

## “THE AUSTRIANS WERE SURPRISED THAT I DIDN’T SPEAK GERMAN”: THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN CZECH-AUSTRIAN RELATIONS

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**Abstract:** Respondents from Austria (N = 146) and the Czech Republic (N = 165) noted down their experiences with people from their neighbouring country and their attitudes to their own country and the neighbouring nation on feeling thermometers. The quantitative content analysis and qualitative critical discourse-inspired analysis of the open statements focused on the role of language in the construction of Czech-Austrian relations. Using qualitative analysis we enquired as to which themes were intertwined with the topic of language, and as to the ways in which the participants perceived themselves, *the Others*, behind the border, and the relations between the two sides. We looked not only into what participants said but also how they said it. Using statistical analysis we tested the link between language-related topics in the descriptions of intergroup contact and the evaluation of the neighbouring nation as a whole. Throughout the article we compare the findings obtained by the two kinds of analysis and comment on (dis)agreement as well as on the (dis)advantages of both approaches.

**Key words:** language; communication; intergroup attitudes; intergroup contact; critical discursive analysis; content analysis

*“Language is the soul and consciousness of a nation”*  
Karel Čapek

### Introduction

Language is the most essential tool enabling human interactions. When it comes to encounters between people from different countries, language becomes even more salient. Besides being a means of making oneself understood, language represents a categorization clue for dividing people into ingroups and outgroups. Our paper deals with language as a means of communication as well as a general category used to characterize Czech-Austrian relations.

The study is intended as a methodological experiment combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to data analysis. This corresponds to the definition of mixed methods research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, Turner 2007; Erzberger, Kelle 2003) that uses elements of qualitative and quantitative methodology in order to gain greater depth and breadth of understanding and corroboration pertaining to the research question. In our study, two

researchers with different methodological backgrounds analyzed open statements describing experiences with outgroup members. The aim of combining the approaches was to (1) obtain a better insight into complex intergroup relations than one acquired by just qualitative or quantitative analysis, (2) compare the strengths and weaknesses of both analyses, and (3) avoid biases intrinsic to single-method approaches.

The current study is a small part of an international research project *Intergroup Attitudes and Contact in Central Europe* pursued at the Institute of Psychology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The research project comprises more than 3000 participants from five central European countries—Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland and Slovakia. Predominantly university students were contacted and provided with a link to an online questionnaire that inquired about multifaceted intergroup attitudes (e.g. national stereotypes, outgroup emotions, ingroup identification), contact with outgroup members (e.g. quality and quantity) and other relevant variables (e.g. language competence, the person's personality traits). The majority of items in our questionnaire were closed questions followed by 5-point Likert scales. One exception was the open description of participants' experiences of contact with outgroup members. Although the design of the whole project can be defined as “quantitative dominant” mixed method research (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, Turner 2007, 124), this particular study strives for the “equal status” of both kinds of research (*ibid*). Thus in this article we focus on an analysis of the open statements from two quite different perspectives in order to better understand the role of language in contact between Austrians and Czechs and their attitudes to each other.

From the very beginning of our research project, we planned to combine the statistical and qualitative analysis in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of participants' opinions and attitudes. However, when trying to combine the different approaches to the data analysis, problems began to emerge at the very outset. When analyzing the open statements we had to agree on a very exact coding process—0 or 1 for every code in every statement. The reason was that we also had to take into account the content and nature of the statistically analyzable scaled answers in the questionnaire so we would later be able to compare them (see Petrjánošová 2011). But this coding did not suit the researchers in our team who had qualitative backgrounds and in the end they coded the same material once more, using their usual coding procedure (not every piece of text is coded for every code) and they also applied other codes to some extent. Thus it was that in the next step we followed completely different paths. The outcomes of the qualitative analyses were extra publications (e.g. Leix 2011; Petrjánošová 2012), which although interesting could not be combined with the outcomes of the quantitative analyses (Hřebíčková, Graf, under review; Hřebíčková, Kouřilová 2012; Kouřilová 2011; Kouřilová, Hřebíčková 2011). In one phase of the project we were even afraid that we would not achieve any better fusion than illustrating quantitative analyses with content rich extracts from the open statements. This paper is an attempt to find areas of overlap, at least when discussing a narrowly defined topic. We have chosen the subject of language, as it is one of the most important themes the participants spontaneously elaborated on and is closely interwoven with the evaluation of the other national group, as we will show in what follows.

In the findings section, the outcomes of the qualitative analysis are always described first and are then followed by the quantitative approach. When possible, we comment on the

overlap/agreement/contradiction between the findings of both approaches. Of course, the ways in which the two kinds of analysis are written up are different. Quantitative analysis uses numbers and tables to produce a very information-rich text and does not need much space. On the contrary, qualitative analysis is mainly textual and as it is grounded in examples from the empirical material, it requires significant space. This difference is clear also in our article, where the qualitative part seems to overwhelm the quantitative part. The second reason for the difference in length is that the quantitative analysis answers specific questions that needed to be defined at the very beginning of the research, at the stage of coding at the latest. On the other hand, qualitative analysis enables more broadly formulated questions to be answered as well as those that emerge later in the process, including special ones like e.g. what is not mentioned explicitly, what can we see only if we look closer; or even what is not there but could have been? Another difference is that qualitative analysis allows us to analyze the structure of the statements and not just the content. Thus there are simply more themes to be discussed when using qualitative analysis.

