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Working Papers in Language Management

No. 6

How multinational corporations affect their local surroundings: Sociolinguistic insights from the Czech Republic

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Working Papers in Language Management are published online by Language Management Research Group, associated with Charles University, Prague, and Sophia Linguistic Institute for International Communication, Sophia University, Tokyo. The opinions used or expressed therein are not necessarily shared by the publishers.

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Abstract

Multinational companies can relatively easily affect the social and communicative processes taking place not only within their branches, but also in their geographical surroundings. This feature has been largely overlooked in the specialized sociolinguistics literature. In this paper, we focus on how multinational companies that operate in the Czech Republic and are based in two countries, Germany and South Korea, change the social and language life, and also the appearance (linguistic landscape), of neighboring towns. We begin by detailing the research background that has led to the current project. We then take a more critical look at the context we are currently examining and introduce our theoretical-methodological approach, based in Language Management Theory (Jernudd & Neustupný 1987; Nekvapil 2016). We detail the most relevant characteristics of the German and Korean communities in the Czech Republic, which contribute to the historical-structural conditions that assist us in our analysis (cf. Tollefson 1991). We then examine the cases of two municipalities, Frenštát pod Radhoštěm and Frýdek-Místek, revealing that the observable diversifying impact of the Korean multinationals is considerably higher than that of the German multinationals, and at present is the object of significantly more socio-cultural management.

Keywords: multinational companies, language management, Czech Republic, Germany, South Korea

Introduction

Multinational corporations or companies (hereafter ‘multinationals’) have become the topic of research in a number of disciplines: economics, sociology, anthropology, history, political science (see, e.g., Bielewska & Jaskulowski 2017; Pula 2018) and to a lesser degree, sociolinguistics as well. Sociolinguistic research has focused above all on the communication taking place between different groups of employees inside the company (including communication between individual branches of the same company) and communication between the company employees and customers – either representatives of other companies, or even end users. This has also been the focus of our own research in the Czech Republic since the second half of the 1990s. We originally aimed at the linguistic *behavior within the boundaries* of the companies – that is, communication between foreign delegates (the so-called expatriates) and the local workers, the languages that they use and the level of mutual understanding in interactions.

However, what happens inside the company walls is just a small part of the company’s influence on sociolinguistic development. From a more macro perspective, it is well known that some multinationals are such massive economic units that their assets exceed the gross domestic product (GDP) of entire countries (cf. Collinson & Morgan 2009). It can thus be presumed that multinationals through their prestige and power relatively easily affect the social and communicative processes taking place not only within their branches but also in their

¹ This paper was initially written for *Chinese Journal of Language Policy and Planning*, where it will appear in Chinese. This English version has been slightly revised and expanded.

geographical surroundings, and can act as an important diversifying element. This feature, though not neglected entirely (see Sherman et al. 2010; Sloboda 2016), has been largely overlooked in the specialized sociolinguistics literature and the aim of the current research is to remedy this situation.

In this paper, we will thus focus on how multinational companies that operate in the Czech Republic and are based in two countries, Germany and South Korea, change the social and language life, and also appearance (linguistic landscape), of neighboring towns: how they contribute to establishing new businesses such as restaurants and hotels (these are used by the expatriates, their relatives, foreign visitors but also local inhabitants), how communication in such facilities takes place, how encounters between foreign small business owners and local people look, to which extent the interest in languages used in multinationals emerge among local people, etc.

We will begin by detailing the research background that has led to the current project. We then take a more critical look at the context we are currently examining and introduce our theoretical-methodological approach, based in Language Management Theory. We detail the most relevant characteristics of the German and Korean communities in the Czech Republic, which contribute to the historical-structural conditions that assist us in our analysis (cf. Tollefson 1991). We will then examine the cases of two municipalities, Frenštát pod Radhoštěm (Frenštát for short) and Frýdek-Místek.

Background

Our research has run parallel to the development in Czech society following the political changes in 1989 and has always been inspired by issues made relevant *outside* of the academic sphere, i.e., by the anticipation and experience of real-life problems of intercultural communication in the newly emerging (or even renewed) forms of economic cooperation. The first such instance of this was the establishment of the joint automobile manufacturing venture Škoda-Volkswagen near Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, in 1991. Because the Volkswagen concern was the major investor in this project and was presumed to represent the import of certain know-how, one point of society-wide discussion was how the newly arrived top management employees from Volkswagen would effectively cooperate with their Czech colleagues. Specifically, there existed the potential for the renewal of ethnic and linguistic conflict, of the dominance of German speakers in various domains of Czech society, culminating in the period of German occupation during WWII, following which more than two million individuals of German ethnicity were expelled from the country.

