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Optimizing Language Instruction at the Tertiary Level: Student Needs Analysis Toward Educational Change

Abstract

The job expectations and requirements of the information age bring along with them a need for a change in teaching and studying. A quantitative approach to working with information and a frontal style of teaching, still a wide practice in many institutions, no longer seem to be suitable preparation for current students' needs. One of the areas affected by these changes are the foreign language competences necessary to efficiently deal with study and job related practices and, correspondingly, to succeed in the job market.

Along with the change in student needs comes the demand for change in the organization of language classrooms and instruction. Young people, facing the quantity of information and utterly unlimited access to resources, are challenged by the changing needs in processing the material. A qualitative approach to information is required with a growing focus on information processing, analysis, critical evaluation and implementation in practice. Similarly, the need for efficient communication skills such as negotiation, argumentation or presenting seem to be more requested than grammatical precision or the quantity of encyclopedic knowledge.

From this perspective, language instruction accentuating activities focused on memorizing and drills needs to be restructured so the students can develop targeted key competences for the current times. This paper focuses on the research of student needs and how they are perceived from the perspective of students and their study or internship experience, as well as from the perspective of teacher practitioners. The purpose of the study is to identify the key competences students need to succeed in the job market as a resource for restructuring university language instruction.

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1 Language Policies in the Time of Globalization

Globalization is currently the driving force for job mobility and international cooperation. It brings with it an influx of foreign capital, management and expertise, a creation of multinational companies and teams which yield opportunities for international experience and the exchange of know-how. This requires various levels of communication in several languages, among which, the one providing the most job opportunities is English. This creates a natural need for professional language policy changes at both macro and micro social levels.

Here, we demonstrate the relationship between the two perspectives, with the student foreign language use as a basis for institutional curriculum creation at the tertiary level. The implications for curriculum creation and adjustments in educational institutions are based on a research of student needs, perceptions and communication strategies. We will emphasise the need to interconnect the micro and macro levels into a development of reformed and functional teaching approaches reflecting the ongoing social changes. Language Management Theory (Jernud and Neustupný 1987; Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003, Nevapil and Sherman 2015) illustrates the relation between these layers with reference to language planning theory. The implications for policy creation, then, are based on the current research into English as a lingua franca (Jenkins 2000, Jenkins 2003, and Jenkins 2005; Seidlhofer 2005; Cogo and Dewey 2006; Pullin 2015).

2 Theories

2.1 Language Management Theory

The language policy and planning theory describes various aspects of "behavior-toward-language" (Fishman 1971) and a variety of language related acts "oriented toward change in the structure and use of language or languages" (Nekvapil and Sherman 2015: 1). Language planning distinguishes between two basic layers – macro and micro. Macro language planning takes place at the level of the state institutions who act as policy makers, setting up conditions for the mezzo layer, represented by local institutions such as schools, hospitals, banks, municipal offices, business, services, libraries etc. All these execute "organized language management". The current paper focuses on institutions at the tertiary level and the language policies implemented into their language curricula and teaching methodologies.

The current study, however, focuses on language practices on the interactional level as determinants for shaping efficient policies for higher education. Language, indeed, is also planned at the level of the individual's participation in social interaction. Defined as micro language planning, it represents "simple language management", systematic, discourse-based acts reflected in the language user's self-perceptions, evaluations, needs, expectations and language learning, and management strategies on various occasions of the foreign language practice. The aim of this study is to illustrate the simple language management practices of higher education students as an inseparable resource for the implementation of organized language management measures.

The simple language management processes are best described in the language management theory (LMT), originally constructed by Jernud and Neustupný (1987) and later developed by other scholars (Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003; Nekvapil and Sherman 2009, and Nekvapil and Sherman 2015). This theory illustrates how language users deal with problematic communication situations, based on studies from such environments as the corporate sector (Nekvapil 2006; Nekvapil and Nekula 2006; Nekvapil and Sherman 2009) or the educational sphere (Jernudd 2002). Language management as described by Jernudd and Neustupný (1987) involves four stages. The first stage assumes an existence of set language norms which the speaker "notes" when deviating from them. The second stage anticipates that the speaker "evaluates" this deviation either positively or negatively. In the case of a negative evaluation, the speaker "plans" an adjustment in the third stage, which leads to the fourth stage, when the speaker "implements" the adjustment. All four stages may or may not be carried out, that is, any stage can be omitted, and the whole process may not be completed. This means a speaker may note but not evaluate, may evaluate but not plan an adjustment, or may plan the adjustment but not implement it.

