



Routledge Critical Studies in Multilingualism

LANGUAGE, GLOBAL MOBILITIES, BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS AND BLUE-COLLAR WORKPLACES

Edited by
Kellie Gonçalves and Helen Kelly-Holmes



Language, Global Mobilities, Blue-Collar Workers and Blue-Collar Workplaces

This collection brings together global perspectives that critically examine the ways in which language as a resource is used and managed in myriad ways in various blue-collar workplace settings in today's globalized economy. In focusing on blue-collar work environments, the book sheds further light on the informal processes through which top-down language policies take place in different multilingual settings and the resultant asymmetrical power relations that emerge among employees and employers in such settings. Taking into account the latest debates on poststructuralist theories of language, the volume also extends its conceptualization of language to demonstrate the ways in which it covers a wider range of multilingual and multimodal resources and communicative practices, all of which combine in unique and different ways towards constructing meaning in the workplace. The volume's unique focus on such workplaces also showcases domains of work that have generally until now been less visible within existing research on language in the workplace and the subsequent methodological challenges that arise from studying them. Integrating a range of theoretical and methodological approaches, along with empirical data from a diverse range of blue-collar workplaces, this book will be of particular interest to students and researchers in critical sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, sociology, and linguistic anthropology.

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9 Evolving Private Labor Markets and the (Non-) Acquisition of Language

Tamah Sherman and Jiří Homoláč

1. Introduction

Immigrant manual laborers are often perceived as not needing, and subsequently do not gain extensive language training to do their jobs. They may thus find themselves in situations that further perpetuate the social and economic disadvantages they already have. This study examines the changing situation of one particular group with this profile: Vietnamese workers in the Czech Republic (CR). It considers how the organization of their employment has influenced their access to language education, and subsequently, their potential further mobility in the majority society. Research with this particular focus is undoubtedly of social as well as sociolinguistic relevance: the Vietnamese minority, numbering approximately 60,000, is the third largest in the Czech Republic (after Ukrainians and Slovaks). They have national minority status, and not only do their members make up a substantial part of the manual laborers from abroad in Czech companies, but over the past thirty years, they have also built up the most visible ethnic economy in the country.

Continuing in the vein of our research on life trajectories (Sherman and Homoláč forthcoming) and on blue-collar workers (Sherman and Homoláč 2020), we will attempt to show that Vietnamese individuals' level of Czech is connected to a number of conditions and processes which develop over their professional routes, often dependent on circumstances beyond their control.

We pose the following research questions:

1. How has the workforce composition of the Vietnamese community evolved in the past-decades and what long-term effects related to language acquisition can be observed?
2. How are the various forms of privately organized labor connected to the acquisition of the Czech language and to the mobility of individuals?

This chapter is structured as followed. First, based on the previous literature in combination with information on the activities of

Vietnamese workers in the former Czechoslovakia, which we gained from our respondents during multiple interviews (see Section 3.1), we offer some historical background on the situation of Vietnamese manual workers, their position in the context of the entire Vietnamese migration to the Czech lands, and the language management done specifically to improve their communication both in and outside of the workplace. We then examine the relationship between certain types of manual jobs and the need for and/or opportunity to acquire language. Finally, we make some general considerations regarding the situation of manual laborers working in ethnic economies as it pertains to questions of state language policy.

2. Communication Management for Vietnamese in the Czech Lands: A Historical Perspective

In order to better understand the current language situation of Vietnamese workers in the Czech Republic, it is necessary to delve into its historical roots. In doing so, it is best to consider the development of the work situation of the Vietnamese in terms of various time periods, with the major division occurring in the years 1989–1990, marked by widespread political and socioeconomic changes in countries of the Soviet Bloc. Prior to 1989 (or more precisely, up until 1990), workers and apprentices were sent to Czechoslovakia on the basis of international agreements intended to provide economic aid to Vietnam.¹ Apprentices initially mostly came from large cities, including Hanoi, and from white-collar and middle-class families (cf. e.g. Secká 1987, 204), in contrast to the small-town and rural origin of many migrants from the 1990s and beyond (Pechová 2007). During this heavily state-controlled period, workers received Czech instruction. In the latter part of the 1980s, however, these individuals were considered to be short-term workers, and less emphasis was placed on language preparation (Alamgir 2018b).

The form and extent of teaching of Czech (or Slovak) to Vietnamese during this time was standardized, and determined above all by their profession. **Manual laborers**² typically received three months of Czech instruction prior to beginning their jobs (Brouček 2003). Ngo (1989) describes these courses as intensive, 32 hours per week, but states that they met with low interest from the workers, who had access to interpreters when on the job, as well as occasionally outside of it, e.g. in the dormitories. In addition, workers could legitimately presume that in order to do their manual, often unqualified jobs, they would not need much language. The low level of interest in language can also potentially be explained by the fact that their contracts were time-limited: four years with the possibility of extension (Brouček 2003). **Apprentices** spent three months learning Czech in a language school, followed by an exam, then three months of direct instruction at trade schools, part of the three-year

program there with instruction in Czech (Ngo 1989; Martínková 2008a). Afterwards, they began working in factories,³ where they had access to an interpreter, some of them eventually becoming interpreters themselves. The overall evaluation of their linguistic competence varies. Ngo (1989, 47) claims that the graduates of these programs were typically able to successfully communicate, while Brouček (2003, 90–91) offers the recollections of a teacher at a forestry program in the early 1980s, who observed that language teaching there had to be adjusted because the apprentices' Czech knowledge was very poor. Those who were apprentices or factory workers in the 1980s currently do not need interpreters in order to handle basic bureaucratic tasks, and for more complicated matters they often turn to their children (who grew up in the Czech Republic) or in some cases to other relatives or acquaintances (Hofírek and Nekorjak 2009, 181; Sherman and Homoláč 2017, 2020). **University students** received the greatest amount of language training, reports on the extent of which vary. Some had a year, initially only in Czechoslovakia (1960s), others later (1980s) had nine months within Vietnam with an exam at the end, followed by a year at a language training center in Czechoslovakia (Ngo 1989). Their resulting high competence led to their frequent employment as interpreters for other Vietnamese or leaders of Vietnamese work groups (Brouček 2003, 18; Martínková 2008b, 172).

