# "Anyone else going through this hell?" or Czech as a foreign language as portrayed on an English-language internet discussion forum

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In this article, I shall evaluate the "foreign language" discussion forum as a source of information on the relationship between foreigners living in the Czech Republic and the Czech language. The data analyzed come from two threads on the topic of language acquisition by native English speakers. I shall focus on several of elements of which they are composed, i.e. types of formulations and devices which surround the practice of advice-giving. I will also present these discussions as an instance of language management on several levels.

## 1. The internet discussion forum as a data source and the "foreign language" discussion forum as a specific phenomenon

I will examine data from a private English-language website run from within the Czech Republic. This website is set up primarily to provide information and connect interested parties and does not exist solely in discussion format like internet newsgroups and computer mediated communities. It thus bears resemblance to sites such as "craigslist" in U.S. cities, the difference being that most of the contributors are living in a foreign country in which many practical aspects of life are unfamiliar to them. The "community" of users self-identify as both native and non-native speakers of English, including Czechs, though it is important to note that this information can only be presumed on the basis of who these users claim that they are. In fact, this self-identification is often an important part of the individual contributions to the discussion forums. Based on this self-identification, the community of users consists of: a) native English speakers living in the Czech Republic (predominantly in Prague), b) native English speakers living outside the Czech Republic, most often in their country of origin, with some vested interest in the Czech Republic, often because they are either planning to move to the Czech Republic or have spent time living there in the past, c) English-speaking Czechs, d) English-speaking nationals of other countries (for more on the subject of internet "communities", see Baym 1995 and Crystal 2001).

The site contains forums devoted to discussion on a number of practical topics – accommodation, entertainment, visa issues, etc. with the primary goal being the exchange of information. The discussion forum section of the website also contains a standard "Code of Conduct", which outlines the rules for its use. These concern, among others, privacy, use of defamatory and vulgar language, relevance of contributions, etc. (for an overview of standards of conduct on similar forums, see McLaughlin et al. 1995).

The issue of language on discussion forums of this website presents itself in two major categories. The first is the forum as a source of information on language courses, textbooks, exchanges (e.g. Czech for English). The primary languages concerned are Czech and English. However, given that English often serves as a lingua franca for people of broadly varying linguistic origin, Europeans in particular, other languages are

discussed as well, e.g. the site contains weekly advertisements for a German conversation club and posts expressing interest in languages such as French or Spanish, as well as Polish, Chinese, and Arabic. This category is mostly covered by a "Language" forum.

The second manifestation of the language issue can be called "talk about language". This category understands language as an everyday issue, an obstacle to be faced on a daily basis, on par with other everyday issues such as shopping or commuting (comp. Neustupný 2003 and Muraoka 2000). These discussions are valuable because they not only confirm the existence of a discourse of the international community within the Czech Republic, but outline the "language problems" faced by this community, some of which have been previously discussed by Crown (1996), Papoušková (1996) and Sherman (2003).

The category of "talk about language" can appear in various forums, primarily those dealing with everyday life. The most common forms of these contributions are questions concerning vocabulary for use in specific situations, for example "how can I address my girlfriend?" or "what is the Czech word for…?" and subsequent discussion regarding any answers which may be offered.

Part of the significance of this and other internet discussion forums is that they make up a body of spontaneously-generated data which records the "discourse of expatriate life". That is, discussions on a number of topics (language in particular) from this forum have been occurring for the entire fifteen years since the political changes in 1989, mostly in cafes and pubs, but in the media as well (e.g. in English-language publications such as the Prague Post), but the recording of them in this manner has taken place only within the past few years. The popularity of the internet discussion forum as a medium and thus as an object of linguistic inquiry is a later development in the Czech Republic than in, e.g. the United States, Great Britain, or several other English-speaking countries and local forums in various languages have been steadily growing in use (attention has been devoted to Czech-language special-interest forums e.g. in Hašová 2003). The main points of the discussion surrounding the acquisition of the Czech language, for instance, can be captured in written form in the space of several days. Forums also allow for a greater dialogue between individuals living in different cities and in fact, different countries and for the greater establishment of social networks prior to one's arrival in the country.

## 2. The discussions

The structure of any given discussion, known as a "thread" gains in complexity with the increasing number of contributors and contributions. It operates as follows: The person who initiates the "thread" poses a question, makes an observatory statement, or provides information in the form of a statement. All those who contribute to the thread thereafter respond to the original contribution, to those following it, both, or in fact, neither (as permitted by the Code of Conduct). Those posting may have read only the first post or all those following it, i.e. there is no sort of direct linearity. Responses may include and comment on quotes taken directly from previous contributions (comp. Antaki and Leudar 2001).

