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Dimensions of Sociolinguistic Landscapes in Europe

Materials and Methodological Solutions

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Constructing a cross-border space through semiotic landscapes: A case study of a German-Czech organization

1. Introduction

Since 1989, the German-Czech frontier has considerably changed. It has changed from a border which one was hardly able to cross and that which separated different economical systems and political blocs to an internal boundary line within the European Union, which nowadays scarcely limits the cross-border mobility of persons, goods, services, and capital. Nevertheless, this border can still be described in terms of (a) varying political (*viz.* legal and bureaucratic) systems, (b) linguistic differences (*viz.* Czech-German language border, important language vs. small language in terms of speakers' numbers and status as a foreign language in other countries, as suggested in Freier and Wohlgemuth 2007), and (c) economical asymmetries (*viz.* different currencies and differences in income) (Holly, Nekvapil, Scherm and Tišerová 2003). After 1989, many forms of Czech-German contact and cooperation have been established along the frontier, and some of them can be described as German-Czech organizations. We define a German-Czech organization as follows: it is an organization in which one or more of the essential stakeholder groups (e.g. sponsors, employees, and clients) are located on both sides of the border.

This article deals with semiotic landscapes of such a binational and bilingual German-Czech organization. Using an organization from the cultural sector[1] as an example, we would like to demonstrate how this organization aims to create a specific "cross-border space". Our interest in describing this organization derives from the rediscovery of space as a source of social transformation, programmatically initiated by Lefebvre's *Production de l'espace* (1974). Borders, the crossing of borders, and the emergence of contact spaces are of great importance within the spatial turn of cultural studies, as discussed by Bachmann-Medick (2006) for instance. According to Bhabha (1994: 319), "to revise the problem of global space

1 During the material collection phase, we guaranteed our informants not to use the real name of the organization, and therefore in this article we resort to the notion of 'the organization' when discussing our observations.

from the postcolonial perspective is to move the location of cultural difference away from the space of demographic *plurality* to the borderline negotiations of cultural translation". We aim to show that the self-characterization of this organization, observable in its semiotic landscapes, refers to such a borderline and aims to create a cross-border contact space where the staged cultural and linguistic differences become translatable as soon as they are displayed.

Furthermore we want to find out whether the cross-border space created by the organization can be the basis for social transformation (i.e. diminishing cultural asymmetries of the Czech-German border). Our analytical perspective is situated within qualitative social research, especially within the theory of language management elaborated by Nekvapil and Nekula (2006) which allows including activities of language planning (organized or transsituational language management) as well as discourse itself (simple or situational language management) in the analysis. In order to describe the conceptualization of the cross-border space in the organization, we will analyze its semiotic landscapes. This means taking into account all the signs provided by a specific space (cf. de Certeau 1984). For this purpose we do not only use visual, but also written and spoken verbal signs as a part of social practice, as suggested and argued by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) and Jaworski and Thurlow (2010).

2. Theoretical and methodological background

This article is methodologically based on ethnomethodology and its assumption that social structures are negotiated and re-produced in interactions. Borders, including the Czech-German border discussed here, are construed social structures, i.e. they are "artful practices" (Garfinkel 1972: 309) that need to be performed in a certain way (e.g. by carrying out border controls, erecting boundary stones). According to Bauer and Rahn (1997: 7, translated from German by the authors), "the discovery of borders of any kind is always the recovery of something that originated in people's heads: projections. Beyond the mental faculties – rationality, imagination and retentiveness – no border exists. [...] The invisibility of the border requires its aesthetical refinement or in fact coarsening." Crossing borders needs some visible or audible marker, especially in Europe that has aimed at breaking down bureaucratic representations of the borders as part of the Schengen treaty. In our analysis we want to find out in which way the semiotic landscape of the organization contributes to the performance of "doing being" (Sacks 1984) a cross-border organization.

Our analysis of the semiotic landscapes uses the theory of language management (cf. Jernudd and Neustupny 1987, Neustupny and Nekvapil 2003).

