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Critical incidents as a window into simple language management

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Abstract: Language learning is a life-long process. In a world that connects people across nations through study, work, travel and socializing, new chances and challenges arise, intensifying a need to improve modern foreign language skills. The aim of language education, therefore, should not be limited to providing mere language instruction but it should also involve the development of learner autonomy so that students are equipped with strategies, methods, and approaches for managing their language development over the course of their whole lives. Higher Education Institution (HEI) teaching practices need to react to this reality through their teaching approaches and methodologies. The following study conducted with ŠKODA AUTO University presents an analysis of the current students' simple language management (LM) process, which reveals their language learning attitudes, behaviors and 'acts toward' language. Data were collected between 2017 and 2020 from students' written narratives describing and analyzing critical incidents (CI) that reflect the learning strategies the students adopt, the study styles they use, motivation for learning, as well as the actions they plan and conduct. As a result, these findings form the basis of a deeper understanding of the language teaching process, which in turn enhances language education methodology.

Keywords: critical incident; language management; language planning; language policy; language teaching

1 Theoretical underpinnings

1.1 Language education

Foreign languages are among the key twenty first century competences due to their potential to enhance international dialog, cooperation, and social mobility. In the light of this fact, the European Union endorsed the strategic goal to teach all

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European citizens at least two foreign languages known as a strategy framework “1 + 2” (Council of the EU 2014:1), which the individual member states implement into their national strategies and practices. In the Czech Republic, this strategy is laid out in the White Paper for education (MŠMT ČR 2001) and carried over into daily teaching practice through General and School Educational Programs (NÚV 2004).

1.2 Language management theory

The process of setting up language strategies, policies, and teaching approaches was first described in the theory of language planning (Fishman 1971) as “behavior-toward-language” occurring at two levels: a macro-level related to global or national policy makers and institutions, and a micro-level, encompassing decision makers from local institutions, e.g., municipalities, media, schools, or businesses. Language management theory (LMT), a modern concept of language planning (Jernudd and Neustupný 1987; Kimura 2014; Nekvapil and Nekula 2006; Nekvapil and Sherman 2009, 2015; Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003), refers to these top-down initiated language-related policies as “organized language management”.

Language learning presupposes individual life-long efforts. Correspondingly, LMT recognizes a third dimension pointing out the individually driven LM of the language users in their everyday interactions. The original two layers, therefore, have been redefined as macro (global and national) and mezzo (local and institutional), in order to introduce the micro-level as discourse-based everyday communication acts of language users driven by their perceptions, evaluations, plans, decisions, and other interactional strategies, defined as “simple language management”.

Jernudd and Neustupný (1987) regard LM as a corrective process that assumes the existence of a norm where deviation from the said norm is subsequently rectified in four consecutive steps (Figure 1). The first step implies “noting” a normative deviation, which if noted, may or may not be further “evaluated”. If evaluated negatively, then an adjustment “plan” may be designed which, finally, may or may not be “implemented”. This process occurs in both organized as well as simple LM and may be discontinued at any stage. For example, the low foreign language proficiency of inhabitants may be measured, i.e., noted, by a state but may not be evaluated as a problem. If seen as problematic, policy makers may plan an adjustive educational strategy, but still may leave it without implementation in the educational practice. Likewise, a language learner may make a grammatical mistake during a conversation which may or may not be noted by either participant. It may be noted but ignored within

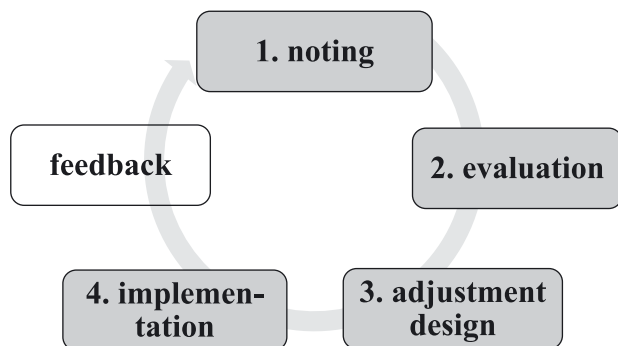


Figure 1: Language management process.

a given context. If evaluated as a problem, either interlocutors may plan a correction, e.g., pose a clarifying question on the hearer's side, apologize, self-correct, or plan extra language lessons on the speaker's side. Even so, none of these plans, for various reasons (e.g., conditions, time, willpower), may be finally implemented.

Nekvapil and Sherman (2009) observe the application of “pre-interaction strategies” in the anticipation of language problems in business practices, e.g., preparing particular vocabulary before a meeting or presentation, consulting with language teachers or more experienced colleagues or seeking proofreading services. The authors also note “avoidance strategies” which, in contrast, aim at circumventing face-threatening speaking situations, e.g., sending a colleague to negotiate, preferring email communication to face-to-face interaction, not sharing ideas due to low self-confidence in a foreign language, etc. In the last phase, the authors outline “post-interaction strategies” planned in response to “what has happened in the previous interaction” for future implementation (2009: 185), e.g., seeking feedback, information, or reaction of others. Sherman (2007) and Kimura (2014) point out that the stages of LM are in fact a cyclical process, since any “post-interaction strategies” will inform the “pre-interaction strategies” of the next instance of communication. They acknowledge feedback, both solicited, or unsolicited, as a fifth stage in the LM process allowing for reevaluation of the earlier stages.

Although national and international policies are clearly delineated, scholars and practitioners continue to explore methods to “streamline” language teaching in order to set up language strategies, policies, and approaches for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) correlating with twenty first century conditions and challenges. Crucial to this endeavor is understanding an individual's behavior-toward-language of their recipients. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to shed

light on students' simple management processes, which would help identify areas of necessary improvement regarding learner-centered education and change, while proposing implications for an HEI's educational practice accordingly.

