



The Language Studies in Strategy as Practice and the Middle Manager Roles: An Essay

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Abstract

This theoretical essay presents a bibliographic research about language and strategy-as-practice by middle management with the goal of answer the research question: how does language contribute with the strategy implementation by middle manager? The middle management studies and language concepts were regarded into a theoretical essay where the language and strategy-as-practice paradigms are confronted. We understand that language can be reckoned as a central character to be studied concerning middle managers work playing different roles that can be assumed as: championing alternatives, facilitating adaptability, synthesizing information and implementing deliberate strategy and through language that the multiple languages can be adapted and the strategizing work can be done. The implications of this essay limit itself by the theoretical and not empirical aspect, but it opens ways to future research lines, theoretical or empirical studies, that can contribute to this study field or to middle manager strategizing practices researches.

Keywords: Strategy-as-practice. Strategizing. Middle-Manager. Language. Theoretical Essay.

Introduction

Middle-manager dealing with top-down and bottom-up information, exerts speech, using the language so that information fits the organizational context, request and produce the desired effects, aligned with the strategic intentions. The study of language in the middle manager role would make an important contribution to the strategy implementation; to understand the difference in the linguistic equation

“speech + language = communication” and would also contribute to middle managers performance.

The middle manager performance, from the perspective of strategy as practice, occurs within the organization at the intermediate level as the concepts conjunction of practices, praxis and practitioners within a context in which the construction of results can support the strategic decision on the contextualized practices.

Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) defined a typology in which middle manager, in strategic exercise, assumes roles of championing alternatives, facilitating Adaptability, synthesizing information and implementing deliberate strategy. To perform these roles, middle manager handles the top-down and bottom-up information in strategy formation process, acting in an articulated manner regarding to the language behind the communication involved in the strategizing process. In this way, we propose the research question: How does language contribute to the strategy implementation by middle manager?

In order to understand the possible solutions to the research question, a bibliographical research classified as a theoretical study (Whetten, 1989), which revised the classic and contemporary studies about the main concepts and theories involving the studies on the language (since Saussure (1857-1923), Bakhtin (1997) and Chomsky (1975) (according to Macedo 2009), Strategy as practice and middle manager [Mintzberg; Waters (1985); Whittington (1996; 2003; 2006); Jarzabkowski (2005); Rouleau (2005); Pappas; Wooldridge (2007); Mantere (2008); Wooldridge; Schimd; Floyd (2008); Lavarda; Canet-Giner; Peris-Bonet (2010); Vaara; Whittington (2012); Balogun et al. (2014)] and the main concepts about what constitutes a theoretical essay, considering the assumptions of theoretical contribution developed by Whetten (1989).

The question presented involves the understanding of the aspects developed in this theoretical essay whose structure follows in the sections: (2) Language and management studies, in which the explanation of the linguistic equation (speech + language = communication) is presented, also its theoretical aspects necessary for the development of the necessary differentiation between communication problem (regarding the lack of information), communication problem (regarding the lack of talk and comprehension) and language problem. Next, the study of strategy as practice, which presents a theoretical overview of the main authors who study middle management in this context. The section: language and strategy as practice and subsection: the role of middle manager and language, in which we discuss how the study of language contributes to strategy as practice studies and in which way language contributes to strategy implementation by middle manager, finally, the section concerning to the language contribution study in strategizing by middle manager, which makes a synthetic appreciation of the concepts presented in this essay and its contribution to a possible answer to the research question proposed.

LANGUAGE AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES

To understand how problems related to language arise, it is necessary to understand the functioning of the linguistic equation: speech + language = communication and what its influence in organizational processes.

