ZSUZSA ARENDAS

'Every word has its special weight'

A qualitative case study of multilingual realities at Siemens, Hungary

ABOUT THE PROJECT

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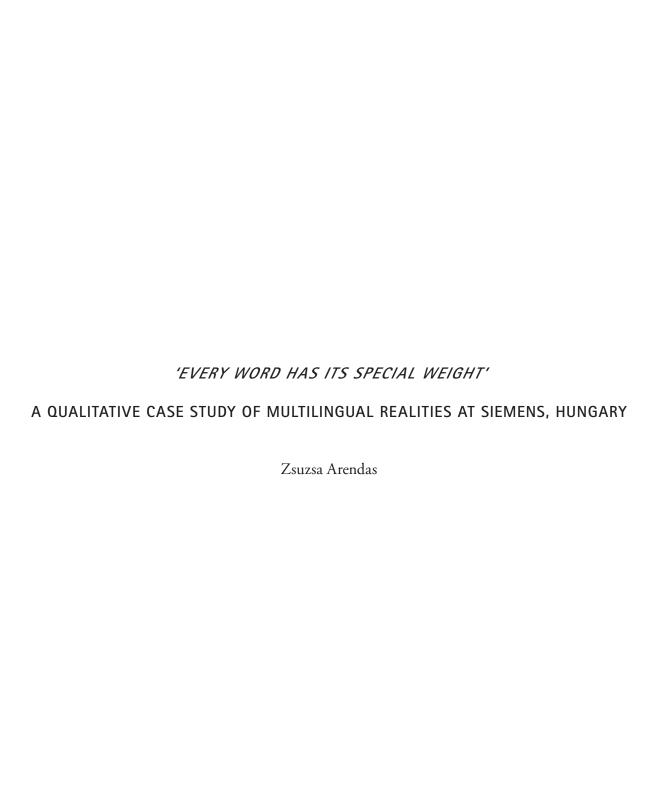
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Zsuzsa Arendas is currently a Visiting Research Fellow at the Center for Policy Studies, Central European University.

CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY
Nádor utca 9, 1051 Budapest, Hungary
http://cps.ceu.edu, cps@ceu.edu

'EVERY WORD HAS ITS SPECIAL WEIGHT'

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF MULTILINGUAL REALITIES AT SIEMENS, HUNGARY

Zsuzsa Arendas

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

It is a generally accepted fact that multinational companies (MNCs) are typically multilingual due to their operations at different sites in various parts of the world, employing large numbers of local employees. However, to facilitate 'in-house' communication, and to manage the often vast linguistic diversity, they use a *common corporate language*, which is English in present business world. It serves as a channel, a link, or a lingua franca between employees belonging to different nationalities, ethnicities or lingusitic backgrounds. For an anthropologist, studying daily manifestations of cultural forms and practices, the instantly arising question is how the idea of a common coprorate language is implemented and used in everyday work-related situations at different sites and locations of MNC practices.

For studying the above, I have chosen Siemens Hungary a company with headquarters in Germany and senior managers coming from Germany and a sizable local (Hungarian) workforce. It was clear from the first visit at Siemens that the *lingua franca* is English, though its status as a company language was not always certain. While senior managers and CEOs were coming from Germany, mid-level managers were from both Germany and Hungary, and blue-collar workers were not expected to speak any foreing languages.

Due to the presence of multiple languages (German, English, Hungarian, and in further instances French, Spanish, Arabic), it seemed to be obvious from the beginning of the research that despite a common company language/ and or a *lingua franca* everyday communication in these locations is a complex socio-linguistic phenomenon. The interplay of different languages connected to different forms and locations offered an interesting case for analysis. These linguistic multiplicities also suggested that English as a corporate language does not automatically lead to its adoption, nor does it become „shared" automatically through the organization. I became interested exactly in those barriers or obstacles of a shared corporate language, how do they emerge and in what situations, also what kind of larger socio-political or socio-linguistic issues can be identified behind them.

As Nickerson (2005) points out, 'the communication event is often considerably more complex than the label of English as *lingua franca* would suggest'. This happens so due to various reasons: the subtle (or sometimes not so subtle) presence of other languages, the link between language and identity often manifested in various forms of nationalisms, such as linguistic nationalism, the different social statuses of languages and their speakers in the society, the historic traditions of different languages and multilingualism as such in the given society, and not least the language competencies of speakers in languages used inside the company.