2 Methodology

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was first used to solve problems related to job success and failure (Flanagan 1954). The technique was later adapted in other disciplines, such as medicine, psychology, or business studies (Apedaile and Schill 2008; FitzGerald et al. 2007; Flanagan 1954; Spencer-Oatey 2013; Wight 1995) as a qualitative data collective research method helping to “uncover existing realities or truths so they could be measured, predicted, and ultimately controlled” (Butterfield 2005: 482). The CIT was also adjusted to the purposes of facilitating intercultural communication through “increasing awareness and understanding of human attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and interactions” (Apedaile and Schill 2008: 7).

Collected in the form of spoken or written narratives, a critical incident (CI) is a brief description of a highly significant, revelatory, or otherwise meaningful and vividly recalled life event that “deviates significantly, either positively or negatively, from what is normal or expected” (Edvardsson 1992: 1) and allows for a wide range of subsequent reflective constructions of meanings built on the narrators' experience. As such, CIs indicate the narrator's own “interpretations of the significance of an event” (Tripp 1993: 8). Research also shows that CIs carry “a high emotional content” because they generate “intense feelings, both at the time and during its subsequent reflective interpretation” (Cope and Watts 2000: 114), for example, confusion, bother, anger, or surprise, delight or satisfaction. As such, CIs are encoded in the memory and in addition to their immediate impact, they stimulate the narrator's future actions. In the intercultural field, CIs are used to study situations such as a misunderstanding, predicament, or conflict (Spencer-Oatey 2013) between participants with varied language and cultural backgrounds. In the current study, CIs are used to explore the simple LM processes related to foreign language communication and learning.

The CIs used for analysis in this study were collected at ŠKODA AUTO University in the Czech Republic from Master's degree students, 22–25 years in age specializing in business administration, who participated in a Business English program between 2017 and 2020. The majority of the students were native speakers of Czech, and a small number were students of Russian, Slovak, or German origin. The students were asked to recall and describe key moments of their lives significant in a positive or negative way. These included situations

evoking emotions, challenging their attitudes or beliefs, causing problems or conflicts, triggering their comfort zone, requiring extra effort, and the like. The students used a general record form to write down their narratives in which they described the participants, setting and actions, their roles, decisions made, including the lesson learned or outcomes. For the sake of the course, the CIs were written in English.

Out of a set of 183 narratives, 45 CIs referring to language issues were identified and used for the purpose of this study. A thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001; Braun and Clarke 2006; Tuckett 2005) was further employed to synthesize patterns related to LM processes, which could be further used for drawing practical conclusions. The analyses revealed a number of themes of the language-related CIs which will be discussed under two categories: (1) situations related to language issues; (2) situations revealing the simple LM acts. These will be further sorted into sub-categories organized in the order of the four LM process stages. Each section will be complemented by a selected sample set of excerpts from the students' testimonies. These citations will be left in their unedited form to reflect the genuine thoughts of the student-respondents.

3 Critical incident analyses

3.1 Situations related to language issues

The data show that foreign languages play a crucial role in the students' personal or professional growth, as the 45 out of the total 183 language-related CIs represent almost 25% of the whole data set. A closer scrutiny of the areas of occurrence (Figure 2), then, cannot only help uncover the key agents of socialization in which

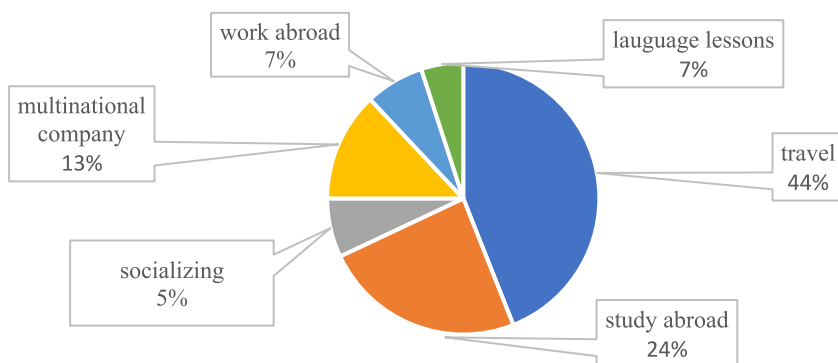


Figure 2: Occurrence of language-oriented CIs by themes.

language-related CIs occur, but also show patterns in the students' language-oriented behaviors and decisions – a key indicator for forming adequate HEI policies, curricula, and language programs.

To begin with, language issues seem to happen most frequently when traveling (44%) on a local level or worldwide, followed by study abroad (24%) within the Erasmus or language programs. A significant number of situations occur during job internships in local multinational companies (13%) or while on an internship abroad (7%). Students also gain communication experiences in language lessons (7%) or while socializing with foreign visitors, class or school-mates, or colleagues (5%).

Nonetheless, other perspectives can be seen. First, students gain most language experiences abroad (travel, study, and work) (75%). Second, foreign languages also represent an important medium during their free time (travel and socializing) (49%). Third, a significant amount of experience is gained at work (locally or abroad) (20%).

3.2 Simple language management acts

As pointed out above, the LM process can be interrupted any time, depending upon (1) an occurrence and acknowledgment of a normative language-related deviation, (2) its type of evaluation by the participants, (3) the existence of a further compensatory strategy plan, and (4) its final implementation. Correspondingly, the student CIs provided constitute varied degrees of progression into the LM process, indicating not only the role of foreign languages in the students' everyday lives, but also the factors influencing their language-oriented decisions or actions. The individual stages of the LM process, therefore, will be discussed separately.

