

“Only this time in English”: Local language learning investment of multilingual migrant engineers

Nuranindia Endah Arum,

Center for Multilingualism in Society across the Lifespan, University of Oslo

While English is widely used as the working language in multinational companies, local languages still play an important role in the workplace. This puts international employees in a difficult position, as they face pressure to become competent in the local language in addition to being proficient in English. This paper aims to shed light on the language learning experience of migrant engineers in Norway by exploring their investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) in learning Norwegian and its interplay with their language learning trajectories. The analysis of the participants’ autobiographic narrative accounts (Pavlenko, 2007) shows that different workspaces lead to different ideologies at play and a shifting value of linguistic capital over time. The reported language practices in the workplace devalue the participants’ English language capital and create pressure for them to use Norwegian for work. Despite the participants’ investment in learning the local language(s), it does not always translate to a sense of belonging and career progression due to ideologies that marginalize these migrant employees, such as raciolinguistic ideologies (Alim et al., 2016). This study provides new insights into the lived experience of highly skilled professionals as learners of languages other than English in multinational companies.

Keywords: language learning, identity, investment, multilingual workplace, migrant workers

1 Introduction

The increasing mobility across national borders in this era of globalization has contributed to a more international and multilingual working environment in many sectors (Angouri, 2013), with some companies reacting to the challenge of linguistic diversity by adopting a “corporate (linguistic) identity” (Vandermeeren, 1998, as cited in Lüdi, 2017, p. 348), that is, by designing a language policy (Kirilova & Angouri, 2017). The Nordic countries provide a rich context for investigating this challenge as English is used extensively in companies in these countries (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013; Lønsmann, 2015) and, moreover, in society. Nonetheless, the local language is still seen as relevant in

Corresponding author’s email: n.e.arum@iln.uio.no

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corporate environments (Bjørge & Whittaker, 2015; Hiss & Loppacher, 2021). For example, many large companies in Norway approach linguistic diversity in the workplace by using two or more languages in parallel, typically Norwegian and English (Sanden, 2020), thus local language skills are still needed to successfully integrate into a multinational workplace (Lønsmann, 2014). This condition can be problematic for international employees who have limited skills in the local language. Although language courses are sometimes organized by the employers, they offer insufficient support for managing more complex and technical issues in the workplace (Yates, 2017). Consequently, employees who do not have the needed competence in the company's actual working language may experience lower self-confidence, increased job anxiety, and limited career prospects (Bordia & Bordia, 2015), even though they were hired for their high-level technical competence. International employees then have to negotiate different contexts of communication in the workplace where linguistic resources have different values (Blommaert, 2010; Canagarajah, 2016). The complex interplay between English and Norwegian can also be found in energy companies, which represent one of Norway's most important industries (Sanden, 2020). These companies, both local and multinational, hire a significant number of highly skilled workers from different countries who bring with them their multilingual repertoires and identities.

Angouri and Miglbauer (2014) argue that it is important to explore "the lived experience of the multilingual workplace and the opportunities and challenges the employees associate with their multilingual daily realities at work" (p. 148). As will be discussed further below, language investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) is a framework for understanding language learning in a complex social environment such as the multilingual workplace. The language learning process is dynamic and occurs gradually, making it important to not just consider investment at one point in time, but to trace migrants' learning trajectories, including their language abilities and practices over time and in space. Indeed, language needs and learning opportunities in the workplace take shape in different ways, depending on the industries, working situations, contexts, and job positions (Yates, 2017).

Against this backdrop, this study investigates the language learning experience of two Indonesian migrant engineers in Norwegian energy companies by looking at their language learning investment and trajectories. The study asks: Why and how do migrant workers invest in learning the Norwegian language? Furthermore, how is the investment in learning Norwegian related to changes in their language learning trajectories? To shed new light on migrant workers' lived experiences over time, I analyze autobiographical narratives (Pavlenko, 2007) shared in interviews with me, an Indonesian migrant researcher in Norway. These detailed narratives provide candid insight into the dynamics which these workers navigate as learners and speakers of Norwegian.

This article is organized as follows. Section two presents the theoretical background and a review of the literature on language learning investment. This is followed in section three by an outline of the methods and data collected. Narratives of the language learning experience of the participants, two migrant engineers in multinational companies in Norway, are analyzed in section four. The analysis will focus particularly on specific moments in their trajectories that show the interplay between linguistic capital, identity, and ideology in their

language learning investment. Section five is dedicated to the discussion and summary of the findings and consideration of the broader implications of this study.

2 Language learning and investment in the workplace

Everyone is new to the workplace environment at some point and needs to be socialized into its particular linguistic and cultural settings (Lønsmann, 2017; Roberts, 2010). In contrast to the generally welcoming environments of first language socialization, second language socialization in the workplace frequently takes place in a relatively challenging environment (Duff, 2017; Roberts, 2010). In a bilingual or multilingual workplace, such as the companies where the participants of this study work, not only do new migrant employees have to be socialized into specific corporate and professional discourses, they are also expected to learn to take part in the linguistic and cultural practices of work in a new country (Vickers, 2007). They may also sometimes face unequal power relations and other obstacles that can impede the process of socialization into the workplace such as “misunderstanding, racist comments, and the deliberate noncontact of some groups” (Roberts, 2010, p. 217). Power dynamics in the workplace may also impact the opportunities to use and learn language at work (Yates, 2017).

The concept of investment offers a perspective to comprehend the social and historical power relations between language learners, the target language, and the evolving social environment. The concept was coined by Norton Peirce (1995) as a complement to the psychological notions of motivation in second language acquisition research. Such notions considered motivation a personal trait that contributed to the success or failure of language learning. The concept of investment, on the other hand, proposes that the opportunities to use the target language are socially structured, leading to different learning outcomes for learners in different contexts. Based on Bourdieu’s work on capital and symbolic power (1977, 1991), Darwin and Norton’s (2015) model of investment connects the concepts of identity, capital, and ideology to make sense of systemic patterns of control that language learners navigate in the globalized world.

