What do "They" Mean by That?
The (Hidden) Role of Language in a Merger

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Abstract

The need for a common language between multilingual merging companies is clear but the problems of understanding between people in mergers, where they use the same language, is less well known. Two companies with the same activities and speaking the same language may not necessarily use the same expressions, meanings, and practices causing confusion that translates into costs for the company. This article focuses on monolingual mergers, when communication turns out to be less self-evident than may be imagined. Through the pragmaterminological approach, this paper proposes human resources management and communication management a way to consider the companies' linguistic material for the success of a merger.

1 Introduction

When people join a company they need to have to access the company's linguistic universe. It is quite common not to understand expressions used by older staff members. To enable newcomers to understand their new environment, companies often use glossaries with definitions of expressions of many kinds. These expressions are most important for the life of the group because without them not only communication is not efficient but also the integration to the group (socialisation) is not satisfactory. In a merger the integration process is a reciprocal one since companies do not necessarily organise their reality in the same way linguistically. For example the designations of products or services may not be the same and staff members need to learn those in use by the *other* company as if they were joining a new one.

In a multilingual merger it is natural to look for a common language, but even in a monolingual one it is necessary to be aware of the different expressions that companies use. Like for multinational management (Maschan et al., 1997), for the success of a merger, language appears to be a major factor since people need to understand and integrate expressions that should form a common ground in the new entity. In monolingual mergers,

languages seem to be taken for granted because everyone speaks the same one. Nevertheless among staff of each merging company one question is frequent: 'what do *they* mean by *that*?'

It is not only a matter of words or acronyms, but more precisely of terms that create the network of expressions that are particular to one firm. The linguistic individuality of a company can be considered a social dialect or sociolect: company-speak (de Vecchi, 1999) which is characterized by the terms it uses. In a merger two company-speaks combine. The paper makes path from topics about mergers in connexion with language matters and the specific problem of data gathering. Then it explores the shift from words to terms and the fields where they are applicable leading on to the last section where a pragmaterminological approach is proposed.

2 Language and mergers

Management, language and mergers have been studied in many contexts with differing aims in view. Among them, the place of language in multinational management (Marschan, Welch & Welch, 1997); cultural factors in international mergers (Majidi, 2007); the introduction of a common language in cross-border mergers (Piekkari et al., 2005), communication failures (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005), intercultural discourse (Clyne, 1994); distance in mergers (Lehto, 2006); multicultural aspects (Trompenaars, 1993); culture and organisations (Hofstede, 1994); acculturation (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988); conflicts in organisational cultures (Weber & Camerer, 2003); case studies (Véry, 2002). The issues of language, however, in connection with mergers and acquisitions have seldom been broached, except in those cases where different languages are spoken in the companies that merge, a common occurrence in transnational mergers (see in particular Vaara et al., 2005). The main reason for introducing a common language is to facilitate communication (Piekkari et al., 2005). The way language organises conceptual systems is perhaps even more important, embodied essentially in the specific words used.

The fact that merging companies use the same language does not mean that everything real or not (including conceptual categories and procedures) has the same name. A merger is the gathering of two different groups that do not necessarily use the same expressions for the same purposes. The names of products or services are good examples because a customer needs to "see" the differences between companies. In the case of a merger when two communities become a single one, people are confronted with expressions whose meaning is not obvious, and misunderstandings may occur. The situation is seldom mentioned except when explicit cases are reported (Véry, 2002; de Vecchi, 2003). In the context of a merger it is not easy for everyone to openly state: *I do not understand what they say*.

In 1990 Air France took control of UTA (Union des Transports Aériens) and the staff was merged in 1992 (Autier et al., 2001). In this merger observed by de Vecchi (2003), staff frequently asked: *what does 'this' mean?* or *what do 'they' mean by that?* The question was raised not only because different expressions were used but because the ways of "thinking" the activity was different, and the consequence that the same objects could have different names. The observation showed that what was not understood was in fact the terms used by each company. In other words, the expressions that encapsulate what people have in their minds when they use them at work. In a merger it is not only the language as a system that has to be observed but the way each company specializes it to express its own reality.

