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Language biographies and management summaries revisited¹

Abstract: Der Beitrag unterzieht das Konzept der *Management Summaries* im Bereich sprachbiografischer Forschung einer erneuten Überprüfung. Ausgangspunkt ist vor allem die Arbeit von Jiří Nekvapil (2004), der zeigen konnte, wie *Management Summaries* verwendet werden können, um soziolinguistische Normen historischer Perioden aufzudecken. Bei Nekvapil sind dies Normen, die das Sprachverhalten von Personen deutscher Ethnie in der Tschechischen Republik in der Zeit der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts beeinflussen. Unser Schwerpunkt liegt im Folgenden auf zwei Aspekten. Zum einen wollen wir, wie in der Arbeit von Nekvapil, einige kollektive Auffassungen in Bezug auf Sprache sowie deren Entwicklung in einem bestimmten Zeitraum und innerhalb bestimmter Gruppen aufdecken. Im Fall von Nekvapil handelt es sich bei der fraglichen Gruppe um Deutschsprachige. In unserem Fall werden englische Muttersprachler fokussiert, die seit den 1990er Jahren in der Tschechischen Republik leben. Zweitens betrachten wir die Form der *Management Summaries*, ihre Erhebung und ihre generelle Bedeutung als Datenquelle, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die einzelnen Phasen des Sprachmanagementprozesses.

Keywords: Language Management, Management Summaries, Language Biographies, Czech as a Foreign Language, Language Testing

1 Introduction

This paper aims to reconsider the concept of management summaries in the genre of language biographies. Its point of departure is primarily the work of Jiří Nekvapil (2004), which demonstrated how management summaries can be used to uncover sociolinguistic norms from historical periods, in this case the latter half of the 20th century in the Czech lands in relation to individuals of German ethnicity. Our focus here is twofold. One, like in the Nekvapil paper, we aim to uncover some of the shared understandings related to language, as well as their development during a specific time period and among specific groups. In Nekvapil's case the group in question are German speakers. In our case, the group in question are native English speakers living in the Czech Republic beginning

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in the 1990s. Two, we consider the form of the management summaries, their elicitation, and their role as a source of data in general, particularly in regard to individual phases of the language management process.

2 Management summaries and their contribution to research on language management

The concept of the management summary emerged as a part of the language management framework. Within this framework, language management (hereafter LM) refers to the many types of activities in which people engage wherein language, including, but not limited to, its structure, use or status, is the object.² Research on these activities is crucial not only for the description and analysis of sociolinguistic situations, but also in interdisciplinary endeavors, such as the understanding of how historical events, economic conditions or sociological developments are connected to language use. Language biographical inquiry is undoubtedly one such endeavor.

One key aspect of the LM framework is its focus on the processual character of metalinguistic behavior, with four to five phases distinguished: noting, evaluation, adjustment design, implementation³ and potentially also post-management evaluation or feedback following the completion of the process.⁴ The point of departure is that language users are continually encountering situations in which something deviates from their expectations or the norms that they are accustomed to in the given context. One example of this might be our expectation regarding the choice of language in an encounter. Based on an expectation that can be paraphrased as *English is spoken everywhere*, a speaker may approach an interlocutor in a non-English-speaking country without asking first if that person speaks English. Upon discovering that the interlocutor does not speak English (i. e., noting of the deviation from expectations) and evaluating this fact negatively, the speaker may select from a number of possible adjustments such as attempting to use another language, employing electronic translation technology, resorting to other communicative means such as gestures, or ending the interaction. The selected adjustment may be implemented and then later re-evaluated.

If we imagine that the situation above is experienced repeatedly by the speaker, a summary of these management processes might be *I only use a few words of Czech when the other person doesn't speak any English at all, I keep my Google translator*

2 Jernudd/Neustupný 1987; Nekula/Sherman/Zawiszová 2022.

3 Jernudd/Neustupný 1987.

4 Kimura 2014.

handy because so many people don't speak English or Nobody speaks English in that shop so I stopped going there. Management summaries can also relate to more macro-level situations, such as *All the kids are learning English as their first foreign language, but after that they won't want to learn anything else, so we decided our son should learn German first.* Statements like these are a part of everyday life for everyone, and the LM framework helps us to make them more explicit. It is thus no surprise that we would find them in ordinary talk or in interviews.