Nekvapil and Sherman (2009) also notice that speakers, based on their experience, tend to plan their communication behavior ahead. In anticipation of a language problem, they adopt varied pre-interaction strategies. Among the more active strategies are theoretical preparations (looking up words in dictionaries, searching for phrases or facts, or consultations with language experts). A more passive approach is defined as "avoidance strategies", which range from preference for written to oral communication, working with an interpreter, or avoiding the interaction opportunities altogether. The authors also define post-interaction management "oriented to what has happened in the previous interaction", but "without the speaker's immediate considerations of future interactions" (Nekvapil and Sherman 2009: 185). These strategies stand as a potential

adjustment measure for prospective situations. Both pre-interaction and post-interaction management strategies were traced throughout the analysis of the data collected in this study.

2.2 English as a Lingua Franca

English has been used at various levels, as a first language (L1), as a second language (L2) or as a foreign language (EFL). As a result of globalization, its use has sprawled out far beyond the L1 settings and English has become an international lingua franca (ELF). This resulted in a significant demographic shift in language use when the L2 and EFL speakers outnumbered the L1 speakers (Crystal 2004). This expansion resulted in two considerable changes at a global level, one being a changing status of L2 learners, the second being notable changes in the English norms and use in interaction. Such a demographic shift goes hand in hand with changing student communication needs and teaching practices. As the role of teachers and students evolve, the teaching methodologies and tools change. English instruction needs to react to its natural vital changes through curricula and methodology adjustments.

Traditionally, second language acquisition (SLA) studies used to view users of L2 or EFL as learners. Many researchers (e.g., Kasper 1998; Kurhila 2005, and Kurhila 2006; Jenkins 2007; Firth 2009; Firth and Wagner 1997, and Firth and Wagner 1998; Mauranen 2006), however, criticize the approach as formalistic and context-free, as it positions the L2 speaker as a "defective communicator" (Firth and Wagner 1997: 288). Based on the assumption that "any language users will always be 'learners' in some respect", including the L1 speakers (Firth and Wagner 1998: 91), alternative approaches treat L2 speakers not as learners but as "legitimate English users" (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 60).

These arguments are based on the English as a lingua franca (ELF) research that draws upon the fact that "it is natural and inevitable that language change occurs" (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 61) as languages have evolved since the rise of our civilization through language contact. Results from a comprehensive research of linguistic consequences and changing language norms indicate a "decreasing relevance of native speaker norms" (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 60) in ELF contexts. This has been observed in shifts in phonology (Jenkins 2000, and Jenkins 2005), or innovations in pragmatics and lexico-grammatical features (Seidlhofer 2005; Cogo and Dewey 2006), pointing out that these have little conversational impact and are becoming widely accepted.

Rather, language management strategies treating communication problems and successfully exploited in the interest of efficient communication can be largely observed in everyday interaction. This yielded an agreement that ELF speakers, indeed, cannot be regarded as "learners of English but as accomplished L2 users in their own right" (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 63). The way they use English, thus, needs to be "treated as legitimate variation not as failed or incomplete native speaker English", that is "non-L1 variation", not errors (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 64).

This led to further work defining the original notion of "communicative competence" (Chomsky 1957, Hymes 1972) from wider perspectives. The original rather formalistic approach, limiting the understanding of communicative competences to grammatical structures, has been replaced by functionalist models. First, the term "interactional competence" (Markee 2000) was introduced. Research demonstrates how L2 learners employ their linguistic resources and reach higher levels of performance based on "mutual support ('assisted performance')" (Kasper 2006: 92), that is through "contingent, situated and interactional experiences of the individual as a social being" (Firth and Wagner 1998: 92).

Secondly, researchers studying English as a lingua franca in business settings (BELF) (Pullin 2010a, and Pullin 2015; Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta 2011; Nickerson 2005; Ehrenreich 2010) use the concept of "global communicative competence" (Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta 2011), which better reflects the sociocultural context of business English users and their challenges. In addition to the essential skills involved in ELF communicative competence – pragmatic skills and communication strategies such as politeness and turn-taking (Cogo and Dewey 2006) – further skills, crucial for achieving intercultural communication competence, are specified. These include knowledge of cultural norms, proper use of explicitness and directness implied in clarity or politeness, and small talk, as well as the ability to achieve rapport (Pullin 2010a, and Pullin 2015).