Though, in general, the material (both language and technical) to be learned was determined beforehand and described in the “Protokol z jednání o odborné přípravě občanů Vietnamské demokratické republiky v Československé socialistické republice [Protocol from the negotiations on the training of citizens of the Vietnamese Democratic Republic in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic]” from June 1973 (Brouček 2003, 121), reports on the actual character of the language training indicate that it varied greatly. Pechová (2007), for example, evaluates the language training provided in the early 1980s as being of the highest quality.

This historical background helps elucidate two main issues connected to the management of language. The first is that despite the fact that personal contact between Vietnamese and Czechoslovak citizens in the early years of the international agreements was highly organized and limited, individuals who arrived in Czechoslovakia prior to 1989 tended to have greater contact with the Czech language and Czech surroundings than those who arrived later. They were taught by native-speaking teachers (Ngo 1989; Brouček 2003), who we presume mostly had no knowledge of Vietnamese and ultimately defined the desired level of Czech competence and communicative needs. The second issue is that, in general, individuals who arrived later could benefit from the knowledge and experience of those who arrived earlier. Martínková (2008b, 175) claims this was especially the case for those who arrived in the 1980s in regard to working conditions and everyday life, anecdotal evidence from the interviews has led us to presume that this information was gradually passed down

in Vietnamese. Overall, however, the local Vietnamese elite, consisting of individuals who arrived prior to 1989 (Hofírek and Nekorjak 2009), played a key role in establishing the ethnic economy (Brouček 2016). Based on the work of various sociologists and economists (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Light et al. 1994; Light and Gold 2000; Kaplan and Wei 2006; Pécoud 2010) we understand the concept of an ethnic economy here as a networked sphere of labor and consumption frequently established by immigrant groups, and even potentially spatially concentrated, in which affiliation with a certain ethnic group enables individuals to find employment (frequently self-employment) outside of the majority society's labor market.

Following the regime change and the end of the international agreements, many workers found themselves unemployed. Some were sent home or moved on to other countries, though many stayed and established businesses (Brouček 2016).⁴ Some were able to continue in activities they had already begun as grey economy side businesses under the state socialist period: selling goods of which there was a shortage (Brouček 2003, 91; Brouček 2016). Gaining trade licenses and founding limited companies (together with a Czech business partner, sometimes a spouse) or working at retail stands was the easiest way to legalize one's stay. While all three groups mentioned (manual laborers, apprentices, and university students) began doing business, it should be pointed out that the former students had the advantages of language knowledge and established social contacts. It was usually not a problem for them, for example, to handle the application procedure for a business license.⁵ For the manual laborers and apprentices, it was typical to turn to interpreters (including those who had interpreted in factories) as well as to gather information from others who had already undergone these procedures. Here we can see the initial private professionalization of brokering services, which will be discussed in more detail later. Otherwise, it was not generally difficult to engage in the retail work itself, such as selling inexpensive clothing imported from Vietnam or China, with little knowledge of Czech.

In the mid-1990s, more people began arriving for the purposes of family reunification, as spouses, children or even more distant relatives of those already in the country, all of whom could also be involved in the family businesses (Brouček 2005, 134).⁶ This was accompanied by an increased need for language and sociocultural adaptation of the new arrivals, especially at schools. As a result, some of the first private courses designed specifically for Vietnamese were offered and the practice of employing Czech nannies to help young children adapt, linguistically and otherwise, to the Czech surroundings, also emerged (cf. Souralová 2015).

The Vietnamese ethnic economy⁷ began to diversify in terms of the types of businesses being run (the services, including eating establishments, grew), the business locations (the move from outdoor stands to

“stone shops”), and in terms of social differences (Hofírek and Nekorjak 2009). Larger wholesale markets, the largest of which is the SAPA market in Libuše,⁸ Prague, appeared at the end of the 1990s.

This period was also marked by the growth of services known in Vietnamese as *dịch vụ* – various interpreting, brokering and other sorts of assistance, the demand for which occurred above all for communication with official institutions (residence and business permits, insurance, taxes, etc.) and everyday practical needs (with doctors, schools, etc.) (Martínková 2008b, 178; Freidingerová 2014, 30; Brouček 2016, 23). As is apparent, the main clientele for these services are non-Czech speakers (both new arrivals and long-term residents), and their establishment and subsequent growth can perhaps be viewed as a counter-force to individual motivation to learn Czech.