We believe that the analysis is influenced by the characteristics of researchers. We are both women; one from the Czech Republic, the other one from the neighbouring Slovak Republic (another country that is part of the research project as a whole). Both of us have experience in intergroup contact and attitudes research. We speak German fluently and understand Austrian (and German) culture. The subject of intergroup contact is also of personal interest to us—one of us has lived in Germany for nine years (in the borderlands of the Czech Republic), the other lives partly in the Czech Republic and partly in Austria.

## Theoretical background

### *Language in intergroup contact*

Encounters between members from different social groups (e.g. nations) comprise interpersonal as well as intergroup levels. Intergroup behaviour stems from the identification of the different group membership of people present in the social context (for a review see Kouřilová 2011). In the case of nationality, the key marker of social identity that distinguishes people is language. Using one's own language or even having an accent when speaking a foreign language quite unequivocally reveals group membership. Subsequently, interactions between members of the different groups are often influenced by attitudes held in relation to the outgroup. At the same time, experience of having contact with individual outgroup members transfers onto the intergroup level—to attitudes towards the whole outgroup. Intergroup contact theory (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami 2003; Pettigrew 1998) provides clues as to the conditions under which contact with outgroup members has beneficial effects on outgroup attitudes. Although a large metaanalysis of more than 500 studies has confirmed the link between contact and reduced prejudice per se, it has also identified several conditions that enhance the effect of intergroup contact on prejudice-reduction (Pettigrew, Tropp 2006).

Some of these conditions were originally formulated by Gordon Allport (1954) and comprise the equal status of interaction partners, cooperation towards common goals rather than competition and institutional support. An effective way of reducing prejudice

is found in opportunities for personalised interactions, especially cross-group friendships (Hamberger, Hewstone 1997; Pettigrew 1997). Where contact between two groups who speak languages as different as Czech and German is concerned, all of these conditions can be expected to be influenced by language. Regarding the first condition, the equality of interaction partners, one factor that shapes the perception of *Others* is the status of the language that is inherently connected to the more general socially-anchored status of both groups. In our study, we will show that German and Czech command different levels of esteem within both subsamples. The second condition pertaining to cooperation is to a great extent also influenced by language in that reasonable cooperation is possible only when people are able to make themselves understood. Closely related to the issue of cooperative interdependence is personalized interaction. Self-disclosure that deepens the feeling of intimacy, one of the cornerstones of friendship, is possible only when an effective communication tool is at hand.

Given that in trans-border contacts language represents a primary marker of group membership, in our study, we will focus on how language influences the link between contact and intergroup attitudes. Despite the key role of language in many intergroup contexts, its effect in intergroup processes has largely been ignored (for a recent exception see Wright, Tropp 2005).

### *Language, identity and difference*

What is most often and most easily observed and evaluated in *Others* is their behaviour<sup>1</sup> and the language they speak. The status of language is thereby special in several ways. Above all, language use and linguistic competence are key factors in ethnolinguistic identity construction and ascription (Carli et al. 2003). Furthermore, different languages can have different levels of prestige and several phenomena connected to linguistic power issues such as the evaluation of the language and positive or negative language attitudes (including a willingness to learn it) can be observed (Phillipson 1992 in Carli et al. 2003).

Border communities are ideal for studying the relationships between language and identity as they are experienced in everyday life. In our case, the border between Austria and the Czech Republic is also a linguistic border—the members of both groups use mainly their own language and it is a self-evident marker of ethnic identity for them. Czech and German are quite different languages: Czech is a Slavic language and German belongs to the Germanic language group. The grammar of both is fairly complicated—the nouns decline, while the verbs conjugate differently for each person and there are seven and four cases respectively.

The Czechs and Austrians are typical central European neighbours trying to establish a new frame of coexistence in the unifying European Union. After forty years of their living spaces being separated by the Iron Curtain, after the Czech Republic's EU accession in 2004

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<sup>1</sup> However, instead of describing behaviour the participants quite often describe the *mentality* of the Others. Mentality is quite a broad concept, most often explained in primordial terms, as being something unchangeable and acquired through birth, upbringing or education (for more details on *primordialism* see Geertz 1973).

and its accession to the Schengen area<sup>2</sup> in 2007, the borders are “dissolving” where many pragmatic questions are concerned (e.g. where to study or work, where to shop for good quality food or for cheaper petrol, etc.). The states are coming closer together, but as they do so, old and new inequalities show through.

The Czech Republic and Austria are more or less the same size with more or less the same number of inhabitants, but Austria is more economically developed. As Holly et al. (2003) mentions, there are always further less objective and less obvious asymmetries which can show up in the qualitative empirical material. These are connected to stereotypes about *Us* and *the Others* in a broader sense, including emotional and evaluative elements and are often resistant to counter-examples.

Thinking in terms of the theoretical background we have outlined above and our personal experiences as well as our interest in intergroup contact, our main research question for this paper (and thus for both kinds of analysis) is: What is the role of language in contact between Austrians and Czechs and how does it shape intergroup attitudes?