In the context of modern research, accentuating function over form in acquiring languages, the teaching reality lags behind. Research clearly unveils that "the teacher's and the student's norms are in conflict", since many teachers frequently "supply 'corrections' that fall short of what students themselves plausibly perceive to be deviations" (Jernudd 2002: 301). Similarly, too many specialists remain "confined to […] roles as arbiters of grammatical 'correctness'" (Jernudd 2002: 298). To reiterate, it is important to realize that communication competences go "far beyond the

conventional grammatical proficiency" (Jernudd 2002: 301). Reflecting this, tertiary level language teaching and curricula restructuring became the center of attention of the BELF research (e.g., Jernudd 2002; Pullin 2010b, Pullin 2013, and Pullin 2015; Richards 2001; Richards and Rogers 2001; Ellis 2003).

The road to meaningful change, therefore, seems to be twofold. One is to leave the formalistic approach and "engage the students in an interactive process of a very different kind than a 'corrective' one" (Jernudd 2002: 301). The language classroom needs to be organized to create active learning strategies yielding "language management techniques that aim at self-adjustment by the student" (Jernudd 2002: 301). The second change needed is to adjust the curricula toward reaching functional communicative competences suitable for interactional practices at a social, economic and geopolitical level.

To formulate the purpose of this study, the discussion returns to the LMT. The dynamics between the micro and macro language planning processes, described as organized and simple language management, mirror the standard "top-down" (policy creation acts) and "bottom-up" (policy change triggers) dichotomy (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997: 196). The interaction between the macro and micro anticipates a spiral effect as "participants recognizably orient themselves towards social structures and thereby reproduce them", and thus, further "contribute to the transformation of these structures" (Nekvapil and Nekula 2006: 308). In other words, the top-down policies implemented from the macro levels generate bottom-up reactions at the micro level, which further initiate new changes at the macro level, launching a progressive cycle. The hypothesis of this paper builds on this premise. The bottom-up to top-down policies induce reactions observable in the simple management of student linguistic behaviors. These should serve as feedback for the institutional policy makers and result in top-down structural changes which better reflect the student needs. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to identify the areas for change and suggest implications for adjustments in language teaching and curricula at the tertiary level.

3 Methodology

This paper is empirically based on a research carried out at the Škoda Auto University with students of the master's degree program in their English language courses, organized through the Department of Language and Intercultural Competence Training (Katedra jazykové přípravy a interkulturních kompetencí). The language courses are aimed at English for specific purposes,

mainly focusing on business and academic English, and are designed to reach the B2-C1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages standards.

The respondents' ages ranged between 22 and 26 years, their gender ratio corresponded to 44% female and 66% male. The respondents' study programs included business administration and operations, human resources and marketing management, combined with practical training. The Škoda Auto University study plan assigns a mandatory internship during the 5th semester of the bachelor's program, and therefore, most of the participating students have a working experience from either the Volkswagen group partner automotive industry companies, the Škoda Auto administration or other mainly business sector companies. This accounted for experience of the communication reality of the job market.

Data was collected from 72 questionnaires. Some questions provided options for responses, while some were fully open for narratives. Students were given the questionnaires prior to the beginning of the semester in order to avoid evaluations of the completed or in-progress courses. The questions were organized into four areas of inquiry, which aimed at situations of English language use, mainly during study, internships or work as well as of everyday social communication practices. Based on this, students provided 1/ self-evaluations of their approach toward participation in English language practices, seen as rather active or passive, 2/ self-evaluations of their language strengths and weaknesses, 3/ perceptions of their language competence needs for study or work to be practiced during lessons, and finally 4/ expectations, priorities and ideas for an ideal language classroom. The data analysis section will be organized accordingly.

This study adopts the needs analysis, that is, the user-centered approach in order to find out how to formulate language teaching curricula at the tertiary level to better address the needs of the end receiver, that is, the student. It aims at achieving student satisfaction by defining their needed job performance skills and competences to be achieved through their language training. The data collected is based on the participants' individual experiences, their perceived gaps in learning, and the goals they strive to achieve. The analysis focuses on tracking the simple language management practices. In particular, it focuses on the occurrences of noting and evaluations of student foreign language communication performance, their planning and implementation of strategies, including identification of pre-interaction or post-interaction techniques.

