

How Important Are Linguistic Competencies on the German Labour Market? a Qualitative Content Analysis of Job Advertisements

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Abstract

Linguistic competencies (LC) are in many companies and industries an essential prerequisite for employees to accomplish tasks and integrate into a job. Under this premise, this paper summarizes the arguments and counterarguments within the scientific discussion on the relevance of LC in Job advertisements (J-Ads) in the German labour market. The main purpose of the research is to uncover the different importance of LC in the respective officially occupational category (OC) to examine whether connections between required LC and the tasks from the J-Ads. Therefore, this research represents an analysis of LC with regard to J-Ads, which was conducted on the basis of a qualitative content analysis. For the methodology of the research, 180 J-Ads were examined on the criteria of KLdB 2010. The investigation took place in a period from November 2018 to February 2019. The paper provides first evidence for the different importance of LC for the different OC and indicates ambiguities within J-Ads. Given evidence there are considerable inconsistent discrepancies between the required LC for applicants and the tasks to be performed, which can lead to inefficiencies in the recruiting process. The study confirms and proves that, in addition to implementation and conceptual problems, some management questions regarding the exploitation of LC in J-Ads can also be optimized through improved awareness and clarification of the ambiguity of the competence term.

Keywords: German labour market, Job advertisements, linguistic competencies, qualitative content analysis, occupational category

Introduction

The globalization of states, markets and humans has made it possible to overcome geographical boundaries. One result of these developments is the increasing pluralization of societies. People with different cultural backgrounds, ethnicities and different religions are shaping coexistence like never before. It can be stated that many Western industrialized countries are shaped by their diverse societies (Kalpaka, 1998). In order to make this coexistence of diversity in public space possible, Gutierrez-Wirsching et. al. (2015) see communication via language as a decisive mediator. This hypothesis could be underpinned by using the increasing number of language courses offered in recent years as an indicator. And from a political perspective, language ability has long been understood as an imperative of integration. This imperative can also be seen in the state structures in which students have increasingly acquired language and cultural skills in their careers and have enshrined them in their curricula. Applied to the economic context, it can be stated that language skills have long been regarded as key competencies of employees in order to survive on the international market.

Against this background, it becomes clear that language and concrete LC are of personal as well as social importance. For us, language catalyzes interpersonal contacts and restricts them when they are not present. Besides that, LC are in many companies and industries an essential requirement for employees to accomplish tasks and integrate into a job. Based on this, companies are continuously facing the challenge to attract and to ensure valuable workforce with this competencies on a competitive labour market (Masgoret, 2006). In order to attract and retain these employees, an effective recruiting plays a key role. There is evidence that effective recruiting is related to fluctuation and success (Korhonen, 2004). Since recruiting involves a high amount of resources, it is necessary to continuously improve and optimize it. One of the biggest

challenges in the recruitment process is the definition and transfer of requirements in job descriptions as well as the transfer of information to the target groups. As a result of this job-analysis, job seekers deduct information about the job and the organization from the message presented in advertisements (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). Against this background, this information is communicated in advance in the form of J-Ads in order not only to provide orientation for potential applicants, but also to create a self-image for the company (e. g. Frijters et al. , 2005). According to Rafaeli and Oliver, J-Ads intend to attract employees on the one hand and on the other hand to impress an audience about organizations (Rafaeli & Oliver, 1998).

In the light of the importance of approaching and selecting candidates in the recruiting process, we examine whether companies are already effectively communicating language-related information in J-Ads or whether discrepancies and inefficiencies can be identified through the different OC. In doing this, we examined J-Ads with a differentiated consideration of industries and OC with regard to LC. For the methodology of the research, 180 J-Ads were examined in a qualitative content analysis based on the criterias of KLD B 2010 and ISCO. The investigation took place in a period from November 2018 to February 2019. The analysis is based on German J-Ads that appeared on an online job search engine. The results of our research are presented in the following logical sequence: After introducing the relevance and need of this topic in job descriptions, the fundamental theory and concept on LC in J-Ads is provided. Therefore, the theoretical basis of LC and J-Ads and the role of communication skills regarding to LC is explained and reasons to understand LC as a recruitment challenge are given.