As the LM framework has been in use in some form since the late 1960s, its relatively large body of emergent research now allows us to point to some general methodological tendencies. One of these is that, at this point in time, it can be safely stated that the management summary (hereafter MS) is the most commonly encountered form of data on LM when any form of qualitative interviewing is used as a method.⁵ It can also be a byproduct, for example, of questionnaire research involving a final section in which participants may freely comment.⁶ Additionally, it is typical for *naturally-occurring* data collected from online media,⁷ or other written sources, e. g., linguistics texts⁸ or historical documents such as personal letters.⁹

The concept of the MS was initially used by Jiří Nekvapil in 2004 in a re-analysis of data that was originally collected in the 1990s. This consisted of a series of language biography interviews conducted with ethnic Germans who remained in Czechoslovakia following the post-war expulsion of Germans in 1945. The text deals with “the problem of conducting individual language biographies as well as with the typical language biography of particular communities”.¹⁰ Nekvapil explores the usefulness of the three-part model by Denzin (1989), which distinguishes between the reality of life, reality of the subject and the reality of the text, pointing out that extracting information regarding both the reality of life and the reality of the subject from language biographies helps to characterize the situation of a particular community.

Nekvapil considered the MS to be an essential aspect of the language biography material and detailed its relationship to the description of individual tokens of LM, which are also found in language biographies, stating that

5 Fairbrother 2015; Marriott 2015; Rudwick 2018; Sherman 2006; Sherman/Homoláč 2014; 2017; 2021; Nekula 2021a; Nekula 2021b; Yoshimitsu 2009; Yoshimitsu 2013.

6 Marriott 2013.

7 Sloboda/Nábělková 2013; Sherman 2009; Sherman/Švelch 2015.

8 Dovalil 2018.

9 Nekula 2023.

10 Nekvapil 2004, p. 9.

[n]arrating one's life requires, among other things, summarizing a lot. In language biographies, management summaries are therefore almost certain to be found. Mr. S's self-categorization "I am self-taught in Czech" [...] may be based on thousands of tokens of simple management, which he as a matter of course did not mention in his story.¹¹

He also pointed to one particular rhetorical device used in MS, the extreme case formulation,¹² in which speakers describe, summarize or evaluate something in a seemingly exaggerated way, using expressions such as *everybody*, *nobody*, *always*, *never*, and the like. In regard to such statements, he emphasizes that "even such 'untrue' formulations may be socially relevant."¹³

Management summaries have been made the focus of the analysis in a number of studies that followed, and mentioned in the description of data in many others. Sherman (2006) explored the MS which came out of interaction interviews with American Mormon missionaries in the Czech Republic, and showed how these can reveal a very specific set of norms that are in operation for their daily activities. Sherman and Homoláč (2014) dealt extensively with MS which came from language biography and follow-up interviews with members of the 1.5¹⁴ and 2nd generation of Vietnamese living in the Czech Republic. In this case, MS were extracted from initial semi-structured interviews, and then used as the basis for follow-up interviews. As a result, the initial MS were often confirmed or reformulated as further MS, which led to the conclusion that the summaries remained more or less consistent. Also, when MS were repeated by multiple interview participants, the researchers could gain important information on the management conducted in specific communities or among people with a similar language background. They state that

[i]t is important to point out that MS are a naturally-occurring phenomenon which can be found in numerous other sources which are not research situations, e.g. in everyday conversation or in written genres, particularly in evaluative ones such as reviews. Though Neustupný (1994: 67), points out that "summaries of language problems provided by speakers in interviews do not necessarily reflect the range of problems encountered in discourse", i.e. a given problem must be assigned the appropriate relevance by the speaker/writer to be worthy of mention, in research of an exploratory character, these summaries can provide information that is unattainable through other methods.¹⁵

11 Nekvapil 2004, p. 25.

12 Pomerantz 1986.

13 Nekvapil 2004, p. 27. See also Nekula 2021a for the further examination of extreme case formulations in MS in language biography interviews.

14 The 1.5 generation (Rumbaut 2004) consists of individuals who immigrated to the new country as children and thus experienced a certain degree of socialization in their native country.

15 Sherman/Homoláč 2014, p. 296.

In a similar vein Fairbrother (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with plurilingual residents of Japan and analyzed their MS, detailing their usefulness as an analytic unit in that they

can provide a broader overview of the problems residents of Japan face in everyday life and can pinpoint specific areas where further research is needed. Also, because the management of language and power is not restricted to actual incidents of language use on the micro level, but also incorporates general attitudes towards language use and issues of identity, management summaries can help the researcher to detect language management at both the micro and macro level of interaction.¹⁶

3 Project background

The language biography that we will analyze in this paper emerged as part of a larger research project focused on a specific instance of organized LM on the part of the Czech state: the institution of a language requirement for citizens of third-countries (non-EU) applying for permanent residence. This group of individuals in question is a very diverse one. As the project aimed to capture the full range of language backgrounds and socioeconomic situations as well as cover these groups in a representative manner, four categories were established at the outset: Ukrainians, Vietnamese, Russians, and English speakers. The first three groups represent the most numerous nationalities of third-country nationals living in the Czech Republic. But it is the final group that will be the subject of our analysis. This group was defined very roughly as consisting of anyone who did not fall into one of the first three groups, and it was presumed that many (though not all) of these people would speak English, either as a first language or an additional one.

