

Tamah Sherman\* and Jiří Homoláč

## “The older I got, it wasn’t a problem for me anymore”: Language brokering as a managed activity and a narrated experience among young Vietnamese immigrants in the Czech Republic

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**Abstract:** Language brokering (LB) practices are a widespread phenomenon in transnational communities. This paper aims to add to the description and analysis of these practices within a community which has not been extensively studied – the Vietnamese in the Czech Republic, as well as show how LB is embedded in other sociolinguistic aspects of community life. Based on language biographies of 13 Vietnamese female brokers, we explore LB by focusing on the respondents’ descriptions and summaries of their beginnings with it, the difficulties that occurred, and how they were overcome. The findings suggest that, among others, the brokers gradually perceive brokering as a normal practice and as one of their family responsibilities. A methodological innovation is the use of Language Management Theory (Nekvapil, Jiří & Tamah Sherman. 2015. An introduction: Language Management Theory in Language Policy and Planning. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 232. 1–12.), through which we examine language brokering as a practice oriented toward language problems stemming from broader communication and sociocultural problems. This perspective, along with attention devoted to the activities, approaches and attitudes of all participants in the brokering (e. g. parents, public officials) enables us to demonstrate the relationship of the brokering to family language policy and also the fact that, for the brokers, the sociocultural dimension of LB can be more important than the linguistic one.

**Keywords:** language brokering, language biography interview, language management, management summaries, Vietnamese in the Czech Republic

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\*Corresponding author: Tamah Sherman, Institute of General Linguistics, Charles University in Prague, Prague 1, Czech Republic, E-mail: tamah.sherman@ff.cuni.cz  
Jiří Homoláč, Akcent College, Prague 4, Czech Republic

# 1 Introduction

Many transnational communities are multi-generational. An aspect of life that typically differentiates one generation from another within these communities is the ability to communicate in the language of the host country. This requires significant cooperation among generations. Parents and grandparents migrate as adults and are frequently immediately engaged in employment, often in ethnic economies, or remain at home with little interaction outside the community of family and friends. Their subsequent language competence may not be sufficient to take on necessary day-to-day tasks. But children, who are born in the host country or arrive there at a young age and attend school, find themselves in an entirely different situation. They not only become full-fledged users of the host country language, but as bilinguals they are also able to provide linguistic and other assistance to their older relatives, as well as other members of the community. This assistance is known as language brokering (hereafter LB, see Tse 1995, Tse 1996; Morales and Hansen 2005; Orellana 2009).<sup>1</sup>

This article is devoted to language brokering practices within the numerous and growing Vietnamese community in the Czech Republic, which are no exception to the phenomenon described above. We focus on the brokering experience from the perspective of the brokers themselves, and on its position in their biographies overall. The material basis for the analysis consists of language biography and follow-up interviews conducted with Vietnamese speakers who migrated to the Czech Republic as children and who are currently in their 20s and 30s. The interviews were aimed at a more refined understanding of these individuals' language socialization and acculturation, primarily in the family, school and work domains. Utilizing Language Management Theory

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<sup>1</sup> Related terms include family interpreting, natural translation or para-phrasing (Orellana 2009: 25–26). Sometimes the focus of studies is limited specifically to children, in which case it is often referred to as “child language brokering” (see, for example, the texts in the special issue of the journal *mediAzioni* from 2010). In terms of language and communication specifically, it may encompass multiple genres or types of activity, e. g. interpreting, translating letters and other documents, or reading to younger siblings (see e. g. Orellana 2009: 119). Beyond this, it is frequently embedded in other sociocultural work, such as acting as an intermediary for another community member and making independent decisions on others' behalf in negotiating, including influencing the content of the translated/interpreted messages (Tse 1996; Morales and Aguayo 2010; Cline et al. 2010; Hall and Robinson 1999; Hall and Sham 2007; Bauer 2010). It has also been observed to be “not separable from other forms of household work” (Orellana 2009:7) and as “an everyday set of activities” (Orellana 2009: 118). The term “culture brokering” has also been used in order to incorporate this extensive range of tasks (see Jones and Trickett 2005; Trickett and Jones 2007; Trickett et al. 2010; Orellana and Guan 2015).

(see Nekvapil and Sherman 2015), we analyze the resulting descriptions of language brokering as management summaries and accounts (Nekvapil 2004; Sherman and Homoláč 2014).

We begin with a brief overview of approaches to child language brokering which focus on its position in the evolving life of the brokers and their families and the way in which the brokers talk about it. We integrate our main theoretical-methodological framework, Language Management Theory, into this. We then detail our data and methods, including the genre of language biographies. In our subsequent analysis, we consider examples from the interview data which represent accounts and summaries of management connected to the situations and practices of brokering. We examine three topics that emerged: 1) initiation into the brokering practices during childhood, 2) the management of situations in which brokers had difficulties during the brokering processes and 3) connections between the division of brokering tasks between siblings and their differing accounts of the experience, in connection with broader questions of bilingual family language management.

The aim of the study is to describe the management processes of our interviewees and to find out whether the problems identified in the data from the individual interviewees are also shared by the others. We understand the demand for LB via problems embedded in family practices (Orellana 2009; Phoenix and Brannen 2014: 15) and in broader communication and sociocultural/socioeconomic issues, and the description of these problems as part of the overall sociolinguistic description of the society in question, including ongoing processes of language maintenance and shift (see Del Torto 2008, Del Torto 2010; Bolden 2012).

## 2 Approaches to language brokering

### 2.1 Language brokering as a formative, evolving, family-related experience

In this study, we are primarily interested in the reconstruction of brokering experiences and its relationship to the narration of the life of the broker and his or her family in a given sociolinguistic context. This is in line with previous studies of language brokering,<sup>2</sup> which have often used data drawn from brokers

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<sup>2</sup> For thorough overviews of LB research, see Buriel et al. (1998); Trickett and Jones (2007); Orellana (2009) or Bucaria and Rossato (2010).

talking about their experiences. These experiences typically have a processual character when recounted in interviews, and the phenomena which emerge from within them are viewed as evolving. Given this, we consider several key areas of previous research findings on LB in our study.

