

Methodological and Theoretical Reflections on Code-switching in Oral History

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While significant focus has been given to multilingual oral history, research and reflection on the use of two different languages within a *single* recorded oral history interview, i.e. code-switching or intra-interview bilingualism, remains under-theorised in the field. I reflect on this phenomenon in my analysis of oral history interviews I conducted with Czech immigrant women in California, who occasionally used Czech in predominantly English interviews. By placing oral history in dialogue with the sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological concepts of code-switching and indexicality, this reflection examines how code-switching in oral history interviews is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but a meaningful, socially embedded practice that has value for oral history methodology and narrative interpretation. Furthermore, I consider the methodological challenge of transcribing and translating multilingual interviews and demonstrate how transparent codification and translation practices address the concept of “responsibility with loyalty” proposed by Barbara Reeves-Ellington.

Keywords: oral history, multilingualism, code-switching, indexicality, translation

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Oral history is as much a method as it is a process of overcoming barriers. There are physical barriers that we, as interviewers, and our interviewees, as narrators, overcome, such as coordinating a meeting place where the interview will take place. There are the interpersonal barriers we overcome: how intersubjectivity is established between us and the narrator, whereby the narrator is comfortable enough to tell their life story, and we are courageous enough to ask difficult questions or breach challenging topics. There is also sometimes a language barrier, one that goes beyond finding common ground in the interview. When we interview

migrant communities, we often engage with narrators in a language other than their native tongue. How, then, does the language of the oral history interview affect the life story told, and our interpretation of it?

The subject of multilingualism and cross-lingualism in oral history is central to our understanding of the methodology in practice, especially for those involved in documenting and preserving the life stories of migrant and diaspora communities. Entire oral history archives are dedicated to recording multilingualism; for example, the Yiddish Book Center's Wexler Oral History Project, created in 2010, devotes itself to the preservation of the Yiddish language and culture through bilingual access. Similar archives allow researchers to reflect on how multilingual interviews require special attention with respect to accessibility. Often, using these archives necessitates working with oral history in translation, as translating recorded life stories (usually from their transcriptions, and typically into English, which remains the global lingua franca) can enhance their reach. Naturally, engaging with narrators in a language other than one's own comes with methodological challenges.¹ In the context of Czech language and oral history, attention has been paid to the processing of multilingual interviews, such as the use of automated speech recognition technologies to transcribe Czech-language oral histories.² Other research has centred on the actual language of the interview; for instance, Jakub Mlynář examined fifteen Czech- and Slovak-language interviews to understand the "linguistically universal" and "topically specific knowledge" that interviewers and interviewees draw on in the act of participating together in an oral history interview.³

Although multilingual and cross-lingual interviewing are theorised in oral history, the phenomenon of using different languages within a *single* recorded oral history interview remains under-theorised in the field. I found myself in this position while conducting interviews with

¹ For an overview, see NORTON WHEELER, *Cross-Lingual Oral History Interviewing in China: Confronting the Methodological Challenges*, Oral History 36/2008, no. 1, pp. 56–68.

² See, for example, JOSEF PSUTKA et al., *Automatic Transcription of Czech Language Oral History in the MALACH Project: Resources and Initial Experiments*, in: Text, Speech and Dialogue. TSD 2002. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, (eds.) Peter Sojka, Ivan Kopeček, Karel Pala, Berlin–Heidelberg 2002, vol. 2448, pp. 219–234.

³ JAKUB MLYNÁŘ, *How Is Oral History Possible? On Linguistically Universal and Topically Specific Knowledge*, The Oral History Review 49/2022, no. 1, pp. 116–32.

Czech immigrants in the United States, where, as a bilingual speaker approaching multilingual narrators, I gave my narrators the choice to speak in Czech, English, or both languages during our interviews. I anticipated that the narrators might have a language preference and that my bilingualism was something I could offer them. While the interviews were mostly conducted in English, my narrators sometimes used both Czech and English, sometimes in the same sentence, in the interview; in other words, they engaged in code-switching.

We can look to other disciplines to understand code-switching as a phenomenon in oral history interviews. While intra-interview bilingualism may indeed be under-theorised within oral history, the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology have developed extensive scholarship on code-switching (sometimes “code-mixing”) and translingual practices. Where foundational works in the field conceptualised code-switching as a contextualisation strategy, later scholarship in linguistic anthropology centred on meaning-making. Peter Auer’s work, for example, examines code-switching in real conversations, critically situating it as a socially and culturally embedded practice.⁴ Michael Silverstein’s concept of indexicality⁵ frames code-switching as a semiotic resource that indexes identity, affect, and stance, among other aspects. Concepts such as translanguaging seek to expand beyond the linguistic notion of “codes” to consider the “realities of everyday social contexts where communication does not always occur through language practices”.⁶ Li Wei, for example, defines translanguaging as an approach that treats “language as a multilingual, multisemiotic, multisensory, and multimodal resource for sense- and meaning-making”.⁷ These approaches view code-switching as a socially-embedded practice, tied to meaning-making, identity, and context. Accordingly, interview language choice, and the methodological and ethical implications that accompany planning and enacting an interview language policy with multilingual

⁴ *Code-Switching in Conversation: Language, Interaction and Identity*, (ed.) PETER AUER, London 1998.

⁵ MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN, *Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life*, *Communication* 23/2003, pp. 193–229.

⁶ JERRY WON LEE, *Translanguaging Research Methodologies*, *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* 1/2022, no. 1, p. 100004.

⁷ LI WEI, *Translanguaging as a Practical Theory of Language*, *Applied Linguistics* 39/2018, no. 1, p. 4, cited in BRUCE HORNER, SARA P. ALVAREZ, *Defining Translinguality*, *Literacy in Composition Studies* 7/2019, no. 2, p. 4.

participants who engage in code-switching, is important. While interview language choice as such is theorised in linguistics,⁸ it remains comparatively underexplored in oral history.

In 2025, I presented my initial reflections⁹ on the phenomenon of intra-interview bilingualism in my study at the 23rd International Oral History Association (IOHA) conference in Kraków, Poland, on a panel titled “Multilingualism and Dissemination”. Much of the focus of the panel was on multilingual archives and novel ways of archiving and disseminating oral histories. Nevertheless, our panel discussion and the conversations I had with my panellists and conference participants gave me the impression that multilingualism was something they often encountered in their interviews. For example, one of my German-speaking fellow panellists, who records Holocaust testimonies, told me that she often interviewed Holocaust survivors who used German terminology, words, and phrases throughout their English-language interviews. She reflected: Did the survivors use German because they knew that she was German? That is, would the life story have been told differently if the narrator were not aware of their mutual language and understanding, and, what was the meaning of the narrator’s use of German in their narrative, if any?

