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The importance of Language Management Strategies in the internationalization process of small, high-tech companies: the Components Engine case

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Introduction

Ever since we entered the age of economic globalization, in which economy and business are developing rapidly, economic exchanges between countries and regions are becoming increasingly common. Indeed, a huge number of enterprises worldwide are looking for new growth opportunities beyond their home country's borders. In order to be able to access foreign markets, more and more companies engage in international trade, namely the sale and purchase of capital, services, and goods across national borders, which can be done by governments or companies that manage to operate successfully on an international scale (Samue 2009). Considering that historically international trade has existed since the barter system, a massive number of scholars have analyzed the topic over the centuries, to the extent that endless theories have been formulated to explain its main phenomena - why companies decide to engage in international trade, how they choose the target markets, which entry strategies they adopt to access foreign countries, and which strategies they must implement to operate successfully abroad are just some examples. More specifically, until the 1970s the internationalization of companies as a research topic concerned mostly multinational companies, rather than small-and-medium enterprises, mainly due to trade barriers that had existed up to the 90s of the 20th century (Daszkiewicz and Wach 2010). To overcome those barriers, companies had to be properly equipped and structured in terms of financial capital, personnel, and skills – qualities that SMEs often did not possess. However, thanks to trade agreements that aimed at lowering governmental barriers and restrictions to the movements of goods and services across countries, also SMEs started to trade freely and at lower costs to such an extent that nowadays they account for the majority of businesses worldwide. This is the main reason why international economists' attitudes toward the internationalization of companies began to change by focusing their attention precisely on small and medium-sized enterprises.

After examining and evaluating the diverse classical theories of internationalization, it has been decided to build the dissertation around the streams of research based on the conceptualizations emanated by the Uppsala School in the mid-to-late 1970s. Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) and Johanson and Vahlne (1977, 1990), argue that companies' participation in a particular foreign market develops according to an

“establishment chain theory”, meaning that enterprises adopt gradual, slow, and incremental approaches to going international. More specifically, they find out that companies generally start their expansion in a physically and psychically nearby market, where market uncertainty is lower. Once they have reached enough experience and knowledge of that market and acquired more control of resources, they gradually expand to more distant markets. The most common way to enter a new market is through export activities, and the establishment of a foreign sales subsidiary or foreign production happens only later. Therefore, the Uppsala model emphasizes the positive correlation between market knowledge and market commitment and also takes into account cultural aspects: only after accumulating enough knowledge, experience, and know-how in the domestic market companies can expand their business abroad.

However, there are also academic articles that show different results. New empirical studies on small international firms proposed by Moen (2004), Aspelund and Moen (2004), Bell (1995), and Coviello and Munro (1997) show that over the last decade, advances in ICT have boosted significantly the process of exporting goods and services to international markets. They identify a huge number of firms that internationalized extremely rapidly in a trend not consistent with the slow process described by the Uppsala School. Therefore, they demonstrate that Uppsala's models are much too deterministic because internationalization is highly situation-specific and unique. Especially in the case of service-intensive industries and high-technology firms, enterprises do not necessarily adopt incremental approaches to access foreign markets, as they may omit stages to accelerate the internationalization process. In addition, they highlight the emerging trend of SMEs to compete in international markets even before establishing a solid home market, as neither the age nor the size of companies influences their decision to internationalize. Finally, they show that there is a limited correlation between the firms' international experience and their foreign entry form, as companies do not follow pre-determined and specific strategies to access foreign countries. To sum up, all these new insights into the internationalization process of small, high-tech firms aim at explaining how ICT has contributed to reducing entry barriers and geographical distance.

Nevertheless, looking at the existing literature on this topic, there is no clear answer to the question of whether ICT and the advent of the Internet are enough resources to successfully overcome cultural and linguistic barriers as well. Indeed, in such a dynamic

business environment where international trade has almost become an obligation for companies, language needs to be considered a topic of major relevance in managing international enterprises. Existing studies conducted by the European Commission (ELAN 2006; PIMLICO Project 2011) surveyed a number of SMEs with the objective of understanding which are the best practices to adopt for successful Language Management and how vital they are for companies to operate successfully abroad and increase their total turnover. However, up to now, no previous research has combined studies on Language Management Strategies with studies on the internationalization process of small, computer software enterprises.

This dissertation focuses on studying one small computer software firm and its internationalization experience mostly from a linguistic and cultural perspective. More specifically, on one hand, the research will investigate how the firm has internationalized, with the main objective of determining whether the advance of ICT has overcome the stage theories of internationalization proposed by the Uppsala School. On the other hand, the same experience will be explored by focusing on the company's language management, with the aim of assessing the importance of language practices when entering foreign markets, which represents the real cause of the company's international success.

The company in question is Components Engine, a small, Italian, software-developing company specializing in developing software solutions for manufacturing companies with the aim of improving, simplifying, and optimizing their after-sales service. With its origins and headquarters in Cesena, a small town in the north-east of Italy, in just a few years the company has managed to enter several foreign markets and build up a very large customer base, most of them from countries other than Italy. Nowadays, Components Engine has a strong international presence and operates in 5 continents and 32 countries, with around 400 customers worldwide. The choice of this company as the object of study for this dissertation is based on several reasons. First of all, the idea came about during my 6-month internship period at Components Engine, where I am currently working in the International Customer Care department with a permanent contract. From the beginning, what impressed and intrigued me was witnessing how such a limited company in terms of financial and human resources was able to expand its presence so extensively abroad. After a variety of research, it became very clear that much of its success was not

due to investments in the facilities or products, but in its language strategies. Therefore, I decided to make it a case study for my dissertation and to combine my interest in economics with my vocation and passion for foreign languages. This led to the idea of combining the topic of internationalization with the adoption of Language Management Strategies, with the aim of demonstrating how crucial language practices are for a small company to succeed in becoming a globally recognized international player. In addition, Components Engine has several features that make it ideal for this case study: it is a small high-tech, software-developing company; despite its very small size and limited knowledge of international markets, the company internationalized extremely rapidly even before establishing a solid home market; it is an international company, meaning that it exports its software solutions to several countries worldwide; the countries in which the company has established a market position are culturally and linguistically different; it has adopted and continues to adopt several Language Management Strategies to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers that arise daily in international trade.

This study uses a qualitative case study approach to investigate the company's internationalization process and its Language Management Strategies, which was the best method of investigation to gather an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a firm-specific experience. As for the methodological approach, the research data in this thesis is drawn from three main sources: interviews, questionnaires, and internal and external corporate documentation. The primary source of data was one-to-one, semi-structured interviews conducted with three members of the Components Engine's personnel, to collect rich information and draw much more detailed conclusions. In addition to interviews, a questionnaire was submitted to the remaining employees of the company to gather highly-detailed insights into the Language Management Strategies adopted by the company to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. Finally, the company's documentation such as projects, list of customers, reports, and financial statements have been crucial to demonstrate the benefits that the adoption of Language Management Strategies has on the company's revenue.

The importance and originality of this study are that it explores a major research topic, namely the internationalization process of small firms, from a new perspective, that is their Language Management Strategies for dealing with communication problems. Understanding that the investment in effective language practices is directly proportional

to the company's greater export sales growth is the key to becoming a successful player in international trade. Therefore, this study makes a major contribution to research on internationalization by demonstrating that it is true that advances in ICT and high technology are key resources for business internationalization, but they are not enough to face one of the most frequent obstacles that usually prevent companies from internationalizing, namely language and cultural barriers.

Nevertheless, the reader should always bear in mind that the study is based on one single company and its unique experience. Therefore, to validate the findings of the present study, future research on other specific individual cases will be needed with the goal of comparing them through cross-case analysis and identifying general trends. Another potential problem is that since the thesis is based on qualitative rather than quantitative research, evidence analysis is highly individualistic and the collected data has been subjectively interpreted because the main focus is on using data to answer specific research questions. Once again, it should be stressed that to find universal answers, it would be necessary to weave together the data and results from different case studies to extrapolate general rules that describe multiple realities.

The overall structure of the study takes the form of five chapters, which develop through deductive reasoning, namely from the general to the specific. The first section gives a theoretical historical-economic framework for the research. It provides an overview of international trade and its main classical theories according to various economists, including Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Eli Heckscher, Bertil Ohlin, Raymond Vernon, and Paul Krugman. Afterward, it has been introduced the concept of internationalization of MNEs through the hypotheses of Stephen Hymer, Raymond Vernon, Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul, Johanson and Vahlne, John Dunning, and H. Igor Ansoff. Chapter 2 narrows the above-mentioned theoretical field by focusing on the internationalization process of SMEs, as over the last decades they have become very important players in international trade. Subsequently, special attention is given to the internationalization of small software-developing companies, as according to existing literature they internationalize in a trend not consistent with the slow processes proposed by most classical theories of internationalization. In the specific case of this dissertation, special attention was paid to the theories emanated by the Uppsala School in the mid-to-late 1970s, as among all existing classical theories, Uppsala conceptualizations are the ones

that best succeed in explaining the foreign expansion process of the company chosen for the case study. In addition, since the Uppsala model is based on “stage” theories of internationalization, its basic propositions have been challenged by new empirical studies on small high-tech, service-intensive firms’ internationalization. The third Chapter is concerned with the importance of adopting Language Management Strategies to face linguistic and cultural obstacles that arise every day in international trade. The section explores which language strategies are most effective according to recent studies conducted by the European Commission and statistically shows the benefits they bring to companies in terms of increased exports and total turnover. The fourth section analyzes the theoretical dimensions of the previous three chapters through the data collected from field research. The case study examines the internationalization process of *Components Engine*, a small, Italian software-developing company, by focusing on its Language Management Strategies. This section is organized in the following way: first, it describes the research approach used to develop the study; next, it lists and explains the multiple data sources used to gather information. To conclude, Chapter 5 describes in detail the company subject of study by focusing on the company profile, the company history, the company’s products, and the company’s markets. Afterward, it presents the empirical findings of the research, focusing on the three key themes of this dissertation. The first one relates to the internationalization experience of Components Engine, with the aim of understanding whether small high-tech companies such as Components Engine can be described as “born global” companies as argued by Moen (2004), Aspelund and Moen (2004), Bell (1995), and Coviello and Munro (1997). The following section illustrates the Language Management Strategies adopted by the company, with the goal of figuring out whether the company was able to internationalize solely by making use of ICT, or whether Language Management Strategies were also indispensable and unavoidable. Finally, the closing paragraph relies on the data extracted from financial statements to graphically illustrate how much the company has benefited from the implementation of Language Management Strategies. Not only Components Engine is generally more successful in foreign markets but also achieves greater export sales growth, which undoubtedly increases the company’s total production value.

Chapter 1 – Globalization, international trade, and internationalization of companies

Over the last 40 years, since about 1980, there has been unprecedented global economic integration. This process, commonly known as the *New wave of globalization*, refers to the “growing interdependence of countries resulting from the increasing integration of trade, finance, people, and ideas in one global marketplace” (Dzaleva and Lazaroski 2011).

Globalization has existed since around 1870 and has been historically divided into three main “waves”: the first wave goes from 1870 to 1914, the second wave from 1945 to 1980, and the third wave from 1980 until the present day (World Bank and Oxford University Press 2002). The whole process has been influenced over the years by two main driving forces: ICT, an innovation that has lowered the costs of communication, computation, and transportation, leading to the so-called “death of distance” (Cairncross 1997), and increasing liberalization of trade and capital markets, meaning that more and more governments decide not to protect their economies from foreign competition, promoting free trade instead. International institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which was replaced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, have helped this process by opposing protectionism. However, what distinguishes the last wave of globalization from the two previous ones, is the rise of international migration and capital movements, which were negligible during the second wave of globalization, and the involvement of a large group of developing countries in global markets (World Bank 2002). An ever-growing number of developing countries – also referred to as “new globalizers” – have succeeded to harness their labor abundance and gain a competitive advantage in labor-intensive manufactures and services over a very short period. Proof of this is given by William Martin (2001), who demonstrated that in 1980 only 25% of the exports of developing countries were manufactures, whereas by 1988 this value has risen up to 80%. Developing countries’ export of services constitutes another substantial change. According to the World Bank (2002), in the early 1980s, commercial services made up only 9% of the exports of new globalizers, whereas during the third wave of globalization the share of services almost doubled to 17%.

In conclusion, in such a dynamic and integrated business environment, companies increasingly want to be able to access international markets, which can open up new opportunities for business development. Thus, international trade appears to be supported by the process of globalization, with markets that transcend national borders.

1.1. Overview of international trade

“International trade” refers to the sale and purchase of capital, services, and goods across national borders, and it can be done by governments or companies that manage to operate successfully on an international scale (Samue 2009). From a historical point of view, the existence of trade dates back to the barter system¹, which was replaced between the 16th and 17th centuries by mercantilism, an “economic theory and practice common in Europe from the 16th to the 18th century that promoted governmental regulation of a nation’s economy for the purpose of augmenting state power at the expense of rival national powers”². So, if initially people used to produce everything they needed locally, modern economic conditions, technological innovation, enhancement of transport, and media led many companies to operate not only domestically, but also internationally. Therefore, before the capitalistic period³, even if trade between states already existed, it was not yet such a widespread phenomenon, as it was mainly based on national specialization, meaning the production of goods based on their own resources. Consequently, along with the development of capitalism, the relationships and interdependencies between world states were amplified, mainly thanks to the international division of labor that led to an international specialization, the support axle of international relations between different economies (Terzea 2016).

International trade differs from domestic business for multiple reasons. Although there are many cultural, social, political, and economic differences even within countries, such

¹ An economy in which goods are directly exchanged for other goods without the use of a medium of exchange (*A Dictionary of Economics*. Oxford. 2009. Online).

² Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "mercantilism." Encyclopedia Britannica, December 1, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/mercantilism>.

³ Although antecedents of capitalist institutions already existed in the ancient world, capitalism as a system dates only from the 16th century (Boettke, P. J. and Heilbroner, . Robert L.. "capitalism." Encyclopedia Britannica, August 18, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/capitalism>.), and according to Jonathan Levy (2017) it was only at the turn of the 20th century that the term “capitalism” came into wide usage.

differences are usually less marked than those among countries. Therefore, companies that aim to conduct business abroad successfully must often alter the type of business activity they are accustomed to domestically to adapt to the foreign environment. This does not mean that a company necessarily needs to become a multinational enterprise to participate in the international market, but all a company has to do is perform any exchange of goods, services, or capital outside its home country, directly or indirectly. Unsurprisingly, export is one of the most traditional methods to enter and operate in a foreign market. Since the world has rapidly shifted toward a highly integrated global economy, more and more companies, both large and small, are becoming international businesses. As a consequence, company managers are required to lead an international business in a different way from that of a purely domestic business mainly due to major differences across countries, and therefore they must also adapt the proper policies and strategies for coping with them. Below are some of the environments that differ from one country to another, which a company must take into account when entering foreign markets (Katsioloude and Hadjidakis 2007).

Legal-Political Environment. Companies that operate internationally are subject to the political system of each country in which they do business. If laws are significantly different from those of the home country, a company may encounter substantial problems abroad and limitations that reduce the company's ability to generate revenue.

Economic Environment. The quality and quantity of a company's business may vary according to a number of conditions that deal with countries' economic levels. Generally, "poor countries have smaller markets on a per capita basis, less educated populations, higher unemployment or underemployment, poor health conditions, greater supply problems, higher political risks, and more foreign exchange problems" (Katsioloude and Hadjidakis 2007). This situation has an impact on a company's productivity, mainly due to employee work absence and inadequate infrastructure and machinery that cause supply problems.

Cultural Environment. Each country's norms of society are based on specific beliefs, values, and attitudes that affect the productivity of foreign companies, which are forced to adapt certain products, advertising campaigns, work, and relationships with the customers to the host country's culture. For instance, different countries are characterized by different norms regarding the degree of worker participation and decision-making

within their organization, certain products are not accepted in some countries due to significant cultural differences or, again, very often advertisement campaigns must be changed and adapted because the public interests may vary according to each culture.

As for policies and strategies, an international company must decide the country where to locate its production activities in order to minimize the costs and maximize the value added; how to organize and control its foreign production; which foreign markets to enter and which ones to avoid; and which entry mode to choose, as it has critical repercussion for the long-term health of the company. In addition, managers must also deal with the rules governing the international trading and investment system due to the limits and restrictions imposed by each government. It must also be remembered that nowadays the majority of governments are committed to free trade, even though in reality they often intervene to regulate cross-border exchange. Consequently, international companies are required to develop strategies and policies for dealing with such interventions.

1.1.1. Italy's positioning in the international trade

According to an investigation published by the *Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale* (2020)⁴, international trade has always played a crucial role in the Italian economy, both from the point of view of exports, which have been the driving forces of the production system on many occasions and from the point of view of imports, which are essential in the Italian economy, which is marked by the absence of raw materials and few energy resources. Therefore, the Italian economy must remain open. Exports are a crucial component of aggregate demand in Italy and, in the last decade, many Italian companies have survived thanks to relatively open and stable access to foreign markets around the world. The economic integration of Italy with Europe and with the rest of the world has been a reality for many decades and it deeply affects all aspects of the economic life of the country. Italy's growth has been based on this integration, both in the past and in recent years, also to emerge from the recent international crisis. Global trade and the internationalization of production processes have supported the turnover and profits of

⁴ Tajoli, Lucia. 2020. "Il Quadro del commercio mondiale nel 2020. A cura dell'Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale". Osservatorio di Politica Internazionale. <https://www.parlamento.it/application/xmanager/projects/parlamento/PI0157.pdf>.

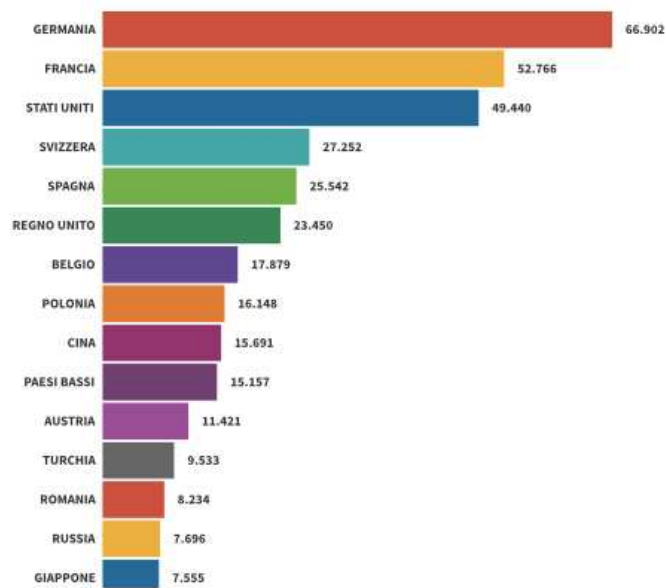
companies in times of weaker domestic demand while ensuring an adequate level of competition. This implies that for Italy, and for Europe itself, isolating itself from world trade and erecting trade barriers would quickly lead to a lowering of living standards and a slowdown in growth, as most economic analyses demonstrate. Therefore, world markets must remain open and accessible (Tajoli 2020).

Italy is currently one of the world's leading exporting countries and occupies a prominent position in international trade. Although in recent years there has been a severe crisis, foreign trade has essentially maintained its role as a key element for economic growth. In fact, according to the latest surveys⁵, in 2019 Italian export has recorded an increase of 2.3% and has maintained the market share in the worldwide commerce stable at 2.84%. Back in that year, Italy was the world's ninth-largest exporter of goods and the thirteenth-largest importer. The growth was mainly registered in the pharmaceutical sector (+25.6%), beverages (+6.8%), fashion products (+6.2%), and metallurgy (+5.3%). There has been a growth in exports to Japan (+19.7%), also thanks to the free trade agreement with the European Union in force since February 2019, and to Switzerland (+16.6%). The sales increased also in the United States (+7.5%), despite the duties imposed at the end of 2019 on certain categories of goods. However, the Istat (*Istituto Nazionale di Statistica*, meaning the Italian national institute of statistics) showed that January-May 2020 data indicate a trend drop of 16% for exports, a clear symptom of the global pandemic, even if starting from April-May 2020, there has been an increase of 35%, reaching again the eight position in terms of exports and the eleventh position in terms of imports. Therefore, it can be stated that from 2019 onwards export has been an important driver for the Italian GDP.

As for the major recipient countries of Italian goods and services and the major countries from which Italy imports goods and services, the following diagram shows the first 15 countries in their respective categories in 2021 (the diagram has been created from the data released by the Italian Osservatorio Economico - Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale⁶):

⁵ Data source: <https://www.mglobale.it/analisi-di-mercato/tutte-le-news/i-italia-nell-economia-internazionale-2019-2020.kl>.

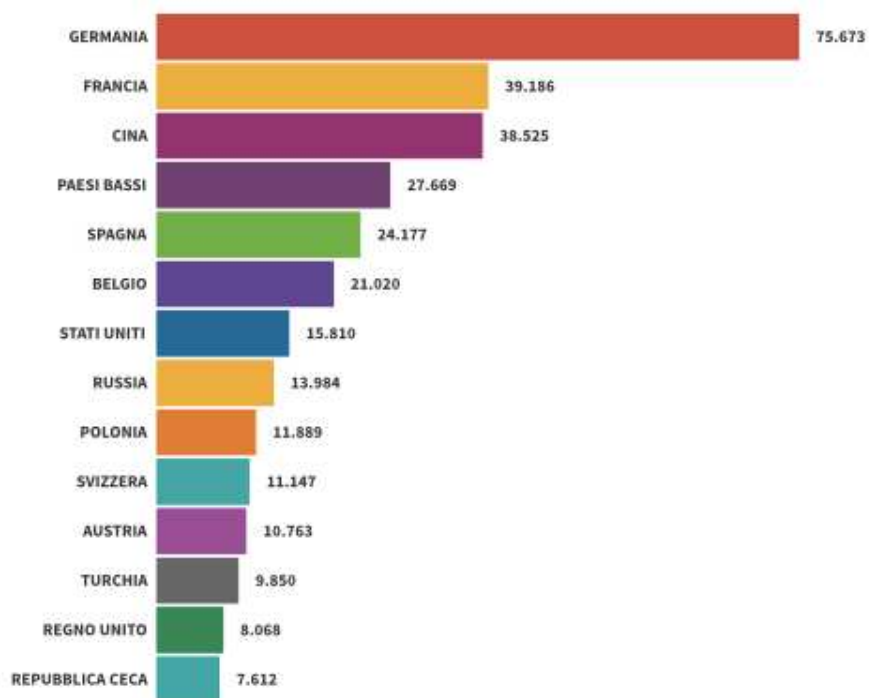
⁶ Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale – Interscambio commerciale italiano con il resto del mondo – Marzo 2022 (<https://www.infomercatiesteri.it/osservatorio-economico-interscambio-commerciale-italiano-mondo.php>)



Ministero Esteri

ITALIA IN DATI
I dati che aiutano a capire l'Italia

Figure 1 - Recipient countries



Ministero Esteri

ITALIA IN DATI
I dati che aiutano a capire l'Italia

Figure 2 - Importing countries

In general, Germany and France have historically been Italian main trading partners, both in terms of imports and exports. Among the recipients of Italian products, the USA plays a key role; among the countries from which Italy imports, China is increasingly preponderant.

As for the main exported and imported goods and services, the following charts illustrate that Italy is among the world leaders in the production of machinery for the industry of all kinds, medicines, cars, and clothing. With regards to imports, historically the main imported products are motor vehicles, medicines, and some raw materials (oil, chemicals, metals, and gas). The data confirm the vocation of Italy as a country specializing in the reprocessing of raw materials or semi-finished products.

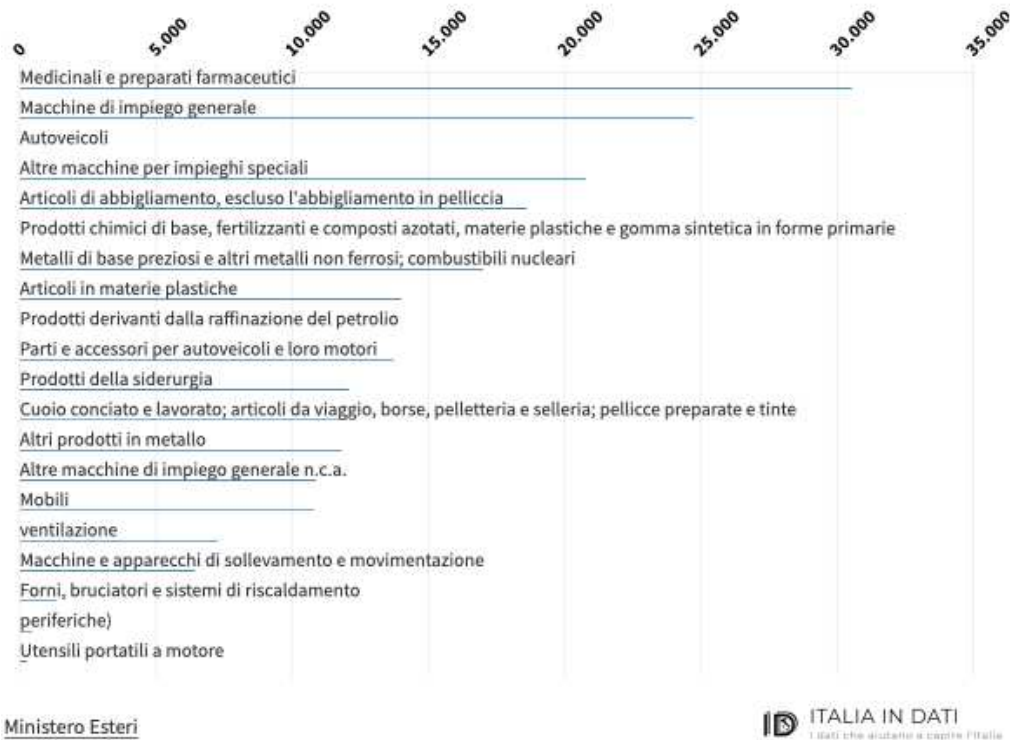


Figure 3 - Export

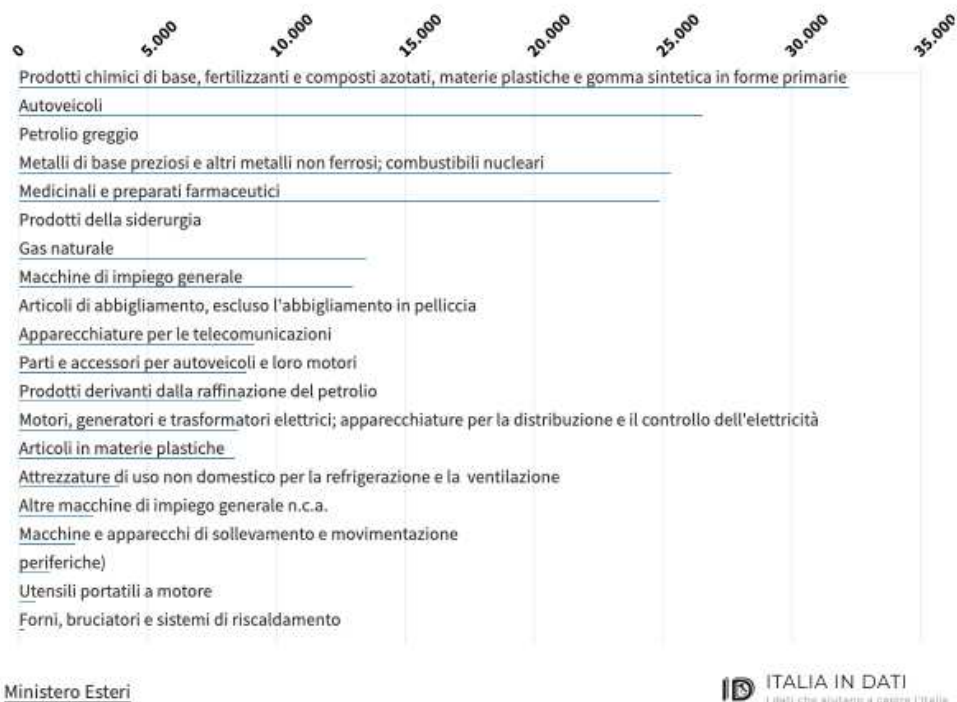


Figure 4 - Import

1.2. Theories of international trade

Classical theories of international trade represent a pivotal starting point in the explanation of why companies decide to engage in international business. In the 18th century, Adam Smith, the founder of modern economics and one of the first thinkers who supported free trade, in his book *The Wealth of Nations* developed the concept of *absolute advantage*. According to Smith, “If a foreign country can supply us with a commodity cheaper than we ourselves can make it, better buy it of them with some part of the produce of our own industry employed in a way in which we have some advantage” (Smith 2007). This means that a nation specializes in the production of commodities that it can produce more cheaply than other nations and then exports those commodities abroad. On the contrary, the same nation will not produce a good that is produced more expensively at home than abroad, as importing those goods will be cheaper. For the first time, Smith brought to the attention the possibility for a country to specialize in the production of a specific good or service at a lower absolute cost per unit than other countries, using a smaller amount of inputs or a more efficient production process. Subsequently, if free trade is operative, consumers will buy a good from the nation that sells it at the lowest

price, and the funds generated from the sale are used to buy other goods and services from other countries. With his theory, Smith aims to explain why individuals, companies, and countries should trade with each other: specialization and trading represent a benefit for all countries, as long as they hold at least one absolute advantage for a specific product. However, subsequent economists did not pay much attention to Smith's theory of international trade, as the biggest limitation was that it could not offer the same perspectives for the countries that did not possess an absolute advantage for any product (Schumacher 2012).

In his book *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), the English political economist David Ricardo suggests an additional theory to overcome Smith's limits: the theory of free trade based on the principle of *comparative advantage*, one of the most important concepts in the economic literature that seeks to explain how and why countries gain by trading. Through his famous England-Portugal example⁷, he shows that each nation and its populations benefit from free international trade, even if one country is less productive in all goods and the other country is more efficient at producing both goods. This shows that absolute production costs are internationally irrelevant, only comparative production costs matter. If the two countries have different cost ratios, specialization and trade will benefit both. So, whereas absolute advantage refers to the ability of a country to produce more or better goods and services than its competitors, comparative advantage refers to the ability to produce goods and services at a lower opportunity cost, no matter the volume or quality (Schumacher 2013).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Swedish economists Eli Heckscher and Bertil Ohlin introduced the *Ohlin–Heckscher factor-proportion theory*, which explains how a country should trade bearing in mind that resources are imbalanced throughout the world and argues that “the difference between countries is given by the production factors, and

⁷ David Ricardo uses the England-Portugal example to explain the concept of *comparative advantage*. Initially, both nations produce cloth and wine. To produce the same amount of cloth, England needs 100 labourers and Portugal 90 labourers. England needs 120 labourers to produce the same amount of wine that Portugal produces with 80 labourers (Ricardo 2004, p. 135). These different labour requirements are due to their dissimilar circumstances that result from a nation's situation, climate, and other “natural or artificial advantages” (Ricardo 2004, p. 132) and are exogenously given. Ricardo shows that it would be advantageous for both nations if they specialize according to their respective comparative advantage and started trading with each other. England should specialize in the production of cloth and import wine from Portugal. The opposite applies to Portugal. As a result, they would both benefit from trade (Schumacher 2013).

the products are different because of the production factors incorporated” (Dima 2010). A country that holds a comparative advantage will export the product with the higher amount of production factors in the respective country. This leads to the assumption that the more abundant a production factor is, the cheaper it becomes. So, “the difference in the production factors is given by the difference in their prices, generating the competitive advantage” (Dima 2010).

Starting from the 1960s, there have been complex evolutions in international trade, mainly due to technological breakthroughs and the development of multinationals. For these reasons, researchers started to look for new theoretical fundamentals to explain the phenomenon. The first contribution is given by Raymond Vernon, who developed the so-called *product life cycle theory*, which combines the development of multinational companies with the theory that trade flows are undoubtedly linked to international trade (Vernon 1966). The life cycle theory suggests that the life of a product is divided into four stages:

- *introduction*, when the product is produced and promoted in order to make consumers aware of its benefits;
- *growth*, when the product gains success on the market, the demand grows, and the production increases;
- *maturity*, the most profitable stage that sees a decline in producing and marketing the product;
- and *decline*, when competitors emulate the product’s success through enhancements and price reduction so that the product starts losing market share and finally declines. At this final stage, a country that initially appears as an exporter of a certain product can end as an importer (Dima 2020).

Vernon’s theory is highly influenced by technological innovations and market expansion: technology is the core element in the creation and development of products, whereas the size and the structure of the market are shaped by the expansion of firms and their internationalization strategy.

During the 1970s, the new *theory of international trade* by Paul Krugman criticized the classical theories, which were all based on free trade. Krugman questions the positive

effects of free trade in the case of infant industries⁸, and states that only through protectionism for a given period of time, those industries have a chance to compete on national and international markets. Later on, in the book *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* (1990), Michael Porter launched the *theory of competitive advantages*, an economic model that explains that industries become internationally competitive and successful and increase their competitiveness thanks to the interaction between four specific elements, that he arranged in a diamond-shaped diagram (Katsioloudes and Spyros Hadjidakis 2007):

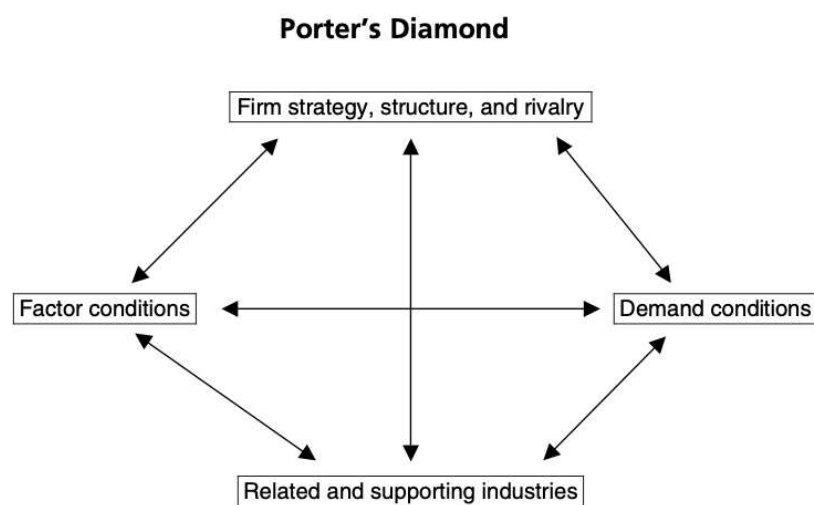


Figure 5 – Porter's Diamond

- factor conditions (the inputs used for the production, such as labor, land, natural resources, capital, and infrastructures, that according to Porter are created, not inherited);
- demand conditions (companies that deal with sophisticated customers in the domestic market are likely to sell superior products also in the international market);
- related and supporting industries (the importance of clustering);

⁸ According to the infant-industry theory (first developed in the early 19th century by Alexander Hamilton and Friedrich List), "an infant-industry is one that is new and in its early stages of development and, thus, not yet capable of competing against established industry competitors", so that they need protection until they mature and develop economies of scale. Definition taken from <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/i/infantindustry.asp>.

- firm strategy, structure, and competition (for instance, conditions for the organization of companies and the nature of domestic rivalry) (Katsioloude and Spyros Hadjidakis 2007).

In summary, Porter's model demonstrates that if the elements of the diamond are increasingly present, trade increases.

1.3. Why do companies decide to go international: main strategic explanations

Besides the theories of international trade, companies' international growth is explained by a series of other reasons that are related to the company's mission (the fundamental goals that the company intends to pursue in the long term⁹), its objectives, and strategies (means to achieve the objectives). According to Katsioloude and Spyros Hadjidakis (2007), companies decide to go international in order to:

Minimize Competitive Risks. Many companies engage in international business because they want to protect themselves against more powerful domestic companies that have already gained an advantage in foreign markets. For instance, Company A may fear that Company B will generate large profits from the foreign market if left alone to operate in that market, and then uses those profits to improve its competitiveness also in the domestic market. Thus, Company A may enter a foreign market, too, to prevent Company B from gaining advantages.

Acquire Resources. Companies usually seek out resources, raw materials, products, and services produced in foreign countries or they look for technologies and information they can import into the home country in order to improve their production process and reduce costs. So, acquiring resources usually enables companies to improve the quality of their products and differentiate themselves from competitors.

Expand Sales. By reaching foreign markets, companies manage to increase their sales more than when they focus just on the domestic market, and this usually leads to higher profits. In fact, "many of the world's largest companies derive over half their sales from outside their home country" (Katsioloude and Hadjidakis 2007).

⁹ Translation of the definition from the book *Economia e gestione delle imprese*, Marco Fontana e Matteo Caroli (2017).

