

On language management in multinational companies in the Czech Republic

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Abstract:

In this paper, we demonstrate the dialectical relationship between micro and macro language planning: macro planning influences micro planning and yet macro planning results (or should result) from micro planning. The relation between the two planning perspectives is illustrated within the framework of Language Management Theory (Jernudd/Neustupný 1987, Neustupný/Nekvapil 2003). We deal with the relations between various levels of "organised management", and with the role of the "simple, i.e. discourse-based management" in organised language management. Attention is also given to the impact of organised language management on naturally occurring discourses and discourse-based management. The paper is empirically based on research carried out during the past two years in branches of multinational companies or corporations founded in the Czech Republic by German, Austrian or Swiss owners. We focus primarily on the situation in a subsidiary of a Siemens corporation. The languages which have become the subject of management activities here are German, English, and Czech. The data we work with were obtained using various types of interviews (semi-structured, follow-up) as well as audio-recordings and participant observation.

Key words: language management, micro language planning, multinational corporations, Siemens, Czech, German, English

1. The macro-micro issue in language planning

The best-known theories of language planning developed after the decline of the colonial system, in the early 1960s, as a reaction to the linguistic and social problems of the developing countries. Language planning taking place at the level of the state or language planning performed by state/governmental institutions may be referred to as macroplanning. However, it is evident that language is also planned by less complex social systems, which is why the term microplanning came to be used. For example, Nahir (1998) noticed that the revival of spoken Hebrew was not in full agreement with the regular definitions of language planning since it was not a central agency but rather a number of local institutions and people active in them that proved to play a decisive role in the revival of the language. The author therefore suggested considering the revival of spoken Hebrew a case of language microplanning. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) use the term microplanning in relation to the activities of such institutions as individual banks, companies, libraries, schools, shops, hospitals, courts or services; a single city constitutes a microplanning unit for them as well. It is beyond doubt that much may be learned by studying the planning activities in such less complex social systems; the findings which will clarify the relations between macro- and microplanning being of particular importance. On the other hand, we should not ignore the fact that both macro and micro language planning are conceptualized here on the same basis – they merely operate within “social structures” of different complexity. “Macro” and “micro” represent extreme limits of social space (“continuum”), which could be further subdivided into “macros” or “micros” of various complexities. Following this line of thought, it is not

surprising that a number of authors also mention meso-level planning (cf. Kaplan and Baldauf 1997).

However, the relation between the dimensions of “macro” and “micro” may be conceptualized in yet another way, which is well known in sociology and also sporadically reflected in sociolinguistics. Generally speaking, the approach may be characterized as the contrast of social structure (“macro”) vs. interaction (“micro”) (cf., e.g. Boden and Zimmerman 1991). The relationship between “macro” and “micro” within this conceptualization has been a permanent topic of discussion in sociology. Various points of view exist, delimiting the respective research agendas – two of these may be considered extreme positions: (1) “macro” and “micro” are two discreet areas of social phenomena and it is therefore legitimate to deal exclusively with one of them; (2) there is no fundamental difference between “macro” and “micro”, since “micro” is also a “social structure”. These two points of view, whether on the level of declaration or in research practice, are also sure to occur in sociolinguistics. Position (1) is in fact reflected in the two-part division of the popular textbook by Fasold (1984, 1990); the autonomous “micro” is close to the definitional inclinations of the so-called interactional sociolinguistics, the autonomous “macro” to the “classical theory of language planning” mentioned above. Position (2) has been held by some representatives of conversation analysis. Let us focus now on position (3), which is of particular importance to the present study. It comprises the views based on the idea that the relation between “macro” and “micro” is dialectical, in other words, these two dimensions of social phenomena elaborate on one another. What this means for us is firstly that in particular interactions the participants recognizably orient themselves towards social structures and thereby reproduce them, and secondly, that in particular interactions the participants contribute to the transformation of these structures; Giddens (1993: 165) formulates this as follows: “structure appears as both condition and consequence of the production of interaction.” These general facts are hard to translate into particular sociological or sociolinguistic research programs. The empirical research pertaining to position (3) seems to be directed solely toward the question of how social structures are reflected in particular interactions. For instance, Heller (2001) demonstrates how the regulations issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education (distal circumstances) influence the language-planning documents of a particular French-speaking minority school (proximal circumstances), and how the contents of these documents are reflected in the types of correction activities performed by the teachers of the school in particular interactions (immediate circumstances) (cf. also Mehan 1991). Certainly, a complementary process may also be imagined where language problems occurring in particular interactions are reflected by a local institution or institutions, which results in a regulation being issued at the level of a ministry or even in the establishment of a ministry language-planning organization.

In this paper we would like to introduce a sociolinguistic theory constructed in such a way that it could *fully integrate* the social dimensions of “micro” and “macro” from the point of view (3). Basic information about the theory, that is, Language Management Theory, will be given in the section below, in the following sections the language-planning situation in a multinational company operating in the Czech Republic will be discussed from the viewpoint of the theory.