This latter is a frequently observed criteria by researchers, as company communication often takes place between speakers whose fluency in English varies, and who may use one or more languages alongside English (Baren-Rasmussen 2003). It suggests that communication gaps, misunderstandings may arise due to different language competencies of speakers of company interactions. Code switching

is also a typical linguistic practice, when speakers of a foreing languages switch back and forth between languages depending ont he discussed topic, level of conversation, new participants int he conversation, and so on. As I observed at Siemens Hungary in informal situations, when not very comfortable in a certain language, speakers tend to 'fall back' to their native language shared by others in the company, this way retrieving to their comfort zones. Such situations form part of those 'multilingual realities' (Charles 1998) specific to every MNC operating in different locations with employees from various linguistic backgrounds.

How are the 'multilingual realities' being shaped at the Hungarian unit of the studied company? What is the take of Hungarian native speakers on foreign language use at their company? How is the German management coping with multilingualism, if at all? These were the central questions this study attempted to address through using the lessons from repeated field visits and interviews conducted at Siemens Hungary.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The interviews and field visits at the three different locations of Siemens Hungary were conducted between Jan- Feb, 2016. The research findings are based on qualitative interviews among employees working at different levels of the company hierarchy and at various departments. I interviewed both local Hungarian employees as well as German and foreign managers. The interviews were conducted both in Hungarian and English, latter with non-Hungarian staff, including Germans and other nationalities. All the interviews took place on company premises.

Siemens Budapest is operating in three different locations within a city context of Budapest, though two of these sites are located in the industrial outskirts. Still, foreign employees are part of a multicultural context offered by the capital city, and references to this contexts are made in some of the interviews. Foreigners working for Siemens 'move around in the expat circles of Budapest', as one of the interviewees suggested.

The predecessor of Siemens Hungary was set up in 1953 as 'Erőmű Karbantartó Vállalat' (Company for Power Station Maintenance), Erőkar, in short form, as a state-owned company. During the company privatization process after 1989, the company name has changed several times. After Siemens purchased it in 1997, a merger took place between the three Budapest units (two in Pest, one in Csepel), in 2011 October. With these steps, the Siemens Hungary obtained its current form. The trade union, named as Egyesült Villamosenergia-ipari Dolgozó Szakszervezeti Szövetsége (EVDSZSZ)[1] remained active all through the transition and since Apr 1, 2012, Siemens Hungary functions under a unified collective agreement.

Currently, Siemens in Hungary employs over 2,500 employees on its three sites in Budapest. On the Csepel site (one of the outside districts of Pest), factory of the Energy Management Budapest produces dry- and oil-transformers, primarily to foreign markets, the Power and Gas Budapest Factory in Pest, Kesmarki street produces turbine components, and is also involved in material quality control,

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1   In English, United Trade Union of Workers in the Electricity Industry

and engineering work (design of compressors). Majority of employees in Budapest are local staff, speaking Hungarian as their native language. Blue-collar workers involved in production do not speak other foreign languages except some team-leaders who may speak some basic English or German, but it is not a job-requirement. Administrative staff, managers, engineers- white-collar staff speaks English as a company language. Additional languages are used on some departments (e.g. sales, discussed later), and company senior management speaks German in addition to English. German is an extra asset for engineers and managers, but not an entry requirement; some of them learn the language later, during their work, if the need arises.

Language courses are provided by the company in form of internal training, in an intensive or weekly 1-2 hours basis. Participation on these courses is always based on job requirements, actual business trips and upcoming project tasks.

3. DISCUSSION OF CASES OF MULTILINGUAL REALITIES

As Barner-Rasmussen and Peikkari (2006) conducted a research study on Siemens AG in 2004, in three different organizational units of the company at Seimens headquarters in Munich and Erlangen, also at a German subsidiary at Mannheim, and at a Finnish subsidiary.

The research findings indicated that opinions and practices related to the corporate language depended to a large extent on the geographical location, the managerial level in the company, and the native language of the respondent. At the German locations, respondents preferred using German language and refered to it as the corporate language in general, even those respondents who were of non-German, English-speaking background working in these places. Whereas in Finland, English was univocally reported as a corporate language. In addition, at the headqarters in Munich, both German and English were reported as equally important corporate languages. These results suggested that irrespective of geographical location, the top management practiced a two-language policy, which was also observed during less formal, corridor discussions by the researchers, often experiencing code switching between the two languages. In non-German locations, the presence of further languages was also reported (e.g. French, Russian, Finish, etc.) In German and Finnish locations, age of the employees seemed to be also playing a role in a way that older employees reported to possess better German skills than younger ones, who prefered using English over German as they excelled in the former. The findings of the research indicated towards 'a considerable tension that existed between Siemens' history, its administrative heritage, and the key role of its German units on the one hand, and its newer business areas, global reach, and the strengthening position of English as the *lingua franca* in international business on the other.' (Barner- Rasmussen and Peikkari 2006: 419)

The research question at Siemens Hungary was to find out if the tensions between the use of German and English languages are being present as well, and if so, to what extent. Also, moving beyond the question of competition between these two languages, I wanted to find out what is the role of the local language in everyday lingustic practices at the Hungarian unit of the company, and what are the local employees' attitudes towards using different foreign languages.