Both discussions analyzed here revolve around the subject of the acquisition of Czech by native English speakers. The posts bear some similarity to "turns" in conversation analysis. The first discussion, initially titled "How long to learn Czech?" (to which I will refer hereafter as "how long"), contains 21 posts by fifteen different contributors, each

posting 1-2 times. The second, "Anyone else going through this hell?" (hereafter "anyone else") consists of 16 posts by 10 different contributors, with the initial contributor posting five times. There are several "key words", which define the tone of the discussion or provide information about the perspectives of the contributors. For "how long", these are "immersion", "pick it up" and "fluency" and for "anyone else", they are "hell", "purgatory" and "support groups".

The tone of the overall discussion is determined by the initial post's titling and definition of the issue. While the first discussion starts with the assumption that native English speakers "become fluent in Czech", the second (humorously) portrays the Czech language as an obstacle too difficult to be overcome, creating problems for life in the Czech Republic and seeks to build a network of support. The "how long" discussion involves a slight conflict between two camps, on the basis of what seems to be a previously-existing dialogue.

The discussion structures reveal that the threads often go "out with a whimper", reflecting the decrease in contributor interest over the time frame of several days. Both discussions are participated in only by (at least those who identify themselves as) non-Czechs.

## 3. Selected discussion elements and devices

In this section, I shall present several of the elements and devices surrounding the practice of advice-giving with an emphasis upon their relevance to the subject at hand. I offer selections from the posts here without any sort of grammatical or orthographic editing, thus reiterating the position of electronic communication at a point between spoken and written language, including the use of slang and "vulgar" language, the varying linguistic and stylistic level of the individual contributors and regional linguistic variation (e.g. British vs. American) and the use of Czech words with and without diacritic symbols within the English sentence and text.

These discussions necessarily begin with the **request for advice**, found in the initial post. The initial post of the discussion "how long" is self-identified as coming from the United States. Some assumptions which may be implied by the title, "How long to learn Czech?", are that foreigners living in the Czech Republic "learn Czech" and that this language acquisition is measurable for a large group of people in terms of time. These assumptions are reiterated by several key words which appear in the post itself, which follows.

(1 – "how long")
*Topic: how long to learn Czech?*
*Hello all...*
*I am still in the US and I just started taking Czech language lessons. I am thinking about moving to Prague and **immersing myself** and hoping **to really learn the language** and was wondering how long it took some of you who were interested in learning the language **to really pick it up**. Like how long did it take some of you who came from a pure English speaking background **to claim fluency**? Thanks...*

The terms in bold (mine for all examples in this article) all refer to either methods of language acquisition (immersing myself, pick it up) or stages of it (learn the language, claim fluency). This post provides a small picture of the sociolinguistic situation of native English speakers in the Czech Republic, specifically through the rhetoric of their

approach to learning foreign languages (which we could compare to that of other groups of foreigners living in the Czech Republic).

The contributor specifies the group "some of you who were interested in learning the language", indicating the existence of a dichotomy between those who either do not learn Czech at all or learn only "Survival Czech" and those who profess a sincere interest in the language, eventually "claiming fluency". While this post contains the assumption that one can "immerse" oneself in Prague, i.e. surround oneself with the Czech language exclusively, it represents, at the same time, the first turn in the establishment of contact between the contributor and Prague's English-speaking community. It also reveals expectations of language acquisition largely involving passivity on the part of the learner. These facts are not pointed out initially, but rather, echoed in different forms throughout the rest of the discussion.

The second discussion, "anyone else", is defined by the less serious tone of the initial post, which follows.

