

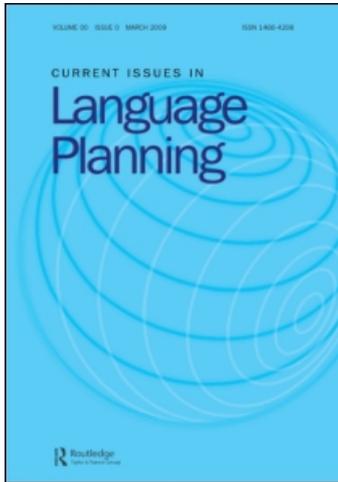
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## Pre-interaction management in multinational companies in Central Europe

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## **Pre-interaction management in multinational companies in Central Europe**

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This article is devoted to the linguistic, communicative and sociocultural situation in branches of multinational companies located in the Czech Republic and Hungary. There are typically several languages used in these branches. In addition to the local languages, there are the languages of the parent companies – most commonly English or German, and also French. The core of the article is the description of the strategies on various levels of the company used to manage problems anticipated in future interactions. We demonstrate that these strategies originate as the result of communication problems the employees have already experienced and are created and reproduced in anticipation of similar problems in the future. We place emphasis on the close relationship between the way in which individuals systematically solve language and communication problems and how multinational companies do so, and we thus contribute to the further investigation of the interplay between micro- and macro-language planning. The article has its theoretical basis in language management theory as conceived by J.V. Neustupný and B.H. Jernudd, but its ambition is also to develop the theory further, above all through the concept of pre-interaction management.

**Keywords:** language management; interaction; multilingualism; business communication

### **Introduction**

Economic relationships are currently the driving force in international collaboration. They stimulate various forms of international cooperation, and the formation of multinational companies is one of the most visible forms of this. Multinational companies establish branches in areas that enable them to optimally increase their profits, meaning that in many cases these are locations where the economic level lags behind that of the country in which the parent company is located. This was (and to a certain extent, still is) true of the former Soviet bloc countries. Though the Czech Republic and Hungary became members of the European Union, they still have not caught up economically with countries such as the Netherlands, Germany or Austria, countries whose share of foreign direct investment in the post-communist countries is quite high. This economic imbalance is projected into the power relationships in multinational companies – the expatriates, the representatives of the parent company, nearly always hold top management positions in the branches. This is related to the status and distribution of the

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languages used – the languages used by the expatriates may be perceived as more powerful than the local languages and it is essentially assumed that the local employees will acquire these languages, while the expatriates can allow themselves to function without knowledge of the local languages.

The imbalance in power relationships in the branches of multinational companies operating in Central Europe is also strengthened by the varying degree of linguistic, communicative and sociocultural competence of the expatriates and local employees. It should be pointed out that foreign capital and the expatriates that accompany it come from countries to which it was difficult to travel from Czechoslovakia or Hungary prior to the fall of the communist regime in 1989, which was reflected in the lower motivation of Czechs or Hungarians to learn the respective foreign languages at all, much less to attain a high level of competence in them. This means not only that an expatriate, e.g. a German employee, can communicate in the work environment in German much better than a local Czech or Hungarian employee (which is self-evident), but even that this person has a much higher competence in English (which is not self-evident), i.e. in the language which is often the corporate language even in daughter companies with a parent company in Germany.

This unequal state, which we present only in a schematic sense, is, however, slowly beginning to change, and not only in Western European companies. For example, there are a number of recent trends to consider, which put the power relationships in perspective. Czech companies have now found themselves in the position of parent company, with daughter companies further east, e.g. in Russia. Russian employees, like Czech employees, are also at a historical and linguistic disadvantage when it comes to learning English. Yet Czech employees, due to their political past and the linguistic closeness of Czech and Russian, are more likely (and often expected) to speak Russian. Finally, companies from Asian countries such as Japan and Korea have established branches in Central Europe. In these companies, the common language is English, and neither group of employees is expected to learn or speak the other's language.

Our paper aims to show how both local employees and expatriates deal with language, communication and sociocultural problems occurring in specific situations, and primarily how they prevent them. That is, this is a description of language behaviour which we will call 'pre-interaction management'. This term is rooted in language management theory (LMT), which we will now briefly discuss.

### **Theoretical framework: LMT**

This theory originated primarily in the work of J.V. Neustupný and B.H. Jernudd (see Jernudd & Neustupný, 1987). Unlike the theories of language planning of that time, it does not only deal with language problems on the level of the entire society ('macro-language planning'). Instead, it devoted attention to language problems in less complex social organisations and in concrete interactions ('micro-language planning') and indicated the possibility of a relationship between these levels (Nekvapil, 2008; Nekvapil & Nekula, 2006a, p. 309). LMT's point of departure is the differentiation between two processes in language use: (1) the production of utterances or communicative acts and (2) management of the produced utterances or communicative acts. The theory thus begins with the everyday experience that we are able to communicate without our attention being oriented towards the fact that we are communicating, or we *note* various aspects of this communication (e.g. a slip of the tongue, or the fact that we do not understand something or that we are not able to find the right word, that our communication partner's pronunciation

is funny, etc.). The management process, however, need not end merely with the noting of something that deviates from someone's expectations or from an established norm, but can continue with the speaker or listener *evaluating* (e.g. negatively) the given deviation, thinking about how to eliminate it and finding a solution (in LMT speak this phase is labelled *adjustment design*), and finally, the given design can be used in communication, *implemented*. Important for the topic of this article is the fact that in LMT the 'problem' is clearly delineated as the negatively evaluated deviation from an expectation (norm). With regard to the text below, we will refer to such a phenomenon as a 'smaller problem'.