Various linguistic competencies and the historical heritage of language use

The spoken communication in the Budapest offices takes place mostly in Hungarian between the local staff, even if English is an entry requirement for all white-collar employees. (Physical workers of the production sites speak only Hungarian.) However, the level of English employees speak (or write) varies to a great extent, often their passive knowledge being better (being able to understand and read, but having difficulties in expressing themselves, as a general problem of speakers of foreign languages in Hungary). People seem to be hesitant in using a foreign language and try to retrieve to their native language whenever an opportunity arises. When asked about company language, most of my interviewees were certain that it is English, as many of them do not speak German at all. However, having an official language (English) is one issue, but linguistic practices on daily practice seem to be a quite different business.

When dealing with partners in German headquarters, hosting visitors from Germany, or sometimes when communicating with the German CEO or other senior German managers, German language is used, according to the interviewees. Thus, some tension occurs between English as the main language and German, as the original language of the company quite similarly to findings of Barner- Rasmussen and Rebecca Piekkari (2006) introduced briefly earlier in this study. Hungarian as a third, and perhaps most powerful language among the three, comes regularly into this multilingual setting of languages.

While German is usually legitimized with the company history (originally German being the company language, but a switch to English took place due to global business trends and also in parallel to the company's worldwide expansion), frequent use of Hungarian is *legitimized by local social history and lack of importance of foreign languages in the past (i.e. during the second half of 20th century) and/ or inefficient foreign language education up to recent times.*

Thus, the question arises- what responses are produced in-house for linguistic diversity in the company?

The anwer is, different solution to every situation, as no diversity management policy is in place, other than a common understanding that in principle, English is the common language, a *lingua franca* understood by everyone (almost). In respect to *written communication*, most of it takes place in English according to the general rules. But, low-level communication in writing (just like in spoken form) takes place in Hungarian. The problem arises when such emails reach higher-level management who do not speak Hungarian. In such cases, German translation of Hungarian correspondence, sometimes in form of summaries, is used. Unavoidably, it involves elements of interpretation and incidents of (mis) translation too, though no concrete cases have been recalled by my respondents.

As majority of the employees of Siemens Hungary are local Hungarians, they were overrepresented among my interviewees too. As a consequence, many of language related problems, uncertainties, shifts in attitude are related to this group of employees/ group of Hungarian language speakers.

On the basis of the field interviews, it seems to exist a *generational divide* between the knowledge and use of foreign languages among Siemens local (Hungarian) employees. Younger generation (approx. below the age of 40-45) speaks mostly English as a foreign language, and prefers to communicate in this language with smaller difficulties. However, the older generation, many of them hired by Siemens at the beginning of their operations in Hungary, speak better German and prefer to communicate in German (in some extreme cases, they do not speak any English at all).

The reasons for the above goes back to the socio-cultural history of Hungary and the role of different foreign languages in society as such, and in particulary in the education system. Before 1945, German used to be the first foreign language in Hungary for a few centuries, followed by Russian, at least officially, though disliked by most as the language of the oppressors. By 1989, as the beginning of a transition period for Hungary, English became the new global language. Older people working in professions where knowledge of foreign languages was a must, tried to catch up with the new trend and learned English on their own, though most of this generation never mastered it on a high level. The education system adopted different foreign languages simultaniously (English, German, French, Italian, as the four most popular languages), though after 1989, the lead role of German among foreign languages persisted, to be taken over by English only after Hungary's access to the Bologna Process in 1999. (Vámos 2011, 196) According to the statistics of the 2009-2010 academic year, one-third of elementary school children took German as foreign language, and two-third of pupils studies English, thus English has become the most popular foreign language and remained so since then.   On the other hand, problems of foreign language teaching seem to persist in the Hungarian education system: students are unable to use English actively, they are mostly occupied with grammar instead of being able to communicate (obviously because of the way they were being taught), and in general they are hesitant to speak up in foreign languages. This is characteristic to all levels of Hungarian state education system, including university level, about which some of my interviewees voiced their dissatisfaction. An engineer working for Siemens Hungary for the last four year said that his English was enough to make it though in his job interview, but he found it difficult to cope with his daily duties in English, thus had to enroll in an English language course. He felt upset about the fact that a reliable knowledge of at least one foreign language was not automatically provided as part of his university education in Budapest. Though language classes were part of his education, but foreign language teaching is still not taken seriously enough in Hungary, he summarized.