Diversify Sources of Sales and Supplies. Many companies are interested in foreign markets to minimize fluctuations in sales and profits. For instance, if sales decrease in a country that is in recession, they might increase in a country that is expanding economically. Thus, by engaging in different foreign markets, companies may be able to avoid the full impact of price fluctuations in any one country.

Increase in Global Competition. Over the past few years, the majority of companies decide to compete internationally because new products become known globally very quickly.

Development and Expansion of Technology. Technological innovation inevitably enabled more and more companies to be engaged in a higher number of international business activities, as communication and transportation costs are increasingly conducive for companies.

Liberalization of Cross-Border Movements. Regional economic blocs throughout the world, like the European Union, NAFTA, Mercosur, Pacific Alliance, etc., provide lower governmental barriers and fewer restrictions to the movement of goods, services, and capital across countries, allowing companies to trade freely and at lower costs.

Development of Supporting Services. Governments and companies of various countries have developed specific services that encourage and facilitate international business. Banking institutions, for instance, have designed efficient means for companies to receive payments of any currency from foreign sales.

1.4. The concept of internationalization: from Hymer to the Ansoff Matrix

According to Welch and Luostarinen (1988), “internationalization” can be defined as the process of business activities across home country borders with an increasing degree of operations. In other words, the term refers to a company that takes steps to increase its footprint or capture greater market share outside of its country of domicile by branching out into international markets. While the term “international business activity” implies the exchange of resources across national borders (Fayerweather 1978), the “internationalization process” is traditionally perceived as the consequence of incremental adjustments to changing conditions within the firm and its environments

(Aharoni 1966).¹⁰ Hence, companies that decide to develop their activities abroad may choose from multiple options, moving from the simplest and least risky operations to a total commitment of the company to foreign markets. In general, the most common forms of internationalization are export, licensing, franchising, joint ventures, and direct ownership (C.I. Clipa and F. Clipa 2011).

According to Castro (2000), the origins of international business activity are associated with the industrial revolution and the consequent globalization. In fact, modern MNEs have their roots in the international movement of goods that took place in the 19th century (Dunning, 1993a), when resource-seeking¹¹ was the most common motivation for foreign direct investment (FDI)¹². Subsequently, by 1850 many companies had already crossed the Atlantic in what can be defined as a market-seeking investment¹³ (Dunning, 1993a; Jones, 1996). However, despite the presence of FDI, at that time —and until the late 1940s— there was still no theory on foreign direct investment as such, and the growth of FDI (and of MNEs) after the World War II emphasized the inadequacy of the neo-classical theories to explain the phenomenon and the need for a new approach. Stephen Hymer's studies (1960) represent the first attempt to define the concept of internationalization. The economist starts from the distinction between portfolio investments¹⁴ and direct financial investments, where control is the main divergence. In fact, direct investments ensure that the company controls cross-border operations, while

¹⁰ Definition taken from "Theoretical Foundations of Firm Internationalization." 2008. *Antecedents of Venture Firms' Internationalization*, 23–81. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-8349-9821-7_2.

¹¹ The resource-asset seeking FDI seek and secure natural resources, for example, raw materials, lower unit labor cost of unskilled labor force and the pool of skilled labor, physical infrastructure (ports, roads, power, and telecommunication), and the level of technology. The definition is based on Wadhwa, Kavita, and Sudhakara Reddy S. 2011. "Foreign Direct Investment into Developing Asian Countries: The Role of Market Seeking, Resource Seeking and Efficiency Seeking Factors." *International Journal of Business and Management*, Vol. 6, No. 11. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v6n11p219>.

¹² Foreign direct investment (FDI) is defined as an investment involving a long-term relationship and reflecting a lasting interest and control by a resident entity in one economy (foreign direct investor or parent enterprise) in an enterprise resident in an economy other than that of the foreign direct investor. (This definition is based on OECD, *Detailed Benchmark Definition of Foreign Direct Investment*, third edition (OECD, 1996), and International Monetary Fund, *Balance of Payments Manual*, fifth edition (IMF, 1993).

¹³ The market-seeking FDI aims at penetrating the local markets of host countries and is usually connected with: market size and per capita income, market growth, access to regional and global markets, consumer preferences and structure of domestic market (Wadhwa and Reddy S., 2011).

¹⁴ A portfolio investment is ownership of a stock, bond, or other financial asset with the expectation that it will earn a return or grow in value over time, or both. It entails passive or hands-off ownership of assets as opposed to direct investment, which would involve an active management role (Investopedia: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/portfolio-investment.asp>).

portfolio investments don't. According to Dunning (1973), "the reason why portfolio theory can only partially explain direct foreign investment is that it ignores that direct investment does not involve changes in ownership."¹⁵ Another key element that determines the internationalization of the productive activities of enterprises is the existence of the so-called *market failures*, which include positive and negative externalities, environmental concerns, lack of public goods, underprovision of merit goods, overprovision of demerit goods, and abuse of monopoly power. According to Hymer, there are essentially two reasons for companies to internationalize: the existence of specific advantages that the company can exploit abroad and the removal of competition in international markets (Horaguchi and Toyne 1990). These advantages are closely related to each other. The existence of advantages is directly linked to market imperfections, but it is precisely the competitive advantages that allow companies to acquire control of other "weaker" companies, thus eliminating competition or possible conflicts.¹⁶ Hymer came to the conclusion that the phenomenon of internationalization should not simply be traced back to the international flows of goods and capital, but that foreign direct investment should be a complex and organized set of transactions that allow the transfer of capital, technology, and organizational skills from one country to another and, as such, more properly attributable to business activities (Dematté 2008)¹⁷. According to Hymer, the company initially grows nationally and its profits gradually increase. Then, once the saturation level of the domestic market is reached, the only possible way for the company is to use the profits obtained to start an expansion process. When such processes are implemented, some difficulties are likely to be encountered. Hymer groups them into the so-called *liability of foreignness* (LOFs), a term that describes the costs that firms operating internationally experience in relation to local firms (Nachum 2016: 1). Despite the innovative and almost revolutionary nature of Hymer's theory, this model has some limitations, which led other scholars to intervene. One of the

¹⁵ "Chapter 2. Foreign Direct Investment and Multinational Corporation. Accessed May 5, 2022. <https://www.fep.up.pt/docentes/fcastro/chapter%202.pdf>.

¹⁶ Cfr. Yamin, M. (2000), A critical re-evaluation of Hymer's contribution to the theory of transnational corporation, in C.N. Pitelis e R. Sudgen, *The Nature of The Transnational Firm*, Londra: Routledge, par. 3, pp. 57-71.

¹⁷ Eneide, Giulia. 2021. "Il Ruolo Dell'interprete Commerciale Nelle Strategie Di Internazionalizzazione Del Bio Made in Italy." *Dissertation*. Università degli Studi di Padova.

limitations is the lack of advantages linked to geographical location, which are interdependent with the specific advantages held by the company.

1.4.1. International Product Life Cycle Theory

As already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Vernon (1966) introduced the international product life cycle theory (or IPLC model), in which internationalization is described as a sequential process related to the difference in production cost levels between various countries. Vernon's model develops a new perspective regarding the delocalization of production activity and offers a firm-specific and product-specific model that explains trade between nations. Although the IPLC model considers the firm level, its focus is mainly on the country level of trade. Therefore, by focusing on the location advantage of the host country, this theory explains why firms make different foreign investment decisions in different target markets. However, the International Product Life Cycle Theory also gained several criticisms: first, it turned out to be too general in explaining the globalization patterns of all firms; second, the theory does not take into account products that are traded without following all four stages (introduction, growth, maturity, and decline stages) of the IPLC due to technological changes and deregulation of markets; third, it does not adequately describe the products with a short life cycle; finally, it seems that such a model is suitable only for manufacturing firms and not for service firms (Andersen and Chan 2014).

1.4.2. The Uppsala Internationalization Model

During the 1970s, Swedish researchers (Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul 1975; Johanson and Vahlne 1977) from the Uppsala University in Sweden criticized the existing theories, as they believed they ignored the problems of cultural differences and the internal foundations needed so that companies could handle international activities. As a result, Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) introduced their internationalization theory to explain the process of international expansion made by individual firms over time. They suggested that firms need an international attitude that leads them to venture abroad. This attitude is affected by experiences that firms gain from international activities. When

firms decide to expand their businesses abroad, they face various barriers, risks, and psychic distance, which can be reduced by obtaining extensive knowledge of foreign markets. Therefore, according to Swedish researchers, internationalization is a gradual process in which firms expand their operations into foreign markets through a slow process, which includes sequential and successive stages that represent higher degrees of international involvement. Later on, in 1997, Johanson and Vahlne presented *The Uppsala Internationalization Model*, based on empirical observation of four Swedish manufacturers. The two Swedish researchers' theory distinguishes between four different phases of entering an international market, which connect a company's situation to the market:

1. Sporadic export activities;
2. Export via independent representatives;
3. Establishment of a foreign sales subsidiary;
4. Foreign production/manufacturing, the direct establishment of a subsidiary in the host country.

They find out that companies generally start their expansion in a physically and culturally nearby market. Once they have reached enough experience and knowledge of that market and acquired more control of resources, they gradually expand to more distant markets (not only geographically, but also culturally, where culture refers to differences in language, politics, and society). In addition, the most common way to enter a new market is through export activities, and the establishment of a foreign sales subsidiary or foreign production happens only later (Henrik G.S. Arvidsson and Ruslana Arvidsson 2019).

The Uppsala model also illustrates the positive correlation between market knowledge and market commitment: the accumulation of knowledge and experience in the domestic market allows a company to know better the foreign market, too. Only after focusing on the domestic market and having gained the right experience and acquired the basic knowledge and resources, companies start their business abroad. However, according to Henrik G.S. Arvidsson and Ruslana Arvidsson (2019), studies have proven that today larger firms have a tendency to skip the first two phases of the model and go directly to stages 3 and 4, whilst small and medium-sized companies tend to be more careful when

penetrating a foreign market by undertaking a more extended process of learning to avoid uncertainty.

1.4.3. The Eclectic Paradigm

In 1988, John Dunning (1988) introduced the *Eclectic Paradigm*, also known as the ownership, location, internalization (OLI) model, which was a further development of the internalization theory and was designed to overcome its existing weaknesses. The term ‘eclectic’ refers to the fact that Dunning’s model embeds various theoretical approaches, such as the monopolistic advantage theory of Hymer (1960) and the localization advantages explained by Vernon (1966, 1974). The OLI model is a three-tiered framework that companies can follow when determining if it is beneficial or not to pursue an FDI—the extent of the presence or absence of OLI can either encourage or discourage firms from undertaking foreign investments. Therefore, for FDI to be beneficial, the following advantages must exist:

- *Ownership advantage.* This first condition includes intangible proprietary information and ownership rights of a company, such as branding, copyright, trademark, patent rights, and the use and management of internally-available skills, which all increase the company’s reputation and reliability.
- *Location advantage.* Companies must assess whether there is a comparative advantage to performing specific functions within a particular country. These considerations should motivate a company in Country A to move production to Country B, and concern the availability and costs of resources, input prices, quality and productivity, transport and communication costs, tax advantages, etc.
- *Internalization advantage.* This occurs when a firm should produce a specific product in the home country rather than abroad, with the aim of controlling and coordinating directly its own property advantages, without transferring ownership or enjoyment to third parties.

However, one of the main criticisms of the OLI model is that is based on the experiences of large MNCs from developed countries, whereas firms from developing countries

undergo different internationalization processes. In other words, MNCs from developed countries, as they are early movers, can access resources required for international expansion. Nevertheless, born-global firms, international new ventures (INVs), and emerging multinationals (EMNCs), which are latecomers, are not usually able to access required resources, such as financial capital, proprietary technology, and strong infrastructures (Andersen and Chan 2014).

1.4.4. The Ansoff Matrix

Another important contribution was given by mathematician and business manager H. Igor Ansoff, who in 1957 invented and published in the Harvard Business Review the so-called *Ansoff Matrix*, also known as the Product/Market Expansion Grid, a tool still used today by firms to analyze and plan their strategies for growth.

In order to be competitive and generate revenue, a company must extend its activity. The matrix shows four different strategies that can be used to help a firm grow on a foreign market and also analyze the risks associated with each strategy:

1. Market penetration (increasing sales of existing products to an existing market);
2. Product development (introducing new products to an existing market);
3. Market development (entering a new market using existing products);
4. Diversification (entering a new market with the introduction of new products).

The first path is taken when a company aims to increase its market share by selling its products in the existing market. The market penetration strategy can be executed by decreasing prices to attract new customers, increasing promotion and distribution efforts, or acquiring a competitor in the same marketplace. In fact, the greater investments are intended for marketing activity, the improvement of communication, relationships with customers, and publicity. The second method regards the development of a new product, acquired externally or created by the same company, to cater to the existing market. In this case, the main objective is to propose new products to the target audience, so as to make the company even more competitive. This type of strategy is employed when firms have a strong understanding of their current market so that it is usually preceded by

market research that has given particularly positive results. The ways this strategy may be implemented include investing in R&D to develop new products, acquiring a competitor’s product and merging resources to create a new product that better meets the needs of the existing market, and forming strategic partnerships with other companies to gain access to the partner’s channels or brand. In the market development strategy, a company enters a new market through the sale of existing products. In this context, expanding into new markets means expanding into new geographic areas, new customer segments, or new nations. In this case, the strategy is most successful if, for example, the company owns proprietary technologies not available elsewhere and protected by patents. The main approaches for using the market development strategy involve catering to a different customer segment, entering into a new domestic market (expanding regionally), and entering into a foreign market (expanding internationally). Finally, the fourth path that companies can take requires companies to enter a new market with a completely new product. This is the riskiest strategy, as both market and product development are necessary, but it may offer the greatest potential for increased revenues, as it opens up an entirely new revenue stream for the company. Companies can employ two types of diversification: related diversification, when there are potential synergies to be realized between the existing business and the product/market, and unrelated diversification, when there are no potential synergies to be realized between the existing business and the product/market. It follows that the latest minimizes the risks of diversification (Corporate Finance Institute 2022).



Figure 6 – Ansoff Matrix
 Source: <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/knowledge/strategy/ansoff-matrix/>

Chapter 2 – The internationalization of small software-developing companies

2.1. Overview of the internationalization of SMEs

Until the 1970s, the internationalization of firms as a research topic concerned mainly large Western multinational manufacturing enterprises, rather than SMEs¹⁸. According to Daszkiewicz and Wach (2010), “such attitude towards small firms could be explained by many trade barriers that had existed up to the 90s of the 20th century. Overcoming those barriers required capital, personnel, and skills often unavailable for smaller enterprises”. Therefore, small firms only functioned locally and had little or no interest in going international. Nevertheless, SMEs' behaviors and researchers' attitudes towards internationalization have changed over time. On one hand, barriers to international trade have collapsed and increasingly continue to collapse. Trade agreements such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), the EC (European Community), ASEAN (Southeast Asian Nations), ESM (European Single Market, 1993), and WTO (World Trade Organization, 1995) changed managerial view towards internationalization and created a new type of customer, the so-called “global customer”, one who has similar needs and desires to those of other people who live thousands of miles away and belong to different cultures. On the other hand, small and medium-sized enterprises have become very important players in national economies, to such an extent that they are often referred to as the backbone of the European economy: there are about 23 million SMEs in the EU nonfinancial business economy contributing to 56% of total value added¹⁹, they play a key role in job creation and are extremely dynamic and flexible, as they adapt quite easily

¹⁸ Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are defined in the EU recommendation 2003/361/EC, which states that an enterprise qualifies as an SME if it meets the staff headcount ceiling and either the turnover ceiling or the balance sheet ceiling, but not necessarily both. The criteria are summarized in the below-presented table:

| Size | Headcount | Turnover | or | Balance Sheet Total |
|-------------------------|-----------|---------------|----|---------------------|
| Medium-sized enterprise | < 250 | ≤ 50 mln euro | | ≤ 43 mln euro |
| Small enterprise | < 50 | ≤ 10 mln euro | | ≤ 10 mln euro |
| Microenterprise | < 10 | ≤ 2 mln euro | | ≤ 2 mln euro |

Source: Commission Recommendation no. 2003/361/EC of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises

¹⁹ Source: Eurostat (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20200514-1>)

to risky and unstable economic conditions (Salvatore 2015; Daszkiewicz and Wach 2012). In summary, thanks to the internationalization of economies and the acceleration of the globalization process, more and more SMEs have been trying to take advantage of new emerging internationalization opportunities and as a result, “more than 40% of European SMEs are involved in some form of international relationship” (European Commission 2010).

SMEs' internationalization process depends on several parameters that the company must consider before embarking on any kind of foreign development. First of all, it is worth noting that the internationalization process refers not only to the sale of goods and services in foreign markets but also to the ability of a company to develop an international network, meaning a network of contacts, business partners, intermediaries, agents, and/or distributors that will help it to become an international player and to better interpret and read the international context. Indeed, entering a new, foreign market means getting to know it from an economic, political, and cultural point of view, studying its potential, understanding the opportunities the country will be able to generate for the company, and analyzing the so-called "country risk," the set of difficulties and risks that arise when a company decides to invest or do business in a country. So, choosing the right market to enter through a market analysis is a basic prerequisite for the company's development in foreign markets (Salvatore 2015).

Once the foreign market has been chosen, the company needs to evaluate the right entry strategy. Antonella Salvatore (2015) classifies entry strategies into export strategies, production and marketing strategies, and ownership strategies. As previously mentioned, exporting is the fastest and most widely common entry form used by SMEs, at least at an early stage of internationalization. Daszkiewicz and Wach (2010) state that the oldest but still significant stream of research defines this kind of strategy as the “stage theory of internationalization”. This theory assumes that in the first phase, a firm operates on the internal market only, with no export activity. Only after acquiring information, experience, and know-how and after achieving a stable position, it gradually expands its international activities. Furthermore, Antonella Salvatore (2015) adds that export strategies can be direct (for example, if the company exports through online sales developing e-commerce platforms, the so-called “Internet-based strategies”), indirect (when the company decides to export with the intervention of an intermediary, such as a

distributor or an agent, to help sell the product locally), or franchising (when the franchisor sells to a foreign franchisee his brand name with the aim of rapidly expanding its business also across the franchisee's market). Nevertheless, exporting may have various types of economic risks usually classified as tariff and non-tariff measures of international trade²⁰. As for tariff measures, protectionist-minded countries tend to protect their local industry and impose very high tariffs on imported goods to prevent the entry of foreign products. On the contrary, non-tariff economics measures include, for instance, government-imposed trade restrictions limiting the number of products that can be imported into a country or laws stipulating that a particular product must contain a percentage of the local product (e.g., food products where milk or sugar must be produced in the country to which they are exported). Additional economic risks are related to import licenses that must be granted by the authorities of the country into which a company is entering. If a country implements a nonautomatic import licensing system, it means that the company must apply for permission to import whenever it has goods to deliver to the market. Undoubtedly, this process entails considerable cost and loss of time.

Production strategies involve additional risks for the SME because it is linked, precisely, to the production of goods. Among these, the most common form of entry into a foreign market is certainly licensing, which involves a parent company (licensor) offering a local partner (licensee) the right to produce and distribute its products in one or more foreign countries, because the licensor lacks the skills and resources to perform directly. However, it is a dangerous method, as it is difficult to control the quality of the finished product and the risk of imitation is very high. Minor production strategies are the assembly contract and the production contract, which provide two major benefits: on one hand, the problem of high tariffs in a country is avoided, as often tariffs are lower when related to parts and components, and on the other hand, they increase labor opportunities locally.

Finally, ownership strategies are considered the riskiest and most challenging entry modes into foreign markets, especially for SMEs as they usually do not pose the required

²⁰ According to the OECD, The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the term "non-tariff measures (NTMs) covers a diverse set of measures in terms of purpose, legal form, and economic effect. NTMs comprise all policy measures other than tariffs and tariff-rate quotas that have a more or less direct impact on international trade. They can affect the price of traded products, the quantity traded, or both" (Source: <https://www.oecd.org/trade/topics/non-tariff-measures/>).

skills and resources to directly open a subsidiary abroad. In addition, governments' attitudes toward foreign companies' presence are still heterogeneous. Some governments in emerging and developing countries are not so prone to the presence of foreign companies in their market, to such an extent that there are laws prohibiting 100% foreign company ownership. On the contrary, some governments favor opening subsidiaries in their own territory, as it brings new job opportunities and development to the area, which is also why foreign companies often receive entry incentives. Finally, some governments prefer a sort of "partial" ownership, that is, an ownership partnership with a local company that allows the transfer of skills and know-how to local firms. The most popular forms of ownership strategies are joint ventures, very common especially in those countries where local regulations prevent the establishment of a subsidiary and 100% ownership, such as the United Arab Emirates and China, and acquisition, which allows entry into a country by accessing an already existing distribution, working with mature and trained resources, and using a brand that is already known in the local market.

2.2. The internationalization of small high-tech companies: the role of ICT overcoming the stage theory of internationalization and the Uppsala Model

In view of all that has been mentioned so far, there is no doubt that internationalization represents both chances and threats for SMEs. However, new studies on small international firms (Bell 1995; Aspelund and Moen 2004; Moen 2004) have identified significant advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a trend that boosts the process of exporting goods and services to international markets. Moen (2004) lists four main barriers that can slow down or prevent SMEs' internationalization and suggests how the Internet can overcome them. First of all, the Internet can increase international visibility, trust, and engagement through access to global information sources, thus eliminating psychological barriers. Secondly, the Internet simplifies export documentation thanks to electronic data transfer, payments, etc., thus overcoming operational barriers. Third, organizational barriers: the Internet provides cheap market research, improves international knowledge, and reduces reliance on traditional intermediaries. Fourth, product/market barriers: the Internet facilitates country/market selection, international customer feedback, and the adoption of global niche strategies

rather than country-centric ones. Aspelund and Moen (2004) argue that the Internet represents an enormous source of information, which in turn “allows for the cross-validation of market information and thereby reduces the risks involved with market entry when the firm does not possess experiential market knowledge”. In general, it can be stated that the emergence of the Internet influences both the choice of the entry form and the market selections of firms expanding to foreign markets. Focusing on entry forms, the research by Salvatore (2015) found that the development of the Internet has dramatically decreased entry barriers and has created a new and global world that any size of SME can easily reach. Benjamin and Wigand (1995) argue that the Internet is creating borderless virtual business platforms on which suppliers, producers, and customers can freely interact without going through the pre-defined channels on the value chain. Furthermore, the European Commission's (2010) finding that testifies to the existence of a direct link between the level of internationalization and the size of the company (the larger the company, the more it tends to internationalize) has considerably weakened because of the Internet. With regard to the choice of markets, the notion of “psychic distance”²¹ has become much less relevant as new communication technology makes global markets more homogenous (Czinkota and Ursic 1987; Nordström 1991; and Hamill and Gregory 1997, as stated by Moen 2004). This view is supported also by Bell (1995), who writes that “some 30-50% of the firms studied had initiated exports with sales to countries that could not be considered as either psychologically or geographically proximate”. Collectively, these studies challenge the predominant stream of research into small-firm internationalization that has been influenced by the conceptualizations emanated from the “Uppsala School” in the mid to late 1970s.

Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975), in their study of four Swedish firms, proposed the “establishment chain” theory, which argues that a company's participation in a particular foreign market develops according to an establishment chain: for instance, initially there is no export activity at all, then the company begins to export via independent representatives, after that via sales subsidiary and finally, manufacturing

²¹ The concept of “psychic distance” is based on O’Grady and Lane’s study, *The psychic distance paradox* (1996), where they state that the definition of psychic distance varies greatly within the literature, depending upon the way in which the concept is operationalized. It was defined initially by Nordström and Vahlne (1992) as “factors preventing or disturbing the flow of information between potential or actual suppliers and customers” and in their view, is comprised of “cultural [...], structural [...] and language differences.”

may follow. As already introduced in Chapter 1 of the dissertation, this sequence of stages has been furtherly complemented by Johanson and Vahlne (1977, 1990), who defined these four distinct phases in an enterprise's gradual internationalization process:

1. No regular export;
2. Export via independent representatives;
3. Establishment of an overseas sales subsidiary;
4. Foreign production/manufacturing.

The second pattern related to internationalization is that firms first target neighboring countries and then enter foreign markets with increasing psychic distance in terms of cultural, economic, and political differences as well as geographic proximity. Other behavioral models emerged in North America in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Some see the development of export activities as innovation-adjustment cycles, and others have suggested a "learning curve" for export development, influenced by external factors, such as unsolicited orders or requests, and/or internal factors such as managerial ambitions or excess capacity (Bell, 1995). All these models have in common that they propose an incremental stages approach, meaning that firms from being unwilling to export proceed through various stages to become internationally experienced exporters. Nevertheless, these theories have also attracted criticism. A number of new empirical studies have posited that entry modes into foreign markets are becoming increasingly more rapid and direct than those suggested by theories of gradual and slow internationalization. For instance, Buckley *et al.* (1979) argued that enterprises do not necessarily adopt incremental approaches to going international, Cannon and Willis stated that firms may omit stages to accelerate the internationalization process, and Reid (1984) affirms that the existing models are "much too deterministic" and that firm's internationalization is quite unique and highly situation-specific. Finally, researchers such as Sharma and Johanson (1987), Engwall and Wallenstal (1988), and Buckley *et al.* (1992) conclude that the existing theories of internationalization are inappropriate for service-intensive industries and high-technology firms. In summary, over the last decade, there has been a huge number of new ventures that internationalized extremely rapidly in a trend not consistent with the slow process described by the Uppsala School.

This phenomenon has been described with different names by researchers. Lindqvist (1991) used the expression “infant multinationals” to define these types of firms; Rennie (1993) suggested the term “born globals”; and finally, Oviatt and McDougall (1994) called them “international new ventures” (INV). No matter the name, all these studies aim to explain the emerging trend of SMEs to compete in international markets even before establishing a solid home market. In the same vein, in his cross-national study into the export behavior of small computer software firms, Bell (1995) argued that “neither the age nor the size of software firms exerted a significant influence on the decision to internationalize. In fact, almost half of the responding firms of his study had less than 20 employees, and some three-quarters employed fewer than 50 staff. Nearly three-quarters of the firms had been established for less than ten years, but over half had been exporting for almost as long.” In compliance with Moen’s study (2004), one of the main factors explaining why and how small software firms go international very rapidly is that the software industry relies on global industrial networks. This means that small computer software firms tend to follow their domestic clients into countries and markets where the clients already had or were establishing new engagements. Some other interesting findings come from the study by Coviello and Munro (1997), which specifies that the internationalization of software companies typically starts after a year with only a few key partners, and take advantage of the partners’ networks to communicate with the market. After three to four years, the company starts developing formal and informal relationships both within and outside the original network, thus initiating a process of persistent growth and international expansion through new and existing networks. In other words, it appears that the market selection and the mode of entry for SMEs are largely driven by existing inter-firm relationships.

Nevertheless, Moen’s research (2004) on five Norwegian small software-developing companies clearly demonstrates that these kinds of firms “do not have a clear notion as to how to classify the foreign entry forms they use”, as “there seems to be a limited correlation between the firms’ international experience and their foreign entry form”. So, a firm may choose one entry strategy in one market but a completely different strategy in another similar market, usually depending on the options available according to their network relationships. With regard to market selection, Moen (2004) points out that global networks, together with new communication technology, are reducing psychic

distance. It is important to remember that most small software firms operate in narrow market niches where the technological level is really high, and since technological expertise is somehow independent of cultural differences, the psychic distance might be reduced. Furthermore, Moen (2004) and Bell (1995) demonstrate that initially, a firm tends to choose a foreign market to enter through a network partner in a psychically close market, but later on, the market selection is less and less influenced by psychic distance, mainly because the Internet increases the growth pace of the network and thus provides more market opportunities to the firm.

In conclusion, the computer software sector is clearly achieving rapid growth within a dynamic global industry, where unlike the traditional manufacturing industry entry barriers are low and the size and age of small-and-medium enterprises are not critical. Indeed, software firms with numerically-reduced staff can develop excellent services which boast incredible export potential. Furthermore, thanks to the emergence of the Internet, the distribution of these services via electronic means is much easier. Finally, intra-firm relationships have a huge impact on the export strategies of small software firms. All the above-mentioned factors undoubtedly influence the export behavior and the internationalization of small software firms. This calls into question the opinion of Nordström (1991) that the advent of the Internet and globalization will make market knowledge easily transferable, minimizing drastically the importance of language and cultural barriers. However, even though it is evident that ICT contributes to reducing barriers, geographical distance, and cultural and linguistic differences between countries still have a significant impact on business operations.

Chapter 3 – Linguistic and cultural barriers in international trade

*“Without mutual understanding,
we are unable to live and work together.
In a Union where diversity is cherished,
a lingua franca can never be enough
to satisfy every communication need.”*
[Viscount Etienne Davignon]

In a world where international trade is no longer a trend, but almost an obligation for companies who want to survive the fierce competitiveness of the market, language needs to be considered a crucial element in managing enterprises. As a matter of fact, the rise of transnational corporations, the promotion of exports to foreign markets, and increasing support for SMEs to open up to foreign countries form the basis for reasserting the status of language as a topic of major relevance when studying international trade.

The relationship between language and economy dates back to the 1960s, when the economist Jacob Marshack (1965) coined the term “Economics of Language” to refer to the interconnection between language and economy, meaning how these two areas are influenced by each other. However, half a century after Marshack first introduced the concept, Maclean (2006) suggests that language has tendentially been overlooked in commercial literature, so much so that it has been described as the “orphan of international business research” (Feely and Harzing, 2002), “the forgotten factor” (Marschan-Piekkari, Welch & Welch, 1997), and “the most neglected field in management” (Reeves & Wright, 1996). So, ever since companies first began to look for overseas buyers and operations, they have found themselves facing with the challenge of interacting with foreign language speakers. Indeed, trade is based on the interaction between individuals and thus is affected by the ease of communication between them, which depends not only on technological factors but more importantly, on sharing an idiom in which they can communicate. To engage in international trade, two individuals from two different countries can adopt one of the following five language strategies: (i) they can share the same language and naturally use it to communicate; (ii) they can speak in their own language and still be understood by the other party (this phenomenon is

known as “intercommunication” and is very common especially in Scandinavian countries); (iii) they can have two different mother-tongue languages, but choose to speak using one of the two languages, provided that one of them is able to speak the other language; (iv) they can choose a foreign language that they both speak; (v) they can rely on the services of intermediaries such as a translator or an interpreter (Ferro and Ribeiro 2016). Therefore, economic areas such as sales, marketing, international management, internationalization, and cross-cultural communication are only some examples of how language affects a company’s activity in the international market.

Maclean suggests that over the last decade, language has begun to enter the literature as a topic of serious research, and several studies by Marschan *et al.* (1997), Marschan-Piekkari *et al.* (1999), Holden (1998, 2004), Hagen (1999), as well as Feely and Harzing (2002, 2004), have shifted the significance of language from a minor issue into a major one that impacts on a company’s success in international trade. The specific link between trade performance and foreign language usage has been furtherly illustrated by a number of studies led by Frankel (1997), Frankel and Rose (2002), and Heliwel (1999), who “attempted to measure language differences as trade barriers and quantified the cost of language barriers as between 15%-22% in terms of tariff equivalents” (PIMLICO Project 2011). In addition, they estimated that sharing a common idiom can increase bilateral trade between 75% and 170%. Apart from linguistic barriers, also cultural obstacles are very frequent, which can include “unexpected regulatory requirements, behavioral and perceptual differences involving preferences for certain styles of packaging, or different interpretations of what is meant by a contract” (PIMLICO Project 2011). However, in most countries, Trade Promotion Organizations (TPOs)²² facilitate companies' access to global markets through practical guidance and financial support to implement their export strategies. Nevertheless, language strategies are almost never included in those programs. This is due to the fact that although companies tend to be aware of the significance of

²² Trade Promotion Organizations are a tool for stimulating international trade and supporting producers and exporters access new markets, primarily by providing information, linkages, technical advice, marketing and policy advocacy. TPOs may vary from one-person offices to powerful organizations with ramified network and many offices spread across different countries. Some of the most popular institutions and organizations are the Australian Trade Commission (AUSTRADE), Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), Dirección de Promoción de Exportaciones (PROCHILE), China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT), Egyptian Internat. Trade Point (EITP), Centre marocain de promotion des exportations (CMPE), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische (PROTRADE), Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing (CBI), etc. (Giovannucci 2000).

languages for foreign trade, most of them are still unwilling to invest in languages as the key to international success.

3.1. The importance of language management strategies according to the European PIMLICO Project

One of the first effective attempts to promote best practices amongst SMEs in how to face linguistic and cultural trade barriers comes from the PIMLICO Project, which stands for *Promoting, Implementing, Mapping Language and Intercultural Communication Strategies in Organizations and Companies*, commissioned by the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Basically, the project is based on surveys carried out on 40 selected SMEs with the aim of identifying and describing the necessary means to adopt a company's successful Language Management Strategy (LMS), sometimes shortened simply as 'language strategy'. In other words, in order to address the diverse communication interfaces of international activity and overcome efficiently language barriers, companies must use various forms of LMSs. The ELAN Study (2006) defines LMS as "the planned adoption of a range of techniques to facilitate effective communication with clients and suppliers abroad", meaning that an LMS is usually characterized by a number of measures that facilitate a company's access or expansion in a new foreign market, where there are linguistic and/or cultural barriers. However, according to Feely and Harzing (2002), before attempting to design concrete LMSs, a company should evaluate the nature and magnitude of the language barrier, and in doing so they must examine three main dimensions:

- *Language Diversity.* The first dimension is the number of languages that a company has to manage, and it depends on the level of expansion of the company's global network of customers, suppliers, subsidiaries, and joint ventures. Colossal MNCs, such as Microsoft, manage around 80 different languages, although this is usually an unrealistic situation for most companies. More typically, companies that operate in the global market use the leading European languages, including some from Eastern Europe such as Arabic,

Chinese, Japanese, and some of the main Asian languages, which are becoming increasingly popular.

- *Language Penetration.* The second dimension refers to the number of functions that are engaged in cross-lingual communication. Nowadays, thanks to the new integrated system of global coordination, almost every function of business have to deal with languages, including Finance, R&D, Production Engineering, Logistics, Sales and Purchasing, HR, Marketing, and Public Relations.
- *Language Sophistication.* The last dimension refers to the complexity, refinement, and type of language skills required, and they will vary according to each post holder within each organization. For instance, a receptionist requires speaking and listening proficiency to recognize requests and to exchange pleasantries, whereas an ideal international manager must possess excellent language proficiency in almost every business area and a full range of rhetorical skills, including persuasion, negotiation, humor, and motivation.

The next step involves measuring these three language barrier dimensions using specific tools. The first one is provided by Linguistic Auditing, a methodology designed to allow international companies to evaluate their foreign requirements, identify their areas of strengths and weakness, assess which kind of language training and recruitment the company needs, and evaluate the efficiency of these programs (Reeves and Wright 1996). However, research by Randlesome and Myers (1998) demonstrated that Linguistic Auditing was a costly and time-consuming process requiring too much support from external language assessors. This is the reason why the tool has not been successful, as only a few companies adopted it. To overcome this criticism, a less costly system called Language Check-up has been created, which evaluates the status of Corporate Language standardization, the availability of computer systems, multilingual websites and publications, and the usage of machine translation tools.

Despite everything, Feely and Harzing (2002) point out that it is not only the cost that has deterred companies from improving their language skills and developing language strategies but rather companies still underestimate the relevance of language as a core management issue.

3.1.1. The impact of language and cultural barriers

Language barriers can affect the management of enterprises of every size – not only MNEs, but also micro, small, and medium companies. The impact and the true cost of language barriers have to be seen in terms of the way they negatively affect relationships. In fact, language barriers commonly generate uncertainty, mistrust, and conflict, which in turn could lead to big losses in total business revenue and in return on investments abroad. Many studies measure language barriers in terms of trade tariff equivalents. As previously mentioned, Frankel, (1997) Frankel and Rose (2002), and Heliwel (1999) sought to measure language differences as trade barriers and they have estimated that the cost of language barriers in terms of tariff equivalents varies between 15% and 22%. They also demonstrated that using a common language could reduce language barriers by 75% to 170%. Subsequently, Noguer and Siscart (2003) argued that language barriers may vary according to each sector: in sectors such as agriculture, mining, refining, iron and steel, and food the tariff equivalent of language barriers is close to zero. On the contrary, significant tariff equivalents of language barriers have been found in printing and publishing (18%); clothing (14%); and professional, scientific, and control equipment (10%).

