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Multilingual Education and Family Language Policy

Abstract

In the post-Soviet realm, people confront bilingualism and diversity, combining their old views upon the ranking of different languages and statuses of certain ethnic societies with their newly adopted democratic post-socialist understanding of multiculturalism. This article takes two important theoretical issues – family language policy and multilingual education – and projects the previous findings upon possibilities and restrictions in the transmission and maintenance of Russian as a heritage language on the pre-primary and primary levels in Finland, Germany and France. An overview of the parents' attitudes towards bilingualism in these countries demonstrates that many families are interested in bilingual or trilingual upbringing and that parents are plurilingual themselves. The strategies that the families apply to raise their children bilingually are discussed and compared. It is stated that the differences are caused by historical and personal experiences and traditions, by family composition and possibilities to maintain language academically.

Key words: *Bilingualism, family language policy, multilingual education.*

Introduction

Today, different kinds of migration and mobility are meeting changing views of parents who want to have the best possible education for their children. Generally speaking, there are two types of education available: the one fosters the natural way of language acquisition and of cognitive development, and the second enhances it through organized and aim-directed activities. Languages shape our world, therefore, the interconnectedness of language and cognition is evident; yet, it also plays out at the level of interactions, body language, sociality, temperament, emotions, values and other behavioral features. The degree of bilingualism varies according to individual opportunities; it depends on socioeconomic status, education, individual capacities and the character of juxtaposition of both languages. Most often, research is upon English language acquisition and immigrant populations acquiring the dominant languages of the host countries.

Nowadays, parents are well informed that children growing up multilingually have certain privileges. Not only can they become more competent speakers of many languages and connoisseurs of many cultures, they can also benefit from several effects through an early start in the use of those languages. As Bialystok & Werker (2017) put it, the specificity of a multilingual environmental input, communicative and cultural experience of bilinguals influence the verbal behavior and cognitive development of such individuals who already have their genetic predispositions and certain other family conditions. Some children may be bilingual but not biliterate, some start to acquire a second language not at home, but later in the environment and may meet a third language at school as the language of instruction (+ some foreign or second languages as well). The same level on bilingual proficiency achievement may have a different history and future in one's life; therefore, it may be extremely difficult to compare memory, attention, executive functions and other cognitive skills in monolingual and bilingual children.

Language is also a tie to a culture that can grow to be very important for the child. It can be the culture of relatives, of a bigger world or just of a small community, yet, it makes the person who is familiar with different cultures special and unique. Texts written in other languages are precious resources and sources of information. Multilinguals are more tolerant in their reasoning and attitudes, they can develop more friendships, enter a

number of different communities, they learn other languages more easily and might find better jobs. Speaking two languages inevitably implies overcoming difficulties such as: not enough input, teasing from peers, more workload at school, uselessness, but this creates a stronger personality. The dominance of the language may change during the lifetime, and the efforts to interest children in it can provoke alternative periods of refusal and acceptance.

The new post-Soviet generations are growing up in the era of personal independence, globalization and with a spectrum of opportunities for personal decisions and life trajectories. There are many paths into the multilingual world. What is important now is the parents' awareness about how to meet such goals. It means that the researchers and educators have to provide knowledge about bi- and multilingualism for positive constructions of the family language policies. Parents should discuss bilingualism's strengths and weaknesses with their children and encourage them to continue to speak and write in their two languages.

Family language policy

Spolsky (2012) claimed that language policy happens on the family level. It constitutes an important part of the neighborhood, community, working place, army etc. tangible practices. The family commits to acquiring a second language while maintaining the first one and exhausts for this purpose material, financial and identity issues. The strategies that families tackle range from informal to formal teaching, communication arrangements, roles of parents and grandparents, schooling, stigmatization, ideologies, choices of language varieties etc.

Minority parents have trouble in maintaining heritage languages. Usually integration into a majority entails a full or a part rejection of the first language in the middle or late childhood, or children become passive bilinguals but very rarely balanced bilinguals. Parents, especially mothers, feel frustrated when they cannot transmit their language to the children because they want to stay good parents and rely on online and offline advice from experts, family, friends and their own experience in justification of their linguistic approaches. According to King & Fogle (2006), parents learn a lot in order to prepare themselves to raise children bilingually, and for the middle-class well-educated parents, promoting additive bilingualism is nowadays a trend, although the family dynamics and other intervening factors may impede the achievements. Curdt-Christiansen (2009) promotes the view that socio-political and economic factors influence the family language policy that some immigrant parents really believe in languages and consider the social and schooling role of languages as very important and act accordingly in an explicit or implicit way. Such attitudes impact on children's behavior and their identity.

