

IR - MultiLing 
Industrial relations in multilingual environments at work



HUNGARY: CASE STUDY CONCLUSIONS

Zsuzsa Árendás
Center for Policy Studies,
CEU, Budapest

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Demographic context: Low number of immigrant work-force, approx. 2% of the population, out of which 2/3 are ethnic Hungarians from neighbouring countries

Legal context:

Citizenship law (1993), since 2011 simplified Naturalization for ethnic Hungarians; since 2005 (HU EU accession) for TCNs- strict visa policy

Political context: anti-immigrant governmental politics, high level of xenophobia

Economic context: Low attractiveness of the economy, increasing outgoing migration (push factors)

CASE 1

South Asian company in Budapest

Since 2001, currently over 1,300 employees, providing services to over 40 companies

BPO, IT desk, language-based services

52 nationalities working for the Bp office, speaking 32 different languages

38% foreign nationals in Bp, gender: 52% men, 48% women

CASE 1- CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS

Company language is English (unwritten rule) but exceptions apply, transgressions are tolerated. **L1- for internal communication (E), L2- for business purposes** (32 diff Ls)

1. linguistic nationalism, CEE vs SA approaches to English and L1; lack of multicultural experience

CASE 1- CONCLUSIONS (CONT.)

2. **East/ West discourses**, German- Hu- Indian scale (progressive/ backward) language use, work ethic, culture, behaviour
3. **Gender-** T/ V form, professional competence questioned, rules of mutual politeness violeted

CASE 1- CONT.

Accent- neutral accent? International English. Getting rid of native L influences for professional reasons, easier to communicate

global citizens in a multilingual company, as a political statement

accent for business purposes (sometimes local accents required by customers)-added value

Training in intercultural values, optional course

No further diversity management introduced, ,no need', unreflected

CASE 2

Automobile-manufacturing company, Eastern Hungary, green field project, to enhance employment opportunities in the region; Since 2012, 4 000 employees

Professional trainings: Betw 2012-2014 in Germany for newly joined workers

Now trained in Hungary, German is an entry- requirement, line-workers speak only H, no migrant workforce, but Hungarians are often returnee migrants from Germ, Aust.

Trade union: local org. of Vasas- nationwide trade union in metal industry, collective agreement since 2012

works council established at the beginning with German partners and the European Works Council

CASE 2- CONCLUSIONS

Languages used: G with company management, H among local staff, blue-collar, line-workers only Hungarian, English occasionally, with business partners, customers. White-collars: G is the only company L.

the company counted on the „long-traditions of German language” in H, when decided to build the factory in K.

Local attitudes towards G lang/ Germans- culture, precision, reliability, value, quality...(Occidentalism)

How to use German language- cultural aspects; German way of communication- non-hierarchical, situativity of a language

German dialects when visiting plants in Germany

CASE 3

Strong player in the energy sector; the original company set up in 1953, privatized and later purchased by a large German company in 1997. Merger of three units took place in 2011. Collective agreement since 2012. Trade union presence since the beginnings.

Currently around 2,500 employees.

Languages spoken: Hungarian among local staff, blue-collar workers, engineers and other professionals speak *English as a „transit language”* connecting non-native speakers, some written communication translated to German if it reaches high-level management (in Germany or elsewhere). „*Company speak*”- technical language based on English.

CASE 3- CONCLUSIONS

Generation gap in foreign language use/ competencies: older generation prefers German, younger one speaks mostly English

Gap between foreign language education at schools and requirements at the job market- a regular complaint, people spend from their own money and private time to catch up with their foreign language competencies

Language courses at the company- need driven, project-based, the intensity and level depends on the case, company pays for it, within working hours

Multilingual meetings: English with German and Hu in between, central principle is flexibility and practicality, no need for further formalization; „least formalized the best”