The question at hand, then, was how the employees, identifying themselves as Czechs and Germans, could overcome their past differences and institute a work atmosphere that was mutually beneficial. Based on interviews with both groups and participant observation inside the company, the research team used Membership Categorization Analysis (Sacks 1992) to show how the employees tried to shift the focus from national identities to corporate or professional identities, for example by preferring the use of the term “expert” instead of “German” or “German colleague” in place of simple ethnic categories such as “German” (Nekvapil 1997a; 1997b).

A second phase of the multinationals research, beginning in 2004 and lasting approximately until 2010, found itself in a new context. The initial privatization processes of the 1990s had ended, and many companies had established routines (or, in fact, a series of routines) in their communicative practices, with many individuals working together for a number of years. And the number of multinationals operating on Czech territory had increased. The aim of this research was to generally focus on the use of language in economic settings, more specifically, in workplaces that were important for the local economy and in which multiple languages were used. One major fieldwork site was Siemens VDO Automotive (later Continental) in Frenštát pod Radhoštěm. This site was chosen based on the company's previous participation in a larger survey and willingness to participate in follow-up research. Based on interviews at the Frenštát plant, another branch in Regensburg (situated in Germany) and the headquarters in Hannover (also Germany), participant observation, recordings of meetings and photos of the linguistic landscape in the plant, the analysis, based in Language Management Theory, demonstrated above all the shift from German to English in the company globally and the gradual decrease in German presence locally (Nekula, Nekvapil, Šichová 2005; Nekvapil & Nekula 2006; Nekvapil & Sherman 2009a, 2009b; 2013; Sherman et al 2012). German knowledge among the Czech employees, had shifted from being highly important to simply being a free bonus among potential employees. Alongside the company research, additional data on attitudes toward English as a *lingua franca* were collected at the technical secondary school in Frenštát.

During the final years of the second phase, other events were culminating in the greater Ostrava industrial region where the Frenštát plant is located. One of the most heavily medialized of these was the construction of the first plant of the Korean-based Hyundai Motor plant in Europe, the largest foreign investment in the Czech Republic, located in a small village close to the town of Frýdek-Místek. Among other issues, such as the sale of the land and ecological concerns (Mácha & Drobík 2010; 2011), there was also the question of whether the local inhabitants would be able to successfully work in the Korean company, and conversely, whether the Korean employees would be able to successfully settle in the region. Given these circumstances, a very clear further path for the research on multilingualism in multinationals opened up (see Nekvapil & Sherman 2018). The beginnings of this were at the Hyundai Motor plant in 2011, but the data collection also expanded into Ostrava to companies such as SunWoo Hitech or Hyundai Materials (see below). With the support of Korean Czech language scholars from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul (many graduates of which are working in the Czech Republic), we have been able to enter the headquarters of both Hyundai and Samsung in Seoul. Again, the research was based on participant observation, interviews and photography of the linguistic landscape. The starting point for not only the analysis, but also the research design, was the idea that the position of individual languages and varieties in Asian companies in the Czech Republic would be different than in German companies. In other words, there would be minimal to no direct historical relationships between the two countries involved, there would be no presumed linguistic accommodation by other side (Czechs would not speak Korean and Koreans would not speak Czech), and the starting levels of English knowledge of the Koreans would be different (from a normative perspective, lower) than those of the Germans. Vast socio-cultural differences inducing extensive socio-cultural management were also anticipated, not only as manifested in everyday workplace communication, but also in what might be called "company culture".

As the trajectory of our fieldwork site selection demonstrates, the logic of our research was gradually leading us to the assumption that it might be useful to compare German-based multinationals with multinationals which are very different, that is Korean-based. Note that though motivated by the research agenda, such comparison is also done by people in the region themselves when trying to find a job and considering both options. In this paper we will compare only one feature of German-based and Korean-based companies, that is, their impact on the socio-cultural surroundings.

As the last phases of our previous studies, here we will utilize Language Management Theory (Jernudd & Neustupný 1987; Nekvapil 2016; He & Dai 2016), which focuses on the ways in which people behave toward linguistic, communicative and socio-cultural phenomena. The management process involves noting something which does not correspond to social actors' expectations, potentially evaluating it and designing and implementing an adjustment, if possible. In this case, we will focus in particular on socio-cultural management. There is a good reason for this choice of approach: we presume that, when multinationals enter a local space, they automatically and necessarily cause observable changes in that space. On the one hand, these changes are noted by the locals, both individuals and institutions, who must react and adapt to them in some way. On the other hand, the companies must find ways to cooperate with the locals, gain their approval and maintain their reputation. And the company employees must manage the activities of their everyday lives in the new surroundings. As in the last phases of our previous studies, our research methodology has been grounded in sociolinguistic ethnography.