3.2.1 Negative evaluations: realizing the gaps

Evidence of the first two stages of the LM process can be traced in all situations of language use. With regard to negative evaluations of observed deficiencies, inadequate knowledge of foreign languages (Figure 3) of both the students themselves and of others especially stands out. Students frequently experience insufficient language competences on their trips abroad, for example when being unable to fully participate in interaction with the locals. Likewise, they perceive language weaknesses at work. For example, one student regrets not being able to read the Cyrillic alphabet when given a task from his boss to search information from a Russian website. Another student recalls being unable to argue his point

Absence of knowledge
<div><div>- "I went alone without knowledge of language to Spain... I felt a shame when I didn't understand."</div><div>- "The incident happened because I did not have the knowledge of Russian language and alphabet."</div><div>- "A man from Middle East came to buy a ticket, but the sales officer did not speak any foreign languages. The man tried English, German, French, and Spanish. The situation escalated to a fact that the sales officer did not want to sell him any ticket until he learned Czech... I think, it is impossible to hire a salesman to a job on the main railway station in a capital city without speaking not even one foreign language."</div><div>- "The problem was that the personnel of the restaurant did not speak English and the menu was in Italian only."</div></div>
Low competence level
<div><div>- "I flew alone to the US without much English knowledge... I was poorly prepared and my English was on a low level."</div><div>- "My French was not at such a level to play games."</div><div>- "It happened because of language barrier and my level of spoken English."</div><div>- "I learned that even in these days it is still not sure that young people despite studying foreign languages compulsory on a high school can also speak the foreign languages."</div></div>

Figure 3: Noting and negatively evaluating: inadequate competence level.

during a meeting held in English. A few students make a point by expecting more advanced knowledge in the area of travel or services, considering that English and other foreign languages have been mandatory subjects in schools worldwide.

Single references to negative evaluation in the student narratives lay out concrete categories of perceived deficiencies. The first, and one of the more frequently mentioned issues, refers to functional language aspects (Figure 4), in particular inadequate vocabulary or grammar. The students recognize deficient vocabulary and a need for a stronger lexicon to function better on trips or at work with respect to communicative flexibility or confidence in social encounters. Weaker language skills seem to limit them especially in situations requiring a quick reaction, as described by one of the students in an incident while

Vocabulary
<div><div>- "I need much more to improve my vocabulary."</div><div>- "I learned I need to prepare some basic vocabulary for travelling, accommodation etc. in the country I am going to visit."</div><div>- "I need to be able to explain in other words."</div><div>- "I used wrong expression and I could not find the right words at that moment."</div><div>- "I would not be so nervous if I could better explain the situation."</div><div>- "I could not find the right words at that moment."</div><div>- "I did not have time to react, I was taken aback. I wanted to explain that smoking is forbidden at the gas station and there are no special smoking areas. [My boss] was clearly upset because he did not find a place to smoke... It happened due to the fact that I could not quickly react and convey my idea."</div></div>
Grammar
<div><div>- "I'm a perfectionist and I really do not like making mistakes that others might see."</div><div>- "I was scared of grammatic mistakes."</div><div>- "I made very bad mistakes in grammatic and questions."</div><div>- "I was afraid I would make a mistake and someone would laugh me."</div><div>- "I was feeling very uncomfortable when speaking with mistakes."</div></div>

Figure 4: Noting and negatively evaluating: functional language.

accompanying his Russian-speaking boss as an assistant on a trip to Italy. When asked by his boss to find a place for smoking at a gas station, he reports being unable to explain fast enough in English to the boss's satisfaction that smoking was prohibited there. Many students also admit that they avoid communication due to language precision concerns described as “*fear*”, being “*scared*” or “*afraid*” of making mistakes. Their concern about a potential grammatical inaccuracy seems to prevent them in many instances from participating in verbal interaction.

The second category of student negative evaluations includes the set of general communication skills (Figure 5), such as presentations, interviews, negotiation, or problem-solving. A number of students recall failing to complete their tasks in a professional communicative setting, pointing out missed job or business opportunities or team problems as a result. Other students share their feelings of disorientation, frustration, abasement, or helplessness as a result of poor communication skills not only at work or school, but also in their free time or on trips. For example, one student, when taken for a secondary security screening selection check at an airport in the Canary Islands, describes feeling treated as a suspect since he was unable to understand the requests of the officials due to impaired language comprehension. Another student writes about her frustration with being overcharged in Russia by a local craftsman who was repairing her suitcase and with her inability to defend herself. Another student who bought the wrong ticket on his trip to Germany feels helpless after failing to

Presenting
- “I was afraid that I couldn’t make a good presentation in a foreign language.”
Interview
- “During my bachelor studies I was looking for an internship. I found a great opportunity in the technical development in SKODA and was invited for an interview. I was self-confident because I knew basically everything about cars and I had a lot of experience in automotive industry. When I came for the interview, there was a chief of the department and asked me whether I wish to speak in English or in German. I was not expecting this; I thought the interview would be in Czech, but it was not... I saw that all my experience with cars is for nothing, because I could not say anything about it.”
- “I had an interview with two managers and my potential boss. But almost all the time I speak with my potential boss and she asked me really weird questions. The whole discussion was in English. After this interview I was sure that I failed. My English was not very good and I was not prepared for an English interview.”
Problem solving
- “When the controller checked our tickets, he tried to explain something... I was learning German in middle school but I do not use it and I was not understood.”
- “The staff at the airport thought I was a smuggler. I personally felt helpless. I couldn’t do anything at all... I didn’t understand them, and I didn’t know what they wanted me to do.”
- “I had to visit a local ‘craftsman’, not speaking English. I had to communicate such problem with my poor Russian language skill and was told, that as long as the suitcase is American, it will cost much more... Russia is not a country to argue with locals as a tourist.”
Intercultural competence
- “The group consisted of four Czechs and five Slovaks. At first, I thought that it doesn’t matter that much, because we all speak a very similar language... I started to realize that similar language is really not enough to get ultimately comfortable. It started with sense of humor.”

Figure 5: Noting and negatively evaluating: communication skills.

explain to the German-speaking train conductor that the mistake was not deliberate.

The third category of negative evaluations dominating the student testimonies is a lack of self-confidence (Figure 6). Described mostly as “*shame*”, “*fear*”, “*uncertainty*”, or “*nervousness*”, self-doubts affect school discussions, work meetings, job interviews, private encounters such as living and speaking with a host family, or shopping. The data also indicate that due to inhibitions in speaking, the students tend to avoid consciously situations that include spoken interaction, but regret it in retrospect as missed opportunities. While some of their self-doubts may dwell in personality traits, such as shyness, many seem to be a result of negative experiences from the past, for example, after failing at work or in school or after miscommunication or interpersonal conflicts.

