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This is a contribution from *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication* 22:2  
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# Some thoughts on “noting” in Language Management Theory and beyond

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This paper analyses how “noting” has been conceptualized in the Language Management Framework originating in the work of Neustupný and Jernudd. It deals with the influence of the cognitivist concept of “noticing” as used in the theories of Second Language Acquisition and instead proposes to assume the discursive approach of “noting” inspired by Discursive Psychology and Conversation Analysis. It pays attention to the formulations and concrete words which people use to express that they “noted” a phenomenon (be it linguistic, communicative or socio-cultural). Finally, it addresses micro-macro-linkage in the framework, namely, how “noting” of everyday speakers connects to management acts performed by experts in institutions.

**Keywords:** language management, noting, noticing, cognitivism, discursive approach

## Introductory remarks

Though this paper focuses on “noting”, it should be taken against the background of the whole Language Management Theory (LMT). One should keep in mind three points in particular. The first one is that the driving force of LMT has been the identification and solving of language problems; that is, the linguistic, communicative and associated socio-cultural phenomena that are not only *noted* but also *evaluated negatively*. The second point is that language management takes place both in everyday face-to-face interactions and institutions of varying complexity (ranging from the family to the school, the language consulting centre or even a ministry of the state), so the theory comprises not only the so-called social “micro” in which “noting” is usually investigated, but also social “macro” or, put differently, “simple” and “organized management”. The main aim of the theory is to explain and, optimally, predict the interplay of these two levels. Finally, “noting” applies

not only to linguistic phenomena in the narrow sense — speakers or social actors also note communicative phenomena and even socio-cultural phenomena. As indicated above, the latter two dimensions of phenomena are also included in LMT and when studying the concept of noting, we should not ignore them.

### Noting as defined in the theory

Today, it is common knowledge among the specialists working within the framework of LMT that “noting” represents the first phase of the management process which can be triggered by various stimuli, such as a deviation from an expectation the speaker had of the normal course of interacting, or the “norm”. It is also common knowledge that “noting” can be followed by further management processes, such as evaluation of the noted deviation or even by the adjustment design aimed at the removing of the negatively evaluated noted deviation and finally, by the implementation of such a design. This is a rough relational definition of “noting” within the theory, and the goal of my paper is to flesh out the concept with further details.

I will start with how the concept is presented in the works which today are considered pioneering. Among these, undoubtedly, two papers by J. V. Neustupný (1985a, 1985b) occupy a prominent place. Neustupný (1985a) is one of the first presentations of the theory labeled “correction model” at that time, and Neustupný (1985b) is in particular an analysis of the norms in contact situations. Symptomatically, in both papers “noting” is conceived of more or less as a primitive axiomatic concept or term which is self-evident and thus does not deserve a detailed explication.

Accordingly, in Neustupný (1985a: 49), the author uses this concept to introduce another concept, namely “violation”, claiming simply that “noted deviations are violations”, though at the same time he acknowledges that “noting (or not noting)” may be a complicated process and should deserve proper attention (p. 49). Moreover, in the same paper he uses commonsense reasoning as a means of identifying “noting”, claiming that “the occurrence of correction will be taken as a sufficient proof that [the process of noting] had taken place” (p. 49).

Neustupný (1985b: 167) distinguishes between aware and unaware “noting” and is concerned with methodological consequences of these two types of “noting”, emphasizing that unaware “noting” cannot be investigated through interviews and pointing out other methods of how to get evidence of it. Among them he refers to commonsense reasoning in the sense of “if something was corrected then it had to be noted” (see above) and in particular to the identification of non-verbal reactions which might indicate that “noting” took place. The follow-up

interview is mentioned, though not employed, in connection with aware “noting”. Finally, the author addresses in detail the circumstances under which “noting” can be expected to occur. It is worth mentioning that, in doing so, the author uses not only the label “noting” but also “noticing”, varying both words synonymously.

Further development has brought few new findings. Even Jernudd and Neustupný (1987), which has been by default taken as the classic source due to the introduction of the term “language management”, presents only further circumstances under which “noting” takes place and also does not entirely avoid the imprecise idiom, employing both “noting” and “noticing”.

To summarize, in regard to “noting”, as early as the 1980s, the basic concepts or terms, research questions to be posed and methods to be used were introduced. The main empirical question has become under which circumstances “noting” takes place or not and thus “management” commences. The main accompanying problem has become the question of which methods one can use to find out that “noting” has taken place. And, finally, from the very beginning, “noting” as an established term in the proposed theory has been more or less unwittingly connected to the cognitivist concept of “noticing”.