Language can be understood under various biases, such as Saussure (1857-1913) and structuralists until Bakhtin (1895-1975) with Marxism and Philosophy of Language. Santos (2000) defines language as an "instrument of communication, a vocal system of signs specific to members of the same community" and as a "social product of the language faculty" or "set of necessary conversions adopted by the social body to exercise of the language." To these saussurian conceptions quoted by the author and Bakhtin (1997) thoughts:

Language lives and evolves historically in concrete verbal communication, not in the abstract linguistic system of the forms of the speech, nor in the individual psyche of the speakers. Thus, for the author, the substance of the language is constituted by the social phenomenon of verbal interaction through enunciations (MACEDO, 2009, p.3). So, speech is constituted in (and by) social interaction in its concrete use.

Like speech, language is seen from a variety of angles, from the earliest studies in Greece to the current linguistic sciences. Language means, for Santos (2000, n.p.):

Use of the word as a means of expression and communication between people. Form of expression by the particular language of an individual, group and social class. Vocabulary, verbiage. In the dictionary of linguistics, it is defined as follows: 'specific capacity of the human species to communicate through a system of vocal signs or speech, which puts into play a complex body technique and supposes the existence of a symbolic function and nervous center genetically specialized'. This system of vocal signs, used by a social group or linguistic community constitutes a particular language.

We can understand language as the way in which the individual will use language, producing utterances and expressing himself in his own unique way.

Understood as an act or effect from the act of communication itself, communication is not exhausted as a term in its different uses, especially when used in place of other terms, especially in place of speech and language. Santos (2000, n.p.) refers the linguistics dictionary to define communication as:

The verbal exchange between a speaker, who produces a statement intended for another speaker, the interlocutor of whom he requests and listens and / or an explicit or implicit response. It is intersubjective. In the psycholinguistic plane, it is the process in whose course the meaning that a speaker gives to the sounds is the same to which the listener gives these same sounds. Its participants or actors are the "people": the self, or speakers, who produce the utterance/speech, the interlocutor, in short, what is spoken, the beings or objects of the world.

Therefore, communication is the process by which speaker uses the speech, through the language, to request or produce effect in another speaker (s), gaining intersubjective character and referring to what is spoken, also, referring itself, 'metalinguistically'.

Communication is a recurring theme, in general, in the formal and informal areas of an organization, it is through it that the company happens and takes shape. However, there is some confusion in the use of the term communication and its related problems. So, it is important to understand the difference between communication problem (regarding to the lack of information), communication problem (regarding to the lack of talk and comprehension) and when the use of these terms is misused (instead of speech or language problems).

Faria (2012, n. p.) defines communication problem (regarding to the lack of information) as "those we identify when information is not available in the proper channels and that content is not disseminated in a transparent way" at the right time, place and audience. This problem occurs when, for example, there are no intranet usage guides or descriptions of the roles and responsibilities for certain positions or when there is no organization chart defined and the relationship with the informal structure causes conflict, among other possibilities.

Communication problems (regarding to the lack of talk and comprehension), for Faria (2012, n.p.) are those that happen by Lack of management and good communication face to face. They arise when open dialogue between leaders, managers and their teams doesn't occur. When subjects are not placed on the meeting schedules of their respective teams. Therefore, there are no exchanges of views and perceptions about the timing of companies.

For Faria (2012), most of the time, the problems are the ones of communication (regarding to the lack of talk and comprehension), because the information is in the channels, but the action of the management, lack of discussion and dialogues do not exist.

Problems of speech or language would be those that, due to the knowledge's lack of the need to adapt language to certain strata of the organization; or different possibilities, such as the use of polysemy words, subjectivities in certain periods, among other possible examples, causes the lack comprehension between the parties involved.

Marques and Nascimento (2010) studied the misuse and abuse of language in management texts, identifying linguistic problems in the minutes and projects of a consulting firm. In this study, the importance of speech and language takes shape in the problems in which they are inserted, such as the use of slang, incoherence in texts, prolixity, tautologies, technical jargon out of context, among other defects that hinder information in the communicational process and are often interpreted as communication problems (regarding to the lack of information).