In summary, it becomes clear that, regardless of continuous school input since the early stages of the educational ladder, today’s students still perceive limits in their language competences. Besides functional language, or general communication skills limiting them in varied academic, professional, or personal situations, they also struggle with factors of an affective nature, such as self-confidence. In order to make adequate adjustments to language-related policies on a macro as well as mezzo level, however, a deeper look into how students construct and further implement corresponding adjustment strategies is necessary. The following section, therefore, will focus on how students design or plan to compensate for the gaps in their everyday interactions.

3.2.2 Designing adjustment: a mind-set shift

The second LM stage describes the process of forming language-related decisions in the students’ minds prior to being implemented. The narratives that refer to

Shopping
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “I remember going to a shop with my friend and arguing with him about who would talk to the shop assistant, because we could not speak the language.”- “My friend, whose father is German, doesn't want to talk. I do not understand that someone who has the gift of knowing foreign language does not appreciate it.”- “I understood what she said but my language was so bad, so I could not answer anything. After that I had a big problem with speaking, I was ashamed.”
Host family
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “I regret I was too shy to say more about me.”
Job interview
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “My nerves, poor preparing and self-doubt left a bad impression about me.”
School
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “The only problem is that I’m little bit afraid of speaking in front of people. I knew I was one of the best ones in our German class at grammar school, but still not confident enough.”

Figure 6: Noting and negatively evaluating: lack of self-confidence.

designing an adjustment strategy (Figure 7) mostly copy the categories described in the previous stages. The students indicate plans to intensify their study of foreign languages to improve their language competence level. They also lay out various specific vocabulary – building study plans, e.g., to streamline communication in hospitals, shops, airports, or hotels in preparation for their future travels. Some also intend to train their promptness and reactions in foreign languages, as well as realize the importance of gaining more self-confidence and willingness to leave their comfort zones. Besides that, they stress the importance of preparation, planning a series of pre-interaction strategies for work related situations, travel or just for the sake of gaining more confidence.

Seen from the perspective of LM Theory, the plans students design in their minds in order to compensate for their language-related deficiencies indicate what they set as language-related needs and priorities for their everyday lives. In particular, the excerpts presented show that the students see foreign language knowledge, higher competence level, or stronger self-confidence as a route to easier, more efficient and safer travel, higher academic performance or professional success. The students also seem to be aware of the fact that the way to achieve this is through more intensive study efforts, a certain degree of discomfort, and careful preparation. Though not all the CIs demonstrate these realizations, they bear evidence of the plans they intend to implement.

Language study
- "When I use Czech more than English, I start to forget it. I need more everyday practice."
- "I must learn German at least at a low level in near future."
- "I decided that I would learn new languages and discover new countries and culture. I do not want to be an ordinary surface tourist."
Vocabulary
- "I am going to learn some basic vocabulary for travelling, accommodation."
- "Next time, I should be more prepared in vocabulary."
Self-confidence
- "...if I want to succeed, I must develop self-confidence."
Comfort zone
- "In the future, I will not be afraid to speak (hopefully) even in situations where I do not understand."
- "Today I would try very hard to find some topic we have in common because I'm aware how great opportunity for practicing my English this would be."
Quick reaction
- "I realized that we should strive to practice quick reactions in all situations."
Preparation
- "I learned from this situation that if you do not know the language or communicate poorly, you need to prepare. For example, write standard questions and answers."
- "I learned a lesson that you need to prepare well, to be not afraid and confident in yourself."
- "I learned that everything I do needs more preparation than I thought."
- "I learned, that I will have at least some application, when I will travel abroad to be able to find basic words in a language I do not speak."

Figure 7: Noting and negatively evaluating: adjustment design.

3.2.3 Implementing adjustment: the triggering factors and outcomes

To better understand the principles leading from the students’ minds to autonomous steps toward implementation, this section progresses to the fourth stage of the LM process, that is, selecting those CIs that contain a description of concrete language-related adjustment strategies. In general, the students’ testimonies seem to reveal three types of adjustments in their language-related behaviors, attitudes, or actions. First, as a result of perceived language knowledge gaps, students seem to concentrate their further efforts on intensifying their language studies. Second, because of a well-managed situation, many students tend to reevaluate their attitudes toward their own performance and boost their self-confidence. And third, they also seem to find strategies to compensate for their gaps in language knowledge through employing their communication and soft-skills.

In particular, intensified language study (Figure 8), include enhanced frequency of study time, various types of challenges, such as self-obligations of a

Threat
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “It was my fault, which would not happen if I had spoken Spanish. I had to start learning Spanish right away... This was my motivation. I went there every summer for three years.”- “I badly filled visa and immigration workers led me to the office... [they] put me in the middle of the room to search my luggage and backpack thoroughly. They took my phone and read the conversations on WhatsApp and Messenger. They searched my wallet and had a lot of questions about my trip, my relationship with my family... Because my English wasn’t at a good level, [it] was very difficult for me to explain that I’m not going to work in the US... This incident had a big impact... in five weeks I learned more than 700 words and improved English”.
Failure
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “I was looking for an internship. I found a great opportunity in the technical development [in a car company] and was invited for an interview. I was self-confident because I knew basically everything about cars and I had a lot of experience in automotive industry. When I came for the interview, the boss asked me whether I wish to speak English or German. I was not expecting this... My English-speaking skills were quite poor, but I decided to try English. It was very stressful for both of us... I could not make myself clear and the boss did not understand what I was saying... Since then, I have studied English much more than I used to. Every time I go for an interview, I remember this horrible experience and I prepare myself much more”.
Embarrassment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “I apologized but with a pronounced accent. She was very angry and started yelling at me... I understood what she said but my language was so bad, so I could not answer anything. I was ashamed and tried to speak only Czech language for a long time”.- “The receptionist tried to tell me something, but I didn’t understand a word. I wasn’t able to tell him I didn’t understand. We stared at each other and it was a very unpleasant feeling. I learned that it is important to speak and not be afraid even in unpleasant situations... It was a good impulse to start working more on my language skills and to start traveling more and meeting foreigners”.- “Since I was afraid to speak, I was giving her only some brief answers. It all ended with her starting to talk with other German girls and that made me feel very ashamed... After this incident I tried to improve my English a lot and work on my communication skills. I believe I’ve came long way since this incident.”- “I was the first student who handed [the thesis] in... the supervisor firstly praised me for handing it in so early and then he continued to criticize my English. The whole lecture theatre, full of almost 100 students heard how horrible my English was, that it was nonsense for me to study this subject... I was disgraced in front of the other students. I had no words... First of all, it really motivated me to learn more... I learn five economic words every day.”