Identity can be defined as “the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (Norton, 2013, p. 4). The concept of investment recognizes the complex and changing identities of language learners, and the ways in which language learning is intertwined with imagined identities (Norton, 2013) that form a sense of belonging to a community. Identity is also shaped by social categories such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, and others (Block, 2013) and constructed and negotiated in interactions (De Fina, 2015). Learners’ positioning in different sociocultural circumstances may be influenced by identity options which can be *imposed* (non-negotiable in a specific time and space), *assumed* (accepted without negotiation), or *negotiable* (subject to contestation by learners; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). Learners put effort into learning the target language to acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, or *capital*, which can provide the learners a greater range of identity positions (Norton, 2013). Based on Bourdieu’s theory of social capital, Darwin and Norton (2016) argue that “the

value of learners' economic, cultural or social capital shifts" as learners move across space and time (p. 24). For example, skills acquired and valued in migrant workers' home country, such as language proficiency or a degree, may be severely undervalued in the new country of residence (Blommaert, 2010; Darvin & Norton, 2015). These capital shifts are subject to ideologies of different groups or fields. According to Darvin and Norton (2015), *ideology* refers to "dominant ways of thinking that organize and stabilize societies while simultaneously determining modes of inclusion and exclusion" (p. 72) and has to be understood "not as a static, monolithic worldview, but as a complex space where ideational, behavioral, and institutional aspects interact and sometimes contradict one another" (p. 27). In the context of second language learning, certain language ideologies, which can be simply defined as "people's ideas about language" (Jaffe, 2009, p. 390), conceal power structures affecting how learners can be perceived as deficient or illegitimate speakers. Raciolinguistic ideologies, for example, shape how racial/ethnic identities are inscribed onto speakers, creating certain language expectations (Alim et al., 2016; Rosa & Flores, 2017). These ideologies may hinder "racialized learners'" access to the target language communities and their professional opportunities and trajectories. Highly educated migrants, such as the participants of this study, may be perceived as deficient speakers and less competent employees based on their language skills.

In addition to social context, time and space are also a crucial part of migrants' language learning experience. The concept of trajectory refers to the movement across time and space and can be used to describe how "learning experiences and outcomes are shaped by different cultures and environments of learning" (Juffermans & Tavares, 2017, p. 103). Tracing the learners' trajectories is thus necessary to understand the relationship between time and space and learners' ever-changing identities, shifting value of capital, and ideologies that they encounter. This is particularly relevant in workplace settings where employees move between multiple worksites or projects.

While Darvin and Norton's (2015) investment model has been extensively employed in research on educational contexts, the term "language investment" is also used in a broader sense by scholars in workplace settings (e.g. Babaei, 2019; Flubacher et al., 2016, 2018; Garrido, 2020; Gonçalves, 2020; Schleicher & Suni, 2021; Sherman & Homoláč, 2020; Strömmer, 2016, 2017). The non-acquisition of the host country's language is commonly tolerated for high skilled, highly educated white-collar foreign workers (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2013, 2018). On the other hand, blue-collar foreign workers are criticized as being unwilling to integrate if they do not speak the local language (Ladegaard, 2020; Sherman & Homoláč, 2020). Non-investment in the host country's language can be attributed to several reasons. For example, when migrant workers can benefit from their broad linguistic repertoire, they may establish good communication with their co-workers without using the host country's language (Gonçalves, 2020). The perception of a language's value can also influence willingness to invest in learning the language. Sherman and Homoláč (2020) discovered that in the Czech Republic, Vietnamese workers' unwillingness to invest time, effort, and financial resources to improve their Czech language skills results from the perception that Czech is not very valuable in local and international labour markets. Even when migrant workers are willing to invest in language learning, this effort does not always improve their career prospects due to hierarchies and inequalities in the job market (Strömmer, 2017). Many newly arrived migrant

workers are also stuck in entry-level jobs that do not offer adequate opportunities for language learning (Strömmer, 2016).

Most of the research on investment in work-related language learning has so far looked at migrants who are looking for an employment opportunity or have an entry-level or blue-collar job. Using the investment model as a basis, the present article investigates in detail contextual and individual aspects in the experience of migrant white-collar workers in a high-stakes work environment who already have a stable job but are still in the process of learning the host country's language for professional purposes.

3 Methodology

The present study is part of a larger three-year project in which the language practices and language learning experience of Indonesians in Norwegian professional settings are examined. A case study of two key participants, Dewi and Firman, Indonesian engineers who work in multinational companies in Norway, is presented. A case study approach allows for in-depth exploration of intentionally selected participants (Duff, 2019). The participants were recruited through an online survey distributed to my personal network of Indonesian diaspora in Norway. Fifty-nine Indonesians working or looking for work in Norway participated in the survey about language practices in different settings and their Norwegian language learning experiences; fifteen willing participants were subsequently interviewed. These two focal participants were selected based on their similar professional profiles (highly educated engineers, working in relatively high-stakes environments) and amount of time spent in Norway (10–15 years), but different biographical backgrounds (i.e. age and gender) and migration trajectories, which provide interesting and quite contrasting views in the data. I had never met either participant in person prior to the interviews, although I had had some brief online interactions with Dewi with whom I had in fact discussed some aspects of this project before starting the data collection. The participants will be introduced in more detail in the next section.

The data selected for this article come from four audio-recorded, in-depth semi-structured interviews (two per participant) carried out online using Zoom videoconference service. The interviews included topics such as their migration trajectory, Norwegian language learning trajectory, and language practices in the workplace. Since both the participants and I are L1 Indonesian speakers, the interviews were conducted in Indonesian, mixed with English and Norwegian.¹ Our similar background as highly educated migrants from Indonesia, albeit within different professional environments, and in Dewi's case, the fact that I had already had interactions with her before the interviews, may also have influenced what they chose to tell me. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim in the original languages used and translated into English (see Appendix for original transcripts). To protect the participants' privacy, the names in this article are pseudonyms and identifying details are purposefully omitted. In addition to interviews, my initial plan was to record and/or observe my participants' interactions at work which would have allowed me to better understand how they use and learn language(s) in the workplace. However, I could not obtain such access, and instead I have taken a narrative approach to analyze the interview data.