## Method

### *Participants*

Respondents from Austria ( $N = 146$ ; in age 18 – 65 years,  $M = 26.5$ ,  $SD = 8.4$ ; 74% women), and the Czech Republic ( $N = 165$ ; in age 18 – 54 years,  $M = 23.4$  let,  $SD = 4.5$ ; 78% women), mainly students, noted down their experiences with people from the neighbouring country based on the instruction: “Can you recall any experiences you have had with an Austrian/a Czech person during your visits abroad or here in the Czech Republic/Austria. How did the Austrian/Czech behave in that particular situation? How did you behave? Please describe the situation below.” The instruction was phrased very specifically so as not to prime generalizations. Respondents obtained the instructions in their native language, Czech or German.

### *Data analysis: qualitative*

In our qualitative approach we used critical discourse-inspired analysis based on the work of Wodak (e.g. Reisigl, Wodak 2001) and Condor (e.g. Abell, Condor, Stevenson 2006). We were interested not only in which language the participants said they had used during their contact with the outgroup but also in *how* they spoke *about* using the language of contact and what other themes they referred to when speaking about language in general. We also looked for instances when they construed membership in (national) groups and borders between the groups through language, and in general, how they perceived themselves, *the Others* behind the border, and the relations between the two sides. Primarily we were not interested in how many answered one way or the other, but in how rich the whole spectrum of viewpoints offered was, and also what might be absent.

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<sup>2</sup> The Schengen area covers most of the EU states which have signed and implemented the Schengen Treaty. There are border controls only when entering or leaving the territory as a whole, but not between the member states.

The statements were open-coded in an inductive material-driven way and further analytical work with the codes was done using the qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti. We used the individual statements as the units of analysis and one statement could be coded with several codes. We used 45 codes and 8 supercodes altogether.

#### *Data analysis: quantitative*

Within the quantitative approach, we used content analysis (CA) to capture salient topics repeated in descriptions of experiences with outgroup members. We prepared a codebook comprising topics prominent to intergroup contact based on multiple readings of the open statements, previous research and relevant theory. The categories captured the characteristics of intergroup contacts (e.g., the context of contact, the closeness of the relationships described, and the language used during contact) as well as evaluations of contact situations, interaction partners and the neighbouring nation as a whole. Two independent coders subsequently rated each open statement on the presence/absence of the categories. The inter-rater reliability obtained satisfactory values throughout all the CA categories (*Cohen's kappa*  $\geq .70$ ). The content analysis resulted in 30 descriptive categories regarding the length, type and circumstances of the intergroup contact. Furthermore, we identified six evaluative categories, positive and negative, pertaining to the situation, the individuals and the outgroup as a whole. For the purposes of this study, we have particularly focused on four descriptive categories related to language used during contact—the respondent's own language, the neighbouring language or another language—and language as a general category used to define intergroup relations.

In order to reveal differences between incidences of topics within the Czech and Austrian subsamples, we compared the frequencies of each category using t-test for independent groups. The links between the different categories of CA were established using a Phi coefficient that determines the level of association between two dichotomous variables.

## **Findings**

### 1 Language use during contact

#### *1.1 Importance of language used in contact*

The qualitative analysis showed that the topic of language came up very frequently although it was not an explicit part of the instruction. Based on the numerous references made to language we could assume that language was a very important aspect, perhaps even one of the most substantial aspects, of intergroup contacts for the participants (cf. Carli et al. 2003). The importance could also be inferred from the fact that when participants spoke about the language of contact at the same time they often also evaluated the situation from their viewpoint (*it is boring, it is taxing, it is pleasant*). Furthermore, they quite often also stated which emotions they were experiencing (*I was sorry, they were angry, I was pleased, he was worried*). We elaborate on this theme more in part 2—Attitudes towards the choice of language of contact.

## 1.2 Who speaks more about speaking?

In the qualitative analysis we did not distinguish between when a specific language was mentioned as the language used in contact and when it was commented upon in a general way. We just observed how people spoke about language and in what contexts. From this viewpoint, the theme of contact language is more frequently and more broadly elaborated by the Czechs—almost one half of the statements mentioned the language of contact, a language barrier, communication problems or fluency of communication. Not only was language mentioned more often, it was also more important than in the Austrian statements. We might infer that greater importance is ascribed to this topic from less casual references (in comparison to Austrians) and more longer, expansive statements, which were often intertwined with emotional accounts as well as evaluations of the other national group. The Czech participants often saw the situation in terms of the fact that they had to/were forced to speak German on both sides of the border. Of the Austrian participants only approximately one quarter mentioned language. This is why we also cite more extracts by Czech participants.

The quantitative content analysis highlighted explicit mentions of the language of contact and other comments concerning language. It showed that in describing their experiences with people from the neighbouring country, 30% of Austrian and 24% of Czech respondents spontaneously specified the language they used to make themselves understood. Our results indicated that the participants from both samples did not differ with respect to how often they mentioned the languages used during the encounters. However, participants did not only state the language of contact but also commented on topics pertaining to language in general, for example a readiness to study the language of the *Others*. As was the case with the category of language used in communication, Austrian and Czech participants did not differ in how often they elaborated on language issues. Language as a general category occurred in one fifth of the open statements (see table 1 under “language in general”). In both subsamples, thematizing language was often connected with overt criticism (for more details see parts 2.4–2.6).