Cultural differences are another strictly related communication barrier, also considered “one of the most often overlooked elements in a company’s international marketing strategy that can determine the success or failure of a product or service in overseas markets” (Wintranslation 2012). Since culture is an extremely wide concept that includes elements such as knowledge, values, attitudes, morale, ideas, customs, language, religion, laws, experiences, cuisine, music, arts, ways of perceiving the world, and social behavior, the failure to understand cultural differences can lead to serious consequences. And it is not only in distant areas of the world that enterprises register the greatest cultural differences but they can also be found closer to the home country. In fact, according to the PIMLICO Project, trading across Europe can mean dealing with hundreds of different national and regional cultures, and one in five European companies report problems. According to the study conducted by the Wintranslation organization (2012), cultural aspects can be either visible or invisible. Visible aspects are those cultural differences that are obvious and noticeable at first glance, such as differences in music, food, clothing,

architecture, etc. On the contrary, invisible aspects are those cultural discrepancies that need time, study, and immersion to be pointed out, and they are usually the same ones that all international companies should be aware of.

The business areas that are most subject to encountering cultural obstacles are undoubtedly marketing and advertising, as marketing strategies in one country do not always translate into success in another country. In fact, a campaign that has not been properly adapted to the foreign country's culture may damage dramatically the company's global brand reputation. It is therefore fundamental to be culturally sensitive and aware when exporting goods and services.

Below some of the most probable consequences of language and cultural barriers detected by Feely and Harzing (2002) are illustrated:

- *Buyer-Seller relationship*: companies exporting to foreign countries sense a greater cultural distance and are aware of greater uncertainty about markets that don't share their own language and culture. For this reason, companies usually sell more successfully to countries that share their languages, as salespeople working using a second language may appear less reliable, less credible, and less persuasive. The same applies to buyers, who may lose their relationship power for being less confident and assertive when working in their second language. As a result, since they may lose their chance of gaining advantageous deals, buyers are likely to demand that negotiations are conducted in the language of the customer. Consequently, companies that are unable to work using the language of the customer will underperform in export markets compared to their more linguistically skilled competitors. This has been furtherly demonstrated by the European Commission's ELAN study (2006), which showed that "a large proportion of European SMEs lose contracts every year as a direct result of linguistic and intercultural weaknesses", specifically the 11% of the 1964 interviewed businesses.
- *Foreign market expansion*: economic literature (the "Uppsala model" by Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Kogut & Singh, 1988; Kostova, 1999; Kostova & Zaheer, 1999; Tihanyi, Griffith, & Russell, 2005; Xu & Shenkar, 2002 as cited by

Beugelsdijk et al. 2017) has widely demonstrated that the process of internationalization of firms is primarily based on a low level of physical distance (where language differences is a crucial factor) between the parent company's country and its subsidiaries' countries. Indeed, when internationalizing, firms first tend to expand to culturally and geographically close countries due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of how the host country works, and then move gradually to culturally and geographically more distant countries as they learn from their international experiences (Beugelsdijk et al. 2017). However, when this possibility cannot be satisfied, parent companies tend to prefer to locate subsidiaries in countries where English, the lingua franca in international trade, is widely spoken.

- *Joint ventures*: whenever the parent company and the host company do not share the same language, the parent tends to feel a higher sense of uncertainty and prefers an entry method where risk can be shared. In addition, joint ventures between partners where only one of the partners uses an international language will end up working in that specific language. As a consequence, the partner that speaks an international language will have more power over the other one, and that language might start to dominate both the communication and the relationship, which will pose increasing pressure on the joint venture.
- *Head Quarter-Subsidiary relationship*: language barriers may dampen the development of close relationships between a parent company and its subsidiaries by increasing the level of mistrust, suspicion, and conflict. Such conditions may lead the parent company to behave in a more formal and detached way, going so far as to avoid collaborative processes such as the transfer of knowledge and technology.

Needless to say, the above-mentioned cases do not constitute an exhaustive list of the potential impact of language barriers, but they aim at illustrating that language barriers can potentially cause a wide range of severe consequences to companies that affect especially their economic dimension.

A study commissioned by the British Chamber of Commerce in 2004 entitled *The Impact of Foreign Languages on British Business* showed how British exporters were penalized

due to language deficiencies. The study surveyed 1,000 British SMEs and found that 75% of exporters reported significant losses in export sales or earnings due to an inability to meet the language and cultural requirements of international trade. Therefore, researchers have found that language skills have a significant impact on export performance and demonstrated that there is a direct correlation between the importance exporters place on language abilities within their business and their annual turnover (BCC, 2004). Two years later, The ELAN survey was conducted with the aim of analyzing the correlation between the use of language skills by companies and their impact on business performance. Once again, the results showed that a substantial portion of business is lost due to a lack of language and cultural skills and that the most effective exporters tend to employ appropriate language or communication strategies. The survey found a clear link between language skills, cultural competence, and export success. Finally, in 2010 another step forward was given by the PIMLICO study that was aimed at defining how SMEs employ language strategies to improve their international performance, and it has been confirmed that the economic impact of language management strategies on firms' export performance is unquestionable, as mostly all of the 40 exemplar companies reported an increase in their sales turnover as a direct result of the implementation of language management strategies.

3.2. How to manage language barriers

The next step involves international firms managing and overcoming language barriers by having a language management strategy in place. Language Management is defined by Feely and Winslow (2006) as “the extent to which the company is able to satisfy its language needs through prudent deployment of a variety of language management tools”. According to Feely and Harzing (2002), there is a wide range of options from which MNCs and SMEs can formulate their language strategy, a theory that has been furtherly demonstrated in the PIMLICO Project, which shows that “successful companies use an LMS comprising a range of language measures [...]. These measures can be wide-ranging and diverse, but are selected because of their positive impact in the company’s marketplace.” In other words, focusing on and adopting one single LMS to address the diverse communication interfaces in international trade is not enough. In fact, a

combination of different, creative, and dynamic strategies is needed. The following list contains some of the most frequent language management strategies, and it has been created by merging the findings of Feely and Harzing (2002) and the PIMLICO Project:

- Lingua franca;
- Functional Multilingualism;
- External language resources, such as professional translators/interpreters;
- Language training and cultural briefing schemes, including online language learning;
- Corporate Languages;
- Using local agents to solve language problems;
- Creating culturally and/or linguistically adapted websites;
- Using linguistic audits;
- Translating promotional, sales, and/or technical material;
- Instituting a ‘polyglot’ employee selection and recruitment policy;
- Encouraging cross-border staff mobility;
- Adopting ‘buddying’ and secondment schemes;
- Forging links with local universities, e.g. for taking on foreign students on placement;
- Encouraging native-speaker recruitment;
- Planning e-commerce underpinned by multilingual operations (e.g. local currency and language).

Some of the above-mentioned LMSs are discussed in detail below with the aim of stating the significance of the most common methods to overcome language barriers.

3.2.1. English as a lingua franca

The impulse of increasing standardization across the globe is also reflected in the area of language management through the adoption of a shared corporate language, which is used to deal with every business situation (Maclean 2006). Undoubtedly, the language selected

is English. According to *The language guide for European business*, it is recognized worldwide that English is the most studied foreign language in the world, and is going to peak at about two billion learners in the next decade. English is also the preferred language for intra-company communications in many global companies, although more and more medium-sized firms are expressing the same preference as more and more cross-border mergers take place. A survey of British exporting companies dating back to 1991 found that over a third used English in dealings with foreign customers (Metcalf 1991), and in most cases, even for European companies based in non-English speaking countries, English has become a recognized milestone. This trend is based on two main assumptions: firstly, a single corporate language allows operational efficiency, and secondly, “the global patterns of language use are reinforcing the status of English as the predominant language of international business communication” (Maclean 2006). However, the reliance on a single language is also a flawed strategy, as the English language’s role as the sole language for international business relations has clearly declined from 51% in 2000 to 29% in 2009 (Bel Habib 2011). First of all, not everyone in the world speaks English, and most importantly, not everyone is willing to speak English. This is due to the fact that SMEs in Europe are using to an increasing extent the target language of the export market so as to establish themselves in new emerging markets. As a consequence, other languages such as German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, and Chinese are increasingly becoming comparatively more important (*English Next* 2006). Also, even if most European SMEs recognize English as the primary language used for doing business in export markets, there is widespread use of other languages as well. For instance, German is used when exporting to 15 countries, Russian is used in trade with the Baltic States, Poland, and Bulgaria, and French is commonly used in 8 countries, including France, Belgium, and Luxembourg (ELAN, 2006). The following chart shows the main languages used by SMEs for exporting:

Languages used by SMEs for exporting

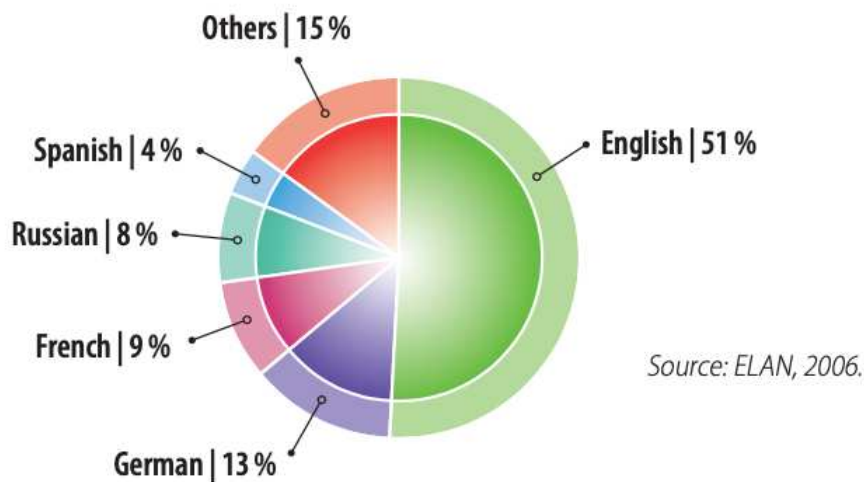


Figure 7 – Languages used by SMEs for exporting
The illustration has been extracted from the study by the European Commission, *ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, (2006).

The most interesting finding is that English is no longer widely spread, due to the tendency for companies to try using the local language of the foreign market. Indeed, another reason why English cannot be considered the business lingua franca anymore comes from the fact that it collides with the growing trend in Linguistic Nationalism, meaning that especially buyers in Asia, South America, and the Middle East are asserting their right to “work in the language of the customer” (Feely and Harzing 2002). Trading in Latin America, for instance, is almost impossible without a few words of Spanish or Portuguese, and traveling around Russia with only English is not the best option. Finally, the total commitment to a single language puts English speakers at risk in negotiations, as, according to the law, contracts, rules, and legislation must be written in the local language, and a company unable to operate in that language is obviously defenseless and vulnerable (Feely and Harzing 2002).

3.2.2. Functional Multilingualism

Another approach comes from Hagen’s study *Business communication across borders* (1999), and relies on what he calls “Functional Multilingualism”. This basically means “muddle through, relying on a mix of languages, pidgins, and gestures to communicate

by whatever means the parties have at their disposal” (Feely and Harzing 2002). According to Hagen’s studies, 16% of international business transactions are conducted in a “cocktail of languages” (Feely and Harzing 2002). However, even if such an effort might be successful in a general social context where the sole objective is mutual understanding, it obviously lacks professionalism and appears hit-and-miss in a business environment. It follows that Functional Multilingualism has the same disadvantages as relying on a lingua franca and increases the likelihood of cognitive divergence among the parties involved in communication.

3.2.3. External language resources

The third strategy to overcome language barriers suggested by Feely and Harzing is to employ external professionals, such as translators and interpreters. Although it might appear the more rational and obvious response, it is by no means an end to language barriers. First of all, relying on excellent external companies specialized in these fields can be incredibly expensive. Secondly, any good translator or interpreter would require to be fully involved in the context of the subject matter so as to provide a top-quality service. However, this is not always possible. On one side, in most cases a company is not inclined to reveal its internal affairs to “outsiders”, and on the other side, the complexity and specialization of the topic may represent an obstacle to full understanding. In fact, even if there is considerable prior planning between the performer and the company, it is highly probable that there will be ambiguity and cultural facets in the source messages the interpreters must deal with. They will undoubtedly endeavor to provide high-fidelity translation, but in such circumstances, the professional has to be intuitive and sometimes guess the right message to convey. Clearly, this might lead to confusion and misunderstandings, affecting negatively business negotiations. So, Feely and Harzing state that “in situations requiring negotiation, persuasion, humor, etc. the use of interpreters is a poor substitute for direct communication”, as they do not allow the company to use full potential, effectiveness, and efficiency.

3.2.4. Language training

Another solution involves language training and personnel development in the case of businesses with skill shortages, offering training programs at every level and in different languages. Since companies that are involved in international trade have to deal with more than one single national culture, cross-cultural learning, understanding of foreign cultures, and respect for differentiation and tradition are vital for their good relationships with distributors, retailers, and customers.

There is a wide range of courses that are implemented by companies to improve their language proficiency. Instituting very general courses, a measure usually referred to as “quick-fix solutions”, appears to be very popular among companies (Revees and Wright 1996). However, since effective language learning requires time and self-commitment, general courses are often unsatisfactory, discouraging, and daunting, as the likelihood of non-completion is high. To solve this problem, tailor-made courses are required. Targeted language training which focuses on the specific communication requirements of each company appears to be very beneficial. First of all, they allow employees to use acquired knowledge immediately, which gives them a reward for the sacrificed effort and motivates them to do better. Another advantage is that since the course has fewer objectives, but realistic and challenging at the same time, learners progress step by step which allows them to actually be aware of their improvements (Revees and Wright 1996). A key example is the Volkswagen Group, a well-known and committed leader in language training. Thanks to a language strategy they have developed over many years, Volkswagen Group can serve as a model of how to manage language professionally. However, Volkswagen's approach emphasizes that language training must be viewed as a strategic rather than a tactical solution. In their system, language progression requires the completion of 6 stages of course that allow employees to reach an acceptable proficiency in communicating in a foreign language. Each stage requires approximately 90 hours of in-class studies, supplemented by additional hours of self-study that are spread over a 6-9 month period. At the end of each stage, learners have to pass an achievement test, a prerequisite for further training. In conclusion, even this professionally managed program requires at least three years of intensive study to produce

accountants, engineers, buyers, or salespeople capable of working successfully in a foreign language (Harzing 2002).

However, as in the previous case, companies willing to prioritize investment in language training as a necessary means of winning business are still very limited in number. This is due to the fact that even if the importance of language strategies has been long recognized as a key factor in international trade, “the interplay between languages in the daily activities of international management is still opaque and poses a critical challenge to international business theory and practice” (Brannen, Piekkari, and Tietze 2014).

3.2.5. Corporate Languages

The adoption of a single corporate language is a great alternative to a customized training program. This way, individuals of the organization will no longer be trained in different languages, but the whole personnel will focus on the achievement of required standards in that one single corporate language. As stated by Feely and Harzing (2002), choosing a corporate language that is shared by anyone within a company has a number of potential benefits: it facilitates both formal reporting and informal communication between units around the world; all technical literature and documents can be accessed and maintained easily over time; it fosters a great sense of belonging; and it focuses the management of language issues. However, once again a corporate language does not represent a comprehensive solution to language and cultural barriers. In fact, one study of a big Finnish company showed that it is undoubtedly a long-term strategy, as even about ten years after the designation of English as the company’s Corporate Language, the meetings reports were still written in Finnish (Marshan-Piekkari et al., 1999). Furthermore, it must also be considered that it is not always effectively possible to adopt a unique language for all situations and circumstances. If, for example, there is a large body of personnel lacking skills in that chosen language, there will clearly be resistance to it. Finally, if on the one hand, a corporate language strategy may improve intra-company communications, on the other hand, it does nothing to eliminate language barriers with external, foreign entities, such as customers, suppliers, or governments. As a consequence, other solutions must be taken into account too.

3.2.6. Using local agents and/or native speakers to solve language problems

“The easiest and the cheapest way to approach the language problem is to hire people already possessing the required skills” (Lester 1994 as quoted by Harzing 2002). Selective Recruitment is, in fact, one of the most widely-used language management strategies to solve language problems, that is, “seeking to appoint workers who have the necessary linguistic and operational skills required to meet a specified business need” (ELAN 2006). As demonstrated by the PIMLICO Project, there exists a positive correlation between the use of native speakers and the increasing trade volume of companies. However, Feely and Harzing (2002) point out that this is not a painless solution as it involves “redeployment and possible redundancy of the post holders who cannot manage their foreign language at the required level”. Furthermore, Hagen (1999) states that there is sufficient evidence to show that the appropriate level and combination of language skills are not always available on the market. As a result, recruitment methods that overcome language barriers need to be used very selectively and may only be beneficial in three different situations:

- “To fill critical areas of language exposure;
- To create a language node;
- To develop expatriate managers” (Feely and Harzing, 2002).

The expression “language node” is used when in the absence of adequate language skills, time, and/or financial resources to start training programs or to adopt corporate language approaches, companies become dependent on their scarce language-skilled workforce (Feely and Harzing, 2002). Therefore, these key figures become informal “language nodes”, establishing themselves as a sort of communicative mediator between the company and the external world. However, even if from the company’s perspective this solution may appear understandable, more in-depth research by Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1997) has indicated that the approach has some disadvantages. First of all, the risk of misunderstanding and miscommunication is higher, as the language node employee might be fluent in a foreign language but inexpert in the field of work object of communication. Secondly, those individuals may feel the power to act as communication gatekeepers,

which may be used in a counter-productive way eliminating, filtering, or distorting the information, thereby impeding rather than facilitating the communication between the parties. In brief, whilst it is fundamental to leverage the personnel's skills within an enterprise, it is equally fundamental that the "language nodes" do not become themselves the source of organizational dysfunctions (Feely and Harzing, 2002).

Continuing this theme, expatriation is another language strategy that is commonly used as an immediate solution to overcome language barriers. Thanks to the expatriates who act as "language node", expatriation management enhance better communication and connection between headquarters and subsidiaries or foreign customers. However, once again the main disadvantage is in terms of costs, as the salary of an expatriate manager is considerably higher than that of a local one (Feely and Harzing, 2002).

3.2.7. Creating culturally and/or linguistically adapted websites

Company websites are commonly used for spreading general information on the enterprise - according to the PIMLICO Project, 65% of all SMEs interviewed report having their own website. But when SMEs want to expand their business globally, the Internet and more specifically multilingual company websites can represent the key to reaching a global audience. By integrating multilingual support into their website, companies are able to reach not only their local audience but also all potential customers based in different areas of the world, hence greatly increasing their chances of getting more business. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of the PIMLICO surveyed companies have invested in a multilingual website, where the range of languages depends on each company's market expansion. As a result, it appears that creating culturally and linguistically adapted websites increases sales by 16%-25%.

3.2.8. Using linguistic audits

Linguistic Auditing is the process of identifying a company's strengths and weaknesses in foreign language communication. This way, companies can understand their current competencies in a particular department as well as the skills of the company's employees. The main purpose of linguistic auditing is to identify needs at a strategic level, but the process requires human resources, training, time, and money (Reeves-Wright 1996:5).

According to Reeves and Wright (1996), there are several factors that affect the process of conducting the language auditing:

- a. The expected duration of the audit;
- b. The company size;
- c. The budget intended for the audit;
- d. The causes of the problem in the field of communication;
- e. The goals set by the company;
- f. The knowledge of the auditor about the organization.

Companies usually apply Linguistic Auditing to provide feedback in four main areas:

- a. “Identifying the needs of the company in terms of recruitment and language training;
- b. Recognizing strengths and weaknesses of an organization;
- c. Assessing the foreign language requirements;
- d. Benchmarking the findings against the capabilities of a company” (Reeves and Wright, 1996: 7).

3.2.9. Forging links with local universities

Making special use of universities for hiring language graduates or foreign students seems to be a common trend among the PIMLICO surveyed companies. Some of the benefits they can bring inside a company are the ability to open up new markets, as well as answer phone calls in foreign languages and provide support and an easy interface with clients from their own countries.

3.3. The benefits of implementing Language Management Strategies

Thanks to the PIMLICO Project, it has been demonstrated that companies that invest in language management and implement LMSs are more likely to have higher export sales than those that do not, as they have all registered an overall increase in turnover. In addition, the project confirms what has been previously shown by the ELAN study, that is, there are four measures of language management clearly associated with increased export performance: establishing a language plan or strategy before exporting to a foreign

market, appointing native speakers, recruiting employees who already possess language skills, and using professional translators and/or interpreters. Companies investing in these four techniques “achieved export sales 44.5% higher than those not making any of these investments” (PIMLICO Project 2011). The following table shows the impact of these four strategies in increasing exports as a share of total SME sales:

| Language Measure | Percentage increase in exports as share of sales |
|---|--|
| Hiring staff with language skills | 16.6 |
| Establishing language strategy in advance | 13.5 |
| Employing native speakers | 7.0 |
| Using professional translators | 7.4 |

Source: ELAN, 2006.

Figure 8 – Language Management Strategies Impact

The table has been extracted from the study by the European Commission, *ELAN: Effects on the European Economy of Shortages of Foreign Language Skills in Enterprise*, (2006).

In the PIMLICO study of 40 successful European SMEs who had introduced a language strategy, the majority of them noticed that sales turnover increased at least by 10-25% by combining different types of language strategies. The following chart shows the percentage increase in 40 companies’ turnover due to LMS implementation – 34 case studies revealed the exact increase, whereas the remaining 6 of them registered an increase but did not reveal the exact figure:

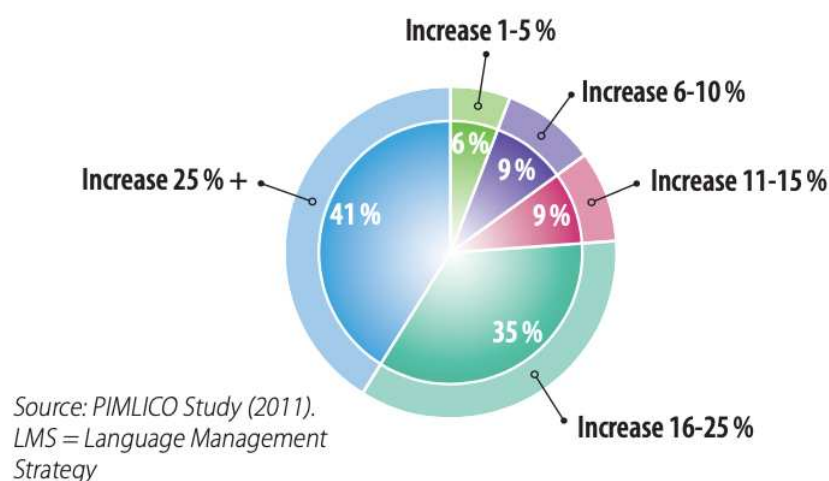


Figure 9 – Percentage increase in turnover due to LMSs

The graph has been extracted from the study by the European Commission, *Report on Language Management Strategies and Best Practice in European SMEs: The PIMLICO Project*, (2011).

What stands out is that an impressive 41% of the companies which adopted foreign language strategies to bridge language and cultural barriers recorded an increase in turnover by more than 25%. An additional 35% noticed a raise from 16% to 25%, and only 25% of the companies registered a business growth below 16%. It follows that all enterprises selected in the PIMLICO study realized the added value of enhancing their communication abilities. In other words, the implementation of Language Management Strategies can produce exclusively positive results.

Chapter 4 – Case study: research process and data analysis

In Chapters 1, 2, and 3, an overview of the main theories of international trade and internationalization at a purely theoretical level has been introduced. The entire discussion has been developed through deductive reasoning, namely from the general to the specific: first, it has been discussed the internationalization process of large multinational companies; afterward, the same phenomenon has been analyzed but from the perspective of small and medium-sized companies, as over the last decades they have become very important players in international trade; finally, a particular focus has been put on small software-developing companies, as they seem to internationalize extremely rapidly in a trend not consistent with the slow processes proposed by most classical theories of internationalization. At the same time, the above-mentioned theoretical framework of an economic nature has been linked with the linguistic-cultural sphere, thus showing the importance of implementing linguistic management strategies to overcome the linguistic and cultural obstacles that companies must deal with during the internationalization process.

4.1. Overview

Chapter 4 aims to introduce the research method used to analyze the themes mentioned in the previous three chapters through the data collected from field research. Therefore, the present study is designed to examine the internationalization process of a small, Italian software-developing company from a purely linguistic and cultural perspective. In other words, it will be shown that although ICT has significantly lowered entry barriers, firms cannot successfully internationalize without implementing effective Language Management Strategies, as “for small companies, good multilingual communication can open up opportunities that make the difference between success and failure” (European Communities 2008). The company here under study is Components Engine, a small, niche, Italian company that in just a few years has managed to enter several foreign markets and build up a very large customer base, most of them from countries other than Italy. Therefore, by retracing Components Engine's internationalization processes and strategies, the following hypothesis will be supported: companies that invest in language

strategies are more likely to successfully enter foreign markets, rapidly internationalize, and increase the company's turnover. The research was conducted through questionnaires and interviews with the Components Engine's internal personnel and internal documentation containing written reports and company processes records. Before going into the heart of the research, the first sections explain why a case study was chosen to test this hypothesis, how the target company was selected, how reliable key information was collected, and the process chosen for the analysis.

4.2. Research Approach

When it comes to data collection and analysis for a case study, two main methods can be distinguished: quantitative and qualitative research. The two methods are tools used to achieve the same goal but with different techniques and procedures. Indeed, they are incompatible in the sense that each has its own unique way of gathering and analyzing data. At the most basic level, quantitative research methods are based on numbers and measurable values and make it possible to test a large number of participants or data, which can then be easily compared through cross-case analysis. In addition, clear values or numbers are obtained, which can be used for rating purposes. By contrast, in qualitative analysis individual case analysis based on personal statements and documents is at the heart of the research, therefore providing a more in-depth insight into specific situations and helping to solve questions or ambiguities (Mahoney and Goertz 2013). The following table shows the main characteristics and differences between quantitative and qualitative methods:

| | Quantitative Research | Qualitative Research |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Definition | An approach that quantifies problems by generating numerical data or information that can be transformed into useable statistics. It is used to quantify categories, | An approach used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. It provides insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or |

| | | |
|--------------------|--|---|
| | attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and other defined variables | hypotheses for potential quantitative research |
| Measurement | Standardized and measurable data | Non-standardized measurement to obtain the most detailed information possible |
| Evaluation | Statistical evaluation: analyzing through statistical and mathematical analysis | Interpretative evaluation: analyzing through summarizing, classifying, and interpreting |
| Sample size | A large number of data to explain only a few cases | A small amount of data to explain many cases |
| Key factors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing • Objectivity • Measurement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding • Context • Subjectivity • Complexity |
| Methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiments • Surveys • Database reports • Questionnaires • Case studies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case study • Interviews • Documents • Observation • Personal accounts and papers • Literature review |

Source: the table is a personal elaboration and has been created by summarizing the content of the research by Daniel (2016), Shields and Twycross (2003), Mahoney and Goertz (2013), and Sinaga (2014).

4.2.1. Qualitative Research

Since the main purpose of the present work is to study a specific company and its experience, qualitative research was chosen to develop the analysis. This approach makes it possible to perform more accurate and in-depth analyses, as well as process unexpected findings. Nowadays there exist several studies that analyze the internationalization processes of small high-tech companies through cross-case analysis to show how technological advancement has lowered entry barriers, but there are still few studies that focus on one single company. Furthermore, there is still no study that correlates the internationalization process of small high-tech companies with the adoption of Language Management Strategies to actually succeed in the internationalization process. It has been widely demonstrated how small high-tech companies' internationalization attitude differs from the Uppsala School's conceptualizations, how they select their target markets, and how they enter into foreign markets, but no attention has been paid to how these companies face one of the most frequent obstacles that usually prevent them from internationalizing: language and cultural barriers. And this is exactly the primary purpose of the present study: analyzing a small high-tech, software-developing company's internationalization experience to understand what types of Language Management Strategies it has adopted to successfully overcome the language and cultural barriers that arise when seeking to enter foreign markets, and demonstrating how much these strategies are vital for the company to become a recognized international player. Therefore, qualitative research has been chosen to study in detail the relationship between a purely economic issue, that is, the internationalization process of companies, and a linguistic one, the importance of Language Management Strategies to go international. Another reason to consider the present research qualitative is the fact that the master thesis is written in form of a case study, which usually falls under qualitative research methods. In the following section, an overview of what exactly a case study is has been introduced.

4.2.2. Case study method

As already listed in the previous table, there are different approaches to performing scientific research. In the context of this work, since the main focus is on individual and firm-specific experience, a case study turns out to be the best method of investigation to

gather an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of an issue. Dul and Hak (2008) define a case study as “a study in which (a) one case (single case study) or a small number of cases (comparative case study) in their real-life context are selected, and (b) scores obtained from these cases are analyzed in a qualitative manner”. The same definition is supported by Harling (2012), who states that case studies can deal with either single or multiple cases. In the case of single case studies, they can be either intrinsic or instrumental: the intrinsic case study is used to learn about a unique phenomenon that the study focuses on, and the researcher has to be able to define the uniqueness of this phenomenon which distinguishes it from all others; the instrumental case study is used to provide a general understanding of a phenomenon using a particular case. By contrast, the collective case study is used to provide a general understanding using a number of case studies that either occur on the same site or come from multiple sites.

For this specific investigation, a single, instrumental case study has been conducted, as the research focuses on one specific company experience, which will serve as a general example for many other cases. If there were multiple cases, thus multiple company experiences, a collective case study would be conducted to gather data from different experiences and then compare the results. The aim of this single case study is to investigate a precise phenomenon within a specific context, where context means the organization or the society in which the phenomenon takes place. This corresponds exactly to the core of this study: the present and observable phenomenon is the adoption of Language Management Strategies to enter foreign markets during the internationalization process and therefore increase exports, whereas the cultural and linguistic barriers that arise when accessing foreign markets during the expansion of a single company - in this case, Components Engine, - account for the context. Needless to say, to validate the thesis proposed in the present study, future research on other specific individual cases will be needed with the goal of comparing them and identifying general trends.

There exist different methods to conduct a case study, but to develop the present study, the approach described by Yin R.K. (2004; 2018) in his books has been implemented. The following section provides a brief overview of the 6 steps described by Yin (Figure 10) that are required to conduct a case study.

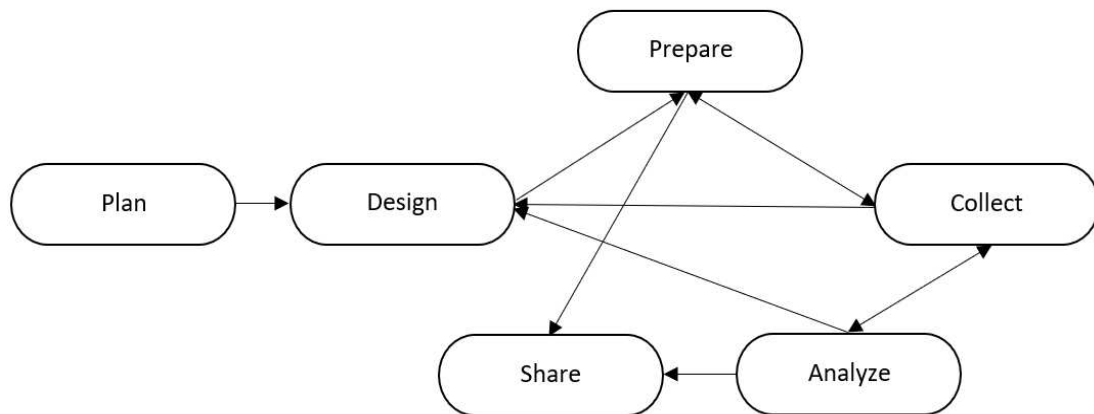


Figure 10 – Case Study Method

Case Study Research: A linear but iterative process Source: Phase of Case Study Research; Yin R.K. 2014. Case Study Research: Design and Methods. 5th ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications Ltd.

Step 1: Planning the case study

According to Yin, the first step consists in explaining why a case study was chosen rather than other research methods, such as experiments or literature reviews, and what are the concrete advantages of a case study. In addition, the planning phase also includes the formulation of one or more research questions, which can be either case-specific or generic research questions. The first option refers to a specific case, for instance, a particular company. By contrast, the second option is more of a general nature, meaning that it is usually based on 'why' or 'how' a certain phenomenon is happening but it does not focus on a unique experience or case to find answers.

The present research uses a case-study approach in order to gain insights into an existing phenomenon and examine its peculiarities with sufficient detail. Indeed, one case study is never equal to another case study. So, one advantage of this method is that it is highly specific, unique, and individual, which is particularly useful to capture the complexities of the phenomenon and to provide rounded, detailed information. Furthermore, it is also beneficial when new information comes up during the research and the method needs to be adjusted. Initially, the idea of choosing multiple case-study approaches was also considered, but one major problem was that not enough companies in the same industry willing to provide information were found. Further detailed information on this topic will be provided below in the “target selection” section (4.2.3.). In terms of research questions,

they are predominantly case-specific research questions as only one company is the focus of the research. The specific questions that will be addressed in this dissertation are the following:

1. To what extent is it true that small high-tech enterprises are "born global" companies?
2. Does an SME need to implement Language Management Strategies to enter foreign markets and therefore become an international player?
3. Which are the main Language Management Strategies that best allow an SME to successfully participate in international trade?
4. Do Language Management Strategies increase export sales and therefore the company's turnover?

Answers to the above-mentioned questions will be provided in sections 5.1 and 5.2.

Step 2: Designing the case study

The second step involves defining the case study by explaining how it was conducted, what data was needed for the analysis, and which methods were chosen to collect data to answer the research questions. There are multiple different research methods that can be used to collect data on a subject. Case studies tend to focus on qualitative data using methods such as interviews, observations, and analysis of primary and secondary sources (e.g., newspaper articles, photographs, intra-company documentation, and official records). However, sometimes a case study can also be complemented by quantitative data.

In this specific case study, data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, meaning that a general plan for what to ask has been previously prepared, but the questions have not necessarily followed a particular phrasing or order. Furthermore, questions were open-ended, allowing the respondents for flexibility, but followed a predetermined thematic framework to give a sense of order. The reason why interviews were chosen as the core method is that they are the most successful and detailed way to collect the necessary data. Moreover, they allow for asking more specific questions about certain areas, gathering rich information, and drawing much more detailed conclusions

than other research methods. How exactly the data was collected is described below in the "Data collection" section (4.4.).

Step 3: Preparing to collect case study evidence

The third step is the preparation for data collection. Yin (2018) divides this step into three different stages that should be worked through consecutively:

1. Literature review;
2. Identify the data source;
3. Acquire the data source.

The first stage is the literature review, “a select analysis of existing research that is relevant to a researcher’s selected topic, showing how it relates to their investigation. It explains and justifies how the investigation may help answer some of the questions or gaps in the chosen area of study” (University of Reading, 2019). More precisely, studies can be furtherly explained by an existing theory, which can be either supported or refuted by the case study. The next step is based on the identification of data sources. This phase involves, for instance, understanding how to get the right data for the analysis, targeting the potential respondents, and detecting which company documentation can be useful to support the research’s thesis. Finally, the third step deals with the acquisition of data, namely how to effectively get the necessary information. Requesting company data, contacting archive owners, and requesting the willingness and permission of potential interviewees to release their information are different options to get the data.

In the context of this dissertation, the literature review has been thoroughly discussed in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 with the aim of drawing a clear and comprehensive picture of the chosen topic which contextualizes the case study that will be presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The research’s general background focuses on some theories that facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon to be studied, namely the main theories of internationalization, with a special insight into the Uppsala Internationalization Model that has been refuted by the internationalization trends of small high-tech companies and therefore by the present case study. As for how the data was obtained and which potential

interview partners responded, a more detailed explanation is provided below in the "Data collection" section (4.4.).

Step 4: Collecting case study evidence

The fourth step is data collection, which can vary from case to case. Yin (2018) points out 4 principles that should be satisfied when collecting data:

- Use multiple sources of evidence;
- Create a case study database;
- Maintain a chain of evidence;
- Exercise care when using data from social media sources.

As previously mentioned, there exist multiple ways of collecting data, such as interviews, direct observations, document reviews, or archival records. For this specific case study, interviews, questionnaires, archival records, and intra-company documentation were selected as the primary source of evidence.

Step 5: Analyzing case study evidence

The analysis represents the most extensive part of the case study, as all the data collected must be processed, interpreted, and interwoven in order to be explained correctly and clearly. Once collected enough evidence through interviews, questionnaires, and corporate documentation, all data has been analyzed from a theoretical point of view with the aim of finding exhaustive answers to the research questions of this dissertation. In the case of the questionnaires, since all the people involved were asked the same questions, it was also possible to identify some interesting trends that have been visually represented through graphs and tables. Obviously, since this is qualitative rather than quantitative research, evidence analysis is often individualistic and subjective because the main focus is on using data to answer specific research questions. To find universal answers, it would be necessary to weave together the data and results from different case studies in order to extrapolate general rules that can be shared by multiple realities.