It was clear from our conversation and my subsequent research that there was evidence supporting the need for further reflection on intra-interview bilingualism within the context of oral history. The following reflection asks, chiefly, how can intra-interview bilingualism, or code-switching, be theorised within the oral history context, specifically with regard to transcription, translation, and the notions of shared authority and mean-making? I find that code-switching in my oral history interviews with Czech immigrants represented not merely a technical challenge but a constitutive feature of narrative mean-making. As such, this reflection adheres to considerations of the oral history methodological framework and relies on the analysis and interpretation of my interviews *ex post facto*. I explore the concepts of indexicality and code-switching

⁸ See, for example, LOUISE ROLLAND, ‘*I’m sure at some point we’ll be switching’: planning and enacting an interview language policy with multilingual participants*’, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 44/2023, no. 8, pp. 702–717.

⁹ This paper is based on a conference paper, Speaking “Czechlish”: Multilingual memory in oral history interviews with Czech immigrants, presented at the 23rd International Oral History Association conference: Rethinking Oral History on 16 September 2025 in Kraków, Poland.

from a sociolinguistic perspective and their pertinence to oral history, but do not seek to provide a full-fledged linguistic analysis of said interviews.

Overview of the “Going West” study

Oral history was chosen as the primary methodology for my study to access the subjective memories of Czech narrators who emigrated from Czechoslovakia between 1960 and 1970 to the U.S. In particular, I subscribe to the post-positivist oral history paradigm, which can be traced to the so-called cultural turn in the field of oral history in the 1970s and 1980s, specifically to the interdisciplinary interchange between oral history, microhistory, and historical anthropology. During this turn, historians, such as Alessandro Portelli, introduced new concepts that emphasised how interviews should not be considered merely as “point[s] of fact”, but instead as subjective narratives that are “generator[s] of meaning”.¹⁰ Thus, the oral history interview was reconceptualised as an intersubjective process between the interviewer and the narrator. This paradigm addressed former criticisms of the method, namely that memory is subjective, by highlighting how the subjectivity of narratives “ultimately enhances the value of the oral sources as historical documents”.¹¹ Given this post-positivist perspective, oral history offers a methodological approach particularly suited to studying the diverse, subjective experiences of migrants. Alistair Thomson notes that the method can reveal the “hidden history of migration” and can broaden our understanding of the “cultural imaginaries” about prospective destinations, the importance of social networks to the migration experience, the role that family plays in migration, identity expression, and more.¹²

Between September 2022 and March 2023, I interviewed five Czech women who met the project’s selection criteria: narrators who emigrated in the 1960s, had Czech citizenship at the time of emigration, and self-identified as Czech.¹³ Originally, I planned to conduct two interviews

¹⁰ ALESSANDRO PORTELLI, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, Albany 1991, p. 2, 254.

¹¹ A. PORTELLI, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, p. 26.

¹² ALISTAIR THOMSON, *Moving Stories: Oral History and Migration Studies*, *Oral History* 27/1999, no. 1, pp. 24–37.

¹³ The research project was conducted by the author for her master’s thesis at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University. See ANNA WEST, *Going West: Czech*

with each narrator, with one narrative interview (first interview) and one semi-structured interview (second interview) as is customary in oral history best practice. Due to time and distance constraints, though, (most interviews were conducted during a three-week-long research trip in California in February and March 2023), all narrators were interviewed once in person, except for Marcela, who was interviewed twice in September 2022 in Prague. Ahead of the interviews, I communicated virtually with the narrators and gave them an overview of the project's general research questions and broad themes, which included the conditions, motivation, and decision-making with respect to emigration; means of emigration; arrival and integration in the host country; the narrators' self-concepts of identity; and perspectives on identity after the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989.

Code-switching, indexicality, and oral history

At the outset of the study, I faced a methodological consideration that other researchers of migrant communities likely encounter: What language should I conduct the interview in? I speak Czech and English, however, I was aware that, like myself, the narrators would have a language preference for their self-expression. Though all the narrators were able to speak both Czech and English, at the start of each interview, I instructed the narrators that they could speak in either language, or both if it suited them, and that I would personally translate any spoken Czech into English in my transcriptions. For most of the interviews, the narrators spoke in English with specific uses of Czech – what we call code-switching.

Code-switching, at least from the sociolinguistic perspective, is the process of shifting from one linguistic code (a language or dialect) to another, depending on social context; in other words, this perspective considers language use within its broader social setting. The term emerged in the 1970s but was based on earlier scholarship which called for a more “socially engaged linguistics”.¹⁴ Since its introduction, the

Immigration to California (1960–1970) (MA thesis), Prague: Charles University, Faculty of Humanities, Oral History – Contemporary History, 2023.

¹⁴ CHAD NILEP, *Code Switching in Sociocultural Linguistics*, Colorado Research in Linguistics 19/2006, no. 1, p. 3.

term has since been used more broadly in other disciplines, while within the field, sociolinguists have differed in their applications and interpretations of “code-switching”, with some preferring the term “code” over “language”, for example.¹⁵ Code-switching has also been theorised to be different from language alteration, as the latter concerns linguistic form, whereas the former concerns the contextualisation of communication. Some have also applied the term to refer to interlanguages, such as Czenglish or Czechlish – portmanteaus of the words Czech and English – which refer to the combination of Czech and English, or the use of English influenced by Czech vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammar spoken by learners of English as a second language.

Despite broad applications and interpretations of the term, code-switching has come to be understood not only from the perspective of linguistic ability, but as the alternation between linguistic systems in order to contextualise speech, making social meanings relevant. This sociocultural approach aligns with the indexical approach in linguistic anthropology, which views language choice as a source for understanding social and cultural categories, including affect, stance, and identities.¹⁶ Where code-switching describes what a speaker does, indexicality seeks to explain what that “doing” means; it is the “capacity of language to point to something without directly referring to it”.¹⁷ Michael Silverstein, who expanded on Charles Sanders Peirce’s semiotic theory, theorised indexicality as a mechanism through which linguistic forms point to (“signal” or “index”) social identities, relationships, and contexts, where micro-interactions index macro-sociocultural contexts.¹⁸

From the perspective of indexicality, as outlined in Silverstein’s notion of indexical order, code-switching between English and Czech in oral history narratives can be seen as indexing features of the narrator’s subjective experiences. For instance, the narrator’s choice to remain in English could signal temporal distance from the experiences narrated

¹⁵ C. NILEP, *Code Switching in Sociocultural Linguistics*, p. 4.

¹⁶ KIRA HALL, CHAD NILEP, *Code Switching, Identity, and Globalization*, in: *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, (eds.) Deborah Tannen, Heidi E. Hamilton, Deborah Schiffrin, Hoboken (NJ) 2015, pp. 597–619.