The issue of context

Though we started with the claim that the socio-cultural surroundings of multinationals have been left aside by the sociolinguistic research, it must be acknowledged that a broader context of multinationals, demographic, linguistic, political, cultural or geographic, has been to some degree considered even in our own investigations – however, such context was conceptualized as that of the whole country. Demographic data on the inhabitants of the country where the multinational company is to establish branches or plant are crucial. For example, there is the question of to what degree the given country can be a consumer of the products manufactured by the company. However, it is not only the overall number of inhabitants in the country, but also its ethnic composition which is another important demographic indicator – in Central European conditions, information about ethnicity is often a predictor of language knowledge, which is necessary for the communication between the expatriates and the local workers. Multinational companies have not always existed everywhere – they presuppose a specific political and economic context. It is not a coincidence that multinationals only began to operate in the former Soviet Bloc countries after the fall of state socialism and the introduction of the market economy in the 1990s. Finally, among the key factors in the decision regarding the expansion of the multinational company is the geographical position of the country. For example, the arrival of Hyundai Motor in the Czech Republic was motivated by the latter's upcoming membership in the European Union and also by the proximity of the sister Korean automotive company Kia in Slovakia.

These types of contexts are typically a standard part of the research on multinationals, and this was also the case for our investigations. Note however that these types of contexts are conceptualized not only very broadly (as contexts of the *whole* country) but also as fixed variables determining the possibilities of existence and workings of the multinational in a

particular country – the issue how the multinationals themselves affect these countries is left aside. This issue is, of course, a very complicated matter, and here we will focus on the ways in which the multinational company affects only its socio-cultural surroundings.

The local context under research are two towns not far from Ostrava, that is, Frenštát pod Radhoštěm, the site of the German-based multinationals Vitesco Technologies (formerly Continental) and Siemens, and Frýdek-Místek, the closest town to the Korean-based multinational Hyundai Motor (on the geographic position of these two towns see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Czech Republic

Historical-structural conditions

As we have already indicated above, functioning of multinationals in a particular country cannot be divorced from historical-structural conditions. Of those, we in the first place want to address the main features of the respective communities, that is the German and Korean communities in the Czech Republic. A few observations on characteristic features of the German and Korean companies follow.

On the territory of the Czech Republic, the German ethnic group existed for centuries. This is not surprising given that the Czech Republic's longest border is with German-speaking countries – Germany and Austria (see Figure 1). Even after the forced displacement of about 2.5 million Germans in 1945-7, an immediate consequence of WWII, the German community has remained among the largest non-Czech communities, amounting to tens of thousands of people (though the number is decreasing). Additionally, new immigration waves of Germans from Germany took place immediately after 1989, not only tourists but also entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs often represent German companies, which have influenced the Czech economy in the 1990s and beyond as a major contributor to the latter's foreign direct investment (FDI). As mentioned above, Germany's strong economic dominance during this period was reminiscent of previous political dominance, such as the weak position of the Czech ethnic group within the Austro-Hungarian Empire or the occupation of the former Czechoslovakia by Hitler's Germany. Not surprisingly, the associated negative experiences led to mixed feelings among the Czech population. It is also worth mentioning that German companies arrived in the Czech Republic not only because it was economically advantageous for them, but also because they could count on the rather extensive knowledge of German among the Czech population. After the social change in 1989, the mandatory status of Russian was abolished and German became the most taught foreign language and kept this position till 1997 when English for the first time was taught more than German (for more details see Neustupný & Nekvapil 2003).