When a term is used, it is important to know what it refers to in order to situate it in a cultural, sociolinguistic or terminological universe. Those all-too-frequently used acronyms are also good examples of this situation and thereby become involved in communication conflicts, giving rise to inefficiency. Moreover, according to the position of a given individual, losing or keeping power (Vaara et al., 2005) can be the result of understanding and controlling the company's terms. In the case of a merger, it is important to manage the linguistic material of the company in as much as the referents of both companies are not necessarily the same and the practices induced from these may differ as well. It is up to the communication manager to facilitate the understanding of terms that the new company, resulting from the merger, use to communicate. Terms are not isolated from the group that uses them and staff members need to know and understand not only terms but also the links they create. Companies are places where, for each group, specific knowledge is applied by specialized staff.

3 The problem of language observation

Gathering and observing data in a merger is no easy task: staff and companies are so involved in the problems brought on by the merger (Feldman & Spratt, 2000) that, in such times of stress, issues of language tend to be pushed aside. But other reasons also contribute. The first is the situation of staff and the companies themselves: confidentiality is all-important. A second reason concerns the language awareness of the speakers themselves. It is well known that speakers are not necessarily aware of the way they speak, and when they sense they are being observed, they pay greater attention to the way they speak. This is the paradox of the observer, as Labov describes it (Labov, 1986). Awareness of language issues occurs when a misunderstanding gives rise to an explanation: *What does this mean - in your firm*? A third reason is the position of the observer gathering the data, and who may be regarded with suspicion by both employees and management. Staff members know that the words or expressions they use contain important information and that silence may be an asset. It can be strategically advantageous to withhold information and when there is a merger, the situation becomes more critical. Consultancies in charge of overseeing mergers and acquisitions could be a source of information, but they do not generally communicate on this subject for reasons of confidentiality, and also because they do not know how to (Cerruti-Bozzola and David, 2007). Piekkari et al. (2005) use invented names in their research; de Vecchi (1999) omits any reference to the company under study and in the example of the two cosmetics firms below, the informer, frightened of losing his job, declined to mention any mention of consultancy or company names (de Vecchi, 2004). Cross (2001) disguises figures of assets and revenues "to protect the company's identity" and uses a pseudonym to place the headquarters of the company observed.

The best way to observe how language is used in the case of mergers and acquisitions is to bring into play an observer who is at the same time a participant. This person will need to be trained for the task and at the same time feel legitimate and involved in the issues of understanding, action and culture. This is an uncommon situation (Piekkari et al. 2005; de Vecchi, 2003). It was in this sort of situation that the linguistic markers described below in the case of the merger of Air France and UTA in 1992 were obtained. The linguist was on the staff of one of the companies and thus had the legitimacy of belonging to the organisation as well as having the theoretical tools required of the observer which allowed a better understanding of the linguistic material of the merger.

4 From words to terms

Brand or product names are data that are easy to consider as belonging to the linguistic universe of a company. For example, American Airlines and British Airways have a business class, but for air transport, *Club World* is specific to British Airways. Employees – and customers- have to be able to distinguish companies, products and services. "Club" and "world" are usual English words but together they designate something specific to this particular company. Other words belong to the jargon of the professions, and are used by different companies, but sometimes unexpected expressions are very characteristic of one firm in particular. Paper napkins are called *ouatose* (cellulose) by Air France. The verb *surclasser* (to upgrade) has a specific form in the same company: *repinver* (from *report involontaire*). For the same transporter, small plastic bags containing sugar, a napkin, and a plastic spoon is called a *complexe*, but *cristalito* in Spanish in Aerolineas Argentinas, and sometimes have no name in other airlines. The mere mention of them identifies the speaker. They could be anecdotic if it were not that they are objects used every day and included in a long series of actions done by different communities inside the company (from purchaser to user). Acronyms are very frequent, and firms often make glossaries for staff, and not only for insiders but also for the general public. Particular nouns (common and proper), noun phrases, acronyms, verbs and adjectives designating the products, objects, departments, needs, and practices of the community create a network that has to be learned by their new members. Considering them as simple words or groups of words hides their real value in the network: a terminological value. In this connection, it is useful to look at one example in detail.