First, LB has been found to be a highly formative and evolving experience in the life of the brokers. During the initiation of the brokering activities in particular, LB has been connected to feelings of stress caused by insufficient language knowledge and/or the complicated character of what needed to be interpreted (cf. e. g. Guske 2010), as well as the feeling of responsibility for the family (cf. e. g. Cline et al. 2010). On the other hand, brokers experience feelings of pride or satisfaction at having helped their parents and/or that they are able to handle matters which are more typical and normal for adults.<sup>3</sup> Most commonly, they have been found to experience a combination of positive and negative feelings (cf. e. g. Morales and Aguayo 2010). The attitudes displayed by brokers also change with age: they eventually understand LB as something self-evident, which they can handle without problems (cf. e. g. Bucaria and Rossato 2010: 265). In comparison with their monolingual peers, brokers have greater developed linguistic and social competence – they speak two languages, are able to negotiate with adults, and not only interpret, but also influence the content as well as the attitudes and emotions of the people for whom they do the interpreting work (Tse 1995). LB has also been shown to contribute to the development of the broker's ethnic self-awareness (cf. e. g. Weisskirch 2010), to the maintenance and development of the language of their parents, and the acquisition of the norms and values of the given ethnicity (Orellana et al. 2003), and leads to the ability to move between cultures and to biculturality (cf. e. g. Buriel et al. 1998).

Second, LB has been deemed to be an experience which has had a significant effect on relationships within families. In particular in the earlier literature on LB, it was possible to observe the opinion that LB can have a negative influence on family relations (cf. e. g. Tse 1996), or lead to “adultification” (cf. Trickett and Jones 2007), “parentification” (cf. Weisskirch 2007), or role reversal (cf. e. g. Martinez et al. 2009). According to other studies, however, LB is merely one of multiple activities which are family responsibilities through which they help their parents (cf. e. g. Orellana 2003). At present, the predominant opinion appears to be that though LB can be the source of problems in the family (cf. e. g. Orellana et al. 2003), it cannot be stated that role reversal

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<sup>3</sup> See also the four “conceptual models of the primary perspectives on brokering” (Kam and Lazarevic 2014: 5).

between parents and children actually occurs (cf. e. g. Orellana 2009). Instead, the team-oriented character of LB has been uncovered: though the brokers negotiate on behalf of their parents, it is usually in collaboration with them (cf. e. g. Dorner et al. 2008). Other studies (e. g. Hall and Guéry 2010) have also pointed to the fact that LB can serve as a significant contribution to the family's economic situation, given that they do not need to purchase the services of professional interpreters.<sup>4</sup>

We integrate two further elements into these strands of research. The first is the described brokering experience of young Vietnamese adults<sup>5</sup> as a part of the shared experience of a selected generation of one ethnolinguistic group (Vietnamese) in a specific setting (the Czech Republic).<sup>6</sup> The second is this described brokering as a type of metalinguistic behavior, oriented towards the management of language, communicative and sociocultural problems. The theoretical-methodological background of this latter aspect is detailed below.

## 2.2 Language brokering as language management

The need for language brokering arises from the (actual or perceived) inability of immigrant adults to speak, read or write in the host country language at a level sufficient to handle their day-to-day activities, including those which involve basic needs such as generating income, overseeing the household and caring for their families. We thus offer a generalized view of LB as a type of metalinguistic

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<sup>4</sup> On the positive and negative influences of brokering on relationships within the family cf. e. g. Kam and Lazarevic (2014).

<sup>5</sup> For another type of use of the narrative interview in research on language brokering, see Phoenix and Brannen (2014), which makes use of the so-called free association narrative interview (Hollway and Jefferson 2012) and applies Ricoeur's concept of *emplotment* (Phoenix and Brannen 2014: 12).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. also Orellana (2010: 62) on the need for research on how and whether LB changes "across cultural, racial/ethnic and linguistic contexts". By far, the most research has been done on Spanish speakers in the United States. There have also been studies done with speakers of various other languages (Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Russian, Arabic, Urdu, etc.) (e. g. Buriel et al. 1998; Hall 2004; Guske 2010). Most recently, European-based research has been conducted with speakers of Chinese or Urdu in the UK (cf. e. g. Hall and Guéry 2010), speakers of Arabic and many other languages in Italy and speakers of Turkish and Arabic in Germany (Degener 2010), and on the brokering of Moroccan immigrant children in Spain (García-Sánchez 2010). Aside from being the first sociolinguistic study of LB to focus on the Czech language context, the present study also contributes to the growing body of literature on LB in Vietnamese transnational communities, including McQuillan and Tse (1995) or Trickett and Jones (2007).

and metacommunicative activity stimulated by the emergence of problems.<sup>7</sup> Our analysis is guided by Language Management Theory (hereafter LMT, see Nekvapil and Sherman 2015), which provides a framework for the examination of behavior toward language. Posing the question of which problems are managed, by whom, when and how, LMT enables the further analysis of the norms in operation in particular sociolinguistic situations. LMT-based analysis is orientated toward a series of phases similar to those of other problem-solving and planning models (see Lanstyák 2014), not all of which need to occur for a management process to be identified as such: 1) an individual notes something in communication, most typically a deviation from a norm or expectation, for example, a mispronounced word, lack of knowledge of a vocabulary item or even lack of an entire code needed for communication in a given situation 2) the individual evaluates what he or she has noted 3) if the evaluation is a negative one and change is deemed appropriate, an adjustment is designed, 4) if possible and desirable, this adjustment is implemented (Nekvapil and Sherman 2015: 7). Furthermore, LMT distinguishes between simple management, which occurs directly in the course of individual interactions and organized management, which is trans-interactive, involves more extensive networks including institutions, and is the subject of various forms of communication and discussion (Nekvapil 2012: 167). The difference between simple and organized management is, of course, relative as opposed to absolute, as there may be many different degrees of complexity of the networks involved, and organized management may result from multiple, widespread instances of simple management. In its most complex realization, organized management encompasses practices traditionally analyzed as language planning and policy. LMT also does not presume that language problems occur in isolation, but rather, that they are embedded in communicative problems, which in turn are embedded in and sociocultural/socioeconomic ones. It is thus possible (and important) to consider the differences and connections between linguistic, communicative and sociocultural/socioeconomic management (Nekvapil 2006: 98).