As for the Koreans, the history of the Korean community starts only in the 1990s, that is, with the gradual introduction of the market economy². The size of the Korean community is difficult to determine, however, it likely consists of no more than several thousand people (2,048 with temporary residence and 452 with permanent residence as of December 31, 2021 according to Directorate of the Foreign Police Service). In the 2021 census, 1416 residents declared Korean as their native tongue. Prior to, and in anticipation of, the Czech Republic's entrance into the EU in 2004, Korean companies began sending representatives there with the aim of establishing branches and plants that would operate under very advantageous conditions. Note, however the case of the plant Avia Vodňany bought by the Korean company Daewoo as early as in 1995, which, like other large Korean companies, had already been operating in other European countries (cf. Cherry 2001). At present, there are several tens of Korean companies operating in the northeast part of the Czech Republic (Ostrava region), where we have been conducting systematic research since 2011. Hyundai Motor, SungWoo Hitech, Hanwha and other companies have set up branches here, some employing up to several thousand people. According to Park (2022), currently there are 90 Korean-based companies in the Czech Republic. In the period of 2013-2020, many visitors to Prague were likely surprised to find at the Prague international airport signs giving information not only in English, Czech and Russian, but also Korean (see Figures 2 and 3), as the Korean company Korean Air gained a significant share in the company operating the airport in 2013, and established a regular direct flight between Prague and Seoul (note that there was no German on the signs).

² Note, however, that as many as ten thousand students from North Korea appeared in communist Czechoslovakia in the 1950s. They left the country during 1960s due to the changing political atmosphere in the country.



Figure 2: A sign at the international airport in Prague; the English inscription is followed by the Czech, Russian, and Korean versions. November 2016



Figure 3: The same sign in the broader context of the airport. November 2016

However, the Covid-2019 pandemic largely restricted the flow of passengers, and as a result, the multilingual signs have been replaced by the signs using only English and Czech.

Frenštát

Frenštát pod Radhoštěm (Frenštát for short) is a small town (about 11,000 inhabitants) in the northeastern part of the Czech Republic. It is located 41 km south of Ostrava (37 minutes by car), and it is the site of the branches of German-based multinationals Vitesco Technologies (Continental) and Siemens. Both branches employ about five thousand employees. Its employees come not only from the town, but also from the wider surroundings – in terms of administrative units, from the district Nový Jičín and, in an even broader sense from the region Ostrava. The number of non-Czech citizens living in Frenštát is not available, but the statistical data for the whole district Nový Jičín is as follows: 3,175 foreigners and of these, only 39 Germans (21 with temporary residence and 18 with permanent residence; as of December 31, 2021, according to the Directorate of Foreign Police Service). In view of the total number of the inhabitants in the whole district, amounting to 149,919 as of January 1, 2022 (source: Czech Statistical Office), it is obvious that the share of the foreigners in the district is very low, that is 2.1%.³

In the town, there is the Grammar School (Academic Secondary School) and Secondary Technical School for Electrotechnology and IT. On its website, the school declares long-term close cooperation with both Siemens and Vitesco / Continental. However, at the Technical School, only English is taught, even within the educational program Electrotechnology (which may be the closest to the needs of Frenštát's multinationals branches). At the grammar school, English is taught as the “main foreign language”, that is, mandatory, and German, French or Russian as the “second foreign language”, that is, the students only choose one out of the three. At the Hotelová škola [Hotel College], the language offering is almost the same, French being missing.

The strategy of English Only at the Secondary Technical School is in harmony with language requirements given in the announcement of free positions in both the branches. As of Oct. 6, 2022, Vitesco Technologies was offering 7 jobs – the description of work was formulated only in Czech and among requirements there was “a professional CV with a letter of motivation in Czech and English” (5 positions) and “communicative knowledge of English” (6 positions). No other language was mentioned. As of the same date, Siemens had 6 open positions. The job descriptions were in Czech with one exception in English, and for all positions, a “communicative” or “good” knowledge of English was required (in two cases, German was permitted as a potential alternative).

The present dominance of English was already anticipated in an interview that we conducted at the Secondary Technical School more than 10 years ago - the informant is an 18-year-old Czech student specializing in IT, is in his final year of study, and has thus far learned only English; he

³ This share is considerably lower than the statewide average: as of December 31, 2021, the total number of inhabitants of the Czech Republic was 10,516,707 inhabitants, of which 660,849 were foreign nationals, that is, 6.3%.

has been asked if he would like to learn another language in the future, e.g., German; the student has stated that he would have nothing against doing so, and the interview continues as follows:

RESEARCHER: mm hmm. and do you think you'll actually do that in the future?

STUDENT: well if it's necessary then I probably will

RESEARCHER: and do you think it'll be necessary? ((laughs))

STUDENT: ((laughs)) hmm. hard to say. it depends on where I get a job and stuff like that, right

RESEARCHER: hmm

STUDENT: even though I think that English completely supersedes German that it's not necessary to have both languages there ((at work)) that (.) at this point I can get by anywhere with English.

