *migr* migrant(s)	"Danish language" "Swedish language" "Norwegian Language" "Finnish language" "language" "language learning" (alternative: "language acquisition")	work* workplace employment (alternative: integration)

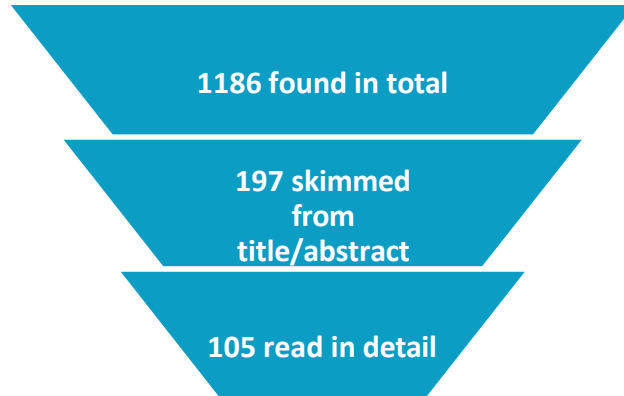
Databases in Finland
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The central Finnish database (finna.fi)▪ Fennica – the national database for publications from Finland (kansalliskirjasto.fi)▪ Helka – central university database, though mostly from the University of Helsinki (helka.helsinki.fi)

In addition to systematic literature searches, we found publications in relevant Nordic journals and carried out searches based on our expert knowledge and through the research network *Language at Work: Migrants and Nordic Workplaces*, which consists of researchers from a number of Nordic universities, including the first author of this report (Kirilova) and one of the consultants on this review (Lønsmann). About 50% of the publications included in the report were not found from the searches, so we would not have known about them if we had not used the research network.

In general, it was challenging both to manage the very different databases and to find the publications that dealt with language learning in a work-related context. This was due firstly to the publication channels and metadata criteria chosen by researchers in the Nordic countries not being explicit enough in the information searches, and secondly to the lack of research into language learning at work. This is one of the reasons why we have included practice-based reports, which we believe can supplement some of the research points and identify challenges that may be relevant in future research studies.

Overview of the literature search process

From the literature search, the figures for publications we found, skimmed and closely read are as follows:



The total set of publications searched, skimmed and read can be seen in the table below by country:

Country	Total found	Skimmed abstract/title	Read in detail
Denmark	766	89	40
Sweden	99	37	32
Norway	235	40	16
Finland	86	31	17
All countries	1186	197	105

REVIEW OF LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

A literature review based on research literature from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland

Introduction

The purpose of the review is to provide detailed insight into the current status of research-based knowledge and knowhow that exists about language learning in the workplace. The review includes data found in research publications, studies, reports, etc. from the Nordic countries.

The results from the review are presented across five themes. The first three themes present information about what factors in a workplace can support and contribute positively to language learning for second-language speakers. Themes 4 and 5 present factors that may influence the opportunities second-language speakers have to learn the language from a broader work and educational perspective. The five themes are as follows:

Themes

Theme 1 - Opportunities for language learning in the workplace

Theme 2 - Collegial sparring and mentoring schemes

Theme 3 - Employees' commitment and participation

Theme 4 - Relationship between language training and employment

Theme 5 - Relationship between language training and professional advancement

Presentation of selected themes from the review

The five themes that were identified in the review are presented below. Themes 1-3 focus on factors in the workplace that can contribute to language learning for second-language speakers. Themes 4 and 5 do not directly relate to language learning in the workplace, but present factors that may have

an impact on the opportunities second-language speakers have to learn languages from a broader work and educational perspective.

THEME 1 - OPPORTUNITIES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

Introduction to Theme 1

Theme 1 presents the resources and opportunities in the workplace which the research identifies as contributing positively to language learning for second-language speakers. There is general consensus in the research literature that the physical environment and the activities that second-language-speaking employees undertake and participate in in the workplace can constitute valuable resources for language learning. Several studies conclude that the linguistic, physical and relational dimensions that exist in the workplace can provide very real language-learning opportunities. At the same time, the selected literature suggests that language learning rarely takes place by itself, and that interacting with colleagues or other people in the workplace is a prerequisite for enabling second-language speakers to learn the language by developing their language skills in the workplace. The literature also shows that the extent to which the potential for language learning is realised varies widely across workplaces, because the work can be organised in many different ways and because workplaces offer very different opportunities for employees to interact.

A number of points are listed below regarding the literature that is included in Theme 1. We expand on these points in the next chapter.

Points regarding Theme 1 - Opportunities for language learning in the workplace

- There is general consensus in the research literature that the work tasks second-language speakers

carry out and the activities they take part in in the workplace constitute a valuable resource for language learning if they can form the focal point of the interaction.

- There is agreement across several studies that language learning requires special language support initiatives, and that language learning rarely takes place by itself in a workplace.
- Some studies suggest that greater use of physical items (e.g. signs, illustrations, objects) in communication can aid understanding and promote learning for second-language-speaking employees.
- Some studies point out that knowledge of terminology and domain-specific language may mean that second-language-speaking employees will be better able to comprehend meaning and in the long run have better opportunities for developing their language.
- The research literature clearly suggests that language-learning opportunities are very limited in cases where second-language-speaking employees carry out their tasks alone.
- It is generally agreed that different types of workplaces may find it more or less challenging to realise the potential for language learning.
- Several studies reveal that possessing language skills can be a necessary prerequisite for advancing in a workplace and that a company's language policy, covering for example what the working language is, can have a great influence on the well-being and motivation of second-language-speaking employees.
- Some studies within the research field *Language Learning in the Wild* suggest that interactions with people in informal learning spaces have a beneficial effect on language learning.

Research studies and reports that deal with opportunities for language learning in the workplace

Language learning needs special language support initiatives

There is general consensus in the research literature that the work tasks second-language speakers carry out and the activities they take part in in the workplace constitute a valuable resource for language learning if they can form the focal point of the interaction. At the same time, it is well documented that language learning in the workplace does not happen by itself without considerable effort from the employee, their colleagues and the workplace (Lønsmann 2022; 2021; Bramm 2020; Kirilova & Lønsmann 2020; Suni & Tammelin-Laine 2020; Bramm & Kirilova 2018; Strømmer 2016a, 2016b; Sandwall 2013; Sørensen & Holmen 2004). The employee must be given the opportunity to participate actively in the working community (Tranekjær & Kirkebæk 2017) and specific language support initiatives must be set up if language learning is to take place as a result of carrying out work tasks (see Pedersen 2021). Realising the potential of the physical working environment as a resource for language learning depends, therefore, on how far the second-language-speaking employee can engage in dialogue and interact with others in the workplace. It is, as Lehtimaja, Virtanen and Suni (2021) point out, the combination of a good working environment, specially organised language support activities and plenty of opportunity for interacting with colleagues that will have the most positive impact on second-language speakers' language learning.

Learning opportunities in the linguistic, physical and relational aspects of the workplace

The potential learning opportunities found in the linguistic, physical and relational aspects of the workplace are referred to in the research literature as *affordances* (Van Lier 2000). The tasks that second-language-speaking employees carry out and activities they participate in in the workplace are a

valuable resource for language learning if they can be included as a focal point for interaction. A number of studies conducted in the Nordic countries indicate how the use of specific physical objects, different procedures or work tasks in the workplace can contribute to learning (Lilja & Tapaninen 2019; Lehtimaja, Virtanen & Suni 2016, Jansson 2013).

In two studies of Norwegian construction sites, Kraft (2019a, 2019b) and Svennevig (2018) both show that tools used by the employees in their work, e.g. *bolt cutters*, can spontaneously be turned into a focal point in a conversation and thereby contribute to the learning of specific concepts.