It is perhaps worth noting that Hungary continues to be a dominantly monolingual country, large segments of the population above 40 years of age speak no foreign languages or only with difficulties, and most importantly basic attitudes towards foreign languages has not changed dramatically since the regime change. This is reflected in the following statistical data:

Population by knowledge of languages (2011)

Language	Number of speakers	Note
Hungarian	9,896,333 (99.6%)	The only official language of Hungary. Of whom 9,827,875 people (98.9%) speak it as a first language, while 68,458 people (0.7%) speak it as a second language.
English	1,589,180 (16.0%)	Foreign language
German	1,111,997 (11.2%)	Foreign language and co-official minority language
Russian	158,497 (1.6%)	Foreign language
Romanian	128,852 (1.3%)	Foreign language and co-official minority language
French	117,121 (1.2%)	Foreign language
Italian	80,837 (0.8%)	Foreign language

According to the *Special Eurobarometer 386 'Europeans and their languages'* (2012) report, countries where respondents are least likely to be able to speak any foreign language are *Hungary (65%)*, Italy (62%), the UK and Portugal (61% in each), and Ireland (60%). In contrast the proportion able to speak at least one foreign language has decreased notably in Slovakia (-17 percentage points to 80%), the Czech Republic (-12 points to 49%), Bulgaria (-11 points to 48%), Poland (-7 points to 50%), and Hungary (-7 points to 35%). In these countries there has been a *downward shift* since 2005 in the proportions able to speak foreign languages such as Russian and German.

Despite all the difficulties with English and other foreing languages in Hungary, younger generation at Siemens Hunagry who speaks English, often stressed that in their understanding, *using English also means professionalism* as most of technical literature in engineering, technical descriptions they are working with, are in English. As most of the local employees at Siemens are Hungarian, communication within office space among close colleague takes place mostly in Hungarian. Communication with business partners (see separate section on sales department) happens in the language of the business partner, in case of some regional suppliers, English may be used as *a connecting languge*, where both sides master the language only partially, but it provides them with basic common understanding. Regional local languages are also being used, like Romanian, Serbian, Ukrainian, in such cases, ethnic Hungarian employees[2] originating from these countries step in as *ad hoc* translators.

Language of in-house meetings

The in- house meetings take place in English, as it is the *connecting language (lingua franca)* of the company, explain most of my interviewees at Siemens Magyarorszag. In practice, the language of the meetings always depends on who is present at the meeting, meaning, it is defined by participants and their language competencies. If a Hungarian employee present at a meeting does not speak English (e.g. a trade union representative), he or she recieves a translation. This is done not by a professional translator, but by a colleague who volunteers for the task.

Some of the meetings may take place in German too, if all present speak enough German, but there are precedents for code switching during the same meeting: a meeting starting in German than for various reasons the conversation shifts to English (e.g. a new person joining the meeting, some technical descriptions coming up which make the use of English easier). As I've learnt from my respondents, the *guiding principle is practicality.*

According to one of the interviewees, a Hungarian engineer working for Siemens for the last 6 years, there is *no need for more formalization in language use* at Siemens Magyarorszag, as *'the least formalized things are, the best they work'*, he opines.

During meetings with other Siemens offices, employees, Hungarian employees of Siemens Magyarorszag observe that Germans prefer to speak German, if it's possible, otherwise they speak good English too. Based on this experience, one of my interviewees decided to learn German (within a company laguage course), and managed to reach a good level of German, and used it later during his work.

No official translators are hired by Siemens Magyarorszag in any situation. If any such need arises, an internal colleague, employee of Siemens, mastering more languages (e.g. HU, Eng, Germ) steps in as ad hoc translator both in cases of written and verbal communication. E.g. The Siemens

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2   Approx. 2/3rd of immigrants in Hungary are ethnic Hungarians accoring to statistics of the Central Statistical Institute (2012, Census).

Hungary CEO's administrative assistant does the German-Hungarian translation of some of the written communication between the German CEO and those office bearers (e.g. trade union head) who don't speak foreign languages. However, such instances are rare, as all employees on higher levels of company hierarchy speak some English which enables them to use English as a connecting language.