STRATEGIZING (STRATEGY AS PRACTICE)

Strategy as practice is a current perspective in the strategy studies, in which strategy is seen as a social practice in action and interaction of strategists (Whittington, 1996). Whittington (2003) states that strategy as practice is intended to understand how people perform work in organizations and what performance effectiveness in the organization, making it clear that the fundamental question should be "what does it take to be an effective strategy practitioner?" (Whittington, 1996).

Whittington (2003) elaborated six questions necessary to the understanding of the strategy as practice, which have guided the research within this practical perspective of making strategy in organizations: how and where is strategizing and organizing work actually done? Who does the formal work of strategizing and organizing and how do they get to do it? What are the skills required for strategizing and organizing work and how they acquired? What are the common tools and techniques of strategizing and organizing and how these are used in practice? How is the work of strategizing and organizing organized itself? How are the products of strategizing and organizing communicated and consumed?

These questions, by the development of the strategizing studies, were evolved by the studies of Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007), in: What is strategy? Who is the strategist? What do the strategists do? What does an analysis of strategists and their actions contribute to? How do organizational and social theories result in an analysis of strategy as practice? These scholars, in dialogue with Whittington (1996, 2003, 2006), developed a conceptual framework (Figure 1) defining:

a) Practices: routine, as it is socially practiced, it is where strategies emerge over time, strategic practice may be incorporated into the culture or may come from outside the organization, derived from the medium;

b) Praxis: the way in which a given action develops;

c) Practitioners: authors of the strategy, those who elaborate and execute it. Not only top executives, but others from the company with their life history, skills and competencies (Jarzabkowski; Balogun & Seidl, 2007).

Practices, praxis and practitioners in conjunction define the strategy as practice, not existing one part without the other, being able to consider the interaction of the process of strategizing.