Step 6: Reporting Case Studies

At the end of the entire process, the most significant results are filtered out from the less relevant ones. Furthermore, deductive reasoning should be applied, meaning that general results should be presented first, followed by specific ones. The visual representation, such as the use of figures and/or tables, should be included as well along with their corresponding explanation.

The final part involves discussing the results, showing the main findings, and summarizing the analysis. In that respect, Yin (2018) points out that the results of a case study cannot be generalized. Indeed, the findings of the present case study do not infer that other case studies about similar companies will have the same results.

4.3. Target selection

To demonstrate that a successful internationalization of small high-tech companies is directly proportional to the implementation of Language Management Strategies, a pre-screening of potential companies was carried out. In order to be selected as the subject of the study, the company had to meet the following characteristics:

- The company is a high-tech, computer software firm;
- The company fits perfectly into the category of SME (both in terms of human resources and turnover);
- Despite its very small size, the company experienced an extremely rapid internationalization process;
- The company is currently an international company, meaning that it exports its products to several countries worldwide;
- The countries in which the company has established a market position should be culturally and linguistically different;
- The company has adopted and continues to adopt Language Management Strategies to deal with foreign customers;
- The company should be willing to be taken as a case study, allowing the use and disclosure of internal information and documentation.

Despite the various prerequisites that undoubtedly narrow the field, and despite the particular and niche industry, the ideal company for this case study has been found. Indeed, the subject of the study met all the criteria:

- It is a northern-Italian company, with its headquarters in Cesena;
- It is a small high-tech, software-developing company, with 12 employees and a production value of 1,217,000 Euros;
- It has undergone a rapid internationalization process, implementing several types of Language Management Strategies;
- It has a strong international presence, as it operates in 5 continents and 32 countries, with around 400 customers worldwide;
- Thanks to such an international and diverse customer base, it regularly deals with language and cultural barriers.

In Chapter 5, a detailed presentation of the chosen company will be provided.

4.4. Data collection

According to Yin's research on case studies (2018), for accurate and credible data collection multiple data sources are required. In the present work, interviews with the Components Engine's internal personnel have been chosen as the primary form of data collection. More specifically, interviews were conducted with one of the company's founders and two long-time employees. The main goal was to gather data extensively and intensively, as the interviews may disclose original and unique information that would not ordinarily be written down on paper. More detailed information on the target interviewees and on how the interviews were carried out are presented in the following chapters.

In addition to interviews, a questionnaire was submitted to the remaining employees of the company with the aim of gathering information regarding educational qualifications and/or specific courses for foreign language learning. Furthermore, the questionnaire included a number of questions regarding personal work experience in communicating

with foreign customers. The data collected were fundamental for the analysis of the present case study, as they give a good insight into the Language Management Strategies adopted by the company to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers.

Finally, both internal and external documentation has been crucial for the research. Internal documentation includes written records of the company's processes and business such as project, customer, and process documentation written exclusively for the benefit of the internal team of the company. Since internal documentation is usually not disclosed, access to the sources and permission to use the data have been requested from the owners of the company. In more detail, the main internal documentation used for the purposes of this study includes a highly detailed report that contains a list of all contacts made with customers over time, divided according to the following categories: active customers, inactive customers, customers who are evaluating the software, customers who have suspended evaluation, customers who have postponed evaluation, and competitors or other. For each of these customers, information such as company name, country of origin, date of first and last contact, date when a customized demo was offered, and date of license purchase is included. Interesting information was extracted from this document regarding the distribution of the company's active and non-active customers around the world, so as to identify which areas the company has the greatest presence in. As for external documentation, annual financial statements from 2010 to 2021 have been employed with the aim of checking the company's turnover trends over the years, any growth or decrease in the number of employees, and the percentage of turnover from export activities.

The following chapters present a more detailed description of how the interviews were structured and developed, and who the interview partners are. Next, a brief discussion will be devoted to questionnaires, which represented the secondary source of data.

4.4.1. Interviews

Expert interviews are a very frequent qualitative research method. Unlike other methods, it works with smaller samples, such as respondents, who provide deeper information that may be crucial for analysis. Furthermore, although the interviews are semi-structured with early-prepared and highly specific questions, answers are unpredictable, with the

benefit that new insights can enrich the analysis. In order to conduct smooth and problem-free conversations, the interview procedure has been planned in advance. Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2009) describe in their article the various steps on how to best prepare, conduct, and analyze interviews. This guide was used as the basis for this case study.

Step 1: Developing the interview schedule

The first step before going into the heart of the interview involves structuring the interview process on the basis of the aims and objectives of the study. First of all, Babbie (2007) states that there exist several types of interviews and identifies three major categories: structured interview, semi-structured interview, and unstructured interview. Given this variety, it is necessary to identify the most useful mode for the purposes of the case study. This step also consists of preparing the interview structure. Polit and Hungler (1995) suggest that the schedule should consist of an outline of categories that are relevant to the research and on which interview questions are ultimately based. The sequencing of questions comprises an initial introduction to the study and verification of consent. Afterward, essential questions which directly concern the main focus of the study should follow. It should also be decided who the respondents would be and in which language the interview would be conducted. Finally, it should also be clear which techniques and tools would be used for the recording, whether a video or audio recording performed during a video call, a telephone call, or a direct conversation.

With regard to this case study, a semi-structured interview has been conducted. This means that a list of structured and explicit questions has been previously prepared with the goal of gathering specific information that answers the research questions of this study. However, while a schedule for predetermined topics has been used, the interviews were also extremely flexible to allow for unanticipated responses and new questions to emerge. The focus was on permitting the interview partners to tell their own stories rather than answering a series of structured questions only, so as to collect individualistic, richer, and more textured data from the participants. The questions submitted to the respondents can be consulted in the Appendix section (A.1., A.2., and A.3.). Concerning the selection

of interview partners, it is fundamental to identify the most ideal participants within the company who are able to provide answers relevant to the objectives of the case study. Once selected, they were offered the case study and asked for their willingness to participate in the survey, also requesting consent to release the information disclosed. Fortunately, none of the people involved refused to participate. On the contrary, they were very pleased to be able to contribute and use their personal experience, and the company's experience itself, for academic purposes. The interviews have been conducted with three respondents:

- Flavio Rondini

Flavio Rondini is one of the two founders and current owners of Components Engine, who has always worked within the company as a software programmer. He founded the company in 1998, and since the product initially lacked great potential in the Italian market, he decided early on to focus on foreign markets. Therefore, internationalization was one of his first goals. Flavio Rondini's contribution to this work has been vital, as he was able to give a comprehensive overview of the company's history and disclose relevant information about the internationalization process undergone by the firm, from its first steps into foreign markets up to the current widespread presence in the world. The key insights given by Flavio Rondini relate mainly to the strategies that the company has adopted over the years to successfully deal with and overcome communication barriers that arise during internationalization. In the section dedicated to the analysis of the sources and findings (Chapter 5), these strategies will be discussed in detail.

- Mario Mecca

Mario Mecca started working at Components Engine in 2006 and is the Export Sales Manager of Italian-, English-, and Spanish-speaking countries, as well as of all European and non-European countries that do not have Italian, English, or Spanish as their first language but use English as their lingua franca. He has a bachelor's degree in Internet Economics and has trained as a multimedia product designer. Mario Mecca's native language is Italian, followed by English (L2) and Spanish (L3). Besides learning English at school, in 2000 he moved to London, where he worked and attended an intensive English course for one year. Upon his return to Italy in 2001, he received the First

Certificate in English (FCE) from the British Council of Bologna, which certifies a B2 level. However, his second language level has undoubtedly improved over the years, reaching a C2. With regards to his L3, Mario Mecca started to learn Spanish self-taught for business purposes using foreign language learning books that contain basic courses for beginners. Indeed, from the very beginning it was clear that in order to operate successfully in the Spanish market, it was absolutely essential to speak the client's language. Only after Mario Mecca managed to obtain an intermediate level in Spanish, the company started to attract and consolidate its first Spanish customers, reaching a total of 16 customers today. Thanks to the interview with Mario Mecca, very interesting information was gathered regarding the importance of using the client's language during business negotiations, the different communication strategies to be adopted depending on the client's country of origin, and the evolution of the company over a time span from before, during, and after the internationalization process.

- Katja Sartini

Katja Sartini has been the Export Sales Manager of German-speaking countries (Germany, Austria, and the German-speaking part of Switzerland) at Components Engine since 2017. She was born in Germany, where she acquired a high-school diploma in Business Administration and a two-year degree in Human Resources. Although Katja Sartini is formally bilingual because she is of Italian descent, she considers German as her mother tongue, Italian as L2, and English as L3. Besides learning English at school, she attended some extra courses to improve the language. Katja Sartini's interview was very helpful in understanding how the company deals with the German market, how important it is to have a resource who can speak fluent German to operate successfully in German-speaking countries, and how necessary it is not only to know the language but also the culture of the foreign customer.

As for techniques and tools, the one-to-one interviews have been carried out in person inside the company's offices and recorded with a mobile phone in order to make sure that no information was lost. Since the respondents all speak Italian, the interviews were conducted in Italian. The interviews have not been translated into English. However, in order to report quotes and discuss the most relevant findings, some limited parts of the

interviews have been translated into English and included in the following chapters of the dissertation.

Step 2: Conducting the interview

After planning, conducting the interview follows. In principle, this step should not be difficult if the planning has been properly processed. As interviews were semi-structured, the pre-organized guidelines have been followed. However, whenever there were deviations, the conversation was not steered back in the right direction immediately, as unexpected responses allowed for formulating new, interesting questions. In addition, Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2009) suggest that a relaxed, confident, and attentive approach demonstrated by the interviewer would help a good interview relationship develop and that the interviewer has to ensure that the interviewee is at ease and not threatened. However, this aspect has not been a major problem since, working in the same company as the respondents, the relationship was on the same level.

Step 3: Transcript of the interviews

Transcription is the most time-consuming step because every word of the recording must be written down. Changing words is usually not allowed, while repetitions, moments of silence to formulate thoughts, hesitations, and stammers may not be included. Since the interviews were conducted in Italian, the transcription is also in Italian and they have not been translated into English. The transcriptions of the interviews can be found in the Appendix section (A.1., A.2., and A.3.).

Step 4: Interview analysis

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, their analysis and interpretation follow. According to Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin (2009), qualitative data are interpreted depending on the theoretical focus of the study and are usually reduced or condensed by a system of coding. There are three major activities involved in data analysis: data reduction, meaning that data are simplified and highly focused; data display, meaning

that data are visibly described through graphs and charts that facilitate interpretation of results and show possible relationships and similarities; and verification, that involves conclusions and explanations of the data collected. Lathlean (2006) argues that the process of analyzing qualitative data is not always linear and objective, but is influenced by the purposes and the methodological underpinnings of the research.

4.4.2. Questionnaire

For the purposes of this case study, structured questionnaires based on a deductive method were used as a secondary source of data collection. This means that mostly open-ended questions were used to explore a substantive area with the aim of formulating a new theory based on the answers collected. The questionnaires were submitted to a total of 8 employees of the company (including the author herself), excluding the three respondents who were involved in the interviews. The form opens with a brief introduction to present the case study to the participant and to place it within a specific theoretical context. Afterward, a series of questions follow regarding the respondent itself, namely personal data, educational qualifications, and language skills, and regarding the company and the respondent's role within the company. At this stage, the questionnaire is structured into 4 main sections: the first one is dedicated to general awareness regarding the company's approach to foreign markets; the second section aims at collecting data about communicating in foreign markets, both from the general perspective of the company and from the individual point of view of the respondent based on its own experiences; the third part includes questions about the Language Management Strategies implemented by the company over the years to face linguistic and cultural barriers that arise during the internationalization process; and finally, the fourth and last part asks for further free-choice comments. The data collected were of vital importance because they were able to explain a precise phenomenon, namely the cause-and-effect relationship between the adoption of Language Management Strategies and the following expansion into foreign markets. The collected data were then processed to identify general trends, which will be discussed in the following chapters and presented in the form of graphs. All questionnaires can be consulted in Appendix, section B.

4.5. Visual representation of the research process

Below, a concept map shows the visual representation that summarizes the research process divided into several steps that have been used to develop the case dissertation.

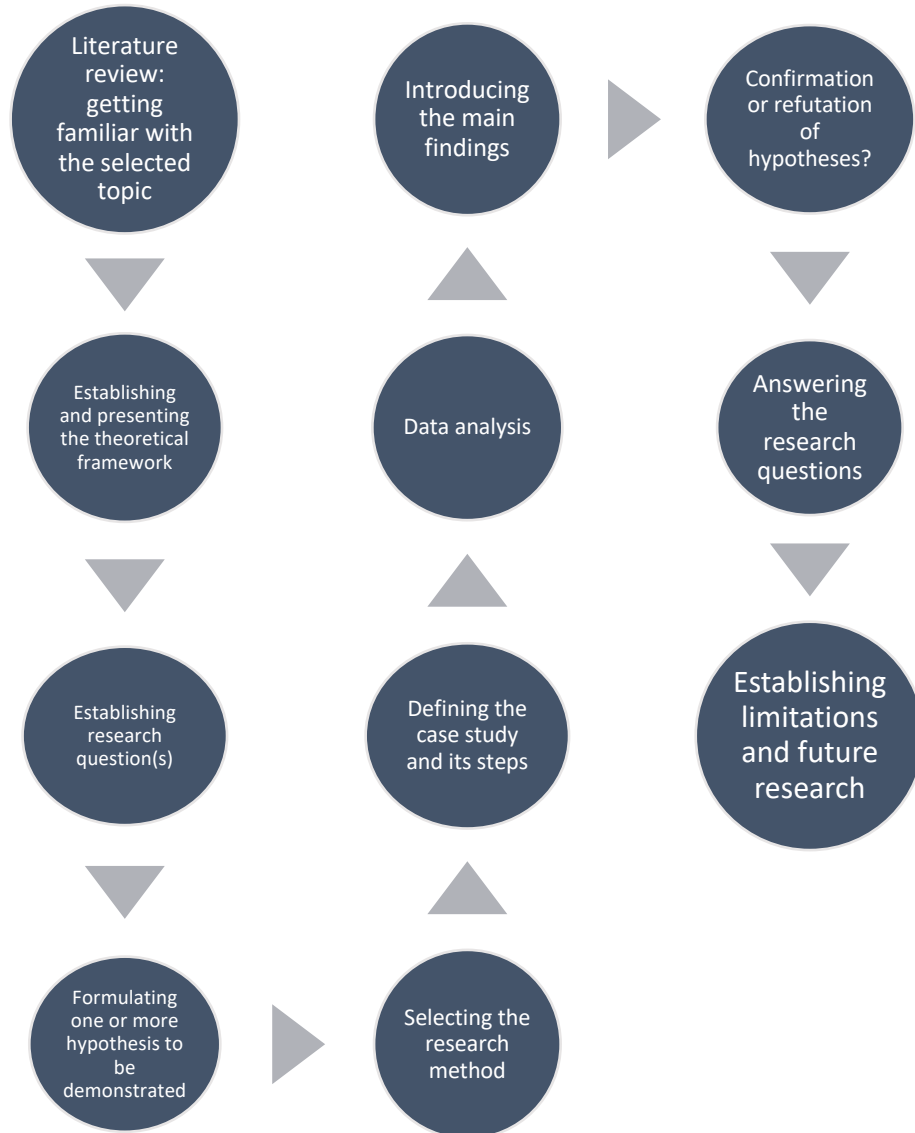


Figure 11 – Visual representation of the research process
Source: personal elaboration.

Chapter 5 - The *Components Engine* case: company presentation, analysis, and empirical findings

After detailing the analysis method, Chapter 5 begins by providing a thorough presentation of the company object of this study, namely Components Engine. First of all, the chapter will relate the company's history, products, and market. Afterward, the analysis process will follow, which is devoted to the examination of the company's internationalization process. To do so, the company's individual experience will be correlated with the theories of internationalization proposed by Moen (2004), Aspelund and Moen (2004), Bell (1995), and Coviello and Munro (1997), which were presented in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The Components Engine case will be used as an example to confirm or refute the theses that argue that the advance of ICT has overcome the classical stage theories of internationalization. Therefore, the first objective is to understand whether small high-tech companies such as Components Engine can indeed be described as "born global" companies. Once this first point is discussed, the internationalization process of the company will be analyzed from a purely linguistic point of view, which is the real focus of this dissertation. To do so, data collected through interviews, questionnaires, and internal and external company documentation will be discussed. The goal here is to understand whether the company was able to internationalize solely by making use of ICT, or whether Language Management Strategies were also indispensable and unavoidable. Finally, the last section will be devoted to presenting the main findings that will serve as answers to the research questions of this case study.

5.1. Company profile



Figure 12 - Logo of Components Engine S.r.l.

Components Engine S.r.l. (Figure 11) is a small high-tech Italian company specializing in providing software B2B solutions for After-Sales and Technical Publications departments of companies in the machinery industry. In particular, it develops software for creating online, offline, and hard-copy format 2D and 3D spare parts catalogs; a service portal for sharing documentation and information with customers, dealers, and service centers; and a web portal for managing maintenance and warranty claims. The company was founded in 1998 and within 20 years has managed to create a customer base of more than 400 companies worldwide. This means that although Components Engine S.r.l. is still for all intents and purposes an SME²³, the company is proudly present in several foreign markets, both European and extra-European, where it exports its after-sales software solutions sold via licenses. This leads to the assumption that Components Engine fits neatly into the category of "international new ventures" or "born global" firms.

5.1.1. Company History

Components Engine S.r.l. dates back to 1998 and has its headquarters in Cesena, northern Italy. It was founded by Flavio Rondini and Marco Lucchi, who beyond being business partners, share a childhood history and a strong friendship. After studying together at ITT high school (Istituto Superiore Tecnico Tecnologico Blaise Pascal) in Cesena and while studying Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Bologna, they decided to start working together at Engineering, an IT Italian company founded in 1996 in Cesena that develops system integrator for the CAD/CAM/CAE industry and the first and largest supplier of Siemens PLM Industry Solid Edge and Femap solutions. After a couple of years, as they wanted to shape their passion and pursue independent careers together, they established their first firm in 1998, Progetplus S.r.l., which specialized in developing custom mechanical configurators mainly for large Italian companies. While working on a project for a client company, they developed an interactive environment called "dynamic smokehouse", where the user could explode the flue pipe into pieces and select

²³ Nowadays, Components Engine S.r.l. has 12 employees and an annual turnover of ... (1 million?) Euros. According to Commission Recommendation no. 2003/361/EC of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (see footnote 19, Chapter 2.1.), Components Engine S.r.l. meets the staff headcount ceiling and the turnover ceiling of small enterprises (<50 employees and ≤ 10 million Euros turnover).

each part. Thanks to all these work experiences, Flavio and Marco got the idea to create a series of products called Mister Engine, List Engine, Assistant Engine, and Components Engine. Initially, they developed Assistant Engine, a system designed to create interactive areas on a machine where the user could click on one section and see the corresponding information and technical documentation. Afterward, between 2004 and 2005, they created the prototype of Components Engine. Initially, the product did not gain a foothold - on one hand, because it was still a rudimentary product, and on the other hand, because there was no demand in the national market. However, since there were similar products in foreign markets, they still decided to continue developing the product, thus launching the first version of Components Engine, Components Engine 2.5., which they have continued to develop up to the present day, thus arriving at the latest version: Components Engine X. Once the first version of the product was launched on the national market, the company began to acquire its first customers – mainly small Italian companies that were looking for similar products and decided to bet and invest in this first Italian solution. As time went on, the two partners noticed that the product had potential and market demand could grow. However, they also noticed early on that the Italian market was reductive and limiting: Italian companies aim to sell a product and are very good at selling it, but they do not value everything that comes after the sale. On the other hand, the goal of foreign companies is not to sell a product, but to sell 20 years of that product. For instance, they sell a machine for €20,000 right away, but they also guarantee after-sales service for the next 20 years, thus arriving at a profit of €200,000 from that machine. In other words, it is as if the product is bought back ten more times just for the spare parts and maintenance services that follow the sale of the product. When Components Engine was founded, this philosophy was already well established in Germany, where the company's major competitors are located, and in North America, where the automotive sector²⁴ is thriving. So, on one hand, Italian companies were old-style, meaning that they managed the after-sales world through still primitive methods (phone calls, photographs of spare parts sent via email or phone, informal documentation in Excel format, etc.). However, on the other

²⁴ All those companies and activities involved in the manufacture of motor vehicles, including most components, such as engines and bodies, but excluding tires, batteries, and fuel. The industry's principal products are passenger automobiles and light trucks, including pickups, vans, and sport utility vehicles. Commercial vehicles (i.e., delivery trucks and large transport trucks, often called semis), though important to the industry, are secondary (Rae, J. Bell and Binder, Alan K. "automotive industry." Encyclopedia Britannica, March 10, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/automotive-industry>).

hand, the biggest advantage of the Italian market came from the fact that Italian companies that wanted to sell abroad needed a tool like Components Engine. So, all Italian customers are at the same time companies selling abroad. It was within this context that they decided to start structuring the company to be prepared for going international. Therefore, they hired the first salespeople and translated their websites and manuals into English, Spanish, German, and Portuguese, thus optimizing their search engine positioning and ranking in good positions over the web for search queries. The translations were performed by internal personnel who graduated in foreign languages or external translation agencies. This is how the company was able to engage its first foreign customers thus taking the first steps toward internationalization. Afterward, in 2006, the company hired one sales manager for the Italian-, English-, and Spanish-speaking countries, Mario Mecca, who made it possible for the company to successfully establish itself both in European and non-European countries. In 2012, the first sales director for German-speaking countries was hired as well, a young Swiss man who was pursuing a degree in Business Administration and managed to engage several German customers. In 2017 his position was replaced by the current sales manager, Katja Sartini, who is a German native. Nowadays, Components Engine S.r.l. has a strong international presence and operates in 5 continents and 32 countries, with around 400 customers worldwide.²⁵

5.1.2. *Components Engine: the products*

Components Engine specializes in providing B2B software solutions to manufacturing companies with the aim of improving, simplifying, and optimizing their after-sales service. Software solutions are sold all around the world in the form of licenses thanks to the following distribution channel: direct and indirect export. The company relies mainly on direct export, however, it also collaborates with technical studios, mainly located in Italy, Switzerland, and Germany, which act as intermediaries: Components Engine sells a license to the technical studio, and the technical studio in turn will handle the sale of the license to end customers. This type of export was implemented by the company especially during the early stages of internationalization when it was not yet internally

²⁵ The information described in the paragraph “Company history” (4.3.1) was obtained through the interview with Flavio Rondini, 02 Feb. 2023.

structured and ready to enter new markets independently. In fact, one of the main advantages of indirect export is that no or very few extra staff is required, as the agent already knows and has access to the foreign market and distribution channels.

The company's flagship products are Components Engine IPC (Interactive Parts Catalog), Components Engine Plus, and Components Engine Claims - the last two being solutions that complement the IPC, thus comprehensively optimizing the complete after-sales service of companies. The three solutions will be presented and described in detail below. Subsequently, some valuable insights into these solutions' main purposes and benefits will be provided.

Components Engine IPC

Components Engine IPC is an all-in-one software for creating, updating, and publishing online interactive 2D and 3D spare parts catalogs. Components Engine IPC provides the customer with two computer applications: Viewer X and Edit X. Viewer X, as the word itself implies, is a viewer, namely an application not requiring an Internet connection that allows viewing the interactive spare parts catalog offline. On the contrary, Edit X is the graphics Editor that actually enables customers to import exploded drawings²⁶ of their machinery, add different kinds of changes to the drawings, make them interactive, and associate the drawing item numbers to the corresponding parts list data²⁷. The following is an example of an exploded drawing and its spare parts list:

²⁶ The term *exploded drawing* refers to a "drawing or photograph of a complicated mechanism that shows the individual parts separately, usually indicating their relative positions" (Source: Collins English Dictionary).

²⁷ Usually, companies include parts lists (often also referred to as BOM, meaning Bill of Materials) in their exploded drawings to give additional information about the assembly components. Parts lists may include information such as position, part number or code, description, material, quantity, and price of each spare part.

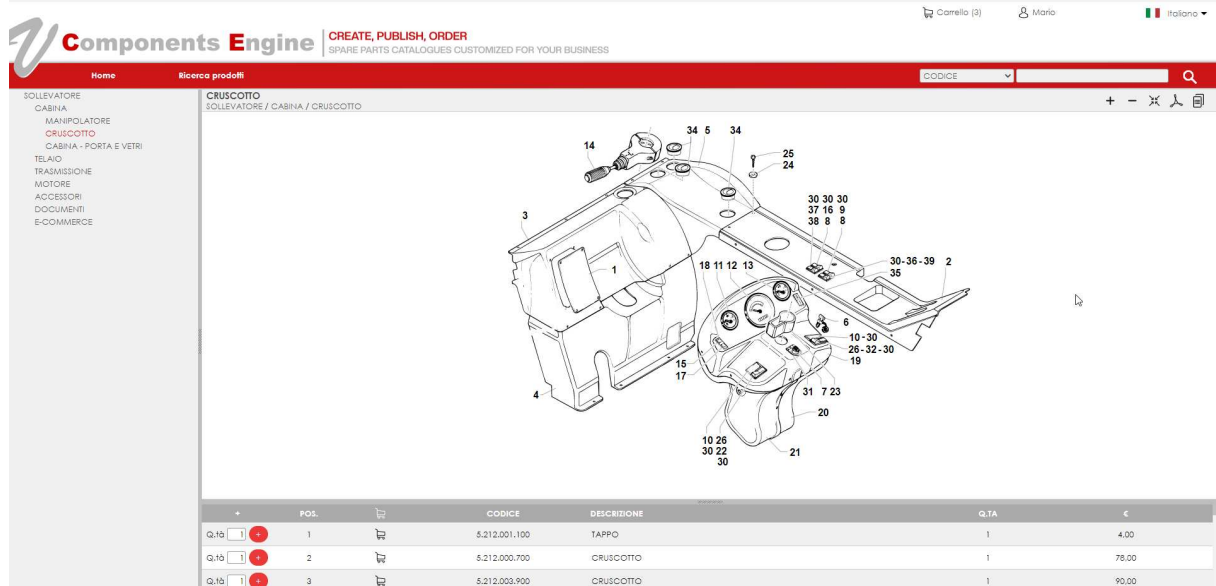


Figure 13 – Example of a spare parts catalog created with the Components Engine software
The image shows an example of an exploded drawing with its spare parts list within an interactive online catalog created with Components Engine.

Once imported the exploded drawings of all the machinery, Edit X allows the customer to publish the catalog online (the catalog can be browsed by simply entering the URL into the search bar of a search engine), offline (the catalog can be consulted through the Viewer X, which allows users to open the catalog without an Internet connection), or to generate a PDF that can be printed.

Components Engine Plus

Components Engine Plus is a web platform for technical documentation management that allows manufacturing companies to store documents, news, manuals, contracts, procedural instructions, and video tutorials online. This way, they are available online 24/7 and can be accessed from any device, thus increasingly simplifying the exchange of information between the company and its customers, dealers, maintainers, and technicians. Moreover, the platform embeds an e-commerce area where companies can sell finished products and consumable gadgets, as well as an order history area where companies can see the list of all orders. With Components Engine Plus, it is also possible to protect information by applying specific visibility rules, that is, deciding which user can see certain information and which cannot.

Components Engine Claims

Finally, Components Engine Claims is an online platform to manage maintenance and warranty interventions connecting manufacturers, distributors, and service centers. More precisely, when a company's machinery has a defect or breaks down, the company's service center or technicians can access the Components Engine Claims portal in real-time, register the serial number of the machinery, assign a service ticket to a specific technician, add details about the intervention (type of machine defect, spare parts and hours needed to repair it, miles traveled to get to the site, etc.), and monitor its progress at any time. Again, all the service tickets and the corresponding information are available online 24/7 and can be accessed from any device. Furthermore, Components Engine Claims embeds a statistics area that allows companies to monitor the performance of their products, and receive real-time reports on faults, replaced parts, and information on customers and service networks. Thanks to tailor-made charts they can receive useful information on the cause of each problem with the aim to find the right solution.

Purposes and benefits

All the above-mentioned software solutions share the same purpose: optimize and facilitate the work of the after-sales department of manufacturing companies. As a matter of fact, a digital catalog is a vital solution for those companies who want to provide their customers with a fast, effective, and easy-to-use tool to order spare parts online. With an interactive 2D or 3D parts catalog, companies would no longer spend time dealing with order requests sent via email, text messages, or telephone and looking for the required items, but it would be the end customer who independently searches for parts and places an order online. Undoubtedly, on the one hand, the digitalization of spare parts catalogs speeds up activities and makes business processes easier, and on the other hand, it drastically reduces the workload of the after-sales department and the number of human resources involved. Other benefits listed in the article *The Evolution of the After-Sales*

*Service - The 2D Parts Catalog*²⁸ and *The Evolution of the After-Sales Service – The 3D Parts Catalog*²⁹, posted on the Components Engine webpage blog, include:

- Sustainability and Cost Decrease: the digital catalog is a solution that saves on paper printing and avoids the use of energy that this entails;
- Improved User Experience: the interactive parts catalog can be accessed quickly and can be browsed as if it were a hard copy, leading to greater involvement of the user;
- Efficiency and ease of updating: the interactive parts catalog has up-to-date information on prices, descriptions, and availability;
- Integration with the company's information systems: CRM, e-commerce, and ERP can be integrated with the catalog, so as to always have up-to-date information;
- Complete product presentation: a virtual space displays all the information the customer needs. Furthermore, since the catalog is Cloud-based, there is no risk of data loss in case of no connection;
- Multilingual communication: a digital spare parts catalog allows companies to activate multiple browsing languages in the catalog, thus overcoming language barriers, solving difficulties due to the different time zones, and managing different pricing policies according to the end customer's country of origin;
- Marketing campaigns and promotions: since the catalog is connected to the company's website, it is also possible to see what parts are purchased the most and what type of customer has ordered them, so as to activate targeted offers.

Components Engine Plus is designed to simplify both internal and external corporate communication. Indeed, companies can upload contracts, forms to be submitted to clients and suppliers, manuals, procedural instructions, and video tutorials with just a few simple

²⁸ Source: https://www.componentsengine.com/site/page.wplus/Electronic-parts-catalog/English/ID_COUNT/blogd/LN/2/IDGLOCODE/The-Evolution-of-The-After-Sales-Service-The-2-d-Parts-Catalog/wx/The-Evolution-of-The-After-Sales-Service-The-2-d-Parts-Catalog.html (Accessed 17 Mar. 2023)

²⁹ Source: https://www.componentsengine.com/site/page.wplus/Electronic-parts-catalog/English/ID_COUNT/blogd/LN/2/IDGLOCODE/The-evolution-of-the-after-sales-service-the-3-d-parts-catalog/wx/The-evolution-of-the-after-sales-service-the-3-d-parts-catalog.html (Accessed 17 Mar. 2023)

clicks, making them available to customers in real-time. In addition, through automatic email notification systems, the company can send new documentation to specific users or to preset distribution lists. According to the article *The Evolution of the After-Sales Service – Plus*³⁰ some of the main advantages of the platform include:

- Fast document retrieval: Components Engine Plus makes it easy and fast to track down archived documents and make them available in real-time. Any document, in any format, can be uploaded into Components Engine Plus and, thanks to metadata (title, format, type, date, code, etc.), they can be found easily and quickly;
- Information security: Components Engine Plus enables allowed users to view each document in a secure way. In fact, viewing, editing, and deleting documents is allowed on the basis of a rights management system, which can belong to the individual user or to groups of users and are related to a single document or to a "document type";
- Flexibility: Components Engine Plus consists of several modules that can be added at different times as needed. This feature enables companies to spread the investment over time and gradually choose which modules and features to activate and configure;
- Cutting-edge development: Components Engine Plus is extremely flexible and configurable. In fact, it can be seamlessly integrated with the systems already in place in a company.

Finally, Components Engine Claims is an online portal designed primarily to optimize internal corporate communication. More precisely, it connects the company with its manufacturers, distributors, and service centers providing them with a powerful tool to manage technical interventions, warranty reports, job orders, and field technicians' activities. The main purpose of Components Engine Claims is to enable the company to be constantly up-to-date on the status of its projects, orders, technical interventions, and individual plants. According to the blog article *The Evolution of the After-Sales Service*

³⁰ Source: https://www.componentsengine.com/site/page.wplus/Electronic-parts-catalog/English/ID_COUNT/blogd/LN/2/IDGLOCODE/the-evolution-of-the-after-sales-service-plus/wx/the-evolution-of-the-after-sales-service-plus.html (Accessed 18 Mar. 2023)

– *Claim*³¹, some of the reasons why companies should implement Components Engine Claims include:

- Product/Serial number registration: intuitive dashboards and custom reports make product registration quick and easy. After registering the serial number, the company can assign a service ticket to a technician and monitor its progress at any time;
- Intervention Report: the form to add the intervention details can be fully configured with all the data necessary for the company to optimize the management of assistance interventions and can be linked to the spare parts catalog. It is also possible to attach photos, documents, videos, etc. to easily identify the problem experienced or to formally accept the repair;
- Intervention history by customer and serial number: at any time, the company can view the list and the details of all the interventions carried out on a single product or on all the products purchased by a customer, such as the replacement of spare parts under warranty, attached documentation, and any other useful data;
- Calculation of refunds (labor time): for each technical intervention, the technician can indicate the products and materials used to repair the fault, and which spare parts have been used by selecting them directly from the online spare parts catalog. There is also the chance to add traveling expenses and the duration of the intervention in order to automatically calculate the refund;
- Statistics consultation: Statistics enable the company to monitor the performance of its products, and receive real-time reports on faults, replaced parts, and information on customers and service networks. Thanks to tailor-made charts, the company can receive useful information on the cause of each problem with the aim to find the right solution;
- Customize the portal: Components Engine Claims can be customized according to the company's specifications with the aim to perfectly meet every need.

³¹ Source: https://www.componentsengine.com/site/page.wplus/Electronic-parts-catalog/English/ID_COUNT/blogd/LN/2/IDGLOCODE/the-evolution-of-the-after-sales-service-claims/wx/the-evolution-of-the-after-sales-service-claims.html (Accessed 18 Mar. 2023)

5.1.3. *Components Engine*: the market

In a 20-year period, *Components Engine* experienced market growth and expansion. It has gone from being a micro-Italian company operating purely domestically to being a small company globally recognized that is a leader in its field. From its founding in 1998 to the present, its growth in terms of employees has been minimal (comparing budget figures, there is an increase in the number of employees from a total of 6 in 2010 to 12 in 2022), while the growth in terms of turnover has been exponential (from 450,000 Euros in 2010 to 1,217,000 Euros in 2021). The reason for such an increase is the rapid internationalization process faced by the company, which led it to enter numerous foreign markets, export its solutions abroad, and thus create a customer base consisting mostly of non-Italian members. As a matter of fact, budget figures show that in 2010 only 25% of sales came from exports, while by 2021 the percentage has doubled, recording 50% of exports in total sales. The following table shows a summary of the above-mentioned figures, extracted from the company's financial statements that cover a time span from 2010 to 2021:

| Year | Value of production | Employees | % export |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2010 | 450K | 6 | 25 |
| 2011 | 569K | 6 | 25 |
| 2012 | 527K | 6 | 25 |
| 2013 | 521K | 7 | 45 |
| 2014 | 552K | 7 | 37 |
| 2015 | 583K | 7 | 50 |
| 2016 | 621K | 7 | 52 |
| 2017 | 671K | 8 | 55 |
| 2018 | 660K | 8 | 55 |
| 2019 | 697K | 8 | 45 |
| 2020 | 968K | 8 | 45 |
| 2021 | 1217K | 10 | 50 |

Figure 14 – Components Engine's financial statements data from 2010 to 2021

Source: personal elaboration. Please note: some data regarding the year 2022 were mentioned above, even though they are not included in the table, as no access was given to the financial statements for the year 2022. However, the data mentioned are reliable because the undersigned works within the company.

As for the customer base, in 2022 Components Engine counted a total of 372 clients, of which 256 were active clients and 177 were non-active clients³². What is surprising for such a small company is the country of origin of its customers: 174 customers out of 372 (47%) are from Italy, whereas 199 out of 372 (53%) are from countries other than Italy. Therefore, more than half of the company's customer base is from foreign countries, which leads to the assumption that Components Engine is a successful international player that operates mostly globally.