Figure 8: Intensified language study: triggers.

number of words learned, situation specific vocabulary pre-interaction preparation, repeated visits to foreign countries with the aim of improving local language skills, and the like. The implementation of the language study-oriented acts, however, seems to be conditioned by the existence of a variety of triggering factors. Among the most frequently mentioned ones is threat, such as violations of security, personal values, face, or success. For example, one student reports that while working as an au pair in Spain, she nearly scalded the child in the shower because she was unable to communicate a warning. As a result of this incident, she reports not only intensifying her studies of Spanish during her stay, but she also claims that this incident motivated her to return to Spain in order to improve her language during the following three years. A similar response can be observed in the incident from a USA airport inspection where a student incorrectly filled in the immigration form. The student reports that the experience of his communication struggles during the security examination resulted in learning 700 words within five weeks during his stay in the USA.

Another triggering factor leading to intensifying language learning efforts and professional skill development is experiencing failure or embarrassment. For example, one student claims that his weak English-speaking skills revealed during a job interview resulted in his losing the job opportunity and caused him to intensify his language study efforts. Another international student recalls a conflict with a shop assistant in Czechia provoked by the student's inability to defend herself and reports that this intensified her efforts to seek more opportunities for speaking practice. Similarly, a student takes a more proactive approach to languages through extended travel and socialization after an embarrassing experience with a receptionist in a hotel in an English-speaking country. Another one reports improving her English after an embarrassing failure to connect with the Erasmus student she was assigned to assist at school.

A feeling of embarrassment may trigger a series of adjustments reaching beyond increased language-related efforts, as reported by a student feeling humiliated in front of a full lecture theater by a teacher criticizing her English writing assignments during her Erasmus stay in Austria. She mentions that this incident prompted her not only to intensify her language learning, but also, and more importantly, it led her to stand up for herself and reinforce her self-confidence (Figure 9). The student explains that feeling humiliated made her realize her strengths and incited her to improve her performance not only in the prospective language course, but also in other school subjects.

Similar to intensified study efforts, gaining self-confidence seems to be conditioned by further triggering factors. In contrast to embarrassment, self-confidence can be gained thanks to a supportive atmosphere, as reported by a student describing her relationship with a host family in Switzerland. She claims

Embarrassment
- “I was disgraced in front of the other students. I had no words... I knew a I have been quite successful in other subjects... Finally, I passed the exam on best grade.”
Health and safety
- “[The doctor] stitched [the wound] with 14 stitches... I needed to visit another surgeon to give me antibiotics, tetanus and do the x-ray... They gave me antibiotics by vein, but after a while, I started to feel headache and all my body was shaking... I had to scream for help. I ended with an oxygen mask, all around me there was medical staff... I found out that I could use English even in tense situations. I am more self-confident in speaking, because I know I can say what I need even in a difficult and stressful situation... I knew I had to settle this myself... I think this experience shifted me a little further in speaking in English... I learned that what I really want to, I can do it.”
- “As many other students, I was afraid to talk. During the lessons, I was sitting on the chair quietly. But in the afternoon, during the sightseeing, I got lost. So, shyness had to go, I was forced to talk. Surprisingly, survived and since then I can speak without fear.”
Challenges
- “I had to present luxury cosmetics. I was trained directly by the boss and his wife who were very strict to me. I was afraid that I couldn’t make a good presentation in a foreign language. [They] gave me only one attempt, not giving me the opportunity to make a trial version without a client. Afraid to fail, I did an excellent presentation, without making a single mistake... I’m glad it happened to me. Since then, I have no fear of speaking, I freely communicate and work on it.”
- “I flew into the unknown. I was very worried. I was 17 and this was my first trip abroad. I flew completely alone and I knew that I had a lot to do myself and without any support... In the coming year, I learned the language and went to university... If I was offered to repeat this again, I would do it with 90% probability.”
Personal values
- “In Manchester with my boyfriend... we went to the nearest shopping mall, where I found nice handbag... The owner of the shop started to explain to me the positives of this handbag. I wanted to explain him something, but I had used wrong expression and I could not find the right words at that moment, so my boyfriend told that instead of me. I was really embarrassed ... Although my boyfriend was trying to help me, in this situation he made it even worse. I was quite mad, that I could not finish on my own... I asked my boyfriend not to help me in these situations... Even if I can’t find the right words, I am trying to manage it alone and I don’t allow anyone to speak instead of me.”

Figure 9: Boosted self-confidence: triggers.

that her shyness and initial feelings of embarrassment at her poor language skills were dissolved by the positive approach of her hosts.

Students also dissolve self-doubts after enduring various health or security related incidents abroad. One student relates her experience of a hospital visit in Greece where she was treated for an injury. She reports that language skills played an important role in the interaction with her agent, doctors, and nurses, and being able to make herself understood led to a realization of her aptitudes. Another student recalls that getting lost in Brighton during a study abroad language course accelerated his boldness to start using English more actively. Even the aforementioned student facing a stressful experience at a USA airport security examination accepts that being able to endure this incident made him trust himself more.