As multiple researchers have observed (Martínková 2008a, 8–9; Brouček 2003), the 1990s saw a definitive change in the character of the migration of Vietnamese to the Czech Republic, from short-term workers whose numbers and profiles were carefully monitored and controlled by the states involved to economic migrants in the classical sense. But the roots of this change date back to the second half of the 1980s, when the Vietnamese migrated not for the purposes of education, but to earn money and to compensate for the lack of local workers available to do unskilled labor (Alamgir 2018a; Brouček 2003). Overall, what differentiates the Vietnamese who had been living in the Czech Republic prior to the mid-1990s from those who arrived later (especially agency workers, as we will see), is the knowledge of language, experience using it, as well as familiarity of the Czech environment and market conditions (Brouček 2005; Hofírek 2009), which in some cases could even compensate for the lack of language. The worst situated were those who arrived during times of increased competition and lacked the social and cultural capital their predecessors had, some of these new migrants thus had to work for other Vietnamese or gain employment through agencies (Hofírek and Nekorjak 2010). If individuals had family and friends in the Czech Republic, it was easier for them to find new jobs through their social networks. If they did not, the situation was much more difficult. This was one of the main differences between those who arrived to work in factories and those who came to work in retail.

Eventually, the level of competition in retail providing inexpensive goods grew, both from within the ethnic economy and from outside of it, through the increase in chain stores. The Czech Republic entered the EU in 2004, leading to the end of duty-free zones in border areas, where many Vietnamese had been running businesses. This contributed to a move of some businesses inland, as well as a search for new economic activities, including retail and restaurants (Hofírek and Nekorjak 2010).

At the same time, beginning in the mid-2000s, the need for factory workers in the Czech Republic increased. The Vietnamese contributed to the supply of these workers in two ways: 1) previously unsuccessful entrepreneurs were looking for work and hired themselves out to agencies (Hofírek 2009) and 2) Czech and above all Vietnamese employment agencies imported people en masse. In 2006–2008, more than 20,000 people arrived from Vietnam (Martínková 2008a, 8; Brouček 2016, 38–48). In 2006, there were 40,779 in the Czech Republic, in 2008 60,255 and in 2009 61,116. As a result of the crisis, the number of Vietnamese dropped to 56,900 in 2015 (www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci/4-ciz_pocet_cizincu). The pre-crisis growth in numbers had some local consequences. Vietnamese community members, in fear that large numbers of manual workers lacking knowledge and local customs would problematize the Vietnamese social position, made an unsuccessful attempt (due to low interest) to organize a Czech course for local factory workers in Pilsen (Martínková 2008a, 12).

Even though agencies charged their clients large sums of money, they often provided them with misleading information about life in the Czech Republic, salaries and working conditions, and in many cases they did not even provide them with the language instruction that had been promised and that was prescribed by Vietnamese law (Pechová 2007, who, however also points out (p. 30) that some individuals working as welders did have a two-month language course). In some cases, e.g. when signing papers documenting their agreement with changes in their job description or place of work, the Vietnamese agency and Czech company, who are likely aware of the workers' lack of language knowledge, take advantage of this fact, for example, by making work contracts only in Czech, allowing them to circumvent legal regulations meant to protect the workers (concerning finances, insurance, etc.) (Krebs and Pechová 2008, 23).⁹

However, it is necessary to state that neither the agency workers nor their employers viewed the lack of Czech knowledge as a major problem. For agency workers to do unskilled labor, it was enough for someone to demonstrate to them how to manually carry out their work, or for a more experienced colleague or interpreter to explain it to them. But above all, they lacked motivation to learn Czech because they had come to the Czech Republic with the aim of earning money and returning to Vietnam within a short period of time (Pechová 2007).¹⁰ Companies dealt with the language issue individually, typically hiring translators for entire shifts.

Following the world financial crisis of 2007–2008 and the reduction in employment of agency workers,¹¹ some Vietnamese accepted the state's offer of a return home (the Czech government's Voluntary Return Programme, explored in detail in Rulíková 2012) but many stayed, having already invested significant savings and/or having borrowed funds to come to the CR (see Brouček 2016). According to estimates by the

foreign police from December 2009, around 80 percent of them legalized their stay in the CR through the acquisition of a trade license,¹² however, many of them actually moved on to other types of “unskilled” manual or service industry jobs such as warehouse or retail work (Hofírek 2009).¹³ Unlike their predecessors in the early 1990s, these individuals had access to a strong Vietnamese ethnic economy established over the previous decades.

In connection with this development, the overall numbers of Vietnamese recorded as living in the Czech Republic continued to grow up until 2009 (61 115), then from 2010 numbers started to decrease (2010–60,289, 2011–58,205, 2012–57,300, 2013–57,347, 2014–56,609, 2015–56,900, 2016–58,205, 2017–59,761).¹⁴

The mapping of these historical and socioeconomic processes helps us to observe clearly defined set of relationships between the purpose for which an individual arrived in the country and his or her resulting language skills. For example, those arriving as **students** undergo systematic Czech language learning, either in Vietnam prior to their arrival, or immediately after they arrive. Unlike individuals working in retail, who only use Google Translate to find specific words, these respondents use the Czech-language internet on a regular basis. They gain experience with oral and written communication in formal and informal settings, and overall, a better and more systematic mastery of Czech communicative norms, which helps them in their aim to be independent. They can also communicate with their classmates and share a sort of class affiliation with them. They have to translate in both directions between Czech and Vietnamese. And as several potential university students reported to us, they were required to pass language exams at various levels, e.g. A2 (Czech University of Life Sciences) or B1 (University of Chemistry and Technology).

Those who became **small business owners** originally sold inexpensive clothing and housewares at outdoor stands, but gradually moved to “stone” shops, then late-night convenience stores, and later, nail studios and food service establishments. If they initially worked at outdoor stands, they typically had at least some communication with customers, in many cases not only in Czech, but also in German and/or English, all of which they could use later in other types of businesses. Of course, there is an essential difference between individuals working in retail, either as owners or employees, on the grounds of the SAPA market, where the clientele is composed almost exclusively of other Vietnamese (Sherman and Homoláč 2020), so they practically do not use Czech at all at work, and those working in other locations.