A series of phases of the management process can be demonstrated using the following example (M is a Czech manager in a large German–Czech company and S is a Czech researcher interested in the situation in this company):

*Example 1 (from Nekvapil, 1997a, 1997b)<sup>1</sup>*

- 1 M: ...když děláme workšopy, (..) tak třeba v oblasti perzonalistiky už je  
 2 to z devadesáti devíti procent bez Němců, (..) nebo bez expertů,  
 3 S: [hm]  
 4 M: [já] nemám rád to slovo bez Němců, takže, eh (..)...
- 1 M: ...when we do workshops, (..) so for example in personnel matters now it's  
 2 ninety-nine percent without the Germans, (..) or without the experts,  
 3 S: [hm]  
 4 M: [I] don't like the wording without the Germans, so, eh (..)...

In this fragment we see that M has used the ethnic category 'Germans' (line 2), but after a short pause he replaced it with a professional category, i.e. 'experts' (line 2). On the basis of empirical research (Nekvapil, 1997a, 1997b), we are aware that the 'norm' in the given company is to not use ethnic categories, because they evoke ethnic stereotypes and the problematic common history of Czechs and Germans (we could say that this norm is an example of a sort of local political correctness). The management process thus likely occurred in the following manner: M *noted* that he had deviated from the norm, he evidently *evaluated* this deviation *negatively* (which is made explicit by his turn in line 4), sought and found an *adjustment design* (i.e. a non-ethnic category with the same referent) and implemented it, i.e. by using the expression 'experts'.

Management that occurs within concrete interactions is 'simple'; Jernudd (2002), in the spirit of computer metaphors, calls it 'on-line'. However, management can also take place outside of concrete interactions, to which, however, it is nevertheless related *in some way* (more on this below), and therefore occurs 'off-line'. This type of management can take place in rather complex social networks, which is why the phrase 'organised management' is often used to describe it. Nekvapil (2008) designated five aspects for its characterisation:

- (a) Management acts are trans-situational
- (b) A social network or even an institution is involved
- (c) Communication about management takes place
- (d) Theorising and ideology intervene
- (e) In addition to language as discourse, the object of management is language as a system

The organised nature of language management is, of course, a matter of degree. Highly organised language management takes place, for example, in language institutes

(academies) and its result can be a language reform proposal. Considerably organised management also takes place in multinational companies and its result can be the introduction of a corporate language or the organisation of intercultural training.

As opposed to simple management, organised management is devoted to ‘larger problems’ – negatively evaluated deviations from expectations (norm), which are also reflected ‘off-line’ become the subject of management, which likely happens because speakers or listeners in concrete interactions did not find the necessary adjustment design or that the given ‘smaller problem’ is often repeated, and is thus experienced as ‘larger’. In such a case it can be assumed that speakers ‘solve’ problems of this type among themselves (informally, among friends, in the family, in laymen’s interest groups) and, in last case scenario, they turn to language experts located in an institution, and their questions can serve as an impulse for official measures of a general character (e.g. a change in prescriptive pronunciation norms).

Thus far in LMT research, attention has been devoted above all to the analysis of simple management, primarily in various contact situations, i.e. in situations where members of differing ethnicities communicate, regardless of which language they use. Organised management has not been studied much using LMT, as it was possible to assume that it had already been researched using theories of language planning. On the declarative level, emphasis was placed on the interrelated nature of simple and organised management, but this was not further examined in depth. Neustupný (1994, p. 50) was often quoted in regard to this matter:

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 fact described in this quotation became the inspiration for the development of the concept of language management cycle (Nekvapil, 2008), and in this article, we attempt to contribute to the analysis of the dynamic relationship between simple and organised management with the help of the concept of pre- or post-interaction management.

### **The concept of pre-interaction management**

This concept essentially appeared as early as in the first sketch of LMT, labelled ‘pre-correction’ (Neustupný, 1978, p. 249). In order to define this concept, it is important to have a sense of the timeline and the place of the norm deviation on it: Does the management occur prior to the beginning of the utterance in which the norm deviation occurs? More precisely, does it occur in anticipation of the deviation from the norm or a language problem? Neustupný (2004, p. 26) formulates it thus: ‘According to when management is executed, it is possible to speak of pre-management (executed before a deviation appears) ...’. By the same logic, Neustupný speaks of ‘in-management’ and ‘post-management’ here.

Because LMT is not devoted merely to language in the narrowest sense, but to communication, or interaction, as well, in this article we introduce the concept of pre-interaction management (see also Nekvapil & Nekula, 2006a, p. 320) and the analogous concept of post-interaction management. The advantage of these concepts, in our opinion, is that we can better capture the dynamics of the management processes, their varying scope and effects on further management processes in further interactions and on various societal levels.

We therefore define *pre-interaction management* as the language management process (noting of a deviation from a norm, evaluation, adjustment design, implementation) done in anticipation of a future interaction or, more precisely, in anticipation of potential problems in a future interaction. This can include looking up words and phrases in a dictionary or textbook, consulting language concerns with a language expert or, even ‘avoidance strategies’ such as preferring written communication to oral communication, bringing along an interpreter or avoiding the interaction altogether (for more detail on this, see below).

Pre-interaction management can be targeted, i.e. oriented towards a specific future action, or generalised, i.e. oriented towards a multitude of similar interactions.