2. Language management theory

The term “language management theory” is used here to refer to the theory developed mainly by J.V. Neustupný a B.H. Jernudd (cf., e.g., Jernudd and Neustupný 1987), and later by

others. To avoid elementary misunderstanding, the self-evident fact should be emphasized that the identity of the theory is based on the set of its theoretical claims rather than by the title “language management”. We mention this here for two reasons: firstly, certain fundamental features of the theory were published under different labels, especially “the theory of language correction” (this version is dealt with by Cooper 1989: 40f.); secondly, some authors use the term “language management” without referring to the theoretical propositions of Neustupný, Jernudd and their colleagues and followers: they use the term more or less synonymously with the expression “language planning”, thereby further increasing the theoretical confusion (cf. the recent Spolsky 2004).

The theory of language management (LM) originated alongside the “classical theory of language planning” (cf. in particular Jernudd’s references to Neustupný in the collections Rubin and Jernudd 1971 and Rubin, Jernudd, Das Gupta, Fishman and Ferguson 1977; cf. also Jernudd 1983), however, it has gradually grown so far apart from it that it represents an independent alternative. What seems to have been decisive was Neustupný’s effort to base macro language planning firmly on the theory of language problems (cf. in particular Neustupný 1978). At the theoretical level, particular interactions (discourses) were recognized as the primary source of language problems, which shifted the focus of theoretical thought concerning language planning towards the micro dimension. The ideal model of language-planning activity was found in a process, which may be described as follows: the identification of a language problem in individual interactions → the adoption of measures by the particular language-planning institution → the implementation of these measures in individual interactions. Neustupný (1994: 50) formulates it as follows:

‘I shall claim that any act of language planning should start with the consideration of language problems as they appear in discourse, and the planning process should not be considered complete until the removal of the problems is implemented in discourse.’

The most comprehensive treatment of the theory is presented in the monograph by Neustupný and Nekvapil (2003), in Neustupný’s article (2002), and its earlier version in the collection of lectures published as Jernudd (1991). Here we shall focus merely on those components of the theory relevant for our paper.

What is language management?

The theory is based on discriminating between two processes which characterize language use: (1) the production and reception of discourse, (2) the activities aimed at the production and reception of discourse, i.e. metalinguistic activities. The latter process is called “language management”. It is to be noted here that Neustupný, echoing Fishman’s wording, often says that the theory of language management deals with (besides certain mental phenomena) “behaviour-toward-language”. Language management may be illustrated by a situation where speaker X repeats with careful pronunciation a word which his interlocutor Y failed to understand, or the standardization of the pronunciation of foreign words carried out by an academic institution and authorized by the ministry.

Simple and organized management

The speaker can manage individual features or aspects of his own or of his interlocutor’s discourse “here and now”, i.e. in a particular interaction. Such management is “simple” or “discourse-based”. It may be illustrated by example 1, where the Czech television presenter uses the non-standard form of the pronoun “který” (“who”), and having realized this he adds the standard form “kteří” (“who”), in other words, he corrects himself.

Example 1 (from Nekvapil 2000: 174)

Presenter: témata, o kterých bude dnes řeč, možná poznáte už podle jmen pánů, který kteří přijali dnešní pozvání [the topics which will be discussed today you may recognize even from the names of the gentlemen who (*non-standard*) who (*standard*) accepted today's invitation]

Organized language management no longer has an ad hoc character; it is directed and systematic. The organization of language management involves several layers. The growing complexity of social networks is accompanied by the increasing degree of organization of language management. In very complex networks the organized management often becomes the subject of public or semi-public discussion among a large number of participants (including specialists, institutions), many of them referring to various theories or ideologies. This may be illustrated by the decision of the Czech government to suspend the obligatory teaching of Russian after 1989 and to promote the teaching of “western” languages. “The classical theory of language planning” specialized merely in organized management; nevertheless, by stressing the analysis of the initial sociolinguistic situation, implicitly acknowledged the existence of simple management, and its evaluation stage in particular (cf. Ferguson 1977).

The theory of LM requires the organized management to rely on simple management as much as possible. Due to their high frequency of occurrence, examples of type 1 (morphological vacillation between standard and common Czech) have indeed become the subject of organized management in the Czech Republic, which, however, has not resulted in specific language-political measures. The suspension of the teaching of Russian was based on the fact that Russian was generally considered a useless language, moreover symbolizing the communist regime (on both examples, in more detail, cf. Neustupný, Nekvapil 2003).

It is clear that simple as well as organized management are closely linked with the factor of power, i.e. with the capability to push certain interests through (Jernudd, Neustupný 1987, Nekvapil 2006). The language management theory is based on the assumption that, as a rule, the interests of different participants and social groups in language planning situations are not identical, and the distribution of power among them is uneven.

Management networks

Language management takes place within social networks of various scopes. It does not occur only in various state organizations, with a scope of activities comprising the whole society – these were the major focus of the “classical theory of language management” – but also in individual companies, schools, media, associations, families as well as individual speakers in particular interactions. The theory of language management therefore deals not only with the macro-social dimension, but also with the micro-social one, however the conceptualisation of the latter dimension might appear.

The management process

Language management involves several stages. The stability and certainty of the production and reception of discourse is based on the existence of norms. The theory of LM assumes that the speaker *notes* the discourse as such the moment it deviates from the norm. The speaker may then *evaluate* the deviation either positively or negatively. The speaker may further *plan* an adjustment, and finally *implement* the adjustment. These four stages (noting, evaluation, planning of adjustment, implementation) constitute different stages of language management. It is significant that all these stages need not be carried out, the management may end after

any of the stages: the speaker may, e.g., merely note a certain phenomenon but refrain from evaluating it, or he may evaluate it without planning the adjustment, or plan the adjustment but withdraw from its implementation. In example 1 we can see that the management process was terminated after the stage of implementation. It is therefore evident that the theory of LM comprises a level of “micro language planning” which could hardly be “more micro”.