Here we see the first difference in the findings from both analyses: the comparison of the categories from the content analysis showed that the Czech and Austrian participants did not differ in how often they mentioned the language used for communication nor in the language issues discussed in general. On the other hand, the qualitative approach found that it was predominantly the Czechs who elaborated on topics pertaining to language. We believe that this difference is partly due to different ways of coding the implicit mentions of language of contact when using the quantitative and the qualitative analysis (see in more detail in 1.4). In this way the qualitative analysis looked into far more statements concerning language.

## 1.3 What language was used?

Based on the qualitative analysis we learnt that Czechs and Austrians communicated mainly *in German*. The less often used options the participants mentioned were *in Czech*, *in English*, *with hands and feet* or *not at all*. The answer *not at all* was typical only on the Czech side, where some participants explained that they did not communicate with Austrians at all because they did not speak German.

The content analysis also showed a striking asymmetry in Czech-Austrian interactions—approximately one fifth of respondents from both subsamples indicated German as the means of communication. In contrast, the use of Czech was mentioned by 7% of Austrians and 2% of Czechs. A third language, mostly English, was mentioned in 14% of Austrian and 6% of Czech open statements. Thus, Austrians enjoy a considerable advantage in that they can use their native language during contact with Czechs.

**Table 1.** Frequency of categories pertaining to language based on content analysis of Austrian and Czech open statements about experience with outgroup members.

	Austrians about Czechs	Czechs about Austrians
Language used for communication		
Own language	19%	2%
Neighbouring language	7%	18%
Other language	14%	6%
Language in general	25%	19%

The findings from both kinds of analysis were in agreement over the most common language of contact despite the fact that more information was gained from the qualitative analysis; the option *not at all* was not a feature coded within the quantitative analysis. This information would therefore have been lost if quantitative analysis alone had been used. Nonetheless, the information is important because it provides important insights into how one of the national groups defines the conditions under which contact is made possible and it is also another argument in the debate about the asymmetries in this communication, see below.

#### 1.4 The explicit and the implicit

While doing the qualitative analysis we realized that these references mentioned above to the language used were explicit, but often no specific language was mentioned in the statements, perhaps because the participants thought it would be more than clear from the context as in the following extracts<sup>3</sup>:

(...) *I asked an Austrian woman who was working in her garden in front of her house. She was an elderly lady and she very willingly explained to me how I could get to the train station. She spoke slowly and clearly so I would understand her* (...) CZ\_484

*My colleague from a higher vocational school [BHS] was Czech, he was very nice. He was happy that he had Czech roots and also he was very happy when he got Austrian citizenship in the last year of school. I remember him very vividly.* AU\_250

<sup>3</sup> The Czech as well as Austrian statements were translated into English by the researchers. They are cited in their original form, even though the use of majuscule is not standard. At the end of each statement there is its number in our database and an indication whether it comes from the Austrian or the Czech participant group.

In the quantitative analysis, since we were trying to achieve an acceptable threshold of inter-rater agreement in the content analysis (Cohen's kappa  $\geq .70$ ) we were forced to introduce a rule about coding only explicit references after an initial trial resulting in unsatisfactory levels of Cohen's kappas. For example, when coding the language of communication, all the implicit information concerning language was not coded and thus represented a missing value.

Here, in the first extract the participant stated the nationality of the woman she had asked and then described how carefully she had spoken so that she could be understood—thus in the content analysis we could code that contact had taken place, but could not code the language of contact. In the qualitative analysis we inferred that the *elderly Austrian lady in her garden* had spoken in her own native language and this is why she had spoken *slowly and clearly* because otherwise the foreign girl—the participant—would perhaps not have understood properly.

In the second case the language of contact was even more implicit, as the participant did not describe a specific conversation with his colleague. But knowing the context of their interactions and all the facts the participant knew about his colleague, in the qualitative analysis we felt it was sure to assume that they had spoken together (possibly more than once) and that it had been in German.

## 2 Attitudes towards the choice of contact language

### 2.1 *Expectations about the language of contact*

Why was there such a great systematical asymmetry in the language chosen for communication? From the qualitative analysis it seemed that almost everybody from the Austrian and Czech sides assumed that they would be speaking German together. There was broad consensus on this implicit norm from both sides and in the overwhelming majority of cases the supposition seemed to be automatic and the asymmetry was not commented upon. The following extracts show a typical statement made by a Czech (the first extract) and by an Austrian participant (the second one):

*I have very good experiences with the Austrians, I have known several of them personally and I don't have bad word to say. They were very nice towards me and tolerated the mistakes I made in German.* CZ\_676

*A few years ago I spent a weekend in Prague with my husband. Unfortunately, we had only very superficial contact with Czech men and women (at the hotel, restaurant, and when shopping, etc.) this experience wasn't any different from in other countries. (I didn't particularly want to mention the fact that we had to speak English sometimes, because I don't consider it important)* AU\_273

Moreover, in many statements the language of contact was mentioned only in passing, for example when speaking about the quality of communication or the contact in general. Thus sometimes the Czechs said the communication with Austrians had been good because they had spoken very slowly and sometimes the Austrians said that the communication had been bad because they had not been understood, but they did not comment upon the fact that they

had been speaking German, as we explained in more detail in the part about the explicit and the implicit references above.