According to Nekvapil and Nekula (2006) and Nekvapil and Sherman (2009), this theory suggests that in interaction, spoken and written statements are not only produced and received, but are also reflected and managed by the participants in due consideration of the communicative norms in the context. Such communicative norms can be described for example in terms of grammatical norms, language attitudes, or expectations of political correctness. Language management processes usually consist of the following steps and can be broken off after each step: (1) noting a deviation from a norm or expectation; (2) evaluating the deviation; (3) designing an adjustment to the deviation; (4) implementing the adjustment. When encountering interactional problems, participants design and execute metacommunicative activities (such as code-switching, self- or other-initiated repairs, metacommunicative comments etc.). Such activities that occur during interaction are referred to as simple language management. When a group of individuals learns and generalizes from previous interactions, this may lead to cross-interactional, organized language management. This organized language management can take place in social structures of different levels, such as families, organizations, or the state. Simple language management activities on the micro level of interaction not only represent ad hoc solutions for communication and interaction problems, but also reflect linguistic standards that are the result of activities of organized language management. Therefore, activities of simple language management are a source for the analysis of the (linguistic) ideologies of an organization on the macro level.

While language management theory has primarily been used on verbal data, our argument is that it might be useful to use it on complex semiotic data (visual and verbal) as well. Following de Certeau's (1984) definition of place and space, we consider semiotic landscapes, on the one hand, as visual composites that are the result of pre-interactionally organized language management, and, on the other hand, as spaces where linguistic and metacommunicative activities (both oral and written) take place in interactions that are aimed at discursive re-production of the semiotic design of the organization. In the analysis of the semiotic landscapes of the organization presented here, we combine the theory of language management with approaches to visual semiotics, as presented for example by Scollon and Scollon (2003) and Jaworski and Thurlow (2010). Thereby, pre-interactionally organized language management is not limited to language choice and language use, but language is integrated into a complex semiotic system that comprises the locality, the linguistic and visual representations of the (cross-)border territory, the architecture and design of the building, the use of the visual differences between writing systems and other iconic artifacts.

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of this semiotic landscape, our analysis utilizes a range of verbal and visual data. They include photographs of the building and the rooms the organization is located in, and printed or electronic texts published by this organization, e.g. leaflets, brochures and its website. Public or semi-public events of the organization (e.g. receptions, self-presentations) as well as internal interactions (e.g. team meetings) were observed in a participative manner, digitally recorded, and later transcribed. In addition, members of staff of the organization were interviewed about the establishment and further development of the organization as well as about the internal and external language choice and language use. The interviews used for this article were conducted by German native speakers and in the German language. In the presentation of our analysis we first deal with the aspects of the semiotic landscape that are part of the public communication of the organization (3.1.). In the next section (3.2.) we refer to the parts of the semiotic landscape that can be characterized as internal communication.

3. The semiotic landscapes of a cross-border organization

The organization is a German-Czech cultural center that aims to enhance the cultural exchange between the Czechs and Bavarians in the border region. Therefore, various events (exhibitions, concerts, workshops and discussions) are organized and take place in the building of the organization as well as in different locations in the border region. At the time the data were collected, there were four full-time employees in the organization: the German head, the Czech deputy head and two German employees responsible for the program and event management. In addition, there is one German employee with a part-time contract and two Czech trainees. While among the German employees only one has very good communicative knowledge of the Czech language, the Czech employee is considered as a bilingual, and significant knowledge of German is a precondition for trainees from the Czech Republic.

3.1. Public communication

This organization is located in a small German town close to the German-Czech border, almost in the middle of the Bavarian-Czech boundary line. This location already represents an identity-providing characteristic, and the guidebook to the buildings explains that "it was self-evident to establish in this place a cultural gateway which offers visitors (...) bilingual information regarding the cultural life in the Bavarian and Czech neighboring regions" (Baumeister 2007: 4, authors' translation). The cross-border space of the neighboring regions described in this

way can also be experienced visually by visitors. A walk-on map of the border area that covers the floor of one of the rooms of the organization (Figure 1) illustrates the symmetric expanse of the Czech-German border around the location of the organization described here.