In Denmark, Tranekjær (2020) conducted a study of weekly team meetings at an industrial laundry. The study specifically identifies some of the language learning opportunities that exist in the physical environment of the workplace. It shows how middle managers use signs, gestures and physical objects as comprehension strategies when communicating with second-language-speaking employees. Strømmer's studies of the cleaning industry in Sweden (2016A, B, 2013, 2010) also show the importance of the physical environment for supporting both understanding and learning. She argues that the more specific a situation is and the more physical objects can be brought into play in the communication, the easier it is for employees to learn to understand a message in a new language.

Terminology and domain-specific language

In some workplaces, knowing certain terminology and specialist language may be important to be able to communicate in the workplace. This applies, for example, to highly specialised employees and knowledge workers, who rarely find it difficult to acquire technical terminology, but who, conversely, may find it difficult to acquire everyday language (Hvas 2017; Green, under publication) and what is called "grey zone language", i.e. language that learners may know from their everyday lives, but which has a different meaning in a technical

work context (e.g. Henriksen 2015). Tranekjær (2020) also demonstrates how second-language speakers' lack of knowledge of specialist terminology, such as *rewashing* or *waste*, can cause problems, especially in workplaces where the work involves very little language use. As an extension to this, Lilja and Tapaninen (2019) show how physical objects and signs with just a few words written on them can be used to help employees understand and learn the terminology associated with the work being done (see also Lehtimaja, Virtanen & Suni 2016). Similarly, Hultqvist and Hollertz (2021) point out that it can be advantageous to simplify language in the workplace in order to create a better balance between terminology and everyday understanding. For example, words such as *eliminate* and *nourish* can be replaced by *remove something* and *give food* respectively (cf. Knutsen, Fangen & Žabko 2019).

Interaction as a prerequisite for language learning

Realising the potential for language learning in the workplace depends very much on how much opportunity there is for employees to engage in dialogue and interaction with others. Exploring this theme, several studies show that opportunities to communicate in some workplaces can be very limited. This is particularly true in cases where the second-language-speaking employees perform their tasks alone.

In a longitudinal study of workplaces, Sandwall (2013), for example, follows four Swedish trainees and finds that three out of the four only speak on average between 30 seconds and two minutes a day. The one exception is a trainee in a kindergarten, who was involved in a greater level of interaction with others. However, the interaction was almost exclusively with two- to three-year-old children who were obviously not able to support the trainee in becoming better at Swedish in the same way as adults. In addition, the amount of interaction decreased significantly over time. One of Sandwall's observations is that when physical objects are included in the conversation, communication generally works well because it can

support and strengthen the employee's ability to understand the content of the conversation. Paradoxically, however, physical objects can serve to reduce trainees' need to use and expand their linguistic repertoire because they can merely point to an object without using the language. The simple tasks that the trainees had to do, which, according to the field study, they often carried out alone, together with their limited knowledge of how to take part in social interaction, also resulted in them virtually never speaking to anyone, cf. Sandwall (2013). In another field study in a Danish supermarket, Bramm and Kirilova (2018) show how the opportunities for learning Danish in this workplace are limited as interaction is very much in the background for the performance of certain tasks. Like Sandwall's (2013) field study, the work is often carried out alone, and thus there are very limited opportunities for dialogue and support for language learning for second-language-speaking employees in the workplace (see Bramm 2020).

In a study of language-learning opportunities for second-language speakers in different workplaces (a market garden, a furniture department store, a kitchen and a care centre), Pedersen (2018) demonstrates that employees' opportunities for interaction are limited by both the work and the interactions they take part in. Pedersen points out that, in many cases, employees could have done a qualitatively better job if their colleagues had helped them gain greater technical insight into the tasks. This would also create a need to enter into a dialogue that would help expand employees' linguistic repertoire. The work insight and dialogue could, for example, focus on how to solve technical problems or provide customer service. In the same way, conversations across languages and cultures during breaks would make it possible to develop both social and linguistic competences. The findings showed that this does not happen in practice in the workplaces included in the study. According to Pedersen, there may be a lot of untapped resources and a need to activate

language learning opportunities when carrying out various tasks (see Pedersen 2021; Pedersen & Lund 2006).

Opportunities for participating in workplace communication

There is general agreement within this field of research that different types of workplaces can find it more or less challenging to realise the potential for language learning (e.g. Bramm & Kirilova 2018; Strømmer 2016; Sandwall 2013; Sørensen & Holmen 2004). Sørensen and Holmen's report from 2004 compares seven different workplaces: a municipal cleaning department, a food shop, a canteen at a freight centre, a private school, a post office, a pharmaceutical factory and a manufacturing company. The study concludes that each workplace offers different opportunities for second-language speakers to participate in communication activities in the workplace. For example, cleaning work contains almost no linguistic exchanges, while work at the factory and in the canteen provides more opportunities for communicating with colleagues and participating in the workplace's communities of practice.

Comparing the seven workplaces in Sørensen and Holmen (2004) also showed that there is a difference in the extent to which the technical focus of the work function is linguistically relevant. In slaughterhouses, for example, there is only routine and repetitive interaction mostly in the form of instructions, whereas communication at a post office morning meeting is more complex as it requires negotiation with employees who have some degree of influence over their work tasks. At the same time, there is an overlap between technical work language and social language, as relationships with colleagues, but also with customers, are interwoven with the actual performance of the work function.

There may also be differences in how much communication takes place at different companies in the same sector. For example, several Swedish studies of building sites indicate that

employees do not need to speak very much because the work is manual. This applies in particular to small construction sites, while large construction projects where several teams work together on a job may result in a greater need for communication across the different teams. Work tasks can also be explained using diagrams, pictures, maps and addresses, which can be understood without knowing the local language (Söderlundh & Keevallik 2022; Söderlundh, Kahlin & Weidner 2020).

Employers' language choices affect employees' opportunities for language development.

In many international companies in the Nordic countries, English is the working language, which is used to handle communication among employees with different linguistic backgrounds (Kotilainen & Lehtimaja 2019; Lønsmann 2017; Øhrstrøm 2015). Several studies from Denmark indicate that in workplaces where the working language is English, it is not always expected that international employees will learn the country's official language (Kirilova & Lønsmann 2022; Lønsmann 2017). However, it has been documented in a number of studies that employees who do not know the official language may feel excluded from informal social situations in the workplace, where conversations usually take place in the official language (Øhrstrøm 2015; Jensen 2014, Lønsmann 2014, 2011). Slots, Johannsen and Juutilainen (2004) point out the lack of employees with foreign backgrounds represented at management level in general and conclude that some companies consider good Danish skills to be a necessary prerequisite for advancing and developing employees in their careers. Inadequate Danish skills can also lead to isolation and result in employees with a foreign background choosing to leave Denmark to pursue their careers elsewhere (Kirilova & Lønsmann 2020).

Tranekjær (2020) examines communication at a production company and reports on the negative consequences of a managerial decision to hold meetings in Danish at a company

in which 80 per cent of the employees have a foreign background and therefore limited Danish language skills. The study showed that even though such a managerial decision may have been made with a view to supporting linguistic development among the employees, limiting the working language to only Danish may turn out to be counterproductive and demotivating for the second-language-speaking employees if at the same time the company doesn't set up any initiatives to support them in learning Danish.