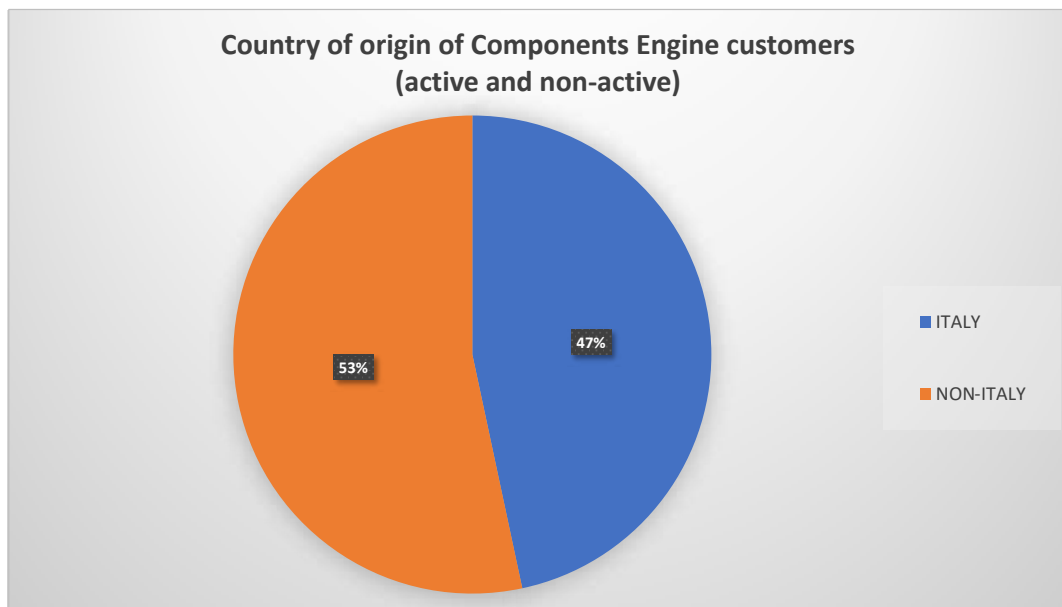


Figure 15 – Country of origin of Components Engine customers
The illustration is a personal elaboration based on the data extracted from Components Engine's internal documentation. The graph shows the distribution of Components Engine's both active and non-active customers based on two criteria: Italy and non-Italy.

If we take into consideration active customers only, namely customers who nowadays actively use Components Engine's software and with whom the company is in contact on a daily basis, the percentage is essentially the same:

³² An "active" customer is one who regularly pays the renewal and maintenance fee for the license that allows them to host the parts catalog on Components Engine's server, publish the catalog online, and take advantage of technical support. A "non-active" client, instead, can continue to use the license, but by not renewing payment, online publishing and technical support are not available. In other words, the customer can continue to use the Components Engine's software to create the spare parts catalog, but only offline versions of the catalog can be generated, meaning a PDF, hard copy, or CD.

Country of origin of Components Engine customers (active only)

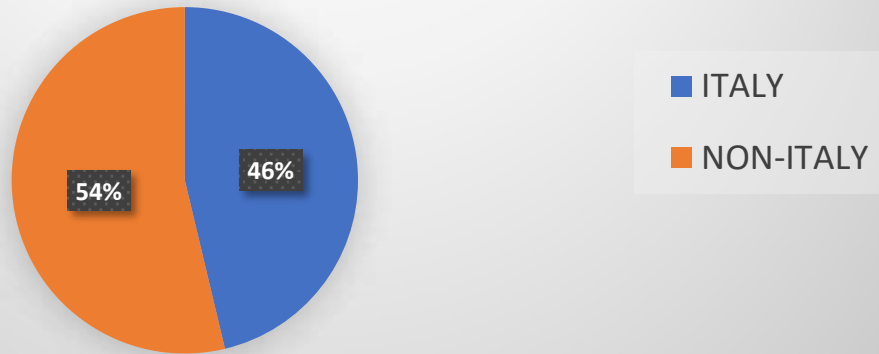


Figure 16 – Country of origin of Components Engine customers (active only)
The illustration is a personal elaboration based on the data extracted from Components Engine's internal documentation. The graph shows the distribution of Components Engine's active customers based on two criteria: Italy and non-Italy. The total amount of active customers is 255.

More specifically, the following chart shows the distribution of the company's clients across the world based on the four main geographical regions, namely the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, and Middle East/Africa:

Components Engine's customers distribution on the basis of the four main geographical regions

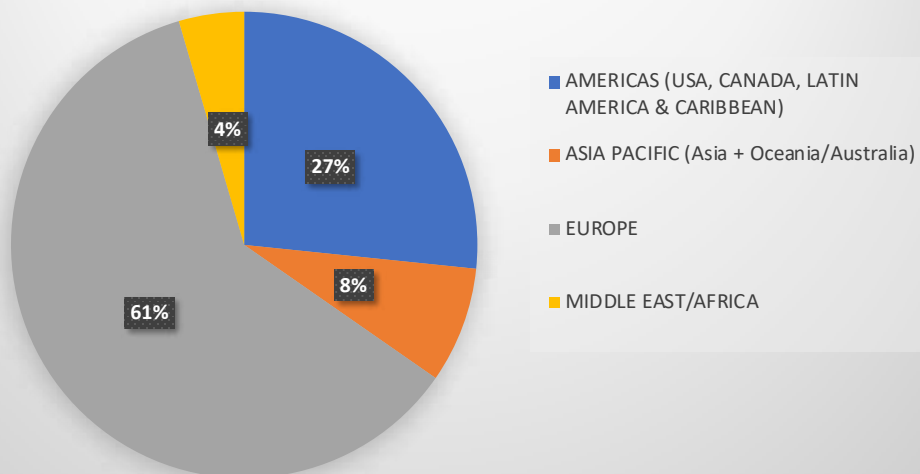


Figure 17 – Components Engine's customer distribution on the basis of the four main geographical regions
The illustration is a personal elaboration based on the data extracted from Components Engine's internal documentation. The graph shows the distribution of Components Engine's customers across the world based on the main geographical regions.

What is evident, is that Europe represents the largest business area for the company, although the Americas (and especially North America), with 27% of total customers, proves to be an area with great interest in the company. To go into even greater detail, the following table lists all the countries where the company is present and the number of customers per country:

| COUNTRY | N. CUSTOMERS |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| USA | 38 |
| Spain | 16 |
| Australia | 12 |
| Canada | 11 |
| Austria | 11 |
| Belgium | 5 |
| Brazil | 2 |
| Croatia | 1 |
| Czech Republic | 2 |
| Denmark | 5 |
| France | 5 |
| Germany | 40 |
| Greece | 1 |
| Hungary | 1 |
| India | 1 |
| Ireland | 1 |
| Israel | 1 |
| Japan | 1 |
| Liechtenstein | 1 |
| Luxemburg | 1 |
| Mexico | 2 |
| Netherland | 4 |
| New Zeland | 2 |

| | |
|--------------|----|
| Norway | 1 |
| Russia | 2 |
| Slovenia | 1 |
| South Africa | 7 |
| Sweden | 2 |
| Switzerland | 9 |
| Turkey | 1 |
| UK | 12 |

Figure 18 – Number of customers per country

Source: personal elaboration based on the data extracted from Components Engine's internal documentation. The table lists all countries where Components Engine exports its licenses and the number of customers for each country as reported in the Report created by the administrative department of the company for internal use only.

The countries where the company has the strongest presence are Germany with 40 customers, the USA with 38 customers, Spain with 16 customers, Australia, and the UK with 12 customers, and finally Canada and Austria, with 11 customers. These countries have been identified as areas where Components Engine believes the greatest opportunities for growth exist. Germany, for instance, is home to Components Engine's largest competitors, such as Quanos and IT-Solutions Möser. Furthermore, since Components Engine's target customers include companies producing industrial machinery and motorized machines and vehicles (trucks, cars, tractors), the USA is an area of great interest because it is historically one of the world's largest automotive producers in the world, followed by Germany, Canada, and Spain, where about 20% of total exports are automobile exports (Haugh, Mourougane, and Chatal 2010). The remaining countries on the list register low numbers of clients, ranging from a total of 1 to 10.

5.2. Components Engine's internationalization process

As anticipated in the previous chapters, Components Engine was founded as a very small Italian company even though it can currently be defined as a small international firm. Despite the fact that from 1998 to the present it has remained a company of very small size both in terms of employees and annual turnover, it has managed to become a

company with a strong, widespread presence in foreign markets, with a large export business and with a customer base consisting of 53% non-Italian customers. This first observation already runs contrary to classical theories of internationalization, which argued instead for the existence of a direct link between the level of internationalization and the size of the company (the larger the company, the more it tends to internationalize), as in order to overcome trade barriers enough capital, personnel, and skills are required. Components Engine confirms what new studies on international small businesses suggest (Bell 1995; Aspelund and Moen 2004; Moen 2004): advances in information and communication technology (ICT) are a new trend favoring the process of exporting goods and services to international markets, and in this context, the Internet incredibly lowers entry barriers. As a matter of fact, Components Engine is a company that develops and markets high-tech products (software solutions), thus forming part of an industry where the Internet leads the way. And not surprisingly, to launch the product in foreign markets, the Internet was the key. According to what Flavio Rondini explained during the interview, the first step was translating the company site into English in order to get good positioning in search browsers, thus increasing international visibility. In this way, whatever term (both in Italian and English) was searched related to this industry, Components Engine was the first result. In addition, Flavio Rondini stated that

"from the moment we decided to target foreign markets we knew we had to equip ourselves properly to do video conferencing. And I think we were one of the first companies in Italy to use GoTo Meeting³³ to do video conferencing. We've been using GoTo Meeting since 2006 and we're still using it today." (Interview with Flavio Rondini, 2 Feb. 2023)

Therefore, the company has used and continues to use the Internet to sell product licenses online through electronic payments, communicate with existing customers on a daily basis through video conferencing and email, hold training courses for customers through

³³ GoTo Meeting is an online meeting, desktop sharing, and video conferencing software package that enables the user to meet with other computer users, customers, clients, or colleagues via the Internet in real time. The reason why Components Engine relies on GoTo Meeting is that transmissions are protected with high-security encryption and optional passwords, and allows the organizer to control the participant's computer and mouse to carry out work directly on the participant's computer.

the GoTo Meeting platform, share commercial and technical documentation through electronic data transfer, and search for new potential customers through the use of CRM software. To conclude, in the specific case of Components Engine, it can be argued that the Internet has created a borderless virtual business space in which the company, its intermediaries, and customers can interact freely and in real-time despite geographical distances without going through "physical" channels. Undoubtedly, this kind of scenario incredibly facilitated the internationalization process of the company.

Another important theory raised by the new studies on "born global" companies concerns market choice. While classical theories argued that the first countries to be targeted were those that were geographically, linguistically, and culturally closest, new theories show that this is not true for small high-tech companies. Indeed, the market selection is increasingly less influenced by psychic distance, especially because the Internet dismantles geographic barriers and thus offers more market opportunities to the firm. This view is also confirmed by Components Engine. In its internationalization process, the company never chose markets based on psychic distance but rather based on how much potential the product could have and on the market demand in a specific country. During the interview conducted with Flavio, he was asked the following question:

"There is a theory that holds that during the internationalization process, the first markets that we target are the closest to us, because they are basically the ones that are the most similar in their way of thinking, customs, moral values, etc. Do you agree with this theory on the basis of how Components Engine has internationalized?"

The answer was as follows:

"Honestly, no. The French do not like Italy. Germany, despite being close to Italy, has a completely different mentality than ours. The only country would be Switzerland. But the fact is that our target market is the manufacturing one, and where can we find the manufacturing market? In Germany, Italy, France, and Spain. You can enter these markets at most, but after that, you have to look further. Neighboring countries like Slovenia and Albania may have a mentality closer to Italy, and so does Greece. But there is no market opportunity for us there, there is a market potential for consumer products

but there is no manufacturing market. So we focus on countries where there is manufacturing, regardless of distance or language and cultural differences.” (Interview with Flavio Rondini, 2 Feb. 2023)

As a matter of fact, the countries with the most attractive markets for Components Engine have always been the USA, Canada, and Germany – the same countries that currently record the largest number of customers (see Figure 15 for more details regarding the number of clients per country).

The following classical theory to be analyzed is the so-called “establishment chain” theory suggested by Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) and Johanson and Vahlne (1977, 1990), who argue that the development of export activities is gradual, incremental, and slow – initially, there is no export activity at all, then the company begins to export via independent representatives, after that via overseas sales subsidiary and finally, foreign manufacturing may follow. However, Components Engine demonstrates that entry modes into foreign countries, especially in the case of small software computer firms, do not follow a slow “learning curve” for export development, but rather internationalize extremely rapidly usually omitting stages to accelerate the process. Indeed, Components Engine was able to compete in international markets even before establishing a solid domestic market, a reason why it can be defined as a “born global” (Rennie 1993) firm or an “international new venture” (Oviatt and McDougall 1994). In fact, during the interview, Flavio revealed that at a very early stage, all the clients were Italian. However, “the domestic market was reductive, we had to focus on the foreign market”. With this clear goal in mind, in 2006 the company acquired its first Israeli customer, only eight years after the company was founded. As for entry strategies, the Components Engine case clearly demonstrates that there is a limited correlation between the small software-developing firms’ international experience and their foreign entry form, a hypothesis supported by Moen (2004). As a matter of fact, the internationalization process of Components Engine has never been guided by specific, predetermined entry strategies. Indeed, it could choose one strategy for a certain country and a completely different strategy for another country. In the case of Germany, for example, the company used an intermediary to acquire its first customers.

"The German market wants a person who knows the language, there is no shadow of a doubt about that. If you don't have it, nothing gets done. But we were actually already present in Germany through one of our dealer partners. [...] He has been our reseller for 2 to 3 years, then the partnership broke up and we decided to do everything independently". (Interview with Flavio Rondini, 2 Feb. 2023)

That was when the company hired the first Export Manager for German-speaking countries in 2012. Nevertheless, the same entry strategy has not been implemented to access, for instance, the Spanish- and English-speaking countries. As for the USA, Mario Mecca stated in his interview that:

"We initially had a very hard time entering the U.S. market, the North American market in general, because they always want referrals from companies already using the software" (Interview with Mario Mecca, 3 Feb. 2023),

whereas regarding Spain he affirmed that since the company website has been translated into other languages,

"site navigations have increased, especially from the Spanish market. Initially, we were doing product presentations in English even with Spanish companies, but since we started doing them in Spanish, there has definitely been an increase in clients and contacts with Spain." (Interview with Mario Mecca, 3 Feb. 2023)

Finally, the last theory to be analyzed concerns the tendency of small software firms to rely on global industrial networks in order to go international very rapidly. According to Moen (2004), small computer software firms tend to follow their domestic clients into countries and markets where the clients already had or were establishing new engagements. Contrary to all previous theories that have been confirmed by the Components Engine case, this view has been refuted. When Flavio Rondini was asked whether once he had acquired his first customers, he ever used corporate relationship networks or partner's network to reach other customers, his answer was as follows:

“We try, but it is very difficult in our industry because we sell a niche product. So, potential resellers have one or two customers to pitch to us, they don't have 100 customers to build a real network with. So, I don't see it as a business opportunity. Again, our market is a niche, we don't offer a consumer product where relationships are a big business opportunity. In our case, relationships are friendships, collaborative relationships, which allow us to exchange at most one or two customers a year, not 100 or 150 with whom we can build relationships based on sales networks.” (Interview with Flavio Rondini, 2 Feb. 2023)

Therefore, in the specific case of Components Engine, market selection and the mode of entry into foreign markets are not driven by existing inter-firm relationships. Nevertheless, one factor indirectly related to this theory that has allowed Components Engine to expand so widely is related to company references. In more detail, in all countries, not only in the USA as previously mentioned, before purchasing Components Engine's solutions, companies often ask for references from other companies that are already customers. Not surprisingly, companies in the same country and in the same industry often know each other, whether because of partnership or rivalry. Knowing that another company in the same environment has chosen Components Engine's solution and is satisfied with it is definitely a strength that boosts the company's reliability and quality, which undoubtedly increases the company's incentive to purchase the license.

5.3. Language Management Strategies adopted by *Components Engine*

So far the internationalization process of the Components Engine company has been analyzed primarily from an economic point of view, comparing its experience with that described by studies on small high-tech companies. The next step involves analyzing the same experience by focusing no longer only on the economic theories of internationalization but rather on the Language Management Strategies adopted by the company to successfully approach foreign markets. Indeed, it is true that the evolution of ICT has decreased or even eliminated trade barriers, exponentially facilitating the internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises. However, this does not imply that effective LMSs are not essential for a company to successfully internationalize and

become a recognized international player. Since its founding, Components Engine has always been a small company with an international outlook. As soon as it noticed that demand for its software solution was still very low in the domestic market, it immediately turned its gaze to foreign markets, where competitors already existed or where the product was already in high demand. However, since the company was not yet structured internally and very limited in terms of financial and human resources, it adopted different types of Language Management Strategies to cope with language and cultural issues that arise every day in international business. In other words, although the Internet has been the key to entering foreign markets, without such strategies it is very likely that the company would not have been able to expand its presence so much globally.

In order to collect information on the company's language management, targeted questions on this specific topic were included in both interviews and questionnaires (interview transcripts and questionnaires can be found in the Appendix section). Therefore, by involving the entire company staff, it was possible to develop a very detailed and precise overview explaining how Components Engine has been able to deal with communication problems in markets in other countries. The findings from the case study demonstrate that the company has used and still continues to use various forms of language management practices to address the diverse communication interfaces of its international activity. Its exceptional performance in international trade is due to a combination of different practices that together have enabled the company to enjoy significant success in terms of increased turnover and export sales relative to total sales. Based on the theoretical framework presented and discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, the following will list and thoroughly analyze the Language Management Strategies implemented by the company under investigation.

- **Culturally and/or linguistically adapted websites**

The first step that allowed the company to expand its business globally was translating the company website into languages other than Italian. According to Flavio Rondini's statement during his interview, since at the time the company still had no qualified personnel in foreign languages, he was the one who first translated the company website into English with the help of an automatic online translator, namely Google Translate. After a short time, a secretary who knew English and Portuguese was hired, who refined

the English website and added the Portuguese version. Later, the site was also translated into Spanish and German by external, professional translation agencies. Thanks to such a multilingual corporate website, the company managed to optimize its search engine positioning, ranking in good positions over the web for search queries. This way, potential customers typing industry-related keywords into search engines would find Components Engine among the first results. This is how the company was able to engage its first foreign customers thus taking the first steps toward internationalization. Today, Components Engine has a multilingual website in Italian, English, Spanish, German, and French, which is daily checked and updated by employees with degrees in translation and interpretation, in order to deliver high-quality texts which are perfectly adapted to the customer's local language and culture. Since multilingual support has been integrated into the website, the company was able to reach not only its local audience but also all potential customers based in different areas of the globe. Survey participants were asked the following questions regarding, precisely, the translation and adaptation of the website to the target markets:

1. Does your company have a website?
2. Does the company translate its corporate website into languages other than Italian?
3. Is the website culturally adapted? (Meaning that it does not contain just a literal translation from your own language, but the contents have been modified and adapted according to a specific foreign culture)
4. Do you think that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased?

The answer to the first question was undoubtedly the same among all participants, namely <https://www.componentsengine.com/>. The same happened to the second question, to which participants answered by selecting the same languages: English, Spanish, French, and German. As for the third question, the answers were different. Employees who have studied foreign languages, translation, and/or interpreting answered YES, while those with no qualification in foreign languages answered NO. This can be attributed to the fact that the concept of "cultural adaptation" may be difficult to understand, especially for someone who has never had to deal with translation, whether academically or

professionally. As a matter of fact, respondents within the company who are not directly involved in translating content for the company (social media posts, sales brochures, technical documents, etc.) are most likely unaware that there is information being adapted to target cultures. The most interesting responses are given below:

“Since we sell software solutions, I think the webpage contents do not need to be culturally adapted. However, when we publish news or articles, in that case, there is some information that needs to be adapted. For example, I remember that we had to publish a news article about the closing of offices for patron's day or the “ferragosto” vacation. These holidays are not internationally recognized, so those in charge of content translations had to adapt the original text to other target cultures.” (APPENDIX, B.2.)

“Yes, because the texts are translated by competent people who know the language and not by automatic translators (except French), so they are culturally adapted.” (APPENDIX, B.7.)

“Yes and no. I mean, since the company develops and markets software, most of the content does not need to be culturally adapted. However, a few examples of cultural adaptation come to mind. Once upon a time, a post was to be published about closing offices for holidays. The holiday in question was “Ferragosto,” which has no literal translation in other languages. So, in this case, a cultural adaptation was necessary.” (APPENDIX, B.1.)

“With the fact that the company deals mainly with information-technology content, most of the time there is no need to adapt texts according to the target culture, partly because many terms remain in English for all languages. However, for example, when I have to translate texts about our customers to be published on our website, there are things to adapt. For example, “company X is located in the heart of Belluno.” If I translate literally, an American customer reading the post maybe doesn't know where Belluno is located, so I prefer to generalize by writing “company X is located in northern Italy.” (APPENDIX, B.5.)

Finally, the last question garnered the same positive response from all participants, namely that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased. Below are some more detailed opinions of the respondents:

“They can better explain what our company produces.” (APPENDIX, B.5.)

“Absolutely. Nowadays, no one would navigate a company web page in a language that is not their own language, or in a language that they don't understand. If the page were only in Italian, a Hungarian, Norwegian, or Turkish customer would not even know Components Engine existed. I believe the translation of the website into other languages has been vital, and certainly the springboard into foreign markets.” (APPENDIX, B.1.)

“Yes, if the company website were in Italian only, no one from foreign countries would navigate the site. So, since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, foreign customers have increased exponentially.” (APPENDIX, B.3.)

Yes, because the message reaches a wider audience of potential customers.”
(APPENDIX, B.7.)

To sum up, the Web has already made it easier for SMEs of all sizes to overcome certain barriers to internationalization. Looking broadly, almost every business nowadays has a corporate website for spreading general information about the company or for e-commerce purposes. However, where the website exists in languages other than the national language, there are better sales, better brand recognition, and better and easier communication.

- Native-speaker recruitment

Over the years, Components Engine has often sought to hire native speakers to enrich its staff. It hired a Spanish translator as an intern for a limited period of time, who was responsible for translating the Components Engine software user manual and various business and technical documents, as well as teaching Spanish to the Export Manager of

the European countries in charge. Nowadays, the company's personnel include a native German speaker, namely Katja Sartini, the current Export Manager for German-speaking countries in office since 2017. During the interview conducted with Katja, we discussed how important she thinks it is to speak the language of the customer and whether this can represent a competitive advantage for the company. The answer was as follows:

“Yes, speaking the client's language is certainly an advantage. They feel more understood, the situation becomes more comfortable, the communication is more accessible, and a relationship of trust is established. But it's not only about the language. In my opinion, culture also matters. You have to know the target culture to facilitate communication. You have to know a little bit about the method in which they work. And of course, if one has already worked in that country, as I worked for so many years in Germany, one knows how the market works, what is important for them, so it's a little bit easier, let's say.” (Interview with Katja Sartini, 16 Mar. 2023)

It becomes crystal clear that in order to operate successfully in the German market, not only an extremely high level of language is required, but having extensive knowledge about the culture of the country is also essential. Having a thorough knowledge of the German market, knowing the attitude of Germans in the business sphere, knowing how to present yourself to them during a business negotiation in order to gain their trust, and knowing what aspects they value are some of the necessary prerequisites to be able to deal with German customers. Indeed, when Katja was asked if dealing with German customers requires specific sales strategies, her answer was as follows:

“Since Germany has a strong purchasing potential and the companies are mostly medium to large, they have higher budgets, they value a lot the product quality. Obviously, the price also matters, but they give more importance to quality, performance, and service, and they often need a lot of time before they start implementing the project. Again, I am not familiar with other markets, for example, the Spanish one, to be able to make real comparisons. But what I do know for sure is that the Germans are very demanding of high quality. I also think that special strategies have to be applied for each foreign market [...]. The sales department must know the German market and be familiar with

competitors' products. The sales and technical documentation must be flawless and easy to understand, and the products must be a good value for money." (Interview with Katja Sartini, 16 Mar. 2023)

Katja also admitted that when Components Engine still had not hired staff specifically dedicated to the German market, customers in that geographic area were almost absent. This allows supporting the hypothesis that without linguistically qualified personnel it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to acquire foreign customers. To the question, "Do you think a German customer is much more likely to evaluate our solution if there are German-speaking reference figures?" the answer was as follows:

"Yes, absolutely. I mean, by speaking English it would certainly be possible to acquire some German customers, I am not saying that the company would not even have a customer in Germany. But Components Engine has very strong German competitors, and these competitors already have a big advantage besides language, which is to be in the same country as the client, so the proximity to the customer matters. In addition, a German does not always have so much trust in foreign companies. So, having a German figure, or a figure who at least speaks excellent German, may facilitate entering the market." (Interview with Katja Sartini, 16 Mar. 2023)

- Polyglot employee selection

To be able to cope with the language and cultural barriers that arise daily in international trade, the company is constantly looking for polyglot employees. The company, in fact, always requires a B2-C1 level of English in its job ads, as well as the knowledge of at least another European language. In addition, during interviews to hire new staff, it always tests candidates' language skills by conducting an entire part of the interview in a foreign language, based on the languages the candidate knows. Nowadays, the company boasts an international and multilingual team that is able to successfully communicate with customers all over the world. Besides the previously presented German native speaker, the workforce includes:

- An Italian native-speaker employee with the title of International Customer Care who has a Bachelor's degree in Intercultural Language Mediation and a Master's degree in Modern Languages for International Communication and Cooperation, with a C1 level in English and Spanish;
- An Italian native-speaker employee with the title of International Technical Support who has a Bachelor's degree in Intercultural Language Mediation and a Master's degree in Foreign Languages and Literature, with a C1 level in German and Spanish and a B2 level in English;
- An Italian native-speaker employee with the title of Sales Back Office Specialist who has a Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages and Literature and a Master's degree in Modern Languages for International Communication and Cooperation, with a C1 level in English and Spanish;
- A Swiss-born bilingual employee with the title of IT and Technical Support who has a high-school diploma in Advertising Graphic Design, speaks perfect Italian and German, and has a B2 level in English, which he had to learn self-taught in order to work at Components Engine;
- An Italian native-speaker employee with the title of International Technical Support who graduated from Liceo Linguistico (Linguistic High School) and has a C1 level in English and a B1 level in French and German.
- An Export Manager for Italian-, Spanish-, and English-speaking countries, as well as for all European and non-European countries that do not have Italian, English, or Spanish as their first language but use English as their lingua franca, who has a C1 level in English and Spanish.
- An Italian native-speaker Project Manager who has a Bachelor's degree in International Relations and Diplomacy, speaks fluent English, and has some knowledge of French.
- An Italian native-speaker Graphic Designer who has a Bachelor's degree in Design and knows English and Spanish at an academic level.
- (Cristina)

Hiring multi-skilled staff proficient in several languages was undoubtedly the key to expanding the company's business, as multilingual employees help improve the

communication between the company and foreign customers and exponentially enhance the quality of the service provided. Furthermore, it is not surprising that a staff's language competence influences the company's choice of markets, as trading may be opportunistic and based on where the company has language speakers. The languages in which Components Engine staff are most skilled and proficient are English, Spanish, and German, and as a matter of fact, the countries with the largest number of customers are precisely the USA, Canada, the UK, Spain, Germany, and Austria (Figure 18). In contrast, in all other countries where the official languages are not English, Spanish, and German, but English is used as the lingua franca, the number of clients is significantly lower. A particular example is that of France. Components Engine currently has some customers in France, albeit a few, who have always complained that there is no one within Components Engine's staff who speaks French. Concerning this topic, the questionnaire included the question "Has your company ever lost customers because none of the staff spoke their language?"; two particularly interesting responses worth mentioning are the following:

"No, we don't have lost any customers because of this, but some potential French customers have refused to buy our solutions because there is no one in the company who speaks French." (APPENDIX, B.3.)

"Rather than losing a customer, the company failed to acquire the customer from the beginning. I recently dealt with a Lithuanian client who could not speak English well, and none of us could speak Lithuanian, of course. This is a customer who was very interested in the product, but because of misunderstandings and lack of communication, the negotiation was not successfully concluded." (APPENDIX, B.1.)

In addition, Mario Mecca also stated during the interview:

"For the French market, we don't have an employee who speaks French right now. If there were a person speaking French and giving technical support in French, that would be a market where we could significantly expand as we did for Spain." (Interview with Mario Mecca, 3 Feb. 2023)

To conclude, it can be assumed that although English is still recognized as the dominant language of global trade (European Union 2011), it increasingly collides with the prevailing trend in Linguistic Nationalism, meaning that buyers are asserting their right to work in the language of the customer. Whenever this is not possible, business negotiations do not always conclude triumphally, as in the case of Components Engine with French and Lithuanian buyers.

- **External language resources, translators, and interpreters to translate promotional, sales, and/or technical material**

Another relevant language strategy the company places great value on concerns translation. From the earliest steps of its internationalization process, the company's founders were always clear that translating the different types of business information would be the key to facing foreign markets. In fact, as previously mentioned, translating the company's webpage into English first, and into other European languages later, would be the gateway to taking the first steps into foreign markets. During the early days, when the company was not yet adequately structured internally, it relied on external translation agencies to translate the company's webpage, software user manual, and technical and business documents. It later began to internalize translation assignments as it hired staff with in-depth knowledge and proficiency in foreign languages. Here is what Flavio Rondini, the company's founder, had to say when he was asked, "If you did not have someone who knew languages, do you think you would have been able to enter the foreign market?":

"I would have looked for a person to translate, there is no question about that."
(Interview with Flavio Rondini, 2 Feb. 2023)

At present, the company relies completely on its in-house staff to translate texts from Italian into English, Spanish, and German. According to the information collected through questionnaires, "the company's translators are not professional translators by trade but are native speakers (German) or they have Bachelor's degrees in Translation and Interpretation, so they could be translators in their own right". Indeed, the people in

charge of translating from Italian to German are Katja Sartini, who is a native German speaker, and an employee who has a degree in Translation and Interpretation and a C1 level of German. Texts from Italian to Spanish and English are handled by two specific employees: both have a C1 level in English and Spanish, but one has a Bachelor's degree in Translation and Interpretation and a Master's degree in Modern Languages for International Communication and Cooperation, whereas the other one has a Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages and Literature and a Master's degree in Modern Languages for International Communication and Cooperation. All of these paths of study feature translation courses of various types, including literary, children's literary, culinary, journalistic, and specialized translation, which allowed them to have deep and comprehensive knowledge of the field. This leads to the assumption that target texts are undoubtedly accurate, correct, of the highest quality, and adapted not only linguistically but also culturally. Within the company, translation is a daily activity. The source texts that need to be translated comprise posts for the company's social media, which include technical posts (in which features that can be activated with the various available licenses are described), client company posts (which introduce Components Engine's client companies and explain why they chose this particular software), and case studies (which describe the collaboration between Components Engine and a client company aimed at creating a complicated project); technical documentation and sales brochures; newsletters for both existing and prospective clients; and video tutorials, which may contain text or voice.

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked two specific questions about whether the translation of business information brings tangible benefits to the company or not. To be more specific, these are:

1. Do you think that translating technical and commercial documentation is a way to consolidate the company's international reputation?
2. Do you think that translating promotional advertisements, posts on social media, blog articles, news, and technical and commercial documentation is a way to attract more foreign customers?

Some worth mentioning answers were the following:

“Yes, of course. Obviously, the quality of service offered to the customer increases, as well as the reliability of the company. If German or Spanish customers receive a technical or commercial document in English they would never be 100% satisfied. The more the customer perceives that the company is close to him and works for him, the more the company's international reputation improves.” (APPENDIX, B.1.)

“Yes, the more "international" a company is even on social media, the more it attracts customers from foreign countries. If the company only posted content in Italian, potential foreign customers would never browse the company's pages.” (APPENDIX, B.1.)

“Foreign companies feel more secure with a supplier who can provide translated documentation and technical support in their language.” (APPENDIX, B.4.)

“Yes, a customer understands better when receiving a technical document in his own language, this increases his satisfaction with the company.” (APPENDIX, B.3.)

“Yes, a potential customer who sees adv in his own language, understands it better and this certainly increases the customer's interest in buying our solutions.” (APPENDIX, B.3.)

“Yes, because a business that does not communicate in other languages is limited to its own nation and cannot have success outside.” (APPENDIX, B.7.)

“Yes, without this, it would not be possible to attract foreign clients, also because our business does not deal with easy and immediately understandable topics, they are highly specific and one needs to know how to explain them in other languages.” (APPENDIX, B.7.)

To conclude, it is manifest that translating corporate written materials into other languages has certainly brought with it a number of benefits to the Components Engine company, which include:

- increased service quality and professionalism
- increased reliability in the company
- increased satisfaction with the company
- increased interest in the solutions offered by the company
- increased visibility globally
- increased inclusion
- increased followers on social media, including many foreign clients and prospects
- increased foreign customers

Needless to say, the direct consequence of all the above-mentioned advantages is an increase in exports and thus in total sales.

- **English as a lingua franca**

The preceding paragraphs have discussed at length the company's main languages of strength, thanks to which it has been able to establish its presence in the markets of corresponding countries. However, based on the table in section 5.1.3. of this Chapter (Figure 18), the company also has numerous customers in countries where the official language is not Italian, English, Spanish, or German. In these specific cases, resorting to a lingua franca that facilitates communication appears essential, and it is common knowledge that in global trade the predominant and conveying language is undoubtedly English. Although, as previously mentioned, speaking the customer's language is the key to international success, in order not to disrupt business relationships when this is not possible, the customer and the company must share English as a common language. Therefore, in countries such as Slovenia, Hungary, France, Turkey, Netherlands, South Africa, Israel, etc., the company has been able to acquire customers solely because of both parties' knowledge of English. In addition, with the use of a lingua franca, the company would potentially have all the credentials to operate worldwide.

Here is what survey participants answered to the question “Situation: you and the client do not share the same language, so you use a lingua franca to communicate. Is this lingua franca always English? Is communication more difficult in these cases? Are there misunderstandings?”:

“Yes, whenever a client speaks a language that I don’t know, English is always our vehicle language. It has happened, for example, with customers from France, Hungary, northern Europe, and Japan. Of course, communication is successful when the other party has a high level of English as well, otherwise, misunderstandings can occur. We have some French customers, for instance, who understand very little English, so it is very difficult to have meetings with them. And in fact, we have been asked very often if there is a person on our team who can speak French.” (APPENDIX, B.1.)

“Communication is more difficult, but if both parties have a solid knowledge of the English language, then misunderstandings are not so recurring.” (APPENDIX, B.5.)

“Yes, the lingua franca is usually English. On average there are a few more misunderstandings but the communication is not that much more difficult, maybe you need to explain things in an easier way.” (APPENDIX, B.6.)

“I normally speak in English during courses with foreign clients. A couple of times some Spanish clients asked me to do the course in Italian: I explained in Italian, and they talked in Spanish.” (APPENDIX, B.4.)

It is well-known that the use of a lingua franca has countless benefits for the internationalization of a company, as it allows it to reach potentially any market in the world, thus exponentially expanding its business. However, the last two testimonies also highlight its limitations. On the one hand, if the buyer and the company do not have the same level of English, communication may be complicated. In fact, as reported in the third testimony, in such cases it is necessary to speak basic, well-spoken English and avoid complex speeches, reasoning, or sentences. This is the only way to ensure that messages are correctly received and understood. On the other hand, despite the fact that English is the most studied language in the world, even today not everyone is so willing to work in a language other than their native tongue. The case of Components Engine's Spanish customers is clear evidence of this. Before the company hired skilled and qualified staff in Spanish, training courses with Spanish customers were conducted in

English. However, they requested that the course should be taught in Italian, rather than English, despite having no knowledge of Italian. This leads to the statement that the lingua franca is a very powerful but not exhaustive resource.

- **Forging links with local universities or institutions**

Components Engine makes special use of universities and institutions by hiring language graduates and interns. It regularly publishes job advertisements on the universities' dedicated web pages with the aim of attracting undergraduates or recent graduates with excellent skills in foreign languages or information technology. In addition to universities, it also cooperates with vocational institutes aimed at training students in computer programming. The company has also recently begun to personally visit these institutions to introduce students to the company and its job vacancies, as well as participate in fairs organized by universities to promote job opportunities to undergraduates, as they may have good competencies that could be related to the various positions of the company. The advantage of hiring language graduates and interns, although without any professional experience, lies in the fact that thanks to their fresh foreign language skills, they are able to open up new markets, as well as answer phone calls and provide an easy interface with customers from countries where their languages of study are spoken.

