

Language Biographies and Management Summaries

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Motto:

Language Management Theory has so far shown a hesitant attitude toward what I call Management Summaries, principally because they present a mixture of simple and organized management. However, these Management Summaries are facts, and it is almost certain that they play an important role in language management in general. (Neustupný 2003)

Abstract

This paper discusses some issues of the biographical method as applied to linguistic research. The biographical method is considered a sociolinguistic method which provides a means of understanding language situations. I deal with the problem of constructing individual language biographies as well as with the typical language biography of particular communities. A language biography is a biographical account in which the narrator makes the language, or rather languages, the topic of his or her narrative – in particular the issue of how the language was acquired and how it was used. The data employed in this paper are the product of the linguistic, social, and political situation that has developed on the territory of the Czech Republic in the course of the 20th century. The materials used are biographical accounts provided by people of German origin who live in the Czech Republic. I propose a tentative typical language biography of Czech Germans. Finally, I add some remarks on the status of management summaries in the language management model.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I want to show what sociolinguists can learn from the use of language biography as a method of understanding language situations. Apart from this general aim, I also want to provide a specific illustration of what this method can reveal about the language situation of Germans who stayed in the Czech Republic (or rather, in the former Czechoslovakia) after

World War II, and have continued to live on the territory since then. I shall focus on methodological questions. Moreover, on the occasion of this lecture¹ I wish to stimulate discussion of one particular issue relevant to language management theory, namely to what extent "management summaries" are useful for the language management model (An extensive introduction to language management theory can be found in Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003.).

This paper is based on biographical research that has been going on since 1995. More than 40 unstructured qualitative interviews have been recorded within its framework. One characteristic of the interviews was that the interviewees (informants) were allowed space to provide uninterrupted narratives, of which the so-called narrative interview can be considered the ideal case (Schütze 1987). The interviews were conducted with citizens of the Czech Republic who, according to our sources, were known to be ethnically German. A majority of the informants were born in the 1920s and 1930s. It follows from the nature of the biographical narrative method that the research was diachronic, in practice covering the life experience of at least three generations (i.e. the narrators themselves, their parents, children, or even grandchildren). The original aim of the research was to contribute towards an understanding of the life of the German community (cf. Stehlíková 1997), but the study of its members' language biographies became the specific goal. This research continues, and some of the results presented here should be understood as provisional.

A language biography is understood here as a biographical account in which the narrator makes a language or languages - and their acquisition and use in particular - the topic of his or her narrative (cf. Franceschini 2001a). However, a language is not merely a private matter: the individual learns it from someone, uses it with someone (inside and outside the family), and this is why the language biography of an individual naturally includes aspects of other individuals' biographies, family language biographies or, to a varying extent, aspects of language situations of a particular language community. It is this fact that makes it possible to obtain information about a wide range of language situations by analysing language biographies.

However, language biographies have not yet been used extensively for this purpose. Usually the analysis of language situations is based on demographic statistics, on various kinds of documents (literature, newspapers, administrative texts), on dialectological records, on questionnaires, and more recently on video and audio recordings of everyday conversations. Biographical interviews can contribute to the verification of findings obtained by the above methods and act as an important component of research triangulation². However, biographical interviews need not be limited to this more or less complementary role. Indeed, they are indispensable if the possibility of obtaining the relevant data by other methods is restricted - as is the case with

investigations into the language situation of Germans in Czechoslovakia after 1945. For various reasons, such research has not been successfully carried out systematically (cf. Povejšil 1997). During the first two decades after World War II, linguists worked with German informants only sporadically, and there are no reliable demographic statistics for consideration of a number of sociocultural phenomena. My position is that language biographies are particularly useful for language-historical and diachronic research.

2. Methodological problems

Language biographies are thus useful in research, but are they reliable? Does the informant not tell a different story each time? To what extent is his or her narrative stable and what factors can be monitored and controlled by the researcher during its production? I varied the time of the narration, ethnic identity of the researcher, and the research aims as communicated to the informants; subsequently I observed the influence of such variation on the informants' narratives. In research practice, this meant that several narratives were recorded with the same informant (see Nekvapil 2001a, 2001b).

As far as the time variable is concerned, the same informants were interviewed at intervals of about a year (at present, the maximum is three times). The analysis has shown that the stability of the narratives investigated is not substantially influenced by the time factor: the informants narrated basically the same stories. However, some problems have been noted. First, the narratives were collected in the period between 1995 and 1998, when Czech society already became relatively stabilised. Had the German informants narrated their biographies between 1987 and 1990, a period fractured by the "Velvet Revolution" in November 1989, their narratives might have been more likely to show a higher degree of variance. This is because biographical narratives provide the past in the light of the contemporary social situation in which the individual lives. This situation has changed considerably in the Czech Republic, or Czechoslovakia, since 1989, and so has the status of the German community. Secondly, the formulation "the informants narrated basically the same stories" allows for some difference among their narratives. How did the narratives differ and how can the differences be explained? I shall return to this question later in this paper.

