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Article

## Adult Migrants' Language Training in Austria: The Role of Central and Eastern European Teachers

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### Abstract

Language has gained increasing importance in immigration policies in Western European states, with a new model of citizenship, the *ius linguarum* (Fejes, 2019; Fortier, 2022), at its core. Accordingly, command of the (national) languages of host states operates both as a resource and as an ideological framework, legitimating the reproduction of inequalities among various migrant and non-migrant groups. In this article, we analyse the implications of such processes in the context of state-subsidised language teaching for refugees and migrants in Austria. Specifically, the article aims to explore labour migration, namely that of Central and Eastern European (CEE, including EU and non-EU citizen) professionals—mainly language teachers who enter the field of adult language teaching in Austria seeking a living and career prospects that they cannot find in the significantly underpaid educational sectors of CEE states. This article shows that the arrival of CEE professionals into these difficult and precarious jobs is enabled first by historical processes linking the CEE region to former political and economic power centres. Second, it is facilitated by legal, administrative, and symbolic processes that construct CEE citizens as second-order teachers in the field of migrant education in Austria. Our article, based on ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative interviews, highlights nuanced ways in which historically, economically, and politically embedded language geographies contribute to the reproduction of hierarchies of membership, inclusion, and exclusion in present-day immigration societies.

### Keywords

adult education; Central and Eastern Europe; governing through language; imperial genealogies; language ideologies; language teaching; native speakerism; precarity; refugee and migrant services; segmented labour market

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

Many have described how language has gained importance within neoliberal governance systems in Western countries as part of broader processes wherein states increasingly perceive the “integration” of citizens and migrants as closely interlinked with education and employment (Heller & McElhinny, 2017; Fortier, 2022). Language in modern Western states operates as an unequally distributed resource (Heller, 2007): It not only

contributes to the common good as a means of communication but, by depending on other resources and reflecting historically developed economic and political power structures, also plays a central role in reproducing such inequalities. Through processes of naturalisation and objectification, language becomes a central tool for the state and the market in legitimising these inequalities (Allan & McElhinny, 2017). In this vein, language learning is perceived as an individual achievement that is technical and neutral compared to culturalising

and racialising (and national, ethnic, religious, or citizenship) categorisations deemed more unjust, prejudiced, and discriminatory.

Language speaking and language acquisition, in this context, have largely become defined as the responsibility of individual immigrants or minorities (Ahlgren & Rydell, 2020; Del Percio, 2018; Lønsmann, 2020), in this way concealing mechanisms linked to societal forces of power and inequality, and furthering the legitimacy of the state or market-imposed constraints and penalties linked to perceived deficiencies in language acquisition.

The hierarchisation and self-responsibilisation of individuals and groups do not exclude, however, the operation of the “left-hand of the state” (Bourdieu, 1999). Administrative-social-educational apparatuses and institutions implement not only the classification, hierarchisation, and policing of individuals but also the delivery of care and support to such marginalised groups. Adult education, and within that, language training, is a significant component of such provisions: Backed by the state and EU subsidies, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as the unemployed, are offered language courses aimed at helping them acquire specific language proficiencies primarily in the national languages of the respective states and, to a lesser extent, in other “world languages” highly valued in the labour market (Rocca et al., 2020).

In the present article, we look at these kinds of publicly supported adult language training in Vienna, Austria, which focus on teaching German to migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. According to our qualitative fieldwork, such language teaching institutions are in great proportion populated by German teachers from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries who learned German as a second language, later obtained higher education degrees and diplomas in German studies in their home countries, and after permanently moving or temporarily commuting became employed in these language teaching institutions in Austria.

The central research questions we pose are the following: What kind of inequalities ground the arrival of CEE German teachers, mainly women, into these adult language teaching institutions? How do such inequalities shape the provision of language learning for vulnerable population groups in Austria? What role does language play in concealing economic and historically politically formed power landscapes in these processes of governing through language?

