

# Between Implementing and Creating: Mothers of Children with Plurilingual Family Background and the Czech Republic's Language Acquisition Policy



Helena Özörencik and Magdalena Antonia Hromadová

**Abstract** The paper examines the language acquisition management cycle perpetuated by the state language acquisition policy in the Czech Republic and how it is dealt with in thematically oriented biographical interviews conducted with Czech mothers rearing children in families where multiple languages are used and transmitted. It analyses the discursive resources and narrative strategies used to construct biographical accounts in order to investigate the emic perspective on the micro-macro interplay of the language acquisition management cycle. Although the analysed narratives deal with experiences involving children with plurilingual family backgrounds, they seem to reproduce the discursive resources underpinned by the monolingual self-perception of Czech society. The analysis suggests that this is a result of comprehensive sense-making processes. On the one hand, mothers construct accounts of some of their activities in terms of the adjustment designs formulated on the macro level. On the other hand, some of them challenge the role of mere “implementers”, assigned to them within the language acquisition management cycle, through their narratives.

**Keywords** Czech Republic · Language acquisition management · Monolingualism · Narrative strategies · Parents' language acquisition policies · Plurilingualism

## 1 Introduction

The linguistic landscape of the territory of the present-day Czech Republic has for centuries been characterized by the coexistence of individuals and communities with different linguistic backgrounds (Neustupný & Nekvapil, 2003). In addition,

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H. Özörencik (✉)  
The Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic  
e-mail: [ozorencik@ujc.cas.cz](mailto:ozorencik@ujc.cas.cz)

M. A. Hromadová  
Charles University of Prague, Prague, Czech Republic

the Czech Republic has become a target country for migration in the last twenty years (Drbohlav, 2011).

Plurilingualism has existed in Czech society continuously, but the dominant language ideology has been based on the community's self-perception as linguistically homogenous ("in the Czech Republic, Czech is spoken") and monolingual ("Czechs speak Czech") (Sloboda, 2010). As a result, society at large may regard the presence of individuals speaking other languages, especially in the context of recent migration, as temporary and therefore unrelated to its self-image. However, there is also a growing number of native speakers of Czech "speaking not only Czech" on account of having been brought up by one Czech parent and the parent's partner from a different linguistic background.<sup>1</sup> The existence of children growing up in such plurilingual family settings is a challenge to the society's self-perception in various respects. The children have been born into Czech society, but have trouble finding their place in it: ideologically and, sometimes, practically.

The command of language(s) makes up a great deal of the social capital of individuals. Individual language repertoires, therefore, become a relevant part of the agenda of many social actors (cf. Cooper, 1989). Seeking to influence language acquisition by the population, these actors design language acquisition policies (LAPs), that is "ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change" (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. xi). The Czech Republic is a country where the state LAP, guided by the requirement that each EU-citizen should be able to use "two foreign languages" besides their "mother tongue", strives to equip individuals with some sort of plurilingual competence (Národní plán výuky cizích jazyků). However, as we will argue, even this plurilingualism-promoting LAP grows out of language attitudes that are firmly grounded in the worldview that is based on monolingualism and in which the ethnical or political categories are interchangeable with the linguistic ones. As a result, the education system treats all Czech citizens as monolingual mother tongue speakers of Czech and as foreign language learners, as far as other languages are concerned.

The dominant language ideology and state LAP are, however, only one part of the Czech sociolinguistic landscape. Language acquisition<sup>2</sup> is inseparably linked to everyday interactions and involves, at different stages, individuals acting according to their dispositions, needs and aims. Indeed, the Czech state LAP gives individuals room to do what they think is best for them. For instance, parents are entitled to take

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<sup>1</sup>Statistics show that there is a relatively constant number of intermarriages between Czech and foreign citizens over the last five years (Český statistický úřad [Czech Statistical Office], 2015). Unfortunately, there are no statistics available concerning the mother tongue or languages of children enrolled in Czech schools. The only statistics available concern their citizenship in terms of being a Czech citizen or not (see Český statistický úřad [Czech Statistical Office], 2015). As children in plurilingual families where at least one parent is Czech usually hold the Czech citizenship, there is no data available as to how many of these children actually attend Czech schools.

<sup>2</sup>Language acquisition here means all the processes through which individuals become familiar with a language and develop their skills in it. The term "language acquisition" is used interchangeably with the term "language learning" and covers both conscious and unconscious processes.

decisions related to their children's schooling while educational institutions are supposed to provide the advice needed for such decisions (cf. Act no. 561/2004;<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2001). The room for their individual input currently seems very limited, suggesting that there is a tendency to expect parents to conform to the general educational tools and aims. But there is still a certain chance for parents to find a place for their children within the LAP or even create one, where none has been provided by the LAP designers. That means that those who are ascribed the role of "policy implementers" by the LAP, i.e., the parents, have the potential to become its "interpreters, appropriators and creators" (Johnson, 2013, p. 2) and maybe even contribute to the bottom-up revision of both the LAP and its ideological groundings.

To understand how the state LAP, an abstract phenomenon, actually impacts the reality of language acquisition, the actorship of individuals needs to be considered in a way that provides sufficient room for them to express their views. Our paper focuses on this very task.

## 2 Theoretical Considerations: The Micro-Macro Interplay as an Everyday Task

In this paper, we will concentrate on the interface of social processes that "move and develop on a continuum of layered scales, with the strictly local (micro) and the global (macro) as extremes" (Blommaert, 2007, p. 1). In the language policy and planning (LPP) literature, there seems to be a gradually growing interest in the different scales of social processes (cf. Johnson & Ricento, 2013). This is also reflected in a variety of systems developed to explore "the relationships between the macro and micro dimensions of language use" (Hult, 2010, p. 7) within the wider social, economic, cultural and historical context, in order to capture the "local, situated, contextual and contingent ways of understanding languages and language policies" (Pennycook, 2006, p. 64).