Literature Review

Although LC play an important role in language-related (Andresen, 2005) as well as in intercultural research (Burwitz-Melzer et al. 2012), there is no standard definition for the construct. In general, it can be defined as the ability to understand linguistic phenomena detached from their content context (Andresen & Funke 2003). However, all definitions of this topic often prove to be problematic in practice, precisely because of their breadth and specificity. Applied to the economic context, it can be highlighted that the operationalization of LC can be enabled in different way of nature. The spectrum ranges from spontaneous language skills in explicit situations to deep implicit linguistic comprehension that allows for the interpretation and understanding of contexts.

Consequently, the question arises as to whether it is justified to subsume these very different forms of LC under the same ability. The scientific discourse therefore still applies a term distinction developed by Chomsky in the 1960s, in which the conceptuality of LC is divided into two areas. According to Chomsky, the terminology of LC is distinguished in terms of „competence“ and „performance“ (Chomsky, 2006). Competence is the term used to describe a cognitive-abstract system of language knowledge and skills that distinguishes a native speaker. Native speakers are capable of forming any number of sentences in their first language (= mother tongue). In shape and structure are these phrases largely correct. However, this ability is potential that does not mean that a person actually forms all possible sentences. Performance refers to the current linguistic realization based on competence. Thus, the performance corresponds to a part of the competence. However, language productions are an expression of performance and, when voice performance is assessed, performance is judged rather than competence. For bilingual people, in a monolingual context, such as the vocational school or an aptitude test, only the performance of one of the two languages is considered. Thus a substantial part of the linguistic competence and performance of the bilingual person is disregarded.

In the psychology literature this topic is also viewed differently. A distinction is made between knowledge, ability and competence. The knowledge of a person is regarded as mental availability and the possibility of applying available knowledge. In learning theory, competence is also understood as a goal-oriented component in which problems can be successfully solved by combining knowledge and skills. A competence thus serves to be able to cope with additional tasks besides the routine (Littlemore & Low, 2006). It can be stated that especially the distinctions from the point of view of learning psychology play an essential role, especially for the personnel selection process, since future employees have to perform and apply productive work in order to ensure company performance. LC can be divided into six areas from a psychological point of view. Understanding skills used to be referred to as passive language skills. The person reading or listening knows best that comprehension has nothing to do with passive behavior. Understanding is a highly active activity and for this reason, today we also speak of receptive language services (Savignon, 2018). This is always the case with both deep foreign-language and mother-tongue competence. Knowledge of the meanings of words and phrases and knowledge of grammatical forms and structures in a language is a necessary component of linguistic competence (Cummins, 2005). In Germany, there is a separation between oral and written language use. While listening

comprehension and speaking are largely experienced in dialect, reading comprehension and writing largely use high-level language. As many companies operate in global markets, they are often in the need of people with dual language skills (Noels, 2005).

For this reason, it is literary essential to include the subject of bilingualism as an object of investigation. From the perspective of learning psychology, bilingual people have two systems of linguistic competence (first and second language) with different characteristics in the individual areas. The second language is in turn divided into two specialized subsystems (oral dialect and written high-level language). For many migrants, the first language is also divided into two subsystems (dialect in the family and high-level language in the wider environment). It should be noted that linguistic competences are always influenced by the context and that successful communication takes place over several levels (Byram et al., 2013). It is therefore not always sufficient to be able to speak a language in order to learn and work successfully in that language. According to Gutierrez-Wirsching et al. (2015), LC is therefore shaped by cultural determinants. This leads to the conclusion that the language and the competence of language represent an effectiveness factor for everyday business life and that this is a prerequisite for both applicants and employees. The determination of these prerequisites as well as the degree of this requirement can be demonstrated in company practice by means of a requirement profile. The requirement profile is a binding, written fixation of the organizational prerequisites of a position in the company with regard to its objectives, tasks, necessary competences and resulting duties.

The requirement profile is an integral part of the recruitment process and describes which criteria the applicants must or should fulfill, it standardizes the ideas of the decision makers of the future jobholder and gives interested parties orientation for self-assessment (Littlemore & Low, 2006). The profile is usually the indispensable basis for a targeted and fair search and selection process. In addition, applicants can be better compared and evaluated. J-Ads are designed and advertised on the basis of requirement profile and previous planning. According to Ahsan et al. (2013), J-Ads must consist of three different components in order to be able to carry out an effective selection process. Here, J-Ads must always inform the employee about the job requirements and task activities. This includes titles, positions, requirements, qualifications, etc. In addition, organizational areas are listed that communicate the time frame as well as application modalities. Particularly in recent years, the high demand for highly qualified personnel on the employer side has led to increasing competition, which has led to the company using personnel marketing methods in J-Ads. This means that additional company information is communicated on the J-Ads.