As we did not ask any specific questions about expectations concerning the language of contact in the questionnaire and as we decided to code only the explicitly given information for the quantitative content analysis, it could not say anything about this subject.

## 2.2 Thinking about other options

Unfortunately (from the researchers' point of view), cases where someone thought about the communication language in a "democratic way" were rather rare. That would have meant taking into account several options, for example simply choosing one of the languages of the two national group members present or choosing English, which is perceived as being universal:

*During a festival in Weinviertel (a part of Austria near the Czech border) I met several interesting Czech men and women. Mostly they were artists. **Unfortunately I could not speak Czech to them, which I regretted.** So we spoke mainly in German or in English. AU\_308*

We were also surprised that nobody explicitly defined the egalitarian solution as the ideal one—always using the language of the country in which the participants were physically located at the time of contact. This solution was proposed by two Czech participants in similar material from the Czech-German borderlands (Petrjánošová 2012). But interestingly, even though their statements seemed quite radical in their appeal for justice, in both of them the demand that Germans should communicate in Czech in the Czech Republic was discursively weakened. In the present Austrian-Czech material this proposition appeared only implicitly, e.g. when Czech participants spoke about their negative feelings about being forced to communicate in German even in the Czech Republic.

But were other options really available? Did participants have sufficient knowledge of the foreign language? In order to determine their actual language competence, we asked participants which foreign languages they could speak in one of the closed questions in the questionnaire. As their primary foreign language, 70% of Czech participants put English and 26% put German. In terms of a second foreign language in the Czech subsample, German prevailed (35%), followed by English (25%) and French (10%). Like the Czechs, 80% of Austrian participants stated that English was their primary foreign language. The most frequent secondary foreign language was French (30%), followed by Spanish (18%) and Italian (12%). Only four Austrian participants acknowledged studying Czech. Although those in the Austrian sample did not have a sufficient command to allow for effective communication, having a sufficient knowledge of English would make exchanges equally difficult for members of both groups. However, the Czech and Austrian open statements indicate that the use of German prevailed, which could accentuate the inequality between members of the two neighbouring countries.

## 2.3 Unevenly distributed language knowledge framed positively

The qualitative analysis found different attitudes to situations where foreign language knowledge is unevenly distributed.

Sometimes the Czech participants referred to this asymmetrical situation, but they mentioned the fact in a positive context, evoking a new kind of symmetry. In this the knowledge of the language of the other, even if imperfect, combines with tolerance and understanding from the members of the national group, whose language is spoken, because they themselves do not know the language of the other and appreciate communication in their *mother tongue*:

*(...) I always behave in the same way towards everybody, it doesn't matter whether they're Austrian, Czech, German, or French. They know I'm a foreigner and I don't speak their mother tongue perfectly. They don't speak Czech or any other language (English, German). Together we get there in the end. (...) CZ\_536*

In other cases Austrians referred in their statements to Czechs speaking good or very good German to them. Sometimes their narratives indicated that the Austrians complimented them on it and talked about the person in a more positive way because of their knowledge. But sometimes we once again perceived an asymmetry of power, especially in cases where the Austrian participants seemed to have taken the language knowledge of Czechs for granted and just evaluated the whole contact as easygoing and pleasant.

This finding corresponds to some extent with the outcomes from the content analysis, which showed that the Austrians evaluated the Czechs positively when speaking German. Austrian participants appreciated Czechs effort to speak German as was indicated by a significant association with a positive evaluation of Czech interaction partners ( $\Phi$  (146) = .26,  $p < .01$ ).

But the qualitative analysis also showed another asymmetry concerning the positive attitudes based on the other's knowledge of the language of the other party, if the knowledge was imperfect. From the Czech open statements it followed that if the Austrians made an effort to communicate in Czech, it was always very positively evaluated even if their knowledge consisted only of *a few words*:

*Once I went with a woman I knew to clean for an Austrian family near the border, as a temporary job, they were nice and because my friend had already been cleaning for them for some time, they had even tried to learn a few words of Czech, which I evaluated very positively. CZ\_523*

Nevertheless, experiences of this nature seem to be very sporadic because they are referred to in only 10 out of the 165 Czech open statements. Carli et al. (2003) proposed the concept of *ethnic stylisation* for cases like these—if a person speaks the more prestigious language then they show a little interest in and curiosity about the less prestigious language, but this is not comparable with serious study of the language (see also Petrjánošová, 2012).

Not once did we find Austrian participants reporting a comparable story—a positive evaluation of Czechs using a few German words. In the Czech statements we found one reference to a similar situation, but the actor was a young child. The girl was studying German at school and interpreted for her parents in broken German when they were shopping together in a sports shop in Austria. The shop assistant behaved in a very friendly way and apparently in order to award the child's attempts to speak German gave the child a chocolate and the parents who were buying the child skis a discount of 100 Austrian shillings.