4 Needs Analysis

4.1 Active or Passive Attitude

At first, the students evaluated their approach to foreign language communication either as passive or active, and were asked for a verbal explanation. As illustrated in Figure 1, approximately half of the students report an active approach by consciously seeking opportunities to speak the language. In the follow-up explanations, varied motivational factors for both the active and the passive approach appear, mainly as forms of pre- or post-interaction strategies. Four motivation factors for the active approach prevail. The first is a desire to improve language competences, such as pronunciation, fluency, grammar, listening comprehension or pragmatics ("because I can practice my English skills and improve them", "get all the intonation needed", "better and clear understanding on both sides"). The second dominant motivation factor is an attraction for intercultural exchange. Many students report that they "like to talk in other languages". The third factor is rather pragmatic, and relates to the students' study or work needs. They report a need to use English at school, at work, to communicate with their colleagues, make phone calls, deal with customers or work abroad. The fourth factor represents affective reasons, such as communication with roommates, finding new friends, traveling, gaining rapport, and the like. Reasons for the passive attitude mostly relate to personality traits. The student testimonies carry words or phrases such as "stress", "nervous", "shy", "afraid", "feel bad", "shame", "not confident", "I am an introvert person", "[passive] is easier" and the like. Negative self-evaluations are not negligible either. The students perceive deficiencies in fluency, grammar or vocabulary ("I don't have a perfect English", "because I need time to formulate the sentences. If I am talking, I am often in stress and forget the words", "not fluent", "I don't speak English correctly", "I have not got enough technical language/vocabulary" and the like).

To summarize, the student attitudes are an overt demonstration of simple language management. The active attitudes can be seen as an implementation of pre-interaction strategies: noting and evaluating in the form of the above mentioned motivations – to improve, experience, or socialize, and then planning and implementing in the form of an active search for interactional opportunities. The passive attitudes, on the other hand, are an example of the post-interaction strategies.

The students' negative self-evaluations seem to be a result of their past negative experience (perceived deficiencies in their language quality, psychological factors), that is, noting and

evaluating negatively, which results in implementing strategies such as a complete avoidance of the language practice, a partial participation through listening only ("I rather listen"), or a substitution with written, mainly email, communication ("I prefer a written form because my oral expression isn't good").

4.2 Self-Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses

An apparent correlation can be traced between the above described attitudes toward activity in a foreign language and the student self-assessments (see Figure 2). Students evaluated their language competences through a five-degree scale ranging from excellent to poor. A proportion of them assessed their English as excellent (11%) or quite good (39%), that is, provided a positive evaluation of their competences, as opposed to those assessing their English rather negatively, as satisfactory (36%), not very good (8%), or poor (6%). Seen from the perspective of practical use, though, the data indicate that a majority of the students are able to use English at a level which allows them to get by in the foreign language at a minimally satisfactory level (86%), that is, as efficient language users.

Regarding their communication skills, students provided a verbal reflection of their weaknesses and strengths. A dominant weakness (see Figure 3) related to vocabulary skills (34%), more specifically to vocabulary range, technical terms, and idioms ("I have a little vocabulary", "lack of technical terms", "lousy words not professional words", "sometimes, I use words which have a little bit different meaning", etc.). The second distinctive perceived weaknesses are speaking and interaction related skills (24%), categorized as speaking in general, fluency, reaction speed, and code-switching ("my weakness is speaking and presentation in English", "I can't speak fluently", "speaking - quick reaction in conversation", "phone call in foreign language", "I cannot think in English and I have to think about what I answer in Czech and after that I translate into English" etc.). Among other perceived weaknesses there appear grammar related issues (20%); students refer to them as grammar, mistakes, or name particular grammatical functions ("I have horrible grammar", "when I'm speaking I can't use correct times or forms" etc.). A special category concerns affective grammar related issues. The narratives contain formulations such as "I am shy to speak due to mistakes and misunderstanding", "shame to do mistake, always say to avoid mistakes". Other weaknesses (representing 20%) regard pronunciation deficiencies, or listening skills, including understanding different accents; a few of the students mention spelling and writing

issues, or affective factors such as shyness, stress or laziness. None of these, however, occur repetitively.