As for in-house language use at Siemens Hungary, its strong connection to company hierarchies needs to be noted: most of low-level communication happens in Hungarian, while communication, at least partially, reaching higher levels of company hierarchy can be of mixed nature (e.g. starting in Hungarian, than English or German translation attached later, or the conversation entirely switching to these two foreign languages at some point of the discussion). In these latter, hybrid forms of language use, hierarchy (status of people joining the conversation), rules of politeness (especially when it comes to German visitors, in such cases the common language becomes German), and finally but most importantly, practicality are the decisive criteria, as I derived from the conversations made with Siemens Hungary employees. This latter means that pragmatism of Siemens engineers often prevails, and they believe in quick adaptation to the actual speech situation instead of too many formal rules or regulations.

Communication with business partners and within sales department

Siemens, Csepel site hosts the sales department, where I have conducted interviews with French, German, Arabic speaker sales managers of Siemens Magyarorszag.

Their experience with use of multiple languages is, understandably, different from other, local employees in Budapest. They have been hired for their excellence in a particular language (German, French, Arabic, etc.), they are usually native speakers of that language and they use it for their daily work. Besides, they use English as a connectings language, as the common company language. Some of them don't speak Hungarian at all, others (who happen to be married or in a relationship with a local Hungarian) speak some Hungarian, and use it in office during daily interactions with their Hungarian colleauges. There are also specific cases of bilingual people, e.g. a sales manager for Germany is a second-generation Hungarian born and brought up in Germany who decided to return to Hungary. His German is of native level, but his Hungarian is of high level too, though with a slight accent, so according to Hungarian assumptions about language use and nationality, he is not necessarily identified as a Hungarian among his colleagues.

The Siemens Hungary French sales manager talks about positive attitudes of his Hungarian colleagues regarding foreign languages and foreigners as such:

> 'I think Hungarians are very open when it comes to communication, they speak German and English, and sometime languages of neighboring countries...'

This is a reference to the fact that many ethnic Hungarian migrants live and work in Hungary, who speak the language of their native land (Serbian, Croatian, Romanian, Slovak). Though the company doesn't hire anyone on the basis of these languages, it happens that during some business transactions with clients from neighbouring countries they need to use these languages. This never takes place automatically, rather after a failed attempt to communicate in English or German. In such 'emergency cases' a colleague steps in as an informal translator, thus solving the communication problem.

A French sales manager in an interview spoke to me about *linguistic nationalisms* in France and Hungary: he claimed the French often refuse to communicate in any other language but French; while this would never happen in Hungary, as Hungarians are alway open and try to communicate in other languages, even if they are happy to speak in Hungarian, whenever it's possible.

A middle-aged Hungarian woman, heading the sales department, spoke about her difficulties in switching from German (learnt at university before 1989) to English. She belongs to the older generation refered to in the section on historic heritage of foreign language use in Hungary. The use of foreign languages, especially to speak English is still an extra effort for her, it doesn't come as an automatic practice, she remarks. Her first foreign language on the university was German, and that's how she was originally hired by Siemens. Meanwhile times have changed as well as preferences among foreign languages, and as an adult, a mother of two, working full-time, she had to begin learning English.

In an interview with her she explains that before the political-economic transition (pre-1989) 'Western languages'[3] (or foreign languages as such) were not taken as seriously as it would have been required for later work purposes. When I asked, which language would she prefer during her daily work if the choice was hers (and I meant a choice between English or German), she replied without any hesitation: *'Hungarian, of course'*. This answer perfectly summarized her attitude towards foreign languages and her comfort level, perhaps typical for an entire generation schooled before 1989 but still active on the job market.

Language use and culture

Most of my interviewees, when asked about foreing language use of others and of themselves, spoke about cultural differences between different groups of people, between different nations. *They thought language use is strongly connected to culture.*

A sales manager originating from an Arabic country spoke about how amazed he was about provincialism of Hungarians after arriving to Hungary. It sounded quite familiar to the interviews with South Asian managers for the first case study in this project (for details see Case study 1, Multilingualism at a South Asian MNC). At the Siemens Hungary (both at production sites and office spaces) he uses only English, he explains. About meetings within Siemens Hungary he feels that despite being able to communicate (his English is understood by Hungarian colleagues), many people from the company, colleagues, don't accept him, and he thinks it happens so because of his Arabic culture, his religion, of being a Muslim.[4]

Just like the South Asian managers in another research paper on MNC lingustic practices in Budapest[5], this Arabic sales manager also mentions about issues related to *mentality of the local workforce* in the interview conducted with him. When asked about the meetings at Siemens in Budapest, he

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3   By this she meant West European languages, a term used during the state-socialist era for all languages outside of 'the Block' (i.e. the Communist Block).