4 The interview

The interviewee contacted one of the researchers in response to an advertisement placed on a Facebook group for women from abroad living in the Czech Republic. The interview took place in that researcher's office. As with many of our previous studies, there were two interviewers, a Czech male and an American female, whose identities were known to the interviewee. In particular, given the shared ethnolinguistic background and some language biography details of one interviewer and the interviewee (both were Americans living in the Czech Republic for many years), many issues were presumed to be understood and not explained in detail. It should also be mentioned that among this particular ethnolinguistic

16 Fairbrother 2015, p. 62.

group, it was very common for people to *tell their stories* of how they came to live in Prague when first getting to know each other, so certain aspects of their language biographies are often not being narrated for the first time, but rather, have been shared and have evolved over time.

4.1 Ms. G.'s reconstructed language biography

Ms. G. was born in the midwestern United States in 1965. She grew up in a monolingual household and had minimal foreign language classes prior to her university studies, during which she majored in French (and later, journalism), spent ten months in France, and also learned Italian. She used both languages professionally in the United States initially, working in a call center, then did a number of other jobs. She was looking to leave her home region and based on the recommendation of a friend who was already living in Prague, decided to move there with the idea that she could work in journalism and also learn Czech, given her language background. She arrived in 1996. She initially worked as an English teacher and a proofreader, and later as a journalist for the local English-language media. She began learning Czech with a tutor but did not make extensive progress, and also immediately became integrated socially into English-speaking networks. After seven years, she received a job offer in Azerbaijan, where she then spent two and a half years, during which she studied Azeri and Russian. She then decided to return to Prague, which she wanted to make her permanent home. For this reason, she decided to improve her Czech knowledge. She worked with a number of textbooks and also attempted to increase her passive exposure to the language. She was interested in gaining permanent residence in the Czech Republic, and by the time she was eligible, a Czech language exam at A1 level of the Common European Framework Reference for Languages was required, and she passed it in 2014. She prepared for the exam by going through the official exam booklet with a colleague. Her level at the time of the exam was higher than A1, so she did not have difficulty passing. Following the exam, she wanted to continue improving her Czech, but her social life remained primarily in English. At the time of the interview, she was preparing for the B1-level language exam and the realia test required for Czech citizenship. She was also interested in further improving her Czech for the purposes of local civic participation and volunteer work.

As can be observed from this reconstruction, there are several key points in Ms. G.'s biography, including arriving in the country, the initial routinization of language practices upon arrival and the decision to remain in the Czech Republic permanently. In the following sections, we will explore what the MS contained in the semi-structured interview can tell us more generally about management

processes in the contexts of her language biography. Overall, Ms. G.'s language biography is characterized by one major theme – that she is dissatisfied with the level of Czech language she has achieved even after many years of living in the Czech Republic, as she stated early in the interview “my Czech sucks after twenty some years here” or later that “my Czech is crap”. This major theme emerges through her MS with emphasis on various phases of the management process. In line with the approach by Fairbrother (2015), we will now look at each in turn.

4.2 MS with a focus on norms and expectations

As with anyone entering a new language situation via migration, Ms. G.'s point of departure was a set of norms based on lived experience and the resulting expectations related to the acquisition and use of a new language. These were outlined in the initial part of the interview, in which Ms. G., like all other participants, was asked to detail her language background.

Extract 1¹⁷

1. MG: **I grew up in Kansas which means we don't do foreign languages more**
2. **or less** so I had uh a very brief course of I think in around fourteen, nine weeks
3. of French nine weeks of Spanish nine weeks of Health nine weeks of some Social
4. Studies or something I don't know and uh then when I went to university, uh I went
5. to the University of Kansas, and I wound up majoring in French and getting most
6. of the master's in French language and literature. so um (.) you know in as a k- as a
7. kid growing up you know you pick up bits and pieces of Spanish, um I'm actually
8. half Mexican but I never really had the connection to that part of my family so...you
9. know, it was very passive **like you'd watch something on television or Sesame**

17 A few words on the transcription of the interview are in order here. We understand research interviews as dialogues between the researcher and participants and always analyze them as such, in most cases using some form of Conversation Analysis transcription (which is also employed in Nekvapil 2004). As the focus in the interview is primarily on content and less on form here, the transcription of this interview was done with consideration given to Conversation Analysis conventions to the degree they were relevant, with focus on reader intelligibility, but with some *literary* elements such as the capitalization of proper names. During this project we encouraged the participants to be the main speakers, and to talk for long stretches if possible. This was successful to varying degrees. Ms. G.'s case was one which was dominated by longer monologues, therefore the specific examples shown here do not contain overlaps. Otherwise, periods indicate falling intonation and commas continuing intonation. Short pauses are marked as (.), words pronounced emphatically are underlined, cut-off words or phrases are marked with a hyphen, and sequences of three periods indicate an omitted passage from the interview. Double parentheses indicate comments by the transcriber. Emphasis in bold is by the authors for analytic purposes. Czech expressions are in cursive and translations are provided in the footnotes.