(2 – "anyone else")
*Topic: anyone else going through this **hell**?*
*i am talking, of course, about learning czech... i have just come back from another hour of **purgatory**, and my head is spinning. am i just being immensely stupid, or is it a really difficult language? are there any **support groups** for learners?! my ´favourite´ thing just now is telling the time, which is totally "blazen". and when my teacher asked me how many parks i wanted, i was baffled - until she explained that parku is also the genitive plural of parek - how does anybody ever learn it?! anyone know any **quick and easy rules** for me to learn about grammar?*

This post, which can be defined by its emphasis on the perceived difficulty of the Czech language, influences the tone of the ensuing discussion due to its form, which can be paraphrased as "venting" or "letting off steam". That is, while the post's concluding question ultimately takes the form of a request for advice, the post's titling indicates the desire to create solidarity among others on the discussion forum in a humorous manner. The keywords "quick and easy rules" are reminiscent of the assumed passivity of the first discussion but in this case appear to be intended ironically. And, in fact, direct reactions to this "question" answer accordingly, for example:

(3 – "anyone else")
*The only tip I'd say about grammar is to try to bang your head against the wall while watching Ceska 1 full volume. Only, that didn't really help for me. More gave me a headache.*

Unlike the "how long", which contains posts from more experienced Czech language learners, the contributors to this discussion are, as the self-identifications indicate, mainly people in the first stages of language learning.

The next significant element of the advice-giving discussion is the **self-identification** – this can include information regarding nationality, native language, origin of the post, (often in case of foreigners) length of time spent in a place, profession, life situation ("I am married to a Czech"), and importantly, experience with the language, including self-evaluation of language level or detailing of which communication situations the individual has mastered in the language. These make up an integral part of many of the posts, as they act as information qualifying the individual to provide advice on the topic.

(4 – "how long")

*My wife and I are Enlgish speakers first language and taking lessons here at the Charles.*

(5 – "how long")

*I have been here 12 years and am **pretty well fluent (spoken)** but I still botch the "pady" or endings sometimes (well, most of the time)…*

(6 – "how long")

*I have been studying on my own on-and-off for two years and can speak **survival Czech**.*

(7 – "anyone else")

*I have been living here for three years and would class myself as **only elementary/pre-intermediate**… However, I'm married to a Czech and so am adopting the thick sculled approach i.e. it might take me eight years, but I will definatley get there.*

(8–"anyone else")

*I'm a **Czech language dropout** after several lessons when I discovered that next to nothing was sinking in to my feeble old brain.*

The self-identification may precede or be combined with a further element, the **anecdote/observation**. An **anecdote** may be defined as the detailing of an occurrence that a contributor has observed or experienced once, while an **observation** may be defined as something that the contributor has noticed or notices repeatedly or in general. The initial post in the discussion "anyone else", for example, is largely composed of an observation. Several others follow.

(9 – "how long")

*…it is somewhat true that if you speak in broken Czech that likely two things happen. They don't or won't understand you. Or they respond to you in English. They is true of a lot of metropolitan European cities. We found this in Austria and various other countries.*

(10 – "how long")

*Native English speakers often make small errors that a Czech would never make and it is quite easy to confuse them with even a small error. Most of the Czechs you would attempt to practice with (waitresses, shopkeepers) are not used to hearing non-native Czech speakers so your accent also can be a problem.…I would say you certainly can speak Czech here. My Czech has become good enough that if I speak it, I will get an answer in Czech often at full speed with many words I have never heard before. I find that if you speak a sentence that is even remotely correct, most Czech people assume you can at least understand them and speak to you as if you are a native speaker. This can be a problem.*
*Many Czechs are quite willing to speak to you in whatever English they know if you ask them, in Czech, if they can speak English. Some, however, will become rude.*

(11 – "how long")

*I have found the Czech people very happy to help you when they know you are **making an effort to learn their language and not expecting them to speak English.** I have found that they will answer you in Czech if you say something to them in Czech. My problem has been that I could not understand parts if not all of their answers.*

The most central element of the threads, **advice** appears usually in the imperative form ("do this") or conditional ("you could do this...").

(12 – "how long")

*make as many Czech friends as you can. If you have a radio or TV, when you move here you can listen to news in Czech. Pay attention to sub-titles in films (the most basic grammar is used). Read signs. Ask people what things mean. Make lists of words. Get a book and practice the basic grammar points. Keep your ears opened. Eavesdrop on trams.*

(13 – "how long")
*So to get a jump start get all that you can here and as was said before **don't hang with expats and immerse yourself**!*

(14 – "how long")
*If you have the chance to study some before you get here, it will be very helpfull when you arrive.*

(15 – "how long")
*1. Listen "musically" - try to understand the rythm of the language. That will help you understand the sentence structure and will help your ear separate sounds and individual words when speaking.*
*2. Treat grammar as a "necessary evil" Try to learn it, but **remember that communication is the goal...not perfection** (it's alot less frustrating)*
*3. Swear  ) no, seriously, learning colloquialisms is much more fun, and much more handy than learning poetry - you'll tell 2 people a day to get stuffed and most probably never get "analagous"  )*
*4. Hang out with Czech people - go to the pub, accept their hospitality, go to tiny Moravian villages for the weekend - and open your ears*
*5. Watch TV. especially advertising. It's a great way to associate images with words. If you're in the US, you can watch czech TV on http://www.ct1.cz/.*
*6. Don't overdo it. Don't get so wrapped up in it that it stops being fun!*