Research using this framework has focused on the identification of management processes in various types of interactions (for example, in semi-structured interviews, see Nekvapil and Sherman 2013) and on their reflection in follow-up interviews (Sherman and Homoláč 2014). The language biography method based on narrative interviews has been useful in research using Language Management Theory, as it generates material analyzable through the accounts

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7 Cf. the conception of language brokering as “a form of interpersonal communication” (Kam and Lazarevic 2014: 9) and as “a social, situated and functional process” (Kam and Lazarevic 2014: 10).

of individual instances of language management (simple and organized) as well as the management summaries (MS) (Nekvapil 2004) contained in the interviews. MS consist of the description and generalization of observed simple and/or organized management, either their own or that of others. Unlike accounts of individual instances of LM, summaries may contain generalizations regarding individual experience in relation to experience within the community or between generations, e. g. that other Vietnamese of the same generation had the same experience or a different one.

We view language brokering as a practice analyzable as a case of (both simple and organized) language management, and as a phenomenon which strongly reflects the embedding of language problems within communicative and sociocultural/socioeconomic ones. We will emphasize the management activities of all social actors in the brokering (not only the brokers).<sup>8</sup>

## 3 Data and methods

### 3.1 Initial point of departure

The data for this study were not originally gathered with the aim of studying language brokering,<sup>9</sup> but rather, language brokering emerged independently as one of several key topics in the course of the exploration, initially made relevant by the interviewees themselves.<sup>10</sup> Our interest had been in the subjective life

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**8** See e. g. Trickett and Jones (2007) and García-Sánchez et al. (2011) regarding the activities or reflections of the parents or teachers of the brokers.

**9** This stands in contrast to many previous studies of language brokering, which set out to focus on it from the very beginning (exceptions to this are e. g. Corona et al. 2012 or Del Torto 2008 and Del Torto 2010). For example, a range of methods have been employed which capture the brokering event itself, i. e. via recordings (e. g. García-Sánchez 2010; Meyer et al. 2010), participant observation (Reynolds and Orellana 2009; Morales and Aguayo 2010) or ethnography (Orellana et al. 2003, Orellana 2010; Reynolds and Orellana 2015). In the absence of the possibility of recording or observing the event directly, additional methods have included its simulation (Hall 2004), questionnaires (e. g. Buriel et al. 1998), focus groups (Orellana 2010; Reynolds and Orellana 2015) or semi-structured interviews (e. g. Orellana et al. 2003; Degener 2010). Overall, our choice of method most closely resembles this final type.

**10** Other topics worthy of similar investigation (see Sherman and Homoláč 2014) included the selection and assignment of Czech names, the emphasis placed by the parents on education, family communication, parents' and siblings' competence in Czech, the description of the process of learning Czech as "automatic" and the experience of "losing" Vietnamese and then regaining it.

experiences, particularly those concerning the acquisition of Czech, of different generations of young Vietnamese who entered school without any Czech knowledge. We had hoped to capture this subjective experience and the telling of the process of language socialization of individuals, primarily as related to areas of life such as the family, school or work. We also wanted to take the first steps toward identifying the multitude of language problems in the Vietnamese language community in the Czech Republic, with the aim of contributing to the complex sociolinguistic analysis of this community (see Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003; Vasiljev and Nekvapil 2012), as well as of multilingualism in the country overall.

The Vietnamese constitute the third largest community of non-citizen inhabitants of the Czech Republic, after the Slovaks and Ukrainians, with an estimated number of 52, 612 individuals or approximately 12.5 % of all non-citizens.<sup>11</sup> Though they are not the most numerous, they are among the most visible, as they constitute the largest non-Caucasian group, and their population is dense especially in certain areas of the capital city, Prague, and border regions. As a transnational community, they are highly diverse in sociocultural and socioeconomic aspects, particularly as they shape and are shaped by language issues. First-generation Vietnamese adult migrants are often able to find employment in the local ethnic economy, which does not require Czech language skills. Support for Czech language acquisition by adult migrants comes largely from non-profit organizations, and language requirements for permanent residency and citizenship are set at levels A1 and B1 of the Common European Reference Framework for Languages, respectively. Even in cases where individuals may achieve these levels and pass the relevant exams, their resulting competence is frequently still not sufficient to handle many communicative tasks. It is thus very often the case that for later generations, language brokering becomes a lifetime commitment to the family and community (cf. Del Torto 2008; Bolden 2012).

The basic method we use in the project is the language biography interview (Nekvapil 2001, Nekvapil 2003, and Nekvapil 2004). The advantage of this method is that if questions concerning LB are a part of the language biography interview, the interviewee decides how much space she will devote to this question and chooses the contexts into which she integrates it. This enables researchers to gain a better picture of the position of the brokering in the interviewee's overall biography than in studies which are oriented toward LB from the very beginning.

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<sup>11</sup> Source: Czech Statistical Office, see <https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/20541803/170222-14.pdf/870a2cea-fe98-4b36-b7d0-cacf30b2a395?version=1.0>, last accessed December 21, 2015. This number does not include Vietnamese who have Czech citizenship.



### 3.2 Language biographies

The language biography interview is an autobiographical narrative interview focusing on language, above all its acquisition and use. The interviewees are typically those for whom language has been a defining theme in their lived experience, e. g. key participants in historical events with consequences for ethnolinguistic constellations in a given space (Czech Germans, see Nekvapil 2001, Nekvapil 2003, and Nekvapil 2004), migrants (Pavlenko 2007; König 2014), inhabitants of border regions (Veronesi 2008, Veronesi 2010) or in general, people who have otherwise spent the greater part of their lives in multilingual situations (e. g. Franceschini and Miecznikowski 2004). In addition to aspects of individual life histories, language biographies also contain: a) information and perspectives from biographies of other people close to the interviewee, for example, family members extending across several generations, b) descriptions enabling the (re-) construction of the language situation of a given national, ethnic or other community (Nekvapil 2003: 64). And when researchers conduct language biography interviews with multiple members of a designated group, they can outline typical or composite language biographies for that group, in addition to those of the individuals within it (see e. g. the individual and typical language biographies constructed in Nekvapil 2001, Nekvapil 2003, and Nekvapil 2004).

### 3.3 Participants and procedure

The interviewees consisted of thirteen Vietnamese women in their 20s and 30s, all of whom had migrated to the Czech Republic as infants or children. At the time of the interviews, all were either university students or recent graduates, and had predominantly studied language-related majors (Czech, English, Vietnamese, Chinese). They were selected for practical reasons – this social and age group was most accessible to us and there were no significant language barriers in conducting the interviews. These selection criteria also form a basis for potential later comparison with the language biographies of Vietnamese who are the same age, yet came to the Czech Republic later, are employed in primarily manual professions and, on the whole, have not acquired Czech to the same degree.