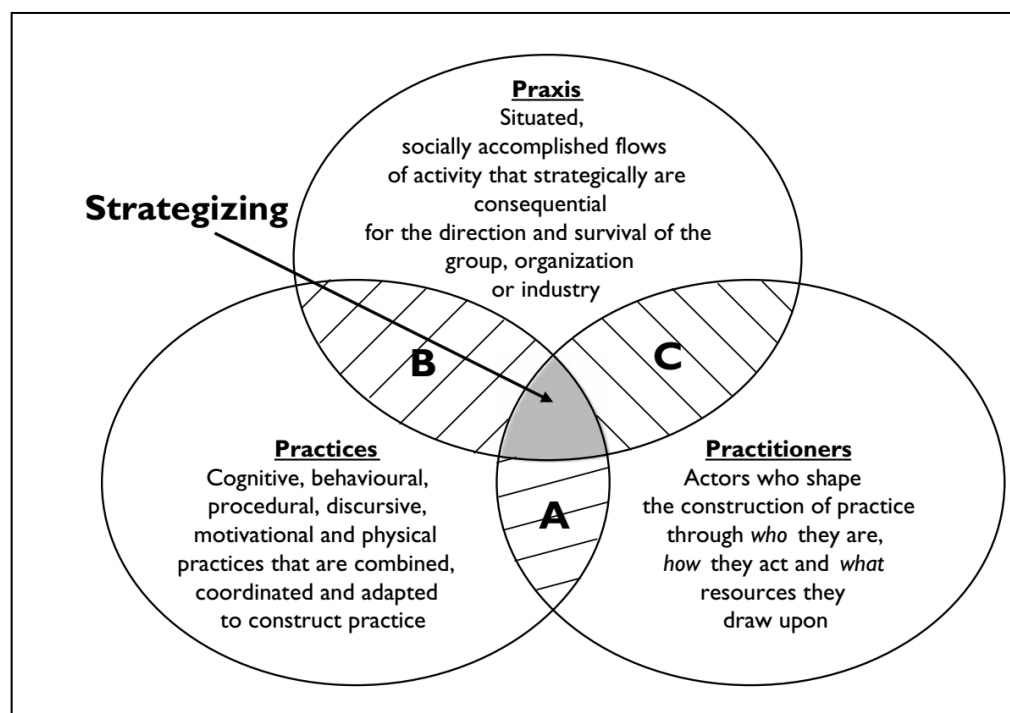


Figure 1. Conceptual framework to analyse strategy as practice

Source: Jarzabkowski; Balogun; Seidl, 2007, p.11

Subsequently, Jarzabkowski et al. (2016) have developed new perspectives on strategy as practice, asking questions such as "What practices are available? Who is involved in these practices? How are practices implemented?" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016), which resulted in a schematic model of strategy as practice (Figure 2), in which context, available practices, actors, praxis and results are integrated, analyzed through feedback perspective supporting strategic decision about contextualized practices. The results can be related to the performance of the company, the strategic choices, the results of the authors, results in the field of action, as well as new practices.

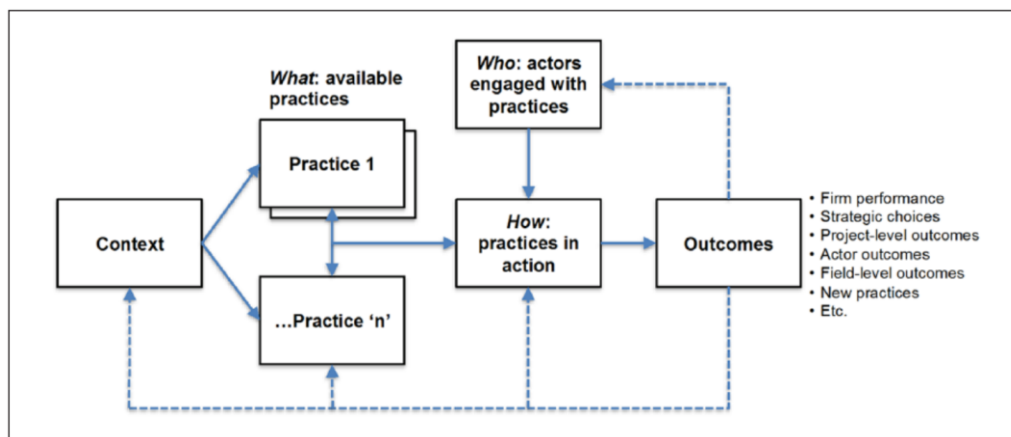


Figure 2. A schematic model of strategy practice

Source: Jarzabkowski et al. (2016, p.17)

Thus, an understanding of the available practices, who is involved in their performance, and how they apply it, within an organizational context in which strategic actors are understood and the results influence on them and on the practices in action can be benefited through the understanding of how the language contributes to the strategy implementation by middle managers, as well as the conjunction of language and strategy studies as practice or strategizing, theme of the following section.

LANGUAGE AND STRATEGIZING

Language, understood as the way in which the individual uses speech, produces utterances and expresses itself uniquely within organizations, must be understood as a whole contextualized, produced in and through human interaction and concretizing organizational relationships.

Koch (1998) states that human language in its conception can be synthesized in three main representations: as a mirror of the world and a mirror of thought, as a tool of communication and as a form of action or interaction. In agreement with the third representation, language as a whole is action, humane, social and contextualized. In other words, according to Mattos (2003, p.38), linguistic activity, an action of an interactive nature that "emerges and is defined, first, contextualized". To this representation, as an active dimension, Mattos (2003, p.38) adds.

Is a doing, an action like any other, only meaningful in itself. So, in our case, theory - any theory - is a theoretical practice, an action with intentionality, not an emission of pure (theoretical) meanings (two supposedly distinct things: emission and meanings). (...) the famous dualism theory versus practice loses meaning, the second of these terms referring to the unique understanding of the administrative situation when it is involved. These are two practices, and therefore, the practitioners of language in both situations have common bases to understand themselves!

Thus, language, in organizations, can be understood as action/interaction in the various media where it is present, also within the communicational tools. And, at this point, it makes sense to study language with strategy as social practice, considering the need for human interaction in this process. The role of middle manager [Floyd &

Wooldridge (1992); Andersen 2004; Mantere (2008)], as an actor from strategy as practice (Whittington, 2006), sensemaking and sensegiving studies (Rouleau, 2005) and the important aspects of language that combine these topics should be considered.