The German origin of both companies (Vitesco Technologies and Siemens) is not highly visible to the public in Frenštát, in fact, there are only two indications of it. In the case of Vitesco, it consists of flags flying in front of the main administrative building and also visible from the street: German, Czech and EU (in this order). We also observed another indication of the relevance of Germany or the German language in the company magazine *Stator*, published by the Siemens plant (the magazine is also available at the information center on the main town square, i.e., it is not aimed only at the plant employees, but also at the public) – the magazine is written in Czech and a continuing German course called *Sprechen Sie Deutsch?* [= do you speak German?] is issued on its back page. When asked why a German course is issued in the magazine, the editor in chief responded that they are a German plant after all and many employees travel to Germany. Interestingly, the course of German has replaced an English course being published for three years.

The linguistic landscape in Frenštát as it is gradually emerging before the eyes of the visitor walking along the streets of the town is dominantly Czech. There are no traces of German, and only some of English and Polish. A quote from our field notes illustrates this:

We walked around the square. English signs appear here in only exceptional cases (I took photos of about two cases of this). At the Information Center for tourists, there were brochures in English and Polish, and when I asked if they had anything in German, the employee there managed to find one. She said that Germans speak English and that Frenštát is now really targeting Poles.

One of the most central points of intercultural contact outside of the plants in Frenštát consists in the surrounding restaurant and accommodation facilities. In the hotel in closest proximity to the plants, English and German can be heard among the clientele, and a student waiter from the Hotel School in Frenštát, working there as part of his training, reported occasionally using his chosen second foreign language, German, with customers. However, the signs in the hotel lobby, as well as in the rooms, are only in Czech and English (see Figure 4). In the elevator, there is a short text about the history of the hotel, including photos of how it looked at various points in the past, but this is all only in Czech, which indicates that Czech clientele is also welcome. Hotel staff also told us that many people from German-based companies located in the wider region came to stay at the hotel, for one or two days and rather exceptionally for longer periods such as a month. The owner of a restaurant close to the hotel estimated that about 70% of his customers come from the hotel, that they are often Germans, and that he communicates with them in English and through the use of gestures and “foreigner talk”.



Figure 4: Bilingual signs in the hotel lobby - as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the pens used by hotel guests for check-in are disinfected after each use. For this reason, it is necessary to differentiate between pens that are disinfected and those that are not, with two precisely marked glasses on the receptionist's desk serving this purpose. September 2022

Frýdek-Místek

Frýdek-Místek is the statutory city of the district of the same name with approximately 60,000 inhabitants. It is located 24 km south of Ostrava (18 minutes by car). It is located in close proximity to Korean companies such as Hyundai Motor, Hanwha, Hyundai Materials (several thousand employees). In the whole district (i.e., not only in the statutory city, but also in the surrounding zones), there are 4,202 foreigners. Among these, there are 150 Koreans with temporary residence and 45 with permanent residence (as of December 31, 2021 according to the Directorate of the Foreign Police Service). Based on our observations however, these numbers can vary substantially, particularly in the upward direction, as short-term stays of Korean workers need not appear in police statistics. This or that way, in view of the total number of inhabitants in the district amounting to 212,347 as of January 1, 2022 (source: Czech Statistical Office), it is obvious that the share of the foreigners in this district is also very low, though the share of Koreans is several times higher here than the share of Germans in the Nový Jičín district.

Frýdek-Místek has two academic high schools, Gymnázium Cihelní (GC) and Gymnázium Petra Bezruče (GPB). Like in Frenštát, both schools offer English as the first foreign language, and for the second, students can choose from German, Russian and French (GC) and from German,

Russian and Spanish (GPB). There is also a technical school, a merger of three formerly autonomous schools (Střední průmyslová škola, Obchodní Akademie, Jazyková Škola Frýdek-Místek) which, interestingly, has offered the teaching of robotics since 2018, that is, a specialization characteristic for the modern production of cars. Not surprisingly, the school's web page mentions cooperation with Hyundai Motor (described as "a significant employer with international participation in our region"), for example, during the visit of students from a German secondary school. The study of technical specializations requires English and the choice between German and Russian. Otherwise, there are 7 state secondary schools and 4 private secondary schools, offering the full range of practical fields of study. As regards languages, also these schools offer what can be generally expected in the Czech Republic at this kind of schools: English, German, Russian and Spanish, with Latin and Czech Sign Language offered to students studying in health and social work programs, respectively.

