

m-voc

Multilingualism in vocational education:

Case study from Switzerland and
Principality of Liechtenstein

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Overview:

- 1) Introductions
- 2) Rationale/research gap
- 3) Case Study Context
- 4) Research design
- 5) Results
- 6) Recommendations
- 7) Discussion



Welcome

Think of a country you know well.

Question: What languages are needed or an advantage in the following trades and industries?

information technologist

carpenters

electricians

painter/decorators

hairdressers

joiner/carpenter

bricklayers

design engineers

mechanical engineers

Gabriela Meier

Education

- 1981-84 Apprenticeship in business admin.
incl. German, French, English
- 1991-96 Translation degree and teaching
qualification for German
- 2000-01 PGCE 16+ Language teacher
- 2004-09 MA & PhD



International experiences because of languages

- Worked and studied in German, French, Spanish, English-speaking countries/regions
- Taught German, English, Spanish. Worked in language teacher education

Research interests

- Multilingualism in Education (primary, secondary, HE)
- Multilingualism in Vocational Education

Esther Styger

Education

- 1981-84 Apprenticeship Swiss Railways
incl. German, French, Italian, English
- 1993-96 Translation degree and
teaching qualification (German, English)
- 2016-18 Degree as Vocational College Teacher



Teaching experience

German, English and French as foreign languages at vocational schools, immigration institutions, colleges of further education, university

Current position

Language teacher at vocational college in German speaking part of Switzerland – currently participating in co-operation project with UoE during my sabbatical.

Opportunities/challenges in multicultural teams

Sharing a language

... can enhance **trust** with colleagues, business partners and customers

Culturally diverse teams

... are a **reality** in many work contexts

... are more **creative** than homogenous teams - if communication is inclusive.

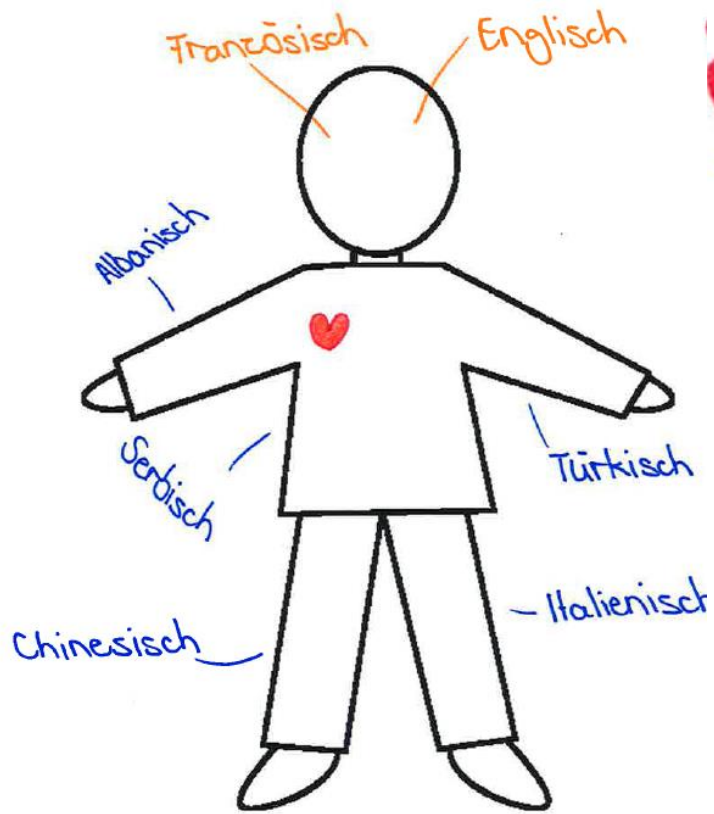
Potential barriers to inclusion in multilingual teams

Certain **accents** can be associated with lack of competence.

Switching languages can be associated with feelings of exclusion, discomfort, suspicion.

Team members can **stay silent** in meetings if they lack confidence in speaking the shared language.

Source: Study with 23 managers from a mix of industries and countries + research literature ([Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2021](#))



♥ = Schweizerdeutsch

- = welche Sprache ich oft höre, aber nicht sprechen oder verstehen kann

- Sprachen, die ich von der Schule kann



- Albanisch

- Kroatisch

- hochdeutsch

- Deutsch

- italienisch

- Englisch

- Französisch

Class mechanical engineers 2019

Albanian

Bosnian

Catalan

Croatian

English

Dialect Swiss-German

Dialect Liechtenstein

French

High German

Hungarian

Italian

Kurdish

Portuguese

Russian

Spanish

Turkish

Research interest and gap

Informal observation in Switzerland

Apprentices in trade and technical apprenticeships are often multilingual.

Lack of research internationally:

Languages used in production/building sites, workshops etc.
The role of languages in apprenticeships.

Source: Coray & Duchêne, 2017

Research questions

- 1) • Which languages do learners bring to vocational training?
- 2) • How do learners develop and use their languages during vocational training?
- 3) • What role do languages play in the linguistic socialisation of learners in different professions?