Considering Language and Middle Managers Roles, for Andersen (2004), middle managers act as important figures in studies of strategy as practice, actively participating at all organizational levels because of the interaction they are exposed to. The intermediate function allows the articulation of information and to influence the decision-making process, precisely because it is in permanent contact with the actions that trigger the strategy, just as these actors know the details necessary to manage the goals inside the organizations.

This organizational participation and knowledge from the "middle" position gives rise to a reflection on the role of these actors in the strategy development to which Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) consider the space in which there is greater articulation of the strategy because debate information objectives in the construction phase and determines actions at the moment the operation is occurring in the daily execution of the activities.

Therefore, these authors consider middle managers as fundamental in thought and formation of the strategy and their studies explain two important dimensions: one that deals with the influence exerted and another that evaluates the extent to which this influence can alter the organization strategy.

Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) then defined a typology (Figure 3) that describes the roles that middle manager plays in strategic making, depending on the position in relation to the information at his disposal. It should be emphasized that the roles of middle manager are played simultaneously within a process of middle-up-down management or integrative strategy formation.

Thus, the roles played by middle manager, when analyzed from the language perspective, can be understood as the use of the appropriate language to the multiple languages existing in the organization. For example, when middle manager assumes the role of championing alternatives, he will deal with linguistic activity in the interpretation and evaluation of information from the operational level, about internal and external organizational events (Currie, 1999, p.144), which will enable the performance of its role; as an implementer, linguistic activity will also focus on reviewing, tuning, seeking to motivate and inspire as a team, dealing with top management information, reinterpreting them as needed. Both examples reveal how the work of middle manager is, in short, linguistic adequacy, choice and interpretation and, from these aspects, may depend its success.

According to Rouleau (2005), it is possible that a failure in the process, due to the lack of training, adequacy or other relevant aspects, will have an impact on how middle manager will play its roles adequately, effectively producing (or not) sensegiving and sensemaking.

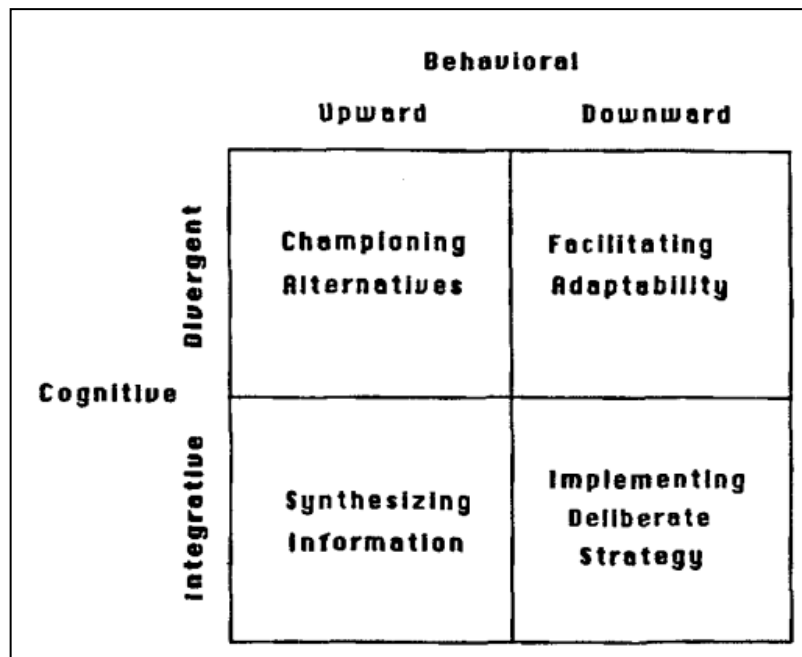


Figure 3. A typology of middle management involvement in strategy

Source: Floyd and Wooldridge (1992, p.154)

This typology summarizes the role of middle manager in the perspectives presented in Figure 4. The roles defined by these authors and their description show, in a specific way, how middle managers deal directly with the information of both top management and the operational one, because they are located between these two levels.