Business owners and their employees working at the cash register, especially those outside the ethnic area, have several advantages compared to manual workers when it comes to opportunities for language acquisition in the workplace. They have to know the product names, which suggests

that they likely have a greater vocabulary overall. The gradual growth in vocabulary is prompted by communication with customers, who inevitably come into the shop with requests for an item that the shop employee does not know, but then must learn. The acquisition of phrases for use in dialogue develops from the repeated management of situations in which misunderstandings occur with the customers. For example, when a customer indicates non-comprehension, it is necessary to repeat words or phrases, a form of pronunciation practice. Several respondents also told us that they frequently asked customers to repeat the new vocabulary item or to write it down, in order to enable an internet search for it or its translation via Google.

In these ways, respondents become familiarized with communication norms, such as the position of speech acts including greetings in interaction, with politeness phrases and forms of address (and are able to assess the (in)appropriateness of informal address forms). In some cases, as is typical for service encounters, some regular customers also engage in small talk and are sometimes willing to assist with the creation of other texts such as menus. If the shop is surrounded by other businesses, it can also happen that “neighborly” relations with their Czech owners are established, leading to further interaction in Czech. Finally, running a small business also involves the purchase of some goods (e.g. cigarettes) from Czech wholesalers, with the relevant communication involved, as well as the passive exposure to the written Czech found, e.g. on business invoices and delivery forms. Overall, these respondents considered their Czech knowledge sufficient to do their jobs.¹⁵ Outside of work, they use Czech practically only when shopping, and in more complicated communicative situations they use paid interpreting services or ask their relatives or acquaintance for brokering assistance.

3. Factory Work, the Private Labor Market, the Ethnic Economy, and Language

As mentioned earlier, our research is based on semi-structured interviews with three groups of people: 1) Vietnamese adults who have been engaged in low- or unqualified manual labor at some point during their stay in the CR, 2) other Vietnamese of various generations and professions who were interviewed as part of a larger project on the acquisition of Czech, and 3) individuals involved in the teaching and organization of Czech language courses. We also conducted participant observation in language courses organized as part of development projects for Vietnamese working in the ethnic economy (mostly at the SAPA market). We will now explore a number of professional trajectories (cf. Sherman and Homoláč 2020) that we observed, in which people moved from job to job, tracing their linguistic aspects as well.

3.1 Theoretical-Methodological Framework, Data and Methods

Our general theoretical basis is in the language management framework (Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003; Fairbrother et al. 2018; Sherman and Homoláč 2020). This framework involves viewing language issues in a given society through the lens of problems that emerge, analyzing the ways in which they are resolved, or in fact, posing the question of why they remain unresolved. It also emphasizes the connections between the management of language and communication and the management of everyday socioeconomic problems. In other words, language problems are never about language alone, but rather, they serve as a reflection of dynamic social mechanisms and, from a methodological perspective, as an important way of identifying them. Through the use of this framework, we aim to show how the case of Vietnamese workers in the Czech Republic, despite its local specifics, can help point to more general trends in the relationship between manual labor, language use and acquisition in the contemporary globalized world.

The approach taken in this chapter is also gleaned from the life course perspective (Elder 1985, 1994; Elder et al. 2003; Wingens et al. 2011; Peters and Vink 2016 on migrants specifically, Sherman and Homoláč forthcoming). This framework views the life of an individual to be an intertwining bundle of so-called trajectories representing different domains of life such as health, work, family, or education. These trajectories consist of a series or sequences of transitions, or milestones or points at which “changes in state that are more or less abrupt” (Elder 1985: 31f; cited in Wingens et al. 2011, 13–14), known as “transitions”. For migrants, this may be, for example, the point at which the individual arrives in the new country. In accordance with the language biography approach (Sherman and Homoláč 2014), which focuses on capturing, via interview, the individual’s linguistic life experience, we also consider language (its use, acquisition, attrition and the like) to be an important domain of life in which it is possible to identify key transitions which may then serve as major determiners of an individual’s subsequent language behavior and management in response to changes in the surrounding society.

Our analysis is based on 76 language biographies and follow-up interviews (Sherman and Homoláč 2014) with 45 Vietnamese people from the first generation, 20 people from the 1.5th generation, and 11 people from the second generation.¹⁶ These interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2018. The largest group of respondents from the first generation, who were born and raised in Vietnam, were students of Czech courses organized by a non-profit organization, and they and the course teachers provided us with contacts to the other first-generation respondents. The 1.5th generation respondents, who were born in Vietnam and came to the Czech Republic as children, were our students in university courses.

We gained contact to the second-generation respondents, who were born and raised in the Czech Republic, from their older siblings who had been our respondents and from teachers at local schools. Interviews with the respondents from the first generation were conducted with the help of interpreters, the others all took place in Czech.

We also conducted interviews with two Vietnamese and two Czech teachers of Czech and 1 course organizer and engaged in participant observation in Czech-language classes organized for Vietnamese people. Our information about the events that took place prior to our fieldwork is based on both the interview data and literature reporting previous research on this topic.

We thus gained various types of data, some of which reflected the experience of Vietnamese blue-collar workers directly, and some indirectly (such as when respondents spoke about their relatives, or teachers discussed their students). The respondents directly quoted in section 3 are those whose language and professional trajectories are typical for Vietnamese migrants of the first generation. The criteria for the selection of examples was, above all, the degree of explicitness with which they described the given point on the language and/or professional trajectories, or in some cases examples of the language management they performed.