As far as the variable of the researcher's ethnic identity is concerned, the same informant was interviewed sometimes by a Czech interviewer and sometimes by a German one (or vice versa) at approximately annual intervals. The influence of the researcher's ethnic identity on the informants' narratives was examined because the researcher's ethnicity is connected to the question of whether the interview is conducted by a majority member (i.e. a Czech) or someone else, in particular a member of the same ethnic group as the informants themselves (i.e. a German).³ Also, in Central Europe, ethnicity is

language-bound, and the use of Czech or German respectively as the language of the interview may be symbolic (e.g. of majority ethnicity) and may affect communication. (On the close link between the ethnic category and a particular language in Central Europe see Nekvapil (2000b) and Stevenson (2000).) My analysis has, however, shown that the factor of researcher's ethnicity and the use of the corresponding language does not exert significant influence on the stability of the narratives investigated. The informants related basically the same stories both in Czech and in German to Czech as well as to German researchers. What the expression "basically the same" in this formulation means will be discussed below.

However, what about the influence of the various formulations of my research aims provided to the informants? I investigated whether it was possible to use the narratives from a research project designed to elicit the biographies of German inhabitants *as Germans* in the investigations of language biographies. This formulation is not redundant. In the interview, even the German minority members can display identities other than German. This problem can be made the topic of the interview itself. At the beginning of one interview, a German informant asked directly if she should narrate as a German. This means that different research aims can generate different narratives based on the presentation of different identities.

Example 1 demonstrates the way the biography of informant S was elicited *as one of a German* living in the Czech Republic, examples 2 (a telephone conversation recording) and 3 (the beginning of an interview) illustrate the elicitation of *a language biography*.⁴ All three examples relate to the communication between the interviewer E and the informant S.

Example 1 (translated from Czech)

E: ((the way)) things were, just as you remember them, and nothing else.

[simply just just]

S: [and er before that] I have some concerns (.)

E: pardon?

S: before that I have some concerns. and I'll ask you a few questions.

E: O.K.

S: you are a journalist er=

E: =[I'm not I'm not]

S: =[from a magazine, sort of or] or for:: the radio something

E: no

S: or something like that, aren't you?

E: no not at all at all

S: or for some association,

E: no. not at all [nothing] of that sort.

S: [no?]

E: I'm=

T: =your hobby?

E: I a-

T: (((laughter)))

E: [nothing of that sort either.] I'm from the university, and there at the university they are organising a sociological research project,

S: hem

E: that is called Germans in Bohemia, and so it's about the life of er the German, German population, that has simply somehow here=

S: =stayed [()]

E: always [lived and] simply lives lives up to now.

S: hem

In this example, the research aim is included in formulations such as the following: "they are organising a sociological project ...", "it's about the life of the German population ...".

Example 2 (translated from Czech)

E: this time I would like to know, how you learned Czech.

S: that's very simple. I learned it on my own.

E: but I'd like you to tell me more about it.

The expression "this time" refers to the preceding conversation between E and S, i.e. the interview whose introductory sequence is included in example 1; the research aim is suggested by the formulation "I would like to know, how you learned Czech".

Example 3 (translated from Czech)

E: fine ((laughter)) I'd I'd I would like to know, eh, that when I listened to that to that recording with you, that, you know your Czech was absolutely marvellous, =

S: =well=

E: =so the question simply, simply suggests itself. like how, (.) how did it come about. (.) in your case.

The formulation "when I listened to that to that recording with you" refers to the recording of the first interview whose introductory sequence is presented in Example 1; the research aim can be seen in the following formulations: "I'd like to know ... how did it come about ... ((that is,)) your Czech being absolutely marvellous".

Was there a difference between the language biographies elicited in the first way (e.g. example 1) and in the second way (e.g. example 2, 3)? My analysis has shown that not even the varying formulation of the research aims

had significant influence on the narratives concerning the acquisition and use of languages. Nevertheless, this statement requires a comment. In the corpus of narratives elicited in the first way, there appear a few narratives in which the language problem was not mentioned at all; in some of the narratives it was discussed frequently, in others hardly at all. This is due to the fact that when the narratives were elicited in order to discover the life stories of the German inhabitants (*as Germans*), the informants themselves determined what was and what was not relevant for their story. And although the researcher was also active in the interview and the narratives developed through co-production (cf. Leudar and Antaki 1996), it was not his research intention to directly inquire about the informants' language. Nevertheless, it is exactly for this reason that the narratives demonstrated the role and importance of language in the lives of the German population (who mentioned the topic and included it in their biographies in various ways). On the other hand, the relevance of language for a *general* life story need not be evident in interviews directed at language acquisition and use.