10. **Street you know children's TV show, and they'd have little Spanish sessions**
 11. **things like that** but that was my only real exposure um until s- until the s- you
 12. know, this nine-week thing and then (.) eh going to um university and then winding
 13. up majoring and I did u:h my ma- my my undergraduate was in French language
 14. and literature but I had (.) kind of a background (.) a concentration I suppose in
 15. Applied Linguistics...so that's sort of why I was interested in what you're doing
 16. ((laughs)) um you know and so yeah so then I g- I uh uh I did that...I always
 17. would you know I'd kinda float toward Spanish but I think it was more of a- you
 18. know, there were other issues involved and **there is wasn't much (.) emphasis**
 19. **in the American system to learn foreign languages** so

This extract contains a combination of MS and tokens of individual management. We posit that this may be typical for this particular part of language biography interviews with immigrants. On the one hand, the interviewee is narrating his or her language background: specific languages were (or were not) used in the home or with extended family and in school, then the interviewee was exposed to different languages in other ways, such as through foreign language classes. On the other hand, the interviewee needs to continually orient to the interviewers' presumed understandings of this narration, which involves explanations or reiterations of the norms in operation at the time.

Overall, this section of the interview can be characterized as Ms. G.'s recounting of what she sees as the minimal foreign language input that she received in her pre-university years, followed by an active decision to pursue foreign languages during her university education. Several MS display a strong orientation to norms, e. g., "I grew up in Kansas which means we don't do foreign languages more or less",¹⁸ "you'd watch something on television or sesame street you know children's TV show and they'd have little Spanish sessions things like that",¹⁹ or "there is wasn't much (.) emphasis in the American system to learn foreign languages".²⁰

The norms reflected by Ms. G. here are examples of regularity norms,²¹ or norms which represent what is common or usual. Ms. G. uses the MS with a focus on these norms to explain the specific character of her linguistic background, which is also intelligible to the interviewer who comes from a similar background. These norms, according to Pandolfi et al. 2017, stand in opposition to "oughtness" norms, which are more prescriptive in character and reflect the narrator's ideological position, which we explore below.

18 Extract 1, lines 1–2.

19 Extract 1, lines 9–11.

20 Extract 1, lines 18–19.

21 Pandolfi/Miecznikowski/Christopher/Kamber 2017.

Extract 2

1. MG: u:m (.) I I don't understand why you wouldn't want to speak the language of
 2. the country you have the citizenship for...that's (.) you know I mean I u:h like I
 3. said I (.) am not very happy with myself with my level of Czech...vis-a-vis my
 4. desire to become a citizen...because I don't believe you can (.) you know you can
 5. become in the same way **Chinese Americans...in Chinatown who don't speak**
 6. **a word of English (.) become (.) citi-...they're they're American citizens just as**
 7. **much as I am...but they can only participate...in this shrunken little world**
 8. and this is a small enough country as it is...so you know I I I feel that yes I do
 9. believe that you need to have (.) uh a certain ability to interact with the country
 10. with which you've chosen to become a citizen...**it just seems (.) normal.**

The norm summarized in this extract, which came from a later point in the interview, is “one should learn the language of the country of which he or she is a citizen” (“it just seems (.) normal.”²²). At the time of the interview, Ms. G. had passed the CEFR A1-level exam required for third-country (non-EU) nationals and was planning to eventually take the B1-level exam required for Czech citizenship. She presents an example of deviation from this norm (“Chinese Americans...in Chinatown who don't speak a word of English (.) become (.) citi-... they're they're American citizens just as much as I am...but they can only participate... in this shrunken little world”²³), indicating a model that she does not wish to emulate, but feels she is in danger of emulating.

In addition to norms, Ms. G.'s narrative also contains summaries which focus on expectations, the deviations from which can also trigger the LM process. Critical to her story is the initial expectation that given her background with learning languages, any other new language, in this case Czech, would also be easily and quickly learnable.

Extract 3

1. MG: all of a sudden there were a:ll of these news programs like you know Sixty Minutes,
 2. or you know...talking about the new Bohemia and **there were all these Americans**
 3. **in Prague and they were like I pay five crowns for this beer...**and for me:
 4. what clicked me into it was that uh they had negative unemployment, and they
 5. wanted English speakers...**and I thought this would be an opportunity...and**
 6. **because of my language background, I thought oh Czech.**

Ms. G.'s presented expectation is that the Czech language would be learnable (“and because of my language background, I thought oh Czech,”²⁴), and it is placed in the context of a more general expectation of how easy it would be for Americans to resettle in the Czech Republic in the 1990s. She describes this expectation as

22 Extract 2, line 10.

23 Extract 2, lines 5–7.

24 Extract 3, lines 5–6.

fueled by media representations of life in the new country, including financial accessibility (“there were all these Americans in Prague and they were like I pay five crowns for this beer”²⁵). Like the description of the norms regarding language education in the United States, the contextualization of this expectation is also done in consideration of the shared background of the interviewer.