In an analogous manner, we define *post-interaction management* as the language management process (noting of a deviation from a norm, evaluation, adjustment design, implementation) which takes place after the given interaction. Obviously, post-interaction management also takes place before future interactions, it cannot be otherwise, but while pre-interaction management is oriented to an upcoming specific interaction or, generally, to a particular set of upcoming interactions, post-interaction management is oriented to what has happened in the previous interaction without the speaker’s immediate considerations of future interactions.

### Methodology and empirical research

Advocates of LMT, like those of conversation analysis, have always emphasised that it is necessary to operate on the basis of analysis of naturally occurring data, that is, from recordings of talk-in-interaction. Unlike conversation analysts, they would then subject the recordings to further research with the help of the so-called follow-up interview, most often with the focus on the evaluations of norm deviations. This method of gathering data in multinational companies is extremely difficult, because these companies fear the release of important information (for example, if various meetings and telephone conferences, etc., are recorded). This is why the researchers are often forced to limit themselves to structured or semi-structured interviews with company employees, which can lead to a biased depiction of what actually happens in a specific interaction.

In contrast to this, research on pre-interaction management using interviews is more or less adequate. This is because pre-interaction management is something reflected, often stabilised, by the speakers or writers, passed on as a tested strategy (generalised adjustment designs) and thus shared. Speakers and writers *talk about* the pre-interaction management among themselves, and so they can also talk about it with a researcher during an interview.

The research involved interviews and participant observation in four multinational companies with branches in the Czech Republic or Hungary. The history of the companies varies: while some companies were directly founded by foreign companies, others are the result of foreign company purchases or privatisation of local companies. Still others have changed owners, from one foreign company to another, larger one.

The larger research project also investigated further companies, e.g. companies from Asia, and locally owned companies that are oriented towards foreign markets further east (Russia, Ukraine) or are supported by foreign capital. We also draw upon data from earlier research on similar topics (Nekvapil & Nekula, 2006a, 2006b; Nekula, Nekvapil, & Šichová, 2005; Nekvapil & Sherman, 2009).

A total of 34 interviews were conducted in the companies by a multi-ethnic team, consisting of native speakers of Czech, Hungarian, German and English. Participant

observation and the collection of written materials were also important parts of the research. A brief description of the companies follows:

*Company A* manufactures car components. It is a branch of a German company with other branches and clients all over the world. The branch of Company A which is the subject of our research is located in Eastern Moravia (Czech Republic), and production here began in 1996. As of June 2007, the branch had 2182 employees, most of whom were Czech, but who were also Slovak, Polish and of other origin. All 'expatriates' or 'delegates' (German and Austrian nationals sent by the parent company to the subsidiary) working in the branch (10 persons) occupy top management positions. Originally, the corporate language of this branch was German, but as a consequence of the merging with another German-based company operating more worldwide, English has been officially introduced. In this company, 12 interviews were conducted with 11 individuals (5 Czech, 3 German, 3 Austrian) in English by a native speaking interviewer. The individuals included eight top managers (three German, three Austrian, two Czech), one assistant (Czech), one HR employee (Czech) and one language course organiser (Czech).

*Company B* manufactures rail transportation products and is a part of large international concern with headquarters in Germany. The branch in question is located on the outskirts of Prague. The company began operations in the Czech Republic in 2002, when it took over and restructured the production of a Czech company. There is no officially declared corporate language, but both German and Czech are claimed by the employees to have this role. The company employs over 1000 people. Technical experts and managers are sent from the parent company in Germany, and there were approximately 20 such individuals working there at the time of the research. Six interviews in German and one interview in Czech were conducted by a German native speaker with Czech language skills. The persons interviewed include one of the chief managers, the personal manager, a German expatriate, a German employee working on a Czech contract, a Czech employee working in the field of communication and one of the interpreters of the company.

*Company C* manufactures rubber products and the branch under study is located in Hungary. It was formerly a German company with headquarters in Germany. In 2004, it was bought by another German multinational company with English as its corporate language. There were no expatriate employees in the company at the time of the research, but rather, the local employees were responsible for communication with the parent company and with other companies throughout Europe. In the company, a total of 12 interviews were conducted in Hungarian (by a Hungarian native speaker), in German (by a German native speaker) and in English. Ten are individual interviews with the employees of the company in different positions, one is an individual interview with one of the English teachers teaching the employees of the factory and one is a group interview with 4 participants. Interviewees included one of the English teachers, one 'main' head of department, two heads of departments, one employee working with foreign customers at the accountancy and one employee working at the production-preparation department.

*Company D* is an electricity company with a branch in Hungary. It was founded in 1951 and remained in Hungarian state ownership until 1995 when it was privatised and bought by a French company. Since then, both French and Hungarian experts execute the management tasks at various levels in the company. There has thus far been no declaration officially about an official corporate language, though both English (by the HR department) and Hungarian (by the local employees) have been mentioned as candidates for this

classification. Research in the company was done on the basis of weekly participant observation. Also, three interviews (including a group interview) with a total of five individuals (all Hungarian), including three Hungarian managers and two English teachers, were conducted by a native English speaker in English.

As we indicated in the introduction, communicative acts in multinational companies in Central Europe are not often generated spontaneously, rather they become the object of attention of speakers or writers; in a nutshell, they are 'managed'. The pre-interaction management strategies which we will now present are one form of this management of communication.