The approach we find useful in this respect is actually an older analytical framework, Language Management Theory (LMT). It originated in the work of scholars arguing in favour of distinguishing between essentially value-free LPP scholarship on the one hand, and language planning as a political enterprise linked to the modernization of developing countries after the end of colonialism, on the other (Nekvapil, 2012, p. 5; cf. Johnson & Ricento, 2013, pp. 8–9).

Formulated extensively in the late 1980s (cf. Jernudd & Neustupný, 1987) LMT is based on the observation that language users commonly and habitually use language to behave towards language(s) (Neustupný & Nekvapil, 2003; cf. Jakobson,

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<sup>3</sup> Česká republika [Czech Republic]. (2013, November 10). *Zákon č. 561/2004 o předškolním, základním, středním, vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělávání (školský zákon), ve znění pozdějších předpisů* [Act no. 561/2004 about preschool, primary, high school, colleges and other education (school law), in the wording of subsequent amendments]. <http://www.msmt.cz/file/19743>. Accessed 15 January 2015. Further: Act no. 561/2004

1999). Instances of such metalinguistic behaviour in everyday interactions are referred to as simple language management. In simple language management, only the features relevant for the ongoing interaction are typically approached directly (“noted” in the LMT terminology). However, in evaluations and potential adjustment designs applied to the noted elements, phenomena of higher complexity, such as language ideologies (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2013), are (often only implicitly) at play.

By contrast, a language policy, including a language acquisition policy (LAP), is an “explicit ‘adjustment design’ [...] that a group of social actors has arrived at and has agreed on in the course of organized language management” (Sloboda, Szabó-Gilinger, Vigers, & Šimičić, 2010, p. 96). Organized language management here means metalinguistic activities that are essentially trans-interactional: they are not concerned with unique interactions but with language as a system or communicative tool and they do not involve interacting individuals but social networks, typically institutions in positions of power (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2015, p. 7).

Returning back to the issue of relating the different dimensions of language use to each other, the LMT perspective considers the main exploration challenge to consist in addressing the interplay (Nekvapil & Sherman, 2015) between complex organized management efforts and the relevant simple language management. In this respect, one of the theoretical conceptualizations available is the language management cycle (Nekvapil, 2009; cf. Canagarajah, 2006). This concept reflects the fact that not all the problems encountered on the micro level of everyday interactions are or can be resolved in their immediate context but initiate a language management (LM) process in which the macro level is involved as well: The problems are addressed on the macro level, where the relevant metadiscourse can be used or produced at an opportune moment. The outcome of such an endeavour is usually meant to be implemented on the micro level again, in subsequent everyday interaction, where the LM process is terminated and the LM cycle including the micro-macro-micro dynamic concluded. The concept of the LM cycle fits both individual situations delineated in terms of time and space (such as consulting a normative dictionary when writing an official letter) as well as processes of higher complexity,<sup>4</sup> such as the implementation of the state LAP.

In the context of the Czech Republic the adjustment designs are formulated in different documents on the macro level of the LM cycle perpetuated by the state LAP. These documents are then usually not labelled as language policy documents, but as educational policy documents.<sup>5</sup> Among others, they aim to change the original

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<sup>4</sup>Complexity here means that the different phases of the language management process are split between different actors who conduct their activities in different spatial and temporal contexts.

<sup>5</sup>Some more general documents, such as the National Plan for Foreign Language Education (Národní plán výuky cizích jazyků [National Programme for Teaching Foreign Languages], n.d.) or the White Paper issued by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (2001), define the general objectives of public education, including, to some extent, with regard to language acquisition. The details of what is to be taught at schools, however, are provided for elsewhere, especially in the binding Framework Education Programme for Elementary Education issued by one of the Ministry’s departments (Odbor, 2013).

monolingualism among pupils into a specific form of controlled, strictly defined, subsequent plurilingualism<sup>6</sup> (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2001, pp. 41–42). Presumably, this adjustment design is based on seeing plurilingualism as beneficial in practice (Odbor, 2013, p. 18). The development of competence in the Czech language is addressed as an essentially monolingual topic (cf. Odbor, 2013). The command of Czech is related not to linguistic but rather to sociocultural objectives that are ideologically grounded in the concept of the nation as a historically formed community of individuals sharing the same monolingual background.<sup>7</sup>

Conforming to the LM cycle concept, these adjustment designs are meant to be implemented on the micro level. The documents that can be interpreted as formulations of LAP not only spell out the adjustment designs but also prescribe (often in a legally enforceable way) the implementation of the adjustment designs during the in-class interaction of pupils and individual educators (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2001).

This suggests that actors of different natures are involved on the different levels of the LM cycle that the state LAP perpetuates. On the macro level, these are state institutions, whereas on the micro level the adjustment designs are carried out by individual educators. However, as suggested above, in the Czech context, an important role in the LAP implementation is passed on to the parents who are legally entitled to make the decisions related to their children's schooling (see Act no. 561/2004; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2001). Although they are not directly involved in designing the LAP or in the interactions relevant for language acquisition, it is their decisions and behaviour that perpetuate the interplay of the different levels of the language management cycle. Parents for instance choose the institution where their child is going to be educated (cf. Act no. 561/2004) or the different foreign languages their child is supposed to acquire (cf. Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, 2001, p. 39). In other words, they decide between the alternative adjustment designs and the forms of their implementation. Obviously, parents can also extend the range of adjustment designs related to their children's

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<sup>6</sup>Accordingly, the learning contents that are (potentially) relevant for language acquisition are split into two different domains in the Framework Education Programme (Odbor, 2013): foreign language teaching and mother tongue education. The two domains, in turn, provide the basis for delineating subjects taught during compulsory education (foreign language and second foreign language, on the one hand, and Czech language and literature, on the other). The objectives of foreign language education are linked to language skills as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (*ibid.*, p. 18). Both foreign languages are taught from a complete beginner level with the aim of reaching A2 and A1 levels, respectively.