Figure 1: Walk-on map of the German-Czech border area



The map roughly divides the Czech-Bavarian borderline in half and illustrates the distance between Plzeň on the Czech side and Regensburg on the German side of the border. So it quickly becomes obvious for an occasional visitor why the organization, placed on the periphery of two national states, considers itself as the center of this border region, a border region that is conceptualized as a symmetrically Bavarian-Bohemian, not as an asymmetric (due to the size of the countries) German-Czech one.

A visitor can stroll over the map that displays Czech and German toponyms (e.g. Regensburg, Plzeň, Waidhaus, Domažlice). These names give a visual impression of two political units (the borderline is part of the map) and two linguistic worlds (there are no exonyms used on the map). This visual presentation helps to construct the identity of the organization by indicating the cross-border space of its activities and by integrating linguistic (and cultural) components from both sides of the border. Another map is used on the website, and there, the eastern administrative districts of Bavaria

(Oberpfalz, Niederbayern, Oberfranken) and the western districts of the Czech Republic (Plzeňský kraj, Karlovarský kraj, Jihočeský kraj) are similar in expanse, too. On that map only the borders of the districts are inscribed, so that the viewer has to reconstruct the political border according to the language of the regional administrative units (e.g. Plzeňský kraj, Oberpfalz). In this symmetrical visual representation of the border region as a cross-border space, language is the only distinctive means by which the political border is evoked.

So we can state that the peripheral location of the organization with respect to the whole national state at the frontier is (re-)conceptualized as the center of a common German-Czech border region, and it becomes a contact space between Germans and Czechs through these visual representations. This view is contrary to the perceptions of this region expressed by employees and area residents, who clearly emphasize the peripheral location in relation to administrative and economic centers (e.g. Munich, Nuremberg or Regensburg) and the resulting lack of occupational prospects and recreational activities, especially for the younger generation. The area is often referred to as "back here" (Interview 03, line 434, authors' translation).

The building which the organization is housed in is located in the middle of a small town and was completely renovated in 2006. Its architecture also highlights its cross-border nature. The building was renovated in a way that preserved its regional characteristics, e.g. by the choice of the materials. Where materials were used that are rather typical for the architecture in administrative and economic centers (e.g. glass), a reference is made to the glass industry traditions that are strong on both sides of the border, and the guidebook, which can be bought inside the building, explains the architectural design.

Summing up, we can say that the architecture refers to the border region, and the guidebook clearly points this out:

> "From that point of view, the building of the [name of the organization] in [name of the location] represents a commitment to common traditions in the German-, respectively Bavarian-Czech, border area. [...] Altogether – inside and outside, formally and with regards to content – the architecture of the cross-border meeting place and cultural center represents the manifestation of a common tradition and – after the fall of the iron curtain – of a common future in Europe." (Baumeister 2007: 4 f, the authors' translation).

The cross-border identity of the organization is explicitly visualized even on the outside of the building, and during special events, the façade is decorated symmetrically with Bavarian and Czech flags or colors (shown in Figure 2).

Figure 2: Use of national colors on the outside of the organization



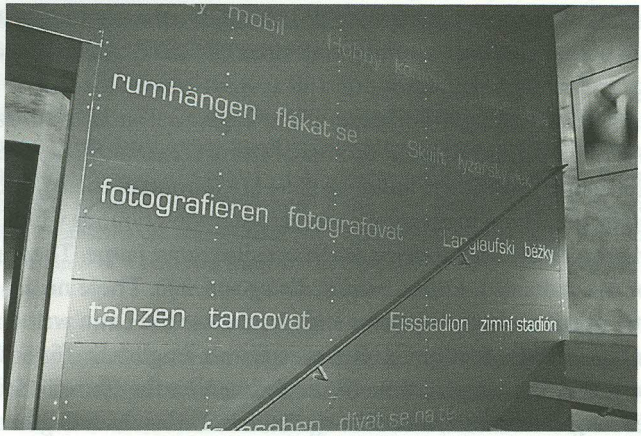
During exhibitions and events, there are banners on the outside of the building giving information in German and in Czech. In a primarily German-speaking environment the presence of not only the Bavarian (or German), but also the Czech national colors and the Czech language, with its diacritical system, serves a symbolic function based on sociocultural associations (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 119), as a visual re-presentation of the Czech-German border and a symbol for the purpose of the organization as the center for Czech-Bavarian cultural exchange *pari passu.*