- **Limitations**

According to the information collected through the questionnaires about the company's language management, it is evident that since the company began to internationalize at least a decade ago, it has always tried to invest increasingly in Language Management Strategies to be able to cope with the language and cultural barriers that arise when entering foreign markets. And not coincidentally, it is because of all the strategies described above that the company today is recognized worldwide as one of the leading companies in its field. Nevertheless, 4 out of 8 respondents pointed out a gap in the company's language management and stated it could invest even more in language skills and cultural capability. More specifically, they affirmed that it is true that the company staff is composed of professional linguists, language graduates, translators, and native

speakers, but their skills were acquired outside the company. Some opinions regarding the topic are listed below:

“I believe that my company should invest more in improving the language skills of its employees.” (APPENDIX, B.4.)

“Yes, the company has a very diverse team that includes native speakers, language graduates, and translators who face linguistic barriers. However, I also believe that the company could invest even more in language skills, for example by offering its employees to participate in intensive courses in foreign languages. This could be very useful for those who need to strengthen their English. Or it would be a very good idea to train at least 2 or 3 employees in French since the staff is weak in that respect.” (APPENDIX, B.2.)

“The company, though, isn’t currently investing in improving the existing team’s language skills and capabilities.” (APPENDIX, B.6.)

“Yes our company has a team of professional linguists, but this is not due to the investment of the company (all professional linguists/native speakers or language graduates learned the skill outside the company).” (APPENDIX, B.3.)

Therefore, it emerges that some of the company's staff think that the company should invest in language training to enable its employees to enhance the knowledge they already possess or even to learn a new language. Giving them the opportunity to learn French, for example, could be the winning move not only to meet existing French customers' requirements but also, to attract more potential customers, thus expanding its presence in the French market.

5.4. Summarizing the main findings

As mentioned in the literature review exposed in chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this dissertation, prior studies have noted the importance of ICT in lowering trade barriers, thus enabling

micro, small, and medium enterprises to easily internationalize. Nevertheless, although it has been acknowledged that the Internet facilitates and accelerates the internationalization process, very little was found in the literature about how enterprises should face linguistic and cultural barriers that arise during the entry or expansion in a new cross-border market. In this context, some previous studies conducted by the European Union (2011) reported a strong, positive relationship between the implementation of Language Management Strategies and the successful internationalization process of SMEs. Therefore, the present study was designed to analyze the internationalization experience of a small, Italian, computer software company with the aim of assessing the importance of LMSs in entering foreign markets, which represent the primary key to becoming a recognized international player.

An initial objective of the project was to determine if small high-tech enterprises can be defined as “born-global” companies. In order to provide answers to this question, a small, computer software company has been chosen as the subject of the investigation. After analyzing in detail its internationalization progress - from the primitive idea of facing the first foreign market to the current presence in more than 30 countries – the study found that the company competed in international markets even before establishing a solid home market. The expression "born global" seems thus a perfect label. The second research question sought to understand whether SMEs need to implement LMSs to enter foreign markets and therefore become international players. The study found that the firm under investigation would never have been able to internationalize without investing in language practices, as they are vital to deal with communication problems in new or expanding markets in other countries. The third question in this research was to identify the main LMSs that best allow SMEs to successfully participate in international trade. Questionnaires included in the investigation revealed that the most effective strategies are culturally and/or linguistically adapted websites; native-speaker recruitment; polyglot employee selection; external language resources, translators, and interpreters to translate promotional, sales, and/or technical material; English as a lingua franca; and forging links with local universities or institutions. In addition, it has been found that the investigated company does not offer its employees foreign language courses to further improve communication, but respondents agree that it would be an effective language strategy to be added to the company’s management. Finally, the most decisive purpose was to

understand whether Language Management Strategies allow companies to achieve greater export sales growth, thus increasing their overall turnover. By combining the studies on language practices with the financial statements of the company under investigation, it has been detected that ever since the company began to invest in language strategies, its total sales have been steadily growing. The following graph concretely illustrates the trend of Components Engine production value from 2010 to 2021:



Figure 19 – Components Engine value of production trend from 2010 to 2021
 Source: The diagram is a personal elaboration created on the basis of data extracted from the company's financial statements from 2010 to 2021.

At a general level, the curve shows that turnover has increased incrementally over the years, from a total value of 450,000.00 Euros in 2010 to 1,217,000.00 Euros in 2021. The rate fell to a low point between 2012 and 2013 and between 2017 and 2018, but what can be clearly seen in this figure is the phenomenal peak from 2019/2020 onward, which is expected to continue increasing in the next few years. The main cause of such growth may be that Components Engine, exactly during those years, began hiring highly qualified English- and Spanish-speaking personnel for its Technical Support and Sales departments with the aim of structuring a polyglot staff. This leads to the assumption that it is thanks to the strengthening of its language management that the company was able to record a

surge in its value of production, which continues to grow to this day thanks to its multilingual and international staff. Another important finding is that the company's overall production value has increased so much mainly due to the growth of exports. As a matter of fact, corporate financial statements revealed that in 2021, 50% percent of total sales came precisely from exports. The following graph shows the increase in exports from 2010 to 2021 in relation to total production value:

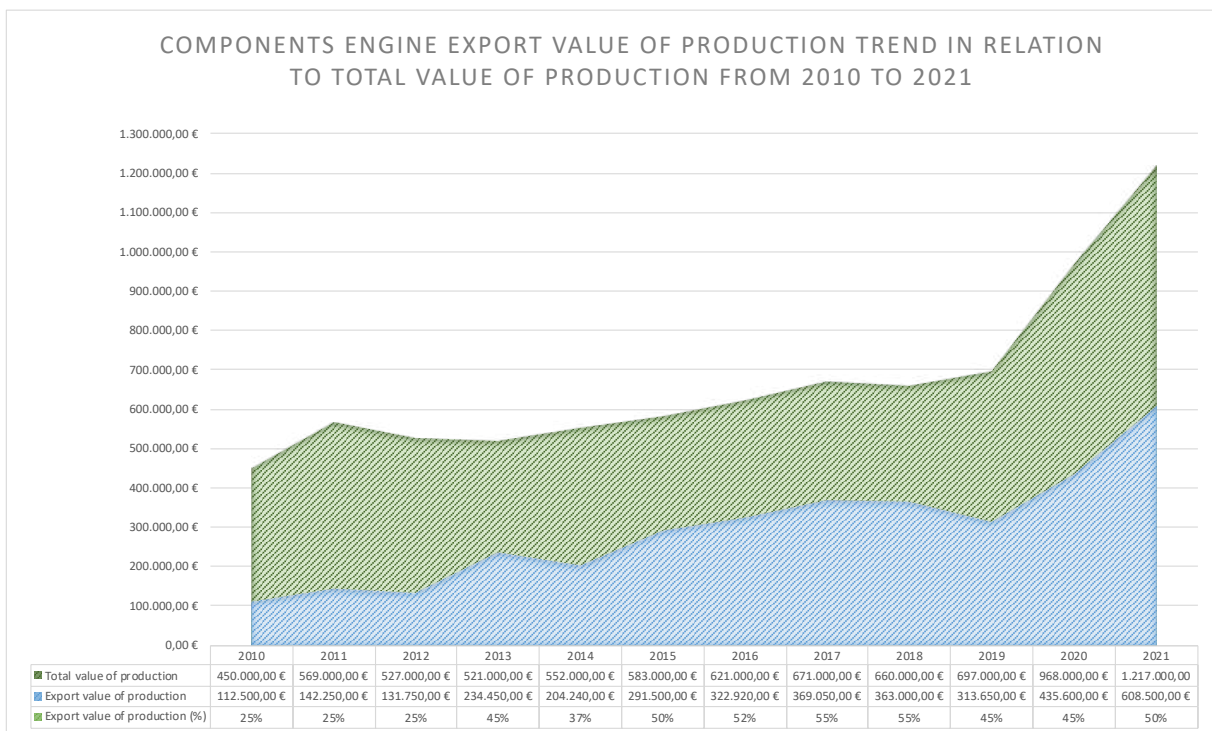


Figure 20 – Components Engine export value of production trend in relation to total value of production from 2010 to 2021

Source: The diagram is a personal elaboration created on the basis of data extracted from the company's financial statements from 2010 to 2021.

Figure 20 reveals that over the same period, namely 2010-2021, export has always been an important source of revenue for the company, and the rate of export sales will probably increase in the coming years. Despite some minor downturns during the first five years, it is evident that from 2015 to the present, the company's export to total sales has always hovered around 50%. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that, as discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.1.3., more than half (53%) of Components Engine's acquired customers are from countries other than Italy, which allows stating that most of the company's total sales come precisely from foreign sales. This is nothing but further confirmation that

Components Engine is in effect a small international company, or more accurately, a "born global" company.

Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to evaluate how decisive and beneficial Language Management Strategies are in the internationalization process of companies, in particular for small, technology-advanced firms. More in detail, the investigation aimed to determine that companies who invest in Language Management Strategies have a better chance of becoming important players in the international market and experience a significant increase in export sales and total turnover.

Over the last decade, many scholars have demonstrated that advances in ICT have dramatically decreased entry barriers, thus incredibly boosting the internationalization process of companies and creating a new and global world that any size of SME can easily reach. More specifically, a number of new empirical studies argued that thanks to the highly technological means that service-intensive industries and high-tech firms have at their disposal nowadays, entry modes into foreign markets are becoming increasingly more rapid and direct than those suggested by existing theories of gradual and slow internationalization. However, most studies in the field of the internationalization of small computer software firms have only focused on the role of information technology, without taking into consideration the importance of Language Management Strategies during firms' internationalization experience.

Therefore, this thesis focused on the internationalization process of one computer software company to understand which Language Management Strategies has adopted to face the linguistic and cultural barriers that arise when accessing foreign markets. The choice fell on *Components Engine*, a small, international, central-northern Italian company that develops B2B software solutions for After-Sales and Technical Publications departments of companies in the machinery industry. The company is headquartered in Cesena and exports to more than 32 countries worldwide, with a wide customer base that includes almost 200 foreign customers. Considering that Components Engine's widespread presence in the world is due precisely to its language practices, the company represented the perfect object for this case study.

The research is structured into three main sections, each with specific purposes and interesting results. The first part is dedicated to the analysis of Components Engine's internationalization process. To do so, the expansion history of Components Engine, as

well as the strategies adopted to become an international exporter, were examined first. The company's individual experience was then compared with the theories of internationalization proposed by Moen (2004), Aspelund and Moen (2004), Bell (1995), and Coviello and Munro (1997). The Components Engine case was used as an example to confirm or refute the new theories of internationalization that argue that the advance of ICT has overcome the stage theories proposed by the Uppsala School. Therefore, the purpose of the first section was to understand whether small high-tech companies such as Components Engine can be described as "born global" companies. Some of the most outstanding findings are listed below:

- Despite being a very small company, both in terms of human resources and financial capital, Components Engine has managed to become an international company with a large export business and with a customer base consisting of 53% foreign customers.
- Components Engine confirms that advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have incredibly lowered entry barriers, thus favoring the exports of goods and services to international markets. In the specific case of Components Engine, the Internet has created a borderless virtual business space in which the company, its intermediaries, and customers can interact freely and in real-time, despite geographical distances.
- As for market choice, in its internationalization process Components Engine never chose markets based on psychic distance but rather based on how much potential the product could have and on the market demand in a specific country.
- With regard to entry modes, Components Engine did not follow a slow "learning curve" for export development but rather internationalized extremely rapidly usually omitting stages to accelerate the process. Indeed, the company was able to compete in international markets even before establishing a solid domestic market.
- The Components Engine case clearly demonstrates that there is a limited correlation between the small software-developing firms' international experience and their foreign entry form.

- Components Engine did not rely on global industrial networks in order to go international very rapidly, and its market selection and mode of entry into foreign markets are not driven by existing inter-firm relationships.

Once this first point was discussed, the internationalization process of the company was analyzed by focusing on its Language Management Strategies, namely the planned adoption of a range of techniques to facilitate effective communication with clients and suppliers abroad. The goal here was to understand whether the company was able to internationalize solely by making use of ICT, as suggested by new studies on internationalization, or whether Language Management Strategies were also indispensable and unavoidable. To provide an answer, data collected from interviews, questionnaires, and internal and external company documentation were interpreted to find out which cultural-linguistic practices are most commonly used by the company. The results of this study indicate that the most effective strategies are:

- culturally and/or linguistically adapted websites;
- native-speaker recruitment;
- polyglot employee selection;
- external language resources, translators, and interpreters to translate promotional, sales, and/or technical material;
- English as a lingua franca; and
- forging links with local universities or institutions.

In addition, it has been found that respondents agree that the company should invest even more in Language Management Strategies, for instance by offering its employees foreign language courses to further improve communication.

Finally, the third section is devoted to the analysis of data extracted from the company's financial statements referring to the years from 2010 to 2021, which were combined with the studies on language practices. The aim was to establish whether Language Management Strategies represent a cause of Components Engine's export sales and overall turnover growth. The results of this investigation show that ever since the company began to invest in language strategies, its total sales have been steadily growing.

Another important finding is that the company's overall production value has increased so much mainly due to the growth of exports. Therefore, this study strengthens the idea that the more a company invests in Language Management Strategies to internationalize, the more it increases its turnover mainly due to export growth.

This work contributes to existing knowledge of internationalization by providing a deeper insight into the relationship between two current phenomena in the modern economy, namely the increasing number of small international firms and the role of Language Management Strategies to overcome language and cultural barriers that arise daily in international trade. Previous research on small international firms, and especially on small, computer software firms, has identified that advances in ICT have significantly lowered trade and geographical barriers, thus allowing companies of all sizes to export goods and services to foreign markets and become international players. However, existing literature has not taken into account that ICT is not a sufficient resource for overcoming language and cultural barriers, which are some of the most tedious obstacles of global trade that prevent small companies from becoming successful international exporters. Therefore, this new understanding should help to improve the recognition that SMEs investing in language management and using a mix of native speakers, language-skilled employees, and specialist translators will have a significantly higher proportion of export businesses than those which do not use these language management techniques.

Nevertheless, the generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. Since the study was limited to one single company and its unique internationalization experience, the results of this case study are not representative of other case studies. Future research on other individual cases will be needed with the goal of comparing them through cross-case analysis and identifying general trends. An additional uncontrolled factor is that since the investigation is based on qualitative rather than quantitative research, the analysis is highly individualistic and the collected data has been subjectively interpreted, as the study aimed at using data to answer specific research questions. Therefore, to validate the findings of the present study and convert them into universal answers, further work needs to be done to establish whether LMSs represent a resource that enables all small businesses to operate in the global market and increase their turnover. Afterward, all similar studies should be weaved together to find general rules that describe multiple realities. Finally, since this case study focused on a niche industry,

namely small, computer software firms, further research into the impact of language skills on other areas of the economy would be conducted. In spite of its limitations, the study certainly adds new insights to our understanding of the internationalization strategies of SMEs.

To conclude, the findings of this case study have a number of important implications for future practice. First, being more aware of the benefits of language skills and the use of customers' languages, businesses may be encouraged to invest in Language Management Strategies to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. For instance, the study suggests recording, exploiting, and developing language skills available within companies; providing training for employees to improve communication; supporting education and training programs linking languages and enterprise, working with schools, colleges, and universities; improving the supply of interpreters and translators; and providing work experience opportunities for foreign students or employees. Another important practical implication is that programs to raise awareness of the importance of Language Management Strategies should be developed and supported.

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APPENDIX

Interviews

A.1. Transcript of the interview with Flavio Rondini

Quando e come nasce Components Engine?

Nel 1998 io [Flavio] e Marco, dopo essere stati compagni di scuola presso l'ITT (Istituto Superiore Tecnico Tecnologico Blaise Pascal) e mentre eravamo compagni di università, siamo andati a lavorare insieme all'Engine di Cesena. Dal di lì, dopo un anno e mezzo abbiamo poi deciso di intraprendere carriera lavorativa insieme, ma volevamo essere indipendenti. Marco ha aperto la partita IVA, e abbiamo aperto la società Progetplus S.r.l. nel 2000.

Che legame c'è tra Progetplus e Components Engine?

Progetplus è nata appunto nel 2000, è andata avanti e c'è ancora, e Progetplus faceva configuratori meccanici per aziende diciamo anche grosse a livello italiano: Bonfiglioli, Camozzi [ecc.], però erano progetti fatti su misura cliente per cliente. Io gestivo principalmente la parte commerciale, quindi cercavo i clienti. Una volta che lo trovavamo ce lo portavamo a casa e sviluppavamo il prodotto. Quindi, per otto mesi programmavi e poi quando era finito quel progetto andavi a cercare nuovi clienti. Facevi tutti progetti su misura, c'erano mesi e mesi di lavoro, eravamo 4 o 5 persone. Però dopo... è come quando fai una casa: la finisci e ne inizi un'altra, quindi non riesci a svilupparla. Mentre sviluppavamo configuratori meccanici e presentazioni multimediali per Cosmogas abbiamo sviluppato un ambiente interattivo, si chiamava fumisteria dinamica, dove l'utente poteva prendere dei pezzi di tubi di fumo, di canne fumarie, smontarle e selezionare le parti. Dal di lì mi venne l'idea di creare un serie di prodotti che si chiamavano Mister Engine, List Engine (non sai cos'è ma esiste ancora ed è lì sotto che gira), Assistant Engine (che è morto), e l'altro era Components Engine. Inizialmente abbiamo sviluppato Assistant Engine che era un sistema per gestire le manutenzioni programmate su degli impianti. Tu mettevi il tuo impianto, poi creavi dei pallini interattivi e andavi lì e vedevi "aspetta qui fra 500 devo sostituire questo". Non era per ordinare le

parti di ricambio ma per avere delle aree interattive sul macchinario dove potevi cliccare e vedere cosa c'era dentro, informazioni e documentazioni.

Mentre sviluppavano Rossi motoriduttori abbiamo fatto il primo prototipo di Components Engine e andavo a presentarlo in giro. Il primo prototipo l'ho fatto io tra il 2004 e il 2005. E non andava bene, cioè non c'era quasi niente, lo andavo a presentare proprio in giro e via dicendo. Poi ad un certo punto sembrava che potesse avere mercato, anche se non lo aveva. Ma vedendo che comunque dei prodotti stranieri c'erano nel mercato, tra cui Enigma che era un programma a suo tempo, adesso non me le ricordo tutti comunque questi prodotti qui.

Quindi dato che questi prodotti potevano avere mercato abbiamo deciso di fare la prima versione di Components Engine, che era Components Engine 2.5, ci sono ancora in giro dei manuali e dei CD perché prima lo facevamo in CD. E quindi abbiamo fatto Components Engine come prodotto, ed è quello che rimasto fino ad oggi. Io sviluppavo la parte web poi Marco ha preso in mano la mia parte di Editor e l'ha portata avanti lui. Quindi io sviluppavo la parte web e portavo avanti la parte commerciale di vendita del prodotto, mentre Marco sviluppava l'Editor. Da lì facendo abbiamo venduto ai primi clienti: Cosmogas, che era già nostro cliente, poi a rotazione arrivarono Annovi Reverberi, Atom, Futura Converting, A.Celli.

I primi erano tutti clienti italiani?

Sì, tutti italiani. Piccole realtà che cercavano qualcosa e che hanno scommesso sul prodotto. Quando abbiamo visto che il prodotto poteva avere mercato abbiamo deciso che ci dovevamo strutturare, quindi abbiamo iniziato a cercare figure commerciali.

Quindi fino a quel momento eravate sempre e solo tu e Marco?

Avevamo anche altre persone, eravamo sempre 5/6 persone, però non avevamo i commerciali. Abbiamo deciso di portare dentro un commerciale a fare questo lavoro ed è arrivato il primo commerciale che è stato qui un anno, e ha seguito i primi clienti. Cioè io gli insegnavo il lavoro.

Però i clienti finora erano tutti italiani. Il primissimo cliente estero l'avete preso voi o grazie ad un commerciale?

Io. Allora, dopo facendo così abbiamo detto “il mercato nazionale è riduttivo, bisogna guardare il mercato estero”. Quindi mi sono messo lì e ho creato il sito in inglese con Google Translate. E poi a quel tempo avevamo qui una segretaria, Elisabetta Drudi, che era laureata in lingue: inglese e portoghese. Lei faceva attività di telemarketing e ci traduceva tutto quanto il sito. Quindi abbiamo iniziato a spingere a fare il posizionamento in tutte le lingue. I primi clienti stranieri furono Jac Machine, che è un’azienda francese facevamo il sito anche in francese, che comprò il prodotto. Morì lì perché il prodotto era acerbo, cioè non era come adesso e non c’erano tutte le cose ci sono adesso. Quindi era partito e poi morì lì. Poi partì una grossa azienda israeliana, Electra Consumer, è tipo da noi...non so se hai presente, adesso non c’è più non esiste più, quel prodotto che vendeva il Mercatone Uno degli elettrodomestici. Electra, un grosso produttore del settore degli elettrodomestici israeliano, lo comprò. Poi partirono WTU, che è un’azienda americana che faceva centrali per microprocessori o cose simili. E...altre aziende straniere, ce n’erano delle altre però dovrei andare a vedere lo storico.

Se tu non avessi avuto qualcuno che conosceva le lingue, pensi che saresti riuscito ad affacciarti al mercato estero?

Avrei cercato una persona che traduceva, non si discute su questo.

Quindi diresti che è fondamentale avere persone linguisticamente qualificate?

Sì, noi abbiamo scelto di puntare sul mercato straniero, altrimenti non avremmo assunto te e gli altri tuoi colleghi, o comunque persone che sapessero le lingue, perché l’internazionalizzazione dà delle opportunità estremamente più ampie.

Poi il commerciale che avevamo, le persone cambiano andavano via, c’era già Elisa che faceva la parte di Back Office commerciali per il mercato italiano, quindi telefonava. A suo tempo c’era un po’ di mail marketing rudimentale che facevo io e telemarketing. Nel 2005 e 2006 telemarketing: si prendeva si chiamava, si prendeva si chiamava, centinaia di chiamate al giorno. E si presentava così il prodotto. I commerciali lavoravano qui in sede sul mercato italiano, mentre io andavo fuori a presentarlo. Quindi loro facevamo praticamente la parte di figura commerciale prendevano l’appuntamento e poi io andavo fuori a fare le presentazioni. A quel tempo lì, io e Marco non volevamo dare responsabilità operativa, andare fuori sul campo perché avevamo paura succedessero degli incidenti.

Era una sorta di protezione. Oppure venivano su con me, però eravamo sempre in due non mandavamo mai il commerciale fuori da solo o da sola allo sbaraglio ma eravamo sempre in due: io a dare la garanzia tecnica e loro a fare la loro parte commerciale. Però non mi sono mai esposto come proprietario o titolare. Io e Marco non ci esponiamo mai, figuriamo come due scagnozzi, due tecnici.

Quindi se ti dovessi chiedere perché avete deciso di guardare all'estero è perché il mercato italiano era limitante?

Il mercato italiano è un mercato di “nani”. Aziende che hanno una visione come il cervello di una gallina. Cioè puntano a vendere il prodotto, lo fanno bene, ma l'assistenza ti mette una persona che ti risponde al telefono. I vantaggi più grossi delle aziende italiane li abbiamo avuti sotto questo punto di vista qui: le aziende italiane che dovevano vendere all'estero avevano bisogno di questo strumento qui. Quindi tutti i nostri clienti sono aziende che vendono all'estero. Le aziende italiane che vendono in Italia lavorano ancora col telefono, ti mando un Excel, ti mando una mail, ti mando una foto, adesso ti faccio una videoconferenza con Whatsapp per farti vedere i ricambi, ci sono tanti pezzi, li vedi e li ordini. Mentre le aziende straniere avevano già una mentalità che veniva dal percorso filogiapponese, non mi ricordo ora il nome preciso in ambito tecnico giapponese, che il loro obiettivo non era venderti la macchina, ma venderti 20 anni di macchina. 20 anni di macchina cosa vuol dire? Io ti vendo una macchina a 20.000€ subito, ma ti devo garantire un servizio che per 20 anni arrivi ad ottenere 200.000€ di quella macchina, cioè me la compri 10 volte solo per i ricambi, assistenza e manutenzione. Quindi non ti vendo un prodotto ma ti vendo un progetto di dieci anni. In Germania c'è questa filosofia, infatti i nostri competitor sono in Germania. Gli americani, spinti molto dal settore automotive. Anche se in Italia abbiamo il settore automotive che è abbastanza fiorente, ma direi che da lì non si è mai travasata quell'esperienza lì nelle altre zone italiane. C'erano tante aziende piccole nane che gestivano la documentazione tecnica come qualcosa che sono obbligati a dare, non come un'opportunità di business. L'idea in Italia è “sono obbligato a fare” ok? Sto con te che ti amo ma sono obbligato anche a farti da mangiare, non sto con te e mi piace farti anche da mangiare perché ha un valore aggiunto alla famiglia. Faccio dei mini-paragoni terra terra per spiegarmi bene.

E quindi all'estero c'era più esigenze, però per andare all'estero bisognava essere pronti. Quindi, traduzioni, sito multilingue, manuali multilingue, ecc.

Quindi la prima cosa che hai fatto per approdare nei mercati esteri è stato il sito aziendale in altre lingue? Quali?

Inglese, spagnolo e portoghese. E anche il tedesco, ma demandavamo fuori dei traduttori esterni, ci affidavamo a delle agenzie di traduzione.

Inizialmente mi hai detto che per vendere il prodotto andavi tu in trasferta, ma solo in Italia. Per quanto riguarda l'estero invece? Facevate trasferte o videoconferenze?

Da subito no. Dal momento in cui abbiamo deciso di puntare all'estero sapevamo che dovevamo attrezzarci bene per fare delle videoconferenze. E penso che siamo state una delle prime aziende in Italia a usare GoTo Meeting per fare delle videoconferenze. GoTo Meeting è dal 2006 che lo usiamo e lo usiamo ancora tuttora.

E la prima videoconferenze in lingua te la ricordi?

Sì, l'abbiamo fatta con Porsche, l'ha fatto il primo commerciale che avevamo qua. E in francese penso con Jac Machine, ma dovrei controllare bene. Poi ce n'erano delle altre perché facevamo già le videoconferenze o le videochiamate con quegli strumenti software rudimentali che c'erano allora, non come adesso che c'è Teams, Skype ecc. Ancora non c'era le videochiamate in quel periodo lì.

Come le hai trovate le aziende estere da contattare?

Posizionamento sui motori di ricerca. A quei tempi, io me la cavavo abbastanza bene nel posizionamento e qualunque termine tu cercavi, Components Engine era il primo risultato. Quindi qualsiasi parola tu cercavi col posizionamento capitavi da me.

Ti contattavano loro?

Facevano delle richieste informazioni.

E poi una volta che hai iniziato ad avere dei clienti acquisiti, hai mai usato le reti di relazioni aziendali per arrivare ad altri clienti?

Ci proviamo, ma è faticoso nel nostro settore perché noi vendiamo un prodotto di nicchia, quindi il nostro potenziale di rivenditore ha uno o due clienti da proporre, non ne ha 100 con cui muoversi. Quindi non lo vede come un portale di business. Ricorda sempre che noi siamo una nicchia di mercato, non è un prodotto di largo consumo dove le relazioni si fanno sentire. Le relazioni sono rapporti di amicizia, di collaborazione, dove ti scambi al massimo uno o due clienti all'anno, non 100 150 con cui ti puoi costruire relazioni basate anche su reti di vendita. Cioè mi creò un agente un distributore e via dicendo. Io e Marco abbiamo sempre voluto provare a creare una filiale in Germania per il mercato tedesco però bisogna andare là, ci sono i costi di infrastruttura e via dicendo. Allora abbiamo deciso di portarci noi in casa un madre lingua tedesco. Da qui nel 2012 è entrato il primo commerciale per il mercato tedesco. Era un ragazzo di origine svizzera che abitava a Cesena, si stava laureando in Economia e Commercio, mentre si laureava ha lavorato qui. Appena si è laureato se n'è andato, poi si è pentito amaramente ha chiesto di tornare diverse volte ma avevamo già assunto la nuova commerciale tedesca.

Quindi è stato grazie a lui che siete riusciti ad entrare nel mercato tedesco?

Il mercato tedesco vuole una persona in lingua, su questo non c'è ombra di dubbio. Se non ce l'hai non porti a casa niente. Però in realtà in Germania c'eravamo già grazie a un nostro rivenditore partner. Più che rivenditore era un italiano che si era trasferito in Germania, che aveva conosciuto noi tramite Cefla (uno dei primi clienti italiani che scelse Components Engine. Anzi per loro svilupparamo proprio delle cose su misura per loro che poi vengono usate anche adesso). Ed era amico del responsabile [...] di Cefla. Gli segnalò noi, venne a conoscere il prodotto e gli piacque molto, e ci presentò in Germania portandoci i primi clienti tedeschi. È rimasto nostro rivenditore per 2/3 anni, però faceva più casini che altre cose, e dopo la partnership si è sciolta e abbiamo deciso di fare tutto in maniera autonoma.

Se dovessi definire la vostra tipologia di export, sarebbe sia diretto che indiretto?

Prevalentemente diretto. Però abbiamo anche degli studi tecnici partner che fungono da intermediari in Germania e in Svizzera, ne abbiamo 1 o 2 con cui collaboriamo. Però ripeto ancora che è un settore di nicchia.

Se dovessi pensare a delle barriere di entrata quando appunto hai guardato ai mercati esteri, quali sono gli aspetti più difficili per entrare in un nuovo mercato?

Dargli una persona che parlasse fluentemente la sua lingua. Una persona che pensasse nella sua lingua. Non che pensa in italiano ma parla inglese, perché sono due cose ben diverse.

Avete mai perso dei clienti perché appunto non si conosceva bene la lingua del cliente o perché la comunicazione non era efficace?

Certo, è successo. È proprio per evitare questo che siete qui.

Da prima a dopo la presenza dei commerciali in azienda, noti delle differenze nel volume di vendite?

Allora, essendo un prodotto di nicchia, non è un prodotto che un commerciale può vendere come se fosse una scopa o una macchina, non basta metterci la parlantina. È un prodotto di nicchia in cui c'è uno spettro tecnologico in cui il commerciale deve essere formato e deve capirlo bene. Quindi un commerciale per quanto sappia le lingue, lo devi formare. Dopo il commerciale deve imparare anche a relazionarsi col cliente, a capire dinamiche di vendita. Quindi un commerciale deve sapere le dinamiche di vendita, i processi di vendita, la programmazione, la logistica, tutto quello che vuoi, trucchi di vendita ecc., ce ne sono quanti ne vuoi di libri su queste cose. E poi devi conoscere il prodotto ed essere in grado di trasmettere sicurezza.

Però il commerciale fa una parte nella vendita. Quello che ti permette di vendere è la base installata e il parco clienti che tu sai dimostrare di avere. Noi abbiamo un parco clienti non da poco, cioè sai che il prodotto funziona. Nei primi anni molte aziende compravano un prodotto che ancora era acerbo e dopo un anno lo abbandonavano, appunto perché il prodotto era acerbo e il supporto tecnico era limitato, noi siamo i primi ad ammetterlo. Eravamo due ragazzini che si facevano strada in un mercato di nicchia. Ora non è più così, ora il prodotto è consolidato ma comunque in continuo sviluppo.

Esiste una teoria che sostiene che, durante il processo di internazionalizzazione, i primi mercati che si vanno a puntare sono quelli più vicini a noi, perché sostanzialmente sono quelli più simili nel modo di pensare, negli usi e costumi, nei

valori morali, ecc. Sei d'accordo per come si è internazionalizzata Components Engine?

Sinceramente no. I francesi non apprezzano l'Italia. La Germania ha una mentalità completamente diversa dalla nostra. L'unico paese sarebbe la Svizzera. Però il fatto è che il nostro mercato è il mercato manifatturiero, e il mercato manifatturieri in Italia dov'è? Germania, Italia, Francia e Spagna. Ti muovi qui e poi vai altrove. Quindi non è che vai in Slovenia, in Albania, che magari l'Albania come mentalità è più vicina a quella italiana, la Grecia come mentalità è più vicina a quella italiana. Qui non c'è il mercato per noi, c'è il mercato per prodotti di largo consumo ma non c'è mercato manifatturiero. Quindi noi andiamo dove c'è manifattura, che sono queste 4/5 macroregioni. Poi hai una multinazionale manifatturiera in Svezia, Norvegia, tipo Tretapac, però sono mercati di nicchia dove devi entrare con personale linguisticamente preparato e via dicendo.

A.2. Transcript of the interview with Mario Mecca

In quale anno hai cominciato a lavorare in Components Engine?

2006.

Quale titolo di studio hai?

Una laurea in Economia di Internet e poi ho fatto un corso di formazione in progettista di prodotti multimediali.

Prima di te sai se c'era già qualcuno in Components Engine che svolgeva il ruolo di commerciale, e che quindi si occupava di trattative di vendita nelle tue lingue (inglese spagnolo)?

Spagnolo no. Qualcosina in lingua inglese, ma diciamo che la maggior parte dei clienti erano italiani.

Quindi da quando lavori in Components Engine diresti che il parco utenti estero è aumentato?

Sì, ma non strettamente legato a me, anche grazie agli investimenti nella documentazione. Comunque, sì, è aumentato notevolmente.

Di quali mercati esteri ti occupi?

Paesi anglofoni e ispanofoni, più l'Europa a livello più generale ma utilizzando l'inglese come principale lingua di comunicazione. Inizialmente avevo anche i paesi germanofoni, ma poi è arrivato un commerciale per la lingua tedesca.

Hai l'inglese come seconda lingua e lo spagnolo come terza, giusto?

Sì.

Come la imparate? L'hai fatto nello specifico per questo lavoro o già le sapevi?

Allora l'inglese, a parte averlo imparato a scuola, l'ho imparato grazie a un'esperienza in Inghilterra di un anno e mezzo, quando ero ragazzo, tanti anni fa. E invece lo spagnolo ho cominciato a studiarlo da autodidatta dopo aver iniziato a lavorare qui, e per un'estate ha lavorato qui una ragazza di Malaga che mi ha aiutato molto nell'impostare un po' le presentazioni commerciali. Mai andato in Spagna in vita mia.

Quali sono secondo te, le difficoltà più grandi durante una trattativa di vendita in una lingua che non è l'italiano?

Diciamo prima tutto la distanza. Il fatto che noi raramente incontriamo i clienti di persona e quindi si deve insomma sicuramente cercare di trasmettere fiducia e cercare di dare la percezione che c'è un'azienda affidabile che è sul mercato da tanti anni. Quello è sicuramente lo scoglio più grande. E poi anche il fatto magari soprattutto quando fai delle videoconferenze con aziende spagnole o aziende americane che comunque sono madrelingua a volte usano terminologie che non sono, diciamo così, non sono slang, però utilizzano dei modi di dire che un non-madrelingua a volte può far fatica a capire e quello sicuramente può essere uno scoglio.

Invece pensi che in italiano trasmettere affidabilità, fiducia ed empatia sia naturale?

È più semplice. È più semplice perché comunque sei nella tua lingua madre e in più ti riesci a collocare meglio geograficamente perché comunque riesci ad avere un contatto diretto, sanno dove sei, c'è una conoscenza sicuramente maggiore dell'azienda nei nostri confronti, quindi di chi valuta Components Engine.

Secondo te qual è il mercato estero col quale è più difficile creare empatia?

Sicuramente inizialmente abbiamo fatto molto fatica negli Stati Uniti, nel mercato nordamericano in generale, perché comunque vogliono sempre delle referenze e aziende che utilizzano il software.

Quello sicuramente.

Esiste una teoria che sostiene che, durante il processo di internazionalizzazione, i mercati nei quali è più semplice esportare sono quelli più vicini a noi, perché sostanzialmente sono quelli più simili nel modo di pensare, negli usi e costumi, nei valori morali, ecc. Sei d'accordo in base all'andamento delle tue trattative commerciali? Credi che più aumenta la distanza dall'Italia più sia difficile esportare?

Diciamo che la lontananza oramai non è più uno scoglio come lo era tanti anni fa. Perché con le videoconferenze, con gli strumenti che ci sono ora la distanza, diciamo la lontananza geografica non è più un limite, un ostacolo. Con un cliente europeo magari forse può essere più facile parlare di determinati argomenti che vanno un po' al di là di quello che è l'aspetto lavorativo. Quindi magari ci può essere quell'empatia nel trattare determinati argomenti che poi ti rendono la trattativa più semplice o la presentazione più semplice. Però diciamo che normalmente la distanza non è un ostacolo.

Ti sei mai sentito meno sicuro, convincente o persuasivo in una trattativa svolta nella tua seconda o terza lingua?

Assolutamente sì.

E hai mai perso dei clienti per difficoltà comunicative?

Diciamo che il cliente non si perde solo per difficoltà comunicative, ma si perde per tutta una serie di fattori dove sicuramente la lingua ha la sua valenza e la sua importanza, però non solo per quello. Sull'inglese non ho particolari problemi perché ho un vocabolario molto più ricco. Forse quando ho cominciato a studiare spagnolo potrebbe essere magari che sul mercato spagnolo ci possa essere stato un problema di quel tipo lì.