Language learning in informal contexts

One example of language learning in a broader context is the research field of *Language Learning in the Wild* (Eskildsen & Wagner 2015; Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh 2018), which looks at learning languages in informal contexts (e.g. at mealtimes, in the shop, at the neighbour's and in the workplace). Even though this field of research does not focus directly on language learning in the workplace, it relates to many of the challenges that second-language-speaking employees encounter in the workplace. Research studies in this area show that interactions with people in informal learning spaces have a beneficial effect on language learning because it strengthens learners' communicative competences and provides them with a linguistic safe space outside the classroom (see Suni & Tammelin-Laine 2020). If the language-learning process is to succeed, it is a prerequisite that the people with whom second-language speakers communicate are prepared to help them.

THEME 2 - COLLEGIAL SPARRING AND MENTORING SCHEMES

Introduction to Theme 2

Theme 2 presents knowledge of collegial sparring and mentoring as supportive initiatives in the workplace that can contribute positively to language learning for second-language speakers. As mentioned in the previous theme, Nordic research clearly points to the importance of interaction as a prerequisite for language learning in the workplace. In addition, the research draws attention to the advantages of offering linguistic support from specially chosen colleagues in the work situations where linguistic needs arise. A significant part of the literature concludes that interaction with colleagues and a good relationship with a linguistically aware mentor in the workplace have a positive impact on language learning for second-language speakers as well as on their general well-being. Several reports also suggest that the mentor role is crucial for employees' socialisation in the work community's routines and for their involvement in communication in the workplace.

A number of points are listed below regarding the literature included in Theme 2. We expand on these points in the next chapter.

Points regarding Theme 2 - Collegial sparring and mentoring schemes

- Several studies indicate that language learning in the workplace only takes place when the employee can interact with colleagues or other people in the workplace.
- A few research studies and several reports suggest that mentors play an important role in the language development of second-language speakers, and that it has a positive impact on language learning and indeed on the general well-being of second-

language speakers that the mentor has in-depth knowledge of the workplace's terminology, routines and work culture, and can provide both linguistic support to the foreign employee and introduce them to the working community.

- Some research studies suggest that it may be more beneficial for the language learning process if the mentor is linguistically aware or is supported by others with knowledge of second language learning (e.g. a language teacher).
- Several research studies suggest that the mentor role can be challenging for the colleagues who take on this task. These studies recommend that mentors are prepared for the task and receive adequate support during the mentoring process, so that responsibility for a successful mentor-employee relationship lies not only with the mentor.
- Several research studies show that less formalised forms of linguistic support from colleagues or others, consisting for example of corrective responses and feedback, can sort out problems in day-to-day communication, without actually focusing explicitly on language learning.

Research-based studies and reports relating to collegial sparring and mentoring schemes in the workplace

The need for interaction and linguistic support from colleagues and others

Several studies suggest that language learning in the workplace takes place only when second-language-speaking employees have the opportunity to interact with colleagues, customers or other people in the workplace (Bramm 2020; Suni & Tammelin-Laine 2020; Bramm & Kirilova 2018; Strömmer 2016). It may also be necessary, and can be beneficial, to provide support for linguistic interaction so as to prevent new second-language users feeling overwhelmed when they take

part in a conversation in the workplace. It is well known from educational theory (Vygotsky 1978) that the learning process is accelerated if a more experienced person helps the learner to develop their language competences and to acquire tools so they can improve on their own with little assistance. In this context, colleagues can provide language sparring on an informal and voluntary basis or they can be formally appointed as mentors to provide linguistic support to second-language speakers in the workplace.

Mentoring schemes in the workplace

A number of studies describe formalised forms of linguistic support in the workplace, where the colleagues who provide linguistic support and feedback are called (*language*) *mentors* (Ditlevsen 2021), *language agents* (Bigestans 2019: språkombudsmän) or *language buddies* (Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration 2022: sprogmakere). What these titles have in common is that they all refer to specially-appointed people in a workplace responsible for helping new employees communicate in the official language, establish relationships with colleagues and understand workplace routines.

These research studies, and indeed also several reports, suggest that mentors play an important role in language learning and in the linguistic development of second-language speakers. The role of *language agent* (språkombudsman) has, for example, attracted increasing attention in Sweden, because collegial language support has worked well in the care of the elderly and is recommended as a resource in this context (Bigestans 2019), where a large proportion of new employees come from different linguistic backgrounds. Someone who is appointed as a *language agent* in the elderly care sector is an employee who can provide assistance in the design of written documents, understanding of instructions, telephone calls and contact with relatives, etc. In Denmark, there have been a number of mentoring schemes (e.g. voluntary mentors in the employment sector, the language buddy scheme

(sprogmakkerordning) for the Basic Integration Education - IGU scheme, etc.). Ditlevsen (2021), for example, examines a scheme at a job centre in Denmark where two recently-appointed employees with a foreign background, both of whom are highly educated women with good English skills, are assigned a mentor from the workplace. Even though Ditlevsen concludes that it is very much the new employees' own resources that have had a positive impact on their language learning in Danish, the language mentor role is highlighted as also being central to their linguistic development.

Several sources also suggest that it has a positive impact on language learning and on the well-being of second-language speaking employees if the mentor has in-depth knowledge of the workplace's terminology, routines and work culture and can provide both linguistic support and introduce the second-language speaker to the working community. The latest report from the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration (2022) on the language buddy scheme (sprogmakkerordningen) for the Basic Integration Education (IGU) concludes that the scheme has contributed to a greater understanding of the rules, procedures and expectations in the workplace, and that this has led to new employees feeling more comfortable and at ease in work situations.

Requirements for mentors

Research suggests that mentoring schemes support both linguistic interaction and well-being among second-language speakers in the workplace, especially if the employees' individual needs (Bloksgaard 2010) are taken into account and if the mentors are 'linguistically aware', i.e. conscious of how they use the language and can adapt their language use to accommodate the second-language speaking employee (cf. Partanen 2013 in Strømmer 2016; Virtanen 2013; Suni 2010). A mentor can also help the second-language-speaking employee become better at distinguishing between everyday language and domain-specific work-related language, as it can be a major challenge to understand different technical

terms and their use in a specific work context (Virtanen & Suni 2021; Suni 2017 referenced in Lehtimaja; Heimala-Kääriäinen 2015; Mähönen 2014).

Moes (2006) also argues that the role of *cultural mediator* (cf. *job mediator*, Pedersen 2007) in a workplace is an important part of the mentor role because it can help the company to understand and make better use of employees' skills. At the same time, it creates awareness and mutual understanding of the fact that there are differences in cultural norms and perceptions of what it means, for example, to be independent, to demonstrate interpersonal skills, to be flexible, etc. A report from the Social Research Institute (Miiller 2006) on the importance of the working environment for the integration of second-language speakers in the workplace makes the points that mentoring schemes for second-language-speaking employees who are new to the labour market can create a safe, comfortable environment for these employees and can act as a conduit to other colleagues in the company. Miiller also points out that a mentoring scheme is dependent on the mentor being interested in fulfilling their role as a mentor, otherwise the scheme will not work.

Challenges associated with the mentor role

Some studies identify certain challenges in the mentor-employee relationship because the mentor role can make some second-language speaking employees feel alienated and incapable of managing on their own (Steel, Lämsä & Jyrkinen 2019; Smith, Hviid, Frydendall & Flyvholm 2013). While the aim of the mentor role is to support a learning process, according to some studies it also has a built-in element of control because the mentor's task is to ensure that the second-language-speaking employee speaks and practices the language in different situations.