'Plan' is a word which anyone who knows English can easily identify, but in a company the meaning of 'plan' may go much further. What can we read into the *Novartis Equity Plan 'Select'* or *Bonus Plan,* using standard English only? What kind of 'plan' is involved? How do these 'plans' correspond to similar schemes in another pharmaceutical company, such as Sanofi-Aventis? How does *Ford Flexible Work Program* as used at the Ford Motor Company in its career 'plan' correspond to General Motors' practice, for that matter, what help could one find relying only on one's knowledge of English? The answers to all these questions will be unsatisfactory, and the examples could be multiplied. For example, when 'plan' is part of *Equity plan 'Select'* it contains a conceptual content which is limited to Novartis as a 'career plan' and it is the same for Ford's *Flexible Work Program*. In both cases they are terms that belong to each company because they express their way these plans or programs are conceptualized.

Many of these examples are legally protected, such as brand names (®, ™), and are thus not just part of the company's linguistic universe but also their property. In addition to the desire each company may have to distinguish their 'plans' or 'programs', each company constructs a network of terms that corresponds to its needs, and which are not interchangeable. In other words, we are firmly placed in discourse, not language, but the use comes to establish a local norm.

If Novartis merged with another laboratory and the new institution needed a 'plan' in the Human Resources sense, there is no reason why *Equity Plan 'Select'* or *Bonus Plan* would be kept as such. If they were, the staff of the *other* laboratory would need to understand what Novartis means by them. Even if they disappeared, terms would become part of Novartis history (and their linguistic heritage). At the same time, new terms may also be created. Such a situation takes us to a second case: that of conceptualization.

The situation is not far removed from that exposed by Schein: "Members of a founding group coming together to create a new organization need to learn about each other's semantic space (even if they start with a common basic language, such as English) in order to determine what they mean by such abstractions as "a good product", of "high quality," produced at "low cost," to get into the "market" "as rapid as possible". (2004:112) In our example, what is a "plan"? In a merger, consensus in the use of these expressions is important at work because people need to share a new semantic space. Both companies may think of a 'plan' in different ways even if for Human Resources (HR) as a discipline it is the same concept. What matters here is the fact that names given by each merging company are the result of a conceptual construct based on that of HR, but shaped by the background of each company. In a merger the HR concept 'plan' will be revised in a new consensual way and renamed (if necessary) or adapted. The conceptual and the linguistic level may then vary because the community makes them vary but not the discipline.

4.1 From fields of knowledge to real activity in terminology

Companies can be considered as a resources portfolio based on what they know (Tarondeau, 1998), for this reason they occupy a place on a market. Many types of knowledge converge in a company's activities (strategy, marketing, HR, logistics, production, etc.). Basic knowledge about marketing or production is not different from one company to another, but the way they do it is. This difference leads to different expressions, actions, and ways of doing them. As a consequence it is not only terms that may differ: concepts can also be different. A company "acts" because it "thinks" in a specific way, the customer must "see" this difference and the staff must "live" this mindset. In other words, all these differences lead to different corporate cultures, and language is very much part of them.