¹⁷ KATE T. ANDERSON, MICHAEL SILVERSTEIN, *Indexicality*, in: *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, (ed.) Lisa M. Given, Thousand Oaks (CA) 2008.

¹⁸ M. SILVERSTEIN, *Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life*, pp. 193–229.

in their life stories, or their alignment or misalignment with their social environment (or even the sociolinguistic environment of the interview, i.e. stance). On the other hand, their use of Czech could signal affect, or even alignment with their past experiences and identities, such as their pre-emigration identity. Interestingly, Silverstein's concept of indexical order aligns with the post-positivist approach to oral history. Just as Silverstein argues that "semiotic agents" signal meanings (Silverstein: "By this time we can surely say that the work of contemporary linguistic anthropology has firmly established that any linguistic, a.k.a. sociolinguistic, fact is necessarily an indexical fact."¹⁹), Portelli asserts that the oral history interview does not only concern itself with historical points of fact, but is a generator of meaning.

In fact, the essential concerns in oral history – intersubjectivity, preserving the orality of the narrative, and narrative mean-making – are fundamentally indexical. Firstly, indexicality can help to explain and describe how Michael Frisch's concept of shared authority, which refers to the collaborative dynamic of co-creating the narrative where both parties are mutually engaged in so-called mean-making,²⁰ occurs in the act of participating in the oral history interview. Here, code-switching can reveal shared personal history and familiarity between the interviewer and narrator, as I discuss later. Secondly, the orality of oral narratives functions indexically; a narrator's voice, pattern of speech, accent, dialect, and code-switching signals who they are and how they position themselves within their narrative. Lastly, oral history concerns itself with narrative mean-making, how narrators tell the stories of their lives and what subjective meanings their narratives hold. As previously stated, code-switching indexes macro-sociocultural contexts, such as affect, stance, and identities.

While intersubjectivity, orality, and mean-making in oral history narratives are well-explored in the field of oral history, the intersection of these issues with the concepts of code-switching and indexicality necessitates further examination. Some studies in oral history have explored the phenomenon of code-switching in oral history interviews,²¹ though

¹⁹ M. SILVERSTEIN, *Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life*, p. 194.

²⁰ MICHAEL FRISCH, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, Albany 1990.

²¹ See, for example, LINDA WILLIAMSON NELSON, *Code-Switching in the Oral Life Narratives of African-American Women: Challenges to Linguistic Hegemony*, *Journal of Education* 172/1990, no. 3, pp. 142–55.

typically not through the lens of indexicality and what code-switching can reveal about oral history methodology. Others have called for further research at the intersection of linguistic theory and oral history, highlighting how a deeper understanding of linguistic approaches might benefit oral history analysis.²² The following reflection aims to bring oral history into dialogue with indexicality, particularly by demonstrating that the central concerns of oral history – intersubjectivity, orality, and narrative meaning-making – can be understood as indexical, as the narrator’s linguistic choice to engage in code-switching indexes affect, stance, and identity, among other aspects.

The narrators, positionality, and sharing authority

If we are to understand code-switching in the oral history interview, it is thus imperative to speak about the narrators and the social context of the interviews I conducted in my study. A total of five narrators from California were interviewed for the research project, including Marcela H.; Jarka W.; Ivana P.;²³ Yana B.; and Jarmila J. Two generations are represented in the group of narrators; Ivana was fourteen years old when she emigrated to California with her family, while the other narrators’ ages ranged from 26 to 32 at the time of their emigration. At the time of interviewing, the narrators were aged 73 to 86 years old. With respect to their places of birth, all of the narrators were born in Czechoslovakia except for Jarmila, who was born in Zagreb, Croatia. Jarmila was born to Croatian and Croatian-Hungarian parents during the Second World War but also has Czech heritage. Because of her Czech citizenship at the time of her emigration, as well as her self-identification as Czech, Jarmila met the project’s selection criteria. It was not intended for all the narrators of the project to be women, but no male narrators were identified who fit the selection criteria.

As previously mentioned, I instructed the narrators that they could use English, Czech, or both languages in their interviews, however, I did not ask the narrators to qualify their fluency in either of the languages. Therefore, it is my observation that all the narrators spoke English with

²² ANISA PURI, *Oral History and Linguistics: Exploring Connections*, Studies in Oral History 47/2025, pp. 106–130.

²³ A pseudonym was chosen for this narrator per her request.

great competency, if not fluency. I should note that a few of the narrators told me when we met that they hoped their English was “good enough” for the interview. Their expression of their anxiety about their fluency in English is likely not unique with respect to oral history interviewees from migrant communities. In fact, when reviewing our interviews, language and bilingualism were a frequent theme that emerged in their narratives. One narrator expressed how her initial limited knowledge of English was an obstacle for her in the workplace, and subsequently her integration, so much so that she took to memorising phrases in English. Marcela acknowledged that learning English was important not only for her own sake but also for her children to adapt in their host country, saying “...I wanted to be corrected by them when they came from school so I could speed up my English...And I thought, we will learn...for the kids to learn Czech was secondary for me.”²⁴ Overcoming language barriers thus became a means of bridging the existing cultural divide. It is no wonder then, that even decades later, some of the narrators still expressed concerns about their ability to communicate in English. While speaking in their non-native language was an added concern for my narrators, their anxieties about their ability to communicate coincide with those of most narrators, who are often nervous to have their stories recorded. One of the perceived benefits of giving my narrators the option to use Czech or English in the interview was to relieve them of the pressure of having to speak and “perform” their best English in the recording of their life story.

The project’s selection criteria meant that Jarmila, who was not born in Czechoslovakia and represents a non-native Czech speaker, was also included in the study. The result was that she spoke almost no Czech in her interview and therefore did not engage in code-switching. She used only a few Czech words in her interview to describe her father’s occupation (*průvodce*/tour guide) or the meetings (*schůze*) she attended as a Pioneer in the Czech Pioneer Organisation of the Socialist Youth Union (Pionýrská organizace Socialistického svazu mládeže, PO SSM). Though she spent 20 years in Prague and speaks Czech fluently, Czech is only one of many languages she speaks. In fact, during our interview, Jarmila was the only narrator to use another language besides Czech or English: she used the German word *nervenzusammenbruch* to describe her father’s nervous breakdown. When I asked Jarmila whether she con-

²⁴ MARCELA H., Personal interview, 24 September 2022.

sidered herself Czech, she told me, “When I’m in Prague, I’m Czech. When I’m here, I’m an American. People say that I’m Americanized. So, I’m sure when you see here around me, I still...I am European. And I love Europe. And I go there every year when I can. So, I am European...”²⁵ We can see that Jarmila identified not only as Czech, but more broadly as European. Interestingly, she seemed to attribute her pan-European identity not to the places she lived in or to her multiethnic background (Jewish, Croatian, Hungarian), but rather to the languages she speaks: “But my languages is good because I was in Rijeka in a hospital. And fortunately, because I know the language, I could speak to the people. I was in Germany in the hospital. And it was really good that I could speak to the people. So, it’s languages that are helping. Yeah. And I can watch TV, in German and Czech, and all this. Just watching...today I was watching President Zeman on this interview.”²⁶