## 2.4 Unevenly distributed language knowledge framed negatively

In a contrasting case sometimes the side communicating in the native tongue of the other side encountered reservations and critique instead of praise or at least tolerance when speaking imperfectly. In our empirical material it was always the Czechs<sup>4</sup> (although this occurred in just a few cases altogether) and never the Austrians who were criticized for the way they spoke the other language, as we can see in the following Austrian(!)<sup>5</sup> extract:

*A colleague of mine – a student, she is from Bohemia. She speaks German very well and she makes an effort during the lectures. But sometimes it's tiring, because she always tries to speak the most beautiful German possible and then it quickly becomes boring. (...) AU\_74*

In the cited extract the Austrian female student could have appreciated how well the Czech student spoke her (the Austrian's) native tongue, but instead she criticized her attempts *to speak the most beautiful* (perhaps standard?) *German*. A few other Austrian participants criticized the fact that the Czechs did not have a perfect command of (Austrian) German grammar or of the local dialect, the few Czechs on the other hand expressed their dissatisfaction with such high demands.

For example a Czech participant cited in the next extract was prepared to speak German in Austria but apparently expected some understanding from the Austrian side. In some cases Austrians had acted in accordance with her expectations and she evaluated them as *obliging and nice*; in other cases they had not and she evaluated them as *relatively unpleasant*, but the negative evaluation was discursively weakened when she used the adverb *relatively*:

*I used to visit my family in Austria so I have a lot of experiences. Some people, even strangers, were very obliging and nice, in spite of the fact that in the beginning I couldn't understand their Styrian [Steirmark] dialect. In contrast, other people (even from my own family) were relatively unpleasant. They made no effort to speak standard German, even though I couldn't follow and in general, they regarded me as a "poor relative". CZ\_505*

She also seems to have distinguished between Austrians who were *family* and those who were *strangers* and would have expected more understanding and help from family members. The narrative culminated in the complaint that the unobliging family members had regarded her as inferior, because of the economical differences. Thus the participant once again intertwined the themes of power in the use of the language of contact (not standard German but the local dialect) and of the expressed subjective superiority of one national group (always the Austrian one), based on other reasons, here the economic differences.

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<sup>4</sup> This finding did not surprise the first author at all. When she realized that, she began to think about her own expectations. For example she reflected upon how in her head the active knowledge about one form of the intergroup contact context (several years spent studying at a German university, near the Czech border) combines and interacts with the subjective and often not consciously defined expectations about how the coexistence of two nations with very different languages works and should work near their common border.

<sup>5</sup> We use an extract from the Austrian material to show that this notion of being subject to quite high demands in terms of the level of foreign language knowledge was not (or at least not always) just a subjective impression of the Czech participants who mentioned such situations.

This corresponded to the situation from the Czech-German borderland, as described by the Czech participants (see Petrjánošová 2012). They referred to Germans *as being unwilling to understand imperfect German*. In this context, the theme of the language of contact is brought up along with the themes of *the subjective superiority* of Germans (*ibid.*).

## 2.5 The role of the place of contact

In approximately one half of the reported cases the contact occurred on the Austrian side of the border and thus the demand for communication in perfect German is in some way more understandable. But according to Czech participants the demands did not change even when the contact occurred on the Czech side of the border, as in the following extract:

*I worked as a tourist guide at an observatory, Austrians came as visitors, we treated each other courteously, the Austrians were surprised that I didn't speak German.* CZ\_616

The qualitative analysis showed how especially in these cases the Czech participants linked the theme of (Austrian) German as the language of contact with the expression of negative emotions and with a negative assessment of the other national group:

*Working as a waitress I met several Austrian citizens and my biggest complaint was (above all) that they don't try to communicate with us in Czech, but we have to try to speak with them in German, even if they are visiting the Czech Republic. I don't like that.* CZ\_516

The quantitative analysis of links between the categories of language used for communication during contact and other descriptive categories revealed an association between speaking German and encounters in Austria ( $\Phi$  (165) = .18,  $p$  = .02 in the Czech subsample;  $\Phi$  (146) = .18,  $p$  = .03 in the Austrian subsample). The over-representation of German in Czech-Austrian interactions is thus partly due to the fact that it is the Czechs who travel to Austria in order to work or study. As such, it is partly up to them to adapt to the foreign-language environment. However, German is not the only means of communication in Czech-Austrian encounters in Austria. Austrian participants also mention using English or other languages during contact in their home country ( $\Phi$  (146) = .17,  $p$  = .04).