<sup>7</sup>In terms of mother tongue education, pupils are expected to develop not only basic skills in language education as such, but also skills needed to understand other educational domains (Odbor, 2013, p. 17). The Czech language is not only the language of instruction throughout the curriculum, it is also taken for granted as pupils' mother tongue and attributed corresponding weight as an overall tool with respect to cognition and individual development as well as social cohesion. Pupils leaving public schools should, apart from possessing certain other skills, "acknowledge the [Czech] language as a means through which the nation has evolved historically and culturally, and therefore as an important force unifying national society" (*ibid.*, p. 18 – our English rendition).

language acquisition by enrolling them in private language schools, heritage language lessons etc.

The parents' role is not further elaborated on in the LAP documents and it is certainly limited by factors such as the legal framework,<sup>8</sup> parents' cultural, social and economic capital, linguistic attitudes and ideologies or their own and their children's physical and psychological conditions. However, at the same time it gives parents an opportunity to take action, for instance, when their children do not share the linguistic background that is supposed to be the starting point of language acquisition and the key to skills and knowledge from other subject areas within the educational system.

Returning to the issue of relating the different dimensions of social processes, our brief summary of the LM cycle perpetuated by the state LAP suggests that, in the context we address in our paper, the relation between different scales of social processes is not just a theoretical concept. It is rather something individuals accomplish in their everyday tasks. As such, the macro-micro interplay within the LA management cycle can be studied from the emic perspective, as part of individuals' life experience with language and society. We believe that further exploration in this direction can contribute not only to understanding the particular instances but also to theoretically conceptualizing the micro-macro interplay that appears to be crucial for LPP scholarship.

### 3 Methodology and Research Question

For the reasons discussed above, research into the interplay between different levels of the LM cycle involves acknowledging the crucial role of the family in implementing the state LAP. Studying metalinguistic processes in families has proven relevant for experts from different fields of linguistics. Two main focus areas can be distinguished in this strand of research: interactions within families with regards to their metalinguistic aspects, and metalinguistic behaviour of families outside concrete interactions (cf. Sherman, Hromadová, Özörencik, & Zaepernicková, 2016). In the second focus area, family language policy (FLP) research has evolved as a subfield of language policy studies (cf. Schwartz, 2010). We wish to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in this subfield by examining the question of how families interact with LAPs in terms of their own attitudes and actions towards language. A range of methods are used in FLP research, with different types of qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews dominating (*ibid.*, p. 185). Data collected in this manner have proven useful for exploring some aspects related to the role of the family in language maintenance, transmission and acquisition, especially in plurilingual settings (see e.g., Curdt-Christiansen, 2013; Schwartz & Verschik, 2013).

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<sup>8</sup>For instance by the fact that school attendance in the first nine years is compulsory in the Czech Republic.

As in other fields of the social sciences, the problem inherent to the interview method consist in capturing the authentic views of the individual respondent rather than the views imposed by the research situation (cf. Ten Have, 2004; for interviews in the FLP context see Schwartz, 2010). We believe that biographical sociology (Schütze, 1983, 1984, 1999, 2007) provides a suitable option in this respect. This method is based on the premise that, in their everyday lives, individuals perform biographical work, i.e., recount and structure their life experiences (Schütze, 1984, p. 78) to make sense of them. The exploratory approach offered by biographical sociology focuses on collecting and analysing biographical accounts to identify the internal organizing and sense-making principles of individual biographies.

An individual's biographical work consists "of narrative recollection; reflection of symbolic, 'deeper' meanings revealing self historical *gestalts* of life; an analytical comparison of alternative understandings; imagining a personal future that harmoniously or contrastively fits to one's personal past; reflective decision making and evaluating the probable outcomes" (Schütze, 2007, pp. 6–7). By examining the structures and cognitive figures that individuals build on, it is possible to identify the recurring and socially relevant types of such structures and figures (*ibid.*). However, the structures and cognitive figures are not identified by an analysis of the mere content of accounts. The analytical focus rather lies on the narrative strategies which individuals employ to construct their accounts.<sup>9</sup> The biographical method is based on the assumption that, in their biographical accounts, individuals develop narrative strategies that represent, reflect and explicate the development of their authentic biographical identity and the social process of its construction (Schütze, 1983, p. 286).

The accounts, which can be analysed using the tools of biographical sociology, are sometimes available in the form of personal notes or even as published biographies. However, they can also be elicited by employing a method called biographical narrative interview (cf. Schütze, 2007). At the outset of each interview (or during the preliminary talks), the thematic focus is broadly set to the life experience of the interviewee. The interviewer should act as an "understanding listener", i.e., only interrupt the interviewee when clarification is required (Schütze, 2007, p. 5). This maxim is motivated by the assumption that any intervention may influence the biographical relevance system of the interviewee.

However, as any interaction between humans, a biographical narrative interview involves individuals with certain attitudes to as well as expectations and perceptions

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<sup>9</sup>In biographical accounts, an individual's life may be depicted in three manners: life as lived, life as experienced, life as told (Sloboda, 2011, p. 285). Analogically, by analysing biographies, we may find out how things were, how individuals experienced them and how they integrate them into their accountable, retrospective versions of their own lives (*ibid.*). While there may be doubts about the factuality, i.e. about how things were in reality, of any biographical account, the tools the individuals use to make their biography tellable and accountable, i.e. the narrative strategies and discursive practices, provide sound analytical material. Moreover, these practices and strategies offer insights into the cognitive structures of the biographer, i.e. into how the person in question has experienced his or her life, and how that life is being communicated to the interviewer.

of interactional norms. It is difficult to assume that these would be completely set aside just because an interaction takes place beyond the everyday context. When someone who is aware of being known to the researcher as a client of a requalification centre (cf. Schütze, 2007) is approached to take part in an interview, it is possible that he or she will orient his or her behaviour in the interaction to this piece of knowledge and e.g., accordingly adjust his or her understanding of the maxim of relevance (Grice, 1975). This might result in the interviewee making an effort to meet the expectations of the researcher by mentioning details from previous failed careers. The thematic and narrative structure of the interaction is thus shaped by the cooperation between the two actors involved, even where the interviewer does not interrupt the respondent.