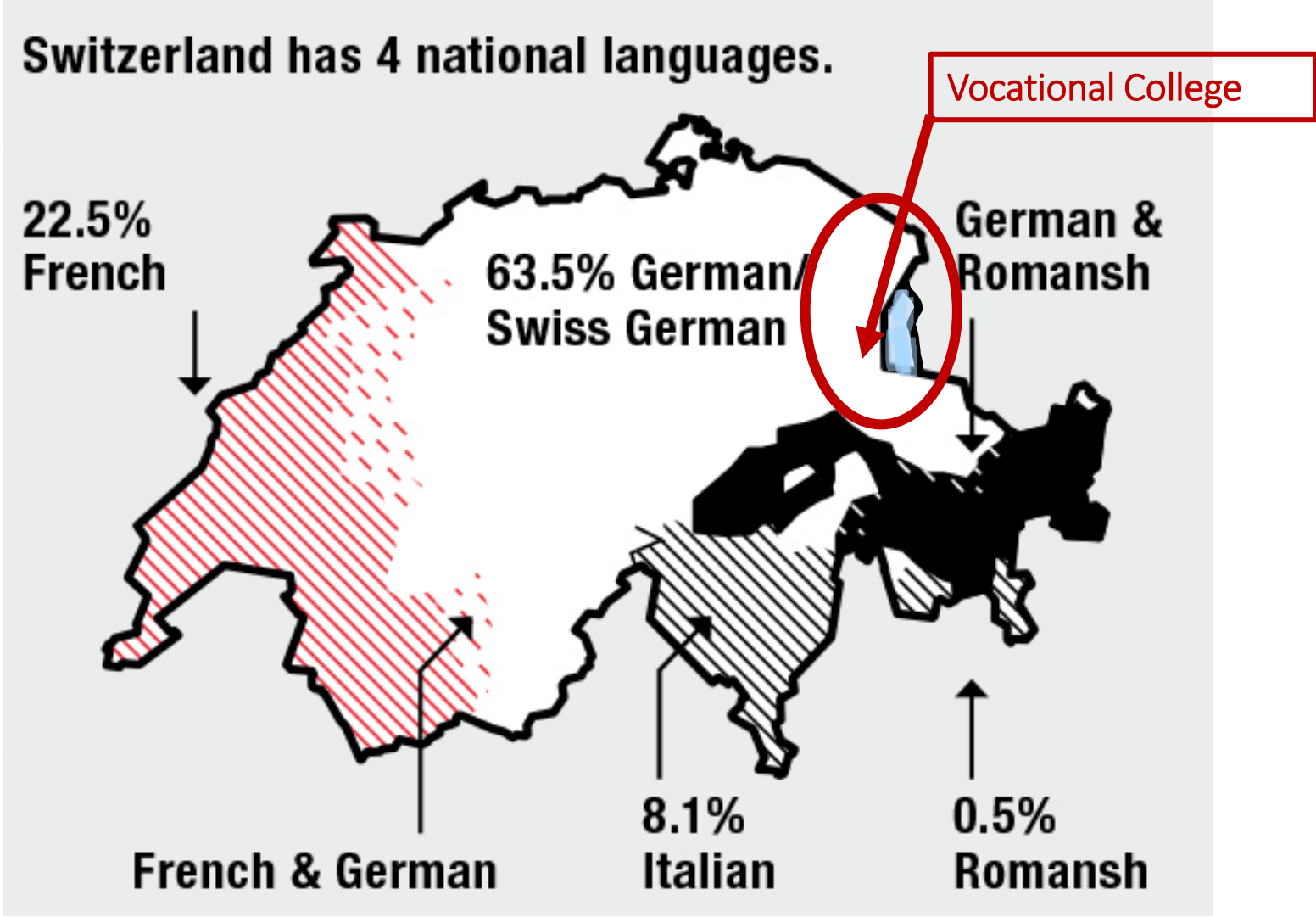
Research context

Young people choosing
apprenticeship route
Switzerland: 70%
Liechtenstein: 50%

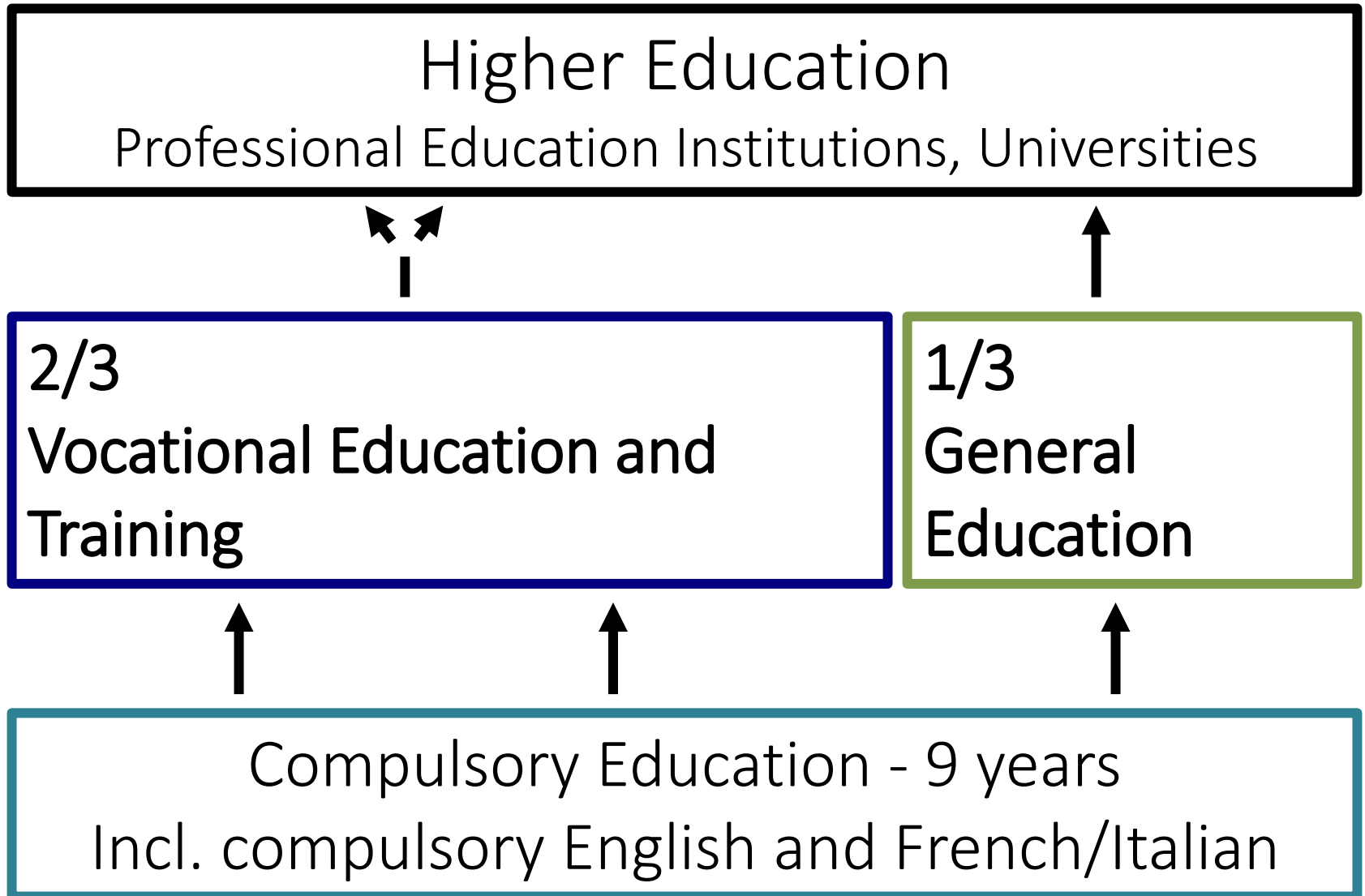




Switzerland- Liechtenstein



Education System



Research context: state-owned college

3000 apprentices (26 different trades – 7 English tuition, 11 in survey)
apprentices from Switzerland (70%) and Liechtenstein (30%)



Berufs- und Weiterbildungszentrum Buchs Sargans (bzbs)

Language learning opportunities for apprentices at bzbs

Compulsory English tuition:

- 7 out of 26 trades

Optional languages courses:

- Extracurricular, in the evening
(English, French, Italian, Spanish, German)