Methodology

With the assumed necessity to evaluate sufficient LC in the recruitment process (Hershfeldt et al. , 2009; Gregory et al. , 2014), it is essential to examine the validity of linguistic components on J-Ads. To address these gaps, we conducted a qualitative content analysis in order to examine LC within the context of J-Ads and to account bias between explicitly requirements and tasks. Specifically, the current study aimed to 1) determine if there is an overriding importance and association of LC between the OC. 2) to examine whether requirement profile and task activities discrepancies were in job ads associated. To address these questions, we conducted the qualitative content analysis by evaluating nine different occupational groups with each 20 J-Ads. The analysis of J-Ads has meanwhile become of one commonly used method for assessing professional competencies (Nonthcumjane, 2011; Sproles & Ratiedge, 2004; White, 1999). Therefore this qualitative content analysis were adapted by using the following procedure outlined by Maceli (2015) and Mayring (2010) to examine the primary research questions regarding the association between linguistic competence and J-Ads.

For this, we have prepared our systematic qualitative content review in total of 180 J-Ads according to the following procedure. First of all, we examined whether the J-Ads explicitly mentioned German LC as a part of the tasks or whether LC were mentioned exclusively in the requirements. In the second step, the same procedure was repeated in regarding to foreign LC. In this meaning J-Ads were evaluated which explicitly state foreign LC in both requirements and tasks or only in the activities or only in the requirements. In the third step it was examined, whether and to what extent undefined languages competences are mentioned as a requirement or in the tasks. J-Ads which did not name any LCs in the activities, i. e. also requirements, were also noted. The examined OC were selected according to classes 1-9 of the German Classification of Occupations 2010 (KldB-2010). The KldB-2010 was selected for this study because the international classification of occupations (ISCO-88) is only applicable to a very limited extent to the German labour market with its dominance of dual training programs and nationally recognized occupational profiles. Due to the fact that our study focuses on companies in competitive situations, especially in international markets, class 0 (military) was not considered, as there is only one employer, and the mobility of educational qualifications in the military is not always given. It is precisely this

classification, which is based on standardized vocational training, which enables better discriminatory power and differentiability than the partially generalizing factors of ISCO.

However, in order to include ISCO in the selection process and because academic occupations are usually examined, we have concentrated on non-academic occupations in ISCO classes 4-8, as these represent by far the largest proportion of the workforce in the German labour market. The following professions were examined: KldB-1: Gardener, KldB-2: Locksmith, KldB-3: Assembler/ Mechanic, KldB-4: IT Specialist, KldB-5: Truck drivers, KldB-6: Salesperson, KldB-7: Assistant tax consultant, KldB-8: Nurse, KldB-9: Media Designer. In order to control the investigation, the J-Ads were collected exclusively from the online platform Indeed. Since Indeed has up to 90% coverage of accessible online J-Ads, a necessary range of J-Ads could be ensured. The J-Ads were collected over a period of four months from November 2018 to February 2019. In addition, only J-Ads in the Berlin area were examined, as there is a sufficient number of vacancies per class and differences in local labour markets could be avoided as a federal state with a median size. In addition, only J-Ads that were not paid to reach a higher rank in the search algorithm were taken into account in the survey in order to avoid any distortions. Furthermore only full-time J-Ads were considered for the study and no part-time or apprenticeships were analyzed. After identification of suitable J-Ads, the J-Ads were analyzed via MAXQDA and coded according to the qualitative terms and objectives mentioned above.

Results

For each OC in our sample the statistics for the search criteria are described in Table 1. As mentioned in the methodology we defined the following search criteria to examining the J-Ads. No LC mentioned (NLC), Requirement undefined "communication competencies", task profile with language references (LC-T), Requirement "German lang. competencies" (GLC-R), Requirement "foreign lang. competencies" (FLC-R). The result shows that many professions of OC have a discrepancy in their J-Ads.