Tranekjær's studies (2020, 2018, 2015) suggest that the linguistic support and sparring offered to second-language-speaking employees, e.g. during meetings or interviews, can

place demands on Danish-speaking colleagues, regardless of whether they have an official mentor role or not. Tranekjær points out that Danish-speaking colleagues often do not have the necessary linguistic knowledge to support second-language-speaking employees and enter easily into dialogue with them. It may therefore be necessary to supervise colleagues who assume the role of mentor if the mentor-employee partnership is to succeed (Jansson 2011; 2013; Steel, Lämsä & Jyrkinen 2019). As the mentor role can be challenging for the Danish-speaking colleague, it can be advantageous to involve both a language teacher who can deal with linguistic challenges and an experienced colleague who can handle practical issues in the workplace (Hållsten, Heinson & Söderlundh 2022; see also Bjärkeblad 2012).

Less formalised forms of collegial linguistic support

Linguistic support can be more or less formalised, deliberate or structured. In its least formalised form, support can consist of corrective response and feedback from colleagues or others, where misunderstandings and ambiguities are corrected during a conversation, but without any explicit focus on language learning (Kurhila, Kotilainen & Lehtimaja 2021; Bramm 2020; Hviid, Smith, Frydendall & Flyvholm 2013).

Kraft (2020a, 2020b, 2018) illustrates in several studies from the construction industry in Norway and Denmark that there can sometimes be what could be termed unofficial *language brokers* in the workplace that speak the official language, English and some of the languages that the construction workers speak. These language brokers constitute a necessary resource in everyday communication in the workplace because they are able to resolve linguistic challenges in the everyday work situation, and also help other new employees with day-to-day communication (see Söderlundh & Keevallik 2022; Söderlundh, Kahlin & Weidner 2020). Even though these language brokers can support communication and positively impact on work processes, care must be taken that they do not help other second-language speakers so much that these

employees end up not needing to learn the official language themselves at all.

THEME 3 - EMPLOYEES' INVESTMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Introduction to Theme 3

Theme 3 presents knowledge of factors that are important for the employee's commitment and participation in the workplace. The research literature on second language learning clearly indicates that recognition and inclusion in the workplace will have a great influence on how far an individual employee feels motivated and has the opportunity to invest in the language learning process. Several studies also reveal that second-language employees' motivation to learn the language in the workplace increases if there is a safe learning environment and if the workplace encourages language-supporting initiatives and allows employees to develop linguistically. A number of studies also reveal that the use of multilingual resources in the language-learning process can generally act as a motivating factor for second-language-speaking employees.

A number of points are listed below regarding the literature included in Theme 3. We expand on these points in the next chapter.

Points regarding Theme 3 – Employees' investment in and participation in the workplace

- Several studies suggest that a safe learning environment which allows second-language-speaking employees to test out and develop their language is of great importance for their motivation and investment in their language learning.
- Some studies conclude that it can have a positive impact on employees' well-being and their desire to learn the new language if the workplace sets up

initiatives that actively support employees' linguistic development.

- Several research studies into language learning in general as well as in the workplace suggest that when employees feel that they can master communication at work, this strongly reinforces their work identity.
- Several studies illustrate how a lack of Danish has been a barrier for some employees who want a job where they can learn Danish but cannot get a job because they do not speak Danish.
- Several research studies across the Nordic countries show that the culturally-determined values that applicants with a foreign background have, as well as their cultural competence, can play a significant role for employers in an employment context, and for some employers this is valued more highly than applicants' linguistic competences.
- Several studies indicate that the use of multilingual resources can support understanding, facilitate communication and contribute to a sense of recognition among second-language-speaking employees.

Research studies and reports relating to employees' investment and participation in the workplace

A safe learning environment has an impact on motivation and investment in language learning

A large number of recent research studies into second-language learning see the second-language user's own investment (Norton 2006) in their language learning process as one of the most important factors affecting how far this process is successful. To ensure that this is the case, it is important to have a safe learning environment, where employees are allowed to make mistakes in the process of learning a new

language (cf. Øhrstrøm 2010). Second-language-speaking employees may be concerned that linguistic errors will lead to a negative assessment of their work skills, and this can affect their motivation to learn the new language. This is described by Knutsen, Fangen and Žabko (2019) in their study of international nurses in Norway who are seeking recognition in the workplace. Hultqvist and Hollertz (2021) also show how employees' lack of confidence in asking questions and drawing attention to what they do not understand act as a barrier preventing the exploitation of learning opportunities that exist in a work situation. Similarly, Miiller (2006) demonstrates that the limited language skills of second-language speaking employees can lead to misunderstandings or a lack of understanding among the employees without them drawing attention to it. According to the report, this can, for example, be interpreted as an expression of the fact that employees do not dare to ask because they fear sanctions. In addition, failure to recognise the employee's 'voice' may result in them losing the motivation to use the language in their daily work (Söderlundh & Keevallik 2022; Kraft 2019; Frederiksen 2013).

Employees' well-being and motivation for learning the local language

Some studies conclude that it has a positive impact on employees' well-being and their desire to learn the new language if the workplace sets up initiatives to support employees' linguistic development, for example through visualisations, mentoring or language classes. A study of the psychosocial working environment among cleaning staff at a workplace in Denmark (Hviid, Smith, Frydendall & Flyvholm 2013) was based on the action project 'Make a difference', where part of the project involved combining language training with training in cleaning skills and providing social interaction for employees. The study indicates that improving language proficiency leads to greater job satisfaction and social integration in the workplace (see also Eriksson, Berg & Engström 2018). The study demonstrates the positive effects to be gained from the company putting in the effort to give their

employees a language boost, but also draws attention to the fact that language is just one of many issues that need to be tackled. For example, they suggest that employees also need to improve their skills in IT, CV writing, reading instructions, etc. (see also Lønsmann 2022; Kirilova & Lønsmann 2020; Rodin, Rodin & Brunke 2017).

Pedersen (2022, 2021, 2006) describes how exploiting opportunities for speaking the language and the desire to invest in language learning for second-language-speaking adults often depend on whether it makes sense to them from a longer-term perspective. As Pedersen points out, language learning must make subjective sense to second-language-speaking adults based on their experience and background, and it must also make sense to them from a future perspective. It may therefore be necessary to help second-language speakers revise or develop new perspectives or change their self-perception before they can see the purpose of investing in learning a new language (Pedersen 2022, 2021).

Improving communication in the workplace forges a work identity

Several research studies on language learning in general as well as in the workplace suggest that when employees find that they can communicate effectively at work, they develop greater work identity and pride in their workplace (e.g. Pedersen 2021; Strømmer 2016; Frederiksen 2013; Liversage 2009). A Finnish interview-based study (Schleicher & Suni, 2021) examines highly-educated second-language healthcare workers in Finland and their motivation for learning Finnish. The study concludes that the vast majority of the health workers regard it as a matter of course to learn Finnish because they live and work in Finland. Schleicher and Suni also maintain that the experience of being able to master communicative situations at work helps give employees a sense of professional identity and pride. The same conclusion is made by Lehtimaja, Virtanen and Suni (2021) with reference to Virtanen's (2016)

research into language learning among highly-educated healthcare professionals.

Several studies suggest that in workplaces where communicative skills and social interaction are a prerequisite for being able to do the job effectively, the inability to participate in the communicative and social dimensions of work, such as 'small talk' with patients or with colleagues, can create a feeling of isolation (Kela & Komppa 2011 cited in Lehtimaja et al 2021; Heimala-Kääriäinen 2015; Mähönen 2014). This also applies to employees in service jobs who can feel excluded and powerless if they cannot talk to anyone (see Bramm & Kirilova 2019; Tranekjær & Kirkebæk 2017; Farsethås, etc. 2011 Sørensen & Holmen 2004).