The narratives thus seem to be relatively stable and the language biographies to a reasonable extent reliable - the recorded narratives were not substantially influenced by either the factor of time, or the ethnic identity of the researcher or the formulation of the research aims. However, as mentioned above, there were certain differences in the narratives of the same informants which could have been, to a certain extent, functions of any or all of the three factors. How can these differences be explained? Can a more profound analysis reveal one of these factors as more "powerful"? Such an explanation is hindered by a problem concerning the relationships between the factors studied. First, in principle only the factor of time can be varied independently, while the other factors can only be varied in connection with it (e.g. changes of interviewers are accompanied by changes in the time dimension). Apart from this self-evident point, the fact that the narratives were repeated three times at most (and often only twice) must be given consideration - consequently, the relationships between some of the factors were not tested.

When explaining the differences between the individual narratives of the same informant, the "effect of the same researcher" and the "effect of the same topic" should also be considered. During the repeated narrative, the informant may be governed by an approach that can be roughly formulated as "I have told you that, you must already know that". In what way can this influence the narrative? We have learnt from Kallmeyer and Schütze (1977) that the narrator, *qua* narrator, must develop certain activities constituting the narrative: s/he must conclude the narrated story, or its partial aspects; s/he must focus on the essentials and condense the story accordingly, s/he must give details to make the story plausible. Naturally, a number of "details" may be eliminated from the repeated narrative as the narrator assumes they are

already known. This can also have the reverse effect - the narrators may give further details in order not to repeat themselves. "The same researcher effect" leads to a general conclusion relating to the overall research: the number of repeated interviews shouldn't exceed a reasonable amount.

However, the question is not only when to apply the language biography method and to what extent the narratives are stable, but also what kinds of information can be obtained by the analysis of the (language) biographical narratives. Basically, three types of findings, corresponding to three approaches to the biographical narrative, can be gained from the informants' narratives (cf. Denzin 1989, Konopásek 1998), viz. information on:

- (1) what "things" were like, how events occurred (findings from the sphere of the reality of life)
- (2) how "things" and events were experienced by the informants (findings from the sphere of reality of the subject)
- (3) how "things" and events are narrated by the informants (findings from the sphere of reality of the text)⁵

Which type of information is relevant in the context of this paper? The answer appears evident: if we want to characterise the language situation of a certain community, we are particularly concerned with "the reality of life", i.e. sphere (1). This seems to correspond with the above-mentioned idea that the (language) biographical method can serve to verify the findings obtained by means of more or less traditional (socio)linguistic methods. However, recent investigation has also been directed at the way language is experienced, and the characteristics of language situations have been partly based on profound research of language attitudes. (Regarding this issue, see an older programmatic study by Trnka (1948/1983); see also Daneš (1986).) Thus, we shall also be concerned with the "reality of the subject", i.e. sphere (2). It should be added that even in this case the language biography narratives can be used as a means of triangulation.

Thus far we have only clarified which types of information will be relevant for the investigation of a language situation. However, the key question is: how can we get this information? Concentrating on the "reality of life", which is no doubt the focus of sociolinguistics, let us ask a more specific question - that of whether the analysis of the language biography narratives can possibly yield information from this sphere. The problem encountered here is a general problem of social reality representation. The question is whether there exists a direct relation between the biographical narrative and the reality that is the object of narration, and if there is none, what factors operate here.

Various approaches to the analysis of biographies have offered various solutions to the problem. If the researchers assume a naive realistic attitude towards the biographical narrative, they have no problem indeed and they can credulously accept what the informants tell them as "the reality of life". Others base their research on the assumption that the narratives do not provide information on how things and events occurred in life but on how they were experienced, and focus therefore on the study of the "reality of the subject". And still others insist that the relationship between the narrative and what is narrated is further complicated by the act of narration itself as well as by the narrative conventions as a part of culture, and focus their investigation on "the reality of the text". For example, Denzin (1989: 34) says that biographies are "formalized expressions of experience". (For a more comprehensive discussion see Denzin 1989, Konopásek 1998.)

The issue need not be solved by simply adopting some of these approaches. We can follow those sociologists who, analysing the biographical narratives, attempt to distinguish "when the bare reality manifests itself, when the subjective experience of this reality and when the biographical text itself does." (Konopásek 1998: 75). If the informant says e.g. that s/he started learning Czech in 1938, it seems acceptable as an item of information from the "reality of life" (Nekvapil 2001a); such information can be verified by means of another method, e.g. the study of written documents. Nevertheless, it is also possible to abandon the traditional methodology of social research and follow those sociologists who subscribe to the "textual turn" in social science. Their approach is based on the assumption that the "reality of life", the "reality of the subject" and the "reality of the text" cannot be separated from each other in a straightforward way, life having e.g. the attributes of the text and the text the attributes of life. We shall return to the question of the relevance of this approach for understanding language situations on the basis of language-biographical narratives in the conclusion of this paper.