### **Pre-interaction management strategies**

This paper is a research probe which aims to look at the use of languages in one type of multilingual environment from a specific point of view. We are not attempting to create a typology of these strategies, rather we limit ourselves to an elementary classification of the data collected thus far, which – we hope – can inspire further research. We will first devote our attention to the strategies that individual employees use more or less spontaneously, and then the strategies which the companies themselves implement.

### **Individual language management**

#### *Face-to-face communication between the local employees and expatriates*

The limited linguistic and communicative competence of employees becomes apparent very quickly in face-to-face communication, which is why we often observed that the local employees in the multinational companies under study tried to avoid such communication in a number of different ways, and the expatriates tried to simplify this communication. The most common strategies are thus 'avoidance strategies' and 'foreigner talk'.

#### *Avoidance strategies*

These strategies can be defined as management strategies that involve not performing a communicative act due to the difficulties associated with it, or selecting a communicative act which requires less work, less confrontation or does not threaten one's professional image. When local employees evaluate their linguistic competence in English or German negatively, one potential adjustment design would be to acknowledge this in interactions and request help from other interlocutors. However, such an adjustment may result in a negative image of the employees themselves or, in fact, of the company. So often the adjustment design selected is the avoidance of such an open acknowledgement of the problem.

One such strategy is the preference of written communication to oral communication. This allows for the use of language aids such as dictionaries, for editing, and for the involvement of other (potentially more proficient) language users (colleagues) in the formulations (see also below). However, written communication in itself may be less effective and more time-consuming, e.g. it may take longer to deal with a problem over e-mail than by making a simple phone call. And, in fact, this is a case which has provoked organised language management, as in Example 2.

*Example 2*

- 1 P: ...I prefer I prefer u:h still phone calling  
 2 T: uh huh  
 3 P: if if uh it's something (.) ((clicks tongue)) very fast need to be  
 4 to be solved yeah?  
 5 T: mm hmm  
 6 P: it means if I know that this person just sent u:h something to me  
 7 and I suppose and it's true that he or she is sitting over there  
 8 yeah?  
 9 T: mm hmm  
 10 P: catchable  
 11 T: mm hmm  
 12 P: I really prefer two three sentences (.)live  
 13 T: mm hmm  
 14 P: yeah? actively hey, because there it's interactive you can get  
 15 immediately [answer left right] and I am again teaching pushing  
 16 T: [mm hmm]  
 17 P: u::h asking my colleagues please, if it is just over the corner  
 18 T: yeah  
 19 P: don't don't send the mail.  
 20 T: mm  
 21 P: stand up and go there.  
 22 T: yeah  
 23 P: face to face we are still uh live people  
 24 T: uh huh  
 25 P: and we shouldn't just- because unfortunately it was, and still  
 26 sometimes it's true that they are sending the mails ((changes  
 27 voice)) I have sent a mail, I have solved that.<sup>2</sup>

Czech director (P) of Company A had noted and negatively evaluated the deviation described in lines 25–27, in which the employees used the direct communication avoidance strategy by preferring to send e-mails than to make a phone call or communicate face-to-face. In his view, such a strategy not only prolongs the solution to time-sensitive issues (lines 3–4), but also creates the false pretence that the issue has been solved (line 27). The hierarchy of communication in such situations, then in P's view, is that face-to-face communication is most preferred and e-mail least preferred.

Other strategies include bringing along an interpreter. This is a strategy used mostly when it is clear beforehand that the speakers will not have a common language, for example, when the company director does not speak English, or does not speak it proficiently (as was the case in more than one Japanese-owned company), or when guests from abroad are visiting the company.

A final, more extreme form of 'avoidance strategy' is finding a way to avoid the interaction altogether. This highlights the fact that there are many companies in which not all employees are able to speak to all other employees, for example, local employees in production do not (and are often not able to) communicate with expatriate top managers.

*Foreigner talk*

Foreigner talk (Ferguson, 1981) refers to speech adjustments made by a native speaker when in conversation with a non-native speaker. This can include slowing down the speech tempo, using more simple vocabulary and many other features. And most interactions in the multinationals occur between two or more people, at least one of whom is not a native speaker of the given language. The pre-interaction management strategy

most commonly reported by native or highly proficient speakers of a given language is to speak in 'foreigner talk' even before problems in communication occur, given the anticipation that they will occur because their interlocutor is not a competent speaker of the given language or has proven in the past not to be one. A Czech assistant in Company A revealed the use of foreigner talk in particular with non-native Czech speakers, describing it as a 'louder and clearer' way of speaking and compared it with the form of speech used when talking to an older person who is hard of hearing. She stated that she was able to empathise with these non-native Czech speakers because she is learning German and would like native German speakers to speak this way to her.

The degree to which the use of foreigner talk becomes a common pre-interaction strategy depends on the anticipated language of the interaction, how commonly it is spoken by foreigners and how much previous experience given native speakers have with non-native varieties. If the language in question is German or French and the native speaker knows he or she will interact with non-native speakers, there may be the expectation that foreigner talk will be used, particularly if such interactions are an everyday event (e.g. a German manager speaking to Czech subordinates). However, while expatriate employees working directly in the daughter company or subsidiary may be accustomed to using foreigner talk when preparing to speak with local employees, customers or employees of the parent company may lack this pre-interaction management strategy, invoking new problems. If the language in question is Czech, or Hungarian, which is not commonly spoken by foreigners, and even less so by western expatriates working in multinational companies in the Czech Republic and Hungary, foreigner talk is less likely to be the norm, and such pre-interaction management strategies are exercised even less.