However, the above four stages may also be distinguished at the level of organized management. Ideally, noting is based on research or expert reports concerning language situations of various scopes here, which should actually mean that the simple management of a particular phenomenon (e.g., the pronunciation of foreign words in language X, or the communication between local and foreign employees in company Y) is thoroughly researched. This stage may be followed by evaluation of various aspects of these situations, planning and preparation of linguistic and political adjustments and their implementation.

It is certainly of particular importance for the organized language management to identify language problems, i.e. such deviations from the norm which are not only noted by individual speakers in particular interactions but also receive negative evaluation.

Linguistic, communicative and sociocultural management

The term “language management” as well as the above examples seem to suggest that the theory of LM deals mostly with language phenomena in the narrow sense of the word, i.e. the phenomena of “linguistic competence”. However, this is not the case. It is possible to manage also communicative phenomena (cf., e.g. the special forms of address required among the members of certain social groups, e.g., political parties) as well as sociocultural phenomena.

The following example comes from Heller’s (2001) ethnographic research carried out in a French minority school located in a big English-speaking city in the territory of Ontario, Canada:

Example 2 (from Heller 2001: 225)

1. Teacher: pourquoi lit-on? [why do we read?]
2. Michel: pour relaxer [to relax]
3. Teacher: pour se détendre, ‘relaxer’ c’est anglais [to ‘se détendre’ (*relax*), ‘relax’ is English]

Evidently, we can witness language management on line 3. The teacher noted that student Michael used an English word in his French discourse, he evaluated this negatively and implemented an adjustment. Both the teacher’s and the student’s linguistic competence must have been at play, since both were able to recognize the French and the English word. Nevertheless, there was also communicative competence involved. They were both oriented toward the norm that French is used consistently during teaching despite the fact that they are both bilingual. However, as pointed out by Heller, there is also socio-cultural management involved – the teacher was oriented toward the ideological maxim “form good Franco-Ontarians”, which receives political and economic support.

As far as organized management is concerned, Neustupný and Nekvapil (2003) claim that linguistic, communicative and socio-cultural (socio-economic) management are ordered hierarchically. Successful language management (e.g. teaching Czech to the Roma) is conditioned by successful communicative management (the establishment of common Czech-Roma social networks), which in turn is conditioned by successful socio-economic management (providing jobs which could lead to the establishment of the Czech-Roma networks).

Methodology

The essential requirement of the methodology used in the analysis of language management is that the measures devised at the level of organized management be based on the analysis of simple management. Therefore those methods which make it possible to analyze individual interactions are emphasized. Since its origin, the theory of LM has developed some of the findings of conversation analysis (particularly in the area of the analysis of correction sequences) as well as its methods. Ideally, both the audial and visual aspects of naturally occurring interactions should be captured (Marriott 1991a, Neustupný 1996) and detailed transcripts of these interactions analyzed. However, since all stages of the management process are to be described (without being confined to the stage of implementation in the way conversation analysis is), the investigation of language management employs methods which make it possible to deal also with noting, evaluation and the planning of adjustments, i.e. with phenomena from the mental field. In this respect, the method used most frequently is the so-called follow-up interview (Neustupný 1999).

Since in a number of social settings the analysts are denied direct access to the actual interactions (e.g. for ethical or professional reasons), the theory of LM relies also on methods which enable the analysts at least to approach these interactions in a relevant manner. Besides the so-called interaction interview (Muraoka 2000, Neustupný 2003), these methods also include focus groups, systematic (self) observation (To and Jernudd 2001) as well as other types of interviews (narrative, semi-structured). Obviously, summarizing language management which accompanies the application of these methods represents a methodological problem which must receive due attention (Nekvapil 2004).

Previous Research

This article is not the first to link the theory of LM with the problems of macro-micro in language planning. This approach is represented in particular by Kuo and Jernudd (1993), who recommend that analysts as well as national language planners employ the macro- and microperspective in a balanced manner. Marriott (1991b) arrives at a similar conclusion based on the analysis of interactions in Japanese-Australian shopping situations and of documents concerning tourism issued by governmental, industrial and corporate agencies.

3. Language management in a subsidiary of Siemens VDO Automotive (“the PLANT”)

We shall now analyze language management in a subsidiary of the Siemens VDO Automotive Corporation. The plant deals with the manufacture of electronic modules for the automobile industry, most to be exported. It has approximately 2 000 employees, and it was founded in 1995 in a relatively small city in the Czech Republic; its parent company (the “headquarters”) is in Regensburg, Germany. Since the research could only be carried out provided the information obtained was kept anonymous to a certain extent, we shall not further localize the subsidiary, referring to it below only as the PLANT.¹

We carried out 11 interviews in the PLANT (both with local and foreign managers), performed participant observations in the administrative as well as manufacturing sections of the factory, collected and analyzed a number of written documents and were even able to record a conference call.² The choice of the company was not motivated by our aiming at the

¹ In 2004 the Siemens group in the Czech Republic was constituted by 23 companies.