Danish skills as a prerequisite for participating in the labour market

The importance of language skills for both retaining employees and for employees to feel an affiliation with their workplace and with the labour market are described in several Danish studies, focusing in particular on women with a different ethnic background than Danish. In a report from the Centre for Integration (Breidahl 2007), whose purpose is to gain insight into the resources that women with a non-Danish ethnic background bring with them and the barriers they face, a number of factors are brought to light that contribute to these women's typically poor affiliation with the labour market, despite them often participating in several job activation programmes. These factors include a lack of self-confidence, and a feeling of lack of co-determination and general powerlessness, which are attributed to limited Danish skills. In the report, the women criticise the activation programme, regarding them as meaningless and a waste of time. The report concludes that these activation programmes do very little to contribute to increasing the women's qualifications, either in relation to acquiring better job-related skills or learning Danish. Often the opposite seems to be the case, with women being isolated and given jobs involving hard physical work and

with very little opportunity for communication, resulting in poor self-esteem and no language learning effect at all (see Bramm & Kirilova 2018; Sandwall 2013). The same problem is described in a study by Liversage (2009) as a vicious circle: even though the women want work where they can learn Danish, they cannot get this kind of work because they cannot speak Danish (see also Lønsmann 2020).

Christensen and Grib (2008) come to the same conclusion in their study of women with a different ethnic background than Danish. They show that these women would very much like to work, but they find that the labour market is not geared to dealing with the “baggage” they bring with them, including poor health, lack of education, limited Danish skills and a conflict between their role in the family and the labour market. Many of the women have a job that involves hard physical work carried out alone, which they have to juggle with going to a language school and the obligations they have at home. Such conclusions indicate the importance of workplaces setting up language-learning initiatives that can overcome the barriers that employees are faced with so as to enable them to learn the language (cf. Kaas-Larsen 2021; Pedersen 2021; Wedin & Shaswar 2019).

Employers’ cultural and linguistic expectations of their employees

Several research studies and reports from Denmark and Norway have documented that the job applicants an organisation decides to employ is very much influenced by employers’ cultural values (see Bjørnset, Kindt & Rogstad 2021; Ødegård & Andersen 2020; Kirilova, 2019; 2013; Moes 2006; Jensen 2011, Lindström 2008). These studies suggest that cultural competence, including knowledge of both national culture and workplace culture, play a more important role for employers when they are hiring new employees than do linguistic competences (Kirilova 2017a; 2017b; 2013; cf. Moes 2006; Jensen 2004, 2011). This is supported by a comprehensive Swedish study of over 6000 Swedish managers from different

companies, in which Dehghanpour and Blomquist (2020) conclude that managers regard how far international employees are assimilated in the host country's lifestyle and culture more important than their academic qualifications, level of education and language proficiency. Similarly, a number of studies from the Nordic countries find that employers' perceptions of cultural, religious and linguistic differences and how important they feel these differences are for integrating employees into the workplace may constitute significant barriers to employers looking to appoint foreigners and expecting them to be able to participate in work-oriented courses (Pájaro 2022, 2021, Kirilova 2018, 2017; Kirilova & Angouiri 2018; Tranekjær 2015, 2011, 2009, 2007, Sundberg 2009).

Investing in language learning through multilingual resources

A number of studies in the research field of *translanguaging* (García & Li Wei 2015; García 2013) identify some general advantages of incorporating second-language users' different linguistic backgrounds as learning resources. These studies do not focus on language learning in the workplace, but more generally on second-language speakers' investment in language learning. Research in this field demonstrates that, to some extent, everybody draws on different linguistic resources when talking to each other. This makes for greater communicative flexibility and also supports the multilingual identities of second-language speakers by allowing for language(s) they can already use and understand. This learning can have a supportive effect, especially for recently-arrived second-language users. By using words and expressions from different languages, new language users can express themselves more coherently and be understood by their colleagues. This provides motivation to learn more and gives a sense of being appreciated, which is extremely important for learning a language (see Holmen & Thise 2022; 2021).

Kahlin, Keevallik, Söderlundh and Weidner (2021) describe how the use of different languages on building sites in

Sweden can function as a resource. When construction workers need to communicate with each other, they try out different phrases, drawing on languages they already know, while pointing to objects and drawings that can support the meaning. The study concludes that different linguistic resources are used in a meaningful and unproblematic way when building work has to be organised (cf. also Söderlundh, Kahlin & Weidner 2020). Kraft's studies from building sites in Norway and Denmark also showed that daily communication is very successful, helped by employing different multilingual strategies that are often based on a professional repertoire and require professional knowledge (Kraft 2017). This means that the involvement of multilingual resources can become a learning strategy that makes it easier for construction workers to make themselves understood and to learn the official language by connecting it to a language they already know.

THEME 4 - RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Introduction to Theme 4

Theme 4 presents knowledge of the links between language training and employment. Language learning for recently-arrived foreigners is offered in different forms across the Nordic countries. Both in Denmark and in the other Nordic countries, there is a strong focus on how the national language training programmes can support foreigners in finding work. The number of research studies involved in language training aimed at employment is still limited. However, the Nordic research is based on the fact that language training in the long term has a beneficial effect on the target group's level of employment. Several studies also address the employment-oriented focus of the Danish language programmes.

Points regarding Theme 4 - Links between language training and employment

- Two large-scale studies, one from Denmark and one from Sweden, both based on statistical data, prove that language training has positive long-term effects on the work and education of foreigners.
- Several minor studies from Denmark criticise the employment-oriented focus of the Danish language training programmes, partly because they do not take into account the individual needs of the learners, and partly because they focus too much on only one aspect of language learning, when they should instead ensure a broad development of language skills.
- A comprehensive study from Denmark shows that an early and intensive work placement experience programme may have a negative impact on newcomers' language learning because the internship takes time away from Danish classes. According to the study, refugees' language skills have a positive

impact on their more long-term affiliation with the labour market.

Research studies and reports that deal with the links between language training and employment

The positive impact of language training on employment

There are two major quantitative studies that investigate the effect of participating in language training on affiliation with the labour market. In a comprehensive Danish study of over 8000 refugees in the period 1999-2016, Foged, Hasager, Peri, Arendt and Bolvig (2022) look at how far refugees taking general Danish language courses at a language school affects the extent to which they are subsequently employed. The study concludes that refugees who have taken general Danish language courses perform significantly better in the labour market than refugees who have not, or only to a lesser extent, done so. The study also shows that taking general Danish language courses has a positive and permanent effect on salary, especially among women and people from countries that do not use the Latin alphabet. Furthermore, Foged, Hasager, Peri, Arendt and Bolvig (2022) demonstrate that the group of refugees taking general Danish language courses found it easier to get employment and had a more permanent affiliation with the labour market (see also Arendt & Bolvig, 2020).

In a Swedish study of 24 job centres, Delander, Hammarstedt, Månsson and Nyberg (2005) investigate the effect of job-oriented language training combined with an internship or apprenticeship for a group of 300 unemployed foreigners. The study focuses exclusively on the group of foreigners with limited Swedish language skills and includes a comparison with a control group. The researchers found that the group of foreigners who participated in the project with job-oriented language training got jobs more quickly than those who did not participate in the project. The study thus demonstrates the

positive effect of participating in a course that combines internship and job-related language training.