### **Cognitivist input**

As is well-known, LMT has been based on various theoretical grounds. The decisive impulse and the first influence was language planning theory of 1960s and 1970s; however, when the “micro” dimension of language planning started acquiring an important place in LMT, other theories became salient. Crucial has been the concept of “norm”, originating from the language cultivation approach of the Prague School (see e.g. Garvin, 1964) and from the model of ethnography of speaking designed by Dell Hymes (see e.g. Hymes, 1974). Some procedures elaborated in Conversation Analysis, including the concept of correction or repair (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977), and theories and concepts of second language acquisition (SLA) have also been important. The latter influence is hardly surprising if one considers that the specialists in LMT were not only theoreticians and researchers, but at the same time teachers of foreign languages. With respect to the topic of this paper, it is important that theories of SLA have paid much attention to the position and to the very concept of noticing in SLA, which was not overlooked by the specialists in LMT — therefore, I will turn to “noticing” now.

Clearly, SLA specialists pursue different research goals than the LMT specialists and their point of departure is different. Research into SLA markedly situates itself in cognitive science (see Long & Doughty, 2004) which cannot be said about the sociolinguistically-based LMT. In SLA research, “noticing” has attracted

much attention, as one presupposes the causal link between “noticing” of linguistic forms and their learning, assuming that “noticing” enhances language acquisition. The nature of this link has been investigated extensively by a variety of empirical methods, including experimental ones, and the research has brought many findings about both “noticing” and the ways of researching it. When studying the specialised literature (see e.g. Cross, 2002; Mackey, 2006; Swain & Suzuki, 2008), however, one soon finds that most of the findings are controversial. As a symptom of this state of affairs, one can offer the title of Jeromy Cross’s paper *‘Noticing’ in SLA: Is it a valid concept?* The first point is that, though the authors agree that “noticing” a linguistic form in the input may be an absolutely necessary first step in language processing, they disagree on whether this step is conscious or unconscious. The second point, of a methodological character, is that

there is a gap of indeterminate length between what is noticed and when it appears as output, which makes data collection, analysis and correlation problematic. (Cross, 2002)

Overall, this means that almost any piece of research can be made and actually is made problematic. What lesson, then, can the LMT specialist draw from this situation?

It goes without saying that it will be not easy to find a “right place” for the concept of unaware noting in the theory. Moreover, to make things even worse, there may be no grounds for the focus on “noting” in this regard and not to continue the issue of unawareness further. If one assumes a cognitivist approach and accepts the fact that someone noticed something unconsciously, then he or she should be concerned with the fact that what had been noticed unconsciously could too have been evaluated unconsciously. Also, she or he should address the fact that what had been noticed and evaluated unconsciously could have possibly led to the unconscious forming or evoking of an adjustment design, and one should be concerned with the fact that such a design could have possibly been implemented unconsciously. It may not be a coincidence that the concept of unaware noting has not played a significant role in the empirical research using LMT. To my knowledge, neither J. V. Neustupný himself nor his collaborators have proven its existence empirically and the representatives of cognitively-oriented SLA also view “noticing” rather as a matter of awareness than of unawareness, though their opinions on this vary. Overall, it is certainly possible to speculate on the “linguistic reality” of the language management model as above or, on the other hand, to propose respective hypotheses and test them, which after all applies to the conscious management processes as well. I think, however, that though it might be important for LMT specialists to follow carefully what is going on in cognitively-based SLA research, and draw their inspiration from there, they could also proceed differently.

An alternative is to more or less abandon the cognitivist approach and to assume the discursive one (on this general step see e.g. Edwards & Potter, 2001). This approach, known particularly under the label “discursive psychology”, seeks to re-specify cognition in terms of discursive categories. In practical terms, cognitive entities such as emotions, beliefs, attitudes or memory

are approached empirically as participant’s ways of talking. The focus is on the way cognitions are constructed in talk, and how their implications are oriented to. (Edwards & Potter, 2001: 14)

### Discursive approach

In this paper I will argue that the individual phases of simple language management (particularly, “noting”, but also “evaluation” and “adjustment design”) can be viewed as categories to which speakers are oriented while reporting their experience with language, communication or socio-cultural phenomena. This does not mean that they use *just* those words (they are likely to use the word “evaluate”, perhaps also “note”, but certainly not “design an adjustment”). Importantly, these categories are employed not only by the interviewee but also the interviewer. Put briefly, in this approach the “linguistic reality” of the language management model is not derived from informants’ or researchers’ mental states but their ways of talking. Relying on follow-up interviews, in fact, most of the studies of “noting” carried out within LMT unwittingly assumed that approach. What I have in mind is that the researcher gains evidence about whether “noting” took place or not from formulations such as:

Example 1

I noticed it but didn’t really think anything. (Fairbrother, 1999: ex. 15)

This means that the researcher interprets something as an instance of “noting” when it was as such or similarly or “not so similarly” (see below) labeled by the interviewee. And, equally importantly, when eliciting from the interviewee (I) whether “noting” took place or not, the researcher (R) herself relies on the same vocabulary of “noting” as exemplified below.