² The research was carried out within the framework of the project “East-European languages as a factor in economic integration” (2003-2005) and it dealt with the language-planning situation in multinational companies

analysis (and presentation) of a peculiar linguistic, communicative or socio-cultural situation; on the contrary, the objective we pursued when selecting it was to give our attention to a “regular”, “usual,” or “typical” Czech-German multinational company.³ In order to fully understand both the simple and organized management processes in the PLANT, some information concerning the socio-cultural and language-planning situation in the Czech Republic should be provided, as well as the corresponding data concerning Siemens.

Language management in the Czech Republic

The socio-cultural and language planning situation in the Czech Republic has undergone a profound change after the fall of the communist regime in 1989 (cf. a detailed account in Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003). As far as the economic sphere is concerned, foreign capital (mostly German, American, Austrian, Swiss, Belgian etc.) started entering the open Czech economy, giving rise to a number of companies which may be considered multinational to a different extent (they currently number in the thousands). It was not only a new economic situation which developed in these companies, but also a new socio-cultural situation: the local, i.e. Czech employees have to deal with the foreign cultural standards pervading their professional and personal activities, adopt the new styles of management and communication or at least get used to them. In these companies, a specific language situation also evolved: certain language functions, performed by Czech up to now, are now taken over by foreign languages, English and German in particular. Foreign as well as Czech employees consider foreign languages (English, German) to be prestigious media which bring in the know-how from technologically more advanced countries with stronger capital. Consequently, the management activities (during conferences, meetings or workshops) are often performed in English or German, while the manufacturing sections are dominated by Czech.

The political changes in 1989 have also had considerable impact on the teaching of foreign languages. Obligatory teaching of Russian having been suspended, English and German started being taught en masse at all types of schools. Of course, these languages had been taught before 1989, but now they also occupied the space freed up by Russian. As far as English is concerned, this is not surprising, while the popularity of German deserves comment. First of all, it should be pointed out that by far the longest part of the Czech border is that with the German-speaking countries, i.e. Germany and Austria. The communication with the “German” world has always been important for the Czechs throughout their history, and therefore the knowledge of German has been relatively widespread. This is not only because it is generally useful to know the language of one’s neighbour, but also because German economic life and culture were actually held in high prestige in the Czech lands. While this does not obviously apply to certain periods, such as the Hitler’s occupation of the Czech lands during World War II, there has been no doubt about it in the 1990s and the present day.

Siemens

The origin of Siemens dates back to 1847, when Werner von Siemens founded the Telegraph Manufacturing Company in Berlin. Today the Siemens group is a well-known manufacturer

founded in the Czech Republic by German, Austrian or Swiss owners. The project was supported by FOROST (Forschungsverbund Ost- und Südosteuropa) of the Bavarian Ministry of Science, Research and Art. The grant was awarded to Centrum Bohemicum der Universität Regensburg. Besides the company dealt with in the present article, the project analyzed the information from questionnaires obtained in 283 multinational companies and the information from semi-structured interviews carried out in 9 such companies (cf. Nekula, Nekvapil, Šichová 2005a, 2005b, Nekvapil, Nekula 2006).

³ It was only subsequently that we found out that Siemens companies have become the focus of scientific interest close to ours (cf. (Amtdt – Slate, 1997, Conradi, 1995).

in the field of transportation, power generation and supply, industry, communication systems, information technologies, health care, home appliances, lighting etc. The number of Siemens employees amounts to approximately 430 000. The majority of the Siemens production still comes about in Germany today, but the remainder is divided among more than 40 countries all over the world and Siemens is being further internationalized. Siemens is divided into 14 business groups, or corporations, roofed over by Siemens AG based in Germany (Munich). We shall be interested in one of these corporations, Siemens VDO Automotive, which came into existence in 2001 as a result of the merger of the German Mannesmann VDO Concern and Siemens Automotive (AT). The newly founded corporation, operating under the name Siemens VDO Automotive, has about 50 000 employees; it is based in Regensburg and Schwalbach in Germany, and its subsidiaries are also spread all over the world (besides European countries, such as Germany, Czech Republic, France, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, they are also in Mexico, Canada, USA, Brazil, Australia, Malaysia, China, Korea and others). The PLANT that we shall deal with is a part of this corporation.

As far as language planning at the level of Siemens AG is concerned, the conclusions of Vollstedt (2002, esp. 51-56) based on research aimed at multinational companies operating in Germany seem to apply: in the context of other activities, language planning constitutes a more or less marginal matter in the corporation, it is “unplanned planning” rather than an elaborate conception. Based on the information available, there does not appear to exist an “official corporate language” in Siemens AG, and according to the Public Relations representative “this matter is handled according to practical considerations, which means that in regional companies the local language is spoken and written. Also for practical reasons, circulars from the headquarters are published in German and English” (quoted from an e-mail from June 2005).

As the individual divisions, or corporations, of the Siemens group are autonomous to a large extent, the language management in the PLANT investigated here relies more on language planning of the Siemens VDO Automotive Corporation. It is of fundamental importance that there was a corporate language, English, introduced officially in the corporation. The PR representative informed us that “the decision on the corporate language was made by the board in 2002 shortly after the merger of Mannesmann VDO and Siemens AT and communicated to the employees via internal media” (quoted from the e-mail from June 6, 2005). Also worthy of mention is a regulation according to which the employees of the corporation sent abroad as delegates are entitled to free lessons of the local language (i.e. they are not obliged to learn the local language, but if they wish to, the tuition is covered by the company).