As seen in our discussion, the nature of the organization as the center of a cross-border space is evoked by the walk-on map (common geographical space, re-conceptualization of the periphery as center), by the regionally influenced architecture of the building (common traditions as shared cultural space), by the use of flags (referring to different political spaces) and by the use of languages (referring to different linguistic spaces). The organization aims to transform a space into a common social space, an area of cultural exchange, "a meeting place and cultural center". Inside the building there are four main rooms, accessible by a central staircase. These main rooms are named by compounds which consist of an abbreviation of the organization and a specific room name. These names are *central* (for the staircase), *forum*, *media*, *dialog* and *info*. These names make use of internationalisms – both Germans and Czechs use the Latin written system – which can be traced back either to German, Czech, English, Latin or Greek origins, so for instance, *central* may be traceable to either the German form *zentral* or the Czech equivalent *centrální*. The symmetrical effect is strengthened by the

consistent use of small letters, that is, by the removal of the German typeface of the script (i.e. German nouns come with capitals, while Czech and English nouns are written with a small initial letter). So a word cannot, at least with certainty, be assigned to one language, and this practice of drawing from one form of a superordinate artificial language creates linguistic ambiguity. This use of an artificial language as a means for creating linguistic neutrality corresponds with Latin being used in the name and the logo of the organization. Of course Latin is not used in the communication of the cultural center, neither is English, normally a widespread lingua franca of contact situations. The linguistic ambiguity in the naming of the main rooms of the organization can be seen as a symbol to neutralize linguistic asymmetries, and it contributes to the creation of a communicative symmetry inside this German-Czech organization.

Another example for creating linguistic symmetry comes from an installation with the title *Language in Space* located in the building staircase. The installation was, as is explained in the panel attached to the staircase, devised by Czech and German pupils during a workshop. By giving this contextual information, the installation is presented as the result of Czech-German interaction, an artifact of the specific cross-border social space. Pairs of German and Czech words for everyday objects and activities are printed on steel panels (Figure 3). The guidebook to the building explicitly refers to this visual symbol which works with both languages and their typefaces, explaining it as follows: "When Germans and Czechs meet at the opening of an exhibition and search for the translation of a word during their conversation, they could find it on the walls" (Baumeister 2007: 12, the authors' translation).