## 2.6 Language of contact interwoven with other themes

The qualitative analysis made us realize how the subject of the language of contact was typically anchored in a complex narrative where several very different themes interacted. For example in the following extract the female Czech participant mentioned the automatic use of German in the Czech Republic in conjunction with the subjective superiority of the Austrians (as a feeling ascribed to the Austrians by the Czechs). In order to support her argument about Austrian arrogance she contrasted *nice* Austrian towns with *Austrian behaviour towards the Czechs*—apparently not very nice. To convey the arrogance and ignorance of a (typical) Austrian she also cited one of them generalizing about Czech women in a very negative way. She portrayed him as being socially blind if he could not understand that prostitution can only work if two parties are present, the one offering the service and the other being prepared (and able) to pay for it:

*During our holidays in Sicily an older Austrian couple were sitting at the next table. They were very nice people, polite, funny and talkative (...) They were very nice. On the other hand, these were the only decent Austrians I have ever met (...) typically they behave **contemptuously** towards the Czechs for example on the border but also at home in our cottage where **the man** got angry with us for not speaking his language when he needed to ask the way...in general I think that the nice roads and towns sharply contrast with the Austrian behaviour, mostly towards us Czechs. Once I even heard an Austrian saying that all Czech women are hookers – but he didn't say who goes to see them (specifically in Southern Bohemia)...CZ\_557*

Also the quantitative analysis revealed that in Czech open statements language was associated with negative evaluations of interaction partners ( $\Phi$  (165) = .14,  $p$  = .06). The habit of using German during Austrian-Czech encounters contributes to Czech feelings of inferiority, which is further bolstered by economic differences on the macro social level. The Austrian participants kept their negative comments to the more impersonal level of evaluation—language occurred together with negative evaluations of the contact situation ( $\Phi$  (146) = .2,  $p$  = .02). The Austrian statements mentioned the Czech aloofness that is seen as being characteristic of the Czechs rather than their disadvantage during communication. Due to the asymmetry in using a native versus foreign language during Czech-Austrian encounters, the Czechs are described as the ones who are reserved and withdrawn when it comes to mutual contact.

### 3 Conclusions

#### 3.1 Findings from both types of analysis

The aim of this study was to examine the role of language in intergroup contact in one of the European borderlands along the former Iron Curtain more than twenty years after it fell. Since we have concentrated only on language and closely related topics, we did not elaborate on other interesting themes, for example subjective comparisons between the two national groups or references to broadly shared stereotypes and whether they are seen as being relevant or irrelevant, etc. Language was often mentioned as a means of communication; however, it also co-defined the status of the interacting partners in Czech-Austrian contacts. If the language is chosen so that the person can make his/herself understood, then this may be advantageous to those who have a better command of it and disadvantageous to those who do not have a sufficient command of it.

The qualitative analysis showed that German was the dominant language of communication. This asymmetry was usually not commented upon and was expected by both Czechs and Austrians. When the predominant use of German in Czech-Austrian contact was mentioned at all, it was mostly in the Czech open statements. The asymmetry in language use was often thematized in emotional terms and together with the topic of the subjectively perceived superiority of Austrians in particular and the negative evaluation of Austrians in general.

Based on the findings of the content analysis, we also found that the prevailing means of communication during Austrian-Czech encounters was German. In the Austrian subsample, use of the native language was associated with a positive evaluation of Czech interaction partners. On the other hand, the Austrian participants negatively evaluated an insufficient

command of foreign languages (including English) both at the level of the contact situation and the neighbouring nation as a whole. The topic of language as a general category was associated with a negative evaluation of contact in Austrian open statements and with a negative evaluation of interaction partners in Czech statements.

Thus the findings from both kinds of analysis indicate a troublesome perception of language on both sides of the Czech-Austrian border, but they differ in the focus as well as in the detail. We believe that this difference is mainly due to 1) the difference in coding or not coding the implicit mentions of language used in contact; and to 2) the narrower categories used for the quantitative analysis. In the quantitative analysis for example the distinction between the evaluation of the contact situation, the individual person and the whole nation was used in order to be able to answer questions about generalizing from personal experience to attitudes toward the whole other national group etc; these were not posed in this article, but are important for the project in general. In the qualitative analysis we were not interested in this sort of detailed distinction, but went deeper into other aspects, e.g. concerning the use of language in contact as a tool of power. Thus although the two kinds of analysis (or rather the two researchers doing them) were analyzing the same set of open statements, they looked at them from different viewpoints already at the coding phase. After the material was coded (let's pretend that the qualitative coding was quite straightforward) it represented two different sets of empirical material in reality, which could not be compared as closely as we planned when we started to write this article.

However the findings from both kinds of analysis indicate the main problem—the asymmetry in choosing the language of contact and the ensuing resentments. What bothers us is the fact that our participants were mostly students and we would expect that students who are young and have no experience of the period when the two countries were completely separated would have 1) better foreign language knowledge and 2) more friendly attitudes to foreigners in general than the average population in both countries. If the language poses a problem even for this special group, either in the shape of communication barriers when the language skills are not good enough or in the shape of the inequality arising out of the choice of language of contact when one national group feels that they are “forced” to use the language of the other, what would the same research findings have looked like when asking “average” people from both countries?

What is more, as we mentioned above, the asymmetry we found in our empirical material was also evident in interactions between Slovaks and Austrians (Lášticová, Petrjánošová, in press) as well as between other neighbours along the former Iron Curtain (Meinhof et al. 2003). The languages spoken on the western side<sup>6</sup> of the border were the more prestigious ones and the participants from the western side evaluated foreign language knowledge in general in a positive way, but it was always *the Others* who had to learn their language. People from the western side did not know the other language and did not want to learn it, except for those in mixed marriages, etc. (Carli et al. 2003). Thus the theme of language and inequality seems to be a rather general problem that does not disappear with changing border regimes.