Nevertheless there is a "distance" between a field of knowledge as considered by terminology and the real activity of a company where that knowledge is applied (cf. core competencies Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). This distance can be easily exemplified through the example of aviation. If aviation is a field of knowledge, commercial, military and private aviation are sub-fields with their specific term networks; we consider them to be fields of activity. If Air France and UTA were both in the same field of knowledge (aviation) and even the same field of activity (commercial aviation), how is it possible that they had terminological misunderstandings? The answer comes from the fact that their company-speaks, the terms that characterize a company, are situated in another type of field: the field of operations. That is to say the way a company, and not an activity, specializes language for its own needs in actual practice. The three fields are therefore interlocked as shown in figure 1.
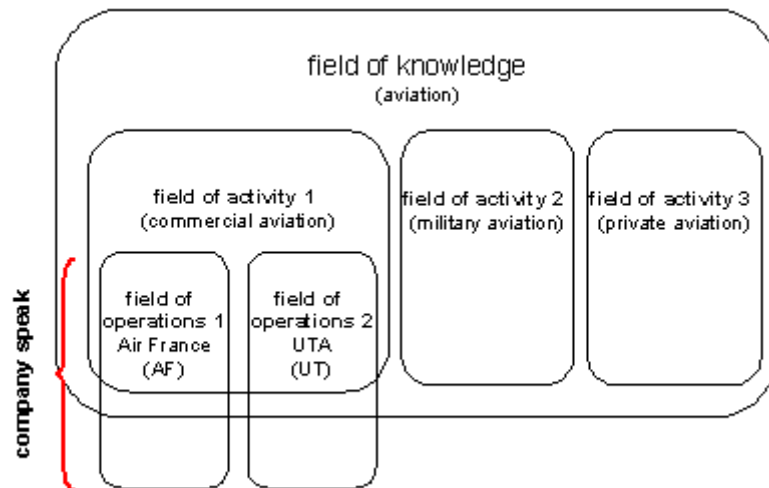
Figure 1. Fields of knowledge, activity and operations

Figure 1 also shows that part of the field of operations is outside the field of activity. The reason is that this part has to do with other fields of knowledge and activity that companies are involved in (finance, marketing, HR, supply chain, etc.). A company is a place where many tasks are carried out and for each one terminological conflicts may also appear. Two examples of conceptual and terminological contrasts are illustrated below.

4.2 When expressions encapsulate different conceptualizations
In 2002 two small French cosmetics firms (de Vecchi, 2004) merged and the communication director of the new entity reported that the staff was having trouble in 'understanding' the following text:

Les objectifs fixés permettent de réduire les coûts de la manière souhaitée. Cette économie vise des nouveaux investissements qui permettront d'augmenter la productivité et l'offre. Le client aura plus de choix. Le marketing se focalisera sur les nouveaux produits Europe.

[The new objectives will reduce costs as desired. These savings target new investments that will increase productivity and offer. Customers will have more choice. Marketing will focus on the new Europe products. (Translated by de Vecchi, 2004)]

In such an apparently simple and short text the following expressions were not interpreted in the same way: 'new objectives', 'reduce costs' and 'Europe products'. Before the merger and in its own context each company understood these expressions in its own way. After the merger, when staff from the two firms began working together, misunderstandings started. The table below shows the differences in interpretation.

Expression	Meaning in company A	Meaning in company B
new objectives	to get rid of specific merchandise	to reach 15% market share
reduce costs	renting costs	distribution costs
Europe products	a line of products	a design of bottles

Table 1. 'Problems of understanding'

These meanings could not be found in any usual dictionary by putting together 'new' and 'objectives', only those actually involved in each company can make the appropriate

interpretation of 'new objectives'. It is therefore important to identify what has been *conceptualized* by people or an institution at large by means of what is *expressed*. In this case, only 'Europe products' was a term for one of the companies, but conceptualizations appeared in the text as semantic forms (Rastier, 1996). They can be considered as terms if we accept that they encapsulate conceptualizations from each company at a particular time of their history, and not static concepts used in management disciplines. Neither conceptualizations nor terms did match and the solution in this case was to put managers around the table and to explain what these expressions meant for *them*, and what they had in mind when using those expressions.

4.3 When terms do not match

For the Air France and UTA merger the observations focused on the on-board service that was not the same for each airline. Even in the same aircraft cabin crews of each airline did not use the same material or procedures, and terminology reflected the situation. Staff of one company may have used a term familiar to *them*, but not necessarily so for the other company involved in the merger. In sociolinguistics variables are elements that are known in advance to have different realizations (Hudson, 1980), for example: two different pronunciations of a same word. In our case it can be the designation an object used by each airline. In mergers however, variables may not be systematically known in advance. Interpretation problems or wrong actions will show them up immediately and are indicated by markers which are typically used. As mentioned before, it is even possible to tell which company a speaker originally comes from, just by noting the terms used. From then on, speakers know that there is an alternative to the way they express what they conceive, i.e. an alternative to their own term. Furthermore, the actual forms of variables may also be used as a sort of index of the extent to which an individual is integrated into the company which produced them, according to whether they are used or not after the merger. These markers appear in both spoken exchanges and written texts – including typographically – with fairly similar formulations, as is shown in table 2 (adapted from de Vecchi, 2003).