Example 2

R: Were you conscious of that when she corrected you?

I: No, because I’m used to it .... (Fairbrother, 1999: ex. 42)

Example 2 brings me to the issue that has important consequences for the LMT research. If one accepts that the question above was aimed at finding out whether “noting” occurred or not, then one should examine the vocabulary of “noting”

carefully and pose the question of what expressions of everyday language can refer to “noting”, because clearly not only the words “noting” or “noticing” do that job.

To start mapping this vocabulary, it may be useful to examine how the meaning of the basic words “notice” and “note” is given in dictionaries of everyday language. If one looks up these entries in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (1995), one finds the following:<sup>1</sup>

Notice = 1. to become **aware** of sth/sb, 2. to pay **attention** to sb

Note = to pay **attention** to sth; to **observe**

If one searches for the meaning of the words through which “notice” and “note” were explicated in the same dictionary, one finds the following:

Aware of sb/sth = having **knowledge** of sb/sth; **realizing** sth

Attention = the action of turning one’s **mind** to sth/sb or **NOTICING** sth/sb

Observe = to see and **NOTICE** sb/sth

As can be seen, in this second group of explications one finds one word from the first group (“noticing” or “notice”) that one wished to be explicated. Again, if one searches for the meaning of the remaining “mental words” through which the meaning of the words of the second group was explicated in the same dictionary, one finds the following:

Knowledge = the **AWARENESS** of a fact or situation

Realize = to become **AWARE** of or accept sth as a fact

Mind = the ability to be **AWARE** of things and to think and feel

In the same dictionary, the word “awareness” or “aware”, which was already used for the explication of the basic word “notice”, features prominently in the explication of the meaning of this third group of words. Thus, it seems that we quickly find a relatively closed group of words of everyday language which may be expected to be used when speakers refer to “noting” in the sense of LMT.

Even this semantic fragment of everyday language, however, does not cover all possibilities of how people can refer to “noting” as obvious, for instance, from Example 2. Moreover, there may be further possibilities regarding how to refer to “noting” in language biography narratives as exemplified below.

### Example 3

Before we entered university we didn’t know we had a problem with our English. I could pass the IELTS requirements so thought that my English was good enough to get into university, but then I found that my English wasn’t good enough for academic study. (Marriott, 2008)

This example presents a quote from an in-depth interview with a Japanese Masters coursework student describing her experience of studying at an Australian university. Undoubtedly, the student is referring here, amongst other things, to the phase of noting, because common sense has it that someone's having found something implies having noted it.

Although such semantic exercises might contribute to the transparency of the LMT methodology, one should analyse, particularly, how "noting" is formulated *in situ*. In addition to the follow-up interview situation, it means the researcher needs to be concerned with everyday conversations or interactions, including their ethnographic background. Needless to say, it is not easy to get such data. In the following example I will analyze one brief everyday exchange which demonstrates *socio-cultural* management whose analysis was advocated by Neustupný (2003) and by me at the beginning of this paper.<sup>2</sup>

Example 4

((Czech wife and husband watching an American thriller on TV, they are silent; in the film, an office and a man sitting in front of the computer appear))

1. X (she): má Apple. [he's got an Apple computer.]

2. Y (he): jó:, (.) jsem si ani nevšim. [ye:ah, (.) I didn't notice at all.]

((both continue keeping silence and watching the film))<sup>3</sup>

First, let us analyze in detail what was going on in this interaction. X noticed a particular sort of the computer and communicated it to Y. How can we know that noticing or noting is involved in turn 1? In turn 2 we can see that Y indeed took wife's utterance as communication about her noticing (he says "I didn't notice at all" implying "you noticed"). Further, in saying "I didn't notice at all", Y communicates an absence of noticing or noting on his part before receiving wife's utterance. Moreover, he displays that he noticed the phenomenon only on the basis of his wife's utterance (he says "ye:ah;"). Thus the first point is that the researcher need not speculate whether "noting" took place or not in this exchange as the speakers themselves display this in their turns, and my position is that careful examination of a number of similar examples could bring much interesting and important information about "noting" for LMT research.