Rouleau (2005) developed a study about how middle manager performs sense-making and gives meaning to what he does by showing importance in change or activities (sensegiving), placing them "as to their interpretations and actions for strategic changes in their daily lives" (Luz et al., 2013, p.133).

For Rouleau (2005, p.1415), strategic sensemaking and sensegiving are complementary and reciprocal processes, since Sensemaking has to do with the way managers understand, interpret, and create sense for themselves based on the information surrounding the strategic change. Sensegiving is concerned with their attempts to influence the outcome, to communicate their thoughts about the change to others, and to gain their support. Although these processes appear to be conceptually different, the boundaries of each are permeated by the other. As discourse and action, sensemaking and sensegiving are less distinct domains (Hopkinson, 2001) than two sides of the same coin – one implies the other and cannot exist without it.

Middle Manager's Roles by Floyd and Lane (2000)	Definition by Floyd and Wooldridge (1992, p.155)
Championing alternatives	Persistent and persuasive communication of strategic options for senior management.
Synthesizing Information	Interpret and evaluate information within a given context in order to transmit it.
Facilitating Adaptability	Promote flexible organizational arrangements, feeling changes, conditions and new approaches.
Implementing Deliberate Strategy	Within the organizational context, interpret and produce the necessary interventions to the adaptations deliberated by the top management, aligning the organizational action with the strategic intention.

Figure 4. Summarized Table – Middle Managers Roles

Source: Adapted from Floyd and Wooldridge (1992); Floyd and Lane (2000)

The execution of his roles, defined in the Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) typology with sensemaking and sensegiving, according to Currie and Procter (2005), permeated by routines and conversations in the organization that support the information obtained by middle managers are related to the development and execution of the strategy through middle managers performance in the promotion of certain practices which will become part of the organization strategic design (Andersen, 2000, p.188).

In this way, middle manager acts as an important part in the integrative strategy formation process (Andersen, 2004; 2013), as well as considering the board vision, transmitting the objectives and practical vision of the organizational reality, having the possibility to modify the direction of the organization goals, integrating their perspectives in the organization daily practices.

Balogun et al. (2014) developed a study on how perspectives in strategic discourse within the domains sensemaking theories, power and sociomateriality are relevant to the strategic knowledge understanding. These authors reinforce the importance of linguistic analysis in the strategic discourse, for this, they list six perspectives of linguistic analysis: Post-Structural Analysis; Critical Discourse Analysis; Narrative analysis; Rhetorical analysis; Ethnomethodology and Analysis of the Conversation and, finally, Analysis of Analogy and Metaphor.

Each of these perspectives has a role defined by the authors considering strategic making and determining linguistic approximation by how sensemaking raises the role of conversations in social interactions within strategy as practice (Balogun et al., 2014). Strategy as practice usually involves competing ideas and expressions, thus, Balogun et al. (2014, p.187) emphasize that:

One explanation for why some ideas rather than others become crystallized and institutionalized is that they are argued in a persuasive and convincing way. Another is that they 'resonate' with broader discourses that are seen as appealing, appropriate, or fashionable, contributing to the narrative credibility of strategies (Barry and Elmes,

1997). In brief, this means that successful strategy statements often condense meaning in a particularly effective way. Their specific texts and discourses may also include a significant degree of ambiguity that enables them to 'take off' in pluralistic organizational contexts, as ambiguous statements can resonate in different ways for different individuals and groups (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

Therefore, the use of certain periods, by middle manager, in strategic statements, can define the success of their performance in the mentioned roles, stating that the use of language successfully adapts to what is expected as a result. For this, middle manager can use a variety of linguistic tools, such as metaphors and analogies, within a cultural and organizational context in which there is a need to understand how these discourses will be constructed. So, the question: How does language contribute to the implementation of the strategy by middle manager?