Spoken markers	Written markers
for us, it's an X	*from now on X*
in our firm, it's a X	*formerly X*
they call it X	*which becomes X*
here we say X	*in the place of X*
etc.	etc.

Table 2. Linguistic markers

The table 3 shows examples of these variables from the merger of Air France-UTA (de Vecchi, 2003).

terminological variable	term as used by AF	term s used by UT
• on-board food cart	*comodi, voiture, VRA*	*trolley*
• means of transport for the crew from the airport to the hotel	*navette*	*navette*
• period during which a crew member can be called on to replace another crew member	*réserve*	*astreinte*
• self-service bar in a precise place of the plane	*mini-bar*	*RV5*

Table 3: Variables from the merger of Air France (AF) – UTA (UT)

When two companies merge, the different variables may come in conflict for a time, and then a process of harmonization will begin to prevent the conflict from spreading. In the first instance this takes the form of 'informal standardization', also known as *normaison* (Gaudin, 2003), whereby a spontaneous solution is found by those actually involved in the communication process. Then, when the staffs realize the actual significance of the term, it will undergo a process of regulation and then of 'internal' standardization proper, in which experts should take part. Even if terminology involves standardisation as agreement between specialists of a field of knowledge or in technology to regulate terms in order to facilitate communication (L'Homme, 2006), it is also possible to regulate terms in merging companies in the same way. At their level staff members are specialists that need to agree on what they think, and the way they designate real or abstract objects they use. In the case of Air France and UTA and for the sector observed most of the terms that remained after the merger were those from Air France, not by any specific decision as far as informers reported (de Vecchi, 1999), but quite possibly because the number of Air France staff using these expressions was much larger, and because of the widespread use in internal documents.

5. Towards the pragmaterminological approach
5.1 Managing what terms refer to
Communication flows, both spoken and written, are most important in a company today and comprise terms of various forms, whose meaning is often impenetrable to anyone who is not directly concerned with their use. Added to this, many expressions have more than one meaning, which can lead to erroneous interpretations, so that it is necessary 1) to explain what is being referred to, that is to refer to the non-linguistic world, be it to a material object or an abstract one and 2) to explain the meaning. The place of the referent, which is intimately connected to the issues of sign and meaning (Rey, 1973; Eco, 1988; Klinkenberg, 1996), features in Ogden and Richards' triangle (Ogden & Richards, 1923), see figure 2. Even if from a purely semantic analysis point of view, this model may be discussed in different perspectives: objectivist, subjectivist and intersubjectivist (Kravchenko, 2006), for the working, communication and understanding needs of staff members in a merger this model is most useful because it allows people to immediately understand their situation. It has to be noted that in each company and for internal corporate cultural reasons meanings exist before the merger. They may be new for the *other* company, and it is this dynamic that the Ogden and Richards' triangle in its first version helps.
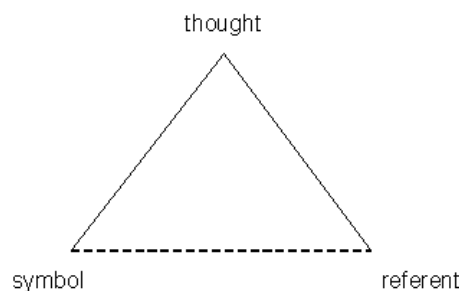
Figure 2. The Ogden and Richards' Triangle

The issue of the referent becomes apparent when the players do not understand the expressions used. For example: *comodi, voiture, VRA* for Air France were unknown terms (symbols) for UTA crews, used to their form: *trolley*. The referent and thought corresponded but not the term: *What do they mean by comodi?*

5.2 The pragmaterminological approach

In the case of companies or fields of operations the pragmaterminological approach (de Vecchi, 2007) proposes that a term can only be properly used and analysed if four conditions or factors determining the value it takes in the community that produced it are taken into account: i.e. the linguistic-cognitive, social, time and pragmatic factors. They must be treated in a staff member perspective to situate the user in his or her real working situation.