Among the areas of competences that the students self-evaluate as strengths (see Figure 4), speaking competences dominate (42%). In addition to speaking in general, students mention fluency, presenting, or argumentation. They also, more notably, mention pragmatics and interaction related competences, such as quick reaction, problem solution, improvisation, communication skills, use of body language, or ability to ask questions, unveiling their general interactional competence ("clear communication of the message", "ability to explain my point, ask questions when not clear", "explaining problems or other issues", "I can describe my ideas quickly in own words", "I am able to improvise and put two and two together", "I was able to communicate with my colleagues very confidently, and formulate my thought clearly", "communication with suppliers", "ability to keep almost all conversations going").

The other areas students self-evaluated as strengths are listening (18%) ("I am a good listener, I understand a lot", "I usually understand the whole of context", "perfect listening") and writing (13%) ("formalistic writing, writing emails without problems", "written communication"). Good listening or writing skills, however, may not indicate active student participation in interactions as, in some cases, they can stand for pre- and post-interaction management strategies compensating for speaking. Further strengths include strong vocabulary (7%), pronunciation (4%), reading (2%), and grammar (2%).

The data also reveal strengths of an affective nature (12%). These imply self-confidence, effort, or personality traits ("now I am not scared to talk with someone", "readiness to learn things fast", "open-mindedness", "I am communicative, hard-working", "positive, good mood" etc.). Some of these seem to work as an important communication incentive, compensating for the perceived weaknesses ("I have no worries to communication to everybody and also when I speak with mistakes, I try to avoid them, but I speak in all situations, I never keep being quiet" or "I do not care if I do mistakes during speaking. I always try to explain the problem on my way. I do not shy to talk"). This reminds one of the above mentioned (B)ELF findings, stating that L2 speakers are "accomplished L2 users in their own right" (Cogo and Dewey 2006: 63) regardless of their divergent non-L1 variations, which are often seen as formalistic deficiencies. Indeed, grammar perceived as a weakness covers only 2% of the data, which acknowledges the earlier quoted claim

that L2 users see their weaknesses in very different areas from those of the language structures (Jernudd 2002: 301).

The respondents were also asked to recall and describe situations of misunderstanding; 39% of the students either left this question unanswered or reported no misunderstandings or communication problems ("not aware of any right now", "there weren't many misunderstandings"). Figure 5 demonstrates the proportion of causes of communication problem described in the 61% recorded reports. 38% of the misunderstandings related to vocabulary. Although many students refer to the lack of "technical" terms needed during their internships within the automotive industry, vocabulary is seen as an important ground for misunderstandings. 28% of the responses referred to accents, such as Indian, Chinese, German, French or Australian causing communication problems ("when people have different accent and speak very fast", "I don't understand Indians, they have a strange accent", "different types of accents"). A considerable number mention conversational issues (19%), namely a slow reaction ("I couldn't react that quickly to listen, understand, remember and respond", "in spoken communication, I have problems to remember vocabulary - after that I must rebuild sentences and it takes time for me"). The remaining causes relate to listening comprehension and pronunciation; only one student mentions grammar. The students' narratives indicate an implementation of single language management strategies to resolve misunderstandings ("all issues were easy to clarify", "we find the way how to solve it (pictures)", "had to ask again"). This illustrates that, during interaction, the students negotiate meanings with no significant difficulties, and thus act as standard language users not learners.

To conclude, the data indicate that the pre- and post-interaction strategies corresponding to the active or passive approach described in the previous section seem to be directly related to the participants' self-perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses. Seen as positive or negative evaluations through the process of simple language management, it seems to be that, predominantly, the affective factors finally determine their language management strategy implementation. Thus, active participation in a social exchange seems to be dependent on an increase in the student's self-confidence. For that reason, rather than focusing on reaching structural perfection, which seems to be one of the dominant inhibitors of confidence and evidently rather insignificant in everyday use, the students need to gain interactional, sociolinguistic and global communicative competence through empowering vocabulary and exposure to both ELF and variations in English as an L1.

4.3 Language Skill Preferences for Lessons

Prior to interpreting the student self-assessments with implications for language teaching curricula, that is, to implement the organized top-down policies or measures for language management, it is important to adopt a bottom-up approach. Based on their simple language management practices, the students were asked to define the language skill priorities to practice through their lessons (see Figure 6). Seen from the perspective of LMT theory, the students articulated priorities, preferences and needs for the organization of the language classroom which must be interpreted as a pre- and post-interaction plan for adjustment.