In line with a typical research question of LMT researchers, the second point is: what prompted the wife's noticing or noting? Considering the ethnographic background of this interaction, one can assume that two factors were involved here. The first one is that, in the Czech Republic, Apple computers are not as common as elsewhere, and therefore they represent a deviation from what can be expected there; put in LMT speak, a deviation from a socio-cultural norm or expectation. The second one is that in that family, an Apple computer was used some years ago and this makes the family members sensitive to this sort of computers



and prompts their “noting” whenever they come across these computers. This may lead to an important finding — people’s “noting” seems to be prompted not only by a deviation from the norm, as claimed in LMT, but also by the particulars of their biographies; in other words, by unique events that have happened during the course of their life, which makes them sensitive to specific phenomena that other individuals (with other biographies) would not “note”. Needless to say, such a conclusion deserves further research, which would employ a variety of methods ranging from systematic self-observation (To & Jernudd, 2001) to language biographic research (Nekvapil, 2004).

### Micro-macro-linkage

So far this paper has been concerned with “noting” taking place in particular conversations or interactions; in other words, simple management. As I suggested at the very start of this paper, however, one of the merits of LMT is its continuous interest in the interplay of simple and organized management, and this research perspective in particular distinguishes LMT from various theories of language planning (as obvious from, e.g., Nekvapil, 2011). To simplify a great deal, much, or at least some, organized management is due to the fact that, in their interactions, everyday speakers come across linguistic, communicative or socio-cultural problems, that is, the phenomena which they noted and evaluated negatively, and as they are not able to solve these problems themselves they turn to linguistic or other professionals gathered in social institutions (in more detail see e.g. Nekvapil & Sherman, 2009).

Organized management can be defined by the following features:

- a. Management acts are trans-interactional
- b. A social network or even an institution (organization) holding the corresponding power is involved
- c. Communication about management takes place
- d. Theorising and ideologies are at play to a greater degree and more explicitly
- e. In addition to language as discourse, the object of management is language as system.

Now, how can one conceive of the relationship of simple and organized management? Ideally, their relationship can assume the form of a “language management cycle” (Nekvapil, 2009). If the events in individual interactions are considered to be social “micro” and all other social structures (education, research, political and economic institutions and systems) to be social “macro”, the language management cycle can be depicted in a simple manner, as

**Micro → Macro → Micro**

This scheme captures the following typified situation: problems experienced by ordinary language users, “laymen”, are noted by linguistic or other “professionals”; the problems are solvable and the designed adjustments are accepted by laymen. Neustupný (1994: 50) might have this in mind when he wrote:

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

The situation above, however, is the ideal case. Logically, and in reality as well, there exist other cases which I have labeled “partial language management cycle” and “fragment of language management cycle”. Using conventions introduced above, it is possible to encounter the following cases:

Partial Language Management Cycle: Type 1

**Micro → Macro** (problems experienced by ordinary language users are noted by linguistic or other professionals, but the problems are not solvable or the designed adjustments are not accepted by laymen)

Partial Language Management Cycle: Type 2

**Macro → Micro** (in institutions, professionals design adjustments without considering actual language problems of laymen; nevertheless the designs are implemented)

Fragment of Language Management Cycle: Type I

**Micro only** (problems experienced by ordinary language users are solved only in ongoing interactions or as simple pre- or post-interaction management)<sup>4</sup>

Fragment of Language Management Cycle: Type 2

**Macro only** (in institutions, there is only weak noting of problems experienced by ordinary language users, professionals design adjustments without considering their implementations, linguistic experts pursue science for the sake of science)

As can be seen, “noting” represents an important phase also on the level of organized management and one might even presuppose a parallel structuring of simple and organized management in terms of the individual phases of the management process; that is, noting, evaluation, adjustment design and implementation (Nekvapil, 2006). Again, however, one will need a good deal of empirical research to be able to flesh out the schemes above with real social processes.

To start with, we can inspect the following data recorded in a language consulting center in Prague. Even though I cannot deal in detail with how this language consulting center functions, it is important to mention at least that it is embedded into a central academic research institution which publishes dictionaries, grammars, and stylistic or orthographic manuals, and some of the members of this center themselves are involved in research or publishing.