Figure 3: Installation Language in Space

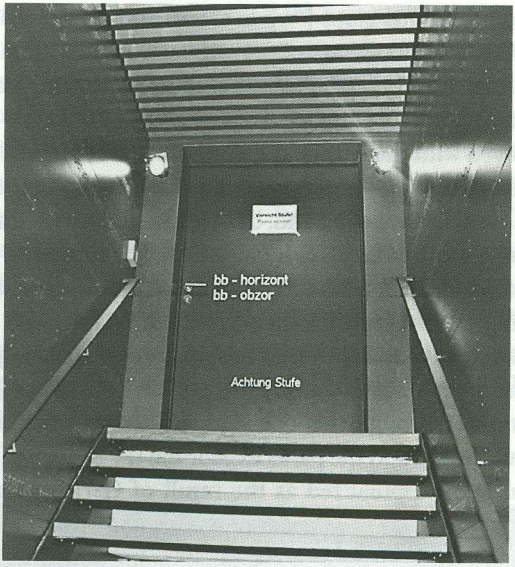


The differences between the two languages, visualized by different lexical systems as well as by the typeface (Czech diacritical marks), become a tool to allegorize the political border using the linguistic border. At the same time it offers possibilities to cross the represented border via interaction and translation. The pairs of words relate to and translate each other. Occasional viewers are thus reminded of learning activities, since they might be tempted to invent corresponding terms in the language familiar to them (i.e. pairs of words in different languages). So crossing borders is portrayed as something that can be learned, and the organization uses the bilingual semiotic design to show that the German-Czech (linguistic) border can be surpassed. Furthermore, in terms of language management, we can consider this display of words as an encouragement for social interaction in this place ("when Germans and Czechs meet") and the installation itself as a symbolic act of pre-interaction management. During the interaction between Czechs and Germans communicative problems that are typical for language contact situations, e.g. the "search for the translation of a word", can be solved with the help of the semiotic landscape of the organization. So this installation fulfils two functions that are both vital to the semiotic landscape presented here. On the one hand, by visualizing the two linguistic systems, it symbolizes the cross-border referential space. The linguistic border is highlighted as an aesthetical representation of the political border: cultural translation as the staging of cultural difference (cf. Bhabha 1994). On the other hand, the border is distinguished at the same time as translatable, suggesting that the cultural differences can be negotiated by linguistic translation (and by the help of the organization). Through this one sign and the explanations given to the visitors by the guidebook and the panel explaining the history of the installation, the organization is conceptualized as the result of German-Czech interaction and it is deliberately displayed as a centre of German-Czech social interaction, representing the common social space created by the networks and activities of the organization.

Another example of linguistic symmetry inside the building suggests that the uses of languages in space can be considered as symbolic. The bilingual lettering on the sanitary facilities, offices, and signs indicating directions, as is the case in Figure 4, showing the door to the terrace, seems to have a symbolic rather than an informative function. This bilingual lettering is addressed to both German and Czech users (visitors and employees) of the building. It is evident that during the design of the semiotic landscapes of the building, its likely or desired use (in particular by users from both sides of the border) was taken into account, since the building is situated in an explicitly German-speaking environment but it was intended to attract both German and Czech visitors. Thus this lettering has a

symbolic function not only for the employees and trainees, who are able to navigate inside the building without the lettering after a while, but also for German visitors who would expect and need the German lettering only (we assume that knowledge of Czech is rare among German visitors). Moreover, this symbolic function of the bilingual lettering also applies to Czech visitors who could likewise try to find their way relying on German signs. At least a passive knowledge of German can be presupposed for Czech visitors (cf. Freier and Wohlgemuth 2007), which is why German or English wording would be informative enough for occasional visitors

Figure 4: Use of bilingual lettering in the organization



As for the more non-permanent semiotic materials of the organization, the publications for instance, are consistently bilingual. They include information materials such as flyers, program leaflets, annual reports, etc. The alternative of separating the German and Czech versions was not realized, even though such materials would be easier to produce (e.g. more content can be provided on one page, less restrictions for the layout) and more comfortable for the recipient (a monolingual page is easier to read). This practice becomes particularly noticeable in the bilingual design of the Internet presence that plays a very prominent role in the self-representation of the organization. While multilingualism in the virtual space is mostly realized by monolingual contents that are (more or less

completely) displayed in different languages, the organization has chosen a synoptic bilingual display of Czech and German contents. German and Czech versions of the texts are arranged in the neighboring paragraphs or columns. This enables the reader to see quickly that the German and Czech contents are obviously equivalent, but at the same time it makes the pages much more difficult to design and to read because of the limited space and the resulting restriction in the typeface. These disadvantages are well known to the management of the organization, as one of our interviewees states:

> "Well, from the beginning the [name of the website] was bilingually designed, there: there have always been er discussions, er er yes that you can click on the language first and then er well er on the website, of course due to the bilingualism there is less room" (Interview 02, lines 728–732, authors' translation).

However, despite these disadvantages, this is the way the management wants to represent the organization on the Internet. This strategy corresponds with the symmetric use of Czech and German visual and verbal signs observed and described above. Fully symmetric bilingualism is seen as a pre-condition for Czech-German cooperation *pari passu,* as pointed out by one of our interviewees:

> "On the other hand, I said that I'll stick to bilingualism, I mean the real bilingualism, because er, because these are er, unique characteristics of [name of the home page] and, and er we, we are a project whose top priority from the beginning was bilingualism also here inside the building and there, er is no compromise" (Interview 02, lines 732–737; authors' translation).