3. Language biographies of Czech Germans

I use the term "Czech Germans" for stylistic reasons (as an abbreviation). The term occurred also in the narrative of one of the informants – clearly, it functions not only as a category devised by the analyst, e.g. the author of the present study, but also as an ethnocategory (cf. Stehlíková 1997). I shall now focus on the language situation of the Germans who have lived permanently in the Czech Republic (and previously in the former Czechoslovakia). According to the 2001 census, 0.4% of the permanent population (39,106 people) on the territory of the present-day Czech Republic declared their ethnicity to be German. (On the macrosociolinguistic situation of ethnic communities in the Czech Republic in more detail see Nekvapil, Neustupný 1998, Nekvapil 2000a, Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003).

We shall start by presenting the language biography of Mr. S, the same informant as in examples 1 - 3.

Example 4

Mr. S was born in 1926 in the family of a village cobbler. His father and mother were Germans. The family lived in a village in east Bohemia, near the Czech-German language boundary. German was the only language spoken in the family. The father of Mr. S could speak a little Czech, his mother none at all. The most important contacts of Mr. S with Czech during his childhood occurred on the following occasions: (1) in 1937/1938 he learned Czech at primary school for two hours a week (this lasted only one year, until the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Hitler), (2) for a short time, a Czech boy lived in the family to learn German, (3) several Czech children attended the same school as Mr. S for a longer time to learn German. Apart from Czech, Mr. S did not learn any foreign language at school. Originally, Mr. S wanted to become a farmer. However, when he was seventeen he was drafted into the German army (in 1943). As a German soldier he went to Hungary, where he learned a little Hungarian. He can still remember some Hungarian words. Immediately after the end of World War II he was sent to work in the inland by the Czech authorities. His family was deported to Germany.

Living in an exclusively Czech environment in the inland he had to learn Czech. In 1948 he met his future wife - a German, born in 1928. She did not live in a purely Czech environment after 1945, which was why she did not master Czech as well as Mr. S. Being a Czech citizen, Mr. S had to serve in the Czechoslovak army in the early 1950s (for three years, followed by three years' work in the mines); he started learning Russian there. However, he took the first steps only. During this period he constantly improved his Czech. He also devoted himself to learning written Czech systematically.

After working in the mines, he was employed (together with his wife) as a worker in a textile factory in east Bohemia until his retirement, i.e. for 34 years. They both lived in the village K. nearby. In 1958 he was nominated by the local council officials to become a representative of the German minority in the council, the reason being his strong knowledge of Czech. Mr. S accepted the offer and held the office until 1974.

Mr. and Mrs. S have always spoken German to each other, as well as to their sons. Two varieties of German, however, were used in the family. Mr. and Mrs. S spoke a dialect to each other, and standard German to their sons. The sons of Mr. and Mrs. S, Horst and Kurt, have learned standard German actively, which made it possible for them to

become representatives of foreign companies in the Czech Republic after 1989. They have a passive knowledge of the local German dialect, their parents' basic means of communication. Both of them mastered Czech perfectly. They both married Czechs. Their wives have only a passive command of German. Czech is spoken in Horst's and Kurt's families. The mother tongue of their children, i.e. the grandchildren of Mr. and Mrs. S, is Czech. German is a foreign language for them in addition to English. They learn it at school in the town where both families live. When the children visit their grandparents in the village K., Mr. and Mrs. S try to change the situation and talk to them in German - the grandchildren understand, yet reply in Czech.

Leaving the contents of the language biography of Mr. S aside for the moment, we shall ask the following question: who has created the language biography? Mr. S himself? This is a meaningful question because even Mr. S could have written about himself using the third person and example 4 could therefore be his autobiography. Note that Denzin (1989: 27) mentions this form of autobiography in American culture. The author of the language biography of Mr. S, however, is the author of this paper. Having said that, another question arises: what is the biography based on? The answer is: on three interviews conducted at intervals of roughly one year; two of them were conducted by the author of this paper, and one by a German researcher; two were aimed directly at the investigation of language biographies, and one at the investigation of biographies of German inhabitants *as Germans*. Naturally, this means that the language biography presented in example 4 is an extract that originated through a number of textual operations, such as elision, selection, generalisation, integration (van Dijk 1980). To make this clear, I shall now cite an uninterrupted narrative of Mr. S from the second interview, in which he himself presents his language biography as a whole. (Note that the beginning of example 5 has already appeared in this paper as example 3.)

Example 5 (translated from Czech)

E: fine ((laughter)) I'd I'd I would like to know, eh, that when I listened to that to that recording with you, that, you know your Czech was absolutely marvellous, =

S: =well=

E: =so the question simply, simply suggests itself. like how, (.) how did it come about. (.) in your case.=

S: =I tell everybody, eh (.) I am self-taught. (.) in Czech.

E: hmm,

S: and yet I've got no Czech schooling at all, (..) yeah [I know] how to pronounce and everything (.)