It becomes clear that the students prefer verbal communication (35%) in their language classroom. Among the concrete speaking competences, they put equal stress on negotiation and argumentation skill enhancement, followed by presentation skills and skills for informal socialization, such as small talk. Task-oriented speaking practices follow, such as meetings, dealing with customers, or telephoning. The active communication skills go hand in hand with the students' desire to expand their vocabulary (24%). Students mainly stress a need for professional vocabulary, pragmatics and cultural specifics, and they also include a need for idiomatic language and colloquialism. The data show a lower preference for writing (15%). Another result derived from the data is the students' attitude toward grammar enhancement. Despite a high occurrence of negative evaluations about the quality of the students' grammar in use (20% in Figure 3), language structure oriented activities in classes are generally less preferred (9% in Figure 6). This, again, indicates that the students perceive it as less important to reach perfection in language form for their interactional practices.

4.4 Ideal Classroom

The respondents included narratives describing their vision of an "ideal classroom". As for the class organization, they generally agree on smaller groups with 6-10 students, organized in a closed set-up, such as U-shape or circles. The interaction in classes, then, is frequently described either as a dialogue between the student and the teacher (e.g., "my ideal classroom will be interacting with the teacher", "I prefer speaking student/teacher 50-50%") or as group work (e.g., "team work and role plays are always the most effective and useful, give more understanding", "every one of us would have a specific role and would have to defend his (her) interest", "work in groups,

discussions", "learning in games", "interactive activities", "group conversation leading by the teacher"). This indicates that even though the concept of a teacher being the central part of the lesson still persists, the students seem to be open and keen to adopt the cooperative teaching/learning methods as accentuated in one of the statements: "Many students don't want to communicate in English in group but then it's useless".

In line with the language skill priorities (see Figure 6), verbal activities prevail in the descriptions of an ideal classroom. Students mention speaking, conversation, discussions, dialogue, interacting, presentations, negotiation, communication, and talk while depicting the ideal classroom as "interactive, based on developing professional communication and self-presentation skills".

While stressing the preference for speaking, students accentuate the importance of working with real-life materials and practical situations ("a lot of conversation about diverse topics, topics from the business and professional world but also topics from the everyday life connected to politics", "use real life examples and discuss", "small groups talk about actual topics", "learn through solving the problems through discussions", "speaking about current problems", "vocabulary and interesting topic and then talk about this at lesson", "the most important is speaking and solving some problems", "model situations such as job interview", "maybe to give teams some case studies, or points of view which they should defend", "only life conversation, discussion. Let it be an active dispute, there should be some conflict or a controversial point of view, which will push everyone to speak. There should be business cases, some problems which team should solve", "I also prefer solving more practical tasks than theoretical problems", "to solve some problematic topic in connection with real enterprises (factory, firm)", "prepare to good communication with colleagues, suppliers"). Similarly, as for materials preferred, stress is put on real-life resources ("different sources, texts, videos, journals", "we should get some new study/teaching materials").

Another observable domain is entertainment. As language courses are more flexible in topic choices, students do not seem not like overlapping content from other subjects, but stress the dimension of "fun" or "school as a game". They would prefer to learn "in games", watch short "funny and educational videos" (e.g., TED talks, YouTube), work with "interesting, creative tasks for students which will wake them up", "discuss topics about interesting things, instead of topics which are covered by other courses within university" or even include topics that are "not boring"

but "based on student wishes" ("why not to allow each student to be the master of the topic for one day?").

Indeed, beyond academic topics, foreign language interaction involves socializing, travel, or networking, as indicated in the data. Small talk and language for socializing, key elements "in building relations and trust" in a business setting (Pullin 2010a: 455), including the attainment of idioms and colloquialism, represent 10% of the desired speaking competences. To maximize opportunities for speaking, the data also reveal a wish for English-only lessons ("I like group work during the class when the conversation happens only in the language that is taught", "integrate as many foreign students as possible to prevent people from speaking Czech", "it's necessary to speak all time in English – for me it is the best way how to get used to spoken language").