The employment-oriented focus in language training

There are some studies that address the way in which Danish language programmes have been linked strongly with finding employment, and the way in which this focus on the labour market has been integrated into language training. Based on a series of interviews with school directors and teachers, Kaas-Larsen (2021) concludes that the drive for language centres to teach Labour Market Oriented Danish² (AD) has not been beneficial for course participants' language learning. It results in the content of Danish language programmes being very narrow and uniform, when they should be providing a much broader range of language skills (see also Due 2019). Instead, Kaas-Larsen and several other studies (Pedersen 2021; Schierenbeck & Spehar 2021; Due 2019) recommend that course content should be based on participants' own dynamic but also current language needs. Pedersen (2021) suggests that teaching be tailored much more to the learners' individual learning needs. The above-mentioned studies therefore propose that the Danish language programmes be based to a greater extent on systematic analyses of participants' learning needs, as otherwise language courses risk becoming uniform and demotivating (see also Schierenbeck & Spehar 2021 on the bureaucratisation of teaching in a Swedish context, and Unger 2021 about the importance of needs analyses in the language learning process).

Work placement experience programmes and language learning in the workplace

In a study based on data on adult refugees who came to Denmark in the period 2012-2016, Arendt and Bolvig (2020) conclude that going on a work placement experience programme soon after moving to Denmark provides refugees with a

² Kaas-Larsen's investigation looked at the specific course covering 'Labour Market Oriented Danish', which was aimed at course participants who were self-supporting employees from the EU, au pairs, etc. in the period 2014 to 2017.

positive but only short-term effect on their chances of getting a permanent job. The advantage of having early contact with the labour market was lost about one year after participating in a work placement experience programme, when salaries and employment levels were the same as for those refugees who had not participated in such a programme. The study showed that going on a work placement experience programme early on adversely affects refugees' formal language skills, as the time they spend on the work placement experience programme reduces the amount of time they spend on learning Danish. Refugees who took part in a work placement experience programme during their first year in the country on average got a lower grade in their Danish exams.

A Danish study that evaluated the IGU integration programme (Jørgensen 2022), which includes language training, concluded that the IGU programme has several benefits and a positive impact on the integration of refugees into the labour market. The study highlighted in particular the model whereby Danish courses were combined with introducing refugees to practical work tasks as contributing positively to increasing the retention of refugees in the labour market. One drawback the study found, however, was that the programme required very close coordination between different stakeholders (companies, language schools and municipalities), which can make planning an effective course expensive and difficult (see also Schierenbeck & Spehar 2021 for similar issues in a Swedish context).

THEME 5 - RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL ADVANCEMENT

Introduction to Theme 5

Theme 5 presents knowledge about the links between language training and job training. Several studies indicate that there may be advantages to be gained in offering work experience places to second-language-speaking employees where further job training and vocational training are combined with specially designed language courses. Some studies, for

example, show how language courses can be organised in combination with vocational training so as to support the target group's development of linguistic skills and specific work skills. Some of the studies also suggest that it may have a positive effect on employees' desire to invest in their own learning if linguistic and vocational training are combined because the language learning is then perceived as being more relevant and practice-oriented. In addition, some studies suggest that there may be advantages in combining linguistic and vocational training, where vocational teachers and language teachers collaborate on the courses offered.

Points regarding Theme 5 - Links between language teaching and vocational training

- Several studies suggest that linguistic and job training can usefully be combined on vocational training programmes, and that it strengthens employees' motivation to learn the language when language training is combined with vocational training.
- Several studies also suggest that participants will benefit most from such combined courses if the vocational teachers and language teachers work together.
- A few studies conclude that teaching language to knowledge workers at universities should be based on the employee's particular language learning needs in relation to the specific tasks they need to carry out for their work.

Research studies and reports that address the correlation between language training and job training

Language training in combination with job training

Several studies suggest that linguistic and vocational training can usefully be combined. Several Swedish studies have, for

example, explored different programmes that combine vocational and language training, e.g. the Swedish “Kombinationsutbildningen”³, a vocational training programme for adult foreigners in sectors such as childcare, care for the elderly, the service industry, the catering industry, etc. which consists of courses in Swedish as a second language combined with vocational training in the workplace.⁴ Dahlström and Gannå (2018) conclude therefore that language learning works best if job training in the workplace is set in a language-pedagogical framework, where vocational teachers are trained in tailoring communication in the classroom to the target group’s linguistic needs and in providing language feedback to adult participants with Swedish as a second language. In addition, participants learn domain-specific language in Swedish through, for example, visual teaching methods, where they simulate doing the work and learn to communicate in different situations (see also Blaker & Pedersen 2018, Pedersen & Lund 2006).

Several studies argue that employees’ motivation for learning language increases when language learning and vocational training are combined (Sandwall 2013; Sørensen & Holmen 2006). One point that is frequently found in the research literature is that the extent to which employees are active and committed to their own language learning will increase when language learning and vocational training are combined (Strømmer 2017) (see also Theme 3 on employee investment and participation in the workplace). In professions where

³ Kombinationsutbildningen is a specific course where Swedish as a second language is combined with vocational training at upper secondary school level. The aim of the course is to provide a fast track to work for recently-arrived foreigners by giving them the opportunity of learning Swedish and a trade at the same time.

⁴ In Norway, it has been decided that from 2024, a similar vocational combination programme should be established at national level as part of a new system of modular further education for adult foreigners. The programme is being introduced following a pilot scheme that has been running since 2017. The combined vocational/language programme is intended to give adult foreigners vocational and trade qualifications (vocational certificate/apprenticeship certificate), and the programme is offered as a holistic course of study where language and job-specific training are integrated.

communicative skills and social interaction are prerequisites for the job, such as nursing or the service industry, the interplay between linguistic and vocational development is particularly important (Knutsen, et al. 2019; Suni 2017).

The need for collaboration between vocational teachers and language teachers

Drawing on the experience with combining language and vocational training, a report by Sandwall (2020) recommends that vocational teachers on the Swedish combination programme work together with language teachers and receive training so that they can use language teaching techniques in the practical part of the programme to ensure that adults with Swedish as a second language benefit as much as possible from the programme (see also Bigestans, et al 2018; Komppa, Jäppinen, Herva & Hämäläinen 2014; Holmen 2002; Thomsen & Moes 2002).

In a Finnish study of training and practical work experience for home care, Astikainen (2017) concludes that close collaboration between vocational teachers and language teachers is necessary so that upgrading vocational skills and language skills can occur simultaneously and mutually support each other. In a Swedish research study, Kahlin, Tykesson and Romanitan (2019) recommend that new employees be taught a variety of communicative strategies that they can then use in the workplace. This may, for example, be how to ask questions, ask for something to be repeated or ask a colleague to speak more slowly if they do not understand what has been said. According to the authors, this kind of targeted teaching will better prepare new employees to participate in conversations as an equal partner in the workplace. All of the above-mentioned studies demonstrate that there is great potential in combining language training and vocational training, and in training vocational teachers so that they can support adult foreigners' language learning in parallel with their job training.

Teaching based on specific language learning needs

Denmark has built up quite a lot of experience in running courses that combine language teaching and vocational training aimed at specific jobs or industries, but few of them are described in the research literature. There are research articles about the university as a workplace where knowledge workers with a foreign background are taught to give lectures, go to meetings and navigate everyday life as university employees. Laursen and Frederiksen (2015a, 2015b) describe several of these tailor-made courses. Their conclusion is that the courses work well when the teaching is based on the specific language learning that learners need to be able to carry out their tasks (cf. Unger 2021).

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Below is a summary of the conclusions in the literature review about language learning at workplaces in the Nordic countries.

- **Companies can help improve employees' language development by setting up initiatives that actively support language learning**

Not all employees need to communicate in Danish to perform their duties, and foreign employees do not automatically learn Danish just by being at a workplace; language learning requires interaction with Danish-speaking colleagues. However, the different situations and work tasks that there are in a workplace offer great potential for language learning which can be realised if a workplace actively supports the linguistic development of its second-language speakers. The workplace itself can therefore act as a resource to assist in language learning, provided that the second-language-speaking staff have access to language learning opportunities in the workplace.