The bilingualism in the semiotic landscape allows the organization to avoid a deliberate language choice in their visual communication as regards the quantity of language. But the way the language is arranged in physical space, e.g. on the wall, on a sheet of paper, or on the monitor screen of the visitor of the website, forces the organization to choose a preferred language. That is, the content in one language has to be placed under or on the right side of the content in the other language and will therefore be only the second one to be seen and read by the viewer: "The mere fact that these items in a picture or in the world cannot be located simultaneously in the same place produces a choice system" (Scollon and Scollon 2003: 120; cf. de Certeau 1984: 117). Seen from the perspective of the ordering of the lettering, the symmetry cannot be kept up, and there is a hierarchy of preferred and secondary language resulting from the physical collocation of the languages. As can be seen on the picture of the installation *Language in Space* in Figure 3 above, the German version of the word is always put in front of the Czech word, suggesting that the former is of greater importance or use to the reader (cf. Scollon and Scollon 2003). While the language order of

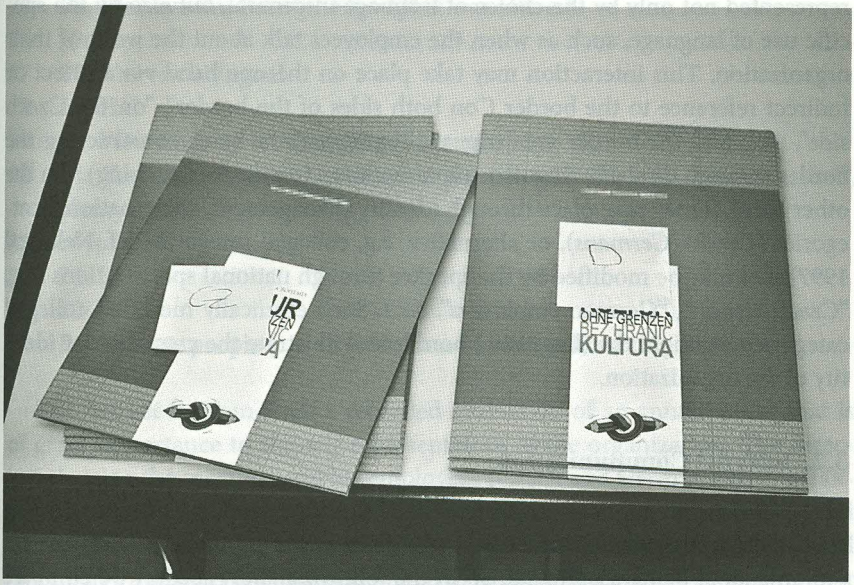
the inscriptions in the building can be considered as indexical (showing that the building is located in Germany and that therefore German is used as the preferred language), the language choice in the virtual space is more deliberate. The conceptualization of the website of the organization as a space outside of German or Czech territory is even stressed by the choice of the neutral domain *.net* instead of the German (.de) or Czech (.cz). But even in this third space the code of preference is quite clear, as German is always placed above the Czech texts if aligned vertically, and in the left position if aligned horizontally. In addition, the fonts of the Czech lettering are not black but grey, which makes them less visible than the lettering of the German texts. So within the bilingualism displayed here, a clear preference for the German version of the texts is observable.

We can thus describe bilingual texts in spatial terms, (1) as a hierarchy between the languages which is evoked by the reading direction (left/top is more important than right/down) and which indicates which language could be considered as preferred and which one secondary; and (2) as a phenomenon of simultaneity that involves the reader into a linguistic Czech-German contact space. Even if the reader is not capable of speaking the other language, it still remains visible and reminds the reader of the fact that this is the utterance of a binational and therefore bilingual organization. Knowing that the content is nearly the same, the reader is, at least visually, part of a process of translation, even without any linguistic competence in the other language. As de Certeau (1984: 117) defines space as a practiced place, a binational space emerges by the practiced bilingual place that is provided by the organization.