The organizational structure of the PLANT and its ethnic composition

The management processes in the PLANT under investigation, i.e. a subsidiary of Siemens VDO Automotive, are not determined only by the existence of the official corporate language, but also by the organizational structure of the company and its ethnic composition. The introduction of a corporate language does not mean that *all* employees of the company must on *all* occasions use that language, but rather that *certain* “functional positions” in the structure of the company are required to use a particular language in *certain* situations when communicating with certain “functional positions” within the company or outside it. For example, the employees in workers’ positions are not expected to communicate with the “headquarters” or with foreign customers, and therefore they need not master either the corporate language or other foreign languages. On the other hand, the ethnic composition of the organizational structure determines which speakers at which levels of the organization of

the company may use their mother tongue “quite naturally”, having an advantage over those who do not use their mother tongue in communication (with them).

As mentioned above, there are about 2 000 employees in the PLANT - of these, 10 are foreigners (with more than a half of them being German). Naturally, such a big company is a complex system which cannot be described in detail here. In accordance with qualitative social research (Lamnek, 2005, Silverman, 2001), the description of the organizational structure of the PLANT relies on the categories used by the informants themselves, i.e. the categories which they found relevant for the characteristics of the linguistic, communicative and socio-cultural situation in the PLANT. The structure of the PLANT, which has a clearly manufacturing character, may be described in their terms as follows: two directors, heads of various departments (e.g. personnel, marketing), various departments (e.g. personnel, marketing), specialists working on individual projects, foremen and workers. An important category is the “top management”, which involves primarily the directors and the heads of departments (altogether about 20 people), and the discrimination between “blue collars” (about 1 500 employees) and “white collars” (about 500 employees). As far as the positions of the foreign employees (“delegates”) are concerned, half of them rank among the “top management”, the second half working as project specialists or directors of projects. The representation of foreign employees in the “top management” is about ¼. One of the directors is German (CFO), the other is Czech (CEO).

The everyday operation of the PLANT and the languages used

In the everyday activities of the PLANT the following languages are used: Czech, German, and English. The large group of “blue collars” uses Czech only. Generally, the foreign employees use only German or English. German or English is used, or *should be used*, alongside Czech, by the Czech “white collars”.

German or English is used as the medium of communication between the Czech “white collars” and the foreign employees, between the subsidiary PLANT and the parent company (“the headquarters”), as well as in contact with foreign customers.

Our research has shown that frequently the communication does not proceed “naturally”; on the contrary, it is managed, in other words the speakers note the way they themselves, or their interlocutors, communicate, they often evaluate it negatively (i.e. they are aware of the problems), they consider the possibilities of eliminating the problems, and finally, they are often able to eliminate them. The problems can be observed in particular interactions, but they are (or were) so fundamental, or frequent, that even the speakers themselves are able to report on them in the research (e.g. follow-up) interview.

The conference call

The problems occurring in individual interaction events may be illustrated by the conference call, which was recorded in the PLANT in March 2005.

The conference call is a routine type of communication, which takes place every two weeks at a time determined in advance, between the representatives of a manufacturing unit of the PLANT and the representatives of the “headquarters” in Regensburg. If necessary, it is joined by representatives of other companies of the corporation (e.g. in Austria). Two representatives of the PLANT and five representatives of the “headquarters” took part in the recorded conference call, with one representative from a subsidiary in Great Britain joining in. The PLANT was represented by a Czech manager (C) and a French manager (F). It is important to

realize that C and F are not in the relation of superiority, or subordination. The representatives of the “headquarters” were German (G). The language used was English, which is not automatic; it could have also been German. During our observation we have found out that in regular routine communications the language preferences are often negotiated, then they become fixed and are no longer discussed – this was also the case in the recorded conference call, which started “quite naturally” in English.

The following fragment occurred about 15 minutes after the beginning of the conference call.

Example 3 (Conference call)⁴

1. G1: so that’s it from my side from S 41 side.
2. F: mm hmm okay.
3. G1: if there are problems from Rychnov due to S 41 products? (..)
4. F: ((two unclear syllables))
5. C: only this this uh you mentioned uh this is uh low parts for the four key. and now we have the
6. fifteen thousand backlog uh: with the customer. (.)
7. G1: [sorry?]
8. C: [becau-] fifteen thousand backlog (..)
9. G1: okay that that’s what I already mentioned yeah?
10. F: [yeah]
11. C: [yes] yes yes.
12. G1: okay? But we don’t ex- at the moment we do not know is it a real problem or is the Ford
13. delivery ordered to stop yeah? (..)
14. F: okay. we we will have to check that with logistics what has () the concern plant.
15. G1: okay wonderful yeah (...)
16. G3: so so just hold on please I’ll try to get in touch with ()

Let us note that C, in comparison with the other participants, has the biggest problems producing his turns (cf. lines 5, 6). This does not involve only the repetition of individual expressions (*this, this*) but also problems with formulations, signalled by the non-verbal expression *uh*, which seems to provide C with the time he needs to find and use adequate word forms (it occurred 4 times in this turn). His English pronunciation is also highly influenced by Czech (which, obviously, is not evident from the transcript). On line 7 we can see that speaker G1 did not understand C’s turn, and he initiates correction. On line 8 C provides a correction. In the following turn speaker G1 evidently verifies his interpretation of the correction (cf. line 9). Thus we can see that the topic of this part of the conference call is not really the manufacture problems in the PLANT but rather linguistic and communication

⁴ We follow the following transcription conventions:

- ? rising intonation
- . falling intonation
- , continuing intonation
- (.) a very short, still audible pause
- (..) a longer pause,
- (...) a long pause
- a cut-off of the preceding word or syllable
- (but) items enclosed within single parentheses are in doubt
- () no words could be distinguished in the talk enclosed within single parentheses
- ((cough)) in double parentheses there is a comment by the transcriber
- out underlining indicates emphasis
- [] the onset and the ending of simultaneous talk of two speakers (overlap)
- ... the utterance continues but this part is omitted in the presented extract from the transcript

problems – in other words, we witness a case of verbally manifested simple language management.