Family language policy is a multidisciplinary field of studies. Schwarz & Verschik (2013) investigated successful decisions made by all of the actors – parents, children and educators – who occupy important positions and demonstrate flexible attitudes. They address a reversing language shift model, a language ecology model, group socialization theory, micro, macro and intermediate levels, language policy model, cultural-historical-activity theory, and parent-child language practice models. Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, they show that the family is the place where community meets the individual and *vice versa*, where practices mirror ideologies of the surrounding society, where majority and minority fight for their rights, and individual impacts on the process are valuable. Smith-Christmas (2015) demonstrates that despite all the efforts and participation in a language immersion program, children might struggle with their heritage language with not very much success; the results also depend on adults' and community linguistic practices norms and ideologies.

If we scrutinize the transnational and multilingual families, we come to a conclusion, as Hua & Wei (2016) proved, that even in the same family, diverse generations have different views on bilingualism. The perception of social relationships, their migration backgrounds, social structures in which they are involved, as well as their own identities shape such opinions. Some maintain the transnational networks though in several generations, some abandon one of the languages in favor of another, some base their existence on the cultural

memory and imagination. Throughout the world, questions of family language policy in the home should be adjusted to the wider society; the decisions are made differently in diverse settings (Macalister & Hadi Mirvahedi, 2017).

It is only natural that caretakers are concerned about a child's bilingualism: whether it can do children any harm, could they be semi-lingual, could they have doubts about their identities etc. Grosbeak (2010) who is one of the most influential scholars in the field claims that the most important thing is sufficient exposure to at least one, preferably to both of the languages, and that at least some of the interactors never switch to another language. Parents should take into account the importance of respective languages for the child and to monitor situations where the child encounters people who speak these languages to keep record of his achievements. The differentiation between languages must purposely be a strict one, although the reality of life might change and thus, the family has to readjust its language behavior. Children themselves understand the needs of learning or skip the languages when they become unnecessary, and when they grow older, they might participate in the decisions of the family. Bilingual children often have lacunae in vocabulary, but they outperform monolinguals in selective (attention) control and analysis, because they acquire and use these languages separately. If the family wants to use a language at home, which is not the language of the outside world, they may try it even if they are not perfect speakers of the language themselves, nevertheless, they must introduce it in a way that communication in this language starts to be vital and advantageous for the child. When addressing a child in one language, adults must comprehend how and for what it must be absorbed. It is not fruitful to combine two languages; rather, both of them should stay separated like in a monolingual situation, as often as possible; whenever conceivable, they must be sources of joy. Summing up these reasoning, I should emphasize that bilingual education must avoid doubling of the same information under the same circumstances, yet, translanguaging adherents do not refuse to combine languages while teaching in a way how it occurs naturally in bilingual communication (cf. **Garcia & Wei 2014**).

Maybe the most influential scale for the measurement of language maintenance is the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, or GIDS, proposed by Fishman (1991, 2001). It comprises eight stages of endangerment for heritage languages. UNESCO has proposed a 6-degree Framework (UNESCO 2009) for saving endangered languages; the Ethnologue has 14 levels. The framework to examine language vitality was proposed by Grin (2003) and Lo Bianco & Peyton (2013) who discerned three factors, which are necessary for language maintenance or for language revitalization: (1) Capacity, which presupposes that a person is proficient in a language (both, formal instruction and informal transmission are necessary), and uses it; (2) Opportunity, which involves creation of domains where the language is used in a natural way, is welcome, it is expected; (3) Desire, which means creation of investment in the learning of the heritage language connected to rewards that it brings for those who have studied it.