E:

[hmm]

- S: in general well,
 E: hmm,
 S: but I can't explain cases
 E: hmm, [hmm] [hmm]
 S: [like] 'cos I have no schooling. that's sim[ply that] I never learned how.
 but I know exactly how to say it but=
 E: =hmm.
 S: (.) I don't know which ((grammatical)) case exactly this one or that one is. you
 know.
 E: hmm,
 S: a great many people comes over here asking me to teach them German,
 E: hmm,=
 S: = yeah (.) and again those cases are my weak spot.
 E: hmm,= [hmm,]
 S: =yeah, [so] I simply can't, (.) say what's what and that's. (.) and how I
 taught myself. well. (.) in thirty-eight, (..) we started at school with, e:h (.) two
 classes a week of Czech. (.) the teacher himself had no Czech. right, (.) he knew (.)
 he knew only from books things like lamp pump gum tulip,=
 E: hmm,=
 S: =and there were pictures alongside, and so in this way (.) this was how we
 started. (.) then (..) in thirty- thirty-eight when (.) he occupied, (..)
 E: hmm=
 S: =Hitler, didn't he, (.) Sudetenland,
 E: hmm,
 S: so Czech was out. (.) stands to reason, (.) and until forty-five nothing. (.)
 E: [hmm hmm]
 S: [and there I] stood, (.) just (..) knew just a little bit. (.) but the rest I had to
 learn. (.) I went to the country, (.) the farmers, and in this way, (.)
 E: hmm,
 S: then I obt- got a job, (.) in forty-seven with a bloke by the name of Dejmek in
 Kamenice, (.)he was in the concentration camp, but e:h
 E: hmm,
 S: that's not to say that he e:h would [say] anything against me,
 E: [hmm,]
 S: or lemme put it like this, (.) he had (.) four kids, (.)
 E: (hmm,)=
 S: =well and they just helped me to improve (.) my Czech. I always asked, and
 was glad when they obliged me, (.) when they corrected me, (.) well and when there
 was something I didn't know I went to ask, then little by little I began to read too,
 (.)
 E: hmm, [hmm,]
 S: yeah, [some] papers some literature and so on, (.) this way I got better,
 then I had to go to the Czech army as well, (.)

- E: hmm,
S: yeah (.) there I served, (..) as (..) one of the unreliables=
E: = hmm=
S: = in the despised AATC, ((Army Auxiliary Technical Corps)) =
E: = hmm, ((laughter))=
S: = yeah, (.) began to work in mines,
E: hmm,=
S: =those in Ostrava, was in Orlová (.) [in the] Žofinka and Zápotocký collieries
(.) well and
E: [hmm,]
S: after the army (.) I signed the contract (.) just when they vetted me then
however, (.) only because I did, (.) sign for three years, (.)
E: hmm,
S: the temporary job, (.) in the mine.
E: hmm, hmm,
S: well and [then I went to]
T: [I don't know] eh-eh-eh is that our? (.) tea, but what it's goin' to do
I don't know.
E: hmm. (.) [fine] well
T: [look] at it. it don't colour much.
E: oh thanks.=
S: =there I was lucky to join a good work gang, again boys eh from around České
Budějovice, (.) from South Bohemia, (..) yeah, (.) and they (.) spelling simply I
began to write something too, (.)
E: hmm,=
S: =always gave it to them, one mate, (.) Peter (.) Pytelka by name (.)
E: hmm, [thanks] ((Thanking T, Mr. S' wife))
S: I gave to [him,] saying Peter. (.) have a look, (.) correct the mistakes
for me, will ya,
E: hmm,=
S: = well he simply done it somehow, and says, look (.) man (.) after some time
he says. (.) we've got Czech schooling, we (.) knows it too but (.) but we do make a
mistake here and there just as well=never mind the mistakes. you just go on
writing. (.) and so I began and even today I'm not a hundred per cent sure I won't
make a mistake. (.)
E: hmm, hmm=
S: =so I just got e:h even better there. (..) well and within those three years I was
there, (.)
E: [hmm]
S: [so] it went just fine, (.) and then when I finished there, I started here in
Lhotka, (.)
E: hmm,
S: me and my wife went to work=got married in the meantime, (.)

- E: hmm,
 S: and settled down in Lhotka until we retired. (.)
 E: hmm, hmm,
 S: well, that's just it (.) it's as simple as that and (.)
 E: hmm, hmm,=
 S:= yeah. fine

When comparing the contents of the examples 4 and 5 the reader should take into consideration the following facts: s/he not only lacks access to the first and third interviews, but s/he can also see - the initial sequence left aside - only the uninterrupted narrative of Mr. S from the second interview. Most notably, the extensive part comprising the interaction between the researcher and the informant following the informant's continuous narrative, the so-called follow-up inquiry, is not presented here. (The whole interview, that is, the informant's continuous narrative plus the follow-up inquiry, lasted 45 minutes and is recorded in a transcript comprising 1020 lines.). To conclude, language biographies in the form illustrated by example 4 are results of various construction activities performed by the researcher.