- **The workplace offers great potential for language learning, which can be realised in the linguistic, physical and relational dimensions of the work context.**

Realising the potential for language learning in the workplace depends on a number of factors, for example how far opportunities exist for having conversations and interacting with colleagues. It is important that second-language-speaking employees are integrated into both the work and the social community in the workplace. The company's management and other employees can support language learning by ensuring that daily activities can become focal points for dialogue, e.g. at meetings and lunch breaks and when giving instructions, and that tasks are organised

in such a way as to create a need and an opportunity for communication, thereby contributing to the language development of the target group. Colleagues can usefully adjust general communication to the linguistic level of the second-language speakers, and using physical objects in communication can increase the number of opportunities for second-language speakers to enter into a dialogue. In addition, the use of multilingual resources in the conversation can increase second-language speakers' motivation to engage in communication with their colleagues.

- **Mentoring and collegial sparring in the workplace have a positive impact on employees' linguistic development**

According to the research literature, mentoring schemes and collegial sparring are two language-supporting initiatives that can actively enhance the linguistic development of second-language employees if the workplace is willing to support such initiatives. A mentoring scheme can help to exploit the language-learning opportunities that exist in the workplace because it is embedded in workplace practice. Having a Danish-speaking colleague as a mentor can have a positive effect on second-language-speaking employees' language learning and also eases the process of introducing such employees to the work community socially. It is important that the mentor is prepared for the task, and that they are aware of how the second-language-speaking employee's language learning can best be supported. In addition, it is an advantage that the language mentor is well acquainted with the language use, routines and work culture in the workplace.

- **Employees' motivation and active participation in communication in the workplace influence their opportunities for language learning.**

Language learning is a process in which both social and individual factors play a role. The investment in and motivation for learning languages for second-language employees is crucial for successful language learning, and it is a prerequisite that the second-language-speaking employees themselves take the initiative to exploit language-learning opportunities in the workplace. There can be considerable differences in the extent to which an individual chooses or has the opportunity to invest in language learning in the workplace, depending on whether it makes sense based on the individual second-language-speaking employee's life experience and from a future perspective. The workplace can contribute to establishing investment and motivation for learning languages among second-language speaking employees by making room for and involving them in specific activities where they can test and develop their communicative competences. When employees who are following a language-learning process experience that they are involved in communication in the workplace, their well-being increases, and they are more motivated to acquire new language skills in the workplace and in general. A prerequisite for employees learning Danish in the workplace is that they themselves invest in their language learning and actively participate in communication in the workplace.

- **Language skills can contribute to increasing employment opportunities for second-language speakers**

There is a well-documented correlation between language skills and employment. The research literature suggests that improving second-language employees' language skills can contribute to increasing their

chances of getting employment, and that participating in general language learning also leads to higher wage levels.

At the same time, several studies are critical of the employment-oriented focus of Danish language programmes. The employment-oriented focus is criticised partly because it does not take into account individual learners' needs, and partly because it results in Danish language programmes being somewhat inexpedient and uniform, when the purpose of such courses is also to ensure a broad development of general language skills.

- **It may be an advantage for second-language-speaking adults to combine language learning and work-related training**

Several research studies indicate that there may be advantages to combining vocational training on a work-related training programme with language support initiatives for second-language-speaking adults. When language training takes place during a work placement on a vocational training programme, it can be built up around the specific physical work context. This will then underpin the interplay between language support and language use for specific work tasks. The research literature also highlights the fact that it can be beneficial if vocational teachers and language teachers work together to develop a course. In addition, it can have a positive impact on second-language speakers' motivation and their desire to invest in their own learning if linguistic and work-related training are combined.

A THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LANGUAGE USE AT WORKPLACES

A key concept in the literature review is 'language learning', as it aims to collect and disseminate information and knowhow about how language learning for adult foreigners can best be supported in a work context. A language learned after acquiring a first language, and which is spoken in the surrounding community, is called a second language. There may be many factors determining when adult foreigners have to learn Danish as a second language, and the language-learning process takes place in a complex interplay between the individual foreigner and the social contexts of which they are part.

This chapter forms a theoretical basis for the literature review, providing insight into some of the theoretical approaches that recent research into second-language learning has adopted. In addition, the chapter presents some perspectives on language use in a work context, as well as some of the contexts that exist between workplace culture and language use in a work context.

Language and language learning

Much of the knowledge about second language learning in general and about language learning in a work context is based on a combination of different theoretical approaches. These approaches differ from each other according to their views on what language is and how the language learning process itself takes place. Language can, for example, be regarded as cognitive proficiency, a communication tool or a means to create and display social status. Similarly, language learning can be defined in different ways, based on, for example, cognitive, social and holistic approaches, depending on whether the learning process is attributed to the individual, the interaction between the individual and other people, or the interaction between the individual and environment the

individual is in. Below is a review of some of the leading approaches to research into second-language learning.

Language learning as a cognitive process

Language learning can be understood as a cognitive process in which the language learners process the language they encounter and notice in their day-to-day lives. A key concept in the cognitive approach is *input*. In order to acquire a new language, the language learner must have as much and as varied oral and written input as possible. In the field of language acquisition research, there is broad consensus that the language learner cannot learn a new language without comprehensible linguistic input that is subsequently stored in memory. Another important concept in the cognitive approach is *awareness*. Here, the research suggests that adults can improve their language learning by being aware of how the language is used, for example in relation to pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Research also indicates that neither input nor awareness in themselves are sufficient for adult foreigners to learn a new language, but that language learners also need to have the opportunity to produce output and thereby test linguistic hypotheses in communicative situations with other people.

Language learning as a social process

Language learning as a social process is based on an approach that focuses on enabling the language learner to participate in social communities in which the new language can be used freely and actively, and where there is an authentic communicative need. Such a need can arise, for example, when a language learner wants to use the language to make themselves understood and to understand others when performing a task at a workplace. Interaction is an essential element in the language learning process, as it is through interaction with other people that the language learner creates and decodes linguistic meaning and strengthens their social position in the community, which is important for the language-learning process.

Language learning as a holistic process

The latest research suggests that language learning cannot simply be explained as being the result of cognitive and social processes; language learning can usefully be seen as a holistic process that reflects the interplay between language learners, the people they communicate with, and the physical environment they navigate in. This means that language learning results from participating in social communities of practice and is situated in a specific context, e.g., a workplace.

Below is a review of selected theoretical concepts that contribute to an understanding of the holistic approach to language learning.

Investment and agency

There can be huge differences in the kinds of resources that individual adult language learners are able to draw on to learn a new language. The Canadian linguist Bonny Norton introduced the concept of *investing* (Norton 2006) to describe how language learning is linked to how much an individual is able to invest in the learning process. How far the language learner's investment in their language learning pays off depends on, for example, whether the language learner is accepted as a legitimate language user, i.e. whether the language learner is given access to and is included in the social communities that they seek to become part of. Norton emphasises that language plays an important role when the language learner is included in social contexts and has access to certain positions in society, such as jobs and education. The interaction between the individual and the environment enables the individual to have agency to invest in and 'capitalise' on his or her investment in language learning.

In this way, language learning can either be enhanced or hindered all depending on how the individual language learner meets and is met by his or her immediate community. There are individual differences between adult language learners, and not everyone chooses or has the opportunity to invest in

the language learning process. For example, some people may find it difficult to initiate a conversation in the workplace, and so here, linguistic support from colleagues can help to give new employees the confidence they need to be able to take the initiative in social situations. According to the Danish researcher Michael Svendsen Pedersen (2021), how far adult learners want to invest in language learning and make use of language learning opportunities can also depend on whether it makes sense for them on an individual level. What you learn must make sense to you personally based on your life experience and from a future perspective. Foreigners who have had traumatic experiences in their lives may need first to revise their own self-image or increase their self-knowledge before they can see any point in investing in learning a new language (Pedersen 2022).