These apparatuses, including the field of adult teaching and language training, demand a great amount of labour, the provision and management of which is also part of the broader field of state governance. Studies have already pointed out how the withdrawal of welfare provisions and decreasing state expenses occur following neoliberal logics by economising on the workforce involved in refugee and migrant services in Western states. Such logics imply poor work conditions: Lower wages, precarious work contracts, and a lack of

long-term career prospects are coupled with long working hours, great demand for affective labour, and continuous stress and anxiety (Andersson & Muhrman, 2022; Fejes & Holmqvist, 2019; Kurki et al., 2018).

Researchers of migrant and refugee integration services have noted the state’s reliance upon migrant workers in filling these precarious jobs. Mechanisms of labour market segmentation with a focus on migrants working in refugee and migrant services have been described in Canada, France, Germany, and also Austria (Amin, 2004; Bauder & Jayaraman, 2014; De Jong, 2019; Zakariás & Feischmidt, 2021). Related more specifically to language inequalities, a few studies thematise the “language work” stemming from the migration background of employees and volunteers that they have in common with refugee and migrant clients and students, where the language competence of workers serves as a non- or poorly remunerated means of translation and mediation, exploited by migrant and refugee provision institutions and organisations (De Jong, 2019; Hassemer, 2020; Scheibelhofer et al., 2021).

While our article, in line with the above-mentioned studies, also centres on the phenomenon of decreasing state expenses connected with migrant and refugee services and the consequences of this for the precarisation of migrant and refugee work, we present a different constellation of language landscapes behind such processes. Instead of examining the common cultural (linguistic, ethnic, national) background of workers and clients or students, we explore how the operation of historical imperial and power relations in conjunction with present-day processes of the differential inclusion (De Genova et al., 2015) of various migrant groups are at play in creating exploitative working conditions in the sphere of Austrian adult language teaching.

The question of multilingualism and related processes of hierarchisation among language teachers in migration contexts has attracted very little attention, with some exceptions in sociolinguistics (Barakos, 2019; Jenks & Lee, 2020; Panaligan & Curran, 2022). This article aims to take these explorations further. First, we show how social histories of various times and scales become layered upon each other in relation to CEE-citizen teachers teaching refugees and migrants in Austria. Historical geopolitical processes in Central and Eastern Europe and the historical legacy of modern empires of the region come together with more recent processes of neoliberalisation in the CEE region. Last but not least may be added to the mix the proliferation of neoliberal populist immigration policies in Austria.

The second empirical part of the article will show how language governance recreates hierarchies between citizens and non-citizens in Austria and, more specifically, among language teachers for migrants and refugees. The legal measures of immigration politics and the institutional-administrative measures governing education classify and categorise the former and objectify these categories; at the same time, language ideologies

produced by policies and institutional actors that circulate among everyday field participants legitimise such classifications in the symbolic domain. We conclude that, by creating second-order (German) language teachers, the state enhances the precarisation and exploitation of workers in the field of migrant services and adult migrant language teaching.

In the framework of this research, ethnographic fieldwork has been carried out since 2021, focusing on one major branch of a Viennese NGO specialising in German language teaching for refugees. Moreover, about 30 interviews were conducted with teachers and management staff working in this and numerous other NGOs and for-profit companies in Vienna, as well as students enrolled in state-subsidised language/integration courses, namely with people granted asylum or subsidiary protection.

The present article offers an introductory perspective on the topic of CEE citizens working in adult migrant language training in Austria, preparing interested readers for further analyses to be developed in later papers. Consequently, this article is mainly based on a state-of-the-art review of a broad palette of relevant scholarly literature, organisational documents, and the analysis of statistical data; in addition, it takes some initial steps towards exploring empirical data collected through qualitative fieldwork.

## **2. Migration Governance, Language Policies, and the Marketisation of Adult Education in Austria**

As part of the process of the culturalisation of migration and belonging, language has played a central role in the development of integration policies in Austria (Gruber, 2018; Gruber & Rosenberger, 2018, 2023). Since the beginning of the early 2000s, laws and regulations have been promoted and implemented that imply that the residence, naturalisation, and entry of third-country residents to Austria are conditioned upon the acquisition of specific levels of competence in the German language within specified timeframes. Regulated, acquired, and tested, language has become a significant aim and legitimating tool of migration control in Austria (Flubacher, 2021; Rheindorf & Wodak, 2020). In contrast to religion standing for an unalterable Otherness, language acquisition and language competence have become a means of the personal responsabilisation of migrants (Del Percio, 2018; Lønsmann, 2020). Public political discourses have become infiltrated by concepts of penalisation by various exclusionary measures for those perceived as “unwilling to integrate” (Rheindorf, 2019; Rheindorf & Wodak, 2020).