Optional exchange programmes or stays abroad:

- 2-week language course in England
- 4-week stay in Ireland (1 week English, 3 weeks in company) for students from Liechtenstein (Erasmus)
- 3-week stay in Ireland (1 week English, 2 weeks in company) for students of engineering
- Exchange programmes with vocational colleges in Finland, Germany and the Czech Republic

Phase 1 (Jan – Oct 22):

- Survey with Learners in 11 professions (674 responses)
- Quantitative analysis
- Intermediary report in German (summary in English)
- Website

Phase 2 (Nov 22– June 23):

- Discussion of first results (teachers, companies, universities, etc.)
- Survey with stakeholders (86 responses)
- Qualitative analysis of open-format responses from both surveys
- Final report in German and English

Phase 3 (June – Dec 23):

- Dissemination
- 2 articles

Research
design

Introduction to participants (Phase 1)

Berufe / Trades	Survey	inter- view
Informatiker*in (EFZ), Information Technologist (VET)	29	1
Konstrukteur*in (EFZ), Design Engineer (VET)	94	4
Polymechaniker*in G (EFZ), Mechanical Engineer G (VET)	81	2
Polymechaniker*in E (EFZ), Mechanical Engineer E (VET)	71	1
Metallbauer*in (EFZ), Metal Builder (VET)	7	
Elektroinstallateur*in (EFZ), Licensed Electrician (VET)	108	
Maler*in (EFZ), Painter (EFZ)	43	
Zimmermann/Zimmerin (EFZ), Carpenter (VET)	80	
Schreiner*in (EFZ), Joiner (Carpenter VET)	66	1
Maurer*in (EFZ), Bricklayer (VET)	52	1
Coiffeuse/Coiffeur (EFZ), Hairdresser (VET)	42	1
Total	674	11

Introduction to participants (Phase 2)

Surveys Nov-Dec 22

Presentations/discussions

Representatives from	Total
Companies	39
Vocational college	22
Several	7
other	6
Unklar	2
Total	86

Date	Institution/profession
Okt. 2022	University of Exeter
Nov. 2022	Westminster Conference
Nov. 2022	University of Malmö
Dez. 2022	Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Dez. 2022	bzbs
März 2023	1 carpenter
März 2023	2 decorators
März 2023	1 electricians
März 2023	2 hairdressers
März 2023	2 joiners
März 2023	1 information technologist

Language assets of young people

UK:

32% of young Brits can read and write in a second language (Bowler, Hillman, 2020)

Switzerland:

49% of young people between 15-24 regularly use 2 or more languages (BFS 2019)

In our sample:

24% use a language other than German at home (daily or almost daily)

26 languages
other than
German
heard/used
at work
(survey Q11)

246 (36.5%)
heard/used
German only



(RQ2) Large differences in how language use in companies is perceived by learners



Learner perceptions of languages used in the companies

International orientation: English + others

Multilingual orientation: many languages

Monolingual orientation: German

Correlation

Between language spoken at home and use of languages at work.

The more often learners use languages other than German at home, the more likely they are to use and hear other languages at work.

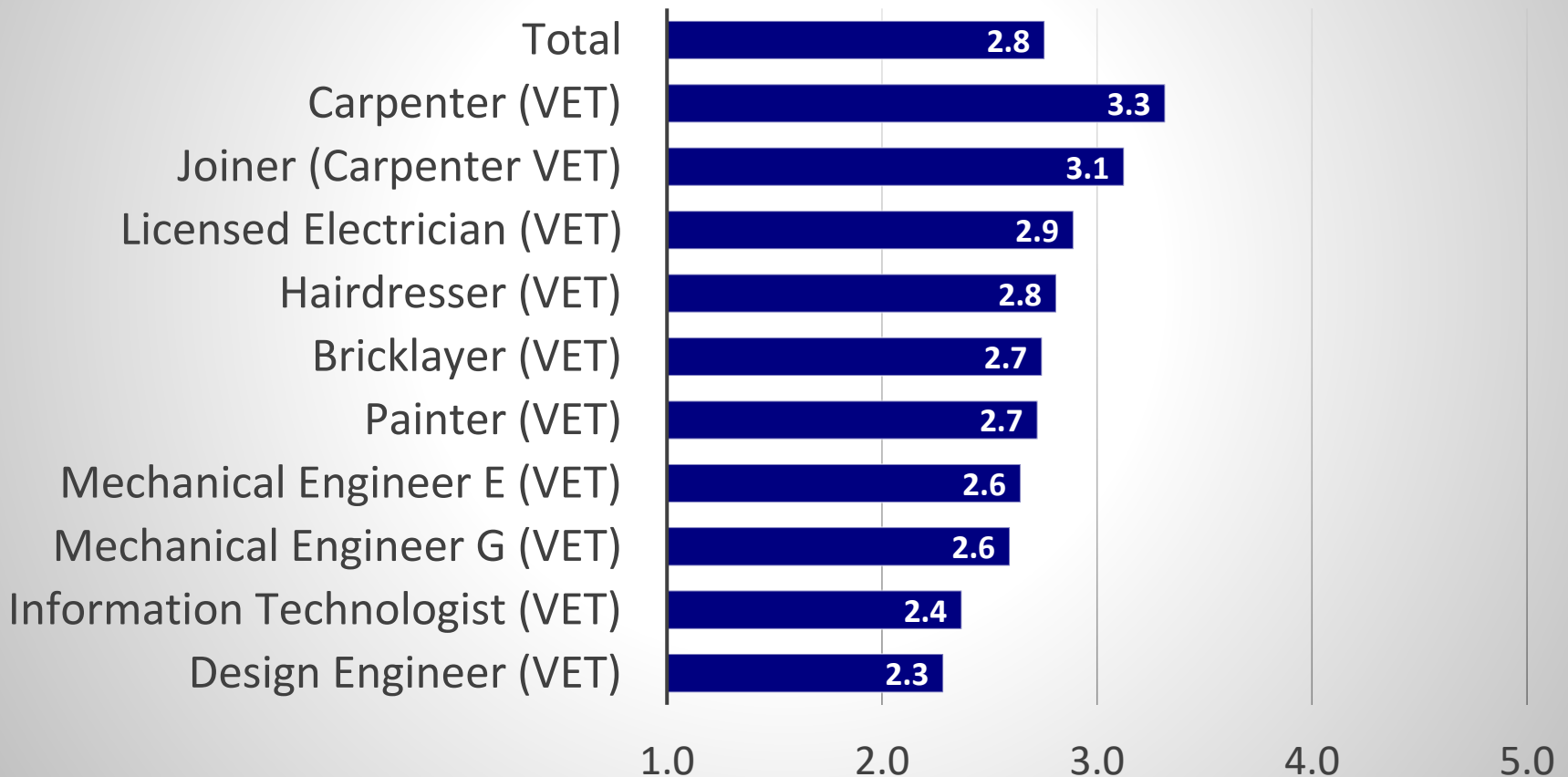
speak (Pearson Coeff. 0.318, p. < 0.001)
hear (Pearson Coeff. 0.270, p. < 0.001)

Questions we cannot answer:

- Are learners likely to find an apprenticeship place depending on their language backgrounds?
- Or, do learners perceive their workplace differently depending on their language background?