During the follow-up interview that took place the day following the conference call Mr C told the researcher (I) that this had been a “completely regular” conference call, where “simply nothing had been unexpected in any way”. Although he evaluated its course and his participation in it as in principle satisfactory, he also appeared to be aware of the limitations in his knowledge of English. He also offered a detailed explanation, which documents the existence of extensive linguistic and communication problems in the PLANT in the past, and possibly even today (see Example 4).

Example 4 (from the follow-up interview with Mr C, translated from Czech, transcription simplified)

C: ... I started learning English ten years ago, quite late, so that so that uh

I: At what age did you start learning English?

C: well earlier. at forty at forty two years I started learning English. then I didn't use it for five years, then three years I uh as I learned it then I used it, then I didn't use for five years, or very sporadically, well and when I came here, so uh the condition was, when I started, English or German. so I again practised the English, I started in the year ninety-nine, before I started I also took a month's course of English, uh sort of privately. in order to a little – as I didn't use it there for five years (). to improve it. well and I came here, and (here) English was spoken very sporadically. mostly German. so I sort of couldn't do anything but hire a private teacher of German, and get into that German a bit, so that I didn't leave a meeting totally frustrated because I didn't know what had been discussed there. and roughly in a year's time I started using German, ... and at that time was the di- at that time were both the Ge- ee eee directors German, and Mister Kohler ee quite refused to communicate in English. he simply started in English, and after ten minutes he changed to German no matter if anybody liked it or not. well and it was quite frustrating when one left the meeting and didn't know what had been discussed.

I: well but then you had to solve that somehow. anyway. right?

C: [(it was ne-)]

I: [(or) you] personally had to solve it.

C: well personally I solved it so, that I then found my colleagues and in- asked ee about – what I didn't understand I asked, ee what what we were actually required to do, what am I to do, and so on. right? so ee since at that meeting there was always sitting a larger half of Czechs, so it was not a problem here ee this in some way to get the information. and but when Mister Boczan came ((= the new Czech director)), and ee it was started in English, so I think that and I would say that also strictly Mister Boczan requires at a meeting when there is one single foreigner, so there must e must be ee foreign language used, so that the foreigner did not feel the same as we did, once, right? When he leaves the meeting and he doesn't know what uh what was discussed, ...

Let us add that Mr C is a member of the PLANT's “top management” (he directs several hundred employees), and also that he considers his present knowledge of English better than his knowledge of German (the same is claimed by Mr F).

We shall return to example 4 in another context, but now let us deal with example 3 again. It contains also another feature symptomatic of the analysed conference call – namely the different socio-culturally based communicative role of speakers C and F, who both, as mentioned above, represent the PLANT. Let us note that in reaction to the request by speaker G1 (line 3), speaker C refers to a manufacturing problem (lines 5, 6). However, it is not speaker C who expresses his opinion on how to handle the problem, but speaker F (line 14), and his suggestion is welcomed by the representative of the “headquarters” (line 15). What we may witness here is what speaker F mentions in the follow-up interview, which took place the

day following the conference call, and what is noted also by a number of foreign employees in our research: it is hard for Czech employees to assert themselves in communication (with representatives of the parent companies), which renders the presence of foreign employees at meetings essential.

Example 5 (from a follow-up interview with Mr. F, translated from German, transcription simplified)

I: uh do you experience any phenomena, which uh complicate the local collaboration?

F: uh one thing is this. that here people in Czechia are not willing to make decisions. so many things may be somehow pushed in the background, they are a bit afraid to make decisions. uh the majority have problems a bit with the ability to advocate their views. when there is a problem when something comes from Germany, ehm they are also the same, when it is spoken from Germany.

I: ((and they proceed like)) let's do it that way then.

F: exactly.

I: OK

F: and and even if they do not want to do it, in most cases they don't trust themselves enough to say that themselves, they come to me and say: what shall we do? ...

However, what F does not mention in the interview is that the foreign employees have considerable power in the subsidiary PLANT, which is based not only on the fact that they hold the positions of “bosses”, but also on their being the delegates of the parent company and, consequently, entering the PLANT with significant “social capital”. Generally, the foreign employees further reinforce their status by communicating in their mother tongue (if they are German) or in a language they have mastered much better than the local employees due to their extensive international experience (i.e. English).

Obviously, example 3 cannot demonstrate all the linguistic, communicative and socio-cultural problems occurring during the conference call, which lasted more than an hour. It may merely serve as a brief example. What we find important is that even such a short fragment of an interaction could, using follow-up interviews, illustrate the existence of simple management – in particular, the existence of cases of noting, which are evaluated negatively by the employees of the PLANT, and regarded as fundamental problems.