4. The typical language biography of Czech Germans

Let us proceed to the next methodological step: we shall move from the individual language biography to the typical biography and attempt to develop the typical language biography of Czech Germans. As is well known, such a task is accompanied by a complicated methodological problem of qualitative social research - the path from the individual cases studied towards a more general pattern of action (cf. e.g. Lamnek 1995). However, such a task is facilitated by the fact that the informants are likely to be influenced in their narratives by the narratives they have heard from different sources during their lives. It can be observed that the narratives comprise not only autobiographical features but also collective-historical features. In other words, the informants not only construct their individual life stories, or the corresponding family stories, but also the history of Germans in the Czech lands. The typification carried out by the informants can therefore serve as a resource for our construction of the typical language biography. (I have already done so in the case of the category "Czech Germans" introduced above.)

I shall now attempt to construct the typical language biography of Czech Germans. I shall present all of its individual features as a narrative product in order to highlight the fact that the language biography is based on biographical narratives. Where necessary I shall illustrate the feature in question with the informants' utterances. Many of these language-biographical features are well illustrated by the narrative of Mr. S (see example 5) as well as by his language biography presented in example 4.

It should be noted here that in the present study I am interested in language as the topic of the narrative. What is left aside is the question of whether the informants speak Czech or German well or what variety of Czech or German they use during the interview. These linguistic problems are basically beyond the scope of language biographies understood as the products of narratives (For a different approach cf. Meng 1995.). The choice of a language code may, however, be a constitutive element of a language biography, particularly when linked to the ethnic identity of the researcher (cf. above).

Note also that the biography is typical of the cohort of Czech Germans born in the 1920s and 1930s (see the selection of informants above).

Now let us turn to the individual features of the typical biography:

A. The informants narrate that (and how) they encountered a language other than German in the pre-war or war period (Czech before World War II, English in the course of it).

Example 6 (translated from Czech)

E: and when did you learn English.

P: e:r during the war. I'm an old man. So during the war I [learnt.]

E: [but where?] where?

P: where? (.) in- in Krumlov and in Germany. (well) in German schools English was compulsory.

E: hem, hem,

P: 'cause the fuehrer ts guessed that when (.) he conquered the world then then er (.) er simply (.)[(he'd get) to]

Q: [he'd also conquer America]

P: the colonies, and they spoke English there.

Q: that he'd also conquer America. [((laughter))]

P: [conquer also America, yeah]

Q and P: ((laughter)) (((laughter)))

E: [um um] and you- how long did you learn English.=

P: =((deep out-breath)) I don't know about two three years.

B. The informants narrate that (and how) they knew no or hardly any Czech after World War II.

In order to further develop this point, they refer to the fact that they did not even know that there existed a Czech language or, in fact, any other ethnic group but the Germans. Cf. the following excerpt:

Example 7 (translated from German)

M: ... yeah? (.) so if I speak German I never say the towns ((in-breath)) towns in German. yeah? that's a sort of habit, (.)

X: (um sure)

M: yeah? that's a sort of habit, because we were born there and grew up and

Y: ([])

M: [before we didn't] know it, yeah? after all we didn't know a word in Czech. ((in-breath)) at home I didn't even know there existed some other nation or something like that. [yeah,] before the Americans came

X: [um]

M: (they freed us at) our place, were the Americans.

C. The informants narrate that (and how) it was difficult for them to use German in a public place or that they couldn't use it publicly at all after World War II.

Example 8 (translated from German)

A: ... and we stayed there, one day I had, (.) er to write as punishment, a hundred times I will not speak Czech at school. (.)

B: () ((something in the sense of: 'Czech?'))

A: not speak German.

B: I see

A: I will not speak German. ...

D. The informants narrate that (and how) they were suddenly forced (directly or indirectly) to learn Czech after World War II. They explain the successful acquisition of Czech by having been exposed to the Czech social environment (when working in the inland, in the sphere of public service, in the Czech army).

The indirect pressure is illustrated by the following sequence:

Example 9 (translated from Czech)

Mrs. H. says: ... nobody forced us to speak Czech at all.

Mr. H. continues: but nobody understood us.

E. The informants narrate that (and how) they married German or German-speaking partners and have spoken German, namely a dialect, to each other at home up to the present. (Nevertheless, it should be noted that mixed Czech-German marriages also occurred. This requires further research; cf. also below.)

F. The informants narrate that (and how) they spoke German to their children at home, i.e. a dialect or standard German.⁶

G. The informants narrate that (and how) their access to education was restricted substantially after World War II.

H. The informants narrate that (and how) their children began speaking Czech after they started attending school.

I. The informants narrate that (and how) their children married Czech partners. The informants' children then spoke Czech in their families.

J. The informants narrate that (and how) their grandchildren did not learn German as their mother tongue and that they learned it basically as a foreign language at school.

Obviously, the above features represent aspects of the language situation in Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic) after World War II in a dynamic way. Of course, there is variation. Using sociolinguistic terminology, the following variables are particularly prominent: language variety, generation identity and communicative domain. The important point is that the reconstruction of the language situation is made possible primarily by language biographies and the biographical method in general. In this respect, the (language) biographical method can be considered a sociolinguistic method.