These processes indicate how public spending from the state budget in Austria, as well as European Social Funds (ESF) subsidies since the early 2000s, have maintained supported forms of adult language teaching for various vulnerable populations, such as migrants, refugees, and the unemployed, under the control of public administration organisations like the Austrian

Integration Fund (ÖIF), the Public Employment Service (AMS), and regional and municipal bodies.

A central characteristic of the development of adult (language) education has been, as elsewhere in Western countries (Bowl, 2017; Fejes & Holmqvist, 2019; Carlson & Jacobsson, 2019; Thériault & Mercier, 2023), a neoliberal organisational agenda (Lassnigg & Vogtenhuber, 2019). As described in other national contexts (Kurki et al., 2018), the EU also played a major role in fostering the economisation and marketisation of adult education in Austria. EU policies, and specifically the operation of the ESF, played a central role in introducing the vocabulary of human capital and the narrow goal of employment into the field of adult education, as opposed to more diverse social goals formulated by traditionally existing adult education policies and institutions in Austria. ESF-funded schemes also prescribed project planning and competitive tendering. This logic is in sharp contrast with those that drove earlier frameworks, which were based less on projects and more on the unconditional provision of lump sums to specific providers (Lassnigg & Vogtenhuber, 2019).

While the ideology of “lifelong learning” linked to adult education has been increasingly echoed in politics and policies in EU countries, since 2000, the realities of employment in the latter area have been associated with harsh working conditions, starkly contrasting with appraisals of this kind (Kreiml, 2007; Kukovetz & Sprung, 2014). A recent comparative study of present-day adult-education career prospects based on case studies from five EU countries, among them Austria, corroborated that contracts are predominantly insecure and career prospects almost entirely lacking, with the only advancement potential lying in acquiring managerial positions available to very few. The authors arrive at the sobering conclusion that in the adult education sector, “career progression means leaving teaching behind” (Clancy et al., 2023, p. 347).

## **3. The Place of German Language Teaching in Central and Eastern Europe: A Short Historical Overview**

A central claim of this article is that adult education jobs, including language teaching for adult migrants, are increasingly carried out by foreign citizens under unfavourable conditions. Regarding their presence in Austria, Kukovetz and Sprung (2014) detected the substantial under-representation of migrant workers, despite looking at the first- and second-generation (im)migrant presence in the field. The post-2015 era, however, suggests a rapid increase in their proportion (See Supplementary File 1).

To understand these tendencies associated with language teaching for adult migrants, this article draws attention to the central importance of historical imperial genealogies in the domain. The German language has been a vital lingua franca in the geographical region of today’s Central and Eastern Europe for centuries

(Darquennes & Nelde, 2006; Glück, 2014; Gross, 2015; Schröder, 2018). Concerning the promotion of the German language in Eastern and Central Europe, the Habsburg Empire and the German lands, most notably Prussia, were major actors in enforcing the control of public language use. Controlling the general language of teaching in elementary and secondary education became a central battleground in the respective (e.g., Czech, Polish, Hungarian, and Slovak) nation-building struggles during the nineteenth century, with the region's ethnic German nationalising minority communities playing a central role (Prokopovych et al., 2020). Following the demise of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the loss of power of Prussia after the First World War, and then again of Austria and Germany after WWII, the status and legal conditions for the public use of the German language became increasingly restricted in CEE states (Kamusella, 2009; Stevenson & Carl, 2010). Starting from the 1950s, the German language became tolerated again. Being the only language officially spoken both in the West and the socialist bloc (in the GDR), it became authorised in public as well as in higher education in numerous CEE countries (Jin & Cortazzi, 2013; Stevenson & Carl, 2010).