All interviews were conducted in Czech by the authors of this study – a female non-native speaker and a male native speaker. The non-native interviewer served as the primary interviewer and the interviewees were aware of her status as a non-native speaker of Czech. The first interview was primarily oriented toward the language biography narrative, told chronologically.

During this interview, there was a general focus on the interviewees' childhood, family language use, education and overall bilingual development.

An initial transcription of the first interview was done, after which critical passages in the interview were identified. Those identified as most relevant to the interviewee's overall biography were selected for the purposes of a follow-up interview which was subsequently conducted around three months after the initial interview (for a more detailed methodological analysis of the follow-up interview procedure, see Sherman and Homoláč 2014). The passages regarding language brokering analyzed in the sections below are from both types of interviews, as we understand the follow-up interview to be an additional source of information on the interviewees' language biographies.

Given the selected point of departure, methods and interviewees, the research questions for this study are as follows:

- 1) What language, communicative and sociocultural (socioeconomic) management can be identified in the brokers' summaries and accounts?
- 2) How do the brokers present the experiences, processes and long-term effects of the brokering in their language biographies?
- 3) How can research on language brokering contribute to an understanding of the language policy of Vietnamese families in the Czech Republic?

## 4 Analysis

### 4.1 Management summaries (MS) as a source of information

We will begin with a general exemplification of the ways in which management summaries can provide specific information on various aspects of the brokering experience. An example of a management summary from a language biography interview is as follows:

**Example 1– Management summaries** (Tam/jazbio/25072012B/11:56-12:56)<sup>12</sup>

01 TAM: ...when they had a problem like that so um (0.5) so I  
 02 (0.3) would go with them, with some like on top of  
 03 that either with acquaintances or (0.5) um w: with  
 04 people from town like who knew our family.  
 05 (1.0)

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<sup>12</sup> All examples have been translated from Czech by the authors and all names and identifying details have been changed.

06 TAM: they like on for example on (0.9) mm in town there was no  
 07 (0.6) or there was a court interpreter, but he (0.5) um  
 08 (0.5) was busy or he simply (0.3) had a lot of work and  
 09 he mostly went to the courts and stuff like that (0.4)  
 10 and I when he wasn't needed just to go to some state  
 11 offices so I (0.3) went. (0.3) or I went to the doctor  
 12 too (0.8) so at that early age I got to know interpreting  
 13 (0.8) I ha:d experience from that, and so I used it right  
 14 away like now in that I interpret at the non-profit and  
 15 stuff like that um um so when um I interpret for some state  
 16 um um institutions and stuff like that. (0.6) and (0.4) a  
 17 lot of people were saying that I could maybe get um um a  
 18 court interpreting license...

This passage illustrates the use of language brokering as organized management done by the speaker's parents and the local Vietnamese community. The interviewee, Tam, describes the multiple designs of an adjustment to a series of problems stemming from her parents' perceived insufficient competence in Czech, as well as their implementation. The brokering is depicted here as a secondary, alternate adjustment – the initial adjustment involved using the services of a professional interpreter (Example 1, lines 10–12). But sometimes further management had to be conducted when this interpreter wasn't available, or even necessary, in cases involving less serious matters (Example 1, lines 10–12). Tam describes having to interpret for her parents and for acquaintances at government offices and when visiting the doctor (Example 1, lines 10–12). The description constitutes a summary as opposed to an account of an individual act of management because it involves repeated as well as concatenated instances of management and the further development of certain aspects of the adjustment design and its implementation. Other interviewees described a similar situation, mentioning financial issues – the needs and/or desires of the family and acquaintances to save money by not hiring an interpreter.

The passage also contains the description of an inferable act of organized sociocultural management on the part of the local Vietnamese community,<sup>13</sup> with multiple people suggesting that Tam could get a court interpreting license

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**13** Similar cases confirm that it is also necessary to research the “neighborhood influences on the culture broker role” (Trickett et al. 2010: 101).

(Example 1, lines 16–18), presumably with the expectation that she could help even more community members. The broader context, including information from another part of this interview and an interview with a colleague of this interviewee, is an ongoing “generational” change: professional interpreters, i. e. Vietnamese who arrived in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 80s to work or study and learned Czech as adults, are being gradually replaced by people who learned Czech while attending school or even earlier. The perspective from which the interviewee recalls the beginnings of her brokering activities may also be influenced by the fact that she works as an interpreter for a non-profit organization.

As this example shows, the management summaries serve as a source of information on 1) the language, communicative and (even) sociocultural management of the brokers, including the problems which occurred during the brokering and the ways in which they were solved (or not) and the ways in which the participants prepared for the brokering activities, 2) the language, communicative and (even) sociocultural management of the brokers’ parents: when and where they used the children as brokers, what they did when their children were not available, and what they told the children about the brokering, 3) the language, communicative and (even) sociocultural management done by other actors, potentially including other community members, brokers’ teachers and other representatives of state institutions, and 4) metalinguistic expression beyond the mere description of the activities themselves, including reflections, comments or evaluation, e. g. brokers’ reflection of their own position, or comments on their parents’ language competence (cf. Cline et al. 2011). In this particular example, an MS reveals that children serving in the role of language brokers retrospectively consider their exposure to the adult world to be somewhat premature (see Example 1, line 12 in which Tam says “at that early age I got to know interpreting”).

In the next sections, we will use this point of departure to analyze several selected language- and communication-related topics that emerged in MS in the interviews. These include the following: beginnings, brokering in the parents’ shop, problems occurring during the brokering and their solutions, differences between the brokering situations of siblings in a single family, the parents’ communication management and its relationship to the brokering, and the situation at the time of the interview – what the brokers still do for their parents or how the parents solve their problems when the children are not present, i. e. changes in the management and its re-evaluation. Given the chronological character of biographical interviews, we will proceed from the described time period during which the brokers were initiated into the LB process.

#### 4.1.1 Beginnings

##### Example 2– Beginnings (Tam/jazbio/25072012B/10:38-11:06)

01 TAM: ...I was like (0.3) sm- sm- small like it was like  
 02 really like already more like ehm problems that adults  
 03 encounter  
 04 SHE: mhm  
 05 TAM: and I was like still small so I didn't understand  
 06 everything yet (0.6) and I was still like sort of  
 07 afraid because of that and so when they told my  
 08 parents that for example they could be fined  
 09 SHE: mhm  
 10 TAM: and so so I really experienced it I was scared (0.5)  
 11 and stuff like that, but  
 12 (1.2)  
 13 TAM: um the older I got it wasn't a problem for me anymore.