Therefore, it seems more realistic to apply the concept of the thematically oriented biographical interviews (Hájek, Havlík, & Nekvapil, 2014). This type of interview explicitly acknowledges that in biographical interviews, even “without any overt pressure, the interviewer is searching for an intersection between their own relevance system and the [...] relevance system of the interviewee, so as to capture the respondent’s own (emic) perspective as much as possible. In this regard, the respondent’s biography is merely a means of obtaining a unique and authentic account; the biography itself is not of special significance to the researcher [...]” (ibid., p. 52). The tools used to find such an intersection can be tracked when the interview is approached as an interactional event.

The biographical method has successfully been used in a variety of fields, including in linguistic research (e.g., Nekvapil, 2003; Franceschini, 2003). This suggests that the biographical method may help us overcome some specific challenges faced by interview-based research on linguistic and metalinguistic topics, particularly the problem that only certain types of respondents’ metalinguistic knowledge are accessible in a research situation. The respondents might, naturally, not be willing to share or able to recall all details of their lives. Moreover, some facts and ideas that may be very relevant for the research question may not be perceived as such (and therefore not brought up) by the respondents, as their relevance systems do not relate them to the topics investigated.

For instance, Franceschini (2003) developed the concept of “unfocused language acquisition” to label situations when a language is acquired without the awareness of the individual. Specifically, Franceschini analysed a biographical account of a respondent, a young female Turkish immigrant in Germany. The use of German in interactions reported by the respondent was not consistent with the time she reported as the start of her “learning the language”. The analysis revealed that the respondent provided accounts of her speaking German before actually reflecting on “learning” it. Franceschini’s respondent related “learning” to an active involvement of her as a learner and believed that language competence could only result from “learning” so understood. The period before she started “learning” the language was therefore invisible to her as far as her competence in German was concerned and would probably have remained invisible even for the researcher had the biographical approach not been used.



Having studied Czech Germans' biographical accounts, Nekvapil (2003) considered the applicability of the biographical method in sociolinguistic research. He concluded that individual autobiographies also include certain "patterns of language-biography narrative" (Nekvapil, 2003, p. 80). Such patterns relate the individual accounts to the intersubjective vision of the language situation in the community in question. Nekvapil assumes that "language autobiographies naturally include aspects of other persons' biographies, family language biographies or, to a varying extent, aspects of language situations of a particular language community" (*ibid.*, p. 64).

This finding is of particular importance to us, as we are interested in the interplay of the micro and macro levels of metalinguistic processes. The conceptual and linguistic resources used by respondents to formulate facts and ideas related to language can, to a certain degree, have their origin in macro-level discourses and be conveniently made to fit the communication frame of the research. When this is done in the context of a personal biography, the macro discourses may become part of the biographical work, i.e., as discursive resources that are accounted for as commonly known and acceptable. However, a biography is based on depicting the individual everyday experience. Organizing these perspectives into an accountable narrative might require specific narrative strategies in which the micro-macro dynamics is actually re-presented. Therefore, an analysis of discursive resources and narrative strategies can provide an important insight into the topic of micro-macro interplay.

As suggested above, we hope to make use of these advantages of the biographical method to reveal the emic perspective on the micro-macro interplay of the LA management cycle perpetuated by the state LAP in the case of pupils with plurilingual family background. We wish to reconstruct this perspective by addressing the research question which discursive resources our respondents employ and how they organize them in narrative strategies to construct biographical accounts of different encounters with the state LAP.

## 4 Data

The analysed data were gathered within a qualitative exploratory study on intergenerational language transmission in plurilingual families living in Prague, established as a result of recent migration processes (Uherek, 2008). The analysis is based on interviews conducted with the mothers.<sup>10</sup> All mothers were born and grew up in the Czech Republic in monolingual, Czech speaking families. Fathers had various linguistic backgrounds and they came to the Czech Republic as adults or young adults.

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<sup>10</sup>All mothers took part in an initial thematically oriented biographical interview and with the majority of them a follow-up interview was realised as well. In the follow-up interview the interviewers posed questions in order to clarify and/or exemplify accounts from the first interview. However, even the follow-up interviews are of narrative nature and contain a great amount of accounts from the respondents' biographies.

The following table shows the sex (m – male, f – female) and age (in years) of the children at the time of the first interview and the language used in the family besides Czech as reported by the mothers:

	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3	Languages used in the family besides Czech
Mrs B	f-17	m-15	m-11	Serbian
Mrs F	m-7	m-5		French, English
Mrs L	f-7			Slovak, Spanish
Mrs O	m-11	f-9		English
Mrs P	m-10	m-9		English, Spanish
Mrs R	f-10	m-7		English
Mrs T	m-10	m-0		English
Mrs U	m-7	m-5		Turkish, English
Mrs Y	m-11	f-7		Greek, English

The mothers had been recruited through acquaintances, the interviewers' existing social networks (church, educational institutions etc.), the friend-of-a-friend method or via random recruiting. The individual interviews were conducted by female interviewers with a plurilingual family background (mostly by one of the two authors of this paper). The interviews focused on the general family biography but the respondents were informed that the interviewers professionally specialize on topics related to languages. The interviewees themselves very often oriented to this perspective in the interview. The interviews with the mothers were all held in Czech, excerpts presented in this paper are translations made by the authors. English translation is simplified as to conserve the meaning of the utterances.<sup>11</sup>

Since all of our interviewees live in Prague, the Czech capital, or in the surrounding area, their situation is to some extent specific as there is a wide range of schools and other educational institutions at hand – considerably more so than in any other Czech region. In Prague, mainstream education at public primary schools is complemented by various institutions offering language courses in the afternoon and activities connected to minority cultures (and languages). There are even private schools (charging tuition fees) where the language of instruction is other than Czech.