(16 – "anyone else")
*You'd be better off looking at a good TEFL textbook and getting a Czech tutor to teach you the Czech equivalents of the functional sections (e.g. ordering in a restaurant, giving directions to a cabdriver, etc.) and use the roleplaying/situational exercises in the TEFL textbook. And take road trips outside of Prague, to the smaller towns and villages where nobody speaks English...IMHO that's the best way of getting fluent FAST, plus you'll finally see the REAL Czech Republic.*

A **refute** is a disagreement with the validity of a statement or the effectiveness of advice given previously. On certain points of debate, a chain of such refutes may occur. In this case, such a chain develops in regard to the question of the feasibility of learning English in Prague in the "how long" debate, started by the following post containing advice.

(17 – "how long")
*If you want to learn Czech then don't come to Prague! Well, it is possible but a lot of expats seem to end up spending most their time around other expats. Moreover, when you try to practice your still limited Czech a lot of people will answer in English (their English being better than your Czech will be for a long time).*

The initial response was:

(18 – "how long")
***don't believe the hype***.

*People will speak czech to you in Praha. If you want, you don't have to speak a word of English for as long as you live here. Learning the language all depends on your dedication and patience.*

The key phrase, "don't believe the hype" (otherwise well-known to many of the forum's users as an expression from English-language popular culture), reveals the widespread

nature of the thought behind the previous post, i.e. that the contributor has been exposed to this idea in the "outside world" of the English-language communication spheres in the Czech Republic. It is but one indicator of the dependence of the discussion forum on discourse and interactions which exist outside of it, in the world of face-to-face communication. It is immediately met with another refute, leading to the following chain:

(19 – "how long")
 lenny, **that's a fat fucking lie, TOTALLY unrealistic** *for an American that is learning a Slavic language for the first time.*

*I don't think anyone can realistically not speak a word of English here UNLESS they are already fluent in Czech when coming here. AND EVEN SO, if they were fluent with an accent, I could imagine many people might respond in English…*

(20 – "how long")
*Fostin, I do not understand your tone of voice when replying to a simple statement. If you bother to read carefully (the thread is only 5 short sentences) it is the choice of the person speaking. If somebody tries to respond in english, it is their choice to answer back in english or try to only use the native language being spoken. Yes, a portion of the people will be rude, but that happens in all walks of life and in all parts of the world.*

**Did I say anything about being fluent? Did I say anything about it being easy? Did I say anything about it not taking time to learn?**

*The reply was to encourage somebody to make the effort. To not believe the hype that Praha is an english only city. To have faith in their desire to learn something new and go for it.*

*Thank you for making the loud statement so everybody could hear how wrong I am in my thoughts and adivce.*

(21 – "how long")
**Do not listen to people who say it's impossible.** *The truth is that most of them are lazy. Sorry guys, but if you don't make the effort you will not learn. I am tired of* **hearing the "I-get-responded-to-in-English" excuse**. *That's bullshit.*

(22 – "how long")
*lenny, I just think you did a disservice by providing unrealistic information. That is all. Perhaps you should read your own post again: a lot of people WILL speak English to you (I think a passive listening knowledge is frankly more important than being able to produce a lot of language)* **and I'd really like to see the person that didn't speak a word of English for as long as they lived here**.

*That said, you're right about the dedication and patience, just unrealistic about everything else.*

The **extreme case formulation** justifies claims, proposing behaviors that are acceptable and right or unacceptable and wrong through the use of expressions such as *every, always, completely, entirely*, etc. (Pomerantz 1986). The practice of justification/rationalization is most often related to the individual contributors' dissatisfaction with their self-identifications, and may also involve the use of irrelevant "facts", details, or speculations to excuse oneself from the inability to solve a given problem. It has several uses specific to this discussion, one of which is the portrayal of a precipitating circumstance as necessitating an action. For example, starting from the point of view that learning Czech is not automatic, it justifies forcing oneself to engage in it

due to the desperate nature of its necessity – the fact that Czech is being spoken in a number of social situations.