There is also the understanding particularly among local employees that successful foreigner talk should be based on a standard variety of a given language and, in particular, that dialectal elements should be avoided. This was mentioned in particular in regard to German in communication with customers on the phone, because these customers speak a German dialect. The ultimate adjustment implemented is to designate an employee who had lived in Austria or Southern Germany to take these calls. There appeared to be no management in this respect done by the German company (the client), which, despite the knowledge that they were dealing with a Hungarian company branch, employed on the telephone a person who spoke neither Hungarian nor Standard German. This can perhaps be attributed to their client status. This problem has also not been managed on the level of organised management in the Hungarian branch, e.g. by including the acquisition of at least receptive knowledge of the most common dialects in training or by sending its own local employees to these clients.

#### *Inserting native language pauses into meetings*

Sometimes, however, not even foreigner talk is successful. In several of the companies, we observed that in anticipation of content-based misunderstanding, expatriates use the following strategy to simplify the communication between themselves and local employees. They interrupt the official course of the meeting and direct their Czech colleagues to discuss the issue among themselves, that is, in Czech. This stands in opposition to the so-called 'secretive' function of Czech we have observed in other multinational companies (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2009) in which Czech employees purposely use the language in order not to be understood. On the other hand, this strategy recalls the examples of the 'emotional' function of a particular language, when, for instance, Czech employees switch to Czech when emotions are high and 'report back' to their German colleagues once they have resolved

the issue. In any case, this strategy conforms to the claims by many expatriates (in German as well as Japanese companies) that they assume that conversation in Czech in their presence indicates that the content is not relevant to them or will eventually be passed on to them in a more ‘digestible’ form.

### *Telephone communication*

Telephone communication in foreign languages is often very demanding for employees with limited linguistic and communicative competence, because the visual channel is not involved. The problems worsen if the native speaker-communication partner (e.g. a client from abroad) uses a dialect as described above. A typical approach to telephone communication for many employees is therefore avoidance strategies, above all the use of e-mail. Another strategy is to make it easier to understand each other on the telephone by taking written notes during the meeting, as voiced by a Hungarian employee:

#### *Example 3*

- 1 E: ja also das ist ein (.) Taktik von mir. also wenn ich mit jemand  
 2 per Telefon spreche, (.) bei mir gibt's immer Papier.  
 3 R: [hmmhmm]  
 4 E: [und ich] schreibe gleich (.) alles was ich verstehen habe.  
 5 R: mhm  
 6 E: und was nicht. das auch. ((lacht))  
 7 ((mehrere lachen kurz))  
 8 E: ( ) also das das immer mit Papier.
- 1 E: so that is one of my (.) tactics. when I speak with someone on the telephone,  
 2 (.) I always have paper nearby.  
 3 R: [mm hmm]  
 4 E: [and I ] immediately write down (.) everything I understood.  
 5 R: mm hmm  
 6 E: and what I didn't. that too. ((laughs))  
 7 ((more people laugh briefly))  
 8 E: ( ) so I always have paper nearby.

In work teams, it is not uncommon to create the function of ‘telephone specialist’, i.e. an employee who is known for his or her linguistic or communicative competence in the given foreign language and who is willing to deal with the necessary telephone calls in place of his or her colleagues. In one company, we even observed a sort of generalisation of this strategy – the employees know about such a function from their own work environment and they assume that there will be an analogous specialist in other companies as well. This is why, during the first contact with another company (or with a subcontractor), the first thing they do is ask for the name of this person (‘the contact person’) and discuss more complex production problems only with that person.

In the work environment, the issue of communication of information concerning numbers is a very sensitive one. To confuse one number with another can have serious implications. For this reason, in the Czech army, the form of the numeral 2 was officially managed years ago. In Czech, this number in the nominative case has the forms *dvě* (pronounced *dvje*) or *dva* (pronounced *dva*). The *dvě* form was, however, often incorrectly heard as the numeral 5 or *pět* (pronounced *pjet*) in spoken communication, which is why official military communication permitted only the *dva* form in spoken numbers (the same strategy is used in Czech train stations when announcing which track the train will arrive at). In the multilingual companies under study, problems are caused by the varying spoken realisation of numerals in the languages used, because their reception demands significant cognitive effort.

For example, German organises the numerals 13–99 such that the unit is heard first (e.g. *vier* = 4) and after it the multiple of 10 (e.g. *zwanzig* = 20), and the number 24 is formed. Hungarian, on the other hand, like English, does this in the opposite order, i.e. ‘24’ (*huszonnégy* = 24, *húsz* = 20, *négy* = 4). One Hungarian participant mentioned the following strategy, with the help of which he can counter the potential misinterpretation of German numerals: while communicating on the phone, he writes down the numbers forming the components of the respective numeral in the order that he hears them and hopes to eliminate misunderstandings in this way.

### *Written communication*

As we pointed out above, written expression, often e-mails, can compensate for insufficient competence in the production and reception of spoken expression, which is why it is sometimes used as a ‘mild’ form of avoidance strategy. Some pre-interaction management strategies, however, are aimed primarily at removing potential problems in written communication – including the installation of electronic aids such as German dictionaries into the computers of the local Hungarian employees. Obviously, this strategy used spontaneously by the individuals could be easily noted on the level of organised management, evaluated positively and, as a generalised strategy, introduced ‘top-down’.