As one can see, the specific backgrounds of the narrators introduce several methodological limitations that shape the conclusions that can be drawn from further analysis. Firstly, the sample of narrators is limited, which introduces a potential sampling bias; thus, my analysis and interpretations are meant to reflect specific experiences over generalisable patterns with respect to Czech immigrants. The gender homogeneity of the narrators limits the diversity of perspectives represented in the study, especially in relation to how language use is linked to gendered experiences of migration and identity. Additionally, the historical context of Czech migration in the 1960s situates the oral narratives in a distinct sociocultural context, and, therefore, the language use and choice by these narrators is not meant to be representative for other diaspora communities. The narrators’ late life stage also influences their narratives, including their recollections and language use. Finally, the potential “bilingual interviewer effect” is considered: there is a likelihood that narrators engaged in code-switching precisely because they knew I understood both Czech and English.

Indeed, as a California-born Czech-American bilingual speaker of Czech and English conducting interviews with Czech immigrants in California, my positionality shaped both the interview conditions and the narratives that emerged. Our shared linguistic background and heritage helped me establish rapport with the narrators, as we were able

²⁵ JARMILA J., Personal interview, 5 March 2023.

²⁶ J. J., Personal interview, 5 March 2023.

to reach a mutual understanding that may have not been possible in a monolingual setting. This shared understanding and background undoubtedly influenced how the narrators positioned themselves in the interview, including their decisions with respect to code-switching and use of culturally- or historically-specific knowledge. On the other hand, my positionality as a historian and researcher introduced asymmetries, as I was ultimately responsible for asking questions that shaped the narratives told and interpreting the narrators' recollections. As Lynn Abrams notes, "power often shifts throughout the process of the interview and post-interview activities," such that *shared* authority does not necessarily mean that the relationship between the two parties involved is always equitable.²⁷ Offering my narrators a choice in their use of language for the interview gave me the false impression of reciprocity, that I had somehow balanced the scales in our distribution of power; narrators "gave me" their life stories, and I "gave them" my bilingualism and language choice as a sort of interview perk. The feeling of wanting to give something back to narrators is tempting.²⁸ Still, it only reinforces the concept of shared authority and the misconception that the distribution of power in an oral history interview can ever be truly equal.

Here, I must also qualify my background and relationship to one of the narrators, Marcela, whose use of Czech in the interview differed from the rest. As is often the case in oral history, I came to the topic of Czech emigration due to personal interests. I am the product of Czech emigration to California: my mother, who is Czech, emigrated to California in 1989 after marrying my American father. My father grew up in northern California to immigrant parents from Germany and the former First Czechoslovak Republic, who were part of a small but tight-knit Central European immigrant community there. Among them was Marcela, our family friend, whose stories of emigration from Czechoslovakia after the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion inspired the project, in part. Naturally, interviewing a friend or family member is different from interviewing a narrator that one does not have a personal relationship with. Valerie Yow con-

²⁷ LYNN ABRAMS, *Oral History Theory*, London 2010, p. 27.

²⁸ Ann Oakley examines the concept of giving back to narrators, which she calls "the gift," in her longitudinal study titled *Becoming a Mother (BAM)* (1974–1979). For more on this dynamic, see ANN OAKLEY, *Interviewing Women Again: Power, Time and the Gift*, *Sociology* 50/2015, no.1, pp. 195–213.

tends that interviewing family members comes with challenges,²⁹ ones that are similar to those experienced with close friends. For instance, Yow explains that establishing trust is central to the oral history interview practice,³⁰ but in the circumstances of interviewing a family member or friend, a great deal of trust can already exist in the relationship. Yow recommends setting boundaries to ensure the family member's comfort and privacy, and to uphold research integrity.

Aspects of my experience interviewing Marcela are mirrored in Stacey Zembrzycki's influential work *According to Baba*, in which she details how she collaborated with her grandmother, whom she calls Baba, to conduct oral history interviews with the Ukrainian community in northern Ontario, Canada. Zembrzycki's Baba acted as her interpreter and "gatekeeper"³¹ to the memory of the community but also partook as a narrator herself. Zembrzycki notes how "sharing authority with Baba required constant negotiation,"³² ultimately revealing lessons on how to do oral history with and about those dear to us. Like Zembrzycki's Baba, Marcela shared certain stories and anecdotes as a way of communicating something about my own family history. There were some instances when she would speak about her shared experiences with my grandparents, for example. Indeed, my family's history and Marcela's life history are inherently linked. Marcela went to high school with my maternal grandmother in Hradec Králové and remained good friends with her even after Marcela emigrated from Czechoslovakia. When Marcela and her family settled in Stockton, California, they befriended my father's parents. In fact, Marcela is responsible for my parents' meeting in Prague, an introduction that changed the course of my family's life.

As such, I was aware of Marcela's role as a sort of "matchmaker" for my parents. Still, most of Marcela's life story before our interviews was new information to me. I learned that when interviewing someone one has a personal relationship with, the narrator may assume that the interviewer already knows their life history, even if that is not the case. Even so, the language of our interview was certainly influenced by our shared

²⁹ VALERIE YOW, *Varieties of Oral History Projects: Family Research*, in: *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, (ed.) Valerie Yow, Thousand Oaks (CA) 2005, pp. 253–281.

³⁰ V. YOW, *Varieties of Oral History Projects*, p. 261.

³¹ STACEY ZEMBRZYCKI, *According to Baba: A Collaborative Oral History of Sudbury's Ukrainian Community*, Vancouver 2014, p. 7.

³² S. ZEMBRZYCKI, *According to Baba*, p. 7.

family histories. Marcela's trust in me allowed her to be more vulnerable and open throughout our interviews, and therefore, she likely felt comfortable using more of her native language with me. Like Zembrzycki, I found that interviewing Marcela necessitated a different approach to shared authority, one better defined as *sharing* authority, calling attention to the relationship as a continuous process rather than a one-time negotiation.

If the relationship between myself and Marcela can be described as sharing authority from the oral history perspective, indexicality can help to describe how code-switching indexes that relationship, i.e. stance. For instance, Marcela's use of non-standard Czech can be interpreted as indicative of her familiarity with me. That is, her non-formal use of Czech in her code-switching indexes stance, and in this case, reduced the distance between me (the interviewer) and her (the narrator). I expand on this more in my analysis of case examples of Marcela's code-switching that follow.