An interesting question is how to explain the fact that *a single* typical language biography can be devised. Why should there be only one typical biography of Czech Germans? In my opinion, the explanation is that the lives of Czech Germans were influenced by certain social factors that affected large numbers of individuals, i.e.:

1. They are Germans who stayed in the Czech territory after World War II.
2. They are relatively old people, born in the late 1920s or early 1930s.
3. They were of the same social status for several decades after World War II. They were, to quote one of the informants, "poor men". From the political point of view, these people came predominantly from anti-fascist, social-democratic or even communist families.

It must also be admitted that a certain biographical homogeneity was incorporated directly into the construction of the research project as the potential informants were chosen particularly on the basis of points 1 and 2 above. Moreover, the typical language biography given is dependent on the construction of research in another significant way: the narrators were primarily chosen using the so-called snow-ball technique, i.e. one German informant referred the researcher to the next potential German informant. Thanks to this, my research could focus on those who displayed the categorical features of the ethnocategory "a German" best, i.e. among others, the feature that "Germans speak German" (cf. Nekvapil 2000b). Such issues as mixed marriages and the language strategies employed in them were thus marginalized.

I'd like to mention another self-evident fact here: the attempt to devise the typical language biography implies the diversity and uniqueness of individual language biographies. Otherwise, why should the analysts seek typicality? Naturally, this means that general as well as specific features can be investigated in language biographies. One of the specific features has already been mentioned above: Mr. S learned a little Hungarian while serving in the army in Hungary (cf. example 4).

5. Language biographies as management summaries

Language biographies are by definition instances of language management: the narrator makes a language, or languages – and their acquisition and use in particular – the topic of his or her narrative. In other words, the narrator can relate only what he or she noted, possibly also evaluated, often talks about his or her plans concerning language learning, including their successful implementation or failure to materialize them, etc. (On the stages of the language management process see, e.g., Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003.).

Narrating one's life requires, among other things, summarizing a lot. In language biographies, management summaries are therefore almost certain to be found. Mr. S's self-categorization "I am self-taught in Czech" (see example 5) may be based on thousands of tokens of simple management, which he as a matter of course did not mention in his story.

Methodologically, an important question seems to be to what extent such management summaries cover what happened in actual discourse (cf. Neustupný 2003: 280, 281). Here, I would like to make two points. The first one is that this question cannot be answered in general as, to say the least, there may exist various types of summaries. The second point is that if we even came to conclusion that management summaries substantially distort discourse-based management, they would still be worth studying carefully.

Let us demonstrate these points on the following extract, which comes from the narrative of Mr. P, the former chairman of the Assembly of Germans in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia.

Example 10 (translated from German)

1. P: and so then we brought the Association of Germans, (.) in Czechoslovakia
2. into existence, (.) after extensive TV appeal, (..) it appeared many of them
3. registered, (..) and it was interesting that (..) er that er er they had raised their
4. voices from regions where Germans had never lived in the past,
5. E₂: hm hm
6. P: so this was the inner expulsion its confirmation, and in fact more than 80%
7. (..) of the letters were written in Czech. (..) it means they had registered they
8. had declared themselves Germans somehow mentally, but they could no
9. longer (write,)
10. E₂: hm
11. P: because because ((cough)) no wonder, er when a German family came into
12. a village, (.) where only Czech ones lived, (.) and and er
13. E₂: hm
14. P: (..) always one showed (it) showed them when while you speak German,
15. you will have difficulties, then parents (..) themselves didn't want their
16. children to continue, and the children themselves didn't want to either. (..) as
17. for example I had a wife, she (.) spoke German also, (.) she was from a mixed
18. marriage, from the very beginning we spoke German with our children. (.)
19. well right it worked till a certain point, (.) er until they went to school. (.) and
20. then the children came home and said we don't want to speak German any
21. longer, (.) because they keep telling us we are fascists. (.) (right,) (.) (in) in the
22. books it was () simply so, Germans and so on they were fascists.

(narration focus: first the 1990's, then approximately the 1950's or 1960's; from Nekvapil 2000b)

As we can see, Mr. P describes the language management of several actors:

- i. LM of the individual members of the German community (*more than 80% (.) of the letters were written in Czech* - lines 6,7)
- ii. LM of the German families (*then parents (..) themselves didn't want their children to continue, and the children themselves didn't want to either.* - lines 15, 16)
- iii. LM of the Czechs (*always one showed (it) showed them when while you speak German, you will have difficulties,* - lines 14, 15).
- iv. LM of his own family (*from the very beginning we spoke German with our children.* - line 18)
- v. LM of his children (*and then the children came home and said we don't want to speak German any longer,* - lines 20, 21)
- vi. LM or sociocultural management of the state (*in the books it was () simply so, Germans and so on they were fascists.* - lines 21, 22)

Now let us sort out these descriptions or formulations according to the type of LM involved, using classificatory labels based on two relevant dimensions: 'simple - organized' and 'individual token - summary'.