Self-confidence also seems to be gained through job or study challenges as illustrated in the case of a student working abroad who recalls her first public presentation. She relishes her strict and uncompromising bosses, who made her concentrate on high-quality performance. Similarly, a Kazakh student speaks

about discarding her initial self-doubts after a successful year of studying in Prague. Being dependent only on herself helped her gain confidence in her abilities and motivated her not only to learn the local language, but also take up further university studies in the country.

Similarly, the violation of personal values or threats to one's face present another triggering factor resulting in enhanced self-confidence, as retold by a student after an incident in a store in Manchester when her boyfriend helped her communicate with the store attendant. Her feeling offended by her boyfriend's gesture of good will provoked her into an emancipated reaction asking him to let her communicate her issues on her own.

Besides enhanced language study efforts or boosted self-confidence, the third type of adjustment strategies the students report is compensating language-related deficiencies with soft-skills (Figure 10). Most frequently, these are employed in situations when students faced challenging tasks at work or in school or when circumstances forced them to leave their comfort zone. One student points out making his first conscious effort toward more active cooperation with his colleague when struggling with a difficult project at his job internship which, as he reports, subsequently resulted in his seeking cooperation more actively. Another student admits to becoming more compassionate with foreigners after her experience of discomfort as an international student in an elementary school exchange program in France, which brought on loneliness, depression, and even despair.

In summary, based on analyzing various language-related strategies or plans, it becomes obvious that students' language-oriented behaviors, attitudes, or actions tend to be triggered by diverse contextual factors. These seem to be internally motivated, that is, aimed at their basic instincts and emotions, such as security, personal values, or self-esteem, which when at stake, seem to result in the

Challenge
- "My internship in international sales department... focused on eastern Europe, e.g., Ukraine, Moldova, Russia. I got a special task from my boss to analyse some of our regions' markets. That would not be a problem if all the websites were not in Russian and therefore in Cyrillic... Firstly, I did not want to ask anyone for help and wanted to do it on my own but then I decided to ask my Russian friend and together with Google Translator I managed to finish the task... I learned I do not have to do everything on my own... I am no longer afraid to ask someone for help."
Comfort zone
- "I could not speak French good enough and I could barely understand. I remember that weekend as a very demanding one, I felt uncomfortable, lonely and almost desperate, I was very tired... I constantly had to make decisions whether to stay positive or give up... Looking back, I can see that this challenging experience gave me a lot. It made me step out of my comfort zone and overcome discomfort... I realized, that it always helps to talk to people even if it is not easy... I also remember my exchange stay in France whenever I see someone who does not understand well or who is lost. I do my best to help, because I know, how that person feels."

Figure 10: Enhanced soft-skills: triggers.

student's action. Therefore, the plethora of pitfalls encountered in communication are instrumental in both language acquisition and personal growth.

3.2.4 Implementing adjustment: the strategies

Many of the CIs collected bring evidence of concrete strategies (Figure 11) which students use to compensate for various momentary, anticipated, or experienced

Synonyms
- "One word seemed strange to her, she repeated it with surprise. I replaced this word with a synonym."
Clarifying questions
- "I began to ask more clarifying questions in order to reach an understanding."
Gestures
- "I decided to show the waitress by gestures that we would like to try the dish the people were having."
- "I went downstairs to the reception desk to ask for pillowcases and sheets... I started explaining my problem. I didn't know how to say 'bedding' in English. Awful... I drew pictures of a bed and all that."
- "Even though we had communication problem, we laughed at it."
- "If you can't communicate with words, your smile and gestures will speak for you."
- "I learned to relate easier to my mistakes by laughing it off."
- "I try to smile and be kind, because it helps a lot."
Preparation
- "Two weeks since I moved in, I went alone to the store... In Belarusian there are a lot of similar words and this is very confusing to me. I went to the assistant and asked: Where can I find champignons. Well, I thought I said so ... But the word 'find' I did not say in Czech but in Belarusian. The assistant was shocked as in Czech it is one of the most indecent words... After that incident, I always double-check the words in the dictionary. Before important conversations, I write down a plan for myself."
- "Every time I go for an interview, I remember this horrible experience and I prepare myself much more not just for interviews but for meetings at work as well, because you never know when English will be useful."
Online tools
- "Watching these videos is also beneficial for my learning English."
- "I was with a friend of mine comparing our Badoo profiles... Between all those guys was just a common Czech boy trying to catch my attention. He looked like a good target for Czech language practices, at least he was using punctuation and capital letters... He proved to be patient with me and my 'tragic' Czech language skills."
- "Together with Google Translator I managed to finish the task."
English lingua franca
- "The salesman started to pack things for us. I tried to explain that we didn't want the goods... But he forced us to buy it. I tried to speak with him in English, but the salesman could speak German."
- "Once I arrived in Madrid, everything was great until the language barrier became an issue. I tried to walk around it by using English."
- "My French was not good enough... and the people around me could not speak English at all."
- "At the elevator we saw a little boy crying and sitting on the ground... I knew I'd better explain the situation in English than in German."
Avoidance strategies
- "He asked me in front of everyone why I was participating in a project when I couldn't speak English very well. I felt sad and embarrassed... All my classmates looked at me, I don't know what they thought. I didn't know what to say. As a result of this incident, I was afraid to speak."
- "I will remember this situation for the rest of my life. I've been pretty scared since then. For a moment... I didn't want to go anywhere anymore."
- "I was trying to answer her questions and give my opinions but my English was very delicate (sic) and since I felt ashamed, I rather tried to avoid future communication with her."
- "Now I'm afraid to say something wrong so it's better to keep silent or ask someone else to say for me"
- "I was trying to avoid having to speak [the language], so I wanted my friend to speak."

Figure 11: Implementation strategies.

communication deficiencies. First, the students exploit several verbal or non-verbal tools. They mention using synonyms to compensate for gaps in vocabulary; some work with clarifying questions to reconcile miscommunication, and others exploit IT tools, such as translation applications to convey their messages. At the same time, they sometimes employ non-verbal communication strategies, such as gestures to substitute for unknown expressions, drawing to explain the unknown word or smiling and laughing to ease communication difficulties.