5.2.1 The linguistic-cognitive factor

This is the traditional terminology treatment that analyzes a term linguistically, the concept conveyed by the term from a language viewpoint: giving a definition, explaining how it is used in context, stating the terms linked to it and that create a network in that field of knowledge or activity and supplying adequate translations and equivalents appropriate for the field. In this traditional approach 'plan' can be understood differently according to the field in which the term is applied. 'Plan' is a term of management as a field of knowledge; of HR as a field of activity. But only in Novartis as a field of operations does *Equity Plan 'Select'* take its particular meaning.

ATLAS food on-board cart can be considered a term of aviation as a field of knowledge; of passengers' airlines as a field of activity; but only in Air France as a field of operations does it become specifically a *VRA* where it will be noted that the acronym refers to: *voiture repas Atlas*. (At the same time the term used by UTA was *trolley*[1]). The term is part of the company-speak and is linked to a specific field of operations (company) where it makes sense and has a specific meaning. Staff can then integrate it linguistically and cognitively. At the very least, an appropriate definition of the term is necessary to characterize the concept, if not, remaining misunderstandings may bring about inefficiencies or loss of time, with all the ensuing financial consequences.

5.2.2 The social factor

If we accept that a company is a group of communities, two aspects must be taken in account. On one hand, these communities share the terms used by the whole company, for example the name of a product or service which is easily identified by everyone. On the other hand, staff working on the development of one particular new product or service will share terms within the narrower sphere of the project itself. Terms may thus be specific to a particular product or service. This is the usual case for a project when code names are used whether it is for reasons of confidentiality or just because a definitive name has not yet been given. For instance, Airbus Industries used the code name A3XX before naming this family of airliners A380. These situations create divisions inside the company between those who know and understand and those who do not. Obviously not everybody needs to know everything in the same way, and each community is a specialist at its own level having a *savoir décalé* (Roqueplo, 1990: 75), but a minimum of understanding is required at the global level if the company is to work effectively. Taking into account the social factor of a term used in company-speak can thus be considered a recognition of the community where the term is used, beyond the linguistic-cognitive factor.

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[1] Air France used the Atlas Group Airlines standard and UTA the KSSU standard (KSSU stands for KLM, Swissair, Sabena and UTA) (Autier et al., 2001).

For Air France's *voiture repas Atlas*, the communities concerned would be: product management, catering, crews, logistics, providers, and maintenance (and the list is certainly not exhaustive), but not necessarily marketing, HR or administration communities. It is important to foresee the possibility of giving access to a concept where it may be necessary. In a company, terms are relevant and are used for exchanges within work communities where they are useful. If this social aspect of a term is ignored, a meaning corresponding to the use by another community may be wrongly attached. Acronyms are frequently involved in this case. Context may in some cases solve the situation, but people are not always aware that in the same company the same expression may convey other meanings.

5.2.3 The time factor

Terms can be dated. For any business, they appear at some point of time in its history. Technological, commercial, social or organizational changes are all reflected in the diachrony of terms. They have a precise place in their history, a place which they occupy and which becomes a semantic feature of the term. A period of time is characterized by the use of particular linguistic forms. Before the euro started being used in Europe as currency on January 1st, 2002, the French cellular phone company Bouygues Télécom offered a flat rate (*forfait*) of 240 French francs for a monthly use of 240 minutes named *forfait 240*. When the euro came into circulation, this rate became the "4 hours flat rate" (*forfait 4 heures*) because the amount in French francs and minutes no longer matched. The term lost its purpose (the rate became 36.58 euros, at the rate of 6.55657 FF for 1 €) and the name of the rate evolved. Today the corresponding term does not exist anymore and the closest one could find would be *eden forfait classique 2 heures* (standard 2 hours rate).