Like in Frenštát, the job advertisements for the Hyundai Motor plant more or less correspond to the schools' offer. Between October 13 and October 19, 2022, there were 11 open positions. The required knowledge of foreign languages was more wide-ranging in its descriptions: none (production operator, electrician), "English an advantage" (quality inspector), "moderate communicative knowledge of English" (junior specialist for maintenance), "intermediate knowledge of English – daily communication" (junior strategic buyer), "communicative knowledge of spoken and written English" (junior specialist for logistics), "advanced knowledge of English" (junior specialist in sales planning), "communicative knowledge of English (minimally B1)" (junior specialist for security) or simply "communicative knowledge of English" (specialist for construction and investment, quality specialist for final assembly, junior specialist for technical administration of maintenance). All positions except for the production worker and quality inspector include the benefit of English or Korean language courses.

Unlike in Frenštát, the presence of Hyundai Motor, as well as numerous other Korean companies, in the Ostrava region, is spread out over a larger geographical area. Though the companies in both towns are located in industrial zones and are accessible by public transportation (which, however, runs primarily based on the company shifts), the companies in Frenštát are more or less embedded in the town, while the Hyundai Motor plant is located in what was previously a cabbage field, outside of any town structures. Outside of the plant, then, the Korean presence is visible primarily in the center of Frýdek-Místek and in one village, Dobrá, located between the plant and Frýdek-Místek, about 5 kilometers from its center.

The Koreans in the Ostrava region and in the area surrounding Frýdek-Místek work in a broader range of professions than the Germans in Frenštát. In both locations, the Koreans and Germans work as managers on various levels, in the German case almost exclusively in top management positions such as chief financial officer. In the Korean case, however, there are not only a great number of individuals working at the site of the Hyundai Motor plant and in direct dependence on it (e.g., in a subcontracting relationship), but also those owning and working for companies with a more indirect dependence. At the plant, there are specialists or technicians working directly in the production halls, sometimes flying in only for the short term (e.g., in maintaining the robots used for assembly, resulting in the Czech nickname "robotáci" for these Korean workers). But there are also people working in the plant's cafeterias and canteens, as the Hyundai Motor plant (and others, such as SungWoo Hitech in Ostrava) serves Korean food along with Czech food, and also has a small store selling Korean products next to the canteen.

Though these facts may seem to be primarily of importance for the situation inside the companies, we can observe that it influences the life in the surroundings as well. Outside of the plant, in Dobrá, the village between the plant and Frýdek-Místek, there were, at the time of our research, two restaurants serving Korean food, at least one of which (based on internet searches, repeated visits to the restaurant, and an interview with an owner), appeared to change hands frequently. Koreans were working in these establishments as cooks and waitstaff. And as for Frýdek-Místek itself, the establishment of the Hyundai Motor plant and other Korean-based companies stimulated the opening of 5-10 Korean restaurants (some of which eventually closed) in the town, a special Korean grocery store was opened, and various accommodation facilities for Korean clientele were set up. Here Koreans were working primarily as managers of the facilities, and typically employed local people as waitstaff and maintenance staff.

These establishments contribute to the diversification of various aspects of the social life of the town (for example Koreans working in towns in the region that are further away stop and spend the night there). They also diversify the linguistic landscape of the town, as manifested on the bilingual Czech-Korean signs or English-Korean signs or just Korean signs (e.g., handwritten notices on the doors of establishments). Such signs index new social processes taking place in the town (cf. analogous processes in Maly 2016). At one point during our fieldwork on Zámecké náměstí (Chateau Square, named for the adjacent chateau), one of the centers of Frýdek-Místek, we counted five Korean establishments, i.e., approximately a third of all establishments on the square.