Simple and organized management in the PLANT

The optimum way towards a systematic description of simple management is an analysis of a large number of individual interaction events in the PLANT, similar to the above conference call. We have not been able to perform such research yet. Therefore, we rely on semi-structured interviews. To be sure, these interviews could not have covered all the simple management processes in the PLANT, but they have at least recorded those which the speakers are able to provide information on, i.e. in particular the processes which they found significant for them in some respect, interesting etc., and they can therefore remember them.

In principle, semi-structured interviews are a sufficient source for a systematic description of organized management in the PLANT. We complemented them with an analysis of the PLANT's documents and participant observation.

Simple management – foreign employees

As far as Czech is concerned, the basic communication strategy (‘pre-interaction management strategy’) of foreign employees is to avoid using Czech in the professional domain. Their assumption is that the production problems are solved in English or German, Czech being suitable merely to establish a good working atmosphere and to enhance social contact. It is

therefore advisable to master at least the rudiments of Czech, which is manifested in professional communication by the use of Czech greeting formulas or, as the case may be, attempts at small talk. It is also good to know Czech because it is a key which opens the way to the non-professional social networks, and because it facilitates the performance of activities in the everyday domain (shopping, restaurants). This is why foreign employees feel that not knowing Czech is a problem, while even minimum knowledge of the language may “gratify” them. It is because of such evaluation that the individuals decide to enroll in organized courses of Czech.

As far as German (but also English) is concerned, the foreign employees presume that it should not be used in communication with the local employees in the same way as in communication with native speakers of the language. On the one hand, the German director (D) praised his Czech colleagues’ knowledge of languages in the interview, on the other hand, he added immediately:

Example 6 (“foreigner talk” at meetings; translated from German, transcription simplified)

D: well then, of course there still are I would say some meetings, where it is necessary I would say a little bit (...) I would say also in English, a little bit proceed carefully, formulate if possible in a simple manner, not in a very complicated way so that everybody everybody understood it. yeah,

Moreover the important information must be repeated several times.

Simple management – local employees

Czech employees evaluate the attempts of foreign employees at communication (or rudiments of communication) in Czech very positively.

As far as the use of German and English is concerned, avoidance strategies are widespread among Czech employees. These strategies are employed mostly in spoken communication (this tendency used to be even more prominent in the past). A Czech informant described the panic which broke out among the young employees of one of the departments of the PLANT when a German code of the incoming call appeared on the telephone’s display (who should pick up the phone?). A foreign employee stressed the fact that Czechs keep writing him huge numbers of e-mails – so as to avoid face-to-face communication. However, avoidance strategies cannot be a permanent solution because performing certain functions in the PLANT involves communication in German or English. As we have seen in example 4, Czech employees regard insufficient knowledge of foreign languages as a big problem which cannot be perpetually solved using ‘post-interaction management strategies’ such as “asking the colleagues what had been discussed”. Czech employees, namely all “white collars”, are economically motivated to improve their command of foreign languages. They seek a prospective solution to their communicative problems in organized language courses.

Organized management

Organized management in the PLANT clearly ensues from the linguistic and communicative problems which the employees encounter in individual interactions. Organized management aims at preventing these problems. For instance, recently the Czech director decreed that the heads of manufacturing departments (i.e. big workrooms) must learn a foreign language within three years so that they could communicate with foreign customers who would like to observe the manufacture of the product they ordered.

Organized management in the PLANT has several distinct forms. The most formal of these is the organization and promotion of language courses. The following forms include the organized “simulated use of languages”, and finally, translating and interpreting. Socio-cultural problems do not constitute a subject of organized management in the PLANT (nor do they in the parent company). The question arises as to whether this is a temporary drawback or a deliberate policy. In another multinational company we encountered the idea that, to use our terminology, the company is not interested in the organized management of socio-cultural problems in which the problems of power can hardly be avoided. It is worth mentioning here that the term “inter-cultural training” was not even understood by the majority of informants participating in our research.

Language courses – foreign employees

Generally, all foreign employees are enrolled in some Czech course. The fee is paid by the PLANT. Typically, the courses are individual, with one-hour lessons taking place several times a week on the premises of the PLANT during working hours. The results of organized management (language courses), however, are not really manifested in particular natural interactions. The low efficiency of the tuition is due to three main factors: first, the lessons are often cancelled (the reason given by the participants is ‘being overburdened with work’), secondly, the courses actually start from the level of complete beginners, with the duration of the course limited to three years, i.e. the average time the employee is delegated to work abroad, and finally, the results of the courses are not evaluated. It should be noted that the former management of the PLANT, i.e. the two German directors (cf. example 4), did not consider learning Czech relevant, and did not promote Czech lessons.

Language courses – Czech employees

English and German courses are organized on the premises of the PLANT. At present they are attended by more than 200 employees. The individual courses have about 10 participants, the maximum duration of the course (which lasts one hour twice a week) being three years. If necessary, more intensive courses are also organized. Besides Czech teachers, native speakers also teach the courses. At the moment, the English courses outnumber the German ones; they are held at more suitable times, yet still after working hours. The progress reached during the courses is evaluated regularly and if the employees fail to reach the expected level, they have to pay the fee themselves. Informal evaluation is also performed by foreign employees, who are in everyday professional contact with the participants of the courses. The participants fall into two groups: those whose language tuition is presently of particular importance to the PLANT, and those whose command of the language could be utilized by the PLANT in a several years’ time. The employees from the latter group tend to attend courses in the city rather than in the PLANT, and they also receive financial support.