### *Language for unspecified addressee 1*

Another type of strategy that reveals much about the linguistic and sociocultural conditions in multinational companies is that which is used in e-mail communication with an ‘unspecified’ addressee. In a situation where a language is understood only by a certain group of employees, the choice of language predetermines the group of potential addressees. This means that the mere choice of language can indicate what kind of message it is. Expatriates working in companies in the Czech Republic operate on the basis of the fact that Czech language mails are not important, because whatever is important is (or should be) written in another language. They also sort through these mails on the basis of this norm and Czech mails often end up in the trash. An Austrian manager in Company A summarises his actions upon receiving e-mails in Czech as follows:

#### *Example 4*

- 1 M: okay I do not always write back. (.) pff bring it to me in English or  
2     forget about it

This is an avoidance strategy through which expatriates advocate the use of the corporate language. An alternative strategy used by expatriates is the request for an informal translation of the Czech mail from one of their local subordinates (in cases where it is not clear whether the mail is important enough) and in their replies, negotiate the use of another language:

#### *Example 5*

- 1 M: ...when I answer back I'm like okay sorry I'm not able to speak in  
2     Czech then the other one has to sit down,  
3 T: yeah  
4 M: and e:h write everything again in English, or German  
5 T: mm hmm  
6 M: so it's a: big effort [so I try] to avoid it  
7 T: [ mm mm ]

Note that the manager tries to avoid certain work situations which he finds inefficient, that is, the work involved in translating e-mails, both for him (he has to organise colleagues to do it) and for his colleagues (they have to translate it), and for the original sender of the mail (who in some cases is asked to re-write the mail in another language, described in lines 2–4 here). This is in line with the general policy of the company branch – English is preferred to translating and interpreting, because it is quicker and more efficient. So ultimately, the avoidance strategy, perhaps interpretable as a pre-interaction management push towards English-only in the company, is to not respond to a Czech e-mail at all. It should be noted, however, that this endorsement of English-only practices need not be interpreted as a power-dominance issue, but as an efficiency and economics issue. Translating takes time, and time is money. Also, M continued on in the interview to point out the fact that the refusal of English often came from Germans.

### *Language for unspecified addressee 2*

The most general strategy advocated in multinational companies operating in the Czech Republic and Hungary is then: when you have to write something and you do not know whom it is for, do not use Czech/Hungarian. But what language should be used? In Central Europe, the position of German is still relatively strong, and at the end of the 1990s, it was still taught more than English. In the branches of multinational companies in the Czech Republic or Hungary which have their headquarters in Germany or Austria, it is thus interesting to observe the competition between English and German (for more on this, see Nekvapil & Sherman, 2009). That is, an unspecified addressee can be addressed in German or in English. Local employees are usually not competent in both languages, so they do not deal with the choice of one of these languages for an upcoming interaction. On the other hand, the German or Austrian expatriates in Company A developed the following pre-interaction management strategy: they communicate among themselves in German, but in cases where the mail could have a more general audience, they write in English (even for a German language addressee).

### *The use of language class for the preparation for a specific upcoming interaction*

As is probably clear in some of the strategies described above, individual management operates in an environment created by corporate language management, e.g. the use of avoidance strategies is often connected to the existence of an official corporate language. Language courses organised by the company create the opportunity to prepare for upcoming interactions in the corporate language. As we have observed, however, in these courses, the employees are not merely preparing themselves on a general level for communication in various types of interactions (which is the essence of language courses as such), but also for actual upcoming interactions. For example, a less-proficient Hungarian English speaker asked his English teacher for help before a meeting. He prepared everything he wanted to say during the presentation, but he took advantage of the English lesson and the fact that he was the only one who attended that lesson, and together with his teacher went through his presentation, and she corrected the mistakes first in speech, then also in writing. On the other hand, the employees discuss language phenomena they have noted during meetings with their teachers, so one witnesses an interesting instance of a language management cycle.

### **Corporate language management**

Unlike individuals, companies advocate above all strategies that are meant to have a long-term effect and are thus aimed at the removal of problems in a number of similar

interactions (which, however, does not mean that the companies do not also apply, for example, avoidance strategies in specific cases). This organised language management is typically manifested through the establishment of a corporate language, through the organisation of language courses and through hiring interpreters and translators. We have already written about these forms in a number of places (Nekvapil & Nekula, 2006a, 2006b; Nekvapil & Sherman, 2009; Nekula *et al.*, 2005). For this reason, here we will only mention other pre-interaction management strategies that have not been at the centre of analytical attention to such a great degree.

#### *The outward presentation of Czech employees' names*

Czech orthography uses the Latin alphabet, but due to the different sound pattern of Czech and the need for a more precise differentiation of sounds, it uses letters with diacritic symbols such as in the letters *í*, *č* and *ů*. These letters often cause problems in e-mail communication with foreigners, because they appear as gibberish in many computer systems, which can lead to the unintelligibility of some expressions. Technically, innovations such as Unicode are a way to avoid these problems, but Czech e-mails are still often written without diacritic symbols. This problem is very sensitive in the case of personal names, because it is difficult to avoid them in both written and spoken communication (how should a foreigner – the representative of the parent company or a customer – write or pronounce the name of Czech top manager *Božena Kudláčková*, with whom he or she has negotiations?). Individuals and companies often solve this problem by presenting their personal names without diacritics (i.e. as *Bozena Kudlackova*). For example, in one company, we observed that on the web pages presenting the company are pictures of the Czech top managers with their names without diacritics. This pre-interaction strategy thus anticipates problems, which could occur in interaction between local employees and foreigners, and prevents a potential fear by the foreigners of using these names. It would be relevant, however, to devote further research to the question of whether this strategy does not document the specific power situations in the multinational companies under study.