I view the participants' responses as autobiographic narratives (Pavlenko, 2007) since they highlight subjective perspectives of the lived experience of language (Busch, 2017). In migration contexts, migrants' lived experience is particularly important as "relocating the center of one's life [...] always means a change both in the life world (*Lebenswelt*) and in the linguistic environment with whose practices, discourses, and rules one is familiar" (Busch, 2017, p. 340). In order to understand the lived experience of language, Busch (2017) suggests supplementing the third person perspective of the researcher by a first-hand account based on biographical narratives. Narrative analysis also allows us to understand how migrants represent "language learning and language learners, including themselves [...] and how they relate language learning to other experiences such as work" (De Fina & Tseng, 2017, p. 383). Thus, analysis based on biographical narrative approach is appropriate for illuminating migrant workers' experience of language learning investment and trajectories in this study.

The analysis of multilinguals' autobiographies has to take into consideration the context in which narratives are constructed and the form of the telling (Pavlenko, 2007). Since the data coding and interpretation are subject to the researcher's theoretical assumptions, it is then crucial to have a clear conceptual framework to analyze autobiographic narratives (Pavlenko, 2007). For this reason, I used the concepts of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015) and trajectory as theoretical lenses to understand the interplay of context and individual experiences in migrants' language learning experience over time. I analyzed the interviews thematically to identify pre-defined themes of language ideology, identity, and capital (the elements of the investment model) in their narratives about language learning and use. Additionally, the themes of time and space in participants' narratives were analyzed to shed light on their trajectories related to their language learning investment. Instances of time and space identified in the narratives included the ideologies encountered in different spaces and shifts in identity and perceived capital over time.

4 Findings

In this section, two cases are presented to examine Indonesian workers' investment in learning Norwegian and its relation to their language learning trajectories. Using the investment model (Darvin & Norton, 2015), we see that there are two main aspects that the participants' experience as important for their language learning investment: work expectations and desire to belong in Norwegian society. The interview extracts presented below were chosen because they provide the most illustrative narratives. It is worth noting that the interactions and the length of the responses are very different for the two participants. While Firman replied in a relatively concise and direct way to the questions that I asked, Dewi took much more initiative and had the tendency to expand her replies well beyond the scope of my questions, although still addressing relevant and interesting issues. For this reason, I do not always include the questions that precede specific excerpts.

4.1 Dewi: Colleagues' expectations and (non)belonging

Dewi, who is in her mid-thirties, moved to Norway ten years ago to pursue postgraduate studies. After graduation she was offered a job by a multinational company where she still works as an engineer. I started the interview by asking about her first experiences in learning Norwegian. Dewi began by taking free language courses offered by her university for one semester. At that time, she mainly used English for her studies, socializing with friends, and daily life activities. The ease of navigating Norwegian society without speaking Norwegian and her initial plan to stay in Norway for a short period meant she was not invested in learning the language. When she did wind up in a job in Norway, the position did not require Norwegian language skills. However, while the company's language policy states that English is the working language, it turns out that Norwegian is widely used. This decreased the value of Dewi's English linguistic capital and influenced her investment in learning Norwegian. Dewi took advantage of language courses paid for by the company for several months. I asked her what her experience with these courses was and she deemed them inadequate for both the professional and social aspects of her job. The courses were held in a private language school where the students had various backgrounds and learning needs, thus it was not tailored for engineering professionals and for Dewi, it did not give her sufficient linguistic capital to meet work demands. Moreover, learning the local language is time demanding and can be an obstacle to one's contribution to the company's activities (Bjørge & Whittaker, 2015). Dewi elaborated on this point further by highlighting the interactions with her colleagues.

Excerpt 1 (D - Dewi)²

- 1 D: [...] Colleagues' expectations are high. "You have passed this
 2 language level and that, why are you still not talking to us?" I don't feel
 3 confident if I must – Because the first one or two years colleagues would
 4 always ask if we were the only foreigners in the room. They would always
 5 ask (mmm) "English or Norwegian?" (aah) and in the beginning (mmm)
 6 of course it was a lot, right. We have to understand the technicalities
 7 (mmm), we have to understand the dynamic between colleagues, and if
 8 it's in Norwegian, we literally don't have the same skills as our English
 9 skills, and English is already a second language too, right (mmm) So as
 10 long as I still had that option, I would take it. But over time (mmm) we
 11 would be embarrassed to utilize that opportunity (mmm), you know? It's
 12 okay if we are still asked that in the first year – (yes) But the second year,
 13 the third year I started to think "Please let there be other foreigners in the
 14 room. Don't let me be the only center of –" "Ugh, because of her –"
 15 [...] because I felt like for them to facilitate only one person is just
 16 annoying. I felt like that after several years.

Team work is common in technical or engineering environments. Dewi identified herself as the only international employee in her team of Norwegian engineers. The use of third person plural *they* in contrast with the first person *I* or *we* (referring to herself and me, see the discussion in Excerpt 4) in Excerpt 1 highlights the distance between Dewi and her colleagues. Moreover, the Norwegian courses that she had taken did not help much to navigate her new job (line 6–8), and consequently she felt put in a more marginalized position due to her low Norwegian skills. While Dewi would initially prefer to speak English, she also felt that she was ascribed an identity of a newcomer who did not speak

Norwegian very well by her colleagues; they thus tried to adjust by using English for the first two years (line 3–5). In companies that adopt a local language other than English as the corporate language, English is used as an auxiliary language (Bjørge & Whittaker, 2015). However, after some time, she assumed that her Norwegian colleagues expected her to be able to speak Norwegian (line 15). Her colleagues seemed to tie their expectations of Dewi's language skills to formal level of proficiency (line 1–2). Dewi also perceived this pressure when she was transferred temporarily to another company as a consultant providing engineering services, as she pointed out:

Excerpt 2

- 1 D: I remember, I started in Stavanger in 2019. In 2019 I had *a meeting*,
 2 because my bosses are mostly British (mmm) in Stavanger but they
 3 are really good at Norwegian, they even already have the Stavanger
 4 accent (mmm). Because but because we are both immigrants, we made
 5 a *gentlemen's agreement* (mmm), I said, "If it's just us, we speak English
 6 (mmm) but if we are with the team, we must speak Norwegian" (mmm)
 7 So – but because there is a lot of people who end up being passive like
 8 that. They understand Norwegian, but they still respond *in English*
 9 (mmm), so I don't find it difficult at all (mmm) Until finally I had a
 10 *meeting with offshore* people (mmm) and I said that I was going to
 11 *present technical* matter. I really remember it was early 2019 (mmm) I
 12 could participate in a discussion in Norwegian, but I said, "For the
 13 presentation *I don't think I can convince you in Norwegian* (mmm)
 14 so *I need to switch* to English". And the *offshore* people just said,
 15 it was a really *official meeting* (mmm) they said, "Hmm, *only this time*".
 16 I had never been treated like that in my life (wow) I have done
 17 presentations for the *authorities*, they didn't have any problem if I
 18 *switched* to English (mmm) But with my colleagues offshore, they were
 19 like "*Only this time huh*", like that. So I was there like okay, I can't do
 20 this if I want to work with *offshore* people, I have to speak Norwegian.
 21 It means that I had to be confident because I felt rather insecure, because
 22 I was so passive (mmm) leading all kinds of *meetings* and I still couldn't
 23 speak Norwegian with technical [...] *glossary*.

The teamwork nature of engineering brings her to work with other departments. One time, she had to give a technical presentation to offshore³ workers (line 10–14). Her professional identity was challenged as she did not feel confident to conduct a meeting where she was supposed to use very technical Norwegian. According to Dewi, the language accommodation that she received from her onshore colleagues, however, was not provided by the offshore ones. This provides insight into the power relation between Dewi and the offshore employees. Those who are fluent in the working language, which make up the majority of the employees, have the opportunity to act as gatekeepers and decide what constitutes linguistic capital in their space. The offshore employees used their power and position to establish the use of Norwegian for work, giving Dewi permission to use English only one time. This treatment was particularly surprising for her as seen from her strong reaction, *I had never been treated like that in my life* (line 16). During the second interview I brought up the question of whether gender issues might have played a part in the experiences she recounted, but she did not seem to have given that much thought. From a management point of view, "forced language-switching" in the workplace,

especially in a language that employees do not feel comfortable using, can be considered “an additional implicit or explicit job responsibility that employees must manage” (Seitz & Smith, 2021, p. 2); and failing to handle it well may have negative cognitive and emotional effects. This can also be true for Norwegian-speaking workers forced to switch to English although this is beyond the scope of this study.

This autobiographical account shows that Dewi lost the value of her English linguistic capital and had to gain Norwegian linguistic capital needed for effective communication in the workplace (line 19–23). In this particular professional space with offshore workers, English is not considered a valuable capital (Canagarajah, 2017). It is also important to note that this particular interaction happened in a meeting with an offshore installation manager, the most senior manager of an oil platform. In such a high position in a high-risk job, managers have the responsibility to ensure the health and safety of the crew on board the installation. Thus, using a language that all personnel can understand, in this case Norwegian, is crucial. This also shows that different spaces within this field of engineering have different power relations, ideologies and regimes of legitimacy. The value of linguistic capital is indeed related to a particular “linguistic market”, which is regulated by the situation and social structures of the participants (Bourdieu, 1977). The linguistic market is built on economic relations in which “different languages are attributed different value, composing a dynamic hierarchy of languages and their speakers” (Flubacher et al., 2018, p. 11).

It is worth noting the repetition of the element of time *I remember it was in 2019* (line 1 and 11) which indicates that this particular moment was a turning point of her language learning trajectory and a trigger for Dewi to improve her Norwegian language skills. After several more years working in the company, she now feels more confident to communicate professionally in Norwegian and incorporates it as a part of her identity, as she narrated in the continuation of the previous excerpt:

Excerpt 3

- 1 D: [...] So after that moment, now I finally don't care if it's English or
 2 Norwegian (mmm) And in fact I would feel offended if someone doesn't
 3 want to speak Norwegian with me (aah) This— *that's interesting, right?*
 4 (mmm) If we're still in the beginning (mmm) we feel like “Ugh, you
 5 *don't really facilitate us. Why don't you want to speak English?”* (mmm)
 6 But when you've been here for a long time, “Is my Norwegian so bad
 7 (hahaha) that you don't want to speak Norwegian with me?” I feel
 8 offended that way (yes) Because I say, “I have *meeting* with other people,
 9 your bosses don't have a problem with speaking Norwegian”. Why when
 10 they they say, “*It's okay if you want to speak English to me, it's*
 11 *okay*” I'm offended like (hahaha) “Huh, why?” [...]

There is a discrepancy between Dewi's expectations and some of her colleagues' treatment. She expects that her language proficiency transforms into symbolic capital, hoping that people will legitimize her identity as a Norwegian speaker by not treating her as a newcomer anymore. It is important to note the contrast between Dewi's comments here and in the first excerpt where she mentioned that her colleagues expected her to speak Norwegian after some time. That is, even though she has developed a new identity as a Norwegian speaker, she

describes how some colleagues still position her as an international employee who only speaks English. This may be attributed to her being a “visible minority” (Song, 2020), as she described below.

Excerpt 4 (D – Dewi; A – author)

- 1 A: [...] In your opinion, what changed between that moment with the offshore
2 people and now that you feel confident? What was it?
3 D: [...] There’s a desire *to be part of them* (mmm) We don’t want to, I
4 mean that we obviously as immigrants are already *physically* different
5 (mmm) so I don’t want to make the gap even bigger because I can’t speak
6 the language.

During the interview Dewi mentioned *be part of them* several times. Her desire to belong in Norwegian society expresses an imagined identity (Norton, 2013) which influences her motivation to learn Norwegian. She is aware of her physical appearance that is different from her Norwegian colleagues. Speaking Norwegian is a way for her to be included and regarded as equal. Her physical appearance, however, also makes her a visible minority, or alternatively, a racialized speaking subject (Rosa & Flores, 2017), and affects how other people treat her (i.e. speak English to her). By using the inclusive first-person plural pronoun *we* (line 3 and 4, also appears throughout excerpts 1 and 3), Dewi aligned with me and positioned me in the same category of immigrants. Her choice to identify as a Norwegian speaker does not always seem to lead to belonging in the workplace, as it is constrained by the ideologies that categorize different kinds of speakers, such as the association of English with “foreignness.”

