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Leading questions and answers on the situation in individual countries: Situation in Czechia

Shrnutí v češtině

Neoficiální jazyky v České republice (ČR) užívají zvláště mezinárodní společnosti a vrcholní manažeři. Zaměstnanci cítící v případě němčiny někdy mocenské pozadí preferují angličtinu. Český trh bývá zpravidla osloven v češtině. Informace o vnímání cizího jazyka v reklamě apod. nejsou, takové reklamy ale jsou řídké, i když si zvláště mladí lidé uvědomují důležitost znalosti cizích jazyků. V mezinárodním obchodu se zásadně užívá angličtina, okrajově i němčina a angličtina. Volba jazyka se považuje za důležitou (viz data ELAN). V ČR nejsou zvláštní zákony či nařízení regulující užívání jazyka v obchodní oblasti.

- 1) *Are there companies in your country which use a language other than the official national language(s) for internal communication? Please explain with regard to features such as:*
 - *type of company (production industry, trade, service, banking, etc.)*
 - *large companies as opposed to small*
 - *international companies as opposed to national or local ones*
 - *whether another language is used alongside or instead of the national language(s)*
 - *whether another language is used within the whole company or only in special sectors.*

Yes, this occurs in all types of companies which are branches or subsidiaries of companies abroad (e.g. all banks are foreign now), joint ventures or companies with other forms of integration of foreign capital. It occurs most often in situations where foreign delegates or “expatriates” are actually working on the premises of the companies, as it is not typical for the majority of foreign employees to learn Czech beyond a symbolic, polite level. It also occurs when the companies do not have foreign delegates physically present, but are often visited by them and/or are in regular telephone and e-mail contact with them.

This occurs in companies of all sizes, but presents a greater problem in smaller companies with more limited financial resources to invest in foreign and/or Czech language training.

In cases of large companies, in particular the production industry, it is often the case that the foreign languages are used at the top- and middle management levels, and Czech is used at the level of production. At the higher management levels, if a foreign employee is present, a foreign language (often English or German) is used or interpreters are hired. Written correspondence which is intended for all top managers or which will eventually travel to the parent company tends to be written in a foreign language.

As concerns production, language problems loom on the horizon, because unemployment in the Czech Republic is becoming gradually lower and there is a shortage of skilled production workers. This means that it is necessary for the companies to import production workers from elsewhere (Poland, Vietnam, and other countries), and somehow provide for the communication needs of these new groups of workers.

- 2) *What is known about the perceptions and attitudes of the employees and of interlocutors such as trade unions etc. regarding the issue of language use within companies?*

A university research has shown that it depends very much on the communication dynamics of a given situation or company. And in the Czech Republic, this is related to the historical situation and can be interpreted as a problematic power issue which Czech employees may evaluate negatively. In German-owned companies, Czechs are at a disadvantage when speaking German. One solution to this has been to implement English as the official corporate language. However, Czechs, particularly older Czechs (over 40), are still at a disadvantage when speaking English to Germans or Austrians. These dynamics change, for example, in Japanese or Korean companies, where the foreign employees' level of English is much lower than that of German employees and the interaction with Czechs may thus be more even.

One is not aware of any current trade union activity regarding this issue.

- 3) *Are there companies that use languages other than the national language in contacts with (potential) customers, in marketing, and in advertising within the country (for the national rather than the international market)?*

The national market is primarily addressed in Czech. There are a few exceptions to this. For example, banks such as *Česká spořitelna* and *Komerční banka* have an “expat center” which is oriented toward people who live in the Czech Republic but do not speak Czech. Also, there are smaller companies in the service industry which cater to non-Czech speaking recent immigrants, particularly speakers of Russian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese and English. In this case, however, the company owners are also native speakers of those languages (and not of Czech).

There are also many advertisements which use (at least in part) languages other than Czech for stylistic or “artistic” reasons rather than for practical ones. There are several articles on this topic.

- 4) *What is known about the perceptions and attitudes of customers and the general public on the use of languages other than the official language of the country in advertising, commercials, job opportunities, or the like?*

No knowledge is available of specific research which has addressed these perceptions and attitudes, but the following observations have been made:

Customers – In the business world, there is an established understanding that the client can choose the language of the transaction, even if this means hiring interpreters. This appears to be accepted in the Czech context.

General Public – Other languages (mostly English and German) appear in advertising. It is common to see job advertisements (particularly for jobs in the companies described above) in other languages in daily newspapers such as *Mladá Fronta Dnes* or *Lidové Noviny*. It is especially teenagers as a target group on advertising that takes English here in friendly manner.

In terms of job opportunities, this is a highly generational issue. Among the younger generation, it appears to be generally accepted that foreign language knowledge increases one's employability.

5) *Which language or languages are typically used by companies in your country in international business and commerce? Are any differences based on the sorts of products or services provided or the target countries or regions?*

English (dominating), marginally also German, Russian. The similarity of West Slavic languages is often also utilized in contacts with Poland and Slovakia.

6) *Contributing to the success or failure of business and commerce in your country?*

Yes, see also ELAN report which is available.

7) *Are there specific laws or other official regulations drawn up by your government or other political institutions for the use of languages by and within companies in your country, concerning either the home market or the export markets or both?*

Basically no. The only one one is aware of concerns the fact that products sold in the home market must be labelled in Czech or in an “easily understandable language”, as per EC regulation 112/79. An observation in the companies studied says that texts such as fire or health regulations posted in the companies are in Czech because this is required by law, but this law has not been examined in detail yet. One is also told in some companies that if native speakers of other languages (such as Vietnamese) are hired to work in production, manuals and other technical materials must be produced in those speakers' languages as well.

8) *What is known about the effect of such measures as those mentioned in Point 7 above?*

See above. This is a component of a research project which is only just beginning.