The transition has led to new developments regarding the position of the command of the German language in CEE countries. Legislation aimed at protecting minority languages in CEE states, including the use and education of German in cultural spaces, was implemented in numerous countries as part of negotiations for EU enlargement (Hughes & Sasse, 2003; Vermeersch, 2004). Importantly, the unleashed free-market expansion of German and Austrian companies towards the CEE region and the accompanying need for cheap labour possessing German language skills increased the labour market value of learning German (Tichy, 2015). Such market demands were also supported by policies and institutions founded and subsidised by the German and Austrian governments, suggesting the primary importance of these policies in the CEE region (Stevenson & Carl, 2010, pp. 45, 98). These foreign cultural policies blend references to national economic interests with the values and vocabulary of human rights, multilingualism, and intercultural communication that characterise EU-level language policies and enable, on the practical level, the promotion of German language education in CEE, explicitly or implicitly covering countries and geographical regions that reflect the borders of the former empire (Teichler et al., 2011, p. 185). Although the educational policies of the post-transition decades in the context of globalisation have brought about the clear primacy of English among foreign languages in the CEE region, these historical and recent social processes have led to the German language still being of central importance in CEE countries (see Supplementary File 2).

The study of German as a second or foreign language is associated with a historically established institutional infrastructure, which includes teacher training in tertiary

education at colleges and universities. The multiplication of foreign languages and the penetration of English after the transition negatively impacted the popularity of higher-level studies in the German language and German teaching in CEE countries (Tichy, 2015). More broadly, the transition around 1989 was followed by the significant withdrawal of state-budgetary support for the welfare, health, and educational sectors (Polese et al., 2015). This resulted in the dramatic underfunding of public education in the majority of these countries associated with extremely low wages and salaries, incomparable either with wages offered at domestic market-based companies or with the remuneration offered in public education in Western European countries (European Commission et al., 2021; Tichy, 2015). This has not only led to a decrease in interest in entering higher education in the areas of languages and language teaching but also the outflow of language teachers from public education in CEE countries, either to the for-profit market segment of the labour market or—as we describe in our case study—their searching for and pursuing work abroad.

#### **4. The Production of Second-Order Language Teachers in Adult Education Institutions in Vienna**

In this section, we discuss the results of empirical fieldwork conducted with teachers, managers, and students enrolled in language courses specifically targeting people granted asylum or subsidiary protection or the unemployed, many of whom have a migrant background. We show, first, how the legal-administrative measures of regulating employment in adult and regular education and, second, more symbolic phenomena involving the language ideologies of “native speakerism” co-construct the specific position of second-order teachers in Austria. Third, we explore how this position is interiorised by CEE teachers in adult language education.

##### *4.1. The Role of Legal-Administrative Measures*

Based on labour market statistics (see Supplementary File 1), as well as our field research in numerous adult education institutions, the EU member states in the CEE region (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), as well as non-EU members, such as the new states of former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia) and post-Soviet countries (e.g., Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Georgia) are important sending countries of language teachers to Austria. Residence and labour rights may differ considerably in these two groups, with the division further complicated by refugee status and the subsidiary or temporary refugee protection granted to many during the numerous wars in the region in the last three decades, the Russian invasion of Ukraine being only the latest among these.

While third-country migrants without refugee status are heavily dependent on their employment positions

and jobs to preserve their residence and work permits in Austria, migrants with recognised refugee status and intra-EU migrants are subject to more relaxed regulations. However, there is a growing consensus among researchers that the free movement of EU citizens does not imply their access to similar socioeconomic positions as those occupied by local citizens. Downward mobility (Favell & Nebe, 2009) and de-qualification (Glorius et al., 2013) are widespread phenomena that structurally lead to labour market segmentation and marginalised positions in the labour market (Favell, 2018; Glorius et al., 2013). Regarding CEE intra-EU migrants in Austria, Reeger (2018) also points to regulatory difficulties related to the nostrification of degrees, de-qualification, lower wages, and longer working hours.