Descriptions of individual tokens of simple management:

more than 80% (.) of the letters were written in Czech (lines 6,7)

and then the children came home and said we don't want to speak German any longer, (lines 20, 21) (this formulation might be also an instance of a simple management summary)

Descriptions of individual tokens of organized management:

In extract (10) there are none (a hypothetical description might be, e.g., *then the government issued an Anti-German law, I think it was in 1946*)

Formulations of simple management summaries:

always one showed (it) showed them when while you speak German, you will have difficulties, (lines 14, 15)

then parents (..) themselves didn't want their children to continue, and the children themselves didn't want to either. (lines 15, 16)

from the very beginning we spoke German with our children. (line 18)

Formulations of organized management summaries:

in the books it was () simply so, Germans and so on they were fascists. (lines 21, 22)

Note that language biographies display not only management summaries but also descriptions of individual tokens of simple management (also descriptions of individual tokens of organized management are not unusual as is obvious from other data).

Regarding management summaries, it is clear that there are several types and that these deserve careful study. Here I mention only one of them – extreme case formulations (see *always one showed (it) showed them when while you speak German, you will have difficulties* - lines 14, 15). To be sure, such formulations do not depict what happened in each situation, rather they work as a particular rhetorical device (see Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998: 299f.). The point is, however, that even such 'untrue' formulations may be socially relevant. Note that Mr. P is politician and he himself participated in the establishment of a German high school in Prague. His descriptions of the history of the language management of the German community have become part of the argumentation leading to changes in the current language management of this community. It follows that management summaries are essential parts of language situations and as such important research objects.

6. Concluding remarks

This paper dealt with language biographies as the results of various construction activities. We have seen the way the informants produce their language biographies as well as the fact that this happens in a research situation, i.e. basically in co-production with a researcher. However, we have also seen the way the researchers devise their informants' language biographies as a result of their research. In doing so, both the informants and the researchers follow a set of rules constituting the narrative genre of language biography. The analysis of this set (or sets) of rules began only recently. However, it is now evident that there exist certain typical modes of presentation ("patterns of language-biography narrative") that the speakers employ when talking about language acquisition and use - let us cite at least one relatively familiar mode of presentation relevant to

sociolinguistic methodology: the narrative regarding a language tends to be closely linked to the description of the actions and attributes of the speakers of the language - it follows that the attitude towards a language can represent, to a large extent, the attitude towards the speakers of the language (cf. Franceschini 2001b, Fünfschilling 1998).

I suggest these patterns of language-biography narrative should be included in the description of language situations. I propose three diverse arguments to support this view:

1. the way e.g. German, Czech or Japanese informants speak about language acquisition and use is interesting in itself;
2. we often approach the "reality of life or the subject", in our case the aspects of the language situation, through the "reality of the text" (cf. the above mentioned investigation of language attitudes); and sometimes we have no other possibility (cf. the language situation of the Germans after World War II alone);
3. the textual representation of the "reality of life" itself is the "reality of life" (cf. the social function of language management summaries).

Transcription conventions

?	rising intonation
.	falling intonation
,	continuing intonation
:	lengthening of the previous syllable
(.)	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
<u>out</u>	underlining indicates emphasis
[]	the onset and the ending of simultaneous talk of two speakers (overlap)
=	subsequent utterance follows without an audible pause (latching on)
X	speaker who could not be identified
...	the utterance continues but this part is omitted in the presented extract from the transcript

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Notes

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² In qualitative social research, the term triangulation is often used to indicate "a combination of several methodologies aimed at studying the same phenomenon" (Lamnek 1995: 402). The use of biographical methods for testing hypotheses is dealt with in the introduction to "biographical perspectives" by Miller (2000).

³ The researchers taking part in our research were German citizens. However, it would also be possible for the interviews to be conducted by a member of the German minority investigated, or even by someone else, e.g. a British researcher. These two possibilities have not been exploited in the research so far.

⁴ See the transcription conventions at the end of the article. The recorded interviews were transcribed according to the conventions developed in conversation analysis (see, e.g., Psathas 1995) and then translated from Czech, or German, into English. The English translations strive to preserve, to a maximum degree possible, the specific features of the original recordings and the original transcripts. The spoken character and the spontaneity of origin of the analysed data are responsible for the appearance in the presented samples of a number of features which - from the point of view of the traditional norms - are ungrammatical, or substandard (especially in syntax).

⁵ For a concise formulation cf. Denzin (1989: 30): "life as lived, life as experienced, life as told". Miller (2000) makes a clear distinction between levels (1) and (3) only.

⁶ They chose the standard language as there were no German schools in Czechoslovakia after 1945 - standard German as a high cultural value could have been passed on to the next generation of Czech Germans only in the family. Naturally, what is understood as a standard language by the informant need not be identical with the linguist's concept of standard language. The important point is that the informants themselves focused on the distinction between standard German and a dialect, making this distinction the starting point of their family language management (cf. Nekvapil 2001a).

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