4.3 MS with a focus on the noting and evaluation of deviations

Further MS relate to the noting and evaluation of deviations. As we have seen above, Ms. G. arrived in the Czech Republic with two expectations: that as an English speaker, she would be able to find work and establish social networks, and that with her facility for languages, she would learn Czech. The deviations from this expectation are detailed in the following extract.

Extract 4

1. MG: and I walked around the city and I just- I really had like a **linguistic breakdown**.
2. **I couldn't do anything** I couldn't fi- I couldn't find Wenceslas Square. (.)
3. I mean I really- I don't know *why* I- I didn't think about- **I think I read a**
4. **few little books, you know learned you know pivo dobrý den**²⁶ I- but
5. didn't really- it didn't really soak in I just wouldn't pick it up. because **I'd**
6. **traveled all over Europe and I always figured it out...you know Greece, you'd**
7. **just- you figure it out** you know, (.) um and here **I couldn't find a single word**.
8. I remember *ovoce* and *zelenina*,²⁷ **I had no idea what that meant**. I decided I'd just
9. get in the metro and ride to the prettiest named- prettiest sounding name I could find.
10. Florenc. um...it was- it was really (.) it was a shock. so yeah, those were my first
11. experiences

Ms. G. characterizes her initial encounter with the Czech language as a “linguistic breakdown”,²⁸ even though she declares that she had acquired a few basic phrases (“I think I read a few little books, you know learned you know pivo dobrý den”²⁹), and despite her previous experiences travelling abroad, in which she had been able to figure out the meaning of words (“I'd traveled all over Europe and I always figured it out...you know Greece, you'd just- you figure it out”³⁰). In other words, she presents it as a deviation from her expectations and evaluates it negatively.

The MS with a focus on noting and evaluation of deviations in this extract employ one type of formulation described by Nekvapil (2004) and also echoed by

25 Extract 3, lines 2–3.

26 ‘Beer, Good Day’.

27 ‘Fruit and vegetables’.

28 Extract 4, line 1.

29 Extract 4, lines 3–4.

30 Extract 4, lines 5–7.

Nekula (2012a) as typical for MS – the extreme case formulation.³¹ These include phrases such as “I couldn’t do *anything*”,³² “I think I read *a few little* books”,³³ “I’d travelled *all over* Europe and I *always* figured it out”,³⁴ “I couldn’t find a *single word*”,³⁵ or “I had *no idea* what that meant”.³⁶ These serve to somehow dramatize the “reality of the subject”,³⁷ or how the subject experienced the narrated events, emphasizing the perceived vast difference between Ms. G.’s past language learning experience and expectations as a person with a facility for languages, and her first encounter with Czech.

The deviations from Ms. G.’s expectations did not end with these first encounters, however. Later, after her language skills had improved, she made attempts to integrate herself into Czech-language activities based on her interests, with the expectation that she would be able to be successful in doing so, as the following extract shows.

Extract 5

1. MG: but I do, I do want it. you know this is this is something I want- I do want to
2. be: (.) a better Czech speaker so I can participate in more things. I did a- I did a-
3. a Red Cross training program during Covid...but (.) you know I: I recorded
4. everything, I took the notes I could and then **I went home and cried**
5. because, I thought, you know I really hope they don’t need me ((laughs))

In this extract, Ms. G. recounts an instance in which she participated in an activity that was important to her in the context of volunteer work – a Red Cross training program in Czech. It turned out that her level of Czech at the time (after many years already living in the country) was not sufficient for the level of understanding she felt she would need to actually participate in the organization’s activities. In this case, the MS “I went home and cried”³⁸ describes her evaluation of the deviation not only at the time, but as an emotional and physical reaction to repeatedly finding oneself unable to overcome the language barrier.

31 Pomerantz 1986.

32 Extract 4, line 2.

33 Extract 4, lines 3–4.

34 Extract 4, lines 5–6.

35 Extract 4, line 7.

36 Extract 4, line 8.

37 Denzin 1989.

38 Extract 5, line 4.

4.4 MS with a focus on gratifications

The LM framework also considers the fact that deviations may be evaluated in various ways, not merely negatively, as these other types of evaluations can also provide important information on the norms in operation. Thus, as described by Neustupný (2003), so-called gratifications are deviations from norms or expectations which are evaluated positively. The following extract reveals such an example:

Extract 6

1. MG: I have been robbed. so I've had to call the police then...but I- to be honest, in
2. those situations the English language services that are available I know...so I
3. **immediately go to the English language services**...u:h when the police came
4. to take a report on my house was burgled...I was **expecting to**
5. **speak Czech with them and they spoke beau:tiful English**