Se ti dovessi autovalutare, quindi se dovessi assegnare un voto in una scala da zero dieci alla tua trattativa di vendita in lingua italiana, quanto daresti? Sempre in termini di self confidence, convinzione, affidabilità, ecc.

In lingua italiana direi 9.

Questo valore si abbassa nella seconda e terza lingua?

Sì, io direi in inglese siamo sull'8. E in spagnolo 7 e mezzo tutto.

Adotti delle strategie di vendita diverse a seconda del mercato target?

Diciamo non a seconda del mercato, ma forse più a seconda della tipologia di azienda o della persona che ho di fronte. Potrebbe cambiare la formulazione dell'offerta. Magari se hai a che fare con direttamente una persona che ha potere decisionale, oppure con una persona che deve solo esplorare un po' le funzionalità del software che proponiamo. Quindi molto dipende non tanto dal mercato, ma dall'azienda e dalla persona che hai di fronte.

Credi che conoscere l'aspetto culturale del paese del cliente sia necessario?

Credo sia molto importante, non solo l'aspetto culturale, ma anche informarsi. Una cosa che è molto utile fare è andare a localizzare geograficamente l'azienda per la quale facciamo una videoconferenza, perché può essere un posto in cui siamo stati. Ci può essere anche un modo per cominciare il dialogo, che esula dall'aspetto lavorativo, quindi può essere un modo per creare quell'empatia che poi serve nella trattativa.

In base al paese di provenienza, qual è il cliente col quale è più difficile fare business?

Chi ti mette maggiormente in difficoltà?

I clienti nordeuropei, quindi danesi e svedesi in generale, non sono più difficili, ma è più difficile creare empatia perché sono generalmente molto più freddi e quindi c'è una comunicazione un po' più fredda, anche per rompere il ghiaccio una battuta adesso sono un po' più rigidi sotto quel punto di vista.

In generale credi che da quando Components Engine ha iniziato a investire in personale linguisticamente qualificate, il fatturato sia aumentato?

Assolutamente sì.

Quindi diresti che più un'azienda che vuole internazionalizzarsi investe in strategie linguistiche, più aumenta il suo fatturato?

Assolutamente sì. È direttamente proporzionale. Chiaramente persone che parlano una lingua, che siano anche persone in gamba lavorativamente parlando.

Quando tu hai iniziato a lavorare per Components Engine, il sito web, ad esempio, era già tradotto in altre lingue?

Era tradotto in inglese, se non vado errato.

E da quando è stato tradotto in altre lingue, hai notato delle differenze nell'andamento del parco clienti?

Beh, sicuramente le navigazioni del sito sono aumentate, soprattutto per il mercato spagnolo. Noi inizialmente facevamo delle presentazioni in lingua inglese anche con aziende spagnole, e da quando abbiamo cominciato a farle anche in spagnolo c'è stato sicuramente un aumento di clienti e di contatti con la Spagna.

Quindi diresti che implementare la lingua del cliente rappresenti un beneficio?

Assolutamente sì.

E questo aumenta la probabilità di concludere con esito positivo la trattativa commerciale?

Certo. Vissuta sul campo. Ti faccio un esempio: nel mercato francese noi non abbiamo una persona al momento che parla francese. Se ci fosse una persona che parla francese e che dà supporto tecnico in francese, quello sarebbe un mercato che si potrebbe ampliare notevolmente come abbiamo fatto per lo spagnolo.

E proprio per quanto riguarda lo spagnolo, è capitato che un cliente si rifiutasse di valutare il prodotto o non volesse continuare la trattativa commerciale con Components Engine appunto perché ancora nessuno del personale parlava lo spagnolo?

Diciamo che molto spesso non cominciava neanche la trattativa perché ricevevano richieste di informazioni in spagnolo noi rispondevamo in inglese e molto spesso era un nulla di fatto, quindi non andava proprio avanti neanche la presentazione.

A.3. Transcript of the interview with Katja Sartini

In quale anno hai cominciato a lavorare per Components Engine?

Era il 2017.

E prima di tale Components Engine c'era già una figura che si occupava dell'area tedesca?

Esatto. Sì, lavorava già qui da circa cinque anni.

Questa persona aveva il ruolo di commerciale estero quindi? Faceva il lavoro che stai svolgendo tu attualmente?

Sì, per la Germania, Austria, Svizzera.

Quindi quando tu sei arrivata in Components Engine c'erano già dei clienti acquisiti dell'area germanofona?

Sì esatto qualcuno c'era già, non era tanti, forse una decina.

D'accordo. Tu sei madrelingua tedesca, giusto? Ma oltre al tedesco vero e proprio della Germania, parli anche qualche variante? Ad esempio, il tedesco austriaco o il tedesco della svizzera?

Allora in Austria e nella Svizzera tedesca tutti parlano il tedesco, però con il loro accento diciamo. Se ovviamente uno svizzero parla Schwiizertüütsch, non si capisce. Però gli svizzeri sanno parlare il tedesco, perché Schwiizertüütsch è come un dialetto e se lo parlano stretto non si capisce, però quando parlano normalmente si sente che non che sono svizzeri ma li capisci comunque.

Chiaro. Quindi con i clienti austriaci, svizzeri, e ovviamente tedeschi della Germania parli sempre tedesco.

Tranne con gli svizzeri del cantone francese o italiano, in questi casi se ne occupa Mario.

Quanto credi che sia importante parlare la lingua del cliente? Credi che parlare la lingua del cliente sia un vantaggio per un'azienda?

Sì, sicuramente è un vantaggio parlare la lingua del cliente, si sentono più compresi. Magari la situazione diventa un po' più facile, la comunicazione è più facile, riesci a prendere più fiducia anche. Ma non è solo la lingua, ma secondo me anche un po' la cultura. Perché tu devi conoscere un po' la cultura e così è più facile per te. Devi sapere un po' il metodo in cui lavorano. E ovviamente se uno ha già lavorato in quel paese, come io ho lavorato tanti anni in Germania, so come funziona il mercato, cosa è importante per loro, quindi è un po' più facile, diciamo così.

La tua madrelingua abbiamo detto che è il tedesco. L'italiano lo considereresti seconda lingua o anche quella madrelingua?

No, una seconda lingua.

La tua terza lingua invece qual è?

L'inglese.

Lo parli? Lo usi spesso nelle trattative commerciali ho usi sempre il tedesco?

Attualmente no, non lo uso tanto l'inglese. Lo uso magari quando faccio delle videoconferenze con i miei clienti tedeschi nelle quali partecipa anche qualche mio collega che il tedesco non lo sa. In quel caso, per non parlare tra di noi in italiano che magari è scortese nei confronti del cliente che non capirebbe niente, usiamo l'inglese. Così ci capiamo tutti. Però nell'azienda precedente dove lavoravo lo parlavo di più, ho condotto trattative anche in altre lingue. È stato sicuramente più difficile per entrambe le parti e forse ha avuto meno successo.

Ok, che livello pensi di avere di inglese?

Come comprensione capisco praticamente tutto, ma siccome lo parlo raramente direi un livello intermedio. Non saprei, un B2 forse.

Secondo te, se Components Engine non avesse una figura come la tua, ovvero un commerciale estero che sappia parlare tedesco, sarebbe riuscita ad acquisire il numero di clienti tedeschi che possiede attualmente?

Secondo me no, perché prima di quel ragazzo che lavorava qui prima di me, con la Germania non si faceva quasi niente.

Secondo te un cliente tedesco è molto più propenso a valutare la nostra soluzione se ci sono delle figure di riferimento che parlano tedesco?

Sì, assolutamente. Cioè sicuramente si riuscirebbe comunque a fare qualcosa parlando inglese, non dico che l'azienda non avrebbe neanche un cliente in Germania. Però noi nel nostro settore abbiamo della concorrenza tedesca molto forte, e questi concorrenti hanno già un grande vantaggio oltre alla lingua, ovvero trovarsi anche nello stesso paese, quindi la vicinanza al cliente. Poi, un tedesco magari non ha sempre tanta fiducia nelle aziende estere. Quindi avere una figura tedesca, o una figura che perlomeno parla bene tedesco, è più facile entrare nel mercato.

Ok. Per quanto riguarda le trattative commerciali, hai detto che trattative in lingua inglese le hai fatte soltanto nell'azienda dove lavoravi prima, ma non in Components Engine. Se pensi a quelle trattative, trovi delle differenze o degli ostacoli nel comunicare in una lingua che non è la tua lingua madre?

Ci possono essere delle incomprensioni, o magari non riesci a parlare in maniera così sciolta come lo fai nella tua madre lingua, soprattutto quando devi parlare del più e del meno per stabilire un terreno di confidenzialità, per mettere a suo agio il cliente. In più ovviamente non conosco bene il mercato inglese o spagnolo o quant'altro.

Credi che per trattare con dei clienti tedeschi siano necessarie delle strategie di vendita specifiche?

Allora siccome la Germania ha un potenziale di acquisto forte e le aziende sono per lo più medio-grandi, hanno un budget un po' più alto, guardano molto alla qualità. Ovviamente anche il prezzo incide, ma loro danno più importanza alla qualità, la performance, il servizio, e spesso hanno bisogno di molto tempo prima di iniziare a realizzare il progetto. Ripeto non conosco bene gli altri mercati, ad esempio quello

spagnolo, per poter fare dei veri e propri paragoni. Però quello che so per certo è che i tedeschi sono molto esigenti per l'alta qualità. Penso anche che per ogni mercato estero debbano essere applicate strategie particolari, come un buon marketing, una buona presenza in rete. Il reparto vendite deve conoscere il mercato tedesco e conoscere bene i prodotti della concorrenza. La documentazione commerciale e tecnica deve essere impeccabile e di facile comprensione e i prodotti devono avere un buon rapporto qualità-prezzo.

Dato che lavori nell'azienda da parecchi anni, in questo arco temporale, dal 2017 ad oggi, diresti che l'azienda ha investito molto in strategie linguistiche per affermarsi sui mercati esteri? Per strategie linguistiche intendo: personale qualificato in lingue straniere che riesca a coprire i mercati nei quali Components Engine è presente.

Sì, assolutamente.

E da quando ha cominciato a farlo, credi che l'azienda abbia aumentato le vendite legate all'export?

Certo, il numero di clienti e di conseguenza il fatturato sono aumentati da quando è stato assunto personale di madrelingua.

Quindi i clienti esteri sono aumentati nel corso degli anni?

Sì, è stata una crescita costante e incrementale.

Dal 2017 ad oggi, il bacino clienti dei paesi germanofoni è aumentato?

Sì, parecchio. Ma anche perché è migliorata molto anche la qualità delle nostre soluzioni, i prodotti sono più all'avanguardia, più costosi. Abbiamo fatto un salto di qualità anche, sia a livello di nostro customer care interno, sia a livello di prodotto offerto.

Qual è il titolo di studio?

Ho una specie di laurea breve in Risorse Umane. In Germania il sistema scolastico è un po' diverso però direi che è equivalente alla laurea breve qui in Italia.

Hai mai fatto dei corsi di lingua?

Ho fatto corsi di lingua inglese, e francese scolastico.

Invece corsi a scopi lavorativi ne hai mai fatti?

Sì sì molti. Ma non da quando lavoro in Components Engine, li ho fatti in passato.

Questionnaires

B.1. Questionnaire of Irina Hristea-Stan

About you

| | |
|--|--|
| Respondent's name | Irina Hristea-Stan |
| Date of birth | 10/07/1998 |
| Age | 24 |
| Qualification (degree or diploma) | Bachelor's degree in Intercultural Language Mediation (UNIBO) + Master's degree in Modern Languages for International Communication and Cooperation (UNIPD) |
| Languages you fluently speak | Italian, Spanish, English |

How did you learn the languages you speak (school, university, job experiences, life experiences, etc.?)

Please explain.

High School, 5-year University, 6-months Erasmus at the Universidad Pablo de Olavide in Seville, Spain, 6-months Erasmus at the University of Warwick, UK

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Have you ever attended foreign language courses? | YES | NO |
| | X | |
| If the answer is YES, please explain when, where, why, and for which language. When I was in High School, I took intensive courses in English and German to get the language certification. | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Do you have a language certification? | YES | NO |
|--|------------|-----------|

| | | |
|---|----------|--|
| | X | |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain which one and the level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cambridge English: B2 First (FCE) - IELTS Certificate Level C1 - Goethe-Zertifikat B1 | | |

About the company

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Company | Components Engine |
| Address | Via Calcinaro 2085/1, 47521, Cesena |
| Country | Italy |
| Telephone number | +39 0547 383495 |
| E-mail | info@componentsengine.com |
| Website | https://www.componentsengine.com/ |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------------|--|-------|
| What is your job title? | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Export Manager | Project Manager | Secretary /Administrator | Employee (Specify your role) International Customer Care | Other |
| In what year did you start working in the company? | | | | |
| 2022 | | | | |

1. General Awareness

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1.1 Do you believe there is a link between the use of foreign languages and export / international performance? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain why. | | |

Absolutely. First and foremost, I believe that a company could never face foreign markets without resources who know the target languages, or at least English, which nowadays is considered a lingua franca in international trade. In addition, based on my work experience at Components Engine, I have noticed that the more a company invests in language strategies, the more international success increases.

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1.2 Do you think your company invests in language skills and intercultural capability? Does the company have a team of professional linguists, native speakers, language graduates, and/or professional translators and interpreters to face linguistic barriers? | YES | NO |
|--|-----|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

Yes, the company invests in language strategies. In fact, the staff consists of a native German sales agent for German-speaking markets, an Export Sales Manager who speaks perfect English and Spanish, a junior sales assistant who is fluent in English and Spanish, and technicians who speak English, Spanish, and German. The staff also includes people with translation degrees who are responsible for translating all content into Spanish, English, and German. In addition, the company also works with colleges and universities to seek qualified language personnel. Furthermore, part of the interviews is always conducted in a foreign language. English is always required, while for Spanish and German, it depends on the candidate's skills. The only negative note I can make at the moment is it lacks qualified French-speaking staff. We have French customers, albeit few, who often ask if anyone speaks French. This is something the company should work on.

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 1.3 Does your company hire staff with language skills to match the foreign markets? | YES X | NO |
|--|----------|----|

If the answer is YES, which sectors of your company are the most equipped with staff with language skills?

Sales and Customer Care /Technical support department

| If the answer is YES, for what markets? All of them | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Australia | Russia | Malta | Finland | Ireland |
| Bulgaria | South-East Asia | Poland | Hungary | Latvia |
| Denmark | U.K. | Slovakia | Lithuania | Middle East |
| France | Austria | Spain | Netherlands | Portugal |
| Iceland | Canada | U.S. | Romania | Slovenia |
| Japan | Germany | Belgium | South Africa | Sweden |
| China | India | Estonia | Turkey | Brazil |
| Norway | Latin America | Greece | Czech Republic | Other (please state): |

1.4 If you have worked in the company for many years, could you describe what kind of growth the company has had? What was it like before and what is it like now? Do you think that having implemented language strategies may be one of the main reasons why the company has grown?

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 1.5 Do you think that since the company began to invest in language strategies, its success both domestically and internationally has increased? | YES X | NO |
|---|----------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

I haven't worked in the company long enough to be able to confirm this, but from what my longer-term colleagues have told me, the company focused on foreign markets early on because domestically the product lacked potential. And in order to succeed in foreign markets, it focused heavily on language strategies to succeed in internationalizing. In my opinion, without such qualified staff in foreign languages, the company would not perform as well internationally.

2. Communicating in Foreign Markets

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 2.1 Based on your role in the company, do you have to communicate with foreign customers on a daily basis? | YES X | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please give more details and explain what languages you use.</p> <p>Yes, as International Customer care I am mainly responsible for giving training courses to customers who purchase a software license. These are usually 10-hour courses (divided into 5 sessions of 2h each) via video conference in which I teach the various features of the software. Since our clients are mainly from foreign countries, the courses are conducted in English and Spanish, as well as in Italian. Moreover, once the course is over, clients are still followed up daily for any doubts, questions, or problems. So, the contact with customers is continuous. Often, we even get to establish a nice relationship of esteem or friendship with the customer.</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 2.2 Do you have encountered cultural differences when communicating with foreign clients? | YES X | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>From my point of view, the most difficult communication is with Americans. Beyond the time difference, I sometimes feel like they have extremely different ways of doing things than we do. I can't give a concrete example, but the impression I get is this. Beyond that, I have never noticed any major cultural differences partly because communication with clients is mainly via video conference, there is no direct contact. Misunderstandings can happen, but nothing serious.</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 2.3 Do you think speaking the customer's language is an added value for the company? | YES X | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>Yes, it is undoubtedly an added value. The customer feels much more relaxed and understood if the staff speaks his or her language. A company that speaks the customer's language is also much more esteemed and valued, its quality increases.</p> | | |

Working here, I have noticed that English is seen less and less as a lingua franca in international business. A Spanish customer wants to speak Spanish. A German customer wants to speak German, even though he can also speak English perfectly well. We have French customers, for example, who complain that there is no one in the company who speaks French.

| | | |
|---|-----|---------|
| 2.4 Has your company ever lost customers because none of the staff spoke their language? | YES | NO X |
|---|-----|---------|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

Rather than losing a customer, the company failed to acquire the customer from the beginning.

I recently had a Lithuanian client who could not speak English well, and none of us could speak Lithuanian well, of course. This is a customer who was very interested in the product, but because of misunderstandings and lack of communication, the negotiation was not successfully concluded.

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 2.5 Situation: you and the client do not share the same language, so you use a lingua franca to communicate. Is this lingua franca always English? Is communication more difficult in these cases? Are there misunderstandings? | YES X | NO |
|--|----------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

Yes, whenever a client speaks a language that I don't know, English is always our vehicle language. It has happened, for example, with customers from France, Hungary, northern Europe, and Japan. Of course, communication is successful when the other party has a high level of English as well, otherwise, misunderstandings can occur. We have some French customers, for example, who understand very little English, so it is very difficult to be able to have meetings with them. And in fact, we have been asked very often if there is a person on our team who can speak French.

3. Language Management Strategies

| | | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.1 Does your company employ native speakers? | | | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.2 Does the company use professional translators and interpreters? Are they part of the company's staff or does the company rely on external agencies? | | | YES X | NO |
| <p>The company's translators are not professional translators by trade, but they are native speakers (German) or have degrees in Translation and Interpretation, so they could be translators in their own right. The company has relied on external agencies in the past when it first started to translate the company website or documentation into other languages. However, since it hired employees skilled in foreign languages, everything is done in-house.</p> | | | | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |

| | | | |
|---------|---------|-------|--|
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |
|---------|---------|-------|--|

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 3.3 Does your company have a website? | YES X | NO |
|--|----------|----|

Please enter the URL.
<https://www.componentsengine.com>

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 3.4 Does the company translate its corporate website into languages other than Italian? | YES X | NO |
|--|----------|----|

If the answer is YES, in what languages?

| | | | |
|---------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|----------|---------|
| 3.5 Is the website culturally adapted? (Meaning that it does not contain just a literal translation from your own language, but the contents have been modified and adapted according to a specific foreign culture) | YES X | NO X |
|--|----------|---------|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

Yes and no. I mean, since the company develops and markets software, most of the content does not need to be culturally adapted. However, a few examples of cultural adaptation come to mind. Once upon a time, a post was to be published about closing offices for holidays. The holiday in question was "Ferragosto," which has no literal translation in other languages. So, in this case a cultural adaptation was necessary.

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.6 Do you think that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased? | YES X | NO |
|---|----------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

Absolutely. Nowadays, no one would navigate a company web page in a language that is not their own, or in a language they don't understand. If the page were only in Italian, a Hungarian, Norwegian, or Turkish customer would not even know Components Engine existed. I believe the translation of the website into other languages has been vital, and certainly the springboard into foreign markets.

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.7 Is the company present and active on social media? | YES X | NO |
|---|----------|----|

If the answer is YES, which social media?

Mainly LinkedIn.

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.8 Does the company regularly publish content on its social media profiles? | YES X | NO |
|---|----------|----|

If the answer is YES, in which language?

| | | | |
|---------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.9 Does the company translate commercial and technical documentation to be provided to foreign customers? | YES X | NO |
|---|----------|----|

| | | | |
|---|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| If the answer is YES, in which languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

3.10 Who is in charge of translating the company's content? Internal personnel or external agencies?

Please explain.

Internal personnel.

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 3.11 Do you think that translating technical and commercial documentation is a way to consolidate the company's international reputation? | YES X | NO |
|--|----------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

Yes, of course. Obviously, the quality of service offered to the customer increases, as well as the reliability of the company. If German or Spanish customers receive a technical or commercial document in English, they would never be 100% satisfied. The more the customer perceives that the company is close to him and works for him, the more the company's international reputation improves.

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.12 Do you think that translating promotional advertisements, posts on social media, blog articles, news, and technical and | YES X | NO |
|---|----------|----|

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| commercial documentation is a way to attract more foreign customers? | | |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>Yes, the more "international" a company is even on social media, the more it attracts customers from foreign countries. If the company only posted content in Italian, potential foreign customers would never browse the company's pages.</p> | | |
| 3.13 Does the company forge links with local universities, for example, to hire student interns, foreign students, or qualified foreign language students? | YES X | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>Yes, from what I know the company hires interns, undergraduates, and recent graduates. I also believe that it is making agreements with some institutes and universities poles, and I also know that it would like to participate in fairs organized by universities to introduce students to job opportunities.</p> | | |

| |
|---|
| 3.14 Can you think of other language strategies adopted by the company that you believe impact international growth? |
| <p>Yes. Staying with the social media theme, the company regularly publishes posts containing case studies on collaborations between Components Engine and client companies. These posts tell what kind of project was implemented and what kind of results it brought. I think this is a great way to highlight both the client company and at the same time the company itself. This strategy undoubtedly increases Components Engine's international visibility because then such posts are reposted by the client company, which are then seen by other companies in the industry, and so on.</p> |

4. Other data

| |
|---|
| 4.1 What percentage of the company's sales turnover comes from export (approximately)? |
| a. 0-10% |

- b. 11-20%
- c. 21-40%
- d. 41-60%**
- e. 60% +

4.2 Any other comments?

B.2. Questionnaire of Elisa Giorgi

About you

| | |
|--|--|
| Respondent's name | Elisa Giorgi |
| Date of birth | 11/09/1998 |
| Age | 24 |
| Qualification (degree or diploma) | Bachelor's degree in Foreign Languages and Literature (UNIBO) + Master's degree in Modern Languages for International Communication and Cooperation (UNIPD) |
| Languages you fluently speak | Italian, English, Spanish |

How did you learn the languages you speak (school, university, job experiences, life experiences, etc.?)

School, university, and 6-month Erasmus at the University of Warwick, UK

| | | |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Have you ever attended foreign language courses? | YES | NO |
| | | X |

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Do you have a language certification? | YES | NO |
| | X | |
| Cambridge English: B2 First (FCE) | | |

About the company

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Company | Components Engine |
| Address | Via Calcinaro 2085/1, 47521, Cesena |
| Country | Italy |
| Telephone number | +39 0547 383495 |
| E-mail | info@componentsengine.com |
| Website | https://www.componentsengine.com/ |

What is your job title?

| | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--|-------|
| Export Manager | Project Manager | Secretary /Administrator | Employee (Specify your role) Sales junior specialist | Other |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--|-------|

In what year did you start working in the company?

2022

1. General Awareness

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 1.1 Do you believe there is a link between the use of foreign languages and export / international performance? | YES X | NO |
| Yes, I believe that if a company has staff who speak several foreign languages, it has a better chance of attracting foreign customers, and thus export more | | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 1.2 Do you think your company invests in language skills and intercultural capability? Does the company have a team of professional linguists, native speakers, language graduates, | YES X | NO |
|--|----------|----|

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| and/or professional translators and interpreters to face linguistic barriers? | | |
| <p>Yes, the company has a very diverse team that includes native speakers, language graduates and translators who face linguistic barriers.</p> <p>However, I also believe that the company could invest even more in language skills, for example by offering its employees to participate in intensive courses in foreign languages. This could be very useful for those who need to strengthen their English. Or it would be a very good idea to train at least 2 or 3 employees in French since the staff is weak in that respect.</p> | | |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------------|----------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1.3 Does your company hire staff with language skills to match the foreign markets? | YES X | NO | | |
| Sales department and technical department | | | | |
| If the answer is YES, for what markets? All | | | | |
| Australia | Russia | Malta | Finland | Ireland |
| Bulgaria | South-East Asia | Poland | Hungary | Latvia |
| Denmark | U.K. | Slovakia | Lithuania | Middle East |
| France | Austria | Spain | Netherlands | Portugal |
| Iceland | Canada | U.S. | Romania | Slovenia |
| Japan | Germany | Belgium | South Africa | Sweden |
| China | India | Estonia | Turkey | Brazil |
| Norway | Latin America | Greece | Czech Republic | Other (please state): |

| |
|--|
| 1.4 If you have worked in the company for many years, could you describe what kind of growth the company has had? What was it like before and what is it like now? Do you think that having implemented language strategies may be one of the main reasons why the company has grown? |
| |

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1.5 Do you think that since the company began to invest in language strategies, its success both domestically and internationally has increased? | YES | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>I haven't worked in the company long enough to be able to answer that, but from what I see the company currently operates successfully in so many different countries. This could be due to the presence of several resources in the company specializing in foreign languages.</p> | | |

2. Communicating in Foreign Markets

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 2.1 Based on your role in the company, do you have to communicate with foreign customers on a daily basis? | YES X | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please give more details and explain what languages you use.</p> <p>Yes, as my position is Sales Junior Specialist, I have to present our solutions via video conference to potential customers from all parts of the world, and I use Italian, English, and Spanish to do so.</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|-----|---------|
| 2.2 Do you have encountered cultural differences when communicating with foreign clients? | YES | NO X |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>Doing mainly video conferencing and never traveling, I never found any cultural differences. What can happen instead is communication misunderstandings, especially when the client and I use a lingua franca to communicate (usually English), both of us having different mother tongues.</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 2.3 Do you think speaking the customer's language is an added value for the company? | YES X | NO |
| <p>I strongly believe that knowing languages gives you the opportunity to expand your market</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 2.4 Has your company ever lost customers because none of the staff spoke their language? | YES | NO |
|---|-----|----|

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| | | |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 2.5 Situation: you and the client do not share the same language, so you use a lingua franca to communicate. Is this lingua franca always English? Is communication more difficult in these cases? Are there misunderstandings? | YES X | NO |
| The lingua franca is always English and misunderstandings can occur | | |

3. Language Management Strategies

| | | | |
|--|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 3.1 Does your company employ native speakers? | YES X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 3.2 Does the company use professional translators and interpreters? Are they part of the company's staff or does the company rely on external agencies? | YES X | NO | |
| The company uses professional translators who are part of the company. They are not professional translators, but they have degrees in translation and interpreting or in foreign languages. | | | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | |

| | | | |
|---------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | Other (please state): |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 3.3 Does your company have a website? | YES X | NO |
| Please enter the URL. https://www.componentsengine.com/ | | |

| | | | |
|--|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 3.4 Does the company translate its corporate website into languages other than Italian? | YES X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 3.5 Is the website culturally adapted? (Meaning that it does not contain just a literal translation from your own language, but the contents have been modified and adapted according to a specific foreign culture) | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. Since we sell software solutions, I think the webpage contents do not need to be culturally adapted. However, when we publish news or articles, in that case, there is | | |

some information that needs to be adapted. For example, I remember that we had to publish a news article about the closing of offices for patron's day or the "ferragosto" vacation. These holidays are not internationally recognized, so those in charge of content translations had to adapt the original text to other target cultures.

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.6 Do you think that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.7 Is the company present and active on social media? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, which social media? Linkedin | | |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 3.8 Does the company regularly publish content on its social media profiles? | YES X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in which language? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|----------|------------|
| 3.9 Does the company translate commercial and technical documentation to be provided to foreign customers? | YES X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in which languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |

| | | | |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

3.10 Who is in charge of translating the company's content? Internal personnel or external agencies?

Internal personnel

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 3.11 Do you think that translating technical and commercial documentation is a way to consolidate the company's international reputation? | YES X | NO |
| Sure. Translating documentation into the foreign client's idiom allows them to understand better our product. | | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 3.12 Do you think that translating promotional advertisements, posts on social media, blog articles, news, and technical and commercial documentation is a way to attract more foreign customers? | YES X | NO |
| Yes, this way the company manages to engage a very large customer base and communicate to them all initiatives, news, etc. | | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.13 Does the company forge links with local universities, for example, to hire student interns, foreign students, or qualified foreign language students? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

Yes, the company hires interns, recent graduate students, and qualified foreign language students. If I'm not mistaken, the company also goes to professional institutes/universities from time to time to make presentations.

3.14 Can you think of other language strategies adopted by the company that you believe impact international growth?

4. Other data

4.1 What percentage of the company's sales turnover comes from export (approximately)?

- a. 0-10%
- b. 11-20%
- c. 21-40%
- d. 41-60% X
- e. 60% +

4.2 Any other comments?

B.3. Questionnaire of Samuele Fabbri

About you

| | |
|--|--|
| Respondent's name | Samuele Fabbri |
| Date of birth | 12/03/1999 |
| Age | 24 |
| Qualification (degree or diploma) | High-school diploma in Advertisement Graphics |
| Languages you fluently speak | Italian, English, German |

| |
|---|
| How did you learn the languages you speak (school, university, job experiences, life experiences, etc.?) |
| English = at work German= life experience due to my birth country (Switzerland) |

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Have you ever attended foreign language courses? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain when, where, why, and for which language. NO | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Do you have a language certification? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain which one and the level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). NO | | |

About the company

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Company | Components Engine |
| Address | Via calcinaro 2085/1 |
| Country | Italy |
| Telephone number | 0547383495 |
| E-mail | info@componentsengine.com |
| Website | www.componentsengine.com |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------|
| What is your job title? Technical support and IT Specialist | | | | |
| Export Manager | Project Manager | Secretary /Administrator | Employee X | Other |
| In what year did you start working in the company? 2021 | | | | |

1. General Awareness

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1.1 Do you believe there is a link between the use of foreign languages and export / international performance? | YES | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain why.</p> <p>Yes, I think that if there are people in a company who speak several foreign languages, export is much easier (mainly for communication).</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1.2 Do you think your company invests in language skills and intercultural capability? Does the company have a team of professional linguists, native speakers, language graduates, and/or professional translators and interpreters to face linguistic barriers? | YES | NO |
| <p>Yes, our company has a team of professional linguists, but this is not due to the investment of the company (all professional linguists/native speakers or language graduates learned the skill outside the company).</p> | | |

| | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----------|--------------|-------------|
| 1.3 Does your company hire staff with language skills to match the foreign markets? | YES | NO | | |
| <p>If the answer is YES, which sectors of your company are the most equipped with staff with language skills? Technical support and Sales departments</p> | | | | |
| <p>If the answer is YES, for what markets?</p> | | | | |
| Australia | Russia | Malta | Finland | Ireland |
| Bulgaria | South-East Asia | Poland | Hungary | Latvia |
| Denmark | U.K. | Slovakia | Lithuania | Middle East |
| France | Austria | Spain | Netherlands | Portugal |
| Iceland | Canada | U.S. | Romania | Slovenia |
| Japan | Germany | Belgium | South Africa | Sweden |

| | | | | |
|--------|---------------|---------|----------------|-----------------------|
| China | India | Estonia | Turkey | Brazil |
| Norway | Latin America | Greece | Czech Republic | Other (please state): |

1.4 If you have worked in the company for many years, could you describe what kind of growth the company has had? What was it like before and what is it like now? Do you think that having implemented language strategies may be one of the main reasons why the company has grown?

I don't have worked in the company for many years.

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1.5 Do you think that since the company began to invest in language strategies, its success both domestically and internationally has increased? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. yes, the fact that we have people in the company who speak well English, German, and Spanish has favored the interest of potential buyers in purchasing our solutions. | | |

2. Communicating in Foreign Markets

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 2.1 Based on your role in the company, do you have to communicate with foreign customers on a daily basis? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please give more details and explain what languages you use. Yes, English. | | |

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 2.2 Do you have encountered cultural differences when communicating with foreign clients? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. No, speaking mainly about technical aspects in short meetings, I did not notice any great cultural differences. | | |

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 2.3 Do you think speaking the customer's language is an added value for the company? | YES | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>Yes, I think it is an added value because it can make the customer trust the communication aspect</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 2.4 Has your company ever lost customers because none of the staff spoke their language? | YES | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>No, we don't have lost any customers because of this, but some potential French customers have refused to buy our solutions because there is no one in the company who speaks French.</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 2.5 Situation: you and the client do not share the same language, so you use a lingua franca to communicate. Is this lingua franca always English? Is communication more difficult in these cases? Are there misunderstandings? | YES | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>No.</p> | | |

3. Language Management Strategies

| | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.1 Does your company employ native speakers? | YES | NO | |
| <p>If the answer is YES, in what languages?</p> | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |

| | | | |
|---------|----------|--------|--|
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 3.2 Does the company use professional translators and interpreters? Are they part of the company's staff or does the company rely on external agencies? Some of the company's employees graduated in Translation and Interpreting, so they are the ones who translate the company's documentation. | YES | NO |
|--|-----|----|

| | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 3.3 Does your company have a website? | YES | NO |
| https://www.componentsengine.com/ | | |

| | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.4 Does the company translate its corporate website into languages other than Italian? | YES | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |

| | | | |
|---------|----------|-----------|--|
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 3.5 Is the website culturally adapted? (Meaning that it does not contain just a literal translation from your own language, but the contents have been modified and adapted according to a specific foreign culture) | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 3.6 Do you think that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. Yes, if the company website were in Italian only, no one from foreign countries would navigate the site. So that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, foreign customers have increased exponentially. | | |

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 3.7 Is the company present and active on social media? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, which social media? Yes, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. | | |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------------------|
| 3.8 Does the company regularly publish content on its social media profiles? | YES | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in which language? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |

| | | | |
|---------|----------|------------|--|
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.9 Does the company translate commercial and technical documentation to be provided to foreign customers? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

| | | | |
|---|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| If the answer is YES, in which languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| |
|---|
| 3.10 Who is in charge of translating the company's content? Internal personnel or external agencies? |
| Please explain. Internal personnel |

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 3.11 Do you think that translating technical and commercial documentation is a way to consolidate the company's international reputation? | YES | NO |
|--|-----|----|

| |
|--|
| If the answer is YES, please explain. Yes, a customer understands better when receiving a technical document in his own language, this increases his satisfaction with the company. |
|--|

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.12 Do you think that translating promotional advertisements, posts on social media, blog articles, news, and technical and commercial documentation is a way to attract more foreign customers? | YES | NO |
|--|------------|----|

Yes, a potential customer who sees adv in his own language, understands it better and this certainly increases the customer's interest in buying our solutions.

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 3.13 Does the company forge links with local universities, for example, to hire student interns, foreign students, or qualified foreign language students? | YES | NO |
|---|-----|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

Yes, whenever we have to add staff to our workforce, we also consult with universities and schools.

I think that the company where I work often prefers to hire a recent graduate/new graduate because you have the opportunity to do a six-month internship, where the person is trained and gets to know each other, and then if both parties get along well then he or she is officially added to the staff.

| |
|---|
| 3.14 Can you think of other language strategies adopted by the company that you believe impact international growth? |
|---|

Another thing that I think has an impact on the international growth of the company is to diversify the solutions according to the country.

For example, we offer solutions for the German market that would not work in Italy for economic reasons.

4. Other data

| |
|--|
| 4.1 What percentage of the company's sales turnover comes from export (approximately)? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 0-10% b. 11-20% c. 21-40% |

| |
|-----------|
| d. 41-60% |
| e. 60% + |

4.2 Any other comments?

B.4. Questionnaire of Elisa Stefanini

About you

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Respondent's name | Elisa Stefanini |
| Date of birth | 23/02/1981 |
| Age | 42 |
| Qualification (degree or diploma) | Degree |
| Languages you fluently speak | Italian, English |

How did you learn the languages you speak (school, university, job experiences, life experiences, etc.?)

Please explain.