There is also evidence for language management activities regarding the semiotic landscape of the organization. Those activities become evident in the layering of the semiotic landscape. For instance, there are communicative situations in which the linguistic symmetries described above are not helpful. In a formal meeting of the advisory board which we observed, the hand-outs were provided to the participants in advance in a folder. Due to the fact that the folders of the organization are, following the linguistic symmetry concept, designed with a bilingual German-Czech inscription, in this specific situation there is a need to mark somehow whether the folder contains a Czech or a German version of the handout. This function cannot be fulfilled by the original semiotic design, so an adjustment is needed. The adjustments took place in the form of post-it notes on the folders, and they bore abbreviations that indicated the language of the hand-out inside. These abbreviations followed the abbreviations of international transport, and D (i.e. *Deutsch*) indicating German and CZ (i.e. Czech) the Czech version rather than Č, which would have been the symmetric solution, as shown in Figure 5. So in this specific case, the bilingual symmetrical use of language

(bilingual folders) is seen as inadequate and is dealt through a specific corrective procedure (added labels).

Figure 5: Marking of monolingual texts with bilingual covers



Another example for language management in the semiotic landscape of the organization can be seen in Figure 4 above. While the inscription of the name of the building terrace on the door is presented bilingually (*horizont* and *obzor*), the warning *Achtung Stufe* [Mind the step] is only inscribed in German in the original semiotic design of the door. However, a piece of paper has been attached to the door, bearing a printed warning in both German and (below and in a smaller font size) Czech language (*Vorsicht Stufe!/Pozor schod!)*, adjusting the monolingual utterance of the organization by adding a bilingual one.

It is, however, obvious that not only is written communication a matter of language management in the observed organization but also those essential fields of oral communication are regulated, too. For example, the official parts of all public (e.g. discussions, opening receptions) and semi-public (e.g. the summer parties) events of the organization are interpreted simultaneously or consecutively, despite of the considerable financial expenses and time involved. Through this kind of refusal to make a choice of language, which can be described as a consequent non-adaptation (cf. Vandermeeren 1998), the German-Czech action

space of the organization is reconstructed in its public events through semiotic landscape, and the organization puts its function as (linguistic) mediator between Germans and Czechs into practice.

Furthermore, the cross-border character of the organization analyzed here is represented not only by the choice of language in general, but also by the specific use of language, such as when the employees talk about the work of their organization. This interaction may take place on the one hand via a direct or indirect reference to the border ("on both sides of the border", "on the Czech side", etc.) and the border area (e.g. via toponyms), or by re-constructing the border through symbolic linguistic representation (e.g. code-switching). On the other hand, it may take place through identity management, using national categories (*Czechs*, *Germans*), or alternative, e.g. collegial categories (cf. Nekvapil 1997) that may be modified by the speaker through national specifications (e.g. "Czech visitors", "German employees", etc.). Such ethnically modified collegial categories highlight the (linguistic) border and illustrate the cross-border identity of the organization.

3.2. Internal Communication

The fact that the public communication of the organization is designed bilingually poses the question of what kinds of resources are used to fulfill the requirements of being a bilingual. So in the following short section we compare the public language use to the internal language use. If we were to transfer the displayed symmetrical use of Czech and German (despite the fact that there is a preferred language) to the internal activities of the organization, the modus operandi for internal communication would be a polyglot dialogue. Every participant of an interaction could speak in their mother tongue, while being able to rely on the fact that all other participants have at least sufficient passive knowledge of their language to understand all of the utterances. Through participant observation we were able to learn that the language used in official internal communication (e.g. in internal meetings) of the organization is predominantly German, so Czech employees adapt linguistically to German as the language of internal communication. The gap between bilingual external communication and monolingual internal communication can be illustrated with the help of the following extract from the recording of an internal meeting:

69 P1 (director, German native speaker): Was there something, well, I mean, that is related to the food,
70 that was okay wasn't it? =