These well-studied phenomena of labour market segmentation, as implied by the legal regulations pertaining to residence and work that affect labour migrants in Western countries in numerous fields and segments, have their specific forms and features in the field of language education. The mainstream Austrian public education system, comprising primary and secondary level public schools, exercises a strong pull effect on adult language teachers. Job security based on open-ended contracts, stable government funding, and the very small proportion of project- and tender-based work makes the situation in the field of regular public education incomparable with the uncertainty and precarity that prevails in the area of adult education. Salaries in the former, fixed in collective contracts for full-time jobs (BABE, 2022; European Commission et al., 2022), and further, when calculated according to the expected number of in-class teaching hours, are significantly higher. All these factors, complemented with the amount of yearly paid vacation and differences in career prospects, provide grounds for existential contemplation for many who work in the area of adult education. According to our data, for the latter teachers and trainers who have the opportunity to access teaching jobs in public education, the potential to switch is always on the horizon.

However, regular teaching jobs, with much more favourable work conditions, are not equally accessible. Discrepant qualification-based conditionalities strictly filter adult educators considering this professional shift. While language-education institutions for adults in Austria accept teachers with a wide range of higher education degrees and certificates of German studies and Germanistics (Austrian Integration Fund, 2023), the teaching profession in both general and vocational secondary education in Austria is strictly regulated. The recognition procedure for teachers that determines whether an applicant's formal qualifications acquired in the EU/EEA are equivalent to the conditions that apply to teaching in Austria constitutes an obstacle for a significant proportion of adult educators. Depending on the type of educational institution and disciplinary area, the relevant federal or state-level governing body must examine the qualifications and

work experience of the applicant formerly acquired in an EU/EEA country and decide—within four months—upon the further conditions of their employability in Austria on a case-by-case basis (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, 2023). According to our interviews with teachers aspiring for such a professional shift and a legal counsellor in this field, the studied disciplinary subjects, the theoretical and practical courses completed, and the length of teaching practice in a relevant institution are often deemed insufficient to allow direct access to teaching positions in regular public education. In many cases, applicants are recommended to enrol in further studies to make up for the missing elements, which may take several months or, in many cases, years. This is not a viable option for many: Those in worse financial-economic situations, who rely heavily upon full-time employment, and those with care duties are severely hindered in their labour market mobility.

#### *4.2. Native Speakerism and CEE Language Teachers*

Beyond the legal and administrative regulations, the structural phenomena of the symbolic domain also contribute to the hierarchic classification of language teachers within the broader educational field in Austria. The term “native speakerism” was coined by Holliday (2006) to assist in a critical examination of the normative tendency of English language teaching to reinforce culturalised hierarchies built upon the native/non-native divide. This ideology associates “native” speaking with an idealised modern, “Western” culture, as opposed to non-Western, “uncivilised” cultures, which has severe political implications for the governance of language use and language teaching in English-speaking contexts around the globe (Braine, 2004). While the majority of the linguistic research on native speakerism is focused on English language use, the phenomenon has also been explored in German-speaking contexts (Jessner et al., 2022; Thoma, 2022).

Although there is no scientific evidence that the quality of language teaching is related to the first spoken language of the teacher (Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Barratt & Kontra, 2000; Sprung, 2013), the everyday realities of German teaching and learning have been and are still closely interwoven with nativist ideologies that claim the superiority of the “native German teacher” in educational contexts in Austria (Jessner et al., 2022; Sprung, 2013). Given the pervasiveness of monolingual linguistic regimes that prescribe and expect the proficient and exclusive use of German in administrative and educational contexts in Austria (Barakos, 2019; Scheibelhofer et al., 2021; Sprung, 2013), it is of great importance how teachers with foreign citizenship, present in great numbers in adult teaching institutions, are regarded and valued, both externally—by managers, colleagues, and students—and internally, by the CEE teachers themselves.

Based on our interviews, and remaining well aware of the critical attitude a dichotomous distinction requires, this section explores the native–non-native divide and investigates how relevant it is to students, teachers, and managers working in state-subsidised language training. At the end of the section, we also explore how such discourses affect how migrant teachers perceive themselves in this regard.

#### 4.2.1. Perspective 1: Non-Native Speakers As More Qualified Teachers

Tala, a recognised refugee from Syria, and a former language teacher herself, offered to be interviewed at her home in Vienna. Shortly after beginning, the door rang, and her friend Jannan came for a surprise visit. She joined Tala in her narration about learning German in Austria; in a way, the process seemed to be a conversation between two friends sharing their experiences. Both women have strong opinions about the numerous German courses they have attended in their—at the time of interview—six years in Austria. They describe a pronounced dissatisfaction with the system of language teaching for adult migrants, especially with the language exams required for integration into the labour market in line with their educational qualifications. Tala and Jannan recounted anecdotes of teachers who, in their eyes, were not qualified and, in a more general way, described the difficulties they faced finding courses, learning German, and preparing for the exams required for vocational training or finding employment:

T: The teacher, you ask her a question, and she goes on Google and does a search [for the answer].