“Simulated use of languages”

The PLANT adheres to the principle that at meetings attended by foreign employees the Czech employees may speak either English or German – the idea is that they use the language which they can speak better (“so that they are not strained”). However, in connection with introducing English as the corporate language, some meetings attended by a majority of Czech employees who prefer German are held entirely in English in order to practise the language (“let us try”).

Marginally, the foreign employees may be encouraged to communicate in Czech in certain circumstances – during a limited period of time (e.g. two hours) the foreign and Czech employees are allowed to communicate only in Czech.

Translating and interpreting

Translating and interpreting are organized forms of management aimed at eliminating fundamental communicative problems. The very existence of translating and interpreting in the PLANT prove that the results of the above forms of organized management (language courses and simulated use of languages) are not adequately discernible in individual natural interactions. In everyday professional communication, interpreting is also used at the level of the “top management” (in particular for the Czech employees who are fluent in German but have insufficient command of English). In spite of this fact, the PLANT does not employ language specialists (interpreters, translators, *language* assistants). Interpreting is performed – in particular at the meetings – by the employees of the PLANT themselves, i.e. by the Czech employees with a good command of English (or German). Sometimes interpreting, or rather translating, is performed by the assistants to the foreign employees. However, since this also involves handling specific technical matters linguistically, they cannot fully cope with the task. An external firm is employed to translate longer texts, particularly various regulations and directives concerning the production or organization, as well as texts where the form and accuracy (of a contract) are vital (these constitute approximately ten per cent of all the foreign texts which have to be translated).

Semiotic appearance of the PLANT: English or German?

As we have seen above, organized management in the PLANT was incited by the fact that English was declared the corporate language of the Siemens VDO Automotive Corporation. This management act performed at the level of the corporation was reflected not only in the forms of organized management at the level of the PLANT, as presented above, but also in the overall appearance of the administrative and manufacturing sections of the factory. What we have in mind are various orientation plans and billboards (signs used to designate each room, orientation plans of the individual buildings, the site plan of the whole factory, the information board with the history of the PLANT and its organizational structure, the charts describing the individual segments of the assembly lines, warning signs etc.). The signs shaping the appearance of the administrative and manufacturing areas of the factory are obviously a matter of organized language management. A number of people were involved in introducing these signs: the Public Relations Manager, the Human Resources Manager, a foreign employee with a talent for art, the employees of the department responsible for the maintenance of the factory buildings, as well as the directors of the PLANT, who not only discussed and approved the proposed artefacts, but also initiated some of them.

All the plans, signs and billboards are bilingual, with one of the languages always being Czech. If these signs are not trilingual (we saw only one of this type), obviously, the other foreign language is English or German. At present, both German-Czech/Czech-German and English-Czech/Czech-English forms may be encountered in the PLANT. However, it is striking that they date from different periods in the history of the PLANT. Older signs use German, newer ones English. (The ‘language biography of the PLANT’ may be viewed as corresponding with the language biography of Mr C in example 4.) The Czech employees consider the prevalence of English over German in the semiotic appearance of the interior of the plant not only as a manifestation of the advancing internationalisation of the corporation but also a symptom of the fact that the PLANT has become a real partner for the parent company. It is also striking that Czech occurs as the first language at the new signs more often than at the old ones (the size of the inscriptions is the same).

The question may be asked why the German-Czech signs were not replaced by the Czech-English ones systematically. At a symbolic level, the three flags: Czech, German and the flag of the Corporation in front of the central administrative building of the PLANT may be quite significant in this respect. Moreover, leaving aside the economic aspect of replacing the signs, it is to be taken into account that the position of German in the PLANT remains strong indeed (“the second priority”): (1) a considerable number of the customers of the PLANT, who come from the neighbour German-speaking countries, require communication in German, irrespective of the fact that the declared corporate language is English; (2) the PLANT is frequently visited by the corporation’s employees from Regensburg and a significant amount of information passed between the PLANT and the “headquarters” is still formulated in German (the PLANT sends about 30% of texts to Regensburg in German, and receives about 10% of German texts from there, the rest being in English).

In this situation the linguistic diversity of the semiotic appearance of the interior of the PLANT may suit all people, social and ethnic groups involved in the operation of the PLANT or coming into contact with it. The linguistic diversity may strike the accidental visitor as haphazard, a result of ad hoc decisions. Nevertheless, a more profound analysis shows that elaborate management of the communicative as well as symbolic function of language is involved.

4. Conclusion

Using a specific language-planning situation in a multinational company, this paper has demonstrated the relation between micro and macro language planning. We employed the theory of language management, which covers both these planning perspectives. Within the framework of the theory, micro language planning is identified with simple (discourse-based) management, and macro language planning with organized language management. We have shown that the two types of language management may be intertwined with one another dialectically: organized management influences simple management, and yet organized management results from simple management. Such language-planning situations may be considered optimal. However, there certainly exist other situations, where organized and simple management do not influence one another by any means. These involve in particular the situations where the language planners underestimate or even deliberately ignore the language problems of the speakers in individual interactions. It proceeds from the theory of language management that such situations are to be criticized.⁵

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