4.2 Firman: Between the Scandinavian dialect continuum and positive stress

Firman is in his early forties and currently works as a senior engineer. In the mid-2000s, when there was a high demand for petroleum engineers, he migrated to Norway as a fixed-term employee in a multinational energy company and became a permanent employee a year later. I asked him about his motivation to move to Norway and Firman told me that he had always wanted to move and work in another country. The much higher salary and good work-life balance attracted him to Norway and he did not consider the effort to learn a new language a deterring factor.

At his workplace at that time, his co-workers were mostly international, so English was used as the working and social language. His trajectory as a Norwegian language learner began in his second year when he took the initiative to attend Norwegian language courses provided by the company. However, he did not have many opportunities to practice since English was always used at work and widely used in the city where he lived. Consequently, his Norwegian learning progress remained stagnant.

Several years later, the multinational company was acquired by a Norwegian company and underwent a merger. The company became ‘Norwegianized’ as the working language in his department shifted from English to Norwegian even though the company’s official language is still English. This event marked a milestone in Firman’s language learning trajectory as he finally had the opportunity to use the Norwegian he had been learning. At the same time, this transition period was particularly stressful for him. Even though the company

offered language courses, which Firman took advantage of, the offer was available only in the first year of the merger. Firman had to find other ways to improve his Norwegian language skills while adapting to the new working environment. He tried to join online language courses, but online learning was not as effective as in-person learning for him. He also tried to learn by himself by consuming various media in Norwegian, including the internet, news, and television programs.

The merger also brought together many international employees from different companies. Although Firman had to quickly adapt to the use of Norwegian in the new working space, he noted that some of his Anglophone colleagues could continue to use English as the Norwegian colleagues would gladly switch to English in their presence. Firman believed that his Norwegian colleagues considered the presence of the Anglophone colleagues an opportunity to practice their English, thus they did not put pressure on them to speak Norwegian. Firman argued that even if he speaks English, he is not considered as a suitable English language speaking partner by the Norwegian colleagues because it is not his first language. However, his Norwegian language skills at that time were still limited and he preferred to use English. He attributed this unequal accommodation to his race/ethnicity, as he narrated below:

Excerpt 5 (F – Firman; A – author)

- 1 A: How do you feel about the difference in their treatment like that?
 2 F: I used to be like “Why are they so weird? How come is there such a level
 3 difference, huh?” But after a while I don’t really care anymore. [...] It’s
 4 an open secret actually, if we’re from Asia (mmm) they tend to expect
 5 that we’re already capable, we should be able to learn Norwegian. But
 6 if we’re white, we’re from UK or from America (mmm) they don’t really
 7 expect us to be able to speak Norwegian. That’s what I—
 8 A: Why?
 9 F: That’s what I understood for more than ten years here. So the expectations
 10 for us who are newcomers from Asia, they expect us to want to learn
 11 Norwegian faster.

There is a perceived hierarchy between Norwegian colleagues, Anglophone colleagues, and him. This can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, the Norwegian colleagues indirectly positioned him as an illegitimate English speaker whose linguistic capital is not valued. The fact that the local colleagues did not switch to English with Firman suggests raciolinguistic ideologies (Rosa & Flores, 2017) that stigmatize Firman as an inferior English speaker, even when he does not lack proficiency in English. On the other hand, they also ascribed him an identity as a capable Norwegian speaker, positioning him as a legitimate Norwegian speaker. Firman resisted this racialized treatment and perceived it as a “positive stress” that pushes him to learn Norwegian more, as he narrated in Excerpt 6 below. He asserted his identity as a Norwegian speaker. He commented that if his department had not changed the working language, he would not have been able to reach his current intermediate Norwegian level.

Excerpt 6

- 1 F: [...] If all of a sudden everything changes using English (mmm) eh

- 2 Norwegian, yes, of course everyone is stressed (yes) But if the stress maybe
 3 the stress is positive, whether we want it or not, we are *pressured* (mmm) to
 4 study (mmm) Because if we had kept using English in the office, maybe
 5 I wouldn't have reached B1 level (mmm) that's for sure (yes)

Similar to Dewi's situation, Firman is also the only international employee in his engineering team. As an onshore engineer, he has to work together with offshore colleagues who mostly come from Denmark. Part of his job consists of maintenance and follow-up work for offshore employees through daily meetings, which turn out to be linguistically complex. As Firman described, the Norwegian and Danish colleagues communicate in their own languages during meetings, because Norwegian and Danish are both part of the Scandinavian dialect continuum and mutually intelligible. This expected mutual intelligibility among Scandinavian speakers is a result of the "historically rooted sense of inter-Scandinavian identity" (Røyneland & Lanza, 2020, p. 11). This language ideology may create a challenge for learners of Norwegian as they are expected to acquire a broad range of linguistic varieties, including various Norwegian dialects and other Scandinavian languages. Even though the Danish colleagues try to adjust their speech to be closer to Norwegian, Firman still has a hard time understanding them. Additionally, there is a considerable difference between the Norwegian that he learnt in the classroom and the one he encounters in his workplace. His Norwegian linguistic capital is limited to the Eastern Norwegian dialect, so he has difficulty understanding other dialects.

In Firman's department, all office communication and meetings are conducted in Norwegian. However, monolingual practices are not enforced as he can opt for English for written communication such as documents and presentation slides. These multimodal and multilingual communication modes are employed by Firman as a learner's way to "shift codes, practices, and strategies while moving across spaces" (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 48).

He also uses English instead of Norwegian to write work packages, which are subsets of a project that he has to assign to other departments, mainly offshore. Firman first stated that this strategy was used to avoid misunderstanding and to save time because this type of document can be lengthy. However, later in the interview, it was revealed that in addition to practical reasons, there is also an ideological basis for his choice of using English in written communication.