School, university and job

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Have you ever attended foreign language courses? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain when, where, why, and for which language. | | |
| No | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Do you have a language certification? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain which one and the level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). | | |
| No | | |

About the company

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Company | Components Engine |
| Address | Via Calcinaro 2085/1, 47521, Cesena |

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Country | Italy |
| Telephone number | +39 0547 383495 |
| E-mail | info@componentsengine.com |
| Website | https://www.componentsengine.com/ |

| | | | | |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| What is your job title? | | | | |
| Export Manager | Project Manager X | Secretary /Administrator | Employee (Specify your role) | Other |
| In what year did you start working in the company? 2005 | | | | |

1. General Awareness

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 1.1 Do you believe there is a link between the use of foreign languages and export / international performance? | YES x | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain why. knowledge of English is essential for companies that want to sell their products abroad | | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 1.2 Do you think your company invests in language skills and intercultural capability? Does the company have a team of professional linguists, native speakers, language graduates, and/or professional translators and interpreters to face linguistic barriers? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

In my company, there are native speakers. I believe that my company should invest more in improving the language skills of its employees

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 1.3 Does your company hire staff with language skills to match the foreign markets? | YES X | NO |
|--|----------|----|

If the answer is YES, which sectors of your company are the most equipped with staff with language skills?

All

If the answer is YES, for what markets?

| | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Australia | Russia | Malta | Finland | Ireland |
| Bulgaria | South-East Asia | Poland | Hungary | Latvia |
| Denmark | U.K. | Slovakia | Lithuania | Middle East |
| France | Austria | Spain | Netherlands | Portugal |
| Iceland | Canada | U.S. | Romania | Slovenia |
| Japan | Germany | Belgium | South Africa | Sweden |
| China | India | Estonia | Turkey | Brazil |
| Norway | Latin America | Greece | Czech Republic | Other (please state): |

1.4 If you have worked in the company for many years, could you describe what kind of growth the company has had? What was it like before and what is it like now? Do you think that having implemented language strategies may be one of the main reasons why the company has grown?

When I started working here, none of the employees could speak English fluently and we only had a few foreign customers. After a few months, my company hired a person who was able to speak English fluently and the number of foreign customers increased a lot. After a few years, a native German speaker was also hired and since then the number of German-speaking customers has also increased. Finally, thanks to my colleague's knowledge of Spanish, Spanish-speaking customers also increased.

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 1.5 Do you think that since the company began to invest in language strategies, its success both domestically and internationally has increased? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. The number of foreign customers has increased exponentially | | |

2. Communicating in Foreign Markets

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 2.1 Based on your role in the company, do you have to communicate with foreign customers on a daily basis? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please give more details and explain what languages you use. To provide technical assistance to foreign customers, it is essential to know English | | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 2.2 Do you have encountered cultural differences when communicating with foreign clients? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. Foreigners are generally more precise than Italians | | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 2.3 Do you think speaking the customer's language is an added value for the company? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. French, German, and Spanish people are not able to speak English fluently and often require talking to people who know their language | | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 2.4 Has your company ever lost customers because none of the staff spoke their language? | YES x | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. See the previous answer | | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 2.5 Situation: you and the client do not share the same language, so you use a lingua franca to communicate. Is this lingua franca | YES x | NO |
|---|----------|----|

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| always English? Is communication more difficult in these cases? Are there misunderstandings? | | |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. I normally speak in English during courses with foreign clients. A couple of times some Spanish clients asked me to do the course in Italian: I explained in Italian, and they talked in Spanish. | | |

3. Language Management Strategies

| | | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.1 Does your company employ native speakers? | | | YES x | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German x | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.2 Does the company use professional translators and interpreters? Are they part of the company's staff or does the company rely on external agencies? | | | YES x | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | | |
| English X | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish X | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |

| | | | |
|---------|----------|----------|--|
| Russian | Romanian | German X | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.3 Does your company have a website? | YES X | NO |
| Please enter the URL. www.componentsengine.com | | |

| | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.4 Does the company translate its corporate website into languages other than Italian? | YES X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English X | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish X | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French X | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German X | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|-----|---------|
| 3.5 Is the website culturally adapted? (Meaning that it does not contain just a literal translation from your own language, but the contents have been modified and adapted according to a specific foreign culture) | YES | NO X |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.6 Do you think that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.7 Is the company present and active on social media? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, which social media? Linkedin, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube | | |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.8 Does the company regularly publish content on its social media profiles? | YES X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in which language? | | | |
| English X | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | | |
|---|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.9 Does the company translate commercial and technical documentation to be provided to foreign customers? | YES X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in which languages? | | | |
| English X | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish X | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German X | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| |
|---|
| 3.10 Who is in charge of translating the company's content? Internal personnel or external agencies? |
| Please explain. The software's user manual was translated by an external agency; technical and commercial documentation is translated by internal staff. |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 3.11 Do you think that translating technical and commercial documentation is a way to consolidate the company's international reputation? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. foreign companies feel more secure with a supplier who can provide translated documentation and technical support in their language | | |

| | | |
|--|----------|----|
| 3.12 Do you think that translating promotional advertisements, posts on social media, blog articles, news, and technical and commercial documentation is a way to attract more foreign customers? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. Foreign followers focus more on posts translated into their language or English | | |

| | | |
|---|----------|----|
| 3.13 Does the company forge links with local universities, for example, to hire student interns, foreign students, or qualified foreign language students? | YES X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. we regularly publish job advertisements on the university website | | |

| |
|---|
| 3.14 Can you think of other language strategies adopted by the company that you believe impact international growth? |
| no |

4. Other data

| |
|--|
| <p>4.1 What percentage of the company's sales turnover comes from export (approximately)?</p> <p>E</p> <p>a. 0-10%</p> <p>b. 11-20%</p> <p>c. 21-40%</p> <p>d. 41-60%</p> <p>e. 60% +</p> |
|--|

| |
|---------------------------------------|
| <p>4.2 Any other comments?</p> |
|---------------------------------------|

B.5. Questionnaire of Benedetta Neri

About you

| | |
|--|--|
| Respondent's name | Benedetta Neri |
| Date of birth | 24/09/1996 |
| Age | 27 |
| Qualification (degree or diploma) | Laurea magistrale in Lingue e letteratura straniera |
| Languages you fluently speak | Italian, german, spanish, english |

| |
|--|
| <p>How did you learn the languages you speak (school, university, job experiences, life experiences, etc.?)</p> <p>Please explain.</p> <p>School, university and life experiences abroad (Erasmus and language courses abroad)</p> |
|--|

| | | |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Have you ever attended foreign language courses? | YES | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain when, where, why, and for which language.</p> <p>Language courses in London and Germany</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|------------|-----------|
| Do you have a language certification? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain which one and the level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). German, Goethe Zertifikat C1 | | |

About the company

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Company | Components Engine |
| Address | Via Calcinaro 2085/1, 47521, Cesena |
| Country | Italy |
| Telephone number | +39 0547 383495 |
| E-mail | info@componentsengine.com |
| Website | https://www.componentsengine.com/ |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------------|-----------------------------|---|-------|
| What is your job title? | | | | |
| Export Manager | Project Manager | Secretary /Administrator | Employee (Specify your role) Technical support | Other |
| In what year did you start working in the company? 2023 | | | | |

1. General Awareness

| | | |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 1.1 Do you believe there is a link between the use of foreign languages and export / international performance? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain why. Speaking the same language of the customers means building a more solid commercial relationship with them. | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 1.2 Do you think your company invests in language skills and intercultural capability? Does the company have a team of professional linguists, native speakers, language graduates, and/or professional translators and interpreters to face linguistic barriers? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. There is a very international team: native speakers, language graduates. | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 1.3 Does your company hire staff with language skills to match the foreign markets? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, which sectors of your company are the most equipped with staff with language skills? Commercial sector and technical support | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| If the answer is YES, for what markets? | | | | |
| Australia | Russia | Malta | Finland | Ireland |
| Bulgaria | South-East Asia | Poland | Hungary | Latvia |
| Denmark | U.K. | Slovakia | Lithuania | Middle East |
| France | Austria | Spain | Netherlands | Portugal |
| Iceland | Canada | U.S. | Romania | Slovenia |
| Japan | Germany | Belgium | South Africa | Sweden |
| China | India | Estonia | Turkey | Brazil |
| Norway | Latin America | Greece | Czech Republic | Other (please state): |

| |
|--|
| 1.4 If you have worked in the company for many years, could you describe what kind of growth the company has had? What was it like before and what is it like |
|--|

| |
|--|
| now? Do you think that having implemented language strategies may be one of the main reasons why the company has grown? |
| |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 1.5 Do you think that since the company began to invest in language strategies, its success both domestically and internationally has increased? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |
| I think so, but not sure. | | |

2. Communicating in Foreign Markets

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 2.1 Based on your role in the company, do you have to communicate with foreign customers on a daily basis? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please give more details and explain what languages you use. | | |
| German for technical support. | | |

| | | |
|--|-----|-----------|
| 2.2 Do you have encountered cultural differences when communicating with foreign clients? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |
| Not yet. | | |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 2.3 Do you think speaking the customer's language is an added value for the company? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |
| You can build a more solid commercial relationship with the customer. | | |

| | | |
|---|-----|-----------|
| 2.4 Has your company ever lost customers because none of the staff spoke their language? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |
| I don't think so | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 2.5 Situation: you and the client do not share the same language, so you use a lingua franca to communicate. Is this lingua franca always English? Is communication more difficult in these cases? Are there misunderstandings? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. Communication is more difficult, but if both parts have a solid known of the English language, then misunderstandings are not so recurring. | | |

3. Language Management Strategies

| | | | | |
|--|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.1 Does your company employ native speakers? | | | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|
| 3.2 Does the company use professional translators and interpreters? Are they part of the company's staff or does the company rely on external agencies? | | | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |

| | | | |
|---------|----------|------------|--|
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.3 Does your company have a website? | YES | NO |
| Please enter the URL. https://www.componentsengine.com | | |

| | | | |
|--|------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| 3.4 Does the company translate its corporate website into languages other than Italian? | YES | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.5 Is the website culturally adapted? (Meaning that it does not contain just a literal translation from your own language, but the contents have been modified and adapted according to a specific foreign culture) | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. With the fact that the company deals mainly with information-technology content, most of the time there is no need to adapt texts according to the target culture, partly | | |

because many terms remain in English for all languages. However, for example, when I have to translate texts about our customers to be published on our website, there are things to adapt. For example, "company X is located in the heart of Belluno." There, if I translate literally, an American customer reading the post maybe doesn't know where Belluno is located, so I prefer to generalize by writing "company X is located in northern Italy."

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.6 Do you think that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.
They can better explain what our company produces.

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.7 Is the company present and active on social media? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, which social media?
Linkedin

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.8 Does the company regularly publish content on its social media profiles? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, in which language?

| | | | |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.9 Does the company translate commercial and technical documentation to be provided to foreign customers? | | | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in which languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| |
|---|
| 3.10 Who is in charge of translating the company's content? Internal personnel or external agencies? |
| Please explain. Internal personal (native speakers or language graduated employers) |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.11 Do you think that translating technical and commercial documentation is a way to consolidate the company's international reputation? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. The foreign customer can better understand the documentation that the company provides him. He feels more confident. | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.12 Do you think that translating promotional advertisements, posts on social media, blog articles, news, and technical and commercial documentation is a way to attract more foreign customers? | YES | NO |
|--|------------|----|

| | | |
|---|-----|----|
| If the answer is YES, please explain. The customer is more attracted and interested | | |
| 3.13 Does the company forge links with local universities, for example, to hire student interns, foreign students, or qualified foreign language students? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. I don't know | | |

| |
|---|
| 3.14 Can you think of other language strategies adopted by the company that you believe impact international growth? |
| |

4. Other data

| |
|--|
| 4.1 What percentage of the company's sales turnover comes from export (approximately)? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 0-10% b. 11-20% c. 21-40% d. 41-60% e. 60% + |

| |
|--------------------------------|
| 4.2 Any other comments? |
| |

B.6. Questionnaire of Francesco Baldiserry

About you

| | |
|--|---|
| Respondent's name | Francesco Baldiserry |
| Date of birth | 16/07/1998 |
| Age | 24 |
| Qualification (degree or diploma) | Diploma in foreign languages |
| Languages you fluently speak | Italian, English, French, German |

How did you learn the languages you speak (school, university, job experiences, life experiences, etc.?)

Mostly at school and through life experiences and hobbies, but job experiences helped as well.

Have you ever attended foreign language courses?

YES - X

NO

During high school in order to prepare myself for the certification exam (both for English and German).

Do you have a language certification?

YES - X

NO

C1 in English.

B1 in German.

About the company

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Company | Components Engine S.r.l. |
| Address | Via Calcinaro 2085/1 |
| Country | Italy |
| Telephone number | 0547383495 |
| E-mail | f.baldiserri@componentsengine.com |
| Website | www.componentsengine.com |

What is your job title?

Product specialist, part of the customer service and technical support departments.

| | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| Export Manager | Project Manager | Secretary /Administrator | Employee (Specify your role) | Other |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|

In what year did you start working in the company? **August 2020**

1. General Awareness

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 1.1 Do you believe there is a link between the use of foreign languages and export / international performance? | YES - X | NO |
|--|------------|----|

Yes, the easiest and fastest the communication, the least amount of time is wasted.

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 1.2 Do you think your company invests in language skills and intercultural capability? Does the company have a team of professional linguists, native speakers, language graduates, and/or professional translators and interpreters to face linguistic barriers? | YES - X | NO |
|--|------------|----|

Yes, the quality of the team helps to have the minimum number of misunderstandings.

The company, though, isn't currently investing in improving the existing team's language skills and capabilities.

| | | |
|--|-----------|----|
| 1.3 Does your company hire staff with language skills to match the foreign markets? | YES- X | NO |
|--|-----------|----|

If the answer is YES, which sectors of your company are the most equipped with staff with language skills? **Actually, almost all sectors of the company are equipped with language-skilled staff.**

If the answer is YES, for what markets? **Worldwide market.**

| | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------|----------|--------------|-------------|
| Australia | Russia | Malta | Finland | Ireland |
| Bulgaria | South-East Asia | Poland | Hungary | Latvia |
| Denmark | U.K. | Slovakia | Lithuania | Middle East |
| France | Austria | Spain | Netherlands | Portugal |
| Iceland | Canada | U.S. | Romania | Slovenia |
| Japan | Germany | Belgium | South Africa | Sweden |

| | | | | |
|--------|---------------|---------|----------------|-----------------------|
| China | India | Estonia | Turkey | Brazil |
| Norway | Latin America | Greece | Czech Republic | Other (please state): |

1.4 If you have worked in the company for many years, could you describe what kind of growth the company has had? What was it like before and what is it like now? Do you think that having implemented language strategies may be one of the main reasons why the company has grown?

The number of employees has increased, due to a higher demand from the customers. Language strategies have been implemented to facilitate the reachability for future clients.

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 1.5 Do you think that since the company began to invest in language strategies, its success both domestically and internationally has increased? | YES - X | NO |
|---|------------|----|

Yes, both a better communication tied together with a nicer graphic and aesthetic component has helped reach more audience.

2. Communicating in Foreign Markets

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 2.1 Based on your role in the company, do you have to communicate with foreign customers on a daily basis? | YES - X | NO |
|---|------------|----|

Yes, every day I'm in contact with foreign people and I mostly give support in English and Italian.

| | | |
|--|-----|-----------|
| 2.2 Do you have encountered cultural differences when communicating with foreign clients? | YES | NO - X |
|--|-----|-----------|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 2.3 Do you think speaking the customer's language is an added value for the company? | YES - X | NO |
|---|------------|----|

Yes, this better communication, in this case, allows for a faster pace in technical processes as well as generally fewer misunderstandings.

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 2.4 Has your company ever lost customers because none of the staff spoke their language? | YES - X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 2.5 Situation: you and the client do not share the same language, so you use a lingua franca to communicate. Is this lingua franca always English? Is communication more difficult in these cases? Are there misunderstandings? | YES - X | NO |
| Yes, the lingua franca is usually English. On average there are a few more misunderstandings but the communication is not that much more difficult, maybe you need to explain things in an easier way. | | |

3. Language Management Strategies

| | | | |
|--|------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.1 Does your company employ native speakers? | YES - X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.2 Does the company use professional translators and interpreters? Are they part of the company's staff or does the company rely on external agencies? | YES - X | NO |
|--|------------|----|

| | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.3 Does your company have a website? | YES - X | NO |
| Please enter the URL. https://www.componentsengine.com/ | | |

| | | | |
|--|------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.4 Does the company translate its corporate website into languages other than Italian? | YES - X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.5 Is the website culturally adapted? | YES - X | NO |
|---|------------|----|

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| (Meaning that it does not contain just a literal translation from your own language, but the contents have been modified and adapted according to a specific foreign culture) | | |
| Having different languages also different expressions, the contents haven't been translated literally but taking into consideration how a person from that language would say it. | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.6 Do you think that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased? | YES - X | NO |
| Of course, ease of understanding is crucial to obtain more customers of a specific language as people may have difficulties reviewing the content in English, even the world's general language. | | |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.7 Is the company present and active on social media? | YES - X | NO |
| Almost all social medias: Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn. | | |

| | | | |
|---|------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.8 Does the company regularly publish content on its social media profiles? | YES - X | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in which language? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------|------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.9 Does the company translate commercial and technical documentation to be provided to foreign customers? | | | YES - X | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in which languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| |
|---|
| 3.10 Who is in charge of translating the company's content? Internal personnel or external agencies? |
| Internal personnel who are certified to have the competence of translating specific content. |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.11 Do you think that translating technical and commercial documentation is a way to consolidate the company's international reputation? | YES - X | NO |
| Yes, having documentation in multiple languages will have a better appreciation amongst more people and so more companies. | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.12 Do you think that translating promotional advertisements, posts on social media, blog articles, news, and technical and commercial documentation is a way to attract more foreign customers? | YES - X | NO |
| Yes, foreign customers are happy to see company content translated into their mother language. | | |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.13 Does the company forge links with local universities, for example, to hire student interns, foreign students, or qualified foreign language students? | YES - X | NO |
| Yes, students are a good source of people with competencies that could be related to the various positions of our company. | | |

| |
|---|
| 3.14 Can you think of other language strategies adopted by the company that you believe impact international growth? |
| No, I think they have mostly been already mentioned in the above answers. |

4. Other data

| |
|---|
| 4.1 What percentage of the company's sales turnover comes from export (approximately)? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 0-10% b. 11-20% c. 21-40% d. 41-60% e. 60% + |

| |
|--------------------------------|
| 4.2 Any other comments? |
| No further comments. |

B.7. Questionnaire of Susanna Baccarin

About you

| | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Respondent's name | SUSANNA BACCARIN |
| Date of birth | 23/08/1997 |
| Age | 25 |
| Qualification (degree or diploma) | LAUREA IN DESIGN |
| Languages you fluently speak | ITALIANO, INGLESE, SPAGNOLO |

| |
|---|
| How did you learn the languages you speak (school, university, job experiences, life experiences, etc.?) |
| MADRELINGUA ITALIANO. INGLESE FATTO ANCHE ALL'UNIVERSITÀ E SPAGNOLO SOLO ALLE MEDIE |
| [Translation: Mother tongue: Italian. English learned at university and Spanish only at middle school.] |

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Have you ever attended foreign language courses? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain when, where, why, and for which language. | | |
| SOLO TRINITY DI INGLESE ALLE MEDIE | | |
| [Translation: ONLY ENGLISH TRINITY IN MIDDLE SCHOOL] | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Do you have a language certification? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain which one and the level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). | | |

About the company

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Company | Components Engine |
| Address | Via Calcinaro 2085/1, 47521, Cesena |
| Country | Italy |
| Telephone number | +39 0547 383495 |
| E-mail | info@componentsengine.com |
| Website | https://www.componentsengine.com/ |

| |
|---|
| What is your job title? GRAPHIC DESIGNER |
|---|

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------------|---|-------|
| Export Manager | Project Manager | Secretary /Administrator | Employee (Specify your role) | Other |
| In what year did you start working in the company? 2022 | | | | |

1. General Awareness

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 1.1 Do you believe there is a link between the use of foreign languages and export / international performance? | YES | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain why.</p> <p>METTE IN CONTATTO LE PERSONE IN TUTTO IL MODO, C'è CONFRONTO E DIALOGO, LA COLLABORAZIONE E Più PUNTI DI VISTA DIFFERENTI PORTANO A UN RISULTATO MIGLIORE</p> <p>[Translation: IT BRINGS PEOPLE INTO CONTACT IN ALL WAY, THERE IS COMPARISON, DIALOGUE, AND COLLABORATION. IN ADDITION, DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW LEAD TO A BETTER RESULT]</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 1.2 Do you think your company invests in language skills and intercultural capability? Does the company have a team of professional linguists, native speakers, language graduates, and/or professional translators and interpreters to face linguistic barriers? | YES | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>NO PER LA PRIMA DOMANDA, SI PER LA SECONDA. È NECESSARIO PER L'AZIENDA PER COMUNICARE CON I CLIENTI INTERNAZIONALI</p> <p>[Translation: NO FOR THE FIRST QUESTION, YES FOR THE SECOND. IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE COMPANY TO COMMUNICATE WITH INTERNATIONAL CUSTOMERS]</p> | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 1.3 Does your company hire staff with language skills to match the foreign markets? | YES | NO |
|--|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, which sectors of your company are the most equipped with staff with language skills?

SUPPORTO TECNICO E REPARTO COMMERCIALE

[Translation: TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND SALES DEPARTMENT]

If the answer is YES, for what markets?

| | | | | |
|------------------|----------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Australia | Russia | Malta | Finland | Ireland |
| Bulgaria | South-East Asia | Poland | Hungary | Latvia |
| Denmark | U.K. | Slovakia | Lithuania | Middle East |
| France | Austria | Spain | Netherlands | Portugal |
| Iceland | Canada | U.S. | Romania | Slovenia |
| Japan | Germany | Belgium | South Africa | Sweden |
| China | India | Estonia | Turkey | Brazil |
| Norway | Latin America | Greece | Czech Republic | Other (please state): |

1.4 If you have worked in the company for many years, could you describe what kind of growth the company has had? What was it like before and what is it like now? Do you think that having implemented language strategies may be one of the main reasons why the company has grown?

SI

[Translation: Yes]

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 1.5 Do you think that since the company began to invest in language strategies, its success both domestically and internationally has increased? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

SI PERCHÈ SI RIESCE A COMUNICARE MEGLIO

[Translation: YES, BECAUSE YOU CAN COMMUNICATE BETTER]

2. Communicating in Foreign Markets

2.1 Based on your role in the company, do you have to communicate with foreign customers on a daily basis?

YES

NO

If the answer is YES, please give more details and explain what languages you use.

2.2 Do you have encountered cultural differences when communicating with foreign clients?

YES

NO

If the answer is YES, please explain.

2.3 Do you think speaking the customer's language is an added value for the company?

YES

NO

If the answer is YES, please explain.

SI PERCHÈ BISOGNA ANDARE INCONTRO AL CLIENTE CHE MAGARI NON CONOSCE BENISSIMO L'INGLESE

[Translation: YES, BECAUSE YOU HAVE TO MEET THE CUSTOMER NEEDS, WHO MAY NOT KNOW ENGLISH VERY WELL]

2.4 Has your company ever lost customers because none of the staff spoke their language?

YES

NO

If the answer is YES, please explain.

SI SUPPONGO PER CLIENTI STRANIERI CHE NON PARLAVANO INGLESE, TEDESCO O SPAGNOLO

[Translation: YES, I SUPPOSE, FOR FOREIGN CUSTOMERS WHO DID NOT SPEAK ENGLISH, GERMAN OR SPAGNOLO]

| | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------|
| <p>2.5 Situation: you and the client do not share the same language, so you use a lingua franca to communicate. Is this lingua franca always English? Is communication more difficult in these cases? Are there misunderstandings?</p> | <p>YES</p> | <p>NO</p> |
|---|-------------------|-----------|

If the answer is YES, please explain.
 SI PENSO CHE IN GENERALE SI POVI PER L'INGLESE MA NON TUTTI I CLIENTI LO PARLANO BENE

[Translation: YES, I THINK IN GENERAL ENGLISH IS USED BUT NOT ALL CUSTOMERS SPEAK IT WELL]

3. Language Management Strategies

| | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------|
| <p>3.1 Does your company employ native speakers?</p> | <p>YES</p> | <p>NO</p> |
|---|-------------------|-----------|

If the answer is YES, in what languages?

| | | | |
|---------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------|
| <p>3.2 Does the company use professional translators and interpreters? Are they part of the company's staff or does the company rely on external agencies?</p> | <p>YES</p> | <p>NO</p> |
|---|-------------------|-----------|

| | | | |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.3 Does your company have a website? | YES | NO |
| Please enter the URL. https://www.componentsengine.com/ | | |

| | | | |
|--|------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 3.4 Does the company translate its corporate website into languages other than Italian? | YES | NO | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.5 Is the website culturally adapted? (Meaning that it does not contain just a literal translation from your own language, but the contents have been modified and adapted according to a specific foreign culture) | YES | NO |
|--|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

SI PERCHÈ I TESTI VENGONO TRADOTTI DA PERSONE COMPETENTI CHE CONOSCONO LA LINGUA E NON DAL TRADUTTORE AUTOMATICO (ECCETTO FRANCESE), QUINDI VENGONO ADATTATI

[Translation: YES, BECAUSE THE TEXTS ARE TRANSLATED BY COMPETENT PEOPLE WHO KNOW THE LANGUAGE AND NOT BY THE AUTOMATIC TRANSLATOR (EXCEPT FRENCH), SO THEY ARE ADAPTED]

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.6 Do you think that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

SI PERCHÈ IL MESSAGGIO RAGGIUNGE UNA PLATEA PIÙ AMPIA DI POTENZIALI CLIENTI

[Translation: YES, BECAUSE THE MESSAGE REACHES A WIDER AUDIENCE OF POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS]

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.7 Is the company present and active on social media? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, which social media? LINKEDIN, INSTAGRAM, FACEBOOK

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.8 Does the company regularly publish content on its social media profiles? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, in which language?

| | | | |
|----------------|-----------|------------|-----------------------|
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |

| | | | |
|---------|----------|-----------|--|
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.9 Does the company translate commercial and technical documentation to be provided to foreign customers? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, in which languages?

| | | | |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | |

| |
|---|
| 3.10 Who is in charge of translating the company's content? Internal personnel or external agencies? |
| Please explain. |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.11 Do you think that translating technical and commercial documentation is a way to consolidate the company's international reputation? | YES | NO |
|--|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

SI PERCHÈ UNA AZIENDA CHE NON COMUNICA IN ALTRE LINGUE È LIMITATA ALLA PROPRIA NAZIONE E NON PUÒ AVERE SUCCESSO ALL'ESTERO

[Translation: YES, BECAUSE A BUSINESS THAT DOES NOT COMMUNICATE IN OTHER LANGUAGES IS LIMITED TO ITS OWN NATION AND CANNOT HAVE SUCCESS OUTSIDE]

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 3.12 Do you think that translating promotional advertisements, posts on social media, blog articles, news, and technical and commercial documentation is a way to attract more foreign customers? | YES | NO |
|--|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

SI SENZA QUESTO NON SAREBBE POSSIBILE ATTRARRE CLIENTI ESTERI, ANCHE perché LA NOSTRA AZIENDA NON TRATTA ARGOMENTI FACILI E IMMEDIATAMENTE COMPRENSIBILI, SONO MOLTO SPECIFICI E BISOGNA SAPERLI SPIEGARE NELLE VARIE LINGUE

[Translation: YES, WITHOUT THIS, IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE TO ATTRACT FOREIGN CLIENTS, ALSO BECAUSE OUR BUSINESS DOES NOT DEAL WITH EASY AND IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTANDABLE TOPICS, THEY ARE HIGHLY SPECIFIC AND ONE NEEDS TO KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN THEM IN OTHER LANGUAGES]

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.13 Does the company forge links with local universities, for example, to hire student interns, foreign students, or qualified foreign language students? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, please explain.

PENSO CHE SIANO IN CONTATTO MA NON C'è UNA VERA E PROPRIA COLLABORAZIONE

[Translation: I THINK THEY ARE IN CONTACT BUT THERE IS NO REAL COLLABORATION]

| |
|---|
| 3.14 Can you think of other language strategies adopted by the company that you believe impact international growth? |
| |

4. Other data

4.1 What percentage of the company's sales turnover comes from export (approximately)?

- a. 0-10%
- b. 11-20%
- c. 21-40%
- d. 41-60%**
- e. 60% +

4.2 Any other comments?

B.8. Questionnaire of Cristina Bruni

About you

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Respondent's name | Cristina Bruni |
| Date of birth | 28/11/1980 |
| Age | 42 |
| Qualification (degree or diploma) | Diploma superiore |
| Languages you fluently speak | Italiano, Inglese |

How did you learn the languages you speak (school, university, job experiences, life experiences, etc.?)

Italiano - lingua madre

Inglese – corsi scolastici ed extra scolastici, esperienza studio-lavoro a Londra

[Translation: Italian – mother tongue

English – curricular and extracurricular courses, work-study experience in London]

Have you ever attended foreign language courses?

YES

NO

| | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| Do you have a language certification? | YES | NO |
| | | |

About the company

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Company | Components Engine srl |
| Address | Via Calcinaro 2085 |
| Country | Cesena (FC) - Italia |
| Telephone number | 0547383495 |
| Email | c.bruni@componentsengine.com |
| Website | https://www.componentsengine.com/ |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|-------|
| Impiegata [Translation: office clerk] | | | | |
| Export Manager | Project Manager | Secretary /Administrator | Employee (specify your role) | Other |
| In what year did you start working in the company? 2016 | | | | |

1. General Awareness

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 1.1 Do you believe there is a link between the use of foreign languages and export / international performance? | YES | NO |
| | | |

| | | |
|--|-----|-----------|
| 1.2 Do you think your company invests in language skills and intercultural capability? Does the company have a team of professional linguists, native speakers, language graduates, | YES | NO |
|--|-----|-----------|

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| and/or professional translators and interpreters to face linguistic barriers? | | |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 1.3 Does your company hire staff with language skills to match the foreign markets? | YES | NO |
|--|------------|----|

If the answer is YES, for what markets?

| | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Australia | Russia | Malta | Finland | Ireland |
| Bulgaria | South-East Asia | Poland | Hungary | Latvia |
| Denmark | U.K. | Slovakia | Lithuania | Middle East |
| France | Austria | Spain | Netherlands | Portugal |
| Iceland | Canada | U.S. | Romania | Slovenia |
| Japan | Germany | Belgium | South Africa | Sweden |
| China | India | Estonia | Turkey | Brazil |
| Norway | Latin America | Greece | Czech Republic | Other (please state): |

1.4 If you have worked in the company for many years, could you describe what kind of growth the company has had? What was it like before and what is it like now? Do you think that having implemented language strategies may be one of the main reasons why the company has grown?

Sono 7 anni che lavoro in questa azienda, e in questi anni l'ho vista crescere molto. Lavoriamo soprattutto all'estero, quindi le lingue da noi sono fondamentali. Sicuramente per i clienti e potenziali tali, poter parlare con del personale qualificato a livello linguistico è un valore aggiunto importantissimo.

[Translation: I have been working in this company for 7 years now, and in these years, I have seen it grow a lot. We work mostly abroad, so languages are crucial to

us. Certainly, for clients and potential clients, being able to talk to linguistically qualified staff is a very important added value.]

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 1.5 Do you think that since the company began to invest in language strategies, its success both domestically and internationally has increased? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

Assolutamente si, per l'utente finale è fondamentale avere riscontro con delle persone che parlano la sua lingua. Lo fa sentire più a suo agio e compreso

[Translation: Absolutely, for the end user it is crucial to have feedback from people who speak his language. It makes him feel more comfortable and understood.]

2. Communicating in Foreign Markets

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 2.1 Based on your role in the company, do you have to communicate with foreign customers on a daily basis? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

Si, ma per quanto riguarda la comunicazione con clienti stranieri, si tratta soprattutto di smistamento telefonate

[Translation: Yes, but as far as communication with foreign customers is concerned, it's mostly about sorting phone calls]

| | | |
|--|-----|-----------|
| 2.2 Do you have encountered cultural differences when communicating with foreign clients? | YES | NO |
|--|-----|-----------|

Dato che mi rapporto solo a livello di smistamento telefonate con i clienti stranieri

[Translation: Since I only relate at the level of sorting phone calls with foreign customers]

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 2.3 Do you think speaking the customer's language is an added value for the company? | YES | NO |
|---|------------|----|

Il cliente si sente "rassicurato"

[Translation: The customer feels "reassured"]

| | | |
|---|-----|-----------|
| 2.4 Has your company ever lost customers because none of the staff spoke their language? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

| | | |
|--|------------|----|
| 2.5 Situation: you and the client do not share the same language, so you use a lingua franca to communicate. Is this lingua franca always English? Is communication more difficult in these cases? Are there misunderstandings? | YES | NO |
| <p>La lingua utilizzata in questi casi è sempre l'inglese. No, personalmente non ho riscontrato problematiche</p> <p>[Translation: The language used in these cases is always English. No, I personally have not encountered any issues]</p> | | |

3. Language Management Strategies

| | | | | |
|--|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.1 Does your company employ native speakers? | | | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.2 Does the company use professional translators and interpreters? Are they part of the company's staff or does the company rely on external agencies? | | | YES | NO |
| Internal staff | | | | |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|------------|----|
| 3.3 Does your company have a website? | | | YES | NO |
| https://www.componentsengine.com/ | | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.4 Does the company translate its corporate website into languages other than Italian? | | | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in what languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|------------|----|
| 3.5 Is the website culturally adapted? | | | YES | NO |
|---|--|--|------------|----|

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| (Meaning that it does not contain just a literal translation from your own language, but the contents have been modified and adapted according to a specific foreign culture) | | |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>I miei colleghi che si occupano di traduzione lavorano sempre tenendo a ben a mente il pubblico target, quindi direi che non si tratta di traduzioni letterali ma di traduzioni adattate.</p> <p>[Translation: My translation colleagues always work with the target audience in mind, so I would say that they do not translate literally, but texts are always properly adapted.]</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.6 Do you think that since the company's web page has been translated into other languages, customers for those languages have increased? | YES | NO |
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>Si, il nostro bacino utenti estero è aumentato molto da quando la pagina web aziendale è stata tradotta in altre lingue. Credo che se non si dispone di una pagina web aziendale multilingue, sarebbe impossibile attrarre clienti esteri.</p> <p>[Translation: Yes, our foreign user base has increased a lot since the company web page was translated into other languages. I believe that if you do not have a multilingual corporate web page, it would be impossible to attract foreign customers.]</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.7 Is the company present and active on social media? | YES | NO |
| Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.8 Does the company regularly publish content on its social media profiles? | | | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in which language? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| | | | | |
|---|-----------|---------------|-----------------------|----|
| 3.9 Does the company translate commercial and technical documentation to be provided to foreign customers? | | | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, in which languages? | | | | |
| English | Bulgarian | Egyptian | Lithuanian | |
| Spanish | Dutch | Icelandic | Other (please state): | |
| Danish | Hungarian | Latvian | | |
| French | Japanese | Portuguese | | |
| Greek | Polish | Slovenian | | |
| Maltese | Turkish | Czech | | |
| Russian | Romanian | German | | |
| Swedish | Chinese | Irish | | |

| |
|---|
| 3.10 Who is in charge of translating the company's content? Internal personnel or external agencies? |
|---|

| |
|---|
| <p>Please explain.</p> <p>Internal personnel.</p> |
|---|

| | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------|
| <p>3.11 Do you think that translating technical and commercial documentation is a way to consolidate the company's international reputation?</p> | <p>YES</p> | <p>NO</p> |
|---|-------------------|-----------|

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>Si, fornire al cliente estero documentazione nella sua propria lingua aumenta la sua fiducia nell'azienda.</p> <p>[Translation: Yes, providing foreign customers with documentation in their own language increases their confidence in the company.]</p> | | |
|---|--|--|

| | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------|
| <p>3.12 Do you think that translating promotional advertisements, posts on social media, blog articles, news, and technical and commercial documentation is a way to attract more foreign customers?</p> | <p>YES</p> | <p>NO</p> |
|---|-------------------|-----------|

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>If the answer is YES, please explain.</p> <p>Si, in questo modo la comunicazione aziendale non si rivolge solo al pubblico target domestico, ma anche a tutti quei potenziali clienti che risiedono in altri paesi, sia europei che non.</p> <p>[Translation: Yes, in this way the company's communication is not only aimed at the domestic target audience, but also at all those potential customers residing in other countries, both European and non-European.]</p> | | |
|--|--|--|

| | | |
|---|------------|----|
| 3.13 Does the company forge links with local universities, for example, to hire student interns, foreign students, or qualified foreign language students? | YES | NO |
| If the answer is YES, please explain. | | |

| |
|---|
| 3.14 Can you think of other language strategies adopted by the company that you believe impact international growth? |
| |

4. Other data

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| 4.1 What percentage of the company's sales turnover comes from export (approximately)? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 0-10% b. 11-20% c. 21-40% d. 41-60% e. 60% + |

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|--------------------------------|
| 4.2 Any other comments? |
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