Multilingual education in support of the family language policy

In many cases, the goal of the language policy is to give global and easy access to high levels of English language proficiency for all socio-economic groups without producing undesirable consequences for local or just smaller languages and cultures (King, 2017). In reality, it is challenging to separate languages and to provide support for each of them on the family, societal and educational levels. Contemporary societies are predominantly heterogeneous, the economy depends upon information, the logistics in international, and proficiency in many languages is a commodity. Global networks function in many languages and are contingent on various cultures. Electronically mediated communication in English as a lingua franca and not so frequently other languages promote plurilingual repertoires of individuals in multilingual cosmopolitan cities and elsewhere. The language of schooling must be understandable for the students if they have to incorporate the new knowledge into that previously acquired. To my mind, it seems that the CLIL-method should definitely contradict such claims. Even when we intensify the language learning, it remains perplexing how to keep pace in the same tempo for all languages used in curriculum. All the models of bilingual education (pyramid or

reversed pyramid, 50/50, one new language every second year, studying the subjects to be examined in the languages in which they will be assessed, two-way-classrooms, immersion etc.) encounter obstacles caused by the presence of average children. Today, teacher encourage students to become independent learners and to act in the real world where their abilities are observed and inspected.

Cummins (2007) divided BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency/Academic Language Proficiency). The first refers to what all typically developing human beings employ to communicate with each other and what language learners on average will be able to do after 1 – 3 years of learning a second language. The last is more sophisticated and requires reasoning skills that provide learning through the language; this level can be reached by those who study in the first language after 5 – 7 years of sufficient exposure to a second language. If children study in a different language, it takes them about 7 – 10 years to be able to catch the contents like their peers.

Vygotsky (1962: 110) wrote: “Success in learning a foreign language is contingent on a certain degree of maturity in the native language. The child can transfer to the new language the system of meanings he already possesses in his own. The reverse is also true – a foreign language facilitates mastering the higher forms of the native tongue. The child learns to see his language as one particular system among many, to view its phenomena under more general categories and this leads to awareness of his linguistic operations”. Timpe-Laughlin (2016) formulates the guidelines for organizing successful learning of a second language: enhanced input to afford opportunities for noticing; opportunities for learners to compare and possibly reflect on certain pragmatics phenomena to facilitate understanding and awareness building; opportunities for social interaction. Hélot & Ó Laoire (2011) contend that the times of diversity of students’ backgrounds at schools oblige educators and teachers to question the traditional ways of teaching all over the world.

In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, one reads that governments ensure “the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own”. Migrant and indigenous children suffer the most in what concerns their future in a multilingual society where they experience trouble while keeping their languages. At the same time, they should become modern competent citizens, fluent in many languages, skilled workforce. Modern handbooks and recommendations for multilingual education emphasize the decisive role of the mother tongue in multilingual education (e.g., Advocacy Kit, 2007; Ball, 2013; Skutnabb-Kangas & Heugh, 2013, Wyse *et al.* 2016, Sandberg 2017). Because of a solid foundation for focused subject learning, it makes learning accessible, it promotes collaboration between home and school and it supports literacy in all languages. Parents are aware of what is happening in the school, and all actors and stakeholders are able to communicate with each other. When the contents are not clear, parents can facilitate them for their children who in turn may concentrate on autonomous development and creativity instead of grinding incomprehensible texts. Inclusion into multilingual education means organization of favorable conditions, i.e. benefiting from sociolinguistic situation, clearing up the goals and objectives of language teaching and learning, stimulating a positive atmosphere, spreading information about the institutions through different media, integrating the plans into the general curriculum and building upon financial and human sustainable resources. Multilingual education needs locally significant materials and specially trained teachers who would implement appropriate methodology and pedagogy and who understand the needs of parents and children and enhances the intergenerational transmission of the own languages in the home environment. The ‘first language first’ principle does not contradict teaching through different languages, but after the mother tongue literacy is fully acquired.

Let me name just a few tendencies in contemporary trends in teaching, which relate to language teaching, that currently inspire the instructional practice and affect the mode how we think about new ways of education for the future. *Critical pedagogy in language teaching*, as Crookes (2010) puts it, combines language studies and curriculum with the idea of social justice, it means that it acts in service of those who are underprivileged

and marginalized, e.g. the ethnic minorities. It also implies the use of critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire who worked for changes in the life of such people. The term *Multimodal pedagogies* covers various forms of communication in learning environments connected to multimodality, or multiple modes, of meaning making, which refers to such things as body language, gestures, activities with visual and aural substances etc., yet, first, with media and technologies. Students may fill in their reports and presentations as creative multiliteracy texts (Angay-Crowder *et al.* 2013). *Positive pedagogy* (O'Brien & Blue, 2017) affirms that success and positive learning experiences, cognitions and emotions make students flourish at school. Trying to find out what is positive within the classroom and what promotes this positivity, researchers discovered behaviors, dispositions, practices, talking manners, social and emotional resources, building materials, individualized learning goals that permit to live here and now and foster self-expression, self-development, and self-determination in individuals and collectives. Other often quoted methods are *PBL* (Project/Problem/Portfolio Based Learning), *PhenoBL* (Phenomena Based Learning), *IBL* (Inquiry Based Learning), *AL* (Active Learning), *CLIL* (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and some more. All of them prioritize the superiority of the creativity, motivation, liberty of choice and autonomous learning.