In a merger, these time features are added to the issue of managing terms. The new entity inherits a double history to which we may add a terminology of restricted usage for a transition period, while the standardization process is being carried out for the new element. It is unlikely and even hardly desirable that the new entity should use 'obsolete' expressions, from linguistic, cognitive and social viewpoints, since the referent no longer corresponds to the current situation, but rather to a past episode of the history of the merger or of the companies which preceded it. This dynamic is close to the life cycle of a term described by Ahmad and Collingham (1995), but for this author the cycle refers to "specialised areas" that are the field of knowledge (see above 4.1) and describe 5 parts in the cycle. As we have seen, the dynamic *inside* a company is different due often to the commercial innovation. Coinage (inception and birth), currency (growth) and obsolescence (death), 3 out of 5 parts of the cycle, do not always give time to translators or terminologists for verification and validation (maturity) of the standardisation seen from outside the field of operations. There is no reason to standardize outside a mobile telephone company the name of a commercial concept like '*forfait 4 heures*', since only staff members and customers need to understand it – but they need this knowledge as soon as possible. For this reason, during the period of transition (see Fig. 3) what is most important in the temporality of a term is valid / invalid use of a term in respect to the period considered. The life cycle of a term inside a field of knowledge and inside a field of operations does not correspond to the same rational.
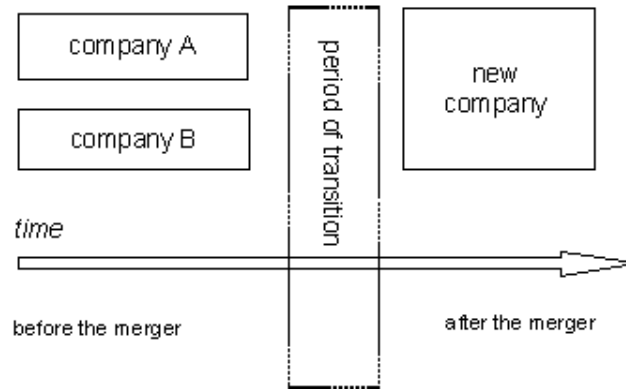
Figure 3 shows the situation in schematic form.

Figure 3. The time factor

The period during which a term is valid counts. The point is that in a merger each company brings its own terminological history, so it is necessary to state when a term is valid since terms may coexist as a daily referent for staff of the other company. An example of this terminological history appears in the fares of railway company Thalys, the high speed train linking France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. In 2002, it offered seven types of fare: *Mini, Tourist, Weekend, Child, Youth, Senior* and *Business*. In 2009 they became: *HI-LIFE, OptiWay, Smoove, YOUTH, Senior, Kid* and *Kid&Co,* each with its own logo. In 2012 they are *Flex, Semi-Flex*, and *No-Flex*. Senior staff know the transformation of terms but those just joining Thalys may not know what the *Mini* or the *Smoove* was. Seniority appears clearly through those who know and those who do not (de Vecchi, 1999).

5.2.4 The pragmatic factor
For a company, two facets, which are closely linked, are relevant in this connection. The first is the factor of action, that is to say concrete action, which must be taken from the collocations of a term (de Vecchi, 2007). The second is the factor of implicit or explicit cultural practices, which are nevertheless describable: *we have always done it this way… In our firm, things just don't happen like that*. These situations hold for company-speak in any field of operations, but they are amplified in the case of a merger. If staff members need to know a term, they need to know also what "to do" with its referent. Practises are intimately linked to the term itself.

For a given term, an action is to be carried out in a company A but not in company B and the cultural usages may be different. For example, a *report* can be 'forwarded' (type of action) in company A to be 'analyzed' by management (cultural usage) or 'archived' (type of action) in company B, since in company B the whole process of analysis has already been completed (cultural usage). Behaviour is perhaps the best way to explore a company culture (Thévenet, 1993). The extralinguistic facets are very much dependent on the will of the people involved. If the facet of the action can be formulated using the verbs found in the proximity of the term under study, the extralinguistic facet is much less so and depends on the will of the people to

state behaviours and practices. The need for standardization once more makes itself felt: after a merger, there can no longer be different actions or different practices carried out by players working together in relation to the same terms and their implications.