German-only orientation (multi-item scale)

German-only orientation
multi-item scale (questions 16.4, 16.3, 18.2)
1: strongly disagree / 5: strongly agree



German-only orientation (qualitative)

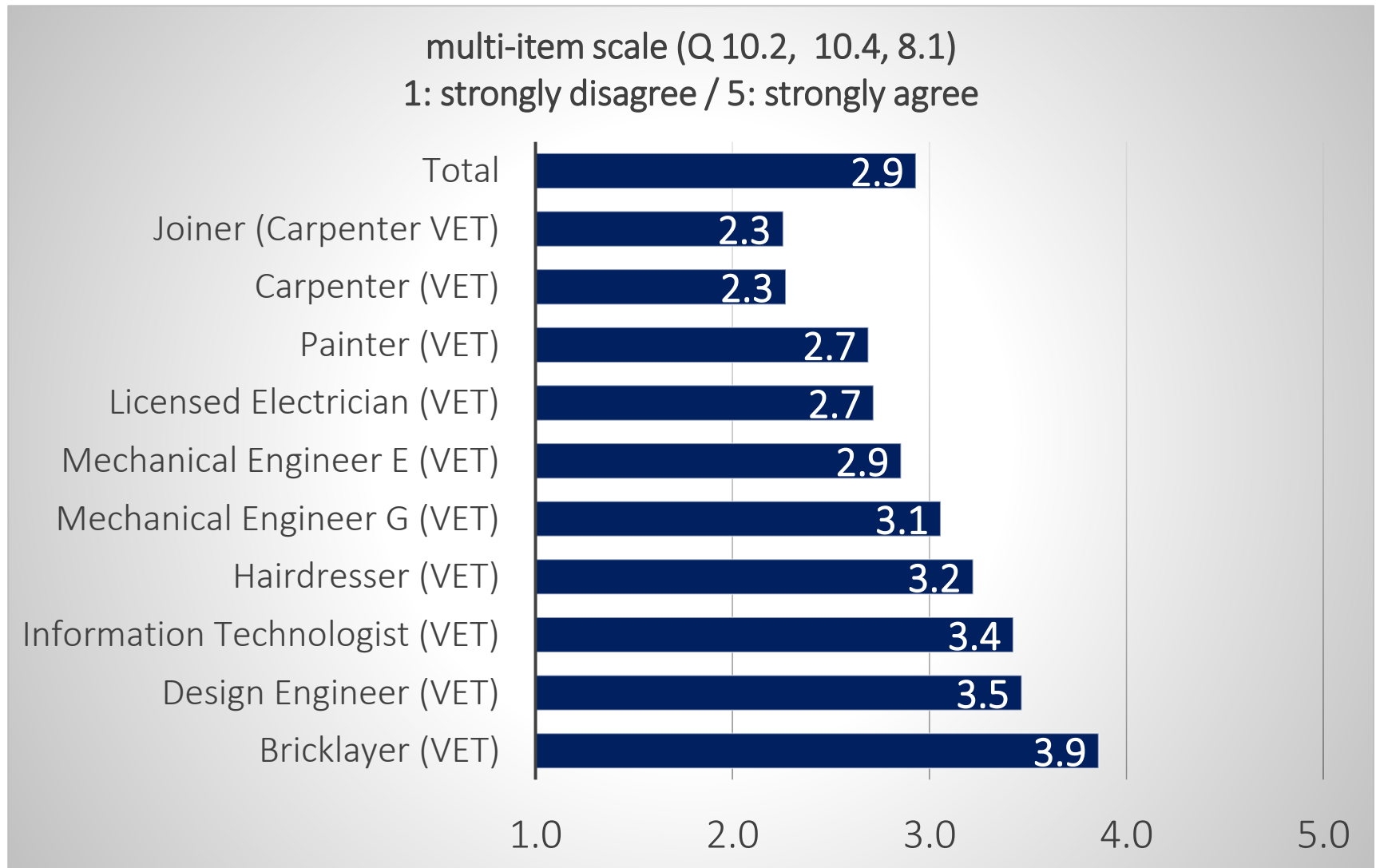
“In my company, no-one can use a second language. We communicate only in German.”

(electrician)

«my boss, sees it as an attack by foreigners, if people don't speak German.»

(mechanical engineer)

Multilingual orientation (multi-item scale)



Multilingual orientation (qualitative)

“I’m working on a building site, and we speak all languages there.”

(bricklayer)

«If someone can’t speak German, I can help him.»

(bricklayer)

How do learners
use their
languages?



language
behaviour
operational
social
cognitive
emotional



Operative function of language(s) (or operational?)

Definition	Example uses of language(s)	Potential risks
One or more languages are used to get things done.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A label or a plan is read in English in order to understand information and to be able to get something done.• Something is explained in a language that is understandable and adapted to the level of another person, so that the information is understood.	Failure to understand this can lead to mistakes that can cause damage and pose a safety risk.

Languages used to get things done

Explain the meaning of an English email to the line manager.

(joiner)

"Certain shampoo names are English. And then there are those who don't know English and then they sometimes confuse the shampoo. And that's actually a really stupid thing, but if you know English, then you can't mix it up.