Excerpt 7

- 1 F: [...] If we look at someone, for example, if someone writes – they're not
 2 smart in writing, but they write in English with a lot of *grammatical* errors,
 3 doesn't it hurt the eyes too? Hahaha (yes hehehe) That's just what I'm afraid
 4 of, if I write a lot in Norwegian (mmm) it's a bit – no, because you can see
 5 which person is new, who is still learning to write in Norwegian and people
 6 who are actually from here, very different.

This excerpt portrays how Firman's identity as a long-term resident of Norway is conflicted with his own standard language ideology (Gal, 2006) and desire to avoid errors. Firman equates grammatical correctness with native-like Norwegian, hence idealizing authenticity and legitimacy (Irvine & Gal, 2000). At the same time, the choice of using English perpetuates his identity as a foreigner who does not speak Norwegian.

As time goes by, Firman now assumes an identity of a capable Norwegian speaker who is able to carry out most of his work in Norwegian. Despite this, he still wants to keep improving his language skills out of personal interest. Nevertheless, juggling a heavy workload in the office and family responsibilities turns out to be an obstacle to enrolling in a more advanced language course. He continues to sharpen his Norwegian skills in the workplace using various strategies. In general, he is now able to understand almost everything discussed in Norwegian during meetings. He sometimes resorts to asking colleagues for clarification or corrections but is often reluctant to do this because he does not want to bother his colleagues as he knows that everybody is busy. Therefore, he does not see the workplace as an appropriate place to ask for language help but rather would try to find the answer himself or use a technical dictionary to search for difficult terms.

I asked whether Firman was interested in being promoted to higher managerial positions. Notwithstanding all the efforts made to improve his Norwegian, Firman stated that he is not very ambitious to advance his career in order to accumulate symbolic capital. Firman narrated that,

Excerpt 8

- 1 F: [...] I am not too grandiose to pursue my career. Because if I want to pursue
 2 my career, if I have language difficulty, not *fluent*, yes it is difficult (mmm)
 3 No matter how hard I try, I will not be able to be *fluent* in Norwegian hahaha
 4 it seems. [...] As long as I still work here, I am happy. [...] Being a manager
 5 is also different because they must be smart to talk to all their *subordinates*
 6 well (mmm) And people have different *styles* (mmm) For me, I prefer, for
 7 such communication, to be fluent, really have to use Norwegian.

Firman considers higher job positions, especially managerial ones, to entail greater responsibilities and require high proficiency in Norwegian. An engineering manager is in charge of planning, organizing, and leading actions necessary to ensure the safety and efficiency of operations. To guide a team of engineers, a manager has to possess excellent skills in communication, negotiation, and organization, all of which demand a good command in the working language. The more communicative nature of these positions discourages Firman who is insecure in his language ability as it would create an additional mental load for him to use Norwegian for a longer period. At the same time, it also shows Firman's satisfaction with his identity as senior engineer. Considering this, Firman's willingness to learn and invest in Norwegian does not seem to lead to professional advancement.

5 Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed to answer the following questions: (1) How and why do migrant workers invest in learning the Norwegian language? (2) How is the investment in learning Norwegian related to their language learning trajectories? The findings of this case study illustrate that there is an interrelatedness between migration trajectories and language ideologies, identity, and capital in the migrant engineers' investment in learning the Norwegian language. The

participants' autobiographical accounts show that different work spaces result in different ideologies at play and shifting value of capital over time.

This case study shows that the status of English as the world language and lingua franca in international business is challenged by some multinational companies in a non-English speaking country like Norway. Unclear language expectations create both subtle and explicit pressure for the international employees to communicate in the local language. In Dewi's case, the unclear expectation of which language is used for work created challenges for her because she did not have sufficient Norwegian language skills and her English language capital was devalued. Meanwhile, in Firman's case, his investment in learning Norwegian resulted from the unofficial 'Norwegianization' of the company after the merger shifted the working language from English to Norwegian. While a number of studies have shown that international white-collar workers' non-acquisition of the local language is tolerable (Ladegaard, 2020; Sherman & Homoláč, 2020), this study suggests that this is not always the case.

Both participants brought English as their linguistic capital when they moved across borders and it served as a "head start" in the new country (Iikkanen, 2019). However, although English proficiency is often regarded as a key to success in professional life, this value shifted in some Norwegian workplaces as Norwegian is considered more valuable and used as an additional working language. Although English was crucial for Dewi and Firman to begin working in Norway, over time they both found that it was not sufficient. The dialect diversity in Norway also creates a situation where learning Norwegian entails acquiring competence in a wide range of linguistic varieties, from various Norwegian dialects to other Scandinavian languages. This language ideology can create a challenge for the international employees who are expected to understand all these varieties.

Both Dewi and Firman invest in learning Norwegian as an asset for constructing professional and social identities and as a means to gain more capital. They learn Norwegian to be able to do their job well and to gain economic capital. Speaking Norwegian is also a way for them to create a sense of belonging in Norwegian society, which can generate symbolic capital. However, their efforts to invest in learning Norwegian do not always translate into a sense of belonging and integration in all work contexts due to ideologies that put learners in different categories of speakers. In this case, because of their different physical appearance, the Indonesian engineers are sometimes positioned as racialized speaking subjects (Rosa & Flores, 2017) by their fellow employees. As Ramjattan (2019) points out, "racialized groups can be generally perceived to not speak particular language(s) (varieties) well in spite of their actual proficiency" (p. 729). This resonates with findings from research on different language learning contexts (e.g. Djuraeva et al., 2022 for school settings) that shows that racialized identities and investment are related. In this case, we see how Firman experiences his colleagues' raciolinguistic ideologies to impact how he is treated, and the conditions under which he must invest in Norwegian. The interconnection between language and race has been investigated mainly in educational contexts, especially in North America. This study highlights that raciolinguistic ideologies also exist in the workplace as the participants perceived that they are positioned (and othered) by their colleagues based on their race.