In their descriptions of study efforts, students obviously work with information technologies. They watch videos or join social media sites with the intention of practicing or refining their language skills.

English as a lingua franca is used in foreign language situations when the students and their interlocutors do not speak another common language, for example, when negotiating at a market in Egypt, working as au pair in Spain, studying in France, or when communicating an emergency in a shopping mall in Germany.

The data also show students making conscious preparation for concrete situations. One Belorussian student started studying specific situation-related terms in preparation for future situations after an unpleasant miscommunication due to using the wrong expression in a store in the Czech Republic. Another student, after losing a job opportunity due to weak English competences, admits that from then on, he started to prepare carefully for any occasion he anticipates would occur in a foreign language.

Many incidents, however, result in adopting avoidance strategies, at least for a limited time. This is indicated by a student on an exchange program who concedes to being afraid to speak in front of her classmates after being openly offended by a fellow exchange student. Similarly, the aforementioned student who recorded his experience from the US airport examination admits that for a while this incident discouraged him from a proactive attitude. Another student, after failing to connect with her German Erasmus peer, started avoiding communication with her. Some students also avoid communication through hiding behind others, as confessed by a few students who wrote about using their more communicative friends to speak for them in various situations.

In a nutshell, the four steps of the LM process described in this paper so far show what students notice and evaluate as language and communication related deficiencies in their everyday actions. In particular, they see and deal consistently with an insufficient level of competence, poor vocabulary, inadequate preparation, slow reactions, or communication or soft skill drawbacks affecting the results of interviews, presentations, problem-solving, or negotiation at work, in school or on their trips abroad. The CI analyses also indicate how students design corresponding plans in their minds to compensate for perceived

deficiencies. These plans, if set forward by internally-oriented triggers, seem to further result in enhanced study efforts aimed at language and communication skill development or boosted self-confidence. Students also adopt a variety of interactional strategies exploited to solve immediate communication problems (e.g., using gestures, questioning, using English as a lingua franca), a set of post- or pre-interaction strategies as a result of and/or in preparation for various types of situations and contexts (e.g., studying context-related vocabulary, practicing using IT apps), or disparate avoidance strategies compensating for self-doubt or embarrassment (e.g., using friends as agents of communication, avoiding communication situations).

3.2.5 Implementing adjustment: negative evaluations reevaluated

One category of negative evaluations noticed from the analyses of the first two LM stages, however, deviates from the LM trajectory described in the implementation stage, in particular students' initial negative evaluations of formative language inaccuracies. The CIs addressing language precision issues indicate that, based on the feedback students receive during the communication situations, they tend to change their perceptions of what they most frequently define as "*mistakes*" by arriving at several realizations (Figure 12). First, some of them observe that language or grammar inaccuracies either tend to go unnoticed or are simply ignored, that is, they are not evaluated negatively by their interlocutors. Rather, the students realize that their conversational partners tend to focus on the communicative result and appreciate the students' effort, abilities to communicate or they simply desire to socialize, despite formal language shortcomings. Second, students come to realize that their general communication or soft-skills make up for formal language inaccuracies in many types of situations. Finally, some students also express regret at being initially reserved in communication because they are afraid of making mistakes, and blame their inhibitions for missing opportunities. In short, the students seem to grasp that grammatical precision plays a minor role beyond the classroom.

Besides interactional experiences, reevaluations of students' attitudes to grammar inaccuracies can also be a result of role model authority. Upon feedback from their teachers, friends, advisors, or bosses, students report making rational changes of mind toward language precision. Contact and interaction with role models generally seems to strengthen their self-confidence, reassures them of their abilities and brings internal satisfaction.

The findings indicated in the students' reevaluations of their initial concerns about formal language precision lay out important implications for language teaching and learning. They not only show the key role of role models in students'

Own reevaluations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “Luckily they appreciated my effort and overlooked the mistakes.”- “I met a lot of people from foreign countries and despite my bad English I was able to talk to them.”- “When I was calling for help... I cared just for what I am saying, not how I am saying it.”- “I learned not to be afraid of speaking, especially with non-native speakers, because the others don’t care about my mistakes, they just want to talk.”- “in a similar situation again, I would not be afraid of making mistakes ... and I would just communicate as much as possible.”- “I realized that there’s no shame if I make a mistake, better be wrong then to keep silent.”- “This incident helped me to understand that I should not be afraid to make a mistake, need to be able to explain in other words.”- “If I didn’t care about speaking with some mistakes, we could have had a better conversation and maybe find some things we had in common to talk about... Today I wouldn’t be ashamed if I’m making mistakes in grammar because I know it doesn’t matter so much.”
Role models feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- “I was really scared before this week, because it was my first contact with native English speaker. I was afraid of doing (sic) mistakes and I thought that he won’t be able to understand me. During this week [we] spent many hours with [our language teacher] Chris... I completely changed my mind. Of course, my English wasn’t perfect and I did lots of mistakes, but I realized, that I’m able to communicate with him and he understand me!”- “The lecturer started to speak about our English. He said that we speak very well even if we think it’s not true. He highlighted that we shouldn’t care about making mistakes and just speak. Other people will understand us even if we speak with mistakes. The important thing is that we can still have an interesting conversation and fun... He wanted to increase our self-confidence and assure us that we shouldn’t be scared to speak... It had a huge effect. It helped me to remind myself that I shouldn’t be afraid to speak in English and shouldn’t mind doing some mistakes. I also try to spread this message among my friends who struggle a bit with speaking in English mainly because of their fear of doing grammar mistakes.”- “My boss is 53-years old man, who is very kind, optimistic, helpful, and talkative... Bob is more friend than boss. These seven months completely changed my way of speaking English. I am not afraid to speak, even though I make still many mistakes.”

Figure 12: Negative evaluations reevaluated.

confidence, whether colleagues or superiors at work, coaches and advisers during free time or teachers in schools, but they also indicate the importance of socialization beyond the classroom.