(hairstylist)



Social function of language(s)

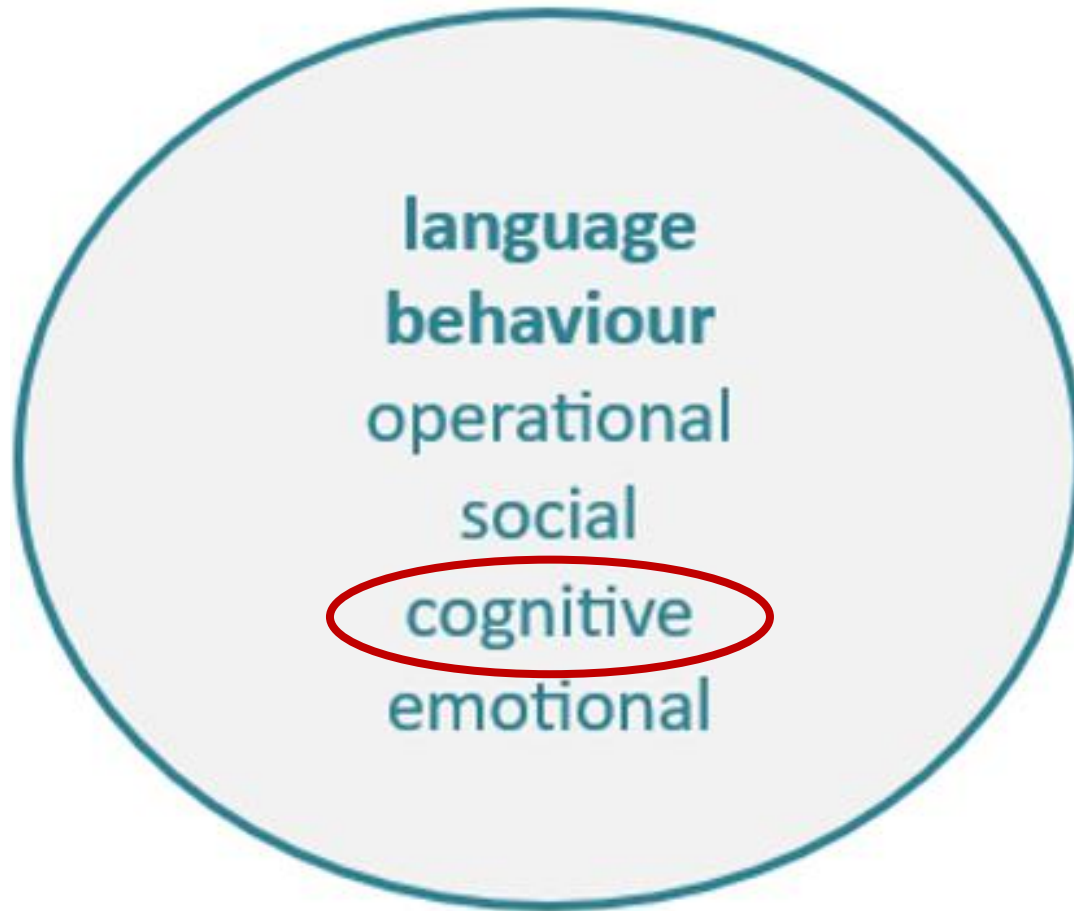
Definition	Example uses of language(s)	Potential risks
One or more languages are used to include or exclude people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An understandable language is used to explain what had been discussed in another language in order to involve someone in the conversation.• Spanish is spoken with a private client to build trust.• In the canteen, colleagues speak in a language that others do not understand and exclude them from the conversation.	In cases of knowingly or unknowingly exclusionary behaviour, employees cannot perform effectively in work situations because, for example, they are insufficiently informed about the work plan and thus cannot contribute their knowledge. Exclusion can also lead to tension and conflict, which can be detrimental to the working atmosphere and morale.

Languages used to build/maintain relationships.

Even for no reason, I go to that person and say, you know, what just happened and tell the joke [that was told in another language] so that it doesn't cause upset." (design Engineer)

"I have often been able to relate to clients through my Spanish and English skills!".

(electrician)



Cognitive function of language(s)

Definition	Example uses of language(s)	Potential risks
One or more languages are used to generate deeper understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructions are read in German and English to ensure understanding.• A person translates for customers to clarify their needs.• An employee is supported in their learning of German or another language.	Monolingual access can 1) lead to limited or superficial understanding, which can have a negative impact on the quality of work, and 2) prevent the possibility of learning a language.

How are languages used to generate understanding?

«For example, if you get an error message from different programmes. They are usually in English. And there, of course, it helps if you can decipher them. And then you understand what you have to do or what the problem is.»
(Information technologist)

"In German, there was only a small explanation of how the component works. All the dimensions and the assembly instructions were all in English."
(design engineer)



Emotional function of language(s)

Definition	Example uses of language(s)	Potential risks
One or more languages are used to express feelings, interest and belonging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jokes are made in a common first language.• Special expressions and songs are learned from each other in different languages.• Language skills are (not) recognised and/or valued by superiors.• Learners are proud of their language skills and are motivated to use them.	<p>Lack of opportunities to use languages and lack of recognition can negatively affect motivation to learn languages.</p> <p>Language bans can negatively influence the sense of belonging.</p>

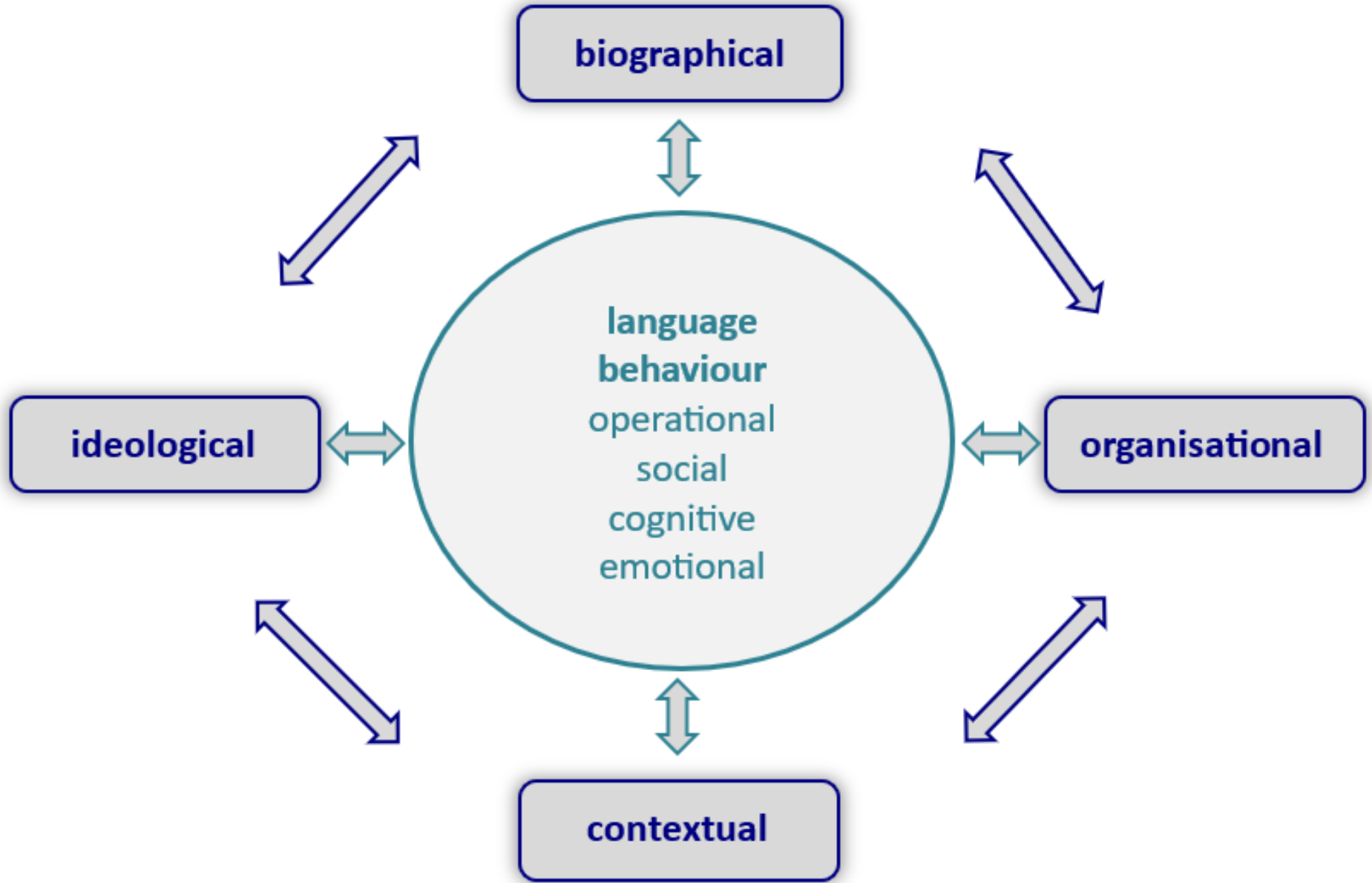
How are languages used to express belonging, etc.