A specific area is the students' attitude toward grammar and vocabulary. Although the students feel deficiencies in these areas (as demonstrated in Figure 3), they are rarely present as activity preference in the narratives. Regarding grammar, opposing attitudes appear. Some students would welcome some or more grammar ("I prefer little bit grammar and vocabulary", "paying time to grammar cases every lesson can be a good point"), others are either against or stress the need to change the style of instruction ("teacher shouldn't teach just grammar", "during my bachelor studies, our classroom was about fill-in the workbook and I don't like this way of teaching", "it is necessary to develop their grammar skills also in more interesting way"). Vocabulary is mentioned the least frequently and, as opposed to grammar, this is in strong contrast with the priorities for skills from Figure 6. This indicates that an ideal class in the students' minds is task rather than competence oriented.

Regarding the student-teacher role, while a demand for a controlled environment in which the teacher plays the role of a front-leader still persists ("according to my opinion, class organization should be teacher to student", "role of teacher should be more active than the student's one", "I think the teacher should lead the class, not in the opposite way"), a shift to a more student-centered classroom is indubitable ("students should actively participate", "emphasis on the role of student is very important", "student is active participant of dialogue"). Many respondents see the teacher as a moderator who "agitates" or "activates" rather than "teaches" ("teacher should be like a moderator, judge, will help to express", "teacher should create interesting, creative tasks for students, which will wake them up", "the role of the teacher would be as a moderator of the

discussion and feedback provider", "teacher should not have long monologues", "teacher more of a facilitator, guide").

Last but not least, a desire for a trustful, relaxed, comfortable class atmosphere stands out ("what I think, it has to be as a little family, everyone should be open to talk, not bored, feel comfortable", "students should feel comfortable, free"). This indicates that many of the passive attitudes to communication may result from discomfort or a lack of self-confidence. Students stress a wish for a "helpful", "friendly" or a "nice" teacher who gives "guidance and advice", is of a "support", "closer to the audience, the part of the class, doesn't make people shy because of their language skills, mistakes"). This resonates with the earlier claim that activity in language practice is dependent on the degree of self-confidence, while the teacher-centered approach may have a discouraging effect.

5 Conclusions

This paper demonstrated how simple language management practices can help shape organized language management policies at an institutional level. The time to adopt a bottom-up approach for implementing top-down measures in the language management process has arrived with the demographic shift in global language use. Modern students have more experience with travelling or even working abroad, and they seek internships both in and outside the country. Therefore, the data received from this research provide valuable information for policy makers as they trace the current student skills needs, while adding the perspective of simple language management practices. Based on their interactional experiences, the students note and evaluate their language practices either positively or negatively, that is, as active, passive, strengths or weaknesses. Accordingly, they plan an implementation of their pre- and post-interaction strategies through their formulations of priorities for language classroom. To reach a meaningful change, the current students' needs for social and professional life, articulated throughout the research, should be taken seriously.

The results above indicate a series of teaching curricula adjustments. First, a preference for lessons that serve as language practice opportunities is evident. Students can study grammar guides independently. They can search words and expand their vocabulary with dictionaries or vocabulary applications. They can watch movies or listen to audio materials out of the classroom. They are widely exposed to texts through technology and media. The skill which is difficult to practice as

self-study is speaking. The students' preference for speaking oriented activities makes perfect sense.

For an efficient change, qualitative measures in language teaching methodologies and curricula need to be taken. Firstly, language classes should adopt the functionalist approach, that is, focus on contextualized task-oriented discourse activities to develop the students' interactional, sociolinguistic and global communicative competences. Formalistic precision can be cultivated through adoption of language management techniques, such as self-adjustment routines, which emerge as interactional opportunities activities when students negotiate meaning cooperatively. Secondly, to maximize language contact, an "English medium policy" (Jernudd 2002) should be implemented. This requires an informed teacher and active preparation allocating real-life materials. Textbooks deteriorate in content as world dynamics bring emerging issues. These need to be addressed with a high level of flexibility and expertize.

This does not mean, though, that other language competences, grammar and vocabulary included, should be omitted. Although not prioritized, these are still among the needs emanating from the data. However, as grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing needs vary greatly, teachers should focus on creating opportunities to supply the students with learning strategies and targeted feedback, rather than explicitly teaching them.