In this passage, Tam summarizes another problem and how she repeatedly managed it, as well as how she perceived it – she had to interpret the instructions from government office employees to her parents at an early age (Example 2, lines 1–6). This illustrates how children begin interpreting at a young age, and in “adult” situations such as those involving authorities.<sup>14</sup> Their very limited linguistic and socio-cultural competence, as well as the fact that they sense a threat to their parents/family, can be a source of stress (cf. Weisskirch and Alva 2002). However, brokers with increased communicative and social competence have been shown to gain self-confidence, as indicated in their biographies (cf. Buriel et al. 1998). This and similar passages in other interviews do not typically contain detailed descriptions of interaction and/or instances of simple language management, because the interviewees do not orient primarily to the specific characteristics of language, communication and sociocultural problems themselves, but to the fact that they successfully overcame them (Example 2, line 13). This example also provides implicit information about the language management of the representatives of state

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<sup>14</sup> We understand this contrast (children in adult situations) both from our own perspective and from the perspectives presented to us by our respondents. In this sense, we perceive certain aspects of the LB described in the interviews in line with what Orellana (2009:23) calls “moments of rupture to the status quo”.

institutions and of the parents – this interview and others confirm that both use brokers on a regular basis.

#### 4.1.2 Brokering process, problems and their solutions

##### Example 3– Brokering in parents’ shop (Yen/jazbio/25112012/24:48-25:43)

- 01 SHE: um and how did it happen like that there [was some]  
 02 YEN: [because  
 03 Vietnamese]  
 04 SHE: decision that you’d go to the shop  
 05 YEN: ehm because Vietnamese children have to um have to  
 06 help their parents. it’s like that yeah. (0.5) a:nd  
 07 () my aunt made the decision so that I wouldn’t be  
 08 bored at home  
 09 SHE: ((laughs))  
 10 YEN: and so I would help also help my parents (0.8) um and  
 11 actually come into contact even um with adults a:nd  
 12 even with new people so I would have some socialization  
 13 and stuff like that. and um even the even for the: even  
 14 for the Czech so that I would master it (0.6) so this was  
 15 decided and I went to to see my parents there and I helped  
 16 them with the goods like unpacking or stocking and stuff  
 17 like that and even with orders we actually had two um  
 18 two um Czech em- employees. (0.7) so occasionally when  
 19 they didn’t understand something so so I translated it  
 20 for them.

The point of departure for our consideration of potential problems during the brokering process itself, which are described here, was the assumption (later confirmed) that, as children, the brokers initially lacked sufficient linguistic knowledge (either in Czech, in Vietnamese, or in a combination of both) as well as content-related knowledge concerning situations<sup>15</sup> in which they had to mediate. In other words, the ability to successfully conduct the brokering did

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<sup>15</sup> Situations like this can undoubtedly be considered family situations (as we were reminded by one of the anonymous reviewers of this text) in that the child brokers are protecting family interests and helping their parents. But at the same time, they can be understood as “very complex, ‘adult-like’ situations” (Morales and Hanson 2005: 472), or “adult situations” (Morales and Aguayo 2010: 219), in which the brokers may experience shortcomings in their own linguistic and/or social competence. And as Orellana et al. (2003: 28) observe “The power that

not come immediately. Many of the interviewees describe the gradual socialization process which occurred, including multiple incidences of management, during which the children's increased brokering abilities were embedded in their acculturation processes as well as in the expectations placed upon them in the context of their Vietnamese families. The brokering process described by Yen in Example 3 began on the site of her parents' place of business (in Vietnamese families this most typically consists of a small shop selling food or textiles). Her work in the store had multiple functions: it was meant to improve her Czech language as well as social skills (Example 3, lines 10–13), but it was also (and, in fact, primarily) grounded in the shared expectation expressed as “Vietnamese children have to help their parents” (Example 3, lines 2–6). This highlights the legitimacy of LB as one of the many activities that children in immigrant families perform (cf. Orellana 2009). Like in Example 1, the interviewee's parents used her as only as a temporary substitute. Her parents' management of communication in the store was done through employing Czech-speaking adults (Example 3, lines 17–20), with whom they themselves also needed to communicate. This communication constituted some of Yen's initial brokering experiences.

**Example 4– Problems and their solutions (Quy/jazbio/13022014B/16:10-17:07)**

- 01 SHE: [well and how did you] how did you  
 02 solve it, in such a [situation.]  
 03 QUY: [yea:h]  
 04 SHE: when you perhaps didn't know a word,  
 05 QUY: hm so I described it somehow, or (0.4) somehow somehow  
 06 it worked yeah. sometimes there were some snags.  
 07 for example translating (0.1) into Czech wasn't such a  
 08 problem. I came up with something, (0.4) uh (0.1) when  
 09 I didn't know exactly how to say it, but it was a  
 10 bigger problem for me to translate back into Vietnamese.  
 11 so for example I had to describe a lot to my mom,  
 12 SHE: mhm  
 13 QUY: and stuff like that. [because]  
 14 SHE: [mhm]  
 15 QUY: at state offices there's a lot of (0.5) there's a lot  
 16 of words there that mm like can't be very  
 17 (1.6)

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children have to access assets for their families is also constrained by the fact that they are children operating in situations that are usually the domain of adults.”

- 18 QUY: well translated yeah. (0.2) or I didn't know how to do  
 19 it.  
 20 SHE: mhm  
 21 (0.8)  
 22 SHE: so y- if you I don't know. (0.2) looked up (0.2) the  
 23 Vietnamese words somewhere later?  
 24 QUY: hm I didn't look them up. always when there was some word,  
 25 (0.2) that I: didn't know exactly how to say in Cz- in  
 26 Czech, so I (0.3) for example described to my mom how like  
 27 (0.4) what it was about or stuff like that. (0.3) and my  
 28 mom understood it somehow. (0.6) but I didn't look it up.  
 29 I don't remember doing that.  
 30 (0.6)  
 31 SHE: mhm  
 32 QUY: and I never had any like any Czech-Vietnamese  
 33 dictionary, or anything like that.