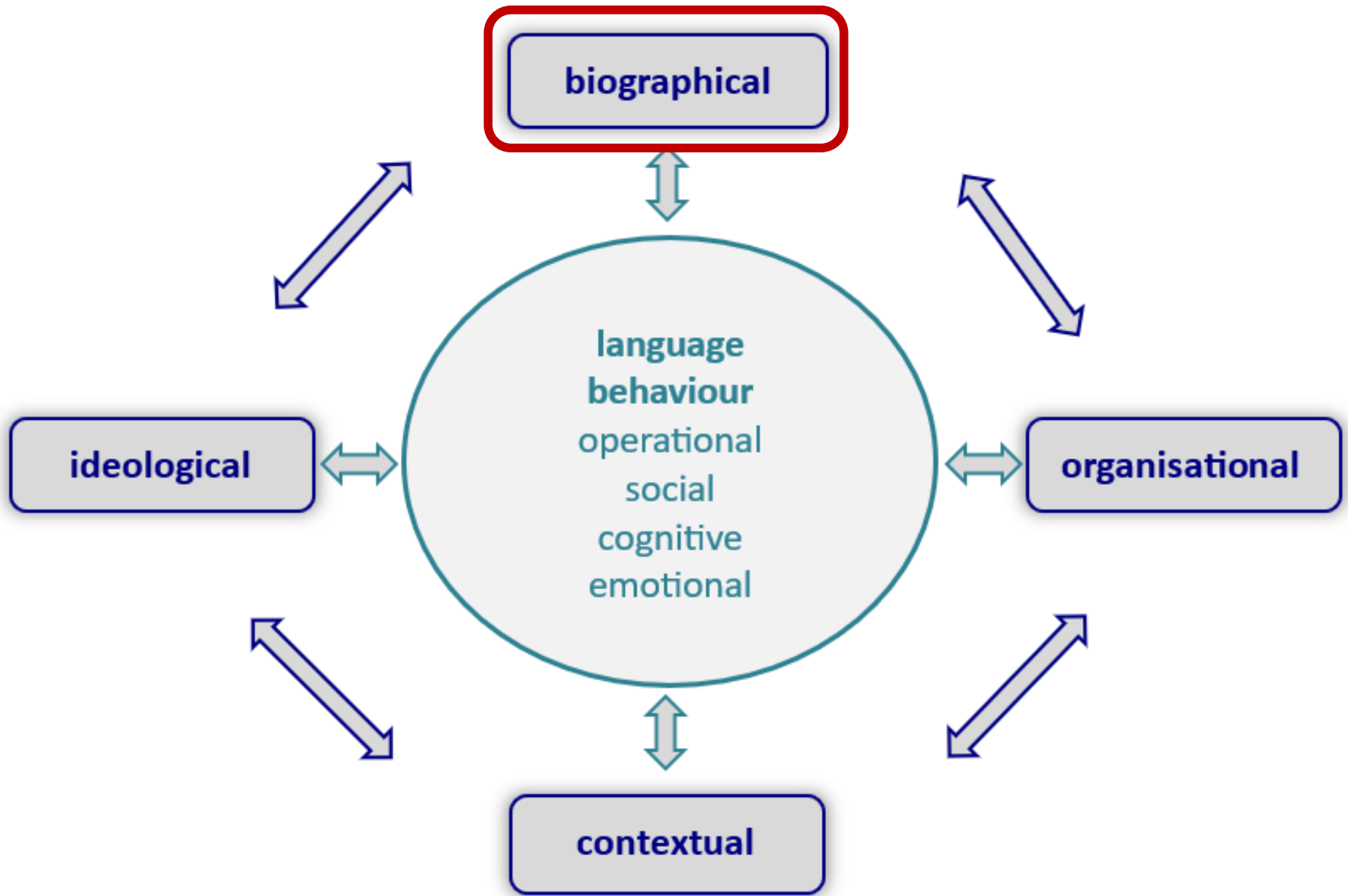
"It's just like a part of me. So I'm just proud that I can speak Russian."

(hairstylist)

"Among Turks it feels good to be able to speak Turkish because the emotions are more recognisable."

(IT technologist)