Russian-speaking diaspora and maintenance of the home language through education.

About 30 million people speaking Russian live outside Russia; inside Russia, about the same number of people are native speakers of other languages (cf. Protassova, 2010). These combinations of linguistic backgrounds influence the family language policies towards child multilingualism. The well-known variables in individual heritage-speaker profiles are age, background, and motivation, exposure to the heritage language, productive and/or receptive skills and gaps in acquisition (Brecht & Ingold, 1998, Andrews, 2000, Isurin, 2008, Pavlenko & Driagina, 2008, Pereltsvaig, 2008, Polinsky, 2008). In the last few years, methods of teaching the Russian language and culture outside of Russia to the heritage speakers of Russian increased considerably. The teaching materials were designed for the specific needs and requirements of heritage learners drawing them into both languages and encouraging the Russian-speaking families to maintain their language in the daily life. It means training children in the practical use of language in all its functions, promoting linguistic variation and vocabulary growth, and combining authentic Russian materials with those created for the local purposes.

If we compare the prerequisites for language maintenance at the societal level with what happens in reality to the Russian language (RL) in three European countries, Finland, Germany and France, we can predict the future of the family RL transmission. RL cannot be used at the nationwide level; despite its longstanding presence, it has no official status. RL is used in public and private educational institutions, working places, and local mass media. Before the Ukrainian crisis, the Russia-European relations were characterized as “Strategic Partnership”, including cooperation in the Nord Stream pipeline building. The mutual trade was important, but not crucial for the European economy. In Finland, before 2014 and later again in 2017 the Russian tourists are spending more than tourists from any other country are.

In **Finland**, Russian is considered to be the largest immigrant language. There is also a historical Russian minority. The repatriation wave ended in 2016. In recent years, business people and students joined the community. Finland provides students with a legal right to mother tongue instruction (Viimaranta, *et al.* 2017). Yet, the parents mentioned several implementation problems and shortages of the educational system, regarding the quality and quantity of the instruction, the quality of the books etc. There are several bilingual Finnish-Russian schools and many pre-primary educational institutions, as well as non-compulsory organisations offering courses in Russian for children.

In **Germany**, the Russian speakers do not have any status. Most of them are Russian-Germans who feel obliged to be regarded as Germans and often name themselves *Rusaki*. The Kontingentflüchtlinge are mostly Russian speaking Jews. There are several state and private Russian-speaking schools and many day care centres. Russian is also taught as a foreign language in many public schools. Quite a lot of Russians speak German as a foreign language and many Germans are to a certain degree proficient in Russian. Russian-

Germans are ethnically Germans, they are not asking for any minority rights and they wanted to integrate as quickly as possible, guessing that the government who had invited them was awaiting this from them.

In **France**, the Russian-speakers mainly come from immigrant and mixed-marriage communities. The old White Emigration forms a base for the long tradition of the Russian presence. No official statistics are known. RL instruction happens in some private institutions. Only in Paris is there a bilingual day care centre on a daily basis. All other institutions operate two days a week, on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

We conducted surveys in each country (e.g., Burd, *et al.* 2014; Solntseva, & Protassova, 2018). Parents of bilingual children are usually born in different countries on the territory of the former Soviet Union and immigrated at least five years ago. All of participants find themselves on the crossroads of different family values and educational priorities in Europe *vs.* in Russia including the baseline principles of the child- *vs.* teacher-centred approach, learning for today *vs.* for the future, learning for yourself *vs.* for society. They have to answer certain questions, e.g., who speaks the truth: the textbook or the family? What are the functions of the school? Is natural acquisition better than the enhanced development? Which languages are more important? What kind of the Russian past are we constructing in the corresponding country and is it better than the situation that we have nowadays?