71 P2 (vice-director, Czech native speaker): = It
72 [was okay, yes
73 P3 (employee, German native speaker): [Yes, it was okay
74 P2: And I think all were satisfied with it
75 P1: We have this list of the food that was offered
76 [I mean
77 P2: It's even bilingual
78 P1: Ha?
79 P2: We even have it bilingually [P3 laughs]
80 P1: Yes, and ah, what I realized is that ah with the rolls, there are, well, plenty
81 of rolls left
82 P3: [Hm
83 P2: [Yes
84 P1: Because people [...] (Rec03, lines 69–84, authors' translation)

The extract is taken from a recorded evaluation of an annual event that is of great importance to the self-representation of the organization. The director, chairing the meeting, and his employees (Czech and German native speakers) are discussing the progress of the event. When the topic turns to the food served (line 69) and the employees share their director's opinion that the food "was okay", a written document is hinted to (maybe to serve as a model for next year's event): "The list of the food that was offered" (line 75). At this point, one of the Czech employees, the vice director, jokes that they even have a bilingual version of it (line 77), because the document is simply the bilingual menu that was used during the event. While the bilingualism of the document as a part of the semiotic design of the public communication is taken for granted, the bilingualism of the document designed for internal use (as a model for next year's choice of food) triggers a metacommunicative remark by P2, stressing the bilingualism of this document. The comment, though repeated by P2, is more or less ignored by the chair of the meeting (indicating that this fact has no practical meaning in this context), but is acknowledged as striking by the laugh of P3 (line 79).

This episode clearly indicates that the language use is quite different in external and internal communication. While the organization represents itself as a bilingual German-Czech organization to its external stakeholders (e.g. by using a bilingual menu), the observed internal communication (e.g. meetings) is monolingual (bilingual documents for internal use are clearly flagged as an exception, as a deviation from the standard). At the same time, it reflects the language

situation of the German-Czech border region. For Czechs, cross-border activities are connected with the use of a foreign language, as opposed to their German interlocutors (cf. Freier and Wohlgemuth 2007). Thus we can state that the bilingual semiotic landscape of the organization has primarily a symbolic function, representing something distant (the Czech Republic) rather than indicating something present (bilingual communication in a cross-border organization).

4. Conclusions

In times of the deconstruction of political borders, the asymmetry between the German and the Czech side of the border seems to be primarily a linguistic one, i.e. related to the differences of languages (cf. Marx and Nekula 2010). The symmetrical German-Czech nature of the cross-border organization is based on a linguistic substrate of the border (Rahn 1997: 177–206), which stresses the difference in national languages. This substrate is used to present and to cross, or to remove the border via translation or by creating symmetries. To illustrate its mission as a gateway between Germany and the Czech Republic, the organization has created a bilingual semiotic landscape that constructs a geographical (by referring to places on both sides of the border) and social (by referring to intercultural interaction) cross-border space. If we compare the external or public language uses (i.e. the set-up of the place and its events) and the internal language use (language choices in formal internal interaction), we can state that the dominant language norms are quite different: bilingualism vs. asymmetrical adaptation of Czech employees to their German interlocutors. The public semiotic landscape of the organization shows how Czech-German interaction *could* be, not how it *is*.

By analyzing activities of simple and organized language management that are related to the semiotic landscape of the organization, we can state that the specific contact space provided by the semiotic landscape of the organization can be seen in terms of Foucault (1991) as a heterotopy. The emphasized symmetry of this artificial space differs remarkably from the existing political, economic, linguistic and sociocultural asymmetries of the border area that are an encumbrance to cross-border activities. Von Bismarck (2002: 137, authors' translation) points out that "in contrast to utopia, [heterotopy represents] a real place, a kind of a social alternative draft, which fulfils illusory and compensatory tasks". The heterotopy of a cross-border space that is constructed by a semiotic landscape allows the following conclusions. In terms of de Certeau (1984), this heterotopy or postulated specific cross-border identity can be spoken of as a place, while the everyday practices observed in the organization (the lived places or space)

reflect the language situation along the German-Czech border in a more realistic manner. Furthermore, we can say that in facilitating social change along the border, the organization plays an ambiguous role, because the crossing of borders is inseparably connected to the reconstruction of borders, and one cannot cross a border that is not marked as a border. The observed semiotic landscape contributes to the reconstruction of the border as well as to its crossing.

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