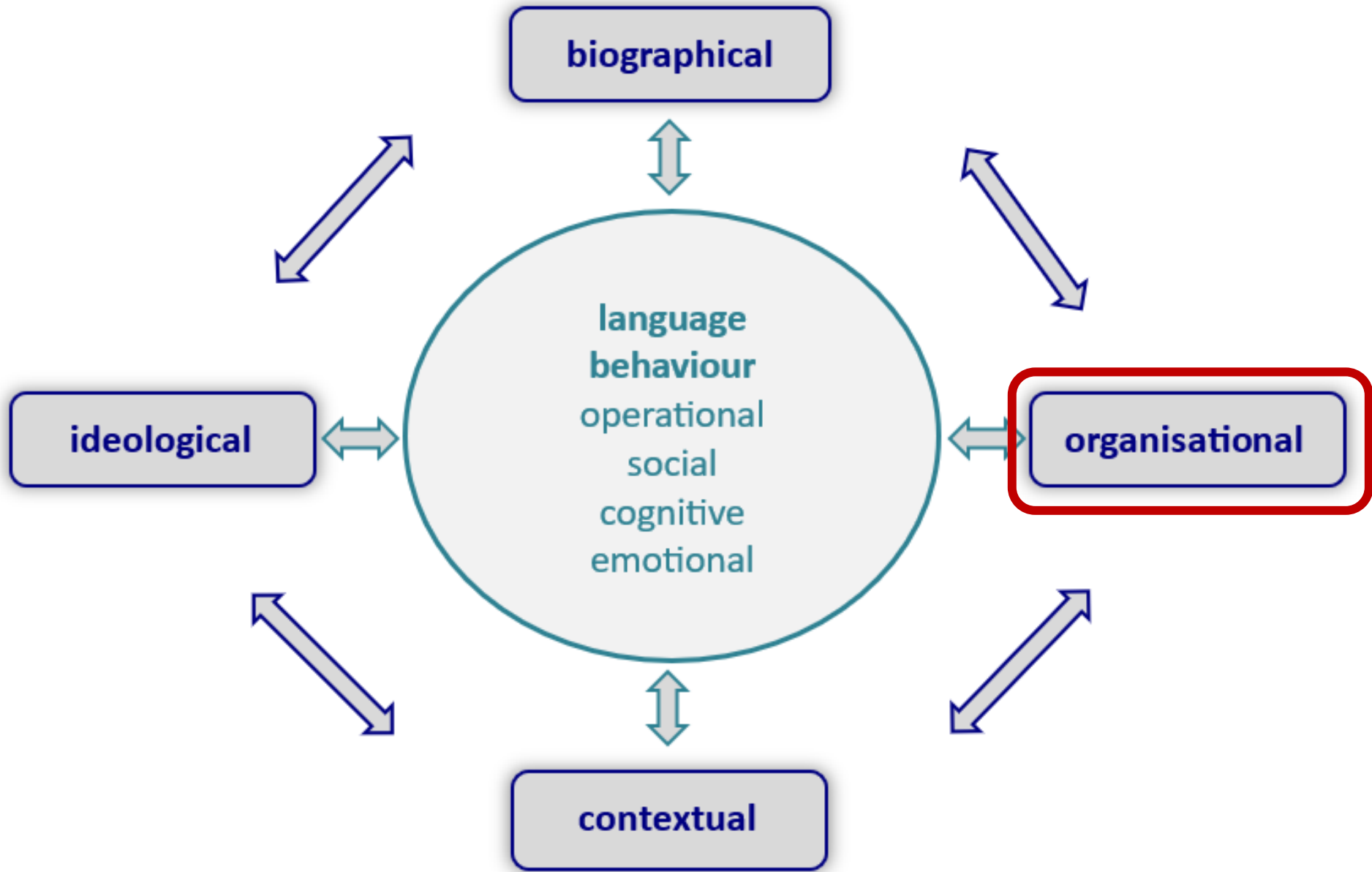


Biographical (language background and competences)

Most learners have competences in German, English and French and some in other languages.

Differences :

- Language background (25% can use 4 or more languages).
- Language use opportunities (mobility, family, private)
- Language competence levels
- Mediation competence levels

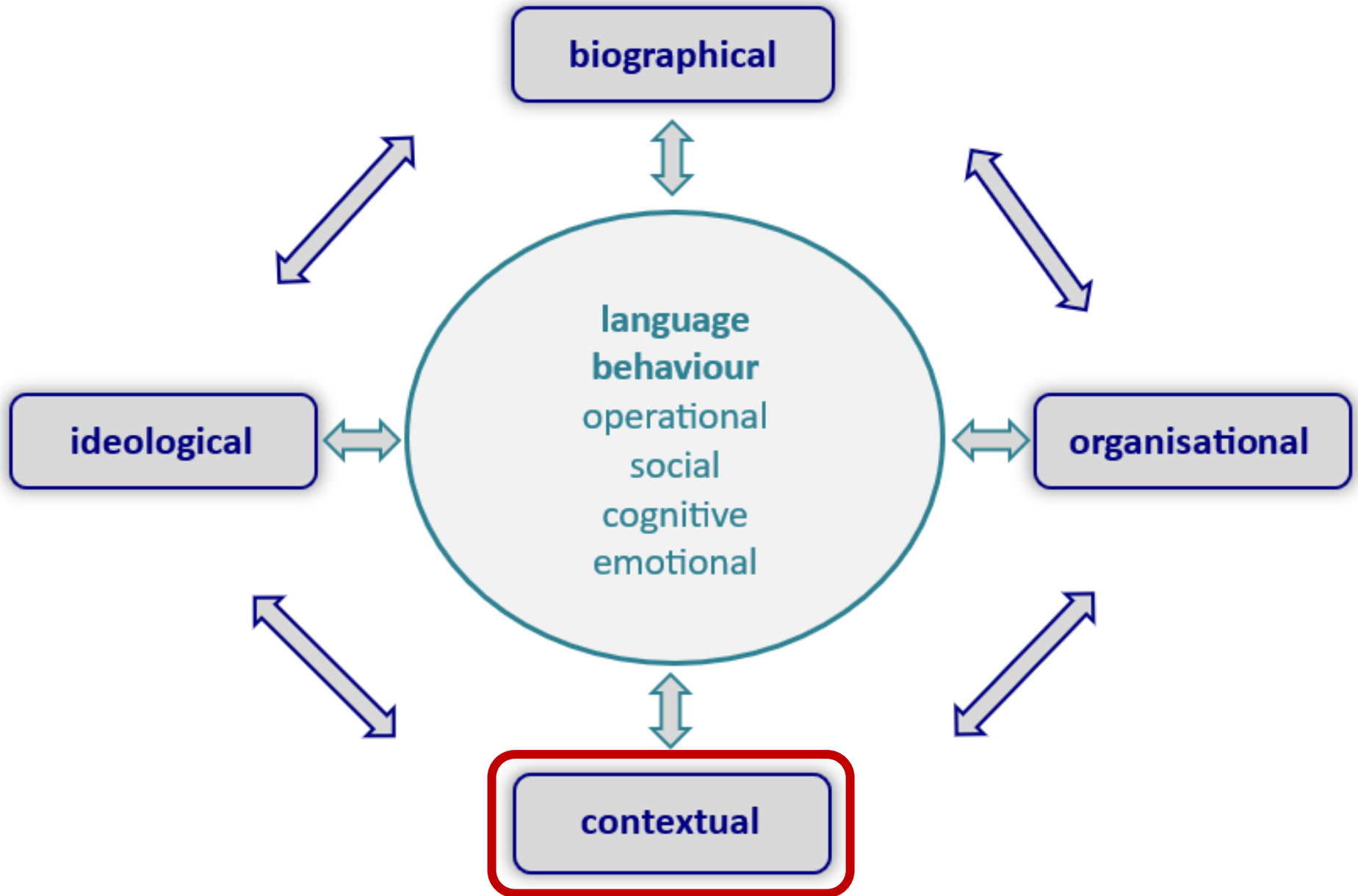


Organisational (language curriculum and learning opportunities)

All learners attend the vocational college but access to language learning and experiences varies.