4   Hungary has not been known for its Islamophobia till now, instead anti-Semitism is the dominant discourse of Hungarian far-right, some of its followers often wore Arafat-scarfs as a clear sign of their anti-Israel stance. However, the right-wing Orban governments' recent communication campaign against immigrants and specifically Muslim immigrants has a definite impact on attitudes of Hungarian population towards Islam as a religion and people practicing Islam.

5   Arendas, Zs. (2016) '*In the corporate world, we need to be inclusive': Towards qualitative approaches of managing linguistic diversity and multicultural practices at a South Asian MNC in Hungary.* (working paper)

voices his surprise and anger over Hungarians' authoritarian way of behaviour, the way in which they don't dare to speak up and express their personal opinions openly.

> *'They might say that I am loud, that I speak too much, but I can't take…I'm usually very outspoken'*,

he summarizes these situations.[6] Also, the submissive attitude of local employees may be linked to the way they imagine company structures and hierarchies. While the Arabic manager comes from a Western-style work culture (from a recent posting in Austria), where flat company structure is the norm, this is not at all automatic or obvious for local Hungarian employees, especially for the older generations (above 45-50 years of age). Lack of comfort or experience with flat company structure plus lack of comfort with daily use of foreign languages may result in interpersonal communication situtions where Hungarians are percieved as authoritarian, lacking the courage to speak up, or even lacking professional expertise and competencies at certain situations. Simultaneously to such negative perceptions, certain 'Othering' may take place (backed by local political discourses in Hungary) by Hungarians towards their Arabic colleague. In short, different linguistic and cultural competencies may and often do result in subtle communicational conflicts, which result in lasting negative categorizations from both sides , and often helped by the larger, socio-cultural and political context. It seems from the fieldwork at Siemens Hungary, that these tensions are not perceived by senior management as serious threats to company cohesion and thus not managed either in any form of interpersonal or intercultural trainings. The reasons behind this can be twofold: 1. these can be very sporadic, atypical incidents, thus needless to be addressed on a systemic level, 2. a pragmatic/ lessaiz faire attitude is applied in intercultural management too, just like in terms of multilingualism, namely there is no need for any regulation (or training) as case-by-case solutions provide the real answer to such incidents, and those are worked out by the actual players/ participants.

Multilingualism from a trade union point of view

Siemens Hungary 'inherited' a functioning trade union of the previous companies, when the purchase of 'Erőkar' took palce in 1997. When Siemens took over these post-socialist companies of the three sites (all in the energy sector) it was a difficult task to reorganize the trade union, and synchronize it with the German employer, says the current head of the trade union, a seasoned trade union worker in her sixties. As she explains, *the Germans represented a different work culture*, the types of social benefits the Hungarian employees were used to prior to 1989 (from the period of state-socialism) were unknown for the German employer or the German trade union model. The head of the Siemens trade union perceived the establishment of factory works council based on German model (prescribed in the *Hungarian Labour Code 2002*) as a direct challenge to the trade unions, to their role in industrial settings. However, this critical period is over according to her, the roles and competencies have been clarified. She finds the relationship between the company management and the trade union as *'functional and balanced'*, a relationship that works well.[7] What is difficult, according to her, is to mobilize the workforce and get

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6   This observation may again roots with Hungarian education system, with frontal teaching methods according to which students were not expected to speak up, rather accept what the teacher told them. This seems to be changing slightly with new methods of teaching entering the schools, but there is still a strong tendency at many places to this 'old school' method.

7   Based on the interview with president of Siemens Hungary, trade union, V. Zsuzsanna.

them involved in the work of the trade union. The non-members expect from the trade union to fight for their rights (especially when it comes to pay-hike and other related social benefits), and often take these achievements for granted. The union head complains about the total lack of solidarity within workforce and about the fact that the trade union functions with 'free-riders', as she calls them. She thinks that achievements in terms of working conditions, salary-raise, and other benefits should be applicable only for those who are active members of the trade union.

During meetings between the company management and the trade union both Hungarian and German languages are being used, and often English instead of German. Among works council representatives not everyone speaks fluent German (or English), but

> *'I have always spoken enough German so that they could not cheat me during the negotiations',*

she states firmly. Despite her limited but confident knowledge of German, the head of the local trade union prefers to negotiate with the employer in two languages, using both Hungarian and German languages. She thinks that during difficult negotiations, when all the skills of persuasion and tactics of negotiotion need to be applied, it is important to communicate on one's first language. Thus, she relies on translation, usually provided by a colleague from within the company.