Problems which occurred during the brokering processes, as mentioned above, were presumed, but the question was that of which specific aspects of these processes had to be managed. Common problems include those described in this example: not understanding administrative terms (Example 4, lines 15–19), and above all difficulties in translating from Czech to Vietnamese (Example 4, lines 9–11). Differences between interviewees were found in their descriptions of the use (or non-use) of language materials in the long-term management of these problems. For example, Quy (Example 4, lines 28–33), even though she was very interested in languages in general and studied a language-based major at university, did not recall such use. More specific descriptions of the tendency to manage this problem through the use of dictionaries, Vietnamese written texts, and other such materials were mentioned more prominently by interviewees who went on to become professional interpreters and mediators and who declared active motivation to maintain and develop their Vietnamese. These tendencies are interconnected with the interviewees' individual positions in the family context, as we will see in the next section.

#### 4.1.3 Sibling differences

One of the defining life experiences for the women we interviewed was their position in the family – whether or not they had siblings, the differences between



their siblings and themselves, the differing language competences between the siblings, both as a point of departure for and as a result of the brokering experience. Indeed, if there are multiple children in a family, LB practices always involve a division of tasks between siblings, and they evolve over time (see Orellana 2009: 52–64). Differences in the tasks required from individual siblings are often connected to their starting positions: their language abilities may differ based on the number of years they spent in school in the host country, ranging from predominant competence in their home country language (older siblings) to predominant competence in the host country language (younger siblings). There may also be displayed differences in personality and interests which makes individuals more or less suited to brokering work. All of these factors typically reflected in the differing accounts of the role of LB in individual overall biographies.

Though all of our interviewees talked about the specific structures of their families, those who had siblings close in age frequently focused on the brokering in connection with differing trajectories of lives, careers and identities. As sibling differences were made relevant by our first interviewees, we decided to interview their siblings as well, when possible. This resulted in interviews with two female sibling pairs. In each case, the older sister was the first in the family to engage in brokering practices (cf. Morales and Hanson 2005; Orellana 2009; Weisskirch 2010), which was presented as playing a more significant perceived role in the later development of her personal and professional life.

**Example 5a– Sibling differences** (Cai/followup/27082013A/31:32-32:36)

01 CAI: ...mm I'm seeing more often (0.5) or (0.3) more often the  
 02 difference between generations. (0.9) a:h even  
 03 between our generation the generation of my sister (0.2)  
 04 a:nd the younger ones. (0.6) that we li:ke um our  
 05 generation really adapts (0.5) um is really interested  
 06 in the pro- projects in interpreting i:n providing um  
 07 services between the two communities (0.4) but whereas  
 08 my sister's communi- uh commu- ((laughs)) my sister's  
 09 um generation so they're uh really c- career-driven  
 10 (0.5) in tha:t they really go after a career (0.3) they  
 11 already know that they either want to um (0.2) they want  
 12 to be scientists they want to do medicine they want to  
 13 do something so they go after it they aren't interested  
 14 in whether the two communities adapt to one another  
 15 (0.3) and somehow understand each other.  
 16 (3.0)  
 17 CAI: and now when you go to Sapa s- um you usually see the

18 generation my generation (0.4) providing the  
 19 interpreting. (0.2) rather than s- (0.2) my sister's

**Example 5b– Sibling differences** (Cai/followup/27082013A/1:02:03-1:02:15)

01 CAI: I think that sh- my sister will only speak and write a  
 02 bit (0.4) in Vietnamese. but to r- return to the  
 03 Vietnamese culture like I did she won't return.

Here, Cai summarizes management practices past and present in her description of the role of the brokering in the context of long-term socialization and acculturation processes, comparing the long-term motivations of what she refers to as “generations” (Example 5a, lines 1–5, 9, 17–19).<sup>16</sup> Her generation often continues in the practice of brokering as adults (Example 5a, lines 4–7), while the younger generation prefers other sorts of careers (Example 5a, lines 7–13), and is thus not likely to develop full literacy in Vietnamese (Example 5b). This example highlights the portrayal of the brokering as a burden lying mainly on older siblings, leading to their experience of it as a responsibility later in their working lives. The older sister, Cai, who was later trained as a professional/cultural interpreter, understands brokering as mediation between two communities. The younger sister, Thu, does not contextualize her own brokering in the same way that Cai does.

**Example 5c– Sibling differences** (Thu/jazbio/28032014A/31:30-32:28)

01 SHE: hm. well a:nd uh (0.2) y- your parents' Cze:ch is  
 02 um or (0.4) we've already heard something (0.5)  
 03 abou:t (0.2) your dad [that]  
 04 THU: [hm]  
 05 SHE: he was able to communicate with the nanny,  
 06 [when you came]  
 07 THU: [my mom was too]  
 08 (0.7)  
 09 THU: my mom was too, but she's afraid (to sa-) to speak, or  
 10 how should I say it (0.2) she feels she has an  
 11 accent (0.3) so she's ashamed. (0.4) but I think that  
 12 if she had to she could communicate.

<sup>16</sup> The age difference between the sisters was four years, but the older sister arrived in the Czech Republic at the age of six and began attending school immediately.

13 SHE: hm. (0.6) well and did you ever have to interpret  
 14 for them?  
 15 THU: of course. (0.3) always at the doctor ((laughs))  
 16 always when we would go to the doctor, so simply  
 17 either me or my sister had to go (0.4) because my  
 18 mom supposedly wouldn't understand, I actually  
 19 think that she wouldn't understand him ((laughs))  
 20 but but alright it's my mom, so we go with her.  
 21 (0.7) and then sometimes we interpret occasionally,  
 22 (0.6) s- I know, that ca- my sister had a part-time  
 23 job as an interpreter (0.3) that at government offices  
 24 that she went there with Vietnamese people (0.8) and  
 25 translated for them there at at the clerk's,

Though Thu also considers the interpreting for her parents to be a given (Example 5c, lines 15–17), from this example and from other, uncited parts of the interview, it is evident that unlike her sister, for her this activity is merely a service performed for her parents. But she also hinted that this service may not even have been necessary to perform for her mother, saying that her mother was in fact able to speak Czech, and expressing doubt about her mother's alleged low to non-existent communicative competence (Example 5c, lines 7–12, 17–19<sup>17</sup>). This moment was later repeated when she further described the situation when she had to interpret for her father's friend at the dentist's. It is imaginable that in certain situations, she would, in fact, even refuse to interpret (see, e. g. Trickett and Jones 2007 on family conflicts motivated in this way).