3.2 From Manual Work in a Factory to Retail in the Vietnamese Wholesale Market

One of our respondents, Hoa, attended secondary school in Vietnam and then worked as a cashier in a supermarket. She came to the CR in 2008 upon the invitation of her aunt, who was already living there. She began learning Czech only after arriving, from her relatives. She initially worked together with them in a Japanese-owned auto parts factory. She gained this job thanks to a Vietnamese acquaintance of her aunt, who was an interpreter in this factory and at the same time acted as a scout for new employees in the local Vietnamese community. According to Hoa, Vietnamese people comprised 30 percent of the employees at that time. After five months, however, she lost this job, moved to Prague and began selling shoes in a Chinese-owned store. At the time of the interview, she was attending a Czech course organized by a non-profit organization to prepare for the exam at the A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages, which is a requirement for permanent residence, but also because she wanted to be able to communicate, for example, with doctors (she was expecting a child at that time) without having to pay for interpreting services.

Extract 1 demonstrates how, even in the case of this respondent, Hoa, work on the assembly line required minimal language knowledge and communication was enabled by an interpreter.

Extract 1 (Original Czech Follows)

1. TS: mhm and at that job eh what kind of work was it did you do something eh with machines () you were
2. H: I worked on the assembly line, where I had a computer screen with instructions that I used to select the wire for the energizer that was the right length and color
3. TS: mhm and how did you communicate at that job
4. H: there was one foreman there. He was Czech so I was able to ask him, I knew the colors, and he actually helped me so it was alright, I already knew a bit of Czech . . . there was a Vietnamese guy there who interpreted for the factory

(Hoa, 9.16.2014)

1. TS: *mhm a v té práci eee co to bylo za práci něco jste dělala ee u u strojů něco () jste byla*
2. H: *mhm vlastně pracovalo se tam jak zvlášť tak i na lince ale já jsem dělala vlastně s deskou takže podle počítače jsem dávala dohromady buď budiče dráty nebo podle barev součástky*
3. TS: *mhm a jak jste v té práci komunikovala*
4. H: *byl tam jeden mistr. To byl čech tak vlastně jsem se dokázala ho zeptat znala jsem barvy a vlastně on mi pomohl takže to šlo, trošku už jsem uměla česky . . . byl tam vietnámec který tam tlumočil pro tu továrnu*

Our next respondent Thu attended secondary school and completed military service in Vietnam. He arrived in the Czech Republic in 2008 at age 26 on a business visa. He initially worked on the assembly line in an electronics factory in a large city in the western part of the country. At the beginning of this job, an interpreter explained his duties to him and later, if problems on the assembly line emerged, the more experienced Vietnamese workers were able to solve them. He himself only learned basic phrases. As one example of a situation where he felt a language hindrance, he described an instance in which he could not defend himself against accusations that he had made a mistake.

After a year, he was let go as a part of an overall reduction in the number of employees. He went to Prague and was employed in a small workshop. At that time, he already knew basic job-related words and phrases such as the names of tools and he communicated in Czech with his Filipino coworkers, and when problems emerged, he knew enough language to handle them. Then he began working at the SAPA market, first in an Asian food store, and then, at the time of the interview, in a store

selling products for nail studios. As he told us, the story of his (acquisition and use of) Czech ended at that point. Though he had attended a Czech course organized at the SAPA market, after passing the exam for permanent residence, he did not use Czech and had to use the services of an interpreter in dealing with issues such as signing his children up for kindergarten.

3.3 From Manual Work in the Ethnic Enclave to Retail With Primarily Czech Clientele

An important point in the professional career of our respondents was the achievement of economic self-sufficiency, usually through purchasing or renting their own retail business. If this business lies outside the ethnic enclave, as in the case of our next respondent, Sang, certain language and communication management are required, typically leading to at least some improvements in their Czech competence. Sang graduated from secondary school in Vietnam and then worked as a toolmaker. He arrived in the CR in 2009 on a student visa, attended a month-long Czech course, and then changed his visa to a business one. He initially worked at the SAPA market in a wholesale grocery and drugstore item warehouse. After obtaining a driver's license (he took the written part in Vietnamese), he worked delivering goods to Vietnamese stores. He learned the names of documents (e.g. "delivery form") or goods from his colleagues. At that time, he did need some Czech outside of work. In 2014, thanks to an intensive four-day course aimed at practicing the test questions,¹⁷ he was able to pass the language exam required for permanent residence. But because he did not need these language skills to communicate with his Vietnamese colleagues and customers, he more or less forgot them. He only began using Czech more in 2017, when he began running his own store in another part of Prague, where the customers were only Czechs or individuals of other nationalities. He thus had to expand his vocabulary. His communication in Czech, however, is still limited to basic phrases used in the store, or in some cases to dialogue about the goods that a customer may be looking for. In these situations, like other vendors, he uses an electronic translator or Google. Business communication takes place in Vietnamese, because he purchases almost exclusively from Vietnamese suppliers. In all other cases, he consults a relative who is a university student and is fully competent in Czech.