(23 – "anyone else")
*I really don't need to learn czech, i am only here for 10 months, but **every single time** i go into town, i am asked for directions… and also, **everyone** in my lab is talking about me…*

However, the idea that *not* successfully learning Czech is acceptable is similarly justified by the extreme nature of its difficulty, an idea commonly embodied by the statement "Czech is the most difficult of the Slavic languages". The contributor from the first post of "anyone else" poses the following rhetorical question.

(24 – "anyone else")
*How does **anybody ever** learn it?!*

The "extreme case" of Czech language difficulty is faced by "even" the native speaker, as in the following example:

(25 – "anyone else")
*I have to fully agree with all that has been said about Czech being a very complex language, **even some of the Czechs have difficulty with it.***

Furthermore, the extreme case formulation is used to point to the acceptability of not speaking "fluent" Czech. Here the concept of fluency comes into play yet again, this time as representing the ideal situation.

(26 – "anyone else")
*I have been living here for three years and would class myself as only elementary/pre-intermediate, however, **if I had been living in Germany or Spain for three years I probably would be fluent by now** :-)*

In another example, "fluent" (the contributor's goal) is presented in opposition to another type of extreme, "perfect" (the contributor's perceived goal of Czech teachers), which is portrayed as an extreme case of pedagogical error.

(27 – "anyone else")
*At least 80% of the horrendous difficulty foreigners have in learning Czech is a direct result of the simple fact that **most cestina teachers simply don't have a CLUE how to teach languages**! They are usually stuck in the 1940s method of grammar-translation, whose primary goal is to give you the grammatical understanding and a sizable vocabulary but very little fluency or functionality.*

*Czech is already a very difficult language grammatically, but most Czech teachers teach it **as though they want you to speak PERFECT Czech, instead of aiming for FLUENT but broken/imperfect Czech first**. Most Czech here is taught in a **hopelessly ACADEMIC** instead of **PRAGMATIC** fashion.*

Conversely, a final use of the extreme case formulation in these discussions is to point to the role of personal agency in language learning, i.e. to counter the claims mentioned above.

(28 – "how long")
*If you want, **you don't have to speak a word of English** for as long as you live here.*

In this case, it is unlikely that the contributor actually believes this to be true or has experienced it him/herself, but rather, wishes to present the issue of social and linguistic networks as one of personal choice, countering the claims of the difficulty of Czech justifying the inability to learn it. For a related portrayal of English in contact with "the most difficult language in the world", see Latomaa 1998.

A final interesting feature of these discussions is what might be called "venting" or "letting off steam", the purpose of which is to acknowledge a given problem as such and to express one's anger or frustration with this problem. It may contain a combination of agreements, complaints, justifications, and/or parodies of standard advice-giving procedures.

The post which follows is presented as answers to the initial post in the discussion "how long".

(29 – "how long")
*1. **You will never be fluent in czech, most czechs aren't fluent in czech**. The language sucks! I tell all my students,"If you can speak czech, then learning English will be easy." Then I point out how much simpler English grammar is than czech and they are relieved.*
*2. I also learned to speak **my maimed version of czech** in a hospoda, I can cuss with the best of them. I like that. The vulgarity is quite colorful.*
*3. I HATE THAT GODDAMNED ř!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Oh well, even Havel can't get that one right. I substitute š and it seems to work.*

This post reminds the reader of the dominant role of humor on this forum and contains all of the elements mentioned above. It presents emphatic agreement with  several points made previously in the discussion – the mention of the use of vulgarities and the social atmosphere of the pub as an aid in learning Czech, and, while revealing the stance that the difficulty of Czech is an extreme one - again, too difficult for even the native speakers, including the former president, known for his inability to pronounce the consonant "ř", criticizes the use of the term "fluency" that defined the initial post of this discussion.


**4. Language Management**
Within the various communities of foreigners living in the Czech Republic, the acquisition of the Czech language is neither automatically presumed nor ruled out. Rather, it is, like the decision to live in the Czech Republic, a highly individual matter. The community of English speakers is characterized by a high mobility, based both on their cultural background and financial status.

The quest to solve "language problems" on discussion forums such as these represents language management (see Nekvapil 2000, Neustupný 2002, Nekvapil and Neustupný 2003) within the Czech Republic. It is divided into two types: individual and organized. While management on the individual level is described within the posts themselves, the existence of the discussions as a whole, or more specifically, the creation of a forum encouraging them to spontaneously ensue, is an instance of organized management, or management conducted by larger bodies or authorities. It is thus an important source of information for the group of individual teachers and schools offering "Czech for Foreigners" and writing textbooks for this instruction.