It also appears that both participants hit a glass ceiling of belonging and career progression. Ideologies in the workplace indeed shape the “expectations of performance and impose norms and ways of doing” (Angouri & Humonen, 2022, p. 22) which may impede some workers to advance in their careers, especially migrant workers. In a welfare state like Norway, equality and inclusiveness are highly regarded, and these values are also embedded in the workplace culture (van Riemsdijk et al., 2016). However, workplaces are still characterized by an unequal distribution of power, and language plays a significant role in establishing power structures (Welch et al., 2005). In their study of a major research and development organization in Norway, Bjørge and Whittaker (2015) found that the choice to use Norwegian over English has consequences for “the power relation between local and international workers, as some career paths within the organization are closely linked to proficiency in the local language” (p. 153). The findings of this study provide further insights into how these unequal power relations occur in Norwegian workplaces, which could also be relevant for similar workplaces in other countries.

Using the investment model as a basis for analysis, this study shows that investing in language learning is not always enough to create a sense of belonging and career progression for migrant workers. Language learning is not a linear process; the participants’ investment in learning Norwegian increased over time but this does not translate to complete legitimacy as a speaker. Similarly to findings in a study of Finnish as a second language speakers (Ruuska, 2020), despite the participants’ high proficiency, their speakerhood was still questioned by colleagues and the ideologies at play in their context. Investment in language learning does not always rely on individual agency, but also depends on bigger contextual and structural factors such as those within modern and complex multinational companies. While a large number of studies have mainly focused on newly arrived migrants, the cases presented in this article show the importance of studying in more detail motivated, highly competent learners, especially of languages other than English. This also leads to other questions: What makes it difficult for second language learners to be legitimate professional speakers? While English has been increasingly used in many professional settings, will it ever be possible to become professional users of languages other than English, in this case Norwegian?

The findings from this small-scale study of personal language investment and trajectories over time and across spaces are an entry-point for further investigation of the lived experience of international employees in multinational companies where a local language other than English is used as the working language. The increase in mobility and participation in transnational networks of communication has made migrants come into various social and linguistic spaces and each of these spaces has “its own language regime – its own set of rules, orders of discourse, and language ideologies – in which linguistic resources are assessed differently” (Busch, 2017, p. 343). This study, by closely examining the lived language learning experience of international employees, sheds new light on the opportunities and obstacles associated with employees’ multilingual reality at work, which in turn may help companies to manage language issues strategically. It is important, however, to note that the results of this study are not to be interpreted as evidence that migrant workers should not learn the language of the country where they live, but rather to highlight the importance of setting clear language expectations for employees, especially for

the international ones. When there is a change in the language policy (official or not), workplaces should support employees' language learning efforts continuously and acknowledge that it is a very challenging and time-consuming process. Learning a language in the workplace is indeed complex as it entails not only specialized and technical vocabulary and specific genres and language functions, but also social and professional interactions at work (Yates, 2017).

While this article examined migrants in a specific engineering environment, the complexities of modern multilingual workplaces are common in other sectors. Future research into the language learning processes of international employees can benefit from ethnographic methods such as participant observation in the field. In addition to interviews, participant observation would provide a more in-depth understanding of the actual language practices in the workplace. While racialization of identities among lower skilled workers has been increasingly studied, more investigation of highly skilled workers is needed, especially in relation to marginalization and inequality in the workplace and a possible glass ceiling of career advancement. Moreover, even though the participants of this study did not explicitly address it, considering that the energy sector is still male-dominated (Center for Research on Gender Equality, 2020), the power relation at the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity is also an important aspect to examine further. The triangulation of such approaches could give a deeper insight into migrant worker's lived experience of language.

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Endnotes

¹ English words and phrases are frequently inserted into colloquial Indonesian speech, especially among educated speakers (Sneddon, 2002). Meanwhile, Norwegian was used for Norwegian-specific concepts.

² Transcription conventions:

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| " " | Reported speech |
| [...] | Omission |
| () | Backchannels |
| – | Self-interruption or interruption by another speaker |
| Roman type | English translation from Indonesian |
| <i>Italics type</i> | Original speech in languages other than Indonesian |

³ In the energy industry, the term offshore refers to “operations taking place along a coastline or in open ocean waters” (Cleveland & Morris, 2015). Most energy engineers work onshore or on land, where they are in charge with design, planning, and project management, and occasionally visit offshore installations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Transcripts in the original languages

Excerpt 1

- 1 D: [...] ekspektasi kolega-kolega itu sangat tinggi, “Lo kan udah lulus ini,
 2 lulus itu, kok lo masih gak ngomong sama kita?” Gak
 3 pede gitu aku, karena kayak setahun dua tahun pertama, kolega kita pasti
 4 akan selalu tanya kalau *we are the only foreigner in the room*. Mereka akan selalu
 5 tanya, “*English? Norwegian?*” gitu kan (aah) Dan awal-awal (mmm)
 6 tentunya, itu kan banyak banget ya, kita mesti ngerti *technical*-nya
 7 (mmm), kita mesti ngerti *dynamic within colleagues*, terus kalau
 8 itu bahasa *Norway* yang *literally* gak sama sama kemampuan bahasa Inggris kita,
 9 *which is* bahasa Inggris udah bahasa kedua juga kan (mmm) Jadi selama
 10 aku masih punya *option* itu, aku akan ambil. Tapi seiring waktu (mmm) kita
 11 akan malu *utilize that opportunity* (mmm), ngerti gak?
 12 Kalau setahun pertama oke lah (iya) kita ditanya gitu masih- tapi tahun kedua,
 13 tahun ketiga, itu udah mulai, “*Please ada foreigner* lain dong di
 14 ruangan, jangan gue doang gitu lo, yang jadi pusat-” “Ah, gara-gara dia kita jadi-”
 15 [...] karena aku ngerasa *for them to facilitate only one* tuh *just*
 16 *annoying* gitu lo. Karena ya aku ngerasain itu setelah beberapa tahun.