According to the older sister, Cai, the younger sister, Thu, and her generation are merely language interpreters, not cultural mediators (Examples 5a and 5b). Cai relates the disengagement of language and culture to her sister's identity: Thu can speak Vietnamese, but will never “return” to the Vietnamese community.<sup>18</sup> This interpretation of differences between siblings was valid for the other sibling pair in our study as well, as was the way in which the younger sister described her relationship to Vietnamese culture (the way of life of the Vietnamese in the Czech Republic and/or in Vietnam), not feeling “touched by

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**17** Lines 18–19, in which Thu states, “I actually think she wouldn't understand him”, appear to contradict this observation in a formal sense. Yet due to the logical organization of Thu's previous statements in this passage and later on in the interview, we speculate that Thu meant to say “she would understand him”, and that what she actually uttered was a slip of the tongue.

**18** For a further examination of the widespread perceived need and subsequent attempt to “return” to one's Vietnamese roots during one's teens and early twenties, see Sherman and Homoláč (2014).

it” (Example 5d, lines 1–2), and in fact associating Vietnam with negative experiences related to local cultural norms, in this case gender-related ones (Example 5d, lines 15–20).

**Example 5d– Sibling differences** (Thu/jazbio/28032014A/46:00-46:44)

01 THU: I think I've like been hardly touched by Vietnamese  
 02 culture. but I think, really very little.  
 03 SHE: hm.  
 04 THU: I don't know if it's maybe a problem of the, like the  
 05 not my generation (0.8) but cl- I know that for example  
 06 my classmate (0.5) I have one at (0.3)  
 07 ((university name)), well actually not anymore, he left.  
 08 SHE: ((laughs))  
 09 THU: but I still had one at the beginning of the fall term,  
 10 there was a classmate, also Vietnamese, my [age]  
 11 SHE: [mhm]  
 12 THU: and he was for example also (0.2) he loved Vietnam he  
 13 simply looked forward to every trip to Vietnam.  
 14 SHE: ((laughs))  
 15 THU: while as for me, when somebody says Vietnam, I get  
 16 afraid that my great-aunts will come over and chew  
 17 my ear off  
 18 SHE: ((laughs))  
 19 THU: about how I'll end up an old maid. (0.9) so (0.6) that's  
 20 a bit of a difference between us.

#### 4.1.4 Relationships between management of brokering and family language policy

As we have seen in the previous sections, the interviewees' bilingual competence both inspired and was inspired by the management of brokering practices in the individual families, but also to the management of other language, communicative and sociocultural phenomena. To demonstrate these more explicitly, we will further examine the case of the family from Example 5. In it there were three children, the eldest (Cai) born in Vietnam, the second child also born in Vietnam but having arrived in the Czech Republic in infancy, and the youngest born in the Czech Republic (in addition to the younger sister, Thu, mentioned above, there is also a younger brother who was not interviewed, but was described by both of his sisters as openly rejecting the Vietnamese language

and culture). From the interviews with the two daughters, it is possible, using the summaries, to reconstruct a form of management which we will refer to as “family language policy”.<sup>19</sup> We understand family language policy as a form of organized language management to which the family members orient, either through their practices, for example, the ban on speaking a certain language at home, or through the way they speak about these practices. It most typically contains observable phases of noting, evaluation and adjustment designs, and in some cases even implementation, often, but not necessarily formulated explicitly.

Descriptions of this family's language policy show that while brokering in itself constitutes management, it can also serve as a stimulus for further management. For example, we found accounts of such further management in situations in which the parent notes that the child has acquired Czech at a sufficient level, such as when the child can speak Czech better than the mother and can then broker for her. During the brokering process, a parent may also note that the child is less competent in Vietnamese than originally expected.

**Example 6 – Parents' communication management** (Cai/followup/27082013A/12:15-12:40)

01 CAI: well a:nd (0.4) after some time my dad spoke to us a  
 02 lot- when we arrived so my dad spoke Czech a lot (0.4)  
 03 he tried  
 04 (1.5)  
 05 CAI: a:nd (0.2) after some when he saw that we were  
 06 speaking, that we were already even  
 07 (1.0)  
 08 CAI: so- even explaining to our mom that (0.2) it works like  
 09 that here and (0.6) not how ((laughs)) she thinks it  
 10 works (0.4) so dad also switched back to it- to  
 11 Vietnamese.

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<sup>19</sup> In this point, we acknowledge the presence of, yet diverge slightly from, the concept of family language policy which has emerged over the past few years among scholars combining approaches from language policy, language socialization, and literacy studies, with a focus on minority, heritage and endangered languages, including those of immigrants (see King and Fogle 2006; Curdt-Christiansen 2009; Schwartz 2010; King and Wright Fogle 2013). These approaches are different in that they consider language policy as a combination of beliefs, practices and management based on Spolsky (2004), whereas we view it as a type of language management as defined in Section 2.2 above.

This example concerns a chronological point in the prototypical trajectory of the migrating Vietnamese family in the 1990s, which involved following relatives. Cai's father had arrived in the Czech Republic before she and her mother did, and later made a systematic effort to have his children speak Czech. The change in his language choice was, as Cai describes, motivated by instances in which he noted that the children were engaging in brokering. The statement "... explaining to our mom that it works like that here and not how she thinks it works" (Example 6, lines 8–10) demonstrates that this brokering was not merely linguistic, but also cultural, from the very beginning.

Another instance of Czech acquisition for the purpose of brokering then acting as a trigger of further management in the context of family language policy concerns the effects of this policy on the brokers' Vietnamese.

**Example 7– Declared family policy** (Cai/followup/27082013A/10:40-11:04)

01 CAI: ...she told us she expl- she often explained to us that we  
 02 were not allowed to lose our roots in ord- in order not to  
 03 lose our roots we have to learn to speak, (0.2) so to us  
 04 she wo- wouldn't [learn Czech] (0.3) that we would be her  
 05 HOM: [mhm mhm]  
 06 CAI: mediators, (0.3) so we should um speak only Vietname:se  
 07 (0.4) to her a:nd (0.8) she actually explained it to my  
 08 dad as well so that- (0.2) da- dad wanted us to be  
 09 completely Czech

The brokers' language problem in this case was the threat of "loss" of Vietnamese or insufficient competence in it (Example 7, lines 1–3), which was managed in Cai's family (and, in fact, in every family whose members we interviewed) through a ban on the use of Czech with and around her parents (who, in some cases, made declared refusals to learn Czech, see Example 7, lines 3–4). In this case, we can observe family language policy described as the result of negotiation between the parents (Example 7, lines 7–9). This was the only case we found in the data actually containing the explicit presentation of the brokers' role ("that we would be her mediators", Example 7, lines 4–6).