This MS emerged in response to the interviewers' questions regarding Ms. G.'s evaluation of her ability to use Czech in a number of different life situations, including the use of emergency services, where clear communication is of particular importance. She admitted to choosing the language based upon availability, e. g., selecting the English option for telephone conversations, but being prepared for the Czech option in face-to-face communication ("so I immediately go to the English language services"³⁹). The MS is supported and exemplified by an example of an individual case of management in which Ms. G. was pleasantly surprised by the language chosen by her interlocutors, stating "I was expecting to speak Czech with them and they spoke beau:tiful English"⁴⁰. This can also be seen as an extreme case formulation ("beau:tiful") that reflects the Ms. G.'s (low) expectations of the level of the police officers' English competence.

4.5 MS with a focus on adjustment designs

Along with the noting and evaluation of deviations from norms or expectations, the description and summarization of adjustment designs played a significant role in Ms. G.'s language biography. Ms. G. repeatedly mentioned that she was continually aware of her "insufficient Czech"⁴¹ and made plans to change the situation. One such instance is detailed in Extract 7.

39 Extract 6, lines 2–3.

40 Extract 6, lines 4–5.

41 This term is used in government policy documents (for more on this, see Sherman/Homoláč 2020).

Extract 7

1. MG: I (.) made the resolution that the problem here is to function outside of an
2. editor's position, **I had to become fluent in Czech because I'm not gonna**
3. **work with a translator you know, to try to get a news story.** so I'd decided
4. OK that summer, I was going to take an intensive Czech class and really
5. dedicate myself to learning Czech

In her first years in the Czech Republic, Ms. G. worked as a journalist covering local stories, which meant that she was repeatedly heavily reliant on the cooperation of translators and interpreters, for example, in interviewing people for stories. She wanted to change this ("I had to become fluent in Czech because I'm not gonna work with a translator you know, to try to get a news story."⁴²). Her resulting adjustment design to learn better Czech was hampered by her move to Azerbaijan, but was renewed upon her return, as is emphasized in Extract 8.

Extract 8

1. MG: you know I read a lot and just decided that (.) you know no place is perfect but
2. this place offered me (.) what I wanted for living...and so coming back (.) I:
3. decided that this was (.) you know, **it was more important for me to- (.)**
4. **you know improve my Czech** and it- **it you know I'm at about a B1 level. (.)**
5. **it comes in fits and spurts I'm trying to push I wanna take the B2 exam by**
6. **the end of the year.**

In this extract, Ms. G. explains her decision to make the Czech Republic her permanent home and places her desire to improve her Czech in that context ("it was more important for me to you know improve my Czech"⁴³). She also states that she was successful in achieving this to a certain degree, which has led to what we might call a renewed adjustment design – her aim achieving even a higher level, which she places in the present context ("you know I'm at about a B1 level. (.) it comes in fits and spurts I'm trying to push I wanna take the B2 exam by the end of the year."⁴⁴).

4.6 MS with a focus on implementations

Throughout her narrative, Ms. G. makes it clear that she has repeatedly made plans and rules for herself regarding language learning and use, i. e., adjustment designs. In the following examples, we can observe the fate of those designs. On the one hand, she has encountered a number of hurdles in the process of implementation, the effects of which she is able to coherently describe. On the other

42 Extract 7, lines 2–3.

43 Extract 8, lines 3–4.

44 Extract 8, lines 4–6.

hand, a cumulative improvement has occurred, which she also acknowledges, and she has developed strategies for engaging people in Czech conversation.

Extract 9

1. MG: I do a lot of hiking on the weekends I travel I try to take day trips almost every
2. weekend...and (.) you know you get a chance to have little encounters...and (.) you
3. know what I do like is that you don't have the (.) you know, **the most frustrating**
4. **thing about living in Prague and trying to speak Czech is, you know they hear**
5. **your accent...and immediately respond in English...and finally I've reached the**
6. **point that I just beg them, you know, that look I'm I've lived here for a long**
7. **time and my Czech is crap. and it's because every time you guys hear my**
8. **priz- my přízvuk⁴⁵...**you know, you- so and you know the thing is that I know
9. they just want to be helpful. (.) you know but it's an emotional thing sometimes
10. you're just like arghh like, you know, you don't understand...so it it it it and of
11. course then your Czech gets worse because every time...they respond to you in
12. English...and you get more stressed...and so yeah it's a dis- it's not an incentivizer
13. by any means.