LANGUAGE CONTRIBUTION IN STRATEGIZING BY MIDDLE MANAGER

In order to answer the question presented in this essay, a table was drawn up (Figure 5) summarizing the main concepts presented, their definition and the contribution to the construction of a possible response. Next, we present the scheme of how, within the organizational context, middle-manager acts according to its roles, adapting the language according to its context of action and source of information.

Concepts	Definition	Contribution
Speech	Instrument of communication, system of vocal signs of members in a community, constituted in (and by) social interaction in its use.	The differentiation between Speech, Language and Communication contributes to the understanding of why to choose to investigate the contribution of language in the study of strategy as practice. Effective language adequacy, then, is important in the organizational context because it enables top-down and bottom-up strategic information to produce the desired effects.
Language	The way in which the individual uses the language, produces utterances and expresses himself in a unique, contextualized way.	
Communication	Process in which the speaker mobilizes the language, expressing its language. It has intersubjective and interactional character	
Strategizing	Social practice in the action and interaction of strategists (Whittington, 1996), analyzed under the conceptual framework of practices, praxis and practitioners (Jarzabkowski; Balogun; Seidl, 2007)	

		social practice and how it is influenced by practices, praxis and practitioners of strategy.
Middle Manager	Intermediate function that actively acts at all organizational levels (Andersen, 2004), actors of strategy as practice (Whittington, 2006)	Understanding the performance of middle manager is to see its influence on the strategic process and its central role in the adequacy of the language necessary to the performance of its roles.
<i>Middle Managers Roles</i>	How middle manager acts in strategic doing, according to the position in middle-up-down management within the cognitive and behavioral dimensions (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Assuming the positions of championing alternatives, synthesizing information, facilitating adaptability and implementing deliberate strategy (Floyd & Lane, 2000)	In the way it is presented, the roles of middle manager is to deal with strategic information in their appropriateness, choice and linguistic interpretation.
<i>Sensemaking and Sensegiving</i>	In the performance of their roles, middle managers produce (or not) sensemaking and sensegiving (Rouleau, 2005)	These concepts, analyzed from the point of view of language, contribute to the understanding that the proper use of the language to the languages present in the organization, it can produce (or not) sensemaking and sensegiving, which can impact the work of middle manager.

Figure 5. Demonstrative board

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Considering the adequacy of the language in its context of action, middle manager will deal with top-down and bottom-up information from the organizational context, mobilizing the language within a context of language so that communication happens according to the roles played by him. When dealing with bottom-up information, middle-manager will interpret and evaluate it (synthesize) according to the context (lan-

guage adequacy) to mobilize the language persistent and persuasively and communicate (defend) the strategic options for top management (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, p.155). In dealing with top-down information, middle-manager will revise (facilitate) and reinterpret it (language adequacy) to adjust it and enable the production of necessary interventions (implement) to organizational action (aligned with strategic intentions); These relationships, essentially developed in the context of the performance of middle manager, seen under the bias of language study are represented in Figure 6.