Example 5

1. Tazatelka: Dobrý den, já mám dva hrozně rychlé dotazy.
2. Poradna: Doufám, že odpovědi budou stejně rychlé.
3. Tazatelka: ((smích)) ... zpracováváme rozhovor s naší (vedoucí odboru) a tam to uvádějí
4. s velkým, někde v uvozovkách — den daňové svobody — měl by se psát s velkým písmenem?
5. Poradna: Určitě ne, je to jen takový imaginární den, není to žádný oficiální název třeba
6. významného státem uznávaného svátku.
7. Tazatelka: Že jo? Já bych to taky tak nikdy nenapsala, to není nijak významný.
8. Poradna: Ano, velké si dovedu představit leda v nějakém recesistickém textu.
9. Tazatelka: Jen taková perlička — navrhovali to na státní svátek, ale návrh byl poslanci
10. odmítnut ((smích))  
((druhý dotaz nezaznamenám, neboť šlo o banální interpunkční problém))

((conversation between an inquirer (I) calling from a ministry to the Language Consulting Center, and the consultant (C); translated from Czech))

1. I: Good morning, I've got two terribly quick queries.
2. C: I hope that my answers will be equally quick.
3. I: ((laughter)) ... we're transcribing an interview with our (head of the department) and
4. there they have with a capital letter, in some places in quotation marks, ((the expression))
5. tax freedom day, should we write it with a capital letter?
6. C: Definitely not, it is only a sort of imaginary day, it's not an official name, for example
7. of a significant day acknowledged by the state.
8. I: It isn't, is it? I'd never write it like that either, it's not significant at all.
9. C: Yes, I could imagine it with a capital letter maybe only in a humorous text.
10. I: Just one funny thing — they proposed it as a state holiday, but the proposal has
11. been refused by the parliament members ((laughter))  
((the second query has not been recorded in detail as it concerned a trivial punctuation problem))<sup>5</sup>

The first thing to be considered here is that the consultant distinguishes between “interesting” and “trivial” queries. The former are worthy of recording in detail, the latter only in regard to their frequency. Obviously, “interesting” queries can serve as indicators of new types of problems even though the high frequency of trivial queries can indicate what is in need of solving as well. Overall, the exchange under review demonstrates how, in a particular interaction, a layman came across a linguistic problem that she had not been able to solve herself and therefore she turned to an expert at the institution. Essentially, the problem (or a similar one, as the case may be) attracted his attention, and despite his immediate reaction one might imagine that further management processes followed — discussing the query with colleagues, evaluating whether the noted problem was worth inspecting further, and, if so, possibly planning a measure (e.g. in the form of extending a rule or adding an example to it), and possibly even implementing it (e.g. in the form of including the case in a manual). Continuing this consideration further, granted that everyday speakers learned how to treat the new case, be it through the direct impact of the manual or through schooling, the language management cycle would be completed. Needless to say, only thorough ethnographic work at the language consulting center and beyond could confirm this consideration and bring reliable findings.

Clearly, however valuable their experience with language, organized language management cannot be based only on spontaneous communications of everyday speakers with experts (see also Sherman, 2007 on the Gramma Language Office, and Lanstyák & Szabó Mihályová, 2009). That is why empirical research of how everyday speakers interact in various settings is organized by the academic institutions. Metaphorically speaking, such empirical research also contributes to “noting” on the level of organized management and may be the starting point of further management processes there.

### **Concluding remarks**

To conclude, in this paper I argued that though the researchers subscribing to LMT often look for their inspiration and support in cognitively based research into second language acquisition, they continue to rely on discursive categories of everyday language. As the cognitivist approach does not seem to always represent a reliable basis for the research, my recommendation is to assume the discursive approach as a complement or even as an alternative. For the theory it implies that “linguistic reality” of the language management model is not derived from informants’ or researchers’ mental states, but their ways of talking. Methodologically, it means that the researcher should rely on naturally occurring interactions as much

as possible, with the special focus on how participants formulate “mental categories” central to the language management model in their interactions.

I also argued that however important the concept, “noting” should not be researched in isolation. It is imperative to cover not only the subsequent phases of simple management but also organized management and, overall, to demonstrate relationships between simple and organized management.

## Notes

1. Emphasis (bold and block letters) in the following entry explications is mine.
2. To avoid possible misunderstandings, the reader should keep in mind that the following example does not demonstrate the *interplay* between the socio-cultural, communicative and linguistic management as linguists including Neustupný (2003) would like to have it. It demonstrates *only* socio-cultural management. In this connection, however, it is worth mentioning that Neustupný (2002: 439) suggests that social sciences or humanities can profit from the study of socio-cultural management alone.
3. In this excerpt I use the following conventions:
  - . falling intonation
  - , continuing intonation
  - : lengthening of the preceding syllable
  - (.) short pause
  - ((laughs)) comment by the transcriber
  - never strong emphasis on a syllable or word
4. “Pre-interaction management” has been defined as the management process done in anticipation of potential problems in a future interaction while “post-interaction management” as the process which takes place after the given interaction (see Nekvapil & Sherman 2009).
5. This piece of data was recorded by the consultant himself in the form of field notes.

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