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<sup>11</sup> We use the following transcription conventions: [...] part of the transcript omitted; (0.2) pause, length in seconds. Names and other personally identifiable information concerning the research participants have been changed.

## 5 Language Acquisition Management and Family Biographies

As suggested above, the biographies we analyse use specific narrative strategies that combine individual biographical experiences with intersubjective discursive resources to construct an accountable biography. As biographies consist of accounts of individual actions, the discursive resources we encounter to a great extent build on institutional expectation patterns (IEPs). IEPs (Schütze, 2007) are normative scenarios that individuals infer from their social experience and that suggest how they should cope with various socially relevant situations that they come across in everyday life. Individuals can also draw on an IEP as a discursive resource to construct accounts of their actions acceptable to other members of society.

This is also true for the moment when parents enrol their children in educational institutions, which is actually their first encounter with the state LAP and the LA management cycle that it perpetuates. These two institutions are both at the centre of our interest. The normative nature of the IEP as well as many aspects of the school enrolment process were not detailed by the interviewed mothers, who are thoroughly socialized in Czech society, as they expected that these could be inferred from the intersubjective knowledge about school enrolment. In the following account of Mrs. B,<sup>12</sup> the level of conformity with the IEP is so high that, as suggested, little narrative work is devoted to the first encounter with the school system:

**Excerpt 1** Mrs. B They go to a normal primary school, but they actually started elsewhere. Maria transferred from a primary school to Kladenská school, which was then what is called a faculty school with extended language instruction.<sup>13</sup> Now that's not the case anymore, you know, it nowadays actually functions as an ordinary primary school from first grade upwards. That was actually the case when Michael went there, he went straight to first grade in Kladenská.

When Mrs. B talked about her youngest son Michael's current schooling (Excerpt 1, line 1), she took the narrative back to her oldest child Maria's early primary school years (Excerpt 1, lines 2–3). The daughter's educational trajectory seems to be particularly important for the family, since the two younger children followed the path first "invented" for their sister. The nodal moment of the narrative, though, is not the very first school enrolment but the moment of the daughter's transfer from one school to another, specializing in foreign-language education, at that time educating pupils only from third grade upwards (a "school with extended language instruction"; Excerpt 1, lines 4–5). Since the school Maria was first enrolled in is being referred to with the generic expression "a primary school" (Excerpt 1, line

<sup>12</sup>Her husband is a Serb from Bosnia and Herzegovina, their children are: f-17, m-15, m-11.

<sup>13</sup>Faculty schools cooperate with universities and are therefore known to be "up-to-date" on teaching methods and in other respects. Schools with extended language instruction used to take pupils only from third grade upwards and subject to an entrance exam.

2–3), it becomes clear that its identity might have been irrelevant. The choice of a school became important and, therefore reflected on, only in the context of Maria transferring to the school referred to by its name “Kladenská” (Excerpt 1, line 3). The school “Kladenská” is later described as a “proven” educational institution in the interview, indicating that this need not have been the case for the first, unnamed primary school. The mother’s narrative is still logically acceptable, as the “omitted” biographical facts are easily inferable from the IEP relating to school enrolment.

Other narrative accounts of the school enrolment process also rely on such unarticulated premises. The premises of “closest school” (that normally children are enrolled in a school close to the family’s place of residence) and “public school” (that this school is normally a public one) are of central importance in this respect. This aspect of the IEP is related even to legislation concerning school attendance. Legally (cf. Česká republika, 2013) parents may choose any school in the Czech Republic for their children, but schools are obliged to accept a child only if the child’s permanent residence is within their catchment area. Especially in urban areas, schools’ catchment areas are based on population density and relative distance between the school and potential pupils’ homes.

The following excerpt of Mrs. F’s<sup>14</sup> narrative provides an example of a narrative strategy used to address the fact that the IEP related to school enrolment was not enacted and the school her older son attends is a private institution. Therefore specific narrative work is required: Mrs. F retraced the boy’s educational trajectory, beginning with the pre-school stage, including the moment of his transfer from crèche to kindergarten (Excerpt 2, line 3). The subsequent narrative offers an argument as to why, in the end, the IEP was abandoned and replaced by another scenario: the boy enrolled in a plurilingual class of a private pre-school, which provided the family a grant covering the full extent of the costs (Excerpt 2, line 11).

The way Mrs. F addresses the fact that the family opted for an alternative to the IEP also reveals some of the IEP’s other features, especially the premise related to potential pupils’ age (the boy did not meet the minimum-age criterion; Excerpt 2, line 3). However, the “closest school” premise was also clearly a relevant point of reference for her narrative. She identified the crèche by its geographical location (the “Pankrác crèche”; Excerpt 2, line 1 – Pankrác is a neighbourhood in Prague), thereby also expressing conformity with the IEP and supporting her claim that the family wished to adhere to the IEP related to school enrolment. This claim is fully developed in the summarizing coda of her account (Excerpt 2, lines 11–14).

**Excerpt 2** Mrs. F [...] we used to visit the Pankrác crèche from the moment when our child was one year old. And when he was two and a half years old, he’s born in December, I actually wanted to enroll him in kindergarten, but –seriously – the year he was born saw the most births since the seventies [...] exactly at that time, sometime in March or April, when we were making our decision, we were contacted by the French embassy. They were opening a new bilingual English-French class at the

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<sup>14</sup>Her husband is from France, their children are m-7, m-5.

French lycée [...] and we were told we'd probably have a chance to get a full grant [...] So because of that he actually goes there because he didn't get into Czech kindergarten but it wasn't like we intended him to.

## 6 Mothers' Creative Metamorphoses

The comparison of the two examples provided in the previous section suggests that narrative strategies vary as to the extent in which they are reflective of the unique features of the mothers' individual biographical experiences. The second example (Excerpt 2) illustrates that this reflexivity increases when mothers talk about not adhering to the IEP. This includes the family's experience with the LA management cycle, and therefore also the state LAP.