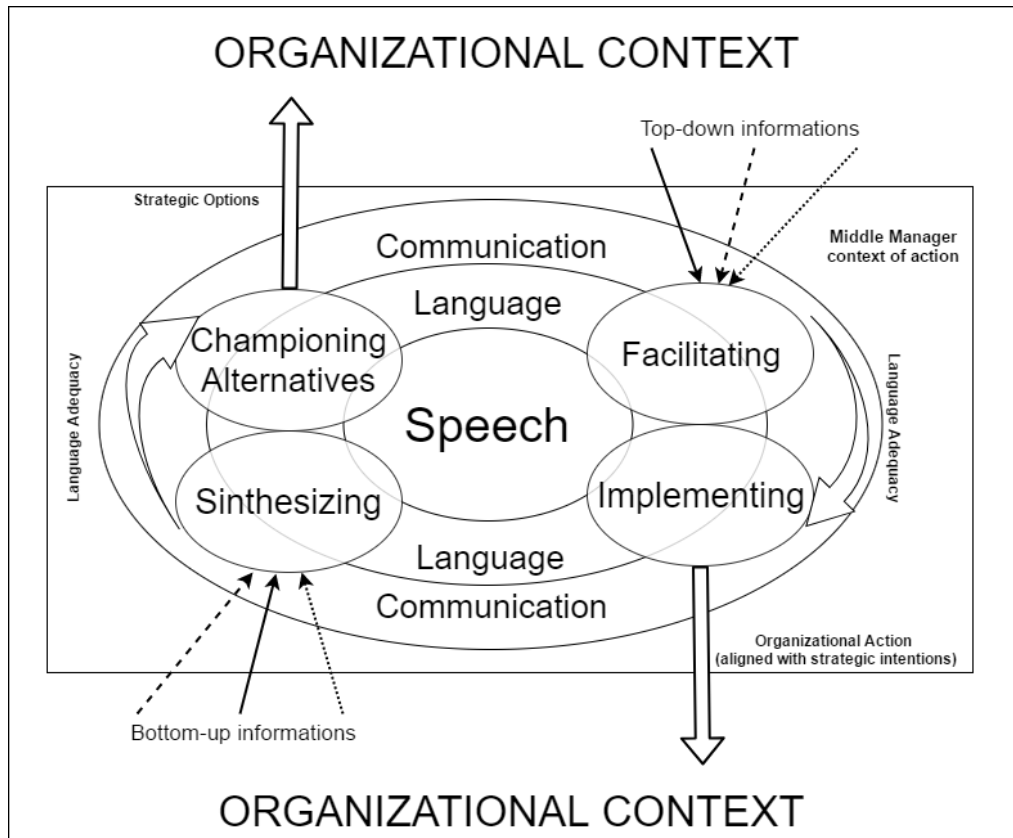


Figure 6. Language adequacy in middle managers performance
 Source: Elaborated by the authors

Final considerations

How does language contribute to the strategy's implementation by middle manager? In order to reach the proposed goal, this work has crossed different lines of thinking: the strategizing, the language perspectives and the roles of middle manager to construct a conceptual framework that supports the possibilities of answering the presented question, following the structure of Whetten (1989) to construct a theoretical essay.

Considering the findings in the literature review, it is understood that the language, as action and interaction, contextualized with internal meaning, can be studied according to his most important aspects, thus, contributing to strategic making by middle manager, under the view of Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) typology. So, the understanding of the linguistic equation $speech + language = communication$, the differences between communication (regarding to the lack of information), communication (re-

garding to the lack of talk and comprehension) and the language problems are important aspects that the language study brings to the field of strategy as practice.

The contribution of the study is based on the understanding that middle-manager, in its context of action (internal environment), will mobilize the speech, through the language, interpreting, reinterpreting, adjusting, signifying and communicating the information coming from the organizational context to play the roles of championing alternatives, synthesizing alternatives, facilitating adaptability and implementing deliberate strategy.

The limitations of this work are related to the theoretical and non-empirical nature; thus, no verification is sought. However, its importance is justified by the capacity of theoretical works to pave the way for future lines of research (Whetten, 1989).

The lines of future research that can be followed from what has been exposed are, firstly, related to the refinement and improvement of the proposed theoretical framework, deepening the studies and the integration among the theorists of language, mentioned in an introductory way, establishing relationship also in an empirical way, with propositions that can be refuted in relation to the presented question.

Another future line of research concerns the empirical study of language and strategy in its materiality, with support in the aspects of materiality defined by Dameron, Lê and Lebaron (2015). Also, the empirical investigation of how the permissive conditions for the performance of the papers, presented by Mantere (2008) are related and also work with the adaptation of the language by middle manager.

Finally, it is hoped that the work developed and the suggestions presented could serve as support and encouragement for future theoretical and empirical research and contribute to the broadening of the view on the subject in understanding the importance of the contribution of language study in the implementation of strategy as practice by middle manager.

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