J: Right, the teachers are inexperienced; they are not qualified.

T: I had a teacher; she was a bank employee; she used to do something else, then she changed jobs, and she applied [to work as a teacher]. They know German, but they cannot give you any information, they have no methods for teaching...

J: Yes! Not necessarily. Me now, OK, I speak Arabic, but I am not good at Arabic grammar....You know what? The people who studied at university, *Ausländer* [foreigners] who come from Bulgaria or [other areas of] Eastern Europe and studied languages at [the] university, are more competent than the “real” Austrians who come to teach. You feel that they are qualified in their work as teachers.

While reflecting on the courses they took, Tala, who in her home country used to work as a language teacher herself, expressed her anger about teachers who, in her opinion, are unprepared for their job. Her statement that “they know German, but they cannot give you any infor-

mation” illustrates her impression that native speakers have mastery of their language but may lack the skills required for teaching. For Jannan, the fact that teachers from CEE countries studied German independently, obtaining a university degree, is a positive asset:

Once I had a teacher, two German [language] teachers really, they were much better than the teachers from Austria. They studied at a faculty of languages and were very good, better than [Austrian teachers]....I don’t remember exactly where they were from; maybe Hungary? But really, they were very good teachers, very good. There was a teacher last year from Deutschland [Germany]; everything was *ganz einfach* [very simple] for him. “That is simple!” And he didn’t do anything; it was all “simple” [for] him. But it is your [the teacher’s] mother tongue!

Contrasting her description of her CEE teachers, she describes taking a class with a teacher of German nationality. In her record, he was little or not at all sympathetic about or comprehensive of the struggles of a person learning German but stated that everything they learned was “very simple.” The fact that German was his first language was considered to be an obstacle to his understanding that, for Jannan, things were not just “very simple.”

#### 4.2.2. Perspective 2: Native Speakers as More Authentic and, Thus, More Qualified Teachers

Contrarily to Jannan, Lina, who had experienced learning under both migrant and native German-speaker teachers, took a position in favour of native speakers, contrasting their approach with an example of an explanation given by a teacher from Hungary:

There are also people of Turkish origin who were born here, but German is not their mother tongue, they speak [it], but they also [sic] don’t speak [it] properly. My teacher was Hungarian; I asked her: “Why do you say ‘at the market’ but ‘I go to the supermarket?’” She said: “That’s German.” But the Austrian teacher told me that you can go *inside* the supermarket while you are *outside* at the market—she said that’s the reason. You see, the teacher whose mother tongue [it was] was different from the one who had learned or studied the language on her own.

Be it either in favour of the first or the second perspective, similar views are held by language teachers, irrespective of their citizenship, and sometimes even by coordinators and managers of projects and programmes in these institutions. Professionals’ opinions, when critical, are less explicit and essentialising than students’ more conclusive and robust claims, as illustrated above. The former is rather constrained to puzzlement and dismay about the occasional experience of the low-quality

speaking and teaching skills of “non-native” teachers, consistently avoiding offering generalisations. However, such reports of professionals who also point out negative examples contribute to solidifying the figure of the “non-native,” less competent teacher; thus, they maintain the discourse of “native speakerism.”

#### 4.3. Citizenship, Native Speakerism, and Teacher Subjectivities

Legal and administrative measures associated with working in Austria, specifically in education, in tandem with culturalising discourses of native speakerism, create categories that classify workers and orient them into different jobs and positions in the labour market. The legal constraints of residence and work in Austria (for citizens of third countries without refugee status) and the administrative barriers of the nostrification of language teaching degrees and diplomas (for all non-Austrian citizens) confine CEE language teachers to work in adult education jobs and hinder their shifting into more stable and better-paid fields of education in Austria. In the eyes of workers, such administrative barriers become legitimised and normalised through discourses of native speakerism, that is, through the idea that ties teaching competence and superiority to “nativeness.”