Accounts in which mothers argue for or even justify their non-adherence to the IEP can be found in most family biographies in our dataset. In several cases, the biographical reflexivity in these accounts of non-adherence had a transformative effect on the narrative strategies used by the mothers to construct the accounts of their experiences.

To illustrate this point, consider the narrative of Mrs. T<sup>15</sup> (Excerpts 3–6). It includes an exhaustive account of the family's divergence from the education-related IEP. Most probably, this exhaustiveness results from the dramatic impact the experience had on the everyday life of the family and from the fact that the second, follow-up, interview was conducted when the family was still experiencing this impact.

Mrs. T is a mother of two sons. Her husband, their father, is from Tanzania. Czech and English are used and transmitted in the family. Mrs. T reported her older son Ben to be a bilingual speaker of Czech and English, but lacking the formalized background, such as grammar and spelling knowledge, in English. At the time of the first interview, Ben was 10 years old and her younger son had just been born. The second interview took place approximately six months after the first.

In the first interview Mrs. T gave an account of the family's decision not to adhere to the IEP and enrol Ben in a private primary school in the family's neighbourhood. She seems to be loosely linking this account to the "closest school" premise under the school enrolment IEP (using the expression "here" in Excerpt 3, line 1) and, in particular, to the "public school" premise. In her description, she denies the school is a special one (Excerpt 3, line 3–4), qualifying its special features as minor (by using the expression "just" in Excerpt 3, line 4). This implies that the IEP itself is not contested; it had only not been enacted in this particular case:

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<sup>15</sup>Her husband is from Tanzania, their children are: m-10, m-0.

### Excerpt 3

- Mrs. T Yeah he goes to a private primary school here.  
[...]
- Mrs. T It's a private primary school and they're not special in any way, there's just a family-like atmosphere and they have only one class in each grade.
- MH<sup>16</sup> Hmm.
- Mrs. T And a small number of children in each class and foreign language instruction starting in first grade.
- MH Yeah.
- Mrs. T We actually wanted them<sup>17</sup> to offer English from the first grade.

Only after this does she turn to the expectation that the boy could benefit<sup>18</sup> from early English instruction in school (Excerpt 3, lines 10–11): The expression “actually” (Excerpt 3, line 11) used in this account suggests that, for Mrs. T, such an expectation is a part of her family's more or less elaborate plan<sup>19</sup> for Ben's education. As the narrative develops, this aspect of the plan is recounted in the light of the experience with the plan's execution.

In the following example, Mrs. T critically reflects on the family's educational plan for the first time (Excerpt 4). She expresses her disappointment at the gap between expectations and reality (Excerpt 4, line 10–13), illustrating it with an account of a dispute between her son and his English teacher over a “vocabulary dictation” (Excerpt 4, line 1). At this point, she constructs the cause of the disagreement as the teacher's unwillingness to compromise on her expectations concerning the English competences of pupils (excerpt 4, line 6–7) and the son's loss of motivation and trust in the teacher as a consequence of such behaviour (Excerpt 4, line 11).

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<sup>16</sup>Magdalena Hromadová.

<sup>17</sup>Meaning the school.

<sup>18</sup>We can assume that this plan was devised in the context of considerations that language acquired in an interactional setting in the family should further be developed by some sort of formal language education. However, Mrs. T's account of her son's language proficiency expressed earlier could have been rationalised, i.e. formed at some later moment in the biographical time, e.g. under the influence of the encounter with the educational setting.

<sup>19</sup>We use the word “plan” to refer to Schütze's term “action scheme”, which is a structure used in biographical narratives that may be described as the “intentional principle of one's biography” (Schütze, 1983, p. 288 – our own rendition). “Educational plan”, then, refers to the principle applied by mothers in relation to the family's decisions on school enrolment.

**Excerpt 4**

Mrs. T Now he's just brought home a vocabulary dictation and he got a three.<sup>20</sup>

MH Uh.

Mrs. T Because he just writes down something else than what they've been given as an assignment. Say they have twelve new words: the teacher just wants exactly these words. Yeah and then he just writes down other words, for example.

[...]

Mrs. T So instead of English being as I thought that it would be, just fine, for him there's no motivation. Ben claims the teacher actually prefers girls, which really bothers him.

This account of a conflict between the English teacher and Ben is a lead-in to the main narrative line of the second interview (Excerpts 5 and 6) with Mrs. T. Between the first (Excerpts 3 and 4) and the second (Excerpts 5 and 6) interviews, the family took Ben out of the school and the mother began to educate him at home. The second interview (Excerpts 5 and 6), therefore, contains a very “fresh” account constructed just after a dramatic change in Ben's schooling. This account serves to justify the family's decision not to adhere to the education-related IEP and reveals one of the essential features of the IEP: the “existing institution” premise, i.e., it is normal for children to be educated in existing educational institutions. Mrs. T's biographical work required the re-assessment of her narrative strategies to deal with the deep split between her individual sense-making processes and the intersubjective and normative education-related IEP. In her narrative, she reflects on the higher-level implications of the various unique features of the experience, presenting her understanding of it:

**Excerpt 5**

Mrs. T [...] But seriously there then was a culmination. It simply was no longer possible to talk to the headmaster and the English teacher about anything, and everything they said was it was all our fault, that Ben was responsible for everything.

(0.2)

MH Yeah?

Mrs. T Had they made some mistakes or would they make concessions so as to improve something for our child in that school? That wasn't possible.

(0.4)

MH Uh.

Mrs. T They actually didn't want him there. So we said that's just not worth the pain. Ben was in a terrible shape mentally, really.

MH Was it that bad?

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<sup>20</sup>On a scale from one to five, with one being the best mark.

Mrs. T It really was. He was completely destroyed, so much so that he started to wet his bed at night. He like wouldn't show that.