#### *Hiring employees with specific language knowledge*

The orientation towards the corporate language leads companies to establish the knowledge of the corporate language as one of the conditions for hiring new employees. It is not, however, only a question of the corporate language, but also of the language spoken by the customer. That is, the customers need not accept communication in the corporate language and can request communication in their own native language. Therefore, even though some multinational companies with headquarters in Germany and Austria have established English as the corporate language, they are aware of the fact that it is advantageous to have German-speaking employees in Czech and Hungarian branches – hence the strategy: English required, German an advantage. In one of the branches, we were told that the French customers do not speak good English, preferring French. If their interlocutors do not speak French, the French customers ‘completely treat you in a different way’. For this reason, French-speaking employees are regularly sought to deal with French customers.

#### *Communication rules*

Organised language management in multinational companies occurs because there exist problems in individual interactions, and its point is to help remove the problems. These

problems, however, are not only language problems (e.g. the absence of linguistic competence), but also communicative and sociocultural problems. LMT (in spite of its name) is thus systematically devoted not only to management of language (in a narrow sense), but also to communicative and sociocultural management and it shows how these three dimensions are interrelated (cf. Neustupný, 2003). Our research confirmed that not even good knowledge of the corporate language guarantees that communication between expatriates and local employees will not be ‘managed’ – reasons for this can include different communicative norms or different sociocultural expectations. On the other hand, it is true that communicative or sociocultural management is easier if the employees possess advanced language competence. It is symptomatic that organised management in the branches of multinational companies in Central Europe was initially devoted primarily to (narrowly) linguistic problems and only then to communicative and sociocultural problems. This is most visible through the fact that the companies organise intercultural training sessions. While several years ago in Company A the word ‘intercultural’ was all but unknown when we conducted research in 2005, our later research revealed that intercultural training is now a reality there.

In some companies, we observed the explicit effort to manage what the employees themselves call ‘communication’ but what often crosses over into the sociocultural dimension. In one Czech-Japanese company, in which there were Spaniards in addition to Czechs and Japanese, on the wall of the meeting rooms there was a ‘rule of meeting’ in which the following is written in English: ‘... if any participant wants to say something, he/she has to speak officially in English. Czech, Spanish or Japanese language is prohibited in company meetings’. This ‘rule’ was approved by the company director himself (Sakamoto, 2008).

In one German-Czech company (Company B), a survey was conducted on the various aspects of work activities, on the basis of which ‘Five principles of internal communication’ were formulated (see Example 6). These principles are hung in the meeting rooms, both in Czech and in German (from the texts, it is clear that the original was the German version).

*Example 6: Five principles of internal communication*

*German text*

- (1) Wir wünschen uns eine offene, ehrliche, sachbezogene und politikfreie Kommunikation.
- (2) Unsere Ziele werden klar formuliert und zeitnah über alle Führungsebenen kommuniziert.
- (3) Wir haben den Mut bei unverständene ((sic!)) Aussagen und Beschlüssen Nachzufragen.
- (4) Wir dulden keine unsachlichen, persönlichen Angriffe – Fehler werden analysiert und Verbesserungen gemeinsam herbeigeführt.
- (5) Wir erwarten, dass unsere Besprechungen durch persönliche Vorbereitung der Teilnehmers ((sic!))effizient sind.

*Czech text*

- (1) Chceme otevřenou, čestnou a věcnou komunikaci bez politikaření.
- (2) Naše cíle jsou jasně formulovány a aktuálně projednávány na všech řídicích úrovních.
- (3) Máme odvahu se ptát v případě nepochopení informace či rozhodnutí.
- (4) Nestrpíme žádné nevěcné a osobní útoky – chyby jsou analyzovány a na příslušném zlepšení pracujeme společně.
- (5) Očekáváme, že naše jednání budou efektivní díky osobní přípravě každého účastníka.

- (1) We want open, honourable and topical communication, and not politicking.
- (2) Our aims are clearly formulated and continually discussed on all managerial levels.
- (3) We have the courage to ask in cases when we do not understand some information or decisions.
- (4) We do not tolerate off-topic or personal attacks – mistakes are analysed and we work on the appropriate improvements together.
- (5) We expect that our discussions will be effective due to the personal preparation of each participant.

Let us observe that the style of these principles are stridently different from the ‘rule of meeting’ mentioned above. While the ‘rule of meeting’ above dictates and forbids, the ‘five principles of internal communication’ are presented as the result of the common will of all employees, either local employees or expatriates. Another matter is the question of to what degree these pre-interaction management strategies are effective. In our previous research (Nekvapil, 1997a, 1997b) it was revealed that the Czech employees were very skeptical towards formulations which could remind them of former communist propaganda – it cannot be ruled out that the effect of the ‘five principles of internal communication’ are limited by this very factor.

Principle number 3 deserves special mention, as it, unlike the other principles, clearly concerns the communicative dimension (in the sense we have described it throughout this paper). We have encountered the problem to which this pre-interaction management related in a number of companies, even in the earliest research. The Czech CEO from another Czech–German company (Company A) also talks about it.