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<sup>6</sup> The Czech Republic is to the north of Austria, but the East/West historical differentiation is nevertheless relevant for the participants.

### *3.2 Comparison of qualitative and quantitative approach*

The aim of our study was to combine the qualitative and quantitative analysis in order to gain a more complex insight into the empirical material. However, we cannot refrain from considering the appropriateness of both approaches—the pros and cons. One of the main advantages of the quantitative content analysis is that the results can be compared across different samples. The current study is just a small part of a larger research project comprising participants from five different central European countries. This way, the incidence of topics in all open statements can be contrasted without the need to understand different languages. However, this potential cannot be fully realized in the sample of the two countries in the current article. Another advantage lies in the fact that the outcomes of the content analysis can be linked to the different measures of intergroup phenomena used in our research. This way, we can investigate how particular experiences with outgroup members shape participants' attitudes towards the outgroup as a whole and what factors influence the relationship between contact and attitudes. However, with the very narrowly defined topic of the current study, this advantage cannot be fully utilised. Although we employed different measures of intergroup phenomena (e.g. emotional attitudes towards the participant's nation and the neighbouring one, the level of identification with the ingroup, perceptions of national stereotypes), the association between these and language as described in the open statements was not salient enough to reach a level of significance.

One of the main disadvantages of the quantitative content analysis is the lengthy process of training the coders in order to achieve a satisfactory level of interrater agreement. Coders with different methodological and theoretical backgrounds tended to interpret the open statements in different ways, which led to differences in the resulting occurrence of categories. Another disadvantage pertains to the reduction of the rich text materials to a bare presence/absence of the several topics chosen. Although our codebook comprised a large number of categories, it could not fully capture the complexity of human experience. Therefore, we wanted to supplement the results with outcomes of a less reductive qualitative approach.

Coding statements in qualitative analysis using the Atlas.ti software is also time consuming, but it is faster than trying to achieve agreement (and Cohen's  $\kappa$  over .7) between two coders coding in a rigorous 0/1 way. Working with the empirical material is less reductive. As with the statistical analysis, possible relations are verified or rejected, but through cooccurrences of codes and their significance is not measurable. New connections between concepts or arguments can be included and additionally coded at any time during the analytical process. Concerning the disadvantages, it is almost impossible to compare all the categories in several data sets, but it is possible when concentrating on specific themes only, e.g. language. Furthermore, it is not possible to relate the analysis outputs to the questionnaire data, at least in a strict way. The biggest potential pitfall is the low validity of such an analysis in the sense that the analyzing person could let herself be carried away by those parts of the material that interest her or irritate her. Thus the researchers' own experience, despite being reflected upon, could lead to an over/underestimation of the prominence given to different topics. Then the analysis would be subjective, not because it cannot be fully objective—that is completely acknowledged by qualitative researchers—but because it would simply be biased. This can be overcome using commonly known methods

of findings validation (see e.g. Plichtová 2002) and at the same time, quantitative approach may provide a possible corrective balance.

### *3.3 Concluding remarks*

Limiting the wide range of topics found in the descriptions of the experiences with out-group members among Czechs and Austrians to just the issue of language led to similar main conclusions in both methodological approaches, except for the differences due to substantially different coding processes. The outcomes of both approaches considerably differed in their extensiveness, making the qualitative analysis seem a more suitable tool for data analysis. However, as mentioned above both approaches have their weak and strong points. Their applications differ with respect to the goal of the particular study and also with respect to the preference of the researcher. Combining both approaches can work when the goal of the study is formulated in such a way that enables this; for example, by limiting the researched phenomena or sample.

Comparisons of this nature would be made unfeasible if all the researched intergroup phenomena and all the topics found in the open statements by participants from the five different countries were to be included. This is because the quantitative and qualitative approaches differ in 1) the topics they focus on which overlap only moderately; 2) the coding of explicit/implicit references; 3) the narrowness of coding categories, and 4) the overall freedom that researchers claim in their interpretation of textual material.

The authors themselves wish to conclude that they will keep to their preferred method of analysis; however, at the same time they are inspired by the advantages of the other approach. Collaborating on a joint paper combining both methodologies was a welcome opportunity to investigate the limits of both approaches. As Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) put it, although a researcher might have one primary home (referring to a preferred use of qualitative or quantitative methodology), it makes sense to visit other homes when the research may benefit from such a visit.

In our next study, we could use quantitative and qualitative analysis concentrating on the same borderland but on different subjects. For example, the qualitative analysis could focus on stereotypes, those that are explicitly expressed but also those that are suggested only implicitly, on how they change over time and how people agree with them or define themselves in relation to them. The quantitative analysis could examine the links between the characteristics of contact and their evaluations in the open statements, as well as evaluations revealed through other methods, e.g. the feeling thermometers. Together, these two approaches can work as two pieces of a mosaic based on the knowledge about coexistence in borderlands, and both could be based on their strong points. The outcomes of quantitative content analysis can be supported by exact coefficients estimating the frequencies and proximity of the relationships between variables. On the other hand, a (good) qualitative analysis guarantees that the approach is not too reductive and that we do not miss important aspects that are rare, present only implicitly or even not present at all.<sup>7</sup>

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