In Finland, about 70% among parents of bilingual children, and in Germany, about 80% of such parents opt for the majority language first solution, but they also do not want to abandon the home language Russian. However, most of the parents are against full immersion into the majority language. About 70% of pre-primary students' parents in both countries and about 60% among parents of primary school students put psychological comfort in the first place, almost nobody thinks that bilingualism could be dangerous or that home education in Russian would be enough. About 90% on average prefer communication in two languages in the educational institutions and about 55% in both countries think that Russian is a key to mutual understanding. English is slightly more important in Germany than in Finland. Parents appreciate the Finnish culture a little bit more than the German culture; about 6% think that the Russian culture is not so important at this age. In Finland, more parents of pre-schoolers, and in Germany, more parents of schoolchildren think that Russian language and culture will be needed for the future life success. In France, parents have to organize bilingual education themselves, and here is what they think about it. At the pre-primary level, half of the participants wanted children to use both languages equally; one fifth wanted Russian to dominate, and 17% wanted children to learn three languages simultaneously. On the primary level, 11% opted for French domination, 56% preferred bilingualism, and 23% preferred the balance of the three languages. For the secondary school, parents designed dominance of French in 14% of cases, bilingualism in 44%, and 32% insisted on trilingualism. In professional education, 17% wanted French, 28% wanted French and Russian, 15% wanted English and French, and 35% wanted three languages. Even in the family education, 53% wanted French and Russian, 18% wanted three languages, 17% wanted Russian dominance, and 6% were ready for French dominance. In the leisure time, 51% used two languages, 29% used three languages, 10% used predominantly French, and 6% used almost Russian only. Other numbers were not significant.

All parents in the three countries address their children in Russian, in France more than in Germany, and in Germany more than in Finland. All children have majority-language-speaking friends. Smaller children use overall more Russian; later, they use more majority language.

Overall, it seems to be a critical mass in number of speakers and the time of sojourn in a country after which parents begin to be more interested in preserving the other language of their family. If we compare the situation in Germany to that in Finland, we see that the state does not promote the use of Russian and does not care so much about it, but the scope of the country is that much bigger therefore it is convenient to have some initiatives. The support for Russian depends even more on parents and private initiatives in France. The Russian-speaking population of Finland has a higher education and comes from Russia and Estonia more often than from Kazakhstan, so the language is not so different from the standard and the ties to Russia are closer.

The Russian culture is more substantial in France. Heller (2010) and Pavlenko (2012) write about commodification of language. When Russian parents feel that Russian language proficiency might be important for their children, they take more efforts to make them study it.

Discussion and conclusion

Having insufficient experience with the language maintenance in the Soviet Union and estimating from their previous experience that speaking an alternative to the state language could be bad for them, in the 1990s, Russian-speakers were not making enough efforts to teach language to their children. Literacy in the language was usually not transmitted through education, because they were not aware of the opportunities to study it and showed no interest in it. Not all members of the community wanted to read newspapers in Russian, they preferred television; presumably, for most of the families, literacy had no big importance. In their country of origin, children learned Russian as their first language, yet the changing environment in Europe resulted in reduced input and mixed language of their surroundings. The childbearing generation, the young adults, knew the language, but developed the attitudes that led to the maximal use of the language of surroundings in the family. The RL remained a language of intra-generational communication. Only a few wanted to transmit it to children; usually, they said that they ‘had nothing against multilingualism and that they respect other language groups’ immigrants who speak their own language not in clandestine but overtly. At the same time, they condemned those who didn’t learn the dominant language of their environment. The most important thing that we observed with many immigrants was the belief that the language cannot be learned in a class but had to be acquired through real communication. This belief had numerous consequences.

Today, the grandparent generation remains speakers of Russian and bearers of the Soviet traditions. The intergenerational transmission is again interrupted, but there is much more awareness of how to promote the use of Russian and what privileges it brings to be a speaker of Russian and the user of the Russian-language culture in the sphere of emotions, cultural traditions, mood, job, food, festivities, broader life perspectives etc. If the language remains in the family, it can be used, it does not disturb their life but offers new perspectives and adds to competitiveness. Variables in individual heritage speakers’ profiles apply to all bilingual situations.

World politics influence the family language policy. Facts about multilingualism and language acquisition must be taught at school. Languages have no universal value; they are ranked in each country according to the particular history of relationships with a respective country and immigration-emigration-repatriation. Parents often cannot monitor what they are doing, yet, the educational policy of the country has an impact upon the family language policy. People commonly highly appreciate the Russian culture; nevertheless, only a few are acquainted with it. Bilingual parents need support in questions of bilingualism, child upbringing and home practices of the language maintenance.

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