To illustrate the production of such “second-order language teachers,” we look at the life story of Ilona, a German teacher in her early forties, born in a small Slovakian village and now living and teaching in Vienna. Being interested in languages, she chose German studies and finished higher education in a college for humanities in a Slovakian city. After obtaining her diploma as a German teacher, she decided to further advance her command of the language by becoming an *au pair* for a Viennese family. After a few years working in customer services for a Hungarian company in Vienna, she decided to apply for one of the largest Austrian private adult education companies for the position of German teacher. This was still her workplace at the time of our encounter.

Just like almost all of our interviewed teachers, Ilona mainly reflected upon the increased emotional and physical workload and lower wages that she contrasted with those in public education jobs. She explained in great detail the detrimental effects of the insecurities associated with tenders and project-based work, all of which undermine, from time to time, both the mental states of workers and the workplace collegial community.

Despite these malaises, Ilona’s central perspective on her job as a German teacher was still one of gratitude and loyalty. She expressed her insecurities and self-doubts throughout the interview: Whether in relation to finding any kind of formal official job in Austria, doing office work, or being employed as a language teacher, she evoked these with surprise, enthusiasm, and, most importantly, gratefulness:

I applied to be a German language teacher, and then it worked out, thank God....I wouldn’t have ever imagined that, in my life, I could be teaching German here. So, thank God, that’s how I see it, because at that time I expected to always be working as a shop assistant or something, and that I would not have any better chances....But thank God, based on my qualifications, I succeeded.

She considers herself privileged and fortunate, if not even indebted for her “good fate” to her employers. All resentments concerning workload, low pay, and temporal insecurities are suppressed by the reiteration of her privileged position. A central element of such self-doubt is her perceived lack of native-German speech: Colleagues’ remarks on misspellings, her accent, potential grammar mistakes, and related student feedback all become interiorised and fed into a questioned identity of being a competent German teacher:

I was somehow nervous that I am not a native [German-speaker], [but I was] still allowed to teach German [laughs]....So the highest level I ever taught was B1. So B2-level teaching, possibly I would not take it on, I guess, because I think natives can give so much more [pauses]. Or maybe not. Because students [say] I can explain things much better than natives. I don’t know; I just don’t know....Because there are students—I heard from a lot of [colleagues] that there are students who want to test the teachers [laughs], so I really don’t need that. I’m not saying I am not on that level, but a native is still a native.

It is not only Ilona who feels insecure about her teaching. Lamenting and (self)constraining their teaching competencies to a lower level are recurring themes in most of our interviews with CEE teachers. These insecurities, experiences, anticipations, and anecdotes in employees’ and students’ remarks are recurring elements in narratives about professional insufficiency. These insecurities tied to non-native teacher positions contribute significantly to the self-doubts and self-devaluing of their own work, relativising and ultimately undermining perceptions of the legitimacy of CEE teachers’ desires for better jobs and working conditions.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion: Hierarchies of Teachers, Hierarchies of Students

In this article, we have departed from discussing the recent phenomenon of migration politics in Western states that have strengthened the role of national languages in the control and governance of immigration. Since 2015, increasingly restrictive populist immigration policies have prevailed in Austria, including in relation to the language acquisition of migrants and refugees (Gruber, 2018; Gruber & Rosenberger, 2023; Rosenberger & Gruber, 2020). The increasing



conditioning of the residence, work, and social welfare of refugees and migrants on their acquisition of German and related governmental discourses of responsabilisation have gone together with contradictory and incoherent policy-making processes that destabilise the professional actors in the field of German teaching for immigrants, such as education institutions and professional and interest groups and organisations (Flubacher, 2021). Such processes that Flubacher (2021) describes as “governmental precarisation” are unfolding in the larger context of EU adult education policies that distribute European public funding through competitive tendering mechanisms. Restrictive populist policies layered upon broader logics of marketisation have resulted in already precarious and challenging work conditions, typical of adult learning environments, becoming even harsher. Low wages, long working hours, continuous insecurity, and a lack of perspectives imply that such jobs are hard to pursue for longer periods—at least for workers who have alternatives in the labour market.