It is not enough to simply indentify terms over the different phases of the merger process, it is also necessary to keep the various aspects correctly updated, as has already been suggested. If this identification and treatment of terms has been prepared beforehand, it could contribute to improving communications in that very short and crucial period immediately following a merger (Feldman & Spratt, 2000; Véry, 2002). This treatment would also help to integrate staff better, and thus be of interest to human resources.

As an example, a term such as Air France's *VRA* after the merger, see above, could be analyzed using pragmaterminology as shown in table 4:

Term: **VRA**
Linguistic factor:
      Forms: acronym for 'voiture repas ATLAS'
      Translations: *cart*
      Equivalents: *trolley*
Cognitive factor:
      Definition: on-board food cart using ATLAS standards
      Connected terms: *voiture boisson atlas, mini-bar…*
      Remark: corresponds to the former UTA usage: trolley.
Social factor: cabin crew, catering, service methods department, constructor, outsourcing
      company…
Time factor:
      ATLAS standard, by Atlas Group, valid since 1970 …
      Remark: UTA's former standard (KSSU) has been abandoned.
Pragmatics factor:
      - actions: fill inside and put objects on the VRA following the company's service
      method, do not overload, follow constructor's instructions…
      - practices: follow AF on-board service methods, former UTA's presentation of the
      VRA are not valid…

Table 4. Example of analysis of a term

Even if data need further technological development that need not be detailed here, it is clear that the term in this case *VRA* conveys much more information than the simple expansion of the acronym or its definition. A term can conceal much information that staff and at to some extent other stakeholders may need to know when necessary. For instance, in a merger, the pragmatic factor may differ while others remain stable, but the actions to be carried out and the way to execute them may be very different from one company to the other and this difference must be stated somewhere for each merging company to have a reference of how the *others* do things.

6. Conclusion

In a monolingual merger, language as a system is seldom perceived as an issue to be explored. It is an added value that the pragmaterminological approach brings to language for HR and communication in considering the linguistic material this situation no matter what language is spoken. The multilingual situation appears to be a second step.

Further linguistic and terminological research is necessary in merging companies, but it cannot be done without a model that can explain the behaviour and implications of terms. Companies shape the languages they use and the result is often hastily designated *jargon*, which is not an appropriate name for the situation, since there is a pejorative connotation. The pragmaterminological approach, specific to organisations, could provide a tool that answers not only the question *what do 'they' mean by that?* but also '*who' says that? 'When' do they say that?* And *what do they 'do' with that?* These are questions that are part of the integration and in the case of a merger will be asked by two companies becoming a single one.

Gathering all these factors may also help to answer a subsidiary question: *what do 'they' call what we call 'x'?* Which is, besides the *what do they mean by that?*-question, also an understanding strategy because people need to know which term corresponds to their reality. It is a whole process that includes not only term users but also a linguistically conscious manager and an appropriate technology.

Language can be seen as an interface between the tangible and the intangible. By nature it reflects the needs of people in a company to name things, and it crystallizes cultural marks for its users. They in turn stamp it with a period of the history of their company both socially and technologically. In the case of a merger-acquisition, these aspects all come together in a mutual integration of terms actually used by both companies: some will survive, some will disappear and others will appear.

It is true that any culture, even a corporate culture, recognizes itself in what it produces (Cuche, 1996) whether they are artefacts in the line of thought of Schein (2004) or linguistic signs following the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Our proposal can embrace a wide spectrum of a company's culture through language, thought of essentially as a form of representation of explicit company knowledge and practices. Last but not least and beyond the creation of a database resulting from the approach, it is necessary to have in HR and in a communication department a person who understands the value language has in a company and the place that a company speak has in it. This is what a linguist sensitive to business life or a manager who considers language as part of his business could do as part of the success of a merger.

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