To create competence and task-oriented activities, to provide opportunities for social exchange and negotiation of meanings, as well as involving the students as active participants in their own learning, appropriate modern methodologies and class organization techniques with a balanced teacher-student role distribution need to be incorporated into teaching. Although some students still prefer a teacher-centered class interaction, which may be based on habit rather than preference, they seem to be quickly adapting to lessons organized in pairs, groups, or problem solving workshops. Described as cooperative learning in the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking methodology, these are modern teaching techniques (more in Steel et al. 2007) that employ the teacher as a moderator who coordinates the students, who participate in a broad range of joint language management actions.

Last but not least, self-confidence seems to be the decisive factor for the students' willingness to get actively involved in interactional opportunities. As most of the respondents report that they speak the language at a minimally satisfactory level, their reluctance to participate in social interaction seems to be a result of emotional discomfort rather than language inabilities.

To enhance self-confidence, feelings such as fear, shame, shyness, should be eliminated from the classroom. This enhances the arguments for organizing the language lesson based on a functionalist rather that formalistic approach. Focusing on form confines concentration and creates inhibitions in achieving function. In language learning, it is the other way around - achieving function enhances self-confidence which, with a growing sense of comfort, cultivates form.

5.1 Implications for Further Research

To make firm conclusions, more research would be needed. Focus groups and follow-up semi-structured interviews with the survey participants would further clarify some of the responses. In addition, recorded material subjected to conversation or content analysis would add to the precision of the data interpretations. Also, other types of schools would help see the modern student needs more broadly, as the participating students from this study were specific in their professional orientation and had mostly automotive internship experience. Similarly, potential employers' views may bring valuable perspective from the field. Finally, a focus on foreign languages other than English would help understand the complexity of communication needs in a modern, global world.

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In case of a need to communicate in a foreign language, is your attitude rather active or passive?

49%
51%

- 1. ACTIVE
- 2. PASSIVE

Figure 1: Active vs passive approach to foreign language communication

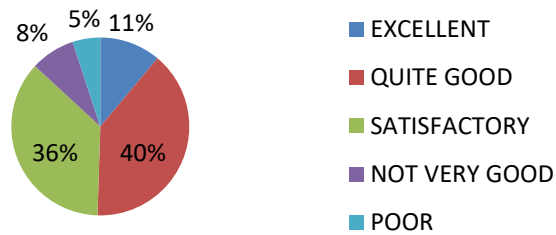**How would you assess your foreign language performance during your internship?**

8% 5% 11%
36% 40%

- EXCELLENT
- QUITE GOOD
- SATISFACTORY
- NOT VERY GOOD
- POOR

Figure 2: Communication performance self-assessment

Describe what yor think are your weaknesses as regards to communication skills

20%
20%
34%
26%

- VOCABULARY
- SPEAKING SKILLS
- GRAMMAR ISSUES
- OTHER

Figure 3: Student perceived communication skill weaknesses

Describe what yor think are your strengths as regards to communication skills
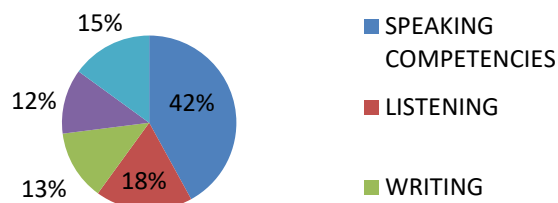

Figure 4: Student perceived communication skill strengths

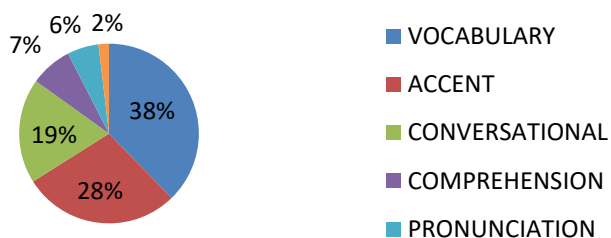**What do you think were the causes of misunderstandings you needed to deal with?**

Figure 5: The causes of communication misunderstandings

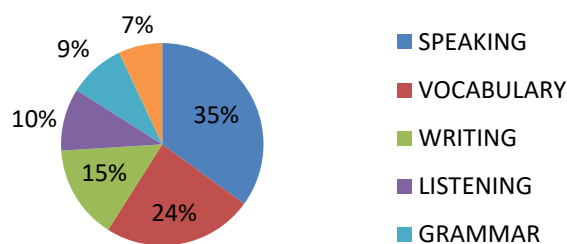**What are the priorities to learn in classes as for your language skills and competences?**

Figure 6: Class related language priorities

Biodata

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