Ms. G. recounts a situation in which she has repeatedly found herself and one that is explored in detail in Sherman (2009), also based on Crown (1996) – her Czech interlocutors, upon hearing her accent, immediately switch into English, most likely with the aim of making the communication easier. For Ms. G., this is a major barrier for the implementation of her adjustment design, and she describes other strategies, including leaving the Prague space where people are more likely to use English (above all “the most frustrating thing about living in Prague and trying to speak Czech is, you know they hear your accent...and immediately respond in English”⁴⁶) and what she refers to as *begging* (“and finally I’ve reached the point that I just beg them, you know, that look I’m I’ve lived here for a long time and my Czech is crap. and it’s because every time you guys hear my priz- my přízvuk”⁴⁷) her interlocutors to use Czech with her. Further strategies are mentioned in the following extract:

Extract 10

1. MG: one of the first phrases I learned was ah *čes- česky je těžký*⁴⁸...and I- I- you
2. know my trick is taxi drivers and bar people when you’ve had a few-
3. a bit to drink...and that was my my in to have a conversation. (.) and I
4. was talking to some *štamgas*⁴⁹ somewhere you know and I’m, you know
5. **I’m just like, you know *česky je čestina je těžká* he’s like (.) *je***,⁵⁰...I just saw

45 ‘Accent’.

46 Extract 9, lines 1–5.

47 Extract 9, lines 5–8.

48 ‘Czech is difficult’.

49 ‘A regular customer in a drinking establishment’.

50 ‘It is’.

6. that pride like yeah come on...you know and I think that- to me that feels a
 7. lot about the culture here...you know, uh people don't (.) go out of the way to
 8. help you so much because they want- if you- **it's up to you to show that**
 9. **you're taking the effort.** (.) **you know and then I get rewarded, you know I**
 10. **get a get a lot of compliments on my ř⁵¹**...you know but it's- at the
 11. same time you know **amongst most of my Czech (.) speaking friends**
 12. **who don't speak English and through the do:g...I developed a small**
 13. **group of them. I used to joke that I'm their pet foreigner**...you know because
 14. I can't communicate (.) you know at a level that is- you know we talk about- our
 15. our contexts tend to quite low level...you know, **I'd love to talk politics but you**
 16. **know you're limited**

Ms. G. details how she uses her gradually acquired knowledge about people's relationship to their language to be able to use it. This involves declaring to them that Czech is difficult and evoking what she perceives as national pride ("I'm just like, you know *česky je čeština je těžká* he's like (.) *je*...I just saw that pride"⁵²) actively demonstrating the effort made to learn the language ("it's up to you to show that you're taking the effort. (.) you know and then I get rewarded, you know I get a get a lot of compliments on my ř"⁵³) and engaging in shared activities such as pet ownership ("amongst most of my Czech (.) speaking friends who don't speak English and through the do:g...I developed a small group of them. I used to joke that I'm their pet foreigner"⁵⁴). She also makes another reference to what, for her, is "insufficient Czech" (see Extract 7 above) in lines 15–16: "I'd love to talk politics but you know you're limited". In other words, it is not merely a question of basic communication, but one of expressing one's opinion, hearing and understanding the opinions of others, particularly locals, and in this way participate in civic life.

4.7 MS as a post-management evaluation

Finally, important in Ms. G.'s language biography are the MS with a focus on post-management evaluation.⁵⁵ This refers to the evaluation of the success, failure or other outcome of the management process once it has been completed, with consideration given to future management processes. In the case of the language biography of a person learning the language of the country to which they have

51 A voiced alveolar fricative trill, which is stereotyped by both native and non-native speakers of Czech as being difficult to pronounce.

52 Extract 10, lines 5–6.

53 Extract 10, lines 8–10.

54 Extract 10, lines 11–13.

55 Kimura 2014.

migrated, it is always possible to view one's present language competence as a result of numerous management process cycles, and overall, as a single management process with its current outcome.

Extract 11

1. the other issue was that I fell rather quickly into an English language
2. community... which wasn't just English speakers- well it was English
3. speakers which meant a wide variety of nationalities a lot- including Czechs...
4. some of those people are still some of my dearest friends,...and many of them
5. have married and they have gone on to have children quite successful lives and...
6. it was a weird sort of beginning but um so speaking Czech very quickly was
7. not as necessary for survival as if I had and I still- I don't wanna say
8. I have regrets, but I think it would've **my life would've gone probably a lot**
9. **easier and I would've enculturated a lot faster, had I done what a lot of friends**
10. **my English-speaking friends did who got here in ninety-two ninety-three.**
11. which is they came as teachers in high schools and went to little villages.
12. and, there was no other option but to learn Czech. you know, so (.) **sadly**
13. **that's my- that's my confession** ((laughs))

This extract occurs early on in the interview, when Ms. G. was asked about her early acquisition of Czech. Ms. G. responds with a MS in which she analyzes her initial learning experiences and social integration, and then compares her situation to that of other people with a similar background who arrived at the same time that she did ("life would've gone probably a lot easier and I would've enculturated a lot faster, had I done what a lot of friends my English-speaking friends did who got here in ninety-two ninety-three."⁵⁶). She follows this up with a summarizing coda, "sadly that's my- that's my confession";⁵⁷ which can be interpreted as an overall negative post-management evaluation.