Excerpt 2

1 D: Aku inget, aku mulai di Stavanger itu di 2019. 2019 aku *meeting*,
 2 karena bos aku kebanyakan orang Inggris (mmm) di Stavanger, tapi mereka
 3 jago banget bahasa *Norway*-nya, dan itu bahkan udah aksen Stavanger (mmm)
 4 tapi karena kita sama-sama pendatang, kita kayak bikin
 5 *gentlemen agreement* (mmm) Aku bilang, "Kalau kita berdua, kita bahasa Inggris
 6 (mmm), tapi kalau kita sama tim, kita harus bahasa *Norway*" gitu (mmm)
 7 Jadi, tapi karena ada banyak juga yang akhirnya mereka kayak pasif gitu.
 8 Mereka ngerti bahasa *Norway*, tapi mereka tetep *respond in English*
 9 (mmm), jadi aku gak merasa sama sekali kesulitan gitu (mmm)
 10 Sampai akhirnya aku *meeting* sama orang *offshore* (mmm) dan aku bilang,
 11 "Kalau aku *present technical*," aku inget banget, 2019 awal (mmm) aku
 12 kalau diskusi bisa, tapi aku bilang, "Kalau
 13 presentasi *I don't think I can convince you in Norwegian*" (mmm)
 14 "jadi *I need to switch*." Dan itu orang *offshore* cuma bilang,
 15 itu beneran *official meeting* (mmm) mereka bilang, "Hmm, *only this time*".
 16 Aku gak pernah digituin seumur hidup aku (waduh). Bahwa aku pernah
 17 *present* ke *authority* (mmm) mereka gak ada masalah aku
 18 *switch* (mmm), tapi sama kolega aku *offshore*, mereka
 19 "*Only this time, ya*" gitu. Jadi aku di situ bener-bener "Oke, gua gak bisa nih
 20 kalau gua mau kerja sama orang-orang *offshore*, gua harus bisa bahasa *Norway*".
 21 dalam artian harus pede, karena aku lebih gak pede, karena
 22 aku pasif gitu (mmm), memimpin *meeting* segala macem tuh aku masih belum
 23 bisa dalam bahasa *Norway* dengan teknik [...] *glossary*.

Excerpt 3

1 D: jadi setelah momen itu, sekarang akhirnya aku udah, mau Inggris mau
 2 *Norway* terserah (mmm), dan justru aku tersinggung kalau orangnya
 3 gak mau pake bahasa *Norway* sama aku (aah) Jadi ini- *that's interesting, right?*
 4 (mmm) Kalau orang yang masih awal (mmm) kita kayak ngerasa "Ih, *you*
 5 *don't facilitate us* banget, sih? Kok lu gak mau berbahasa Inggris?" (mmm)
 6 Tapi ketika lo udah lama di sini, "Bahasa *Norway* gue sejelek itu lo
 7 gak mau (hahaha) pakai bahasa *Norway* sama gue?" Kan jadi
 8 tersinggung (iya) gitu lo. Karena gue bilang, "Gue *meeting* sama yang lain,
 9 bos-bos lu gak masalah mereka", kenapa ketika
 10 dia dia bilang, "*It's ok, if you want to speak English with me, it's*
 11 *ok*", jadi aku jadi yang tersinggung gitu kan (hahaha), "Hah, kenapa?" [...]

Excerpt 4

1 A: [...] Menurut Mbak, apa yang bikin berubah antara momen itu sampai
 2 sekarang bisa pede tuh, apa sih yang ini?
 3 D: [...] Ada rasa kepengin *be part of them* ya (mmm), kita kan gak mau,
 4 maksudnya, kita tuh udah jelas sebagai pendatang itu *physically* beda gitu lo,
 5 (mmm) jadi aku gak mau bikin jurang itu tambah besar lagi dengan aku gak bisa
 6 bahasanya gitu.

Excerpt 5

1 A: Tapi Bapak perasaannya gimana dengan perbedaan perlakuan seperti itu?
 2 F: Dulu sih memang seperti, "Kok aneh ya mereka? Kok seperti ada
 3 perbedaan level gitu ya?" Tapi lama-lama saya sih gak terlalu peduli lagi. [...]

- 4 Sudah jadi rahasia umum sih sebenarnya kalau kita dari Asia (mmm), cenderung
5 ekspektasinya itu kita sudah bisa, harus bisa untuk belajar bahasa *Norway*. Tapi
6 kalau kita dari kulit putih, kita dari UK atau dari Amerika (mmm), mereka gak
7 terlalu ekspektasi bisa bahasa *Norway*. Itu apa yang saya-
8 A: Kenapa?
9 F: Itu yang saya tangkap selama lebih dari sepuluh tahun di sini. Jadi ekspektasi
10 untuk kita yang pendatang dari Asia, mereka ekspektasinya kita mau belajar
11 bahasa *Norway* lebih cepat.

Excerpt 6

- 1 F: [...] Kalau tiba-tiba berubah semua pakai bahasa Inggris ya (mmm) eh
2 bahasa *Norway* ya pasti semua stres (iya) Tapi kalau stresnya mungkin
3 stresnya positif, kan mau gak mau kita di-*pressure* (mmm) supaya
4 belajar (mmm) Karena kalau misalnya kita di kantor masih pakai bahasa Inggris,
5 mungkin saya gak bisa sampai level B1 (mmm) itu pasti (iya)

Excerpt 7

- 1 F: Kalau kita liat orang, misalkan orang nulis dia gak pintar
2 tapi dia nulis pakai bahasa Inggris yang salah banyak *grammatic*,
3 kan sakit juga di mata, kan? Hahaha (iya hehehe) Itu saya cuma takut seperti itu,
4 kalau saya tulis banyak-banyak di *Norway* (mmm) agak- gak, karena keliatan
5 orang yang mana yang orang baru, baru ngerti bahasa Norway nulis sama orang-
6 orang yang emang orang di sini, beda jauh.

Excerpt 8

- 1 F: [...] Gak terlalu muluk-muluk untuk ngejar karir. Karena kalau ngejar
2 karir, kalau bahasanya susah, gak *fluent*, ya susah juga (mmm).
3 Mau berapa keras pun usaha gak akan bisa *fluent* untuk bahasa *Norway* hahaha
4 sepertinya. [...] Selagi masih kerja di sini, saya merasa senang. [...] Ya manajer
5 juga beda lagi, karena harus pintar untuk berbicara sama semua *subordinate*-nya
6 dengan bagus (mmm) *Style* orang kan beda-beda (mmm) Saya cenderung untuk
7 komunikasi seperti itu, untuk lancar, harus benar-benar pakai bahasa *Norway*