Differences :

- Compulsory English in curriculum for some professions
- Some know about opportunities others don't
- Some would like to learn more languages some are glad they not longer need to study a FL
- Some would like to see more intensive, some more applied and work-relevant FL education.

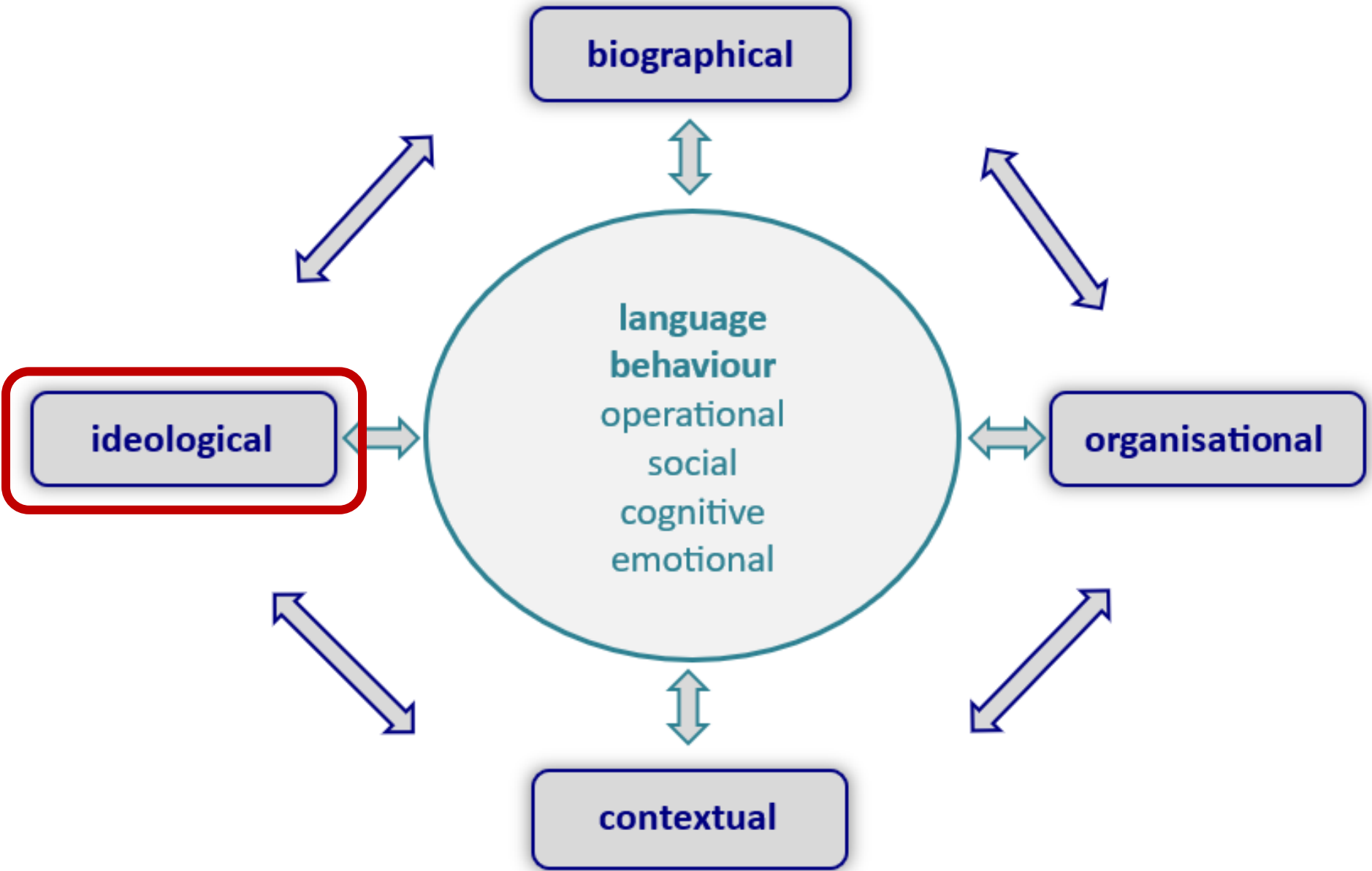


Contextual (language use opportunities and exposure at work)

All learners work 3 to 4 days in companies, where they are exposed to varied language experiences.

Differences :

- Monolingual (German only), international (German and English) or multilingual orientation in work situations
- Different opportunities and exposure internally and externally, in the trades and professions, company, department, work situation and team.



Ideological (attitudes and beliefs related to languages and speakers)

Learners have different views on languages and groups who use them.

Differences :

- Spectrum from inclusive to exclusive attitude (foreigners need to assimilate to multilingual societies are normal and creative solutions are necessary)
- Willingness to mediate or no willingness.
- Willingness to mediate intralingually (adapted language) or to mediate using the whole language repertoire.

From research we know that

Languages play a role in terms of...

The economy of a country

- (Language Strategy 2020)
- Recruitment of apprentices (Stamm, 2013)

A company's external links (export, sales, customer relations)

- Tibrewal (2021)
- UKIT (2014)
- CBI (2019)

A company's internal links (productivity, safety, social interaction)

- Coray & Duchêne (2017)
- Meier & Smala (2021)

Recommendations for companies

- All learners should be given opportunities to use/develop their language repertoire
- Language use and ambitions could form part of work appraisals for learners (e.g. ELP)
- All suitable learners should have access to apprenticeship places, regardless of their language background.

Recommendations for bzbs

- All learners should be given opportunities to use/develop their language repertoire
- Create an regularly update an overview of all extra-curricular language-learning and mobility experiences.
- Coordinate communication of opportunities between learners, companies and the college.
- Build language awareness into the wider curriculum.
- Develop multilingual language coaching (impossible to offer language education that fits all)

Recommendations for research

- Development and research related to multilingual coaching
- Develop and research language awareness for VET
- Empirical testing of how factors (contextual, ideological, biographical, organisational) influence language behaviour
- Further case studies on language learning and use in technical occupations and trades
- Examine ways in which language background might be a criterium in the recruitment of learners.

Discussion

- Any questions and comments?
- Do these findings resonate with contexts you're familiar with?
- What would you see as next steps?
- Who needs to know about such results?