#### *Example 7*

- 1 P: ...we are teaching our people please don't hesitate to interrupt  
 2 T: mm hmm  
 3 P: and to ask. this is any, any killing point if you:didn't  
 4 understand  
 5 T: mm hmm  
 6 P: opposite. you are shaking this he- this way ((indicates nodding))  
 7 your head  
 8 T: mm hmm  
 9 P: that you understand, your partner (does) suppose  
 10 T: mm hmm  
 11 P: that everything was clear. and afterwards you have confirmed, this-  
 12 by this body language [that] you will do that you will you will do  
 13 T: [yeah]  
 14 P: that  
 15 T: mm hmm  
 16 P: and uh I don't know a few days are gone,  
 17 T: mm hmm  
 18 P: and nothing happened [because] you didn't [understand] it  
 19 T: [ mm ] [ mm hmm ]  
 20 P: it means please this is very danger  
 21 T: mm hmm  
 22 P: you are destroying image of you, image of factory, image of even  
 23 Czech Czech people.

The pre-interaction language management process here can be reconstructed as follows. The Czech employees in Company A deviated from a communicative norm in that they nodded their heads and acted physically like they understood what was being asked of them, but in fact they did not understand (for linguistic or other reasons) (lines 6–14). This deviation was noted when some period of time went by and ‘nothing happened’

(line 18), i.e. someone (likely the CEO) noticed that these employees did not do what they were supposed to. He evaluated this negatively, because through this behaviour, in his opinion, the employees ‘are destroying image of you, image of factory, image of even Czech Czech people’ (lines 22–23). In this evaluation, the CEO projects the potential evaluations by other employees, clients and non-Czechs (presumably German expatriates).

The adjustment design used here is ultimately an act of generalised pre-interaction management stemming from individual instances of post-interaction management, as the CEO pointed out ‘we are teaching our people, please, don’t hesitate to interrupt and to ask. This is any, any killing point if you didn’t understand’ (lines 1–4). The implementation is characterised by this ‘teaching’, which presumably has become a part of the training for new employees, particularly those who are observed to have difficulties with English.

Unlike the previous example, this is a case of organised management which is not codified in official written form, but rather, it is an essential piece of know-how that top managers working in Central Europe (regardless of their ethnic identity or first language) must be able to utilise and share with one another and with employees on various other levels of supervision.

### Concluding remarks

In this paper, ‘language planning’ has been re-cast in terms of ‘LMT’. In the vein of LMT, we sought to demonstrate the interplay between the so-called micro and macro; in other words, how simple language management and organised language management are intertwined. Such a task can be accomplished via the concept of language management cycle which follows the trajectory of management acts produced by particular interlocutors in particular interactions, through social networks of various complexity (social institutions and systems as the most complex) and back to particular interlocutors and interactions.

Here we have also examined the dynamic factors that underlie language management from a different perspective. We have described the management processes that take place before and after particular interactions, in other words, pre- and post-interaction management. We have demonstrated that the interlocutors noted and evaluated linguistic, communicative and sociocultural phenomena which they encountered in previous interactions, and outside of the given interaction, but still on its basis, they even designed appropriate adjustments and sought to implement them in anticipation of problems in similar upcoming interactions. We have shown that an individual can design such pre-interaction management with respect to an upcoming *specific* interaction or with respect to a *set* of similar interactions, and particularly in the latter case it is apt to speak about pre-interaction management strategies. If such strategies are generalised among individuals sufficiently, it is likely that representatives of organised language management note these strategies, and due to their power in the company, they can spread these strategies in a ‘top-down’ manner even more or devote due attention to the problems these strategies serve to solve.

We have collected a number of pre-interaction management strategies that are used in the collaboration of the local employees and expatriates in multinationals in Central Europe. Overall, the locals employ a broader range of these strategies and they seem to use them more often than the expatriates or the representatives of the headquarters abroad. This is due to the fact that we stressed at the beginning of our paper – there is a widespread, if not explicit, then tacit, expectation that the locals should learn the language of the expatriates while the opposite does not hold. Expatriates or the representatives of the headquarters abroad more typically ‘generate’ their communicative acts without problems, while it is not infrequently that the locals ‘manage’ or ‘pre-manage’ theirs. Moreover, some of the

pre-interaction management strategies are characteristic for the locals (avoidance strategies) and some for the expatriates (foreigner talk).

The above situation holds particularly for the multinationals under study, but we should exercise caution in order to not extrapolate it excessively. As we mentioned at the start of our paper, for example, the situations in Czech-Asian multinationals – where there is no general expectation that either group will learn the other's language en masse – or in Czech-American ones, where the English language is also a marker of one group's identity and yet there is no available lingua franca – may look different and are deserving of more detailed study. Finally, it should be acknowledged that the field for this study consisted exclusively of the daughter companies/subsidiaries, thus the perspective gained from research conducted at the parent company headquarters would likely also reveal further management strategies.

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### Transcription conventions

[ ]	the onset and ending of simultaneous talk of two speakers (overlap)
?	rising intonation
.	falling intonation
,	continuing intonation
:	lengthening of the preceding syllable
=	sudden insertion of the following expression or turn, without pause (latching on)
(.)	short pause
(..)	longer pause
(...)	long pause
()	unintelligible point
(but)	presumed, but not completely intelligible expression
((laughs))	comment by the transcriber
-	sudden interruption of the word or construction
<u>never</u>	strong emphasis on a syllable or word
...	omitted portion of the transcript

### Notes

1. In the presentation of spoken data, we draw on some conventions of conversation analysis.
2. Throughout this paper, quotes from English-language interviews have not been edited.

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