> *'Each and every word has its special weight, a consequence which translates directly to wages',*

she adds, explaining the importance of good, turstworthy translation in such situations, which obviously has the role of equalizing language hierarchies between native-speaker management and Hungarian trade unionists. It does not mean that she would not appreciate the foreign management, on the contrary, as observed in other MNC situations too, Hungarian employees seem to be satisfied with their foreign employers, appreciating their correctness, fairness, business integrity, professionalism, and so on. I do not want to suggest that this relationship is unproblematic, but it certainly lacks important elements of work-related conflicts often experienced with Hungarian management, including misuses of power, lack of transparency in decision-making processes, background 'politics', personal preferences over professional criteria, just to name a few of the most often quoted examples. The head of the trade union argues for her preference for German management over Hungarian as follows:

> *'I'm glad that we had German-born management from the very beginning as they have been socialized in a certain culture of workers rigths representation; it was natural for them (unlike for Hungarians). When the first CEO left, I was afraid that they will nominate a Hungarian top-manager for the post, luckily it didn't happen...'*

Later on, she explains what she meant by the previous sentences:

> *'If an employee is strict, it means he/she follows the rules, which is good for us as well, as we can remind him to follow all the rules and regulations when dealing with us (the trade union).'*

Such opinions are very often based on the East/ West divide created in public and official discourses in Europe, including Central Eastern Europe. A category of 'Hungarian' or 'German' is understood on the basis of this axis. In these narratives 'East' and 'West' appear as very specific cultural constructs, standing for a complex set of meanings, hierarchies and values. Edward Said in his well-known

work *Orientalism* (1978) speaks about Orientalism in different ways. As a more general meaning of Orientalism, he refers to a 'style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident".' (Bayoumi-Rubin 2000: 69) This involves large masses (incl. writers, economists, theorists, administrators), whose common characteristic is that they accept the basic distinction between east and west, and use it as a starting point for their arguments and theories.

Understanding Orientalism in this more general and popular understanding, Attila Melegh (2006), analyzes the East European, mainly Hungarian population discourses. He brings in important examples on how the operation of the East-West *civilization slope* and *East-West dichotomies*, local and global discourses come together in Hungary since the 1970's. (Melegh, 2006: 51) Melegh speaks about "Western" discourses as 'discourses and discursive statement which place the textual perspective at the apex of civilizational progress.' (Melegh 2006: 52) The *East-West civilization slope*, cases of *orientalism* can often be detected in interviews and narratives of Siemens employees; German technology, management, trade union model, precision, discipline etc. are positioned on the Western side of the scale of progress, and gain positive attributes of development, enlightenment, and progress. The other side of the scale is associated with negative values like underdevelopment, lack of integrity, transparency, positive work ethic, and so on. This side of the scale is usually linked to CEE.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS RELATED TO DIFFERENT FORMS OF MULTILINGUALISM AT SIEMENS HUNGARY

As Barner-Rasmussen and Bjorkman (2007) argue, MNCs are almost by definition multilingual, thus, by introducing a *common corporate language* will not render the firm monolingual, as language diversity within a global firm is likely to persist. In the present study, I made an attempt to explore and understand the ways in which use of different languages takes place in everyday linguistic practices of an MNC unit in Hungary, finding answers to questions like what is the role of company language, and how is it being used, if there are any languages at use and if so, what are the different roles of these languages, and most importantly, how do different language users relate to foreign languages and to their own first language. By taking a closer look at diverse issues related to a central, a seemingly simple question of 'language use at company level', a whole series of questions opened up in the course of the research which had to be answered. I do not claim that all of them have been thoroughly anwered, but an attempt has been made to locate the exact question and catalogue the possible answers emerging out of the fieldwork conducted at Siemens Hungary.

The question of language is closely intertwined with several other issues, starting from socio-historical context of foreign languages and multilingualism in a region, language education in schools, the link between language and nation, thus the issue of linguistic nationalism, the connection between language and culture, just to name some of the most prominent and almost automatically questions related to language. This paper tries to touch, at least briefly, upon most of them, but a detailed discussion of any of these larger issues would require a separate paper each.

Since the beginning of its operations (1997), English has been the *lingua franca* at Siemens Hungary, used by local employees (mostly Hungarians, with some international staff for instance on sales section, by German managers, and foreign partners). This was a conscious decision at Siemens, adjusting to global business trends, also making communication between different geographical locations easier, as Siemens has a strong global presence in more than 190 countries.