Criteria	Total Documents	Percentage	KldB-1	KldB-2	KldB-3	KldB-4	KldB-5	KldB-6	KldB-7	KldB-8	KldB-9
NLC	75	41,67	11	14	13	1	15	0	6	10	5
LC-T	38	21,11	4	1	2	5	1	7	7	7	4
GLC-R	16	8,89	3	3	2	0	3	1	2	1	1
LC-T + GLC-R	12	6,67	1	1	0	4	0	3	2	0	1
LC-T + GLC-R + FLC-R	11	6,11	0	0	0	4	0	1	1	0	5
LC-T + ULC-R	11	6,11	1	0	3	3	0	4	0	0	0
NLC + ULC	7	3,89	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2
LC-T + FLC-R	4	2,22	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1
FLC-R + GLC-R	2	1,11	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
FLC-R	2	1,11	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
LC-T + ULC + FLC-R	2	1,11	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Sum	180	100,00	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20

Table 1: Descriptive statistics about OC in relation to LC

No Linguistic Competencies mentioned (NLC)
Requirement undefined "communication competencies" (ULC)
Task profile with linguistic reference (LC-T)
Requirement "german lang. competencies" (GLC-R)

Requirement "foreign lang. competencies" (FLC-R) Overall, only 58% of the 180 J-Ads selected mentioned LC. It can be stated that some classes like e. g. KldB-5 Truck driver do not mention any language elements in the J-Ads 15 times in total, but three times German LC are required in the remaining five J-Ads. Another example of this discrepancy can be seen in KldB-8 Nurses. Here in 20 J-Ads only seven times LC are stated in the task activities but at the same time only two times LC are described in the requirements. However, a relative congruence could also be demonstrated in the context of all KldB, particularly in KldB-4 and KldB-6. Here LC are mentioned in the tasks as well as in the requirements.

Furthermore, it can be seen that especially in KIdB-4 IT specialists also have a higher importance of foreign LC. In the class 6 Salespersons it can be stated that there are unclear and no explicit denominations of languages in the tasks as well as requirements are present. Furthermore it can be emphasized that the KIdB-1 Gardener, KIdB-2 Locksmiths, KIdB-3 Assembler, KIdB-5 Truck driver, KIdB-7 Assistants in tax, explicitly do not mention foreign LC both in the tasks and in the requirements, and thus foreign languages play an essential role only in KIdB-6 Salespersons. A perspective within an occupational group shows that we also have different terminology logic, possibly hermeneutics of LCs. For example, the occupational groups KIdB-4 IT specialists and KIdB-6: Salesperson represents a strong variance in the naming of LC. Here, language skills are considered necessary, but only unclearly defined. In addition to an individual consideration of the KIdB categories, a superordinate consideration of the discrepancies already discussed becomes clear. Figure 1 gives an overview of unique positions and overlaps. Language is explicitly mentioned in 54% of the J-Ads examined. However, only in 16% of the cases was a fit found between the task and the requirement profile. In most cases (27%) a verbal task was mentioned without explicitly demanding verbal competence. Even more astonishing are the 11% of J-Ads in which verbal competence is required without the task having verbal components in any way.

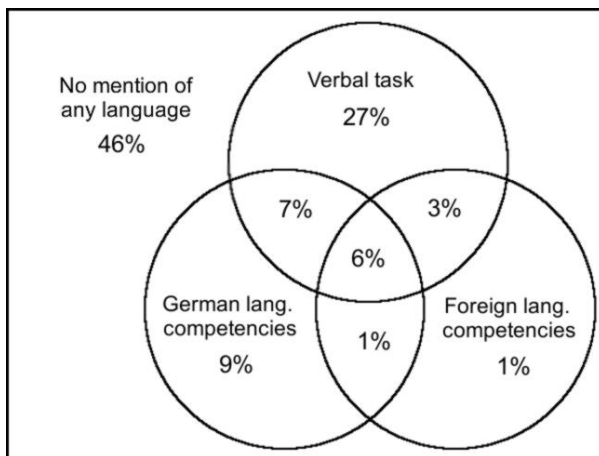


Figure 1: Overlapping LC in J-Ads leaving

At the occupational group level, language was most frequently left unmentioned by motorists (75%) and locksmiths (70%) and, as expected, least by salespersons (0%), with IT specialists also shining with 5% not mentioned. Unexpectedly, language was only part of the call for tenders for nurses in half of the cases examined. Both IT specialists and media designers require foreign-language skills in 35% of the cases.