Extract 2 describes the influence of the change in jobs (from manual laborer to store owner) and leaving the local ethnic Vietnamese market based on his knowledge and use of Czech:

Extract 2 (Original Czech Follows)

INTERPRETER: because he¹⁸ has to hold conversations in Czech every day and for the same, for example, the same goods that he had listed in the warehouse, he only knew the names and that was it, sometimes he forgot things when he had to use Czech. Now, because he has to use Czech every day in the store, it helps him learn more new words in Czech and at the same time he knows how things work in stores more and more for example () he learned a lot of new things and rules and regulations

(Sang, 7.24.2018)

Tlumočnice: díky tomu že je dennodenně každý den musí konverzovat v češtině a pro to samé například samé zboží které měl předtím za evidováno v tom skladu tak věděl jenom názvy a to bylo všechno občas i zapomínal pokud eh vlastně už jakoby musel používat tu češtinu a teď kon každý den a díky tomu že ten obchod mu pomáhá s tím že se naučil víc nových slov eh v češtině a zároveň už vidí víc jak se chodí v obchodě například () naučil se hodně nových věcí a předpisů

3.4 From Retail Back to Manual Work Outside the Ethnic Economy¹⁹

In some cases, workers who began as manual labors and initially followed the trajectory described earlier, leading them to retail work, ended up more or less back where they began in terms of the type of job they were doing and the resulting language requirements. Nhu, one of our respondents, arrived in 1995 on the basis of family reunification. Her husband worked in a factory beginning in 1988. When he lost his job at the beginning of the 1990s, like many other Vietnamese, he began selling cheap clothing at a stand. His Czech skills were minimal, so Nhu had to take care of all formal matters with the help of an interpreter. She even acquired the Czech that she needed to work in the shop on her own or with the help of customers. At the time of the interview (2015) she ran a shop in a small town near Prague and also communicated with Czechs outside the shop. Her husband found a manual job in a warehouse of a large chain store, where he worked with other Vietnamese, and practically did not need Czech. He did not communicate in Czech either at work or outside of it. In extract 3, she explains his work situation, indicating that there were various ways of getting around the lack of language knowledge:

Extract 3 (Original Czech Follows)

1. JH: and what does your husband do . . .
2. N: in [name of town] there's this company and there's a sort of warehouse . . . for meat, he works there
3. TS: mhm how uh does he communicate with his boss for example
4. N: um eh there used to be one guy working there who knew Czech so he dealt with everything with the boss, but he probably already left that job, but the boss is tolerant, so like, they somehow manage things there . . . so when for example they have an afternoon shift it's enough to just show them from what time to what time and everyone understands

(Nhu, 5.28.2015)

1. JH: *a co dělá manžel*
2. T: *v [název města] je [název obchodu] a tam je vlastně jakoby sklad . . . jako na maso tak tam dělá*
3. TS: *uhu jak e spolu komunikují se šéfem třeba*
4. T: *uhm e dřív tam pracoval jeden co uměl česky tak vlastně řešil všechno co se šéfem ale ten už pravděpodobně odešel ale šéf má pochopení takže e jako tak tam nějak zvládají . . . takže když třeba mají odpolední směnu tak stačí jenom ukázat od kolika do kolika a všichni tomu rozumí*

Information from our respondents as well as from the literature confirms that many Vietnamese who arrived in Czechoslovakia in the 1980s lost their jobs in Czech companies after 1989 and then began setting up their own retail businesses (see section 2). But this extract shows that some of them, for various reasons, ultimately left small business ownership and returned to working as employees for Czech companies. The language and other services that had been provided to Vietnamese workers by company interpreters before 1989 were now provided to Nhu's husband by his wife.

3.5 The Role of Czech Companies in Managing Communication

As mentioned earlier, Czech companies (and international companies with branches or plants in the Czech Republic) have long managed the communicative problems stemming from the lack of Czech knowledge among the Vietnamese agency workers by hiring interpreters, who sometimes even operate as “scouts”. This information is supported by the

findings of Nekvapil and Sherman (2013), who in their discussion of the language ideologies tied to management in multinational companies, examine a situation in which Vietnamese agency workers were brought in to cover extra shifts during a time of prosperity. There were several shifts, with an official translator assigned for each. In this case, however, the agency workers were let go when the world financial crisis hit.

The only case we found in our data in which agency workers received language instruction were the three-month courses that were initiated by a civic organization and the program, which lasted two years, and was financed by the Czech state. The subcontractor, a large foreign manufacturing company with a plant in the Czech Republic, provided logistics support, and their Czech employees provided a list of technical expressions that were then translated into Vietnamese and distributed to the Vietnamese course participants. But the important thing was that those individuals who successfully passed the course could then gain better positions and thus even more motivation to learn Czech. According to teachers, whom we also interviewed, some participants did achieve this.

Binh, one course participant, arrived in the Czech Republic in 2008. Her work permit was arranged by an agency in Vietnam, which organized a three-month course for its employees, in which a Vietnamese citizen who had previously worked in the Czech Republic taught them the most important basics. Her employment was arranged by a cooperating Czech agency. First, she worked in a factory making household products in a small town in the south of the country. She viewed her work as simple, so it was enough for the others to show her what to do. There was an interpreter available for communication with the forewoman. She gradually learned the names of the parts and other necessary words. In time, she was even able to hold basic conversations about work matters. In addition to Czech employees, there were also individuals of other nationalities working in the factory, and she was able to make small talk with them. After nearly a year, she lost her job due to the economic crisis. She then changed the purpose of her stay in the country to business. With the help of a Czech employment agency, she found employment in the factory described earlier manufacturing seat belts in another Czech town, where she then worked for another five years. Again, this job only required very rudimentary Czech knowledge. An interpreter was available, and on some shifts, instructions in Vietnamese gradually appeared on machines. In spite of these aids, she tried to learn the names of the parts from her Vietnamese colleagues. She stated that she had signed up for the course because even then she was planning to stay in the Czech Republic for a long time. To the question of what the Vietnamese workers were told about the course, and by whom, she responded (in Extract 4):

Extract 4 (Original Czech Follows)

They [the interpreters] told us that if we were planning to work there long-term, we should learn a bit more Czech and also that since it was a non-profit organization, the courses would be free of charge . . . and I wanted [it] and my friends did too.