MH Of course but ...

Mrs. T He wouldn't show them that they've broken him, yeah.

MH Yeah.

(0.3)

Mrs. T But, put simply, he was like - you know I was angry at him as well, of course.

MH Oh, but that's really terrible.

Mrs. T I was of course mad at him as well, you know, as I would always be hearing from the school that he had done something. You know, that Ben had been misbehaving again, that Ben had been disturbing the lesson again. I told him: Ben, is this really necessary?

[...]

Mrs. T Everything was just completely wrong, everything.

MH Yeah, that's terrible, I hope ...

Mrs. T Well in the state he was in, he simply hated the teachers. What would have happened if he'd gone to another school?

MH Yeah. (0.8) Well

Mrs. T Because I told myself it would start again. I said to myself no. Was he supposed go from one school to another and find out that they're morons everywhere?

In the first interview (Excerpts 3 and 4) discussed above, Mrs. T tended to consider the conflict situation in terms of the immediate interactions between the English teacher and her son. She recounts this attitude in the second interview (Excerpts 5 and 6), however, she now (Excerpt 5) constructs the situation not as a product of isolated (if reoccurring) interactions but a structural feature of the relationship between the school and her son. At the beginning of her account, she would use the words "headmaster" and "the English teacher" (Excerpt 5, lines 2 and 3, respectively), but later on she would switch to broader categories, such as "they", "that school" or "everything" (Excerpt 5, lines 8 and 13, 9 and 33, respectively). This broader biographical view makes her contest even the IEP itself saying that she has lost trust in the particular school and the teachers involved (Excerpt 5, lines 1–5), and questioning the competence of the educational system as such as far as her son's needs are concerned (Excerpt 5, lines 39–41). In Mrs. T's reinvented narrative strategy, the fact that Ben was systematically categorized as a misbehaving child (Excerpt 5, line 4–5) is associated with a negative trajectory, imposed on him by the school's unwillingness to adjust its view:

**Excerpt 6** Mrs. T And if someone doesn't fit their parameters, (0.8) they then don't want to do anything about that.

According to Schütze, a negative trajectory is a type of biographical experience that limits the individual's influence over his or her own life development and



imposes upon him or her certain conditions, which he or she cannot control (cf. Schütze, 1983, p. 288). When justifying her alternative to the IEP, i.e., educating Ben at home, Mrs. T is actually constructing an account of refusing a negative trajectory. She constructs the IEP as a negative trajectory and the need to refuse it as very urgent as it is related to the experience of the boy's severe psychological hardship described in lines 14–15 and 17–19 (Excerpt 5).

The alternative to the IEP is arrived at in a creative metamorphosis (Schütze, 2007) of Mrs. T's own biographical identity. While initially her narrative was based on conformity with the existing IEP, the transformed biographical identity includes being able (or even having) to create alternatives to the normative premises underpinning the IEP. In the case of Mrs. T, the alternative is a comprehensive replacement of the "existing institution" premise by home schooling. The alternatives presented in the other biographies that we have gathered, are less extensive in that they intend to replace less central elements of the education-related IEP. Typically, it is the premises of "professionals", i.e., that some matters are normally to be arranged for by trained professionals, that is revisited in the narratives of mothers who were themselves involved in detecting and diagnosing their children's special educational needs. However, such instances of replacement are incorporated to the mothers' narratives within the transformative effect produced by biographical experiences that are commonly constructed as harm to the children.

## 7 Parents' Language Acquisition Policies?

As some of the examples discussed above suggest, the LA management cycle and LAPs play a certain role in the accounts of the decisions about which school to choose (and the potential reassessment of such decisions). The interviews with Mrs. B and Mrs. T (see Excerpt 1 and Excerpt 3, respectively) show, that the LAP relating to foreign language acquisition is referred to in such accounts. This reveals the existence of another premise underpinning the education-related IEP: the "foreign languages" premise suggesting that children are normally to be given the opportunity to learn foreign languages. However, some accounts in our dataset indicated that the prevalent conformity with the "foreign languages" premise is a result of a sense-making process that is more complicated than the passive or unreflected acceptance of a normative discursive resource.

The most extensive account of the LAP implemented by an educational institution was provided in the narrative of Mrs. F<sup>21</sup> who referred to "supporting French" (Excerpt 6, line 4) when describing her sons' school:

**Excerpt 6** Mrs. F It's a French school, it's administered by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and it's an institution similar to the Francophonie.<sup>22</sup> It actually inter-

<sup>21</sup> Her husband is from France, their children are: m-7, m-5.

<sup>22</sup> Meaning Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

nationally supports the French language all over the world, so it's basically similar, you could say. Actually it's not an international organization.

However, at another point Mrs. F made clear that the school is suitable for her family as the graduates should be equally proficient in all the three languages that are taught at the school, i.e., English, Czech and French. In our opinion, this seeming inconsistency implies that she expects her aspirations related to LA to be realisable within the framework defined by the school's LAP. Similarly, Mrs. T's expectation that her son would be able to benefit from early English instruction, provided under the school's LAP, was not fully compliant with the actual LAP, which was designed for pupils with no competence in English. The narrative implies that the family had expected to be able to execute their educational plan<sup>23</sup> under this LAP, which proved wrong in the end. Both examples suggest that parents also develop some sort of a relatively elaborate LAPs distinct from the LAPs implemented by the educational institutions concerned. Despite this, the mothers are able to refer to their LAPs in compliance with the normative discursive resources.

One discursive resource present in the accounts of school enrolment has so far gone unmentioned in this paper. It is the "parent" premise, i.e., that it is normal for parents to be responsible for their children's education. The "parent" premise is actually the most essential requirement for the accountability of the narratives analysed here. Our respondents consider themselves (co-)eligible or (co-)responsible for shaping their children's education and construct their biographical accounts accordingly. Arguably, this would not be the case, for instance, in societies where all such decisions are taken by males or where individual educational trajectories are determined just by social status.