Discussion

This study examines the relationship between LC and OC by means of J-Ads in respect to work out the different relevance and possible discrepancies and to make the recruitment process more effective. Overall, a different importance of LC in the OC can be understood by means of J-Ads. It can be stated that occupational groups which generally represent a personal reference also communicate a higher proportion of LC in the J-Ads. Surprisingly, however, it could be stated that the occupational group KIdB-8 of nurses only requires LC to a relatively limited extent. This is remarkable of the necessity of social interactions and increasing societal importance. Reasons for this could be fundamental recruitment problems in hiring suitable candidates which language skills are tested or trained afterwards. Since undefined or unclear requirements with regard to LC could be established, especially for the occupational group, the possibility of recruiting measures could be more effective. In addition, it was found that OC that are less person-related also show fewer language demands in the J-Ads. At first glance, this correlation is congruent and comprehensible. However, it is remarkable that LC must also play an important role in J-Ads for these occupational groups. A truck driver must also have LC attested to in his job profile. Here, however, it can be seen that the wide range of language skills can be trained in a few small courses and can therefore be considered secondary for recruitment. After Ahsan et. al. (2013) misunderstandings and cultural factors play an essential role, which lead to operational conflicts. Conflicts are to be regarded here particularly from economical viewpoint as cost

factors, since they disturb the operational sequence of an enterprise and can lead to quality losses. From this perspective, companies must try to reduce these conflict potentials in order to avoid these negative aspects.

One aspect to avoid conflicts could already be contributed in the recruiting process and here in particular by effective communication of language skills. In addition to conflicts, the motivation of employees to work in a way that maximizes profits also plays an important role. Since the majority of scientific contributions already attest to a connection between employee motivation and customer loyalty as well as their contribution to increasing profits, it is necessary for many companies to secure employee motivation (Masgoret, 2006). The extent to which language skills have a direct or indirect influence on the motivation of employees is unclear and cannot be determined from these results. However, it can be understood that without language skills, the handling of these problems is made more difficult.

Conclusion

The presented study showed a different importance of LC with regard to their inclusion in J-Ads. If an explicit mention can also be postulated as an actual indicator for the importance of LC, this study was able to demonstrate effectiveness problems by means of J-Ads and to derive potentials for action. However, as in other studies concentrating on J-Ads as the object of investigation, there remains a doubt that implicit factors in the J-Ads also determine LC. This limitation can be strengthened above all by the fact that one must assume fundamentally that each task or J-Ads requires a certain degree of LC. However, since we have controlled this disturbance factor in this study, the study is greatly simplified. The following expressions such as team and communication skills or empathetic and competent behavior were not considered for the study, since this terms do not require a clear explicit verbal LC. However, it cannot be denied that these examples imply LCs. Thus, the ability to communicate, in addition to non-verbal forms, also represents the transfer of information via language. The same also applies in a limited way to a competent appearance, which is achieved precisely when necessary information is provided through the use of language. Furthermore, it can be stated that many companies have J-Ads written by computer programs or external service providers, so that possible ambiguities can also be traced here in the provision of services. This impression also becomes clear in the course of the study, since according to the findings there is no clear definition and hermeneutics of LC within the occupational groups and this ambiguity of the definition could also be proven for the discrepancy between tasks and requirements.

Recommendations

The results of this study might be useful for the managerial procedures focused on recruitment and personnel marketing. Recruitment has a considerable effect on organizational performance and also represents a major cost problem, and must therefore be constantly improved. The recruiter should learn to reduce the ambiguity of the terms in his J-Ads in order to prevent effectiveness problems and also to promote a more understandable image with the candidates. The good news from our study is that managers in recruitment on German labour market do understand that language matters, and thereby foster performance. Nevertheless, managers should be aware of the comprehensibility and importance of language as a competence, especially against the background of migration and social diversity, and should communicate this more clearly in J-Ads. More specific, the results of this study are relevant for management procedures to help recruiting issues to prevent and gain a better consciousness of misunderstandings in J-Ads and the effects of this on recruiting processes. The potential of obtaining the right candidate through a comprehensible list of tasks and requirements may increase when this is already communicated in the J-Ads.

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