## 5 Discussion and concluding remarks

This study has provided an initial exploration into language brokers' descriptions of their brokering practices in the context of the Vietnamese community in

the Czech Republic.<sup>20</sup> There are a number of observations, found among multiple interviewees, which form the basis for an understanding of the management processes, corresponding to our first research question:

- 1) The interviewees' initial engagement in brokering practices was at an early age (Examples 1 and 2, confirmed by all interviewees), usually beginning as soon as the children's parents realized that their children's competence in Czech was sufficient to engage in these tasks.
- 2) The range and character of the brokering situations is broad, ranging from interpreting during shopping situations to dealing with state institutions (Examples 1, 3, 4, 5c).
- 3) An essential part of the interviewees' experience was having to interpret in situations for which, initially, they were not sufficiently equipped either socially or linguistically and they encountered numerous difficulties in the brokering process which were often managed ad hoc (Examples 1, 2, 4).
- 4) Cases of families with multiple children help to elucidate the division of brokering work between siblings. The situations of individual siblings differed in terms of how much brokering they were asked to do, the importance they assigned to it in their biographies (all parts of Example 5), the degree to which they viewed brokering as a responsibility or as a personal calling, associated with choice of career direction later in life.
- 5) The management summaries contain only few instances of *language* management – the management described was rather predominantly communicative (see Example 4, lines 23–27) and sociocultural (see Example 6, lines 7–8). Though we have expertly defined language brokering as such, the specifically linguistic dimension of the brokering may not be the most important one for the brokers themselves (cf. Hall 2004).

As concerns our second research question, the most salient finding was that out of all possible ways of talking about the brokering in the interviews, the interviewees displayed the tendency to talk about it as something that was successfully handled. In all cases, the brokering experience was a highly formative one for the interviewees, which they considered, gradually and in retrospect, to be a normal part of life (cf. Orellana 2009; Cline et al. 2011).<sup>21</sup> Our material thus seems to support the

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, though, there were phenomena that we did not find in our data. The respondents, for example, did not discuss shortcomings in their own brokering abilities, nor did they express doubt about them (cf. Reynolds and Orellana 2009; Hall and Sham 2007).

<sup>21</sup> “Many translational activities took place within the framework of everyday activities, and were experienced by children as “just normal.”” (Orellana 2009: 124)

observation that the popular image of role reversal between parents and children is not the reality of the brokering experience (cf. Orellana 2009: 123).<sup>22</sup>

We view the interviewees' emphasis on their successful brokering performances and related achievement of bilingual competence as a part of the communicative framing of the research interview, i.e. it was influenced by the researchers' linguistic orientation, as well as by the subjects' own academic and professional profiles. Through differences between interviewees in their later professional orientation, it is possible to partially explain the varying degree of attention devoted to brokering in the context of overall individual language biographies (cf. Orellana 2003, Orellana 2010; Gárcia-Sánchez 2010). Some of the interviewees have gone on to assume the role of "professional integrated/bicultural Vietnamese", e.g. as trained intercultural moderators working in non-profit organizations, and this is reflected in their self-presentation in the interviews.

In these reflections, we find initial answers to our third research question: our material indicates that the life course described above is typically chosen by older siblings who came to the Czech Republic as children and received part of their school education in Vietnam. For younger siblings, LB is merely one of many family activities and does not have a special relationship to their professional and personal identities. These differences between siblings cannot be viewed as mere consequences of birth order, but as one of several ways in which parents actively influence their children's brokering. In addition to often specifically selecting the oldest child as the primary broker, parents, through their own participation in the brokering situations, observe their children's language development in both Vietnamese and Czech, which can serve as an impetus for the establishment of and changes in family language policy such as the choice of language spoken at home (Examples 6 and 7). However, these initial impressions, based on interviews with a limited number of interviewees (and only with sibling pairs from two families), needs to be further examined on the basis of more extensive empirical material.

There are implications of our study for the sociolinguistic analysis of summaries and accounts of language brokering. First, it should explore the phenomenon in relation to the brokers' other activities, both those realized during childhood (for example, in the Vietnamese shops, children do not only translate, but they also help their parents in other ways, such as by working at the cash register) and those realized later, above all the choice of school or profession. It is apparent that

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<sup>22</sup> Rather, interviewees tended to defend their parents' non-acquisition of host country language, citing disadvantages such as later age of immigration and lack to time to study due to work obligations. On similar behavior cf. Guan et al. (2016), in which two Asian-American respondents also defended their parents in this way.



LB and these activities mutually influence one another: brokers' activities influence their linguistic competence, and interpreting during childhood can serve as an inspiration for a professional career. Second, the sociolinguistic analysis of language brokering should devote attention to the activities, approaches and attitudes of all participants in the specific cases of brokering (e. g. parents, teachers, public officials), who enter into the interaction with specific expectations and communicative goals.<sup>23</sup> Such a perspective enables us to better understand the dynamics of the relationships between the simple and organized management performed by members of transnational communities (above all the position of LB in the family's overall language policy), as well as by representatives of institutions (e. g. schools or health care institutions) which come into contact with them.

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## Transcription conventions

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| [ ]          | the onset and ending of simultaneous talk of two speakers (overlap) |
| ?            | rising intonation   |
| .            | falling intonation  |
| ,            | slightly rising or rising-falling intonation                        |
| :            | lengthening of the preceding sound                                  |
| (0.3)        | pause measured in seconds   |
| ( )          | unintelligible portion of the transcript                            |
| (but)        | presumed, but not completely intelligible expression                |
| ((writes))   | comment by the transcriber  |
| thi-         | sudden interruption of the word or construction                     |
| <u>never</u> | strong emphasis on a syllable or word                               |
| ...          | omitted portion of the transcript                                   |

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<sup>23</sup> For example, parents can ask a small child to translate something in order to check his language knowledge, or a teacher or public official can decide whether or not to use the services of a child broker in the given context.

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