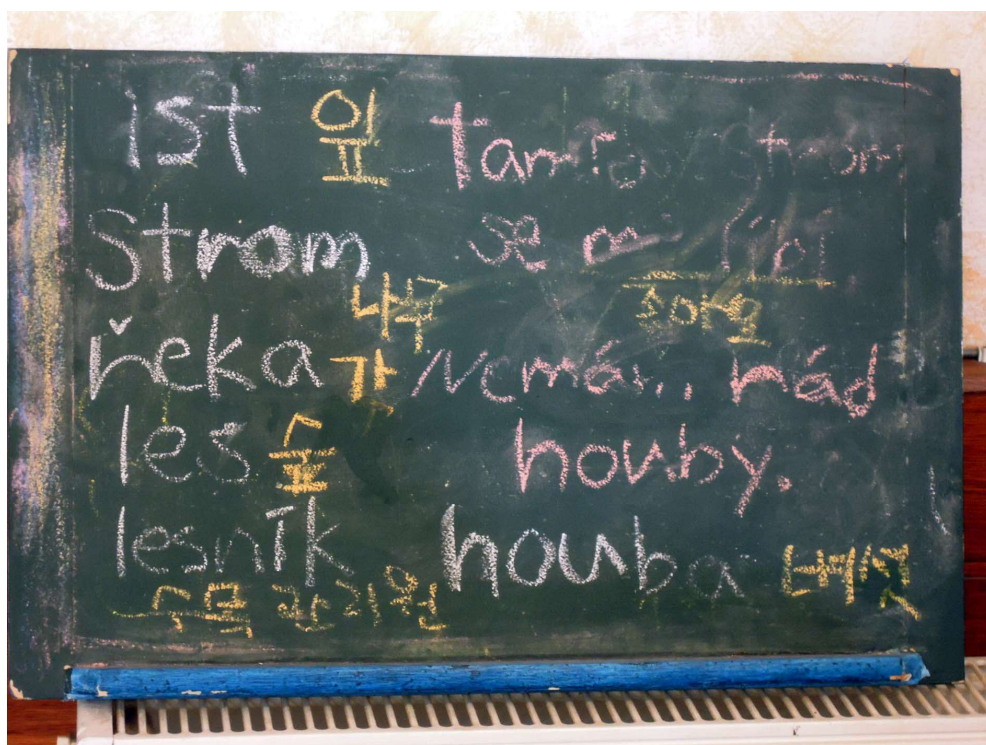


Figure 5: A chalkboard in the interior of a Korean restaurant - on it, Czech words are written with their Korean equivalents on the same line as or just below them, e.g., in the column on the left are the words *list* (leaf), *strom* (tree), *řeka* (river), *les* (forest), or *lesník* (forester). August 2019.

The local surroundings of the company do actually indicate that there are instances in which Czechs and Koreans learn each other's languages, though perhaps not entirely fluently. In the interior of one Korean restaurant we found a chalkboard which was used for learning Czech by the Korean owners of the restaurant (see Figure 5). Note that this restaurant was frequented not only by Koreans who might have been the primary customers but also by the Czechs, so at least a visual idea of the Korean language or script was establishing itself in the Czech environment.

Restaurants, of course, can contribute a lot to the cultural diversity through the products they offer. Particular food or meals, however, require particular ways of treating them and these particular ways can constitute a barrier preventing from selling such meals. A great challenge for the Czech customers is the use of chopsticks. At one Korean restaurant catering not only to Koreans but also seeking to attract the Czech clientele, detailed instructions "How to use the Korean chopsticks?", written in Czech, were attached to the menu (see Figure 6). Most likely, this act of socio-cultural management was initiated by the will to solve specific socio-cultural problems, but also by the will to strengthen positive feelings from an intercultural encounter, in other words, a so-called gratification (Neustupný 2003) might have occurred here.



Figure 6: "How to use Korean chopsticks?" – "(1) grip one stick according to the picture (creating a firmly held stick) between your thumb and ring finger, (2) grip the other stick with your remaining fingers, as if you were holding a pencil (creating a moving stick)..." August 2019

The presence of Korean establishments in the public space of Frýdek-Místek and its surroundings has also led to the need for socio-cultural management in everyday face-to-face spoken service encounters. An interview with a Czech waitress working in a Korean restaurant in the center of the town provides an indication of the socio-cultural norms and expectations in operation:

WAITRESS: a lot of times someone comes in and (.) sees the Koreans so (.) they simply run away right...and then there are people who specifically ((come here)) and I think they're here by accident and I tell them we're a Korean restaurant. And they say well, but that's the very reason we're here...

RESEARCHER: aha. (.) and d- did it happen that some people were somehow e: insulted?

WAITRESS: ...yeah that's happened that like a lot of times they'll say that's why we're here. We came to have Korean food. And I say well I apologize in that case, because most people come in here by accident, like, the Czechs of course, they come and they find out from the menu, which is why I sort of warn people at the door...

The waitress's answer points to the general expectation that Czechs are not interested in Korean food, and, more generally, that the two groups are segregated, the illustration of which is described initially ("someone comes in and sees the Koreans so they simply run away"). She summarizes the socio-cultural management she conducts as "I sort of warn people at the door". However, she also details the experience of a gratification (the concept mentioned above), or a positively evaluated deviation from her (negative) expectations, wherein the Czech customers tell her "but that's the very reason we're here...we came to have Korean food". In this case, a different set of norms are assigned to the Czech customers by the researcher, who asks if they are insulted by the waitress's warning (i.e., that the waitress did not see them as cosmopolitan individuals with a taste for international food). The waitress indicates that this happens, and when it does, she is able to handle the situation by apologizing and explaining the norms that have led to her actions ("I apologize in that case, because most people come in here by accident").