4 Conclusions

CI, as described by Tripp (1993: 24), prove to be “an excellent way to develop an increasing understanding of and control over professional judgment, and thereby, over practice”. CI, as conveyed by the students in this study, show their potential for language learning and teaching. Analyzed through the lens of the simple LM process, they provide a valuable insight into the circumstances of individually driven language-related attitudes, decisions, behaviors, and actions, and as such, bear wider implications for shaping the organized LM forms. Indeed, the CI both accelerate the process of growing self-awareness and self-driven steps toward developing key competences and skills when experienced by students, and also represent valid material for educational institutions and nation states while setting up meaningful language policies from within.

The data highlight some basic findings which may help form these steps. First, it seems that even at the time of globalization and sophisticated language teaching strategies and programs, foreign language competences still cannot be taken for granted. The student testimonies describing various situations from practice reveal significant gaps in both functional competences when using English as a global lingua franca as well as abilities to communicate in other foreign languages within varied local contexts. The CI analyses presented also indicate that there is a mismatch between what is required in schools in the area of language skills compared to what the reality of communication is in practice.

Second, the data prove the vital importance of social interaction when learning a foreign language as students obviously gain most language experience outside the classroom. Consequently, language learning and teaching cannot be limited to formalized lessons and include meeting with friends, peers, colleagues, or role models, taking part in free time activities, traveling and taking trips abroad, seeking local or international study, and work internships. In these wider contexts, students realize their needs in practice, develop corresponding communication and language learning strategies, gain valuable experience, and grow on a personal as well as professional level.

Finally, in the context of socialization and language interaction, this study points out the general importance of stepping out of one's comfort zone within the learning process. In particular, incidents that trigger basic instincts or values seem to help invigorate students' abilities, knowledge, and skills. After enduring stress, discomfort or failure, students realize and test their aptitudes, boost their self-confidence, identify areas for self-improvement, and become more proactive in their learning efforts. They start planning better, cooperate more efficiently, become more socially active, develop interpersonal skills, such as compassion or understanding, and become more willing to take personal responsibility for their own learning. In other words, social interaction in varied contexts means facing more CIs with a high and memorable emotional charge, which has a significant impact on internal motivation for learning, develops student autonomy and ultimately leads to accelerated personal self-development, academic or professional success.

4.1 Implications for HEI of language education

By implementing the key findings from student individual behaviors into language education practice on an (inter)national or institutional level, HEIs arguably play a prominent role, as they prove to be a key source of both primary and secondary agents of socialization in students' lives. The data presented in this study show that

students gain their language experiences not only when interacting with their international peers, colleagues, or advisors during their studies, but HEIs also influence most of their work, freetime, or travel initiatives behind the scenes. As a gateway to social interaction, HEIs should, therefore, foster their internationalization programs, regardless or even in spite of global epidemics. With a view to creating the invaluable possibilities to participate in interaction and build social networks, they should not resign from expanding their institutional partnerships among countries, but further encourage study, work, teaching, and research exchange, as well as provide adequate adaptation services to both incoming and outgoing students and scholars. Schools should also endeavor to be an informed partner in developing students' international opportunities and travel plans, as well as cultivating their professional motivation and interests.

The data also indicate the strong impact of job internships on student advancement. Besides learning languages in practice, students gain invaluable work experience, test their abilities, realize their weaknesses and strengths, take risks, and experience failures while still under the protection of the status of a student. HEIs, therefore, should consider extending cooperation with companies or institutions to provide more opportunities for practical training and incorporate job internships into their curricula.

To help students fill the perceived foreign language gaps, HEIs should continue to enforce their language programs, which would not only strengthen their English programs and offer a variety of foreign languages to meet the 1 + 2 European strategy, but also, and more importantly, restructure their language teaching approaches and methodologies. They should implement the principles of modern student-centered, content- or competence-based approaches, such as Content-Based Instruction eliminate acronym (Brinton et al. 1989), Task-Based Instruction (Ellis 2003), or Content and Language Integrated Learning (Marsh 1994; Morgado et al. 2015) which are better suited to preparing students for practical life situations in various social contexts. This implies a necessary change in the way grammar is taught, mistakes are treated, and student communication skills are evaluated. To fill the frequently mentioned gaps in practical vocabulary, competences to handle challenging life and work situations, including prompt reactions and self-confidence, a functional rather than formative approach should be implemented into everyday teaching practice (Pullin 2013, 2015; Richards 2017). This means necessary adjustments in organizing class interaction and activities, which aim at developing interactional competences, such as abilities to solve problems, make decisions, and draw up strategies and plans.

While analyzing the language-related situation through the CIs as they are experienced, described, and interpreted by the students themselves, this study emphasizes the importance of drawing students as equal partners into the process

of forming language-related policies on national and institutional levels. Students are not only active users of language in varied contexts, but also the end receivers of the language services formed by nation states and institutions. Student needs analyses, therefore, should be an inseparable part of the HEI procedures on how to build curricula and designing courses, to better identify what students find necessary for not only their personal or academic life, but also, and quite importantly, for their professional careers.

This, finally, leads to stressing the importance of teachers as role models and partners for study and student personal development. The data show that teachers can be a crucial source of positive motivation, leadership, advice, and constructive feedback. Their expertise and experience as well as a competent and empathetic approach, along with creating a psychologically safe atmosphere for learning, significantly contribute to developing student learning autonomy. Teachers are an important authority along the path to developing efficient language learning strategies, building confidence, and overcoming initial self-doubts. An incorrect approach, on the other hand, may do harm.

The ultimate goal of schools, nonetheless, is to prepare students for life-long learning. This study shows that besides its potential for creating language policies, the CIT can also serve as a powerful educational method leading to this goal. While engaging students at a meaningful and personal level through interaction, discussion, writing, or feedback, CIs show them how to “examine attitudes and behaviors that might be critical to their effectiveness in the roles they are already performing or preparing for (in the workplace, in educational settings, and in society at large)” (Apedaile and Schill 2008: 7). Even languages are learned over the course of one’s whole life. Integrating CIT into language education, therefore, represents a functional strategy that students can continue employing in other contexts.

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