When asked about the existence of a common company language, most of the interviewees at Siemens Hungary aswered that in their opinion, English language was the one, though not sure about the exact document, regulation related to this language use. From the descriptions of the respondent it was quite clear that English at the local company unit is used *as lingua franca,* to connect different langugae speakers to each other within Siemens Hungary and outside of it, connecting to other Siemens units and the rest of the world.

Due to the changing role of English in the CEE region and different language competencies of both the Siemens employees and their regional business partners, English is often used as a *transit language* too, briding linguistic gaps between speakers of different regional and national languages. It also means that English is used by speakers of different levels of linguistic competencies and its primarily rule is basic understanding. Often, English as a transit language is supported or substituted by local languages in translation (e.g. speakers of Romanian, Serbian, Croatian at Siemens Hungary, as explained above).

But having English as a connecting language does not mean that other languages would not have been used at different company locations and levels of hierarchy. In Hungary, blue-collar workers speak only Hungarian, with some 'Maisters' being able to communicate in basic English to foreign engineers. The presence of Hungarian language is very strong in higher levels of company hierarchy too: Hungarian language is used among white-collar administrative staff, local engineers, departmental head, as majority of the local staff are Hungarian speakers. They communicate in Hungarian between themselves if no outsider, or non-Hungarian speaker is involved (e.g. in an office). As part of multilingual realities of Siemens in Hungary, German is occasionally spoken (though it is not a compulsory language in the company), and other regional languages (e.g. Romanian, Serbian) if regional business partners find it difficult to communicate in English.

In this latter case, English is used as a „*transit language*", bridging the communcation gap between different, non-native speakers of English. A mix of German and English technical words, expressions form a specific „*company speak*", which is used by engineers and managers used within larger company context, between different locations in Germany, CEE, and other parts of the world.

The role of German language at Siemens Hungary seems to be undergoing some major changes and by now it has become an additional language not required at entry level by the new employees. On the other hand, this language has deep roots in the region (as explained in detail earlier), thus many employees still speak the language or are willing to learn it. Such positive attitudes are welcomed by German managers in Budapest, and turn out to be an asset in different work-situations like visitors from the German headquarters, business trips and assignments to Germany, and so on.

Among Hungarian staff of the three Budapest sites, a *generational divide* seems to be characteristic, that is older generation prefer to speak German as a foreign language, while younger generation opts for English. However, their first choice would be, and in fact it often *is*, Hungarian language. This is out of sheer practicality (if everyone around speaks Hungarian), but related to linguistic nationalism too, roots of which run deep in the history of the region. Uneasiness about foreign languages is not simply

related to history or politics, but to the education system too. My interviewees often complained about insufficient foreign education in Hungarian education.

Language use was often directly linked to culture by my respondents; foregin employees of Siemens Hungary assessed cultural traits of Hungarians ('very open people', or the other way round, 'authoritarian', 'sheepish') based on the way they communicate in English, and on the basis of the multilingual capacities or lack of such capacities ('they speak many languages'). On the other hand, foreign speakers, and through the ways they used English ('outspoken', 'loud') were percieved as the 'Other'. This particular practice of othering sometimes borders with ethnic/ cultural intolerance, racism, or xenophobia according to some of the foreign respondents.

The use of different languages in formal situations (e.g. meetings, official visits) depends on the level of company hierarchy the communication takes place. Communication with headquarters in German often takes place in German. If other sites, including Hungary are involved, English becomes the connecting language. Low-level communication in Budapest happens mostly in Hungarian, but if people on higher levels of company hierarchy get involved, communication switches to English (occasionally German). Other than hierarchy, it is seniority of involved people and their status in the company which matters during such code switchings. E.g. in case of German visitors from the headquarters, communication is often in German.

As part of the research, I tried to examine if the local trade union is involved or was ever involved in any language related issues, including representing language rights of employees at Hungarian site of Siemens. No such specific cases could be detected, however the trade union plays a specific role between the mostly German senior management and Hungarian workers they represent. This mediation involves langugae related issues as well due to the fact that the trade union leadership belongs typically to the older generation, who doesn't speak foreign languages well. To bridge this communication gap between foreign management and the trade union (and workers they stand for) they use mostly in-house translation from German to Hungarian and vice versa. But in general, they did not recall any instances of lingustic discrimination or conflict of interests based on language differences or lack of clear communication. Moreover, trade union representatives often engaged in orientalist narratives about the progressive West and the positive values it stands for in terms of trade union traditions, management techniques, respecting workers' rights and suggested that the Hungarian employers need to learn from this positive model as a way to progress.

5. LIST OF REFERENCES

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