This article explores the consequences of these processes and, more specifically, the arrival of foreign citizen workers into these educational institutions. In understanding how foreign citizens, and among them CEE language teachers, are increasingly filling these positions, we looked at various economic, political, and social processes on diverse historical timescales and geographies. First, imperial genealogies and the centuries-long institutionalisation of the German language in the CEE region were explained as founding elements of the labour pool, which, well supplied with linguistic resources, became instrumental in the governance of migrant language teaching in Austria.

Second, we described how the specifics of labour markets and welfare policies in the CEE region are core structural elements in fuelling the migratory processes of CEE workers towards Western European countries, among them Austria (Melegh, 2023). The dramatic deterioration of welfare services in the post-transition decades, including the relative decrease in budgetary support for education in post-socialist states, is a central driver that incentivises teachers and German studies degree holders to find German language teaching in Austria appealing (see Piore, 1986). Based on such geopolitical differences, CEE teachers conceive of adult education work in Austria as a definite advancement, despite its precarity and their eventual material difficulty. Moreover, economic mobility, built upon the official recognition of higher education diplomas in German studies, is considered professional mobility too, as one is exempt from the usual phenomena of de-qualification and status loss.

From the perspective of Austrian migration governance, CEE workers who take up these positions can be understood as a significant source of labour whose linguistic resources, deeply embedded in imperial histories, are channelled into labour market positions abandoned by Austrian-citizen workers. We also describe how governance mechanisms are in place that con-

tribute to constructing and maintaining differences in labour market opportunities, confining foreign workers to such educational domains. These mechanisms are partly constructed through general residence- and work-related regulations, as widely explored in studies of segmented labour migration (Grimshaw et al., 2015). Furthermore, these are also constructed through institutional-administrative regulations in the field of education, allowing the inflow of CEE teachers into adult education domains while limiting their access to more stable and secure positions in regular public education.

Last but not least, the secondary position of CEE teachers is also reinforced through the symbolic domain by language ideologies of “native speakerism.” Our interviews with managers, teachers, and students revealed that such ambivalent discourses involving measuring “native” and “non-native” teachers against each other, recurrent in teaching contexts, have destabilising potential. Irrespective of the stance of the speaker—whether conclusive and valuing “non-native”-ness positively or negatively—such discourses threaten the identity of foreign citizen teachers, often categorised as “non-natives,” and provoke the self-questioning of their own competence and professional value as German teachers.

Citizenship discourses and legislation underline and reinforce greater recognition and deservingness for citizens as opposed to non-citizens, strongly interlinked with the respective legal and material resources. Among such discourses of deservingness linked to citizenship and successful labour market participation, finding and continuing work and employment become cornerstones not only of material survival but of subjective perceptions of membership and recognition (Streinzer & Tosić, 2022). These logics that unfold in the context of adult education and language learning tie foreign language teachers and, in great proportions, CEE citizens to specific positions. In contrast to typical segmented labour market contexts, the latter comprises formal and skilled jobs, offering the potential for economic and professional mobility compared to the low-paid and devalued language teaching in CEE countries. However, these positions are construed as less valued, financially and symbolically, compared to those in mainstream segments of the Austrian education sector. This draws the contours of a classification system and a strict hierarchy of language teaching opportunities for CEE language teachers.

Furthermore, the corresponding teacher hierarchies are closely intertwined with the general phenomenon of migrants becoming part of the secondary-order labour supply for host countries. Their ordering also closely reflects the classification and hierarchisation of student categories and groups. While there is no evidence that CEE teachers do objectively less “qualified” work than Austrian citizens, their administrative, financial, and symbolic devaluation reflects how policies and institutions regard adult students, among them adult migrants, as second-order individuals compared to those (in the majority, Austrian citizens) enrolled in the regular public

education system. These kinds of interlocking systems of classification and hierarchisation, and the relationships they foster between managers, teachers, and students in various positions deserve further scholarly attention. In this article, we have taken the initial step in this regard, and by focusing on governing through language, we have highlighted the nuanced ways in which historically, economically, and politically embedded language geographies contribute to the reproduction of hierarchies of membership, inclusion, and exclusion in present-day immigration societies.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

### Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

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