Language brokering as a managed and shared experience among young Vietnamese immigrants in the Czech Republic

Tamah Sherman¹, Jiri Homolac²

¹Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic
²Akcent College, Prague, Czech Republic

Language brokering, or the provision of translation and interpreting for others with lesser competence in selected languages, is a common practice in migrant communities (Morales & Hansen 2005, Morales et al 2012). Language brokers are typically children and young adults whose knowledge of the majority language exceeds that of their elders. This paper focuses on language brokering as a shared, subjective experience from the perspective of the brokers themselves – Vietnamese speakers who migrated to the Czech Republic as children, currently between 20 and 35 years old.

Language biographies and follow-up interviews were originally conducted with the participants in order to understand their lived process of language socialization, primarily in the family, school and work domains. This was done in consideration of the multitude of language problems in their community, given its sociocultural and socioeconomic variability (e.g. through the lens of superdiversity). Utilizing language management theory, the resulting accounts of language brokering are understood and analyzed as management summaries (Nekvapil 2004). The demand for language brokering is understood as a language problem, and we pose the question of how different individuals resolve it.

In this context, the experience of language brokering was revealed as a highly formative one, particularly for the oldest children in the family, some of whom have gone on to assume the role of "professional integrated/bicultural Vietnamese", which is reflected in their self-presentation in the interviews.

References:


Keywords: language management, Vietnamese, language brokering.