Learning opportunities in everyday life

When adult foreigners meet and use a new language in the country where the language is spoken in the local community, there will typically be learning opportunities as the learner interacts with others in their community. The American linguist Leo Van Lier argues that language learning depends on the interplay between the language learner and the opportunities offered by the environment the learner navigates in. These opportunities (also called '*affordances*', Van Lier 2004) can support language learning if the language learner is able to exploit them. For example, a staff room or staff canteen can be an obvious learning environment if the language-learning employee feels included in the social environment at work and is motivated to engage in conversations with their colleagues. However, it can also be seen as a place where language-learning employees do not want to be, because they cannot keep up with the conversation, or because their colleagues engage with their mobile phones instead of talking to each other. Language learning depends, therefore, on the interplay between learning opportunities and the way in which the individual utilises these opportunities. In this context, the workplace can play a central role in the language learning process if managers, employees and mentors in the workplace

help to support and guide new employees in the language-learning process and if employees are able to accept and benefit from the support.

Language support (scaffolding)

It may seem overwhelming for a language learner to enter into a conversation in Danish in the workplace, especially if the language learner has limited Danish language skills. It is well known from research that adult language learners can feel inadequate and even shameful if they think that they cannot express themselves properly in the new language or if they are misunderstood. It may therefore be necessary and beneficial for the linguistic production of adult foreigners to be supported so that it is not too difficult for them to participate in a conversation.

The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) argues that learning takes place when the learner is challenged to perform slightly above their current level of ability by 'stretching' their skills from their current developmental stage up to a new stage within the so-called Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky 1978). This approach focuses on the social interaction between the learner and a more experienced language user, e.g. a colleague or a mentor. One of the points in this context is that experienced language users, e.g. the other employees in a workplace, can help to develop the language skills of second-language speakers by adapting communication to the employee's linguistic level, while at the same time challenging them to produce more target language. Thus, second-language-speaking employees can acquire the tools to be able to cope on an equal footing with their colleagues in a workplace if they receive the correct linguistic support through so-called scaffolding (Bruner 1978). Linguistic scaffolding can, for example, be based on support to achieve a specific linguistic goal or to respond to specific linguistic challenges. By getting support, language learners can also work out meanings or other things that they are not familiar with,

e.g. technical work-related terms or certain norms for language use in the specific work context.

Multilingual resources in language learning

Most people's linguistic repertoire consists of elements from different languages, and it is common to draw on these linguistic resources when engaged in dialogue with other people. In sociolinguistic research, this is called *polylinguaging* (Jørgensen 2008) and in pedagogical contexts *translanguaging* (García 2009, Holmen & Thise 2022). The inclusion of multiple languages in second-language learning has proved beneficial as it can give language learners the opportunity to express themselves in a more nuanced way, develop meta-linguistic understanding and be more creative linguistically. It can also help give the language learner a sense of being appreciated. In a work-related context, it is often a good idea to involve several languages in communication with colleagues. Beginners especially may benefit from drawing on elements from several different languages, because it can make it easier for them to enter into a conversation in the workplace, even though they have limited knowledge of Danish.

Language use in the workplace

The sections below present a range of different perspectives on language use in a work context and provide an introduction to some of the links between workplace culture and language use in the workplace.

Types of language use in the workplace

The language used in a workplace will often be closely linked to the specific contexts in which employees work and communicate. In other words, the language used in the workplace is anchored in the workplace's community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) and in the activities that the employees participate in as a part of their work. This means that language use

in the workplace will often be unique for an individual workplace; there are therefore huge differences in language use across different workplaces.

A workplace also involves many different kinds of activities, all of which require different types of language use. For example, there may be linguistic activities in which employees write, read, listen and talk to colleagues, customers and other people. There may also be activities that involve carrying out practical tasks, such as stacking shelves, emptying a washing machine or cutting up fruit. In addition, there are some activities that involve building relationships with colleagues, customers or other people in the workplace (cf. Kemmis & Grootenboer 2008). These three types of activities are often closely related to each other, albeit in different ways.

In many workplaces, linguistic activities will include specific jargon and cover technical work-related language. In addition, most employees will need to use words that cover other areas than just work-related language, as they interact in different ways with colleagues during a working day. Finally, linguistic needs may change over time. It can therefore be difficult to define precisely what language repertoire a new employee must master to be able to work in a specific technical area or in a specific industry.

Different language needs in the workplace

In addition to differences in the types of language used in different workplaces, how much communication actually takes place may also vary from workplace to workplace. The language used in a workplace is normally closely related to the tasks that need to be carried out. As the performance of the tasks is central, they will naturally be accompanied by the language necessary to carry out those tasks. This means that there may be very little linguistic interaction in some jobs, while other jobs may have a lot of interaction. Many routine tasks in manufacturing companies or in the cleaning industry may, for example, be carried out with very little or no

interaction with colleagues, whereas work tasks in e.g. a nursing home or in a kindergarten are typically associated with a high degree of interaction.

Highly educated employees at knowledge institutions and in international companies may in some cases experience a limited need for interaction in Danish if English is used as the lingua franca in work and social contexts. However, such employees may find they need to learn Danish anyway, for example, following a career change or from being given new and different work tasks. In some workplaces, it will therefore be possible to carry out your work perfectly well without the employee finding themselves in situations requiring Danish language skills, and where there is no natural, spontaneous, authentic learning situation, while the opposite may be the case in other workplaces.

Language learning as cultural learning

When second-language speaking employees have to learn the language use and the work-related language in a workplace, it is not just a question of learning certain words, but also about getting to know the workplace culture. By gaining knowledge of new words and expressions - e.g. the Danish "bagværk" (pastry) or omvask (rewashing), employees also acquire knowledge of what, for example, *rewashing* is and the work processes associated with it. In this way, a workplace's language use and the employee participating in the work community provide opportunities for situated learning, which results from authentic communicative situations.

Language use in the workplace is thus different from the language that a language learner encounters in the classroom because it is based directly on the activities that the language learner is part of. In the workplace, employees also take on different roles, e.g. in relation to their colleagues, their manager, customers, and each situation will require different behaviours, including communicative strategies and an

understanding of cultural norms. In this way, language learning in the workplace is also about learning the workplace culture.

Language learning at work and in classroom contexts

As described above, there is a lot of potential in the workplace for giving language learners the opportunity to invest in learning the language, thereby increasing the employee's level of investment and motivation for language learning. When language learning takes place in the workplace, it can also open up unique learning opportunities that are linked to the specific working context and the way language is used in that context. It is therefore possible to learn something in the workplace that you would not learn so readily in a traditional classroom teaching context.

The learning opportunities offered by the workplace are defined to a large extent on the basis of the work culture, for example whether importance is placed on involving the employee in the community of practice, and whether the workplace allows time and creates opportunities for interaction between the language learner and Danish-speaking colleagues. It is therefore not a given that you will learn the language simply by doing a job at a workplace. As mentioned above, it will require different types of scaffolding. Research shows that most learners who have to learn a second language develop their language skills most effectively if they also have access to formal learning, i.e. learning through language teaching, e.g. at a language school where learning is facilitated by a trained language teacher. A combination of formal learning and situated workplace learning can contribute to creating the optimum conditions for adult foreigners to learn and develop their language skills.

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