This brings us back to Ms. G.'s position as a respondent in the project of which this interview was a part. Though Ms. G.'s situation is in many ways different from the other project respondents, in terms of language background, profession, socio-economic status, and the like, she has one major point in common with nearly all the others. That is, her narrative reveals that the routines established in the initial years of her stay were absolutely crucial in determining her language acquisition. We will return to this point in the following section.

5 Discussion and conclusion

In this text, we have attempted to accomplish two goals. First, we have further examined the way in which MS, in addition to accounts of individual instances

⁵⁶ Extract 11, lines 8–10.

⁵⁷ Extract 11, lines 12–13.

of LM, can highlight different phases of the management process. This serves as yet another illustration of the richness of the data gathered through language biography interviews. Second, we have highlighted the way in which Ms. G.'s use of MS and accounts serve as indicators of numerous norms, expectations, ideologies, and tendencies in the development of the management process among people in similar situations to Ms. G. First of all, Ms. G. is a university-educated citizen of the United States who arrived in the Czech Republic in the 1990s. Her expectations of acquiring the local language quickly and fluently, in line with the ideology of integrating into the host culture as much as possible and based on her previously demonstrated facility for languages, were very soon in contrast with her rapid establishment of social networks in which English was the most commonly spoken language.

This overall picture is also in line with the findings of earlier research on English speakers in the Czech Republic such as Sherman (2009), in which the strong ideology regarding linguistic integration often contrasts sharply with actual practices. It also corresponds to some of the findings in Sherman (2003), in which language biographical interviews were conducted with individual members of Czech-American couples. One general observation made there was that while the Czech members tended to present their narratives of learning English as part of a collective experience, the American members' narratives had a significantly individual character. Though Ms. G.'s case is also highly individual, it reflects a system of norms and expectations that were and have been shared by English speakers migrating to the Czech Republic. It also shows how Ms. G. has a very strong sense of personal responsibility for her own language acquisition and describes any failures in this sense as primarily her own, though, as Extract 10 shows, she does mention people's unwillingness to communicate with her in Czech.

However, as mentioned above, Ms. G. was very typical for the respondents we gathered for our project. Our project was focused on the A1- or A2-level exam for third-country nationals. One of our theoretical approaches was the life course perspective,⁵⁸ which views biographies as a series of points of varying social relevance, i. e., as trajectories relating to different life domains such as work, family, or education. Our point of departure is that individuals also have trajectories of language learning and use. One of the main questions we then posed was that of where the language exam stood in the language trajectories of our respondents, in other words, whether it was seen as an important point which determined the

58 Elder/Johnson/Crosnoe 2003; Wingens/Windzio/Aybek 2011; Peters/Wink 2016; Sherman/Homoláč 2021.

further course of the individual's language acquisition and which, retrospectively, was viewed by the respondent as such.

Our overall results have shown that the answer to this question is almost exclusively a negative one. The most important point on the respondents' trajectories is, conversely, almost categorically elsewhere, that is, in the individuals' initial period of stay in the Czech Republic. In case after case, we observed that people only began preparing for the exam a few months before taking it, and in many instances, the state of their Czech knowledge at the time of the exam represented its pinnacle, and their use of Czech afterward more or less did not continue. In other situations, people already had a higher level of Czech at the time of the exam, making it a mere formality. What differentiates Ms. G. from many of our respondents is her interest in languages, her declared desire for acculturation and civic participation, and her almost apologetic take on her cumulative language acquisition, which is also a product of the setting of her narrative, speaking to a pair of interviewers whom she views as language experts (which was also interesting for her because she had studied Applied Linguistics). Overall, our data shows that exam requirements after a period of five years in the country may not be the best form of policy to encourage the acquisition of Czech, and that it is crucial to focus upon the time period immediately following the individuals' arrival, even if, as is often the case, they are not yet sure if they will be staying for a longer time.

There are also several methodological issues that come out of this study. One is that of how to identify the MS, especially in a very rich narrative that freely combines individual instances of management with single MS or groups of them, which, as we have pointed out earlier, are natural aspects of the narrative interview genre, among others. On top of this, following Fairbrother (2015), we chose to focus on the MS that emphasized certain phases of the management process. We use the term *emphasis* as it is also apparent that these MS often contain more phases, e. g., both deviation and evaluation, or adjustment design in combination with implementation and post-management evaluation. In the course of a narrative, above all for various rhetorical reasons, interviewees themselves do not explicitly separate out the individual phases and do not necessarily mention all of them. However, this does not change the fact that they orient to these phases and assign importance to them, often to the same degree that analysts do, as the MS analyzed here reveal. This supports the idea that the management phases and their progression are not merely analytical constructs, but reflect people's natural processual orientations in their behavior toward language.

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