The rather minority interest in Korean restaurants on the part of the locals demonstrated here is also reflected in the rather limited demand for the Korean language. In contrast to German, Korean is not taught at secondary schools and in fact it is offered only by a few private language schools, and only a few local people working in Korean establishments reported having learned a few words. Individual interest in learning Korean at a more advanced level is sufficiently satisfied by individual face-to-face classes. At one private language school in Frýdek-Místek we even encountered the opinion that it is not necessary to learn Korean because at the Hyundai Motor plant they do everything in English.

Discussion

The subtle presence, bordering on absence, of the German language, is likely related to the desire of the German-based companies to not present themselves as exclusively German, but as international or global. This strategy was used programmatically in the 1990s, when the arrival of German capital in the Czech Republic was viewed by many Czech citizens as a threat to the national state, as a return of the "traditional enemy". Thirty years later, this motivation is not as relevant – today it is important for German companies that they are viewed as global players. For this reason, German managers and expatriates are willing to use English as the language of

globalization and thus they confirm the opinion that “you can get by in English with Germans”, which is characteristic not only of local workers of multinationals, but also local inhabitants living in the region. This is also helped by the fact that in German-based companies the expatriates need not be necessarily ethnic Germans, for example, in Frenštát’s Vitesco Technologies the CEO is an Indian. Significantly, the German-based companies do support learning foreign languages, financially or even allow the local lecturers to enter the enterprise, but they focus on English (though German is not excluded).

The Korean multinationals essentially have the same strategy – they do not want to be viewed as Korean, but as global. An essential difference, however, is that they are not able to execute this strategy through the use of English, as the knowledge of English among many Korean managers is low. Hyundai Motor’s language policy is thus not restricted to offering English courses for local employees, but it also aims to improve the level of English of the Korean employees. Though Hyundai Motor does offer a Korean course to the local employees, interest in it is very low and the course itself is understood more as an act of socio-cultural management than as a tool for improvement of the communication between the locals and the Koreans. Significantly, it also serves as preparation for the sending of local employees on short-term stays in Korea, which happens relatively frequently.

Our findings have been based on the comparison of two small municipalities (Frenštát and Frýdek-Místek) which are sharply delimited by the Czech administrative system. The focus of our research has been given not only by this external fact but also by the fact that town identities are deeply grounded in the consciousness of the local people. It may be presumed however that what we have found goes beyond the confines of the two towns. As we indicated at several points, a relevant research unit might be constituted by the whole Ostrava region. An external manifestation of the regional coherence on this scale is the organization of public transport, ensuring the fluent movement of the labor force across the whole region. Overall, the Ostrava region may represent a specific “regional innovation system” (Cooke, Heidenreich & Braczyk 2004), a concept still awaiting sociolinguistic elaboration (cf. Williams 2004; 2010). An expansion along these lines remains a potential subject of our future research.

Conclusions

Unlike German companies, Korean companies stimulate the emergence of infrastructures that satisfy the needs of the Korean employees (accommodation and restaurant establishments, canteens and shops). These establishments exist physically beyond the borders of the company space, in its immediate surroundings, and are thus also accessible to and for the most part, shared with the local inhabitants. The market mechanism leads to the fact that this “Korean infrastructure” serves the local, non-Korean clientele, and can thus influence their daily lives. German companies do not create an infrastructure of this type, as they essentially do not need it. There is a very limited number of German employees (e.g., in Siemens there are currently just three) and they are basically not forced to remain in the region physically – Germany is easily accessible by numerous forms of transport and it is possible to commute there relatively frequently. Another issue is the fact that German culture is largely integrated with the Czech one (and *vice versa*) over the centuries, and, as a result, there seems to be a little socio-cultural difference among the German and Czech ethnic groups (for example, there are no German restaurants as a particular type in the Czech Republic). This is related to the fact that German is a

language that is basically at home in the Czech Republic, even though it no longer has the position of the first foreign language. It is firmly anchored here not only in the consciousness of the local employees, but also institutionally, as a language regularly offered as a part of the Czech education system. In contrast, Korean culture including the language represents for the locals something that is completely new. Therefore, the observable diversifying impact of the Korean multinationals is considerably higher than that of the German multinationals, and at present is the object of significantly more socio-cultural management.

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