(Binh, 12.15.2018)

Oni [tlumočníci] nám vlastně řekli že když tady sme máme záměr vlastně dlouhodobě pracovat tak že bysme se měli tu češtinu trošku víc naučit a také že když je to nezisková organizace takže to vlastně bude bezplatné ty kurzy . . . a já sem vlastně chtěla a kamarádi taky.

She left the factory in 2014, got married, had a baby, and, together with her husband, began operating a small grocery store in a smaller town in the central part of the country. She passed the exam for permanent residence and stated that she continues to learn Czech and participates in an online course run by a Vietnamese teacher based in Vietnam.

4. Discussion

Our analysis of the relationship between work and language acquisition among Vietnamese manual laborers in the Czech Republic has aimed to further elucidate the difference in motivation to learn Czech deriving from the difference in socioeconomic status within the Vietnamese community as a whole. It has confirmed the expectation that the selected group of first-generation migrants from Vietnam, manual laborers, need minimal Czech. Those working in factories continually perform the same tasks on assembly lines. These tasks are explained to them at the beginning by a Czech employee with the help of an interpreter or by a more experienced Vietnamese coworker, or through instructions in visual form, such as on a computer screen. In all other cases, they utilize the services of a Vietnamese interpreter employed by the factory, or in some cases they may, with the help of coworkers or interpreters learn what to say, for instance, when they are interested in working overtime. Those doing manual work in the ethnic enclave, e.g. as drivers or in warehouses, do not need Czech at all, or only minimally, for example, the names of the goods in the warehouse.

The fact that people working in the ethnic enclave made up the absolute majority of attendees of the Czech courses we observed is thus not a result of the fact they needed language skills at work or outside of it,²⁰ but by the necessity of passing the exam necessary for permanent residence. Another bit of evidence supporting the idea that this is their

primary motivation for learning Czech is the fact that while the course participants did express the desire to learn to communicate in state offices or at the doctor without an interpreter, some of those who had already passed the test declared that they were using Czech even less than before and were forgetting the A1-level skills they had gained previously. Therefore, this is a matter of socioeconomic management rather than language or communicative management: they are not learning for the purposes of communicating with the majority at work or outside of it, but rather, in order to gain permanent residence and ensure stable conditions for doing business. From the perspective of research on life trajectories, we can state that the preparation for and the taking of the exam do not constitute a key transition on their trajectories of language acquisition and use.

Majority language acquisition and use, and eventually also language requirements for adult migrants in given countries often reflect past migration trends in those countries (Pulinx et al. 2014, 26). The requirements in the Czech Republic, where mass immigration is a relatively new phenomenon and there exists a “monolingual habitus” (Gogolin 1997), can be considered comparatively low. Resulting competence is, then, a mix of individual initiative and ever-evolving job-related motivation. Our analysis has also shown that in the way in which Vietnamese workers in the Czech Republic manage the situations in which they need the Czech language to communicate, there is a certain continuity from the period of state socialism. Just like at that time, they now have an interpreter available in the company, or more experienced Vietnamese colleagues help them. And if they work in the ethnic enclave, for their practical needs they use the services of the *dịch vụ*, the translation and mediation services and agencies founded in the 1990s by Vietnamese who had studied in Socialist Czechoslovakia. Due to the fact that the Czech state enabled family reunification beginning in the mid-1990s, unlike their predecessors, they could also get help from their children, who had arrived in the country at a young age or were born there.

5. Conclusion

The economic migration of Vietnamese to the Czech Republic is by no means an unusual case. Like in other spaces throughout the world, this movement of people, which peaked in the first decade of the 21st century, is a manifestation of globalization mechanisms and, at the same time, has been and continues to be influenced by the local context, both in the historical sense and otherwise. In simplified terms, we can observe that the employment of Vietnamese manual laborers by Czech companies is the contemporary, updated version of the activities of the Vietnamese workers during socialist Czechoslovakia, and that the Vietnamese ethnic economy, which has been developing in the Czech Republic since the 1990s, is the contemporary realization of the Vietnamese grey economy side businesses under the state socialist period.

The emergence and development of the Vietnamese ethnic economy, however, are unthinkable without the extensive economic and legal liberalization and the widely utilized rights regarding family unification. The fact that many new Vietnamese arrivals acquire only minimal Czech is enabled by two things: 1) work in the ethnic economy and 2) Vietnamese families' gradual amassing of linguistic know-how, enabling them to resolve essential communication problems, and with the coming of age of the 1.5th- and second generations, to become linguistically "autonomous".

Though the Czech state has partially regulated the number of Vietnamese over the past 30 years, during selected periods even ceasing to issue visas, the fact that many Vietnamese are able to gain a business visa enables them to abandon Czech companies in favor of work in the ethnic economy. However, even if they are doing business in spaces outside the ethnic enclave, this does not place greater demands on their Czech knowledge. Even in these cases, they manage communication through the use of professional interpreters, relatives or residence requirement and who are not presumed to meet it in the future due to the length of their acquaintances.

The language policy of the Czech state, in the form of exams for residency permits and citizenship, is merely following the example of many European countries that have introduced such an exam. This policy does not sufficiently consider the historical and contemporary context of the Vietnamese economic migration to the CR, and the language exam does not appear to serve as an effective remedy to the current situation. In relation to the agency workers in Czech factories, who have not yet met the five-year requirement for permanent residence, the state's language management is limited to the non-systematic financial support of language courses organized by Czech non-profit organizations (see Section 3). In our opinion, a more effective tool of state policy would be to monitor whether Vietnamese and Czech labor agencies actually provide their clients with a basic language course, or even better, to require these agencies to purchase these courses from organizations that have experience organizing them. Given the fact that some of these workers have business licenses or will gain them in time and can begin running their own businesses (as some of the trajectories demonstrate), such a step would not only constitute state assistance to private companies, but could also have a positive influence on other aspects of the life of new migrants.