Lost in transcription? Issues in the transcription and translation of code-switching

Given that code-switching in my oral history interviews functions indexically, I had to decide how best to represent this phenomenon in my transcriptions, where I would also translate any Czech used in the narratives. Portelli notes how the process of transcribing an interview removes the very orality from the oral source and can profoundly change the narrative meaning.³³ By removing the orality from the source through transcription, certain nuances of the spoken narrative are missing, such as a narrator's cadence or the tone of their voice. When transcribing and then translating Czech sections of an interview, I was aware that I not only removed the *orality* from the narrative, but I also made choices on the narrator's behalf with respect to translation, such as word choice.

Like oral history, translation is a subjective process. Bogusia Temple, for instance, considers how presenting a narrative in one language is "not just a matter of an easy read", but rather is "highly culturally specific"

³³ A. PORTELLI, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*, p. 46.

with “problems of inequality” shaping who can talk and when.³⁴ Temple points to the issue of “foreignizing” a translation, whereby a text that uses a non-English grammatical structure can be judged as having poor grammar, perhaps leaving the reader to interpret the narrator as having poor grammar themselves.

This was a risk I faced in translating and transcribing my interviews. As Barbara Reeves-Ellington notes, the control a narrator can exert in the interview is “lost in the process of turning that narrative into text when the researcher begins to exercise editorial decisions.”³⁵ Reeves-Ellington suggests that the researcher-translator, the position I found myself in, has a special relationship to the narrator, as she is responsible not only for conveying the narrative to her readers, but also has a loyalty to the narrators as the “original partners in the communication process”.³⁶ Here, she introduces the concept of “responsibility with loyalty”,³⁷ which she adapts from Christiane Nord’s “functionality plus loyalty” (where the translator is committed to both the source text and the intended text situation), defining it as the researcher-translator’s responsibility to readers of the text and their loyalty to the co-producers of the narrative.

Applying Reeves-Ellington’s concept to my case, as the researcher-translator, I was responsible to the reader of my translated transcriptions (“microtexts”) as well as their use in my “target text”³⁸ or macrotext (my thesis), in which the translated transcriptions were embedded, interpreted, and analysed within a larger historical context. How, though, does one carry out this responsibility and loyalty? Reeves-Ellington demonstrates several translation strategies using oral history interviews that she conducted with Bulgarian female narrators. For my research project, I did not employ any translation strategies, as I did not think to search for any, though in retrospect I subconsciously applied Reeves-Ellington’s concept of “responsibility with loyalty”. Though the majority of the interviews were conducted in English, I knew it was important to translate Czech into English to make the entire narrative accessible to the reader (“responsibility”), while taking into account the issue of “foreignizing”

³⁴ BOGUSIA TEMPLE, *Casting a wider net: reflecting on translation in oral history*, Oral History 4/2013, no. 2, p. 102.

³⁵ BARBARA REEVES-ELLINGTON, *Responsibility with Loyalty*, International Journal of Translation Studies 11/1999, no. 1, p. 106.

³⁶ B. REEVES-ELLINGTON, *Responsibility with Loyalty*, p. 107.

³⁷ B. REEVES-ELLINGTON, *Responsibility with Loyalty*, p. 107.

³⁸ B. REEVES-ELLINGTON, *Responsibility with Loyalty*, p. 111–112.

a translation. In my transcriptions, I therefore translated the Czech text as close to the original spoken version as possible and presented the original spoken Czech beside my English translation in the transcriptions (“loyalty”).

The use of informed consent forms in the study, as is customary in oral history best practice, also, in retrospect, added an additional measure that addressed the concept of “responsibility with loyalty”. Of the five narrators, three requested that they review their interview quotes before publication. These narrators were sent drafts of the proposed quotes, and two narrators provided additional clarifications. Upon publication, all the narrators approved the use of their interview quotes. This included approval of my English translations of Czech-language excerpts. Sharing authority in this stage of the research project thereby added an additional dimension of “loyalty” as “co-signatories”, if not exactly co-producers, of the translated parts of their narratives.

Even so, my translation of the spoken Czech on behalf of my narrators introduces an interpretive aspect with respect to their narratives. In retrospect, I could have taken Reeves-Ellington’s concept further in my work. For example, while I presented the original Czech and my English translation side-by-side in my transcriptions, I could have carried that practice over to my final target text, in my published thesis, where I only included my English translations. In sending my narrators quotes from their transcriptions, I could have specifically asked them if they approved of my English translation of their spoken Czech, where applicable. Simply including the original Czech transcription next to the English translation, even in a footnote, would have given more visibility to my narrators’ original intent. While I highlighted the issue of oral history in translation in my methodology in the target text, I could have taken additional steps to emphasise the sensitivity of this issue throughout my analysis and interpretation of my narrators’ life stories. Ultimately, my translation of my narrators’ use of Czech sheds light on my own subjectivity in my dual role as researcher-translator.

How, then, could a transcription and translation protocol be applied to code-switching in oral history interviews? First, I returned to the recordings of the interviews to review my transcriptions and translations of Czech used in the predominantly English interviews. I developed a simple codification for each instance of Czech: I marked the transcription [CZ] to indicate the use of Czech and italicised any use of Czech to distinguish it from English. One could argue that italicising Czech words

is, in fact, a way of “foreignizing” the transcription (and subsequent translation), and that it shows a preference for English as the dominant language (i.e. “problems of inequality”). However, because English was the dominant language used by the narrators in the interviews, I felt it appropriate to codify the interviews in this way. If more Czech had been used in the interviews, where the use of Czech and English was more interchangeable and balanced, I would have revised my codification protocol to reflect this dynamic. It is important to note that this codification system was applied *ex post facto*; for future research where interview language choice was given to the narrators and code-switching was expected, I would develop an interview planning protocol to address and anticipate transcription and translation of code-switching.

Next, I re-listened to the recording to ensure that the transcription was as close to preserving how the narrator spoke; for example, this included adding ellipses to show pauses in speech. Once I felt that the transcription of the text was “responsible” and “loyal”, I translated the Czech language use into English. Here, the English translation was marked [ENG – TRANS] and directly followed the Czech language use. If the narrator used a Czech word or short phrase, I would include the English translation in brackets and position it directly next to the Czech usage. For example: “...then my father always wanted to leave. But I think, you know, talking about it in an abstract theoretical way. And going through it, it’s, you know, *nebe a dudy* [ENG – TRANS: heaven and bagpipes] ... which means totally different.”³⁹ If the instance of Czech use was longer, I would include the English translation at the end of the sentence.

This initial codification helped with the identification of Czech language use but did not provide me with information that could have importance for narrative mean-making or interpretation. Thus, I codified the instances of Czech language use further to categorise their aspects. In many instances, Czech words were “sprinkled” into the narrative, what I consider “filler words” one might hear in Czech, such as the word “*teda*,” which means “so” or “well,” that filled the pauses in my narrators’ memories. These I marked as [CZ – SINGLE WORD]. Other times, the narrators used Czech words because they wanted to express a particular idiom in Czech, or simply because they indeed did not remember the English word over a Czech one. This was the case in the example above with Ivana, with the use of a Czech idiom over an English one (*nebe*

³⁹ IVANA P., Personal interview, 1. 3. 2023.

a *dudy*) which Ivana then restated or reiterated in English.⁴⁰ I marked this instance as [CZ – IDIOM, REITERATION]. Other examples from Ivana's use of Czech included the use of specific terms that have difficult translations in English. For instance, she said "*pavlač*, or whatever that thing is called"⁴¹ when remembering the living quarters where her family stayed in Vienna. Here, even I had to look up the term in English during my transcription of our interview. A *pavlač* is a kind of suspended porch which serves as an access route to individual apartments on one floor, a structure common to mainly lower-class residential buildings at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, it is no wonder that Ivana would not have known the English translation for the word. This I marked as [CZ – TECH] to indicate the use of a Czech word that had a specific technical, cultural, or historical connotation.

Another instance when a narrator may have switched into Czech would have been to convey a conversation that happened in the past. For example, Marcela, when speaking about her husband's return from a trip to California before their emigration, said, "And he said, and so he kind of controlled himself a little, and then I had filet mignon or some delicious steak for dinner for him, for welcoming, and he said, 'Oh, don't give me any. I am full of steaks.' *Udělej mi něco jednoduchého. Krupicovou kaši nebo něco.* [ENG – TRANS: Make me something simple, like semolina porridge or something.]"⁴² Here, she switched into Czech to convey part of the original dialogue in her native language. This was marked as [CZ – DIALOGUE].

Other instances of Czech language use were more nuanced. In the case of Marcela, she often mixed Czech words into her speech such that it was not merely a shift from English to Czech, but rather a mixing of the languages. This could be simpler ("*Ja jsem byla tak* embarrassed. [ENG – TRANS: I was so embarrassed."⁴³]) or more integrated, such as in this instance, in which Marcela explained how her husband found it difficult to find work as a doctor in California before he got his American license:

⁴⁰ See, for example, KATARIINA HARJUNPÄÄ, ALEKSI MÄKILÄHDE, *Reiteration: at the intersection of code-switching and translation*, *Multilingua* 35/2016, no. 2, pp. 163–201.

⁴¹ I. P., Personal interview, 1 March 2023.

⁴² MARCELA H., Personal interview, 17 September 2022.

⁴³ M. H., Personal interview, 17 September 2022.

"I thought that he could do drawing blood or something, and no. Uncle, doctor, he told him, 'You cannot touch the patient until you have license.' *To je* very, very difficult. *Prastě* don't ever. *To bylo pro mně* surprise. *Tak on musel sedět jenom a studovat. A moje...* my first job, some Czech person..."⁴⁴

[ENG – TRANS]: "I thought that he could do drawing blood or something, and no. Uncle, doctor, he told him, 'You cannot touch the patient until you have license.' That is very, very difficult. Basically, don't ever. That was a surprise for me. So, he had to sit and study only. And my...my first job, some Czech person..."⁴⁵

As we can see, Marcela's code-switching in this instance shows how she was not using Czech to convey an idiom, recall prior dialogue, or as a result of not knowing a word in English. These instances were more difficult to codify, as they did not fall into an easy category, so I marked them [CZ – MIX]. While all instances of Czech language use were important to consider, those marked [CZ – MIX] that constituted a more substantial switch into Czech – ones that went beyond single word use, idiom use, or reiteration – offered perhaps more for narrative interpretation from the perspective of mean-making. Next, I consider how these instances could be interpreted within the context of code-switching, indexicality, and oral history.

Case examples: Code-switching and narrative mean-making for oral historical use

While the narrators all used Czech in their interviews in some form, there was only one narrator who used much more Czech and in a different way than the narrators, and that was Marcela. Marcela's narrative was mostly told in English, but more parts of her life story were told in a mixture of Czech and English. As such, I want to use two instances of Marcela's switch entirely into Czech from English as case examples of how we can begin to look at code-switching in oral history interviews, namely how we might interpret code-switching as indexing affect, stance, and identity, aiding in our interpretation of oral history narrative mean-making. These case examples represent starting points and suggestions, rather than complete linguistic analyses.

⁴⁴ M. H., Personal interview, 24 September 2022.

⁴⁵ M. H., Personal interview, 24 September 2022.

In the first instance, Marcela switched from English to Czech for the duration of nearly two minutes. This memory was particularly traumatic for her. She described how her family emigrated through Vienna, Austria, after passing through Yugoslavia, which for many Czechs was a pathway to the West in the 1960s. Upon her arrival in Vienna, Marcela and her family sold personal belongings in exchange for the local currency, and they had to find very cheap housing as Marcela and her husband were afraid to live in migrant camps with their young children. She recounts their living situation in Czech, here:

*“Hnusnej hospodu. Který měli nahoře dva pokojíky malý. Tak jeden jsme mi měli a měl společnej záchod. Smrděl. No prostě: krysy na dvorečku běhali, když jsem chtěla, aby děti si šli ven na dvorek abych na něj viděla. Vařila jsem na okně na tom kempingovém... tom. A Dušan se začal učit připravovat se na první zkoušku... takovádle bichle! Tak jsme museli vodejít, aby měl svůj klid. Tak jsme chodili, už byl podzim taková... začla pak zima, tak jsme chodili furt v parku, aby von měl klid a přišli večer. Jednou za tejdén jsme se šli sprchovat k sestrám zdravotním, který jsme poznali, taky čekali na emigraci nikam. Tak jsme se seznámili. Chodili jsme k nim, protože bydleli ve špitále a pracovali tam jako part-time. Tak jsme se tam chodili koupat. Pak jsme... spali jsme... já jsem v životě nespala tak děsně s nikým jako tam. Úžký, dvě jednoduchý postele a museli jsme podvou.”*⁴⁶

For non-native Czech speakers, it is important to note a few aspects of Marcela's speech. Firstly, Marcela's Czech represents a colloquial way of speaking (Common Czech), one often associated with a Prague dialect but can be heard throughout the Czech Republic. It is characterised, for example, by the use of *-ej* replacing *-ý*, such as in Marcela's use of *společnej*, which would be *společný* in Standard Czech. Another characteristic is the use of *-v* before certain words beginning with an “o”, such as Marcela's use of *vodejít*, which would be *odejít* in Standard Czech. Marcela's language in this excerpt typifies an informal Czech. As noted before, Marcela's use of informal Czech in her code-switching indexes stance and can be interpreted here as a closeness and familiarity between us.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the distinction between standard and non-standard

⁴⁶ M. H., Personal interview, 17 September 2022.

⁴⁷ Michael Silverstein analyses the opposite scenario, in some senses, by looking at “honorification” as a system of linguistic forms that functions indexically and demonstrating how it can indirectly signal social relationships and hierarchies between the speaker and addressee. See the section “Indexical order and lexical registers in honorification” in M. SILVERSTEIN, *Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life*, pp. 211–216.

Czech use is not captured in my English translation, though it is certainly important to the understanding our relationship. My English translation follows:⁴⁸

[ENG – TRANS]: “A horrible pub that had two little rooms upstairs. We had one and there was a shared bathroom. It smelled. Basically, rats in the backyard, they were running when I wanted the kids to be outside where I could see them. I cooked on the window, on the camping thing. Dušan began to prepare for the first exam...such a thick textbook! So, we had to leave so he could have his peace. So, we walked...autumn was already so... winter then came, so we kept walking in the park so that he could have his quiet and then we would come back in the evening. Once a week we went to shower at the nurses we met, who were also waiting to emigrate somewhere. That’s how we met them. We went to them because they lived in the hospital and worked there part-time. So, we went there to bathe. Then we... we slept... I’ve never slept so close to someone in my life than there. Narrow, two single beds and we had to sleep two in each one.”⁴⁹

How can we interpret Marcela’s switch from English to Czech? From a psychological perspective, we can interpret that Marcela’s switch to her native language suggests that the traumatic memory of her time in Vienna was one perhaps formed, remembered, and best conveyed in Czech. Indeed, psychology research shows that among bilingual speakers, “L2 [language 2] was for them a less emotionally charged language, in comparison with their L1 [language 1],” and that “a speaker often uses his L1 [language 1] to express emotions, since each language can convey distinct emotional meanings according to the interlocutors and the context.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, applying what we know about code-switching and indexicality, Marcela’s switch from English to Czech tells us that her linguistic choice functions within the social context of the interview and produces meaning, rather than as a result of her internal emotion state alone. We can interpret that her code-switching in this instance indexes affect. The emotionality of Marcela’s recollection is strong, especially in comparison to the rest of her narrative. Her recorded life story is filled with emotion, but this excerpt contains perhaps more emotional details in comparison. Particularly powerful is the imagery; the image Marcela evokes of watching her children play outside among scurrying rats, as she

⁴⁸ This translation was reviewed and edited upon relistening to the original interview and therefore is different than the translated excerpt used in the author’s thesis.

⁴⁹ M. H., Personal interview, 17 September 2022. Author translation.

⁵⁰ FOTINI ANASTASSIOU, *The Effect of Multilingualism on Cognition, Memory, and Emotions: A Review*, International Journal of Learning and Development 10/2020, pp. 68–76.

cooks in a kitchen on a camping stovetop, demonstrates how much she and her family sacrificed in their emigration journey.

Following this recollection, Marcela continued to speak in Czech for a few seconds. When I asked her a follow-up question, in English, she switched back to English. On reflection, my question in English most likely caused the language to shift. It is impossible to know if the interview would have continued in Czech if I had asked my question in Czech, if I had made the language shift as the interviewer to “meet her” at her language of choice in that moment. What we can begin to observe, though, is how code-switching indexes stance and affect, and how we might analyse and interpret these shifts in the framework of oral history.

The second instance when Marcela switched from English to mostly Czech occurred during our second interview. I asked her about how she viewed herself within the context of being Czech and American. She reflected on her decision to emigrate and the effects of the decision on her children. Because she was visiting Prague with her adult children at the time of the interview, she began to reflect on her daughter’s identity through the lens of her daughter’s affinity for Czech foods:

“... The food here, she is crazy about...about those tastes from when she was little. You should see her in the grocery store. It’s crazy. I was embarrassed almost [laughs]. There is a piece of...piece of *vepřové koleno*, or some pork with skin and fat and, you know, *takový. A je to čerstvě upečený. Takovej kousek*. And she [Marcela’s daughter] said, ‘Could I have this please and piece of paper?’ And she takes it in the...*skrz obchoda. Tak se živý. Pak zase je Pribináček, to ji spomína Pribináčky, jak jedla, když byla malá.*”⁵¹

[ENG – TRANS]: “... The food here, she is crazy about...about those tastes from when she was little. You should see her in the grocery store. It’s crazy. I was embarrassed almost [laughs]. There is a piece of...piece of pork knuckle, or some pork with skin and fat and, you know, that kind. And it is freshly baked. And she [Marcela’s daughter] said, ‘Could I have this please and piece of paper?’ And she takes it in the...through the store. That’s how she lives. Then there is *Pribináček* [Czech yogurt brand], which reminds her of the *Pribináčky* that she ate when she was little.”⁵²

She continued to explain what her adult children did in the Czech Republic on their recent visit:

⁵¹ M. H., Personal interview, 24 September 2022.

⁵² M. H., Personal interview, 24 September 2022. Author translation.

“...And she took Dušan when we returned from Šumava. I said, ‘I have enough of walking for a while.’ So, they went and she [Marcela’s daughter] ...she took him to some Havel, Havlovo ... some little *hospůdka kde mají šišťičky s mákem. Pak zase ho táhla do meruňkové knedlíky. A, jo, a říkala, ,já jsem šla na dietu, než jsem jela abych mohla se podlehutit, tak. ‘Víš, každou minutu využíla. Já nevím kolikrát už šla po Karlově mostě a vytáhla Dušu až na hrad.’*”⁵³

[ENG – TRANS]: “... And she took Dušan when we returned from Šumava. I said, ‘I have enough of walking for a while.’ So, they went and she [Marcela’s daughter] ...she took him to some Havel, Havlovo ... some little pub, where they have dumplings with poppyseeds. Then, she dragged him to apricot dumplings. And, yeah, she said, ‘I went on a diet before I left so I could eat whatever I wanted.’ You know, she made the most of every minute. I don’t know how many times she walked across Charles Bridge and took Dušan up to the castle.”⁵⁴

Perhaps in a first reading, Marcela’s switch to Czech at the end of our second interview, regarding memories of food and her daughter’s nostalgia for Czech food in particular, does not seem altogether that significant. The memory, though, evokes a strong sense of nostalgia. Her code-switching in this instance indexes both affect (particularly nostalgia) and identity, as we can interpret that she frames her feelings about her identity through the lens of her daughter’s own feelings about Czech food culture, which speaks to identity. Indeed, Marcela’s code-switching indexes stance as well; her use of Czech when speaking about specific Czech foods and products signals our shared cultural background. As Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall argue, “At the most basic level, identity emerges in discourse through the temporary roles and orientations assumed by participants, such as evaluator, joke teller, or engaged listener. Such interactional positions may seem quite different from identity as conventionally understood; however, these temporary roles, no less than larger sociological and ethnographic identity categories, contribute to the formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in discourse.”⁵⁵

If code-switching here indexes affect, stance, and identity, we can consider what Marcela’s memory about her daughter’s nostalgia suggests about identity from an oral history mean-making perspective. In her study on the culinary practices of South Asians in West Yorkshire, Razia Parveen recorded orally-transmitted recipes, or recorded “recipe

⁵³ M. H., Personal interview, 24 September 2022.

⁵⁴ M. H., Personal interview, 24 September 2022. Author translation.

⁵⁵ MARY BUCHOLTZ and KIRA HALL, *Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach*, Discourse Studies 7/2005, no. 4–5, p. 591.

narratives,”⁵⁶ to understand diaspora identity. Parveen found that “food and cooking are intrinsic to creating an identity in diaspora and can assimilate memories of the homeland.”⁵⁷ Particularly, food memory can convey “the feeling of forever looking back to your country of origin to preserve a time and place which has become over-romanticised and can be an obstacle to coping with the world of the every day.”⁵⁸ This is precisely the sense I had when listening to Marcela’s anecdote about her daughter. Through her story, Marcela attempted to convey in a comedic manner how her daughter’s experience of food in today’s Czech Republic is overly romanticised as a result of their family’s emigration to the U.S. Her anecdote also shows how her experience differs from her daughters; when she says in a joking manner that her daughter’s tastes from her childhood are “crazy” and that she is almost “embarrassed,” it calls to attention the differences between them. It suggests that Marcela lacks the nostalgia that her daughter experiences, and that for her daughter, her connection to her Czech identity – her “Czechness” – lies in the tastes from her childhood.

It may also seem obvious that Marcela would have switched into Czech when speaking about Czech food, as food and cultural dishes require the use of specific language. Still, it shows an association between the language of food and her native language. Interestingly, Parveen’s research was also a multilingual study; Parveen notes that she is a trilingual member of the community and interviewer and that she conducted her interviews in Punjabi and Mirpuri and translated them into English.⁵⁹ Parveen does not reflect much on her decisions with respect to translation or the multilingual nature of the interviews themselves, however, in her translated excerpts, she retains many of the original Punjabi and Mirpuri words and terminology. This shows how the language of food retains a cultural specificity that often necessitates the use of the native language, in Parveen’s case, Punjabi and Mirpuri, and in mine, Czech.

⁵⁶ RAZIA PARVEEN, *Food to Remember: Culinary Practice and Diasporic Identity*, Oral History 44/2016, no. 1, p. 49.

⁵⁷ R. PARVEEN, *Food to Remember*, p. 55.

⁵⁸ R. PARVEEN, *Food to Remember*, p. 55.

⁵⁹ R. PARVEEN, *Food to Remember*, pp. 47, 49.

Conclusion

Given the nature of conducting multilingual oral history, one might ask: Should oral history practitioners only conduct multilingual interviews within their communities? Not necessarily. Molly Andrews reflects on her time spent conducting a research project in Germany, where she did not speak the language and used a translator to interpret for her in her oral history interviews.⁶⁰ She notes that while the use of a translator was often frustrating, the experience of the language barrier was also “not wholly negative”, as sometimes the interviewees even commented to her that the communication lag time had “given them an extra moment to consider their responses.”⁶¹ Yet, Andrews points out that her “both outside and not outside” positionality as a “Western” interviewer interviewing narrators from East Germany after the fall of communism may have been easier to see as she and the narrators communicated “across the barriers of language”.⁶²

Of course, as Andrews finds, doing oral history interviews with a translator comes with more challenges than benefits. Andrews admits she would not embark on the project again, knowing what she knows now. A bilingual interviewer who understands a migrant community’s history will be able to navigate an interview more fluidly and therefore can highlight linguistic shifts in the narrators’ narratives. Just as we notice changes in tone, volume, and intonation, a shift in language necessitates our analysis and interpretation. Conducting oral history interviews in both the multilingual narrator’s languages can not only enrich our understanding of migrant perspectives but can help to preserve the linguistic diversity in migrant communities. This practice can also help to bridge community and research divides, where English remains the dominant language in use.⁶³

Perhaps most importantly, conducting bilingual interviews – that is, the use of two languages within a single oral history interview – allows us to preserve how those two languages interact, and reflexively,

⁶⁰ MOLLY ANDREWS, *Against Good Advice: Reflections on Conducting Research in a Country Where You Don’t Speak the Language*, *The Oral History Review* 22/1995, no. 2, pp. 75–86.

⁶¹ M. ANDREWS, *Against Good Advice*, p. 80.

⁶² M. ANDREWS, *Against Good Advice*, p. 83.

⁶³ CHRISTOPHER CHENG, *Mutual Language Barriers in the Oral Histories of Immigrants*, *Agora* 58/2023, no. 2, pp. 26–29.

demonstrates how a bilingual narrator interacts with their inherent bilingualism. Understanding how languages interact when spoken is work perhaps best left to linguists. Nevertheless, how a multilingual narrator interacts with their multilingualism in an oral history interview tells us something about the narrator, their narrative, and their relationship to the interviewer; it can reveal to us, for instance, the importance of using one language over another, whether certain memories are best conveyed in a narrator's mother tongue, and how the narrator positions themselves in their narrative and in relation to the interviewer. Oral history interview practices that engage narrators in multilingualism and code-switching should therefore consider implementing language policies and protocols, and can look to the field of linguistics for further insight and inspiration.⁶⁴

Drawing on interviews with Czech immigrant women who emigrated from Czechoslovakia to the United States in the 1960s, this reflection illustrates how intra-interview bilingualism, specifically code-switching, informs our understanding of intersubjectivity, shared authority (sharing authority), orality, and narrative mean-making in oral history. Furthermore, it shows that code-switching indexes stance, affect, and identity, shedding light on our understanding of these aspects in oral history narrative mean-making. While the transcription and translation of code-switching in oral history interviews poses several methodological challenges, as they introduce aspects of linguistic interpretation on behalf of the narrator that shape the narrative, I attempt to demonstrate how transparent codification and the inclusion of the spoken Czech alongside English translation can address these tensions and Reeves-Ellington's concept of "responsibility with loyalty". Though not the focus of this reflection, it warrants mentioning that oral history interviews can serve as resources for linguists interested in understanding code-switching and indexicality in practice, as they offer long-form, subjective narratives co-created in intersubjective encounters for analysis. Thus, this reflection serves to inspire more research at the intersection of these fields and concepts by expressing how language use and choice enrich our understanding of oral history in practice.

⁶⁴ For example, L. ROLLAND, *'I'm sure at some point we'll be switching'*, pp. 702–717.