When respondents adopt the biographical identity of parents, they tend to more or less systematically draw on two normative principles (cf. Schütze, 2007) to justify the account of their own activities. Firstly, mothers attribute some of their actions to their effort to avoid and minimize what they consider harmful to their children. Secondly, mothers referred to providing their children with the opportunities to maximize their competitive advantages as a longer-term perspective goal.

We believe that these discursive resources are also relevant for the accounts related to children's education.<sup>24</sup> By looking at the narrative strategies and discursive resources, used in the accounts of school enrolment, in combination with the more general normative principles, related to the biographical identity of a parent, the nature of the parents' LAPs can be understood in a wider context: The premise of "foreign languages" can be applied, as it complies with the plan to further develop children's plurilingualism in order to maximize their competitive advantage.

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<sup>23</sup> It is also worth noting that the reinvented home-schooling curriculum actually further developed this aspect. The family has decided to teach their son not just the required English curriculum contents for the given school year but to prepare him for an international certificate examination.

<sup>24</sup> However, the accounts of school enrolment are potentially relevant also with regards to the other biographical identities of our respondents. Especially the decision about when children should be enrolled in an educational institution at pre-school level is closely related to mothers as professionals.

As the case of Mrs. T shows, the first principle is a more intensive narrative impulse than the second one. Accounts where the second principle became activated were to a greater extent based on the education-related IEP. However, biographical accounts where mothers apply the first principle tend to be more elaborate and more creative as these accounts cannot depart from the discursive resources available within the IEP. Unlike the other discursive resources, the first normative principle was never reinvented or even contested. We believe that the children's well-being is at the centre of the "parenting agenda". Attitudes that could perhaps be described as the "parents' LAPs" are, therefore, in our view best regarded as a part of the more holistic concept of "parenting policies".

## 8 Conclusion

Our paper aimed to contribute to the understanding of the micro-macro interplay of the LA management cycle, perpetuated by the state LAP. It examined the interplay from an emic perspective, departing from the assumption that, in the Czech Republic, it is the parents, entitled to decide about their children's education, who play a key role in that interplay. It investigated biographical accounts of mothers of children with plurilingual family background to find out how they make sense of their experience with the LA management cycle. In order to reconstruct the sense-making processes of the mothers, our paper focused on analysing their discursive resources and narrative strategies.

The sense-making processes reconstructed from our data do not represent events "as they really happened". However, this does not make the inquiry less relevant. Knowing how individuals make sense of their life experience can help us understand why, under given conditions, they think they acted in a certain way. In our view, strategies used by individuals to cope with social reality cannot be properly understood without considering the individuals' perceptions of the reality and their accounts of motivation.

Our analysis yielded three findings. The first two relate to the immediate social context of our research, while the third is of importance for the FLP research in general.

Firstly, our data suggest that our respondents base their narratives on several premises (some of them are the "foreign languages", "closest school", "professionals" and "parents" premises) and that they regard these premises, which are related to their children's education and especially to the school enrolment process, as intersubjective (common) knowledge. The existence of these premises seems to confirm that the LA management cycle perpetuated by the state LAP is part of our respondents' life experience. The mothers construct accounts of some of their activities in terms of the adjustment designs put forward by the actors on the cycle's macro level. The "foreign languages" premise corresponds directly to the adjustment design under the state LAP promoting pupils' controlled plurilingualism and the "parents" and "professionals" premises with the roles assigned to parents and

professionals, respectively, by the state LAP. The “closest school” premise seems to concern particular educational institutions rather than aspects of education in general. It is, however, based on the idea that there is no difference between individual public schools except for their location. In other words, all schools within the educational system provide the same education, i.e., implement the same adjustment designs in the context of the LA management cycle.

Secondly, our data seem to confirm the theoretical assumption that some discursive resources, such as the premises described above, are seen as normative by nature because as they depart from the IEP that itself is normative. When an individual experience described in the narrative was constructed as not complying with the IEP, special narrative strategies, including argumentation and justification, had to be used.

These special narrative strategies, requiring more intensive narrative work, seem to be used to introduce alternative discursive resources but also a higher level of reflexivity as far as mothers’ individual experience is concerned. The increased reflexivity also concerns the IEP. For certain reported biographical experiences, the respondents would not perceive the IEP as a suitable sense-making device, which triggered a transformation of their narrative strategies. The most essential feature of this transformation seems to be a creative metamorphosis of the biographical identity of the mother involved. The biographical identity was reinvented so as to include not only playing the role assigned to her in the context of the IEP, but also the possibility (or even obligation) to come up with more or less comprehensive alternatives.

Thirdly, our research suggests that the accounts of school enrolment seem to be based on a certain awareness of the LAP promoted by specific educational institutions and the assumption that the families’ goals can be achieved within the LAP’s framework. This suggests that families do not simply conform to existing LAPs. Instead, they tend to design their own more or less elaborate LAPs. However, the language-related agenda is only a part of a more holistic concept – the parenting policy. The chief concern and the basis of parenting policies is children’s well-being. The children’s overall well-being is more important to families than issues related specifically to language acquisition, which is a factor that needs to be considered both in FLP research and when designing LAPs.

Our paper is situated in a context where children with plurilingual family background represent a challenge for the essentially monolingual dominant language ideologies and the related state LAP. The results of our analysis suggest that the narratives of our respondents seem to reproduce the dominant attitudes, which are part and parcel of the discursive resources they draw on when talking about their life experience. However, this sometimes seems to result from the application of comprehensive sense-making processes. Moreover, the conformity with the dominant discursive resources cannot be sustained throughout the narrative, and the narrative strategies employed to deal with this fact include the reinvention of the role that the mothers were assigned within the IEP. In the course of such creative metamorphoses, some mothers also reinvent their attitudes to the state LAP. Mothers, who are supposed to be passive “implementers” of the LAP, thus turn into their active and critical “creators”.

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