Notes

1. This practice was typical for the Soviet Bloc countries; see for example the description of the situation of Vietnamese workers in the former German Democratic Republic (Schaland and Schmiz 2015).
2. In the 1980s, they made up two-thirds of the Vietnamese in Czechoslovakia (Martínková 2008b, 171).

3. For an example of the overall organization of their work activities and everyday lives there, see Secká 1987.
4. These changes were reflected in the rapid drop in numbers of Vietnamese living in Czechoslovakia and after 1993, the Czech Republic. In 1990 there were around 13,000 (Brouček 2005, 132), and by 1994 only 9,633 (Source: Czech Statistical Office, R04 Cizinci v ČR podle státního občanství v letech 1994–2017 (k 31. 12.) www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci/4-ciz_pocet_cizincu).
5. The group of Vietnamese who did not return to Vietnam was also supplemented in 1993 and 1995 by other Vietnamese who had been living in the German Democratic Republic and had to leave following the end of similar international agreements. Those who arrived in 1993 were given compensation of 3000 DM and had knowledge of German, both of which helped to enable them to run businesses, especially in the borderlands (Martínková 2008b, 177).
6. In 1995, the number of Vietnamese grew from the preceding by nearly 5,000 people to 14,213 and then, with the exception of 2000–2001, it grew by a maximum of 4,000 people (Source: Czech Statistical Office, R04 Cizinci v ČR podle státního občanství v letech 1994–2017 (k 31. 12.) www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci/4-ciz_pocet_cizincu).
7. Hofírek and Nekorjak (2009, 165–166) refer to this as the “Vietnamese immigrant economy”.
8. According to the information gathered by the local municipality (www.praha12.cz/dozorova-cinnost-v-arealu-sapa/d-39246), the market area is 35 hectares, containing 814 places of business, 138 legal entity addresses, and two personal business addresses. This same source also estimates that the site is visited by approximately 6,000 people per day, 10,000 on weekends. The SAPA market also serves as the most important center of the Vietnamese business and community life. Vietnamese retailers from the entire country shop there, Vietnamese holiday celebrations take place there, etc.
9. As a result of this situation, the non-profit organization La Strada undertook a project to research Vietnamese working conditions and their overall life situation (see Krebs and Pechová 2008). This was a reaction to the negative evaluation of behavior of labor agencies as well as an investigation into whether Vietnamese were being exploited or were the subjects of forced labor or human trafficking.
10. Cf. “Trying to recover the reputation of Vietnamese community in Pilsen a group of students from Vietnam decided to hold free courses of Czech language and “manners” for Vietnamese workers. However, and not very surprisingly, their effort failed to succeed. The workers showed minimum interest in the courses” (Krebs and Pechová 2008, 15).
11. In November 2008, there were officially more than 17,000 Vietnamese manual workers in the Czech Republic, and in December 2009, there were 3,500 (Source: <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/ekonomika/ceska-ekonomika/z-ceska-zmizeli-vietnamsti-delnici-ted-podnikaji/r~i:article:655424/>).
12. <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/ekonomika/ceska-ekonomika/z-ceska-zmizeli-vietnamsti-delnici-ted-podnikaji/r~i:article:655424/>.
13. Some began participating in illegal activities, e.g. growing marihuana (Nožina and Kraus 2009, 94).
14. Source: Czech Statistical Office, www.czso.cz/documents/11292/27320905/c01R07_2017.pdf/24ad2ce0-e1ae-4c91-b50b-ada59c346af6?version=1.0
15. Similar conclusions were reached by a study on the participation of Vietnamese and Ukrainians in the Czech labor market (Ezzedine-Lukšíková et al. 2006, 18). In response to the question “What should be changed for you to

- be able to do business better?”, the most frequent response from Vietnamese respondents was “I feel good, I do not need to change anything, it is good already”, the second most frequent response was that they would like “better or more information for foreigners”, and the least frequent response was “I want to learn the Czech language”.
16. Cf. Zhou and Bankston 1998 for a delimitation of the generations based on the age at which the immigrants arrived in the new country.
 17. Since 2009, one of the conditions for gaining permanent residence (for non-EU citizens) or Czech citizenship is passing an exam at A1 and B1 CEFR levels, respectively. The ministry of the interior argued for the introduction of these exams for foreigners who have been living in the CR for at least 5 years by stating that foreigners need to communicate with the authorities better and also that that language knowledge enables integration (See Sherman and Homoláč in prep., for an overview of the issue of language exams as an instrument of integration cf. e.g. Extra et al. 2009; Hogan-Brun et al. 2009, for a critical view on the potential correlations between language skills and the degree of integration see Vigouroux 2017).
 18. In some cases, the excerpts are in third person due to the use of interpreters during the interviews.
 19. When conducting our interviews, we only encountered one case of this type. The director of the non-profit organization that organized the Czech courses for Vietnamese told us that in recent years, due to a shortage of capital or increased competition, a growing number of Vietnamese have prioritized a stable income from factory work over running one’s own small business in the ethnic economy.
 20. The research was conducted in Prague. The interviews held with two storeowners living in small towns outside of Prague reveal that Vietnamese shop-owners are more integrated into local social networks and thus use more Czech.

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