As concerns individual management, the formulation of the "language problem" varies slightly between the two threads analyzed. It can be generally formulated as follows:

(a) I live in/plan to move to a foreign country and do not speak the language. I must learn the language but am concerned that it will take a long time.

(b) I live in a foreign country and have begun learning the language. The language has proven to be highly difficult to learn.

The process of language management involves the noting of deviations, evaluation, the creation adjustment designs and implementation of these adjustment designs. All of these elements are present in the discussions, though the first of them (noting of deviations) appears to be the most interesting for research.

The noting of deviations is based upon established ideas of norms. In this case, the established idea of the norm for Czech language acquisition by English-speaking foreigners has two sources. One the one hand, it can be traced back to the (highly significant) understanding of the linguistic background of this forum's users and their subsequent expectations regarding the language prior to their arrival. This is best summarized by the initial post in the "how long" discussion and generalized in (a) above. On the other hand, this norm is born out of the discourse on Czech as a foreign language for English-speakers, which exists both on discussion forums such as these and elsewhere. This discourse points to geographical factors, i.e. a highly spirited discussion of Czech-speaking opportunities in Prague versus the rest of the country as well as to actual realized behaviors, i.e. questions regarding the relative frequency of the use of Czech among this group's members, e.g. *"The reason most people say it's so difficult is that they do not make the effort to learn, because it is really, relly easy to not speak any Czech at all"* and the question of what level of Czech English-speaking foreigners need to know in order to successfully function in Czech society, e.g. *"remember that communication is the goal...not perfection", "survival Czech", "I really don't need to learn czech, i am only here for 10 months, but every single time i go into town, i am asked for directions, and it looks a bit silly just pointing in the general direction of wherever the thing is and saying "tam. to je tam." and also, everyone in my lab is talking about me, and I WANT TO KNOW WHAT THEY ARE SAYING!!"*.

Thus the question of the generally accepted norm for Czech language acquisition for English-speaking foreigners, i.e. that of whether they *should, do,* or *will* learn Czech remains unclear. That is to say that the noting of a deviation from established norms is a highly subjective matter, e.g. some foreigners may live for many years in the Czech Republic, speak no Czech, and never consider this to be a deviation, while others will consider every small mistaken case-ending as such. In this sense, the management employed by this group of foreigners can be compared with that of e.g. groups of asylum seekers/refugees, E.U. citizens newly residing in the Czech Republic, or others.

In general, the first posts in both discussions can be viewed as examples of deviation noting. Parts of the ensuing discussion make up potential adjustment plans, for example, both discussions contain suggestions on how to improve one's Czech, and the discussion "anyone else" even contains a concrete proposal to start a learners' group. The implementation of these plans, i.e. the functioning of such learners' groups, language exchanges, or private lessons, exists outside of the discussion forum's realm.

## 5. Conclusion

As with all internet discussion forum discourse, it is also important to consider the limitations of the group of people participating in the discussion, i.e. these users do not necessarily make up a representative population of Czech language-learners. This reflects both the issue of which members of the English-speaking community have access to the internet and furthermore, which choose to employ sites such as this one as social support networks. It can be hypothesized that individuals who are more "successful" cases of Czech language acquisition are thus able to navigate their way through the Czech-speaking world and are less likely to use this discussion forum, but there is no way to prove this.

That said, here I do not concern myself with the question of the validity of any of the contributors' observations or claims, nor do I wish to propose a "proper" solution to the "language problems" discussed, but rather, I am interested in the elements of the discussion as such. The primary format of the threads analyzed here is, as mentioned, "advice-giving", an area which has been often investigated by linguists in areas involving an "expert", e.g. healthcare or legal issues. Here, as with many other "interest-group" forums, there are no clearly-defined "experts" per se, hence the use of devices such as "self-identification", i.e. an explanation of what qualifies a given individual to give advice, is key in the analysis.

From a Language Management perspective, the discussion on these forums reveal:

1. The linguistic preparation and assumptions of the native-English-speaking Czech language learner.
2. The interrelated nature of language learning and integration into Czech culture.
3. The existing discourse of Czech language learning in the Czech Republic as a whole and in its various parts as contributed to by both foreigners and locals.
4. The existing attitudes surrounding command of the Czech language.

This analysis